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WRITING AMERICA:
RACE, GENDER AND NATIONALISM
IN AMERICAN FRONTIER FICTION

by
Margaret McGlone McCrea

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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Abstract

**WRITING AMERICA:
RACE, GENDER AND NATIONALISM
IN AMERICAN FRONTIER FICTION**

by

Margaret McGlone McCrea

Adviser: Professor William P. Kelly

This dissertation focuses on five nineteenth-century American novels that employed history to explore contemporary issues of their day. James Fenimore Cooper, Lydia Maria Child, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, William Gilmore Simms, and Robert Montgomery Bird each wrote about times when Indians and colonists co-existed, and each explored historical settings and characters to frame discussions about the impact of the Revolution, Indian-white relations, and concerns about religion and gender. Despite their significant differences, these authors shared a common goal: to create a usable past that promoted their visions of what America could and should become.

Reading these five novels together highlights the changing social climate of the young nation. Ostensibly about frontier battles long since

settled, Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, Child's *Hobomok*, Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*, Simms' *The Yemassee*, and Bird's *Nick of the Woods* actually engaged contemporary problems still percolating in society. The authors' genders, political leanings, and religious prejudices helped to shape their portraits of America's past, and also to articulate their visions of the nation's future.

Central to the discussion are Indians, especially regarding the mixing and blurring of other cultural and racial boundaries. Such blurring presupposed a primary question of the post-Civil War era: how to accommodate the freed slaves. The Indian-white marriages found in several novels took aim at traditional attitudes about religion and gender roles, showing women having influence in their communities. I begin with Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, which confronts the issue of racial identity and extends, only to reject, a vision of a future of mixed-races. Child's *Hobomok* challenges patriarchal Puritan society by admitting the possibility of a multi-racial community. In *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick uses shared traditions to couch her modern interpretation of the present, while Simms employs his historical setting in *The Yemassee* to promote his conservative position supporting the slavery and the Southern plantation way of life. Bird's *Nick of the Woods* situates the future in the western territories, celebrating the nation's march west even as it measures the cost of such progress.

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My parents, Drs. James and Virginia McGlone, offered immeasurable help, both academic and domestic. My father has been relentless in his belief in me and I am honored and thankful for his faith. In her quiet way, my mother has also been invaluable. A scholar, teacher, wife and mother, she has been my model. She is my hero.

I am grateful to my husband, Jerry, for his patient, unwavering support through years of exams, research papers and chapter revisions. He never questioned the countless nights, weekends and summer vacations spent at the computer. His generosity of time and spirit has been immeasurable. Finally, I thank my children Cate, Claire and Liam for almost always understanding when Mommy needed to do her schoolwork.

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INTRODUCTION

Halfway through Lydia Maria Child's 1824 Puritan-Indian romance, *Hobomok*, Child's narrator poses a question that at first seems an insignificant aside: "Who would have believed that in two hundred years from that dismal period, the matured, majestic and unrivalled beauty of England, would be nearly equalled by a daughter, blushing into life with all the impetuosity of youthful vigor?"¹ This question is tucked almost casually into a scenic description of a bustling Puritan settlement, but it is one of the novel's most important references to the future of the nation. Using feminine imagery – the nascent United States is a daughter of England, and a strong, healthy one at that – Child offers her interpretation of the future, cast in the figure of a vital young woman born in difficult times.

This romantic description of the new nation as a blushing young woman is central to the novel about Mary Conant, daughter of a stern and

¹Lydia Maria Child. *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians*. Ed. Carolyn Karcher. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991, 100. All future references are from this edition.

religious father, struggling to survive in the male-dominated Puritan society. Child's vivid image of an impetuous daughter connects her heroine with the birth of the United States by linking Mary's choice to disobey her father and marry the Indian, Hobomok, with the colonists' choice to sever ties with England. Mary, and the nation, are shown to be willful children who do not suffer from their spirited independence but thrive because of it. Making such a strong national statement is one of Child's primary goals in *Hobomok*. She addresses contemporary issues of national identity by resetting them in a fictionalized past. Child is just one of many early nineteenth-century American writers who employed history to explore the conflicts of their day. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, James Fenimore Cooper, William Gilmore Simms, and Robert Montgomery Bird engaged issues including the lasting impact of the Revolution, Indian-white relations, and concerns about religion and gender in their novels. Each of these authors returns to a time when Indians and colonists co-existed, and each explores historical settings and characters to frame discussions about contemporary affairs. Despite their significant differences, these authors share a common goal: to create a usable past that promotes their visions of what America could and should become.

Clarifying and strengthening a national identity was of paramount concern for the writers of this era. The early part of the American nineteenth century was a chaotic time. Social and political issues involving slavery and

Indian removal splintered the country. The collapse of traditional authority, the receding power of religious leaders, and the rise of Jacksonian Democracy, with its accompanying fears of Mob rule, left Americans without a solid social foothold. The Revolutionary generation, a group united by a common cause, was fading into the past, too, leaving in its wake social and political confusion. Responding to these uncertainties, many American writers turned to the past as a setting for their work. Much could be gained by this turn. In the absence of a stable social framework for their own age, these authors sought a safe haven in history, where they could assign their own meaning to historical situations, characters, and political and social change. Re-imagining the past allowed them to invent a future. Placing progressive notions in a historical context provided a sense of legitimacy. For example, in *Hope Leslie*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick employs the journals of real settlers to add authenticity to her fictional events. Her readers in the 1820's and 1830's knew the history of the early Puritan settlements, the major personalities, and the important events. Sedgwick employs shared traditions from the past to couch her modern interpretation of the present. On the other hand, William Gilmore Simms uses an historical setting in *The Yemassee* to promote his conservative position supporting the status quo. Simms returns to colonial times in his effort to legitimize the role of the Southern colonies in

the birth of the nation. Simms seeks to place the South, often overshadowed by New England, on equal footing with the North.

Emory Elliot, in his insightful *Revolutionary Writers: Literature and Authority in the New Republic, 1725-1810*, identifies the instability of this era as “a crisis of culture,” with roots that extend a century before the era of Cooper and Child. Distrust of authority, conflicting ideas about religion and government, and the young country’s expanding economy and geography didn’t simply evaporate at the start of the nineteenth century. Themes explored by Charles Brockden Brown, Joel Barlow, and Hugh Henry Brackenridge in the eighteenth century continued to trouble American writers into the next century. But unlike Brown and Brackenridge, who, as Elliot explains, investigated the “moral purposes of imaginative literature and the relationship between art and religion,” the novelists of the 1820’s and 1830’s shifted their discussion from the imaginary to the real issues of their time.

(54) For many who wrote historical fiction – and especially the five authors I will examine here – that meant focusing on Native Americans.

The Indians were of great concern for two main reasons. First, the immediacy of the Indian Removals, which Lucy Maddox considers in her book, *Removals*, influenced Americans of all regions and political beliefs. The frontier clashes between the Indians and the white settlers highlighted enormous shifts in social policy, especially regarding questions of authority

and democracy. In addition, Indians played a critical role in a larger discussion about the mixing and blurring of other cultural and racial boundaries. Fictionalized racial blurrings presupposed a primary question of the post-Civil War era: how to accommodate the freed slaves. The Indian-white marriages found in several novels took aim at traditional attitudes about religion and gender roles, showing women having influence in their communities. Ostensibly about frontier battles long since settled, these novels actually used their Indian-white conflicts to engage other issues still percolating in society. The declining influence of the clergy, the increasing power of the people, and the growing influence of women are all examined within the context of Indian politics.

My discussion begins with Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, written in 1826 and set during the French and Indian War of 1757. Cooper's frontier tale employs the convention of the captivity narrative to investigate questions of race, specifically as they are played out in two romantic triangles. Though complicated by Cooper's refusal to imagine the actual blending of different races and cultures, *The Last of the Mohicans* confronts quite profoundly the issue of racial identity. It extends, only to reject, a vision of a future of mixed-races – literally in the case of Cora, figuratively, in the case of Hawk-eye – whose blended lineages do not pollute the nation's moral fiber. Central to this discussion is Cooper's contrived racial subplot, the problematic

presentation of Uncas and Chingachgook as both inferior Indians and superior human beings, and the manner in which Cooper uses the relationships between Uncas and Cora and Hawk-eye and Chingachgook to articulate an ambiguous view of the nation's racial future.

Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* is of vital importance because it challenges patriarchal Puritan society by admitting the possibility of a multi-racial community. In this short work, Child is more forgiving than Cooper, yet not so radical as she would later become. She offers an imperfect vision of a racially blended society based on the marriage between Mary Conant, the daughter of a rigid Puritan, and Hobomok, an Indian living on the edges of the religious community. As a progressive exploration of Indian-white miscegenation, the novel has two major shortcomings. The union between Mary and Hobomok dissolves with the return of Mary's first love, and the son born to Mary and Hobomok eventually loses all traces of his Indianness. But Child's feminist agenda is more successful, as she presents a Puritan society accommodating to women. Whether Child succeeds in offering a realistic example of miscegenation is not as important as how well she uses the Indian-white marriage to suggest a future in which American women are partners to American men. Mary Conant's defiance of her father both foreshadows Child's abolitionist career and reflects Child's lifelong views on gender politics.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick blends Cooper's issues of race, Child's concerns about women, and her own questions about religion in her 1827 novel, *Hope Leslie*. Setting her story in the early Puritan settlements, Sedgwick follows the popular literary formula of captivity and escape, but broadens it to include questions of female involvement in society, the conflict between the races, and the repressive role of religion in society. She builds on the work of Child, and creates what Carolyn Karcher describes as a novel more progressive than *Hobomok*.² Although her feminist perspective is of paramount importance, Sedgwick also is concerned with the religious beliefs of her characters, both the Catholicism of Oneco and Faith, and the Puritanism of the early settlers. Grappling with central social issues, Sedgwick presents a vision of the future less driven by religious zeal and more accommodating to women, but ultimately no more welcoming to the Indians.

William Gilmore Simms' *The Yemassee*, published in 1835, broadens my discussion to include a Southern perspective. The novel takes as its setting the Yemassee Uprising of 1715, and it uses this historical backdrop to further a white supremacist point of view. In creating his vision of nationhood, Simms advances two important objectives: the preservation of the racial and social order of his pre-Civil War society and the validation of the

² Carolyn L. Karcher. *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994, 35.

role of the South in the birth of the nation. His is a portrait of gallant English settlers living among moody Indians engaged in inter-tribal strife. It does not re-imagine the result of the Indian-white skirmishes, nor reassess the question of Removal, as the previous novels do. Instead, *The Yemassee* creates a past totally supportive of the author's vision of a racially homogenous, pro-slavery future.

Robert Montgomery Bird's *Nick of the Woods* balances these sentimental portraits with an uncompromisingly dark vision of the frontier. Published in 1837, the novel celebrates the taking of the Kentucky settlements from the Indians. It recasts the battle in patriotic terms, with the noble native found in the novels of Cooper and Simms depicted as a savage, the settlers as passionate crusaders. Unlike Cooper's novels, *Nick of the Woods* does not contrast the malevolence of some Indians with the majesty of others, and unlike the novels of Child and Sedgwick, *Nick* is only tangentially concerned with issues of gender and religion. More importantly, Bird's work is different from these other novels because of its western gaze. The novel privileges the frontier over the Eastern seaboard, envisioning the west as the heart of the future nation. With its Gothic imagery and brutal battles, the novel rejects the accommodationist views of Child and Sedgwick, and it exploits the violence of the Indian-white conflict to support America's march west. Nonetheless, the novel also examines the cost of the western campaign,

including the personal price of the Indian wars. Bird's novel, with its dual identities, convoluted plot-lines and curious resolutions, is the most complicated narrative of the five I discuss. Its confusion is its strength, however, because it articulates the difficulties facing the young nation.

Reading these five novels together highlights the changing social climate of the young nation, and demonstrates how the central social issues of the day influenced each of the five authors differently. Despite their diverse historical settings – which range from the earliest colonies to the western frontier – the writers all focused on the same issues of Indian Removal, western expansion, gender roles, and religious oppression. Their own political leanings, the time they were writing, and their specific historical settings helped shape their distinct visions of the nation's future. Each vision, complicated in its own way, offers insight into this chaotic time.

My work builds on both earlier and contemporary critical commentary. The discussion originated with the work of Richard Slotkin, Henry Nash Smith, and Leslie Fielder, and subsequently shifted to include the feminist perspectives of Nina Baym, Mary Kelley, and many others. Robert Tilton's excellent study, *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative*, broadened the conversation by exploring the influence of the Pocahontas motif in a variety of American literary works, while Lucy Maddox illustrated how the politics of Indian Removal permeated all aspects of society in the

early part of the nineteenth century. More recently, Susan Scheckel focused on the cultural contradiction of Americans needing Indians to authenticate their past while simultaneously preventing them from participating in their future.

I am indebted to this scholarship, and I hope to extend its lively critical conversation with my discussion. Avoiding the binary of “the separate spheres,” which has focused much of the criticism to the differences between male and female authors, I will examine these five novels for insight into how their authors’ genders, experiences and politics affected their interpretations of the past and their visions of the future.³ I will attempt to explore the ways in Cooper, Child, Sedgwick, Simms, and Bird engaged a double vision that allowed them to reinvent the past to produce a uniquely defined American future. I hope to extend Maddox’ discussion of the influence of Indian Removals by focusing closely on the ways these novelists used their historical settings to advance their political and social agendas. The politics of miscegenation will be central to my discussion, as will the metaphoric possibilities offered by the Indians’ fate. But my primary focus rests on the ways these authors grounded their visions of an emerging national character in the historical events of the nation’s rich past.

³ See Cathy N. Davidson’s essay, “No More Separate Spheres!,” the preface to a special issue of *American Literature* that focuses on “the formulation of American literature as either ‘separate’ or as simply dualistic.”

**‘CROSSED’ PURPOSES: FENIMORE COOPER’S
VIEWS ON RACE AND NATIONALISM
IN *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS***

In the second volume of what was to become the *Leatherstocking Tales*, James Fenimore Cooper returned to characters Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, introduced in his earlier work, *The Pioneers*. In this novel, however, he chose to portray his frontier wanderers in their prime, not as clownish members of the social fringe but as manly warriors of the frontier. By reaching farther back in time, Cooper forges a path to the future through a re-examination of the footprints of the past. Such retrospection serves Cooper well for several reasons, not the least of which is that he is able to conjure a story of exceptional adventure and personal heroics in a virgin forest long since vanished. In addition, he addresses such issues as Indian Removal and miscegenation without discussing directly how they affected contemporary

society and politics. The past, in essence, provides a safe refuge because it offers an opportunity to sort out the future without getting tangled in the messy present.

Making sense of their age was not an easy task for Cooper and his contemporaries. Faced with the social and political confusion of establishing a new democracy, Americans of the early nineteenth century had no blueprint for the future. Regional squabbling, the fate of the native Americans, the vastly increasing size of the country, as well as the problems of slavery and the development of an industrial economy, were some of the issues confronting the young nation. Cooper understood that land rights, racial blending and Indian Removal were crucial concerns for his readers, and he also knew that situating them in a distant historical setting provided him space to examine them and their influence on the nation and its people. In this sense, he was following the Romantic form perfected by Sir Walter Scott, whose novels used historical settings to highlight conflicts, and ultimate resolutions, between moral and racial opposites.¹ In addition, as Nina Baym notes, Cooper recognized that the frontier in general and Indian captivity in particular were of great interest to a reading public hungry for the numerous

¹See Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence*. 2nd ed. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000. In his chapter on the Leatherstocking myth, Slotkin argues that, as models for Cooper, Scott's romantic novels were problematic, especially because "the Americans were closer in their struggle with the Indian than Scott was to the era of the English-Scottish warfare. (472).

captivity narratives being published.² By detailing captures and rescues, following Hawk-eye and Chingachgook as they interpreted the language of the forest, Cooper could move away from what W.M. Verhoeven describes as the family-centric stories of *The Spy* and *The Pioneers* to focus on the visceral adventures of the wild frontier. In history, he found drama, adventure and a cast of characters that he could manipulate to explain the present and even prepare for the future.

Although often discussed within a context of war and violence, *The Last of the Mohicans* offers many characters and scenes that fall outside that violent arena.³ In her insightful study, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction: 1790-1860*, Jane Tompkins suggests that *The Last of the Mohicans* be read as an outline for the coexistence of many diverse cultures. With this in mind, readers might come to understand that the novel

² Baym, who notes that nineteenth century critics tended to call all American historical fiction Indian stories, describes the explosion of historical fiction after the publication of Scott's Waverly novels as a vogue, but she maintains these novels never dominated American writing. See Baym's books: *Feminism and American Literary History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1992; and *American Women Writers and the Work of History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995.

³ Cooper's use of violence has been the subject of essays and books going back four decades, to the work of Leslie Fiedler, and Henry Nash Smith. More recently, see Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860*. 2nd ed.; William P. Kelly, *Plotting America's Past: Fenimore Cooper and the Leatherstocking Tales*. Shirley Samuels, "Generation through Violence: Cooper and the Making of Americans" and Robert Lawson-Peebles, "The Lesson of the Massacre of Fort William Henry," both in *New Essays on The Last of the Mohicans*. Ed. Daniel Peck.

is less about border warfare and rescue derring-do, and more about Cooper's vision of the new America and its nascent culture and society.

* * * * *

It was not until I took my first college survey of American literature that I realized how unfashionable Cooper had become. I was surprised to learn that generations of English majors were allowed to tolerate, but certainly not to appreciate, James Fenimore Cooper and his awkward, racist frontier tales. Students better read than me would point to essays outlining Cooper's one-dimensional characters, his stilted dialogue, his addiction to *deus ex machina*. Given permission by the Academy to scoff, they would inevitably miss – or perhaps dismiss – Cooper's theatricality and his flare for the melodramatic moment. Rather than viewing these as liabilities, I saw them as solid reasons to spend time with the frontier saga. Cooper's fast-paced plots are the engines that propel his complex ideas about the past and present, the importance of history to the future, and the roles that race, class, and religion play in creating us as individuals and as a nation. Thankfully, all the required *mea culpas* have been made. The *Leatherstocking Tales* have been rescued from the category of children's literature, and a variety of readers have managed to engage in meaningful thematic and historical

discussions of Cooper's writing. Following the landmark work of Fiedler, Slotkin and Ringe, many scholars have contributed to a renewed interest in Cooper, including but certainly not limited to Jane Tompkins, William P. Kelly, Annette Kolodny and Geoffrey Rans. In the last two decades, the critical conversation has shifted away from essays defending Cooper's place in American literature and toward his valuable insight into the tumultuous time.⁴ Even Michael Mann's 1992 movie version of *The Last of the Mohicans* reaffirms Cooper's legitimacy. The nineteenth-century novel is not handled with deference in this action movie, but rather it is reinvented for modern audiences, with emphasis placed on its forest adventure and improbable love.

In all this scholarship, one of the most debated topics is Cooper's influence on early American culture. Writing in the sunset years of the Revolutionary generation, Cooper was one of several writers working to create an American epic and an American literature. He was also one of many concerned with forging a future less chaotic than the immediate past. If

⁴ See Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*; John McWilliams, ed. *The Last of the Mohicans*; Geoffrey Rans, *Cooper's Leather-stocking Novels: A Secular Reading*; W.M. Verhoeven, ed. *James Fenimore Cooper: New Historical and Literary Contexts*; Daniel Peck, ed. *New Essays on The Last of the Mohicans*; Martin Barker and Roger Sabin, *The Lasting of the Mohicans*; Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*; and Renee L. Bergland, *The American Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*.

the previous generation successfully but violently severed its ties with England, its heirs needed to shore up relations with foreigners on different shores, and simultaneously to sort through relationships with foreign cultures within America's borders. Central to these relationships were questions of race and class, both in terms of the history of the Indian and their claims to the land. As Lucy Maddox cogently argues in *Removals: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Politics of Indian Affairs*, the Native American's place in American society, both in a geographic and socio-political sense, was a part of every discussion and work of literature of this time. Even writers not directly engaging the Indian question made reference to it. The plight of the Indian, Maddox suggests, was representative of the situations facing women, African slaves, and European immigrants continuously arriving on American shores. How the young nation should deal with these others could be sorted out in the fictional accounts of how Americans handled the Indians of the past. Cooper, and others including Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, and Robert Montgomery Bird, saw frontier skirmishes and social conflicts of the past as useful tools in their cultural work. They could revisit the past to interpret their present and explore the possibilities of the future.

Setting their novels in an earlier time enabled these authors to pass over "second generation degeneracy," explains Werner Sollors in his study,

Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture. Sollors argues that all Americans, at least metaphorically, see themselves as third generation and not part of the middle generation of immigrants, the group responsible for the dirty work of cultural assimilation, such as learning a new language and adapting to new traditions and social expectations. Though distasteful, the accomplishments of the second generation leave future offspring free. "If we are all third generation (at least as an ideal), we may have parents who, for all practical purposes, are more ethnic than we are; but we can transcend them by invoking real or imagined grandparents and founding fathers." By doing so, Sollors maintains, "we may thus create an independent self in the name of American." (230)⁵ Cooper, too, engages in this game of generational hopscotch. Going back to earlier generations, before the cultural influences of European settlers had caused so many social boundaries to blend, Cooper links his present with a colorful past.

* * * * *

Cooper opens *The Last of the Mohicans* in a nostalgic tone, with the two old friends who are central to the tale discussing the events of their

⁵ In his argument, Sollors does not directly engage the novels with which I am concerned, but he does focus on the nineteenth-century drama "Pocahontas" by George Washington Parke Custis, which deals with similar themes.

shared past. Hawk-eye and Chingachgook patiently pass the late afternoon beside a river flowing through the virgin forests of New York State, near what is now called Lake George. They are talking in the forests where the French and Indian War is being fought, and yet there is nothing but peace under their canopy of trees. The two are so engrossed in their discussions that they do not notice “the lazy tap of a wood-pecker, the discordant cry of some gaudy jay or a swelling on the ear, from the dull roar of a distant water-fall.”⁶ And what conversation so engages them? The story of their forebears, their particular characteristics, and how their peoples came to be where they are at that specific moment. Hawk-eye, his face expressing what Cooper describes as “sturdy honesty,” speaks with Chingachgook in his friend’s native Delaware language. The Indian warrior is telling the story of how Indians and the white man are different, and how the animosity between them grew out of the corruption of the white man. Hawk-eye sees things differently. “Your fathers came from the setting sun, crossed the big river, fought the people of the country, and took the land; and mine came from the red sky of the morning, over the salt lake, and did their work much after the fashion that had been set them by yours.” (30) Chingachgook disagrees, saying the white man and lead bullets are much different than the “naked red-man,” and Hawk-

⁶ James Fenimore Cooper. *The Last of the Mohicans*. 1826. Introd. Richard Slotkin. New York: Penguin Books. 1986, p. 28. All future references are from this edition.

eye, acknowledging that he is “genuine white” (“surveying with secret satisfaction the faded colour of his boney and sinewy hand” as he speaks), does not argue. (31) The two men continue to tell their histories – after what Cooper emphasizes is the Indian way of passing their culture to the next generation – and they mourn the inevitable disappearance of Chingachgook’s people. “Hawk-eye, we were one people and we were happy. The salt gave us its fish, the wood its deer and the air its birds. We took wives who bore us children; we worshipped the Great Spirit.” (33) Paradise faded however, with the arrival of the white man. “The Dutch landed, and gave my people the fire-water; they drank until the heavens and the earth seemed to meet, and they foolishly thought they had found the Great Spirit. Then they parted with their land.” (33) Hawk-eye, Cooper tells his readers, “is a great deal touched at the calm suffering of his companion.”

The arrival of Uncas abruptly interrupts the conversation. The future – represented by Uncas, the last of the Mohicans – appears just as his father is re-telling the past. We readers, like Cooper’s contemporaries, know the past is the future as far as the Indians are concerned. We know where Cooper is leading us. This conversation, about the role of the past in shaping the future, sets the tone for the rest of the novel, as the two heroes engage in the discussion about how differences are central to shared histories, and thus to their present and future. As he does throughout the novel, Cooper frames

this conversation in racial terms. Hawk-eye is aware, as is Chingachgook to a lesser degree, that his bloodlines dictate some of his behavior and desire. And so he marvels at Uncas' killing of a deer "with Indian skill." He plainly states that "to my ears the woods are dumb," and yet he shows surprise that Chingachgook should "understand white sounds better than a man, who, his very enemies will own, has no cross in his blood, although he may have lived with the red skins long enough to be suspected!" (35)

Into this idyllic scene comes the riding party of Cora and Alice Munro, who are, supposedly, on their way to Fort William Henry, the military outpost under the command of their father, Colonel Munro. They are accompanied by Major Duncan Heyward, an earnest member of the Royal Americans, David Gamut, a church musician, and their Indian guide, the darkly brooding Magua. When Hawk-eye advises them of their errant path, they suspect Magua's treachery, but he escapes before they can capture him. Hawk-eye, Chingachgook and Uncas seek protection for the vulnerable party in the caves of Glenn's Falls. In this sequence – the first of the novel's many capture and rescue escapades – Cooper provides another key to the frontier map he will unfold. He describes the leading characters in racial terms, giving them physical traits that illustrate authorial judgments and personality traits directly linked to their race. For example, Magua is introduced as swarthy, a savage with "an air of neglect about his person" and a "sullen fierceness mingled

with the quiet of savage.” (17) His unkempt appearance contrasts with Uncas and with Chingachgook, who has the “expanded chest, full-formed limbs and grave countenance of (a) warrior.” (29) Hawk-eye is described in a similar manner. His muscular body is not as strong, but “the eye of the hunter, or scout, whichever he might be, was small, quick, keen, and restless, roving while he spoke...Notwithstanding these symptoms of habitual suspicion, his countenance was not only without guile, but at the moment at which he is introduced, it was charged with an expression of sturdy honesty.” (30)

Cooper’s initial portrait of Heyward, however, is grounded more in his actions than appearance. “A young man, in the dress of an officer,” Heyward is shown to be out of his element in the chaotic frontier. (18) He naively misses the most obvious clues of Magua’s villainy, including Magua’s eye, “which glistened like a fiery star amid lowering clouds.” (18) Soldier or no, Heyward is unfit to protect the women in these unfamiliar surroundings. The Munro sisters are also distinguished by race. Alice has “a dazzling complexion, fair golden hair and bright blue eyes,” which contrast with her sister Cora, who is “not brown...but rather appeared charged with the color of the rich blood.” The older sister, though “dignified and...beautiful,” is later identified as the daughter of a West Indian mother. (19)

When these characters enter the shifting and violent frontier, which by definition is the place where differences collide, they behave according to

their racial pre-dispositions. Although superior in his white gifts, Hawk-eye takes lessons from Uncas and Chingachgook in the way of the natural world. Similarly, Heyward's competence in formal warfare fails him in the woods, and he must learn from Hawk-eye to survive. When Hawk-eye first encounters the Munro sisters and Heyward under Magua's guidance, he immediately sizes up Magua. "I tell you that he who is born a Mingo will die a Mingo." (37) But Heyward protests, unable to see the differences in the tribes and perhaps unwilling to acknowledge his mistake in choosing his guide. "I have told you our guide is now a Mohawk, and he serves with our forces as a friend." To which Hawk-eye reiterates, "A Mingo is a Mingo and God having made him so, neither the Mohawks nor any other tribe can alter him." (39)

Cooper is not always so rigid in his categories of behavior. For example, Cora steps out of the female stereotype during the Indian attack at the falls. The arrival of Magua and his band is imminent, and Hawk-eye and his companions prepare to die. Cora listens as Chingachgook and Uncas lash out against their attackers, berating them as cowards and laughing at their actions. Hawk-eye tells her these "peculiar outbursts" come from the Indian tradition of mocking their killers. "As for me, who am of the whole blood of the whites, it is befitting that I should die as becomes my colour, with no

words of scoffing in my mouth, and without bitterness at the heart.” (78) The distinction is important to Hawk-eye, but it makes no sense to Cora.

“Why die at all,” said Cora, advancing from the place where natural horror had, until this moment, held her riveted to the rock. “The path is open on every side. Fly then, to the woods, and call on God for succour! Go brave men, we owe you too much already. Let us no longer involve you in our hapless fortunes.” (78)

Hawk-eye remains motionless, and Cora again asks why they remain, since to do so assures their death.

“There is reason in her words” at length broke from [Hawk-eye’s] compressed and trembling lips; “Ay, and they bear the spirit of Christianity; what might be right and proper in a red skin, may be sinful in a man who has not even a cross in blood to plead for his ignorance. Chingachgook! Uncas! Hear you the talk of the dark-eyed woman!” (78)

They hear, and agree. Hawk-eye and Chingachgook leave first, but prior to Uncas’ departure, there is a subtle and important exchange between him and Cora. Calling him a “generous young man,” Cora tells the Mohican “with an intuitive consciousness of her power” to go to “my father and be the most confidential of my messengers. Tell him to trust you with the means to buy

the freedom of his daughters. Go; 'tis my wish, 'tis my prayer, that you will go." (79) Uncas' calm turns to gloom as he departs, leaving Heyward with the brave Cora, and a frightened Alice, who "veiled her eyes in horror" clinging to Heyward with "the dependency of an infant." (80)

This passage is significant on several levels. In terms of plot, it forces a shift in control, as the rescuers avoid their own captivity through the help of those they were supposed to save. This shift in authority – a white man obeying a mulatto woman – is reinforced by a shift in natural behaviors. The Indians depart from their code of conduct to adopt the strategy of the white man, one that results in future rewards. This suggests an opportunity for the different cultures to adapt each others' strengths, to the benefit of everyone. Immediately after Hawk-eye emphasizes his white lineage (his frequent "man without a cross" self-descriptions are meant to explain that he has no Indian blood, even if he wears Indian shoes), he asks his Indian friends to disregard their cultural traditions and follow his lead. He insists he cannot behave in any way other than as a white man, and yet at the same time he expects Chingachgook and Uncas to go against their Indian customs. In addition, the unmistakable romantic connection between Cora and Uncas suggests Cooper's willingness to investigate the blurring of certain racial boundaries. This ambiguity is interesting because it represents an important departure from a landscape of carefully drawn racial lines. First, the moccasin-wearing

scout recites his own, pure lineage, even as he prepares to die like an Indian. Then, grasping the logic of Cora's plan, he and his frontier companions depart from Indian traditions of warfare. The blurring of previously honored differences seems natural, and even necessary, for their survival.

Cooper confuses the point further in the next scene, when Magua bargains with his captives' lives in order to make Cora his wife. Cora can save Alice and Heyward – and by extension, the future of the nation – if she agrees to his terms. But not only is Cora repulsed by the offer, her weaker sister somehow musters the courage to pronounce death more inviting, too. Incensed, Magua hurls a hatchet at Alice's head. Just as he misses, Hawk-eye and company appear, re-rescue the sisters and their guardians and proceed on to Fort William Henry, the setting for the novel's central episode. Having delivered the sisters to their father, Heyward and his future father-in-law share a small but critical scene. If, as William Kelly argues, the bloodshed of the upcoming massacre is the "cultural genesis" of the future nation, the scene between the two soldiers preceding it is also significant for its message for the future. Munro encourages Heyward to ask for his daughter's hand, thinking he is pursuing Cora. Heyward surprises him by asking for Alice, and Munro immediately suspects prejudice. In an awkward exchange, the older soldier tells of his marriage to

“a daughter of a gentleman of the isles, by a lady, whose misfortune it was, if you will,” said the old man, proudly, “to be descended, remotely, from that unfortunate class, who are so basely enslaved to administer to the wants of a luxurious people! Ay, sir, that is a curse entailed on Scotland, by her unnatural union with a foreign and trading people.”(159)

Heyward tries to deflect these charges, saying “the sweetness, the beauty, the witchery of your younger daughter, Colonel Munro, might explain my motive without imputing to me this injustice.” (159) It is a difficult, confusing moment. At first, Munro is angry, and then just as quickly he relaxes, exalting the superiority of his older daughter while simultaneously accepting Heyward’s preference for Alice. The reason is simple: Cora’s West Indian ancestors may have been cultured, but their lineage is not compatible with Heyward’s. This scene restores a sense of cultural order for the readers, too, because it, in effect, reserves the pure-bred sister for the hero, leaving the mixed-breed Cora available for the Mohican. The placement of this scene directly before the gruesome clash between Munro’s white soldiers and their Indian attackers underscores Cooper’s point about cultural and racial heritage. Before he annihilates the American garrison, he clearly maps out the lineage of the future nation. The purity of Heyward’s family, their loyalty and morality, are emphasized, as is the ancestry of Alice’s mother, who died in

childbirth. Cooper provides readers with an understandable reason for Heyward's preference for the weaker Alice – Col. Munro also feels for a similarly “suffering angel” – while simultaneously offering an excuse for the suggested romance between Uncas and Cora. (159) Her blood is mixed, so the crossing of boundaries has already occurred, and no more harm can be done. The emotional conversation between Colonel Munro and Major Heyward also suggests that, as much as Cooper is concerned about presenting the inevitable death of America's native people, he is concerned with laying the racially pure cultural foundation for generations to come. Cooper ends this scene with the commander's decision to surrender to Montcalm, and thus he masterfully juxtaposes an image of hopeful love and future happiness with the violent massacre at the hands of Magua's warriors. Following a quiet, personal scene in which racial order is established in the proposed marriage of Alice and Heyward, Cooper emphasizes the chaos of the violent cultural war waging in the forest. The attack of the Indians threatens the peace brokered between the colonel and the major, and it jeopardizes their future, and by extension, the future of the nation. It also offers Cooper another opportunity to show how the disorder of the frontier confuses the lines of natural behavior. He hints that Magua's deep hatred for Munro, who had unjustly whipped him many years earlier, is partially the cause of the Indians' barbarism. He also blames the French general, Montcalm, who incites his

Indian allies. A passive observer, Montcalm permits them to do things that are taboo in his own culture. In the end, the mediating scout, Hawk-eye, the sole character comfortable in both worlds, surveys the destruction before setting out on the chase for Alice and Cora. It is at this point that Heyward understands his need to negotiate the frontier conflict as Hawk-eye does. It is a lesson Cora has already mastered – as demonstrated by her sage advice to Hawk-eye at the falls – and one that Heyward pursues in the rest of the novel.

Having raised the possibility of negotiating cultural and racial boundaries in the first half of the novel, Cooper puts this theme into action in the second half, using disguise and cunning to unfold another series of escapes and rescues. The musician David Gamut is found wandering the woods dressed as an Indian. Heyward, trying to rescue Alice, dresses as a French doctor. Hawk-eye goes a step further by entering the Indian village disguised as a medicine man disguised as a bear. He secures Alice's safety, and then sends Heyward to guide her out of the village as he goes to free Uncas. In explaining his decision to try to free the young brave, Hawk-eye likens his feelings for Uncas to those Heyward has for Alice.

“You have risked life, and all that is dear to you, to bring off this gentle one....As for me, I taught the lad the real characters of a rifle; and well has he paid me for it. I have fou't at his side in many a bloody scrimmage; and so long as I could hear the

crack of his piece in one ear, and that of the Sagamore in the other, I knew no enemy was on my back.... There is but a single Ruler of us all, whatever may be the colour of the skin; and him I call to witness – that before the Mohican boy shall perish for the want of a friend, good father shall depart the 'arth and 'kill deer' become as harmless as the tooting we'pon of the singer!"

(266)

Here, again, Cooper takes aim at the ramparts of racial identity, but he does not tear them down. He demonstrates that race matters, since it may determine how well an ear might hear an approaching horse. But sometimes emotions blur the lines. Here Hawk-eye's stated affection for Uncas – though similar to the sentiment later expressed by Munro about his daughter and the young Mohican – is shown to be acceptable because they speak of filial, rather than romantic, love. As the final scenes of the novel unfold, echoes of the first conversation between the scout and his Mohican friend are unmistakable, as is an allusion to the first chapter's epigraph, a passage from Shakespeare's "Richard II," that concludes "Say is my kingdom lost?"

Balancing the melancholy of the Mohican's demise, however, is the hope that the future will be different. That hope rests in the suggestion that Heyward and Alice will apply the lessons of the frontier to their future lives, and that

the teachings of Cora, Uncas and Hawk-eye will benefit them and their offspring.

* * * * *

Central to Cooper's work of establishing national identity is his engagement of the law and his commentary on its role in the new republic. During the years after the revolution, a crisis of authority was a primary concern for many writers, and the legal system provided a framework to discuss it. Revolutionaries had become members of the ruling class; a formerly dominant clergy was adapting to a new and lesser role in the democratic nation. The law was one of the few stable forces amidst the social chaos of the time. How early American novelists used the legal system to promote their visions of the future nation has thus attracted the attention of many scholars. Susan Scheckel believes the law is vital to Cooper's views of the future, views she argues he first articulates in *The Pioneers*. Scheckel argues that *The Pioneers* is "a story about national origins, about the desire of nineteenth-century Americans for an originary myth upon which to found a sense of national identity." (15) Scheckel maintains that the setting of *The Last of the Mohicans* is too removed to be influential in defining a new nation. Rather, the work creating a nation, and by extension, establishing its

unique identity, was accomplished in the legal “process of settlement by which the new nation took possession, from the Indians, of the vast territory it now claimed as its own.” (15) The ownership of land and its transfer from one generation to the next is central to *The Pioneers*, and not to its sequel. I appreciate Scheckel’s position, but I believe she misses the importance of the historical perspective in *The Last of the Mohicans*. The issues addressed in the earlier novel are expanded upon and complicated in the second. Rather than confining the creation of a national identity to the legal process of determining ownership – which Scheckel argues is the primary goal of *The Pioneers* – Cooper uses history in *The Last of the Mohicans* to unearth the complications that existed prior to frontier settlement. Scheckel acknowledges that the influence of the Indians had already waned, and therefore, she interprets them as symbols rather than as characters in a plot. Indians mattered, Scheckel argues, not because they represented a physical or political threat, but because “the actual history of Indian relations in America called into question the legitimacy and morality of [American] national identity.” (9) While Cooper’s first novel focuses on who has the right to own and govern the land originally possessed by the Indians, is the question of ownership really at the heart of a national identity? Placing the question in a legal framework marginalizes the process of settlement, the skirmishes, political maneuverings – not to mention outright wars. Moreover, ownership

of the land or of anything of value was denied to large segments of the population, including women, Indians and slaves. Non-landowners were viewed as “incomplete,” according to Brook Thomas, who, along with Charles H. Adams, examines Cooper’s work from a legal perspective. Both Thomas and Adams position the law as the chief controlling factor of American society. “Law is indispensable for defining the republic’s social identity in this era,” Adams states, noting that it not only provided the framework for social discourse but was important in establishing order in a widely diverse society. “Out of the cultural economic, and religious diversity of colonial America, the law’s commitment to finding unity in multiplicity gave it a unique power to forge national coherence.” (7) Adams contends that the trial at the end of the novel is its most important scene because it demonstrates the successful resolution of disparate claims. He argues that the legal system defines man, and by extension, the nation. It is the “seamless bond between personal identity, social integrity, legal order” and it is the heart of Cooper’s social criticism. (21) ⁷ I do not believe Cooper intended a discussion about national identity and nation-building to be confined within the limited scope of the law. Whereas Scheckel assigns meaning to the

⁷ Adams overlooks the epitaph starting Chapter 30, a quote from “The Merchant of Venice.” “If you deny me, fie upon your law!/There is no force in the decrees of Venice:/ I stand for judgment: Answer; shall I have it?” This quote suggests Cooper recognized the futility of the courts and the white legal system in resolving questions of the frontier. It also emphasizes his cultural theory of different gifts for different races. Despite Adams’ arguments to the contrary, the tribunal involving two cultures resolves nothing.

Indians only in the past – as a black spot on the collective American consciousness – Cooper was willing to give them limited meaning in the future. As Lucy Maddox has explained, the Indians were no longer present in the community, but they were central to the national discourse about what kind of nation the young republic would become. The Removal policies not only determined who would live where, and who owned what parcel of land, they also sparked a “widespread public re-examination of the terms in which the nation wished to define itself.” (17) The Indian was short-hand for what Maddox describes as the “high vs. low debate.” They were representative of all Others, immigrants, blacks, and women. Scheckel is right that the Indians mattered to Americans’ sense of themselves. But Cooper recognized that they mattered not just as relics belonging to a vanishing past but as links to a broader definition of the future. This is not a simple idea. Cooper did, after all, resolve his novel with the death of the noble Uncas, symbolizing the same inevitable end of the Indian that he had previously portrayed in *The Pioneers*. But Cooper, I would suggest, recognized the tumultuous society in which he lived and he tried to embrace its conflicts rather than simply erase them. The changing American landscape and the rapid growth of the nation created considerable uncertainty. As a result, writers trying to make sense of the present looked for answers in what they saw as a simpler past. If the lessons could be found in the interactions between a band of Mohicans and a few

white travelers, they could be interpreted for the contemporary conflicts, such as the Indian Removals, facing the nation. Still, it would be a mistake to hope that writers could find answers by simply re-writing history. As Geoffrey Rans notes in his reading of the five *Leatherstocking* novels, Cooper could not escape history, and neither did he want to. In fact, Rans contends, Cooper plays with the past and present in his the *Leatherstocking* novels, jumping back and forth in time as he chronicled the life of Natty Bumppo. Each new narrative recalls and complicates the previous one, and in doing so they emphasize the complexities and uncertainties of their time. Rans believes that Cooper utilizes the ambiguities of his historical setting to great effect. “The only resolution Cooper found (was) to represent both sides, unreconciled.” (25) Rans maintains that, although readers “cannot doubt that Cooper’s sympathies lay with the civilizers,” he nonetheless offered repeated criticism of their treatment of both the Indians and the land. Cooper endorses the white man’s “civilized values,” concedes Rans, but “his novels reveal ruthlessly the irreconcilable contradictions that undermine their reliability.” (41) Because Cooper refuses to reconcile the central conflict of his time, Rans argues that he should be viewed as a progressive author. The novels’ lack of resolution “constitutes the highest fictional value Cooper possesses...(because) it reveals fully the price that was exacted for the establishment of ‘civilization’ and demystifies its most prized virtues.” (41)

Many scholars disagree with Rans' interpretation. Michael Joseph Pikus argues that, although Cooper is "often identified as the first writer of a national literature in the United States," his work actually strayed little from old world traditions, remaining committed to old-fashioned notions of race and class and literature as "stabilizing social and cultural influence." In Pikus' view, Cooper could not accept the cultural and social upheaval that accompanied the Jacksonian era, preferring instead to promote "a vision of America as an aristocratic social paradise." (522)⁸ My reading, more aligned with Rans, has been informed by two other, older but certainly seminal works, William P. Kelly's *Plotting America's Past* and Jane Tompkins' *Sensational Designs*, whose middle chapter offers an eloquent argument that Cooper's purpose in *The Leatherstocking Tales*, and especially *The Last of the Mohicans*, is a social one. Kelly outlines Cooper's vision of history in the five-part saga, while Tompkins is concerned with the cultural systems of race and class. Both raise important questions about Cooper's use

⁸ See also Barbara Champury Lucas' dissertation *Gendering Race: Representations of Native American and African American Men in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Twentieth-Century Film*. Diss. University of New York, Stony Brook, 1998, DAI No. DA9824675, which compares Cooper's "sentimental racism" to the "more overtly racist works" of Bird and Simms. Joshua David Bellin also discusses the issues of land ownership in *The Pioneer*, in *The Demon of the Continent: American Literature, Indian Conversion and the Dynamics of Cultural Exchange*. Diss. University of Pennsylvania, 1995 DAI No. DA9543049, 1996. But the most unusual viewpoint comes from Lora Romero, who contends that Cooper blames Cora for the "doomed aboriginal race." Uncas falls in love with Cora, and once smitten, he is no longer patient and watchful but reactive and emotional. Her unnatural influences lead to his downfall. See *Home Fronts: Domesticity and its Critics in the Antebellum United States*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997.

of the historic perspective and his insistence on what Tompkins describes as harmony “through mutually exclusive systems of classification.” (117) While I am indebted to their work, I nonetheless interpret the novel in different terms. For example, whereas Kelly situates his discussion on the battlefield and is primarily concerned with the preparation of Duncan Heyward to be the patriarch of the new America, I contend that Cooper has a broader social message that includes women and Indians and offers a place for them in the American portrait. And while Tompkins argues that the novel’s literary value lies in its being read as a study of kinds, I find much of interest in the many ambiguities Cooper identifies within the areas of race and class.

Although Tompkins’ discussion of the literary value of the novel does not specifically address the issue of nationhood, she does offer ideas about how Cooper saw the nation developing. Cooper is not interested in psychological struggle nor in political consequences, Tompkins argues. Instead, he conceives “a drama whose purpose is to work out the rules of coexistence that make human society possible.” (119) Furthermore, Tompkins asserts that Cooper demands a harmony that rests on his need for clear and understandable distinctions, whether they be of guns, race, or religious beliefs. Protected by these barriers, humans can coexist. It is more by inference than statement that Tompkins presents Cooper’s vision of a new America: populated by people who have obvious distinctions and who do not

cross cultural boundaries. In Cooper's world, "To be fully human, a person must belong to one class, one totem, one tribe," Tompkins claims. (118) She supports this position by referring to the many negatives resulting from the mixing of cultures and the crossing of cultural boundaries. Magua's addiction to European whiskey, Uncas' reckless and un-Indian actions regarding Cora's kidnapping, the complete breakdown at Fort William Henry, when the codes of battle disintegrate into chaos – these are just three examples of the consequences that occur when distinctions are blurred. Because this novel is essentially about kinds, its stereotypes are useful because they further a system of classifications, as a character's humanity depends on his or her distinctions. As Tompkins argues, "the cultural coordinates that give a person a physical, social and spiritual identity are the source of all human dignity and worth." (118)

And yet I find in Cooper's novel characters who continuously cross these lines. Magua is an obvious example, as is Cora because of her mixed lineage. Uncas, because of his infatuation with her, crosses a cultural line, too. Hawk-eye, although he repeatedly notes his status as "a man without a cross," is also a cultural blur. "He wears a medley of white and Indian garments, carries both the knife and the gun, wanders restlessly over border after border, frequents the company of Indians and has at least seven different names." (Tompkins 118) His blood is not mixed – and he swears to remain

“true to his ‘gifts’ as a white man and a Christian” – but he looks every inch a mixture of white and Indian, and he often behaves in a manner closer to Uncas and Chingachgook than to the soldier Heyward. Tompkins’ penchant for typing characters forces her to make difficult choices – choices Cooper pointedly avoided. For example, her placement of Hawk-eye in the pure white category is as questionable as the character’s frequent insistence of fellowship with only his white, Christian brothers. Similarly, Tompkins’ classification of Magua overlooks his movement between cultures. He, too, speaks several languages, and he alternately aligns himself with other Indian tribes, the English and the French. These contradictions can be understood, if not eliminated, by taking a broader approach to Cooper’s vision of a national identity tolerant of some blurring. If viewed from this broader perspective, Cooper’s world is not based on complete separation as much as it is forged from many cultural collisions. Hawk-eye, Uncas, and Cora are not the blood ancestors of the future America, but they have influence over those who are.

Recall Werner Sollors’ discussion of second and third generations. Although a person’s parents are central to his or her own identity, Sollors maintains they are also links to earlier people, to grandparents and great-grandparents whose identities were slightly or perhaps even dramatically different from their offspring. Sollors contends that, to create their own identity, the sons and daughters of the assimilating generation often invoked

the influence of more distant ancestors as a way of romanticizing as well as legitimizing their cultural claims. Cooper is performing a similar service in killing those on the verge of crossing the cultural divide while, at the same time, celebrating their influences. Moreover, if it is to be believed that Cooper is staunch in his refusal to see cultural intersections, then his preoccupation with Cora's lineage is puzzling. As Geoffrey Rans points out, "Miscegenation is gratuitous in the sense that Cooper did not have to include it – the story does not require it; we may therefore assume it to be deliberate." (129) The complications surrounding Cora's birth, Rans contends, "prove not Cooper's awkwardness but his awareness of the issue's complexity, which resists simple characterizations based on romance criteria." (129)

But if the future of America rests solely on the genetics of the white race as represented by Heyward and Alice, what can be made of her infantile personality and terrorized soul? An examination of Kelly's interpretation of the growth of Duncan Heyward is useful here. In Kelly's reading, the battle of Fort William Henry is the apocalyptic moment in the novel, an event that sparks a "cultural genesis." (65) Breaking with European war traditions, this battle creates the new American identity, to be shouldered by Duncan Heyward. The violent clash, perhaps encapsulated by one Indian warrior ripping the baby out of her mother's arms and smashing its skull on the ground, marks a turning point in the narrative, as well as in the course of

American history, argues Kelly. "At William Henry...America's European and Indian ancestry was annihilated, clearing the way for the birth of a new national identity." (65) According to Kelly, Heyward continues this break from tradition. He is disciple to Hawk-eye's master in the first part of the novel, but he graduates to become master himself as the second half of the novel unfolds. I believe a similar, albeit not as dramatic, transformation takes place in Alice. Just as Hawk-eye's influence over Heyward can be traced throughout the story, so can Cora's subtle power over her sister. Heyward becomes a better officer, more practiced in the new warfare of the frontier and more adept in his interaction with the Indians. Alice becomes more like her sister, adapting Cora's courage and spirit in her own docile character. Her wish to die rather than see her sister marry Magua is one early example of defiance, and her "low and stifled sobs" at the death of Cora demonstrate a maturity when compared to her earlier, mostly infantile behavior. (348) It cannot be denied that Alice's primary characteristic is her beauty, for even Cora sums her up this way: "She is kind, gentle, sweet good as mortal may be. There is not a blemish in mind or person....She is fair - Oh! How surpassingly fair!" (316). And yet accompanying their marriage is the inference that Alice and Heyward will remember the lessons taught them in word and deed by Cora and Hawk-eye. The progenitors of the future have

not solved the problems of the frontier, but they have adopted its lessons for the benefit of future America.

There is, of course, an obvious problem with such a reading of the novel. The characters I present as the novel's true heroes – the Indian Uncas and Munro's mixed blood daughter Cora – die. It is understandable, therefore, that few readers and scholars cast them as national progenitors. But I do not believe their deaths negate their lives or their influence. These characters are not the Others that Tompkins describes as "stick figures." (96) They are the Others whose lives, and not their genes, are woven into the rich fabric of America.

The notion is easier to accept if these characters are viewed simultaneously as both contemporaries and distant ancestors – for that is the double-vision that Cooper asks of his readers. For example, though Cora is a mulatto herself, and suffers prejudice because of her birth, she voices Cooper's politics of separation when responding to Tamenund's suggestion of marriage to Magua.

"A great warrior takes thee to wife. Go. – thy race will not end."

"Better, a thousand times it should," exclaimed the horror-struck Cora, "than to meet with such degradation." (313)

Cora's retort may seem hypocritical, especially considering her own mixed lineage. But Cooper makes it clear that Cora has a purpose other than as future mother of American generations to come. By denouncing the idea of marriage to Magua, Cora performs a vanishing act of her own, passing the crown of motherhood to Alice. Cora will have no offspring, and yet her courageous spirit will be embedded in her sister, and her memory will remain in the hearts of the Delaware tribe. This would seem to contradict Tompkins, who suggests Cora is one of the novel's crossed characters who are unable to obtain full humanity in Cooper's fictional world. If that is true, why is her death the novel's greatest tragedy? The answer lies in Cooper's understanding of the social complexities of his time. Cora is appalled by Magua's proposal, whereas she is kind and encouraging to the noble Indian Uncas. Her romantic feelings for the Mohican are made as clear as her disgust for the treacherous captor. And while Cooper stops well short of marriage for the young couple, he does celebrate them in another ceremony – the funeral rite. The funeral service for Cora and Uncas, in fact, represents an intersection of cultures that is certainly as important to Cooper's vision of America as the previously discussed court proceeding. The rites bestowed on the pair symbolize their union – chaste because of death – but a union nonetheless.

Consider the prayers said over the bodies by the Delaware girls, and how they resemble marriage vows. They “admonished (Uncas) to be kind to her, and to have consideration of her ignorance.” (342) “They pronounced him noble, manly and generous; all that become a warrior, and all that a maid might love.” (343) Cora, described as “ardent, high-souled and generous,” (340) is exhorted to be “of cheerful mind, and to fear nothing for her future welfare. A hunter would be her companion, who knew how to provide for her smallest wants. A warrior was at her side, who was able to protect her against danger.” (343) The Delaware maidens, who “had found no favour in his eyes,” offered an explanation of his preference for her in this way:

He was of a race that had once been lords on the shores of the salt lake, and his wishes had led him back to a people who dwelt about the graves of his fathers. Why should not such a predilection be encouraged! He was of a blood purer and richer than the rest of her nation, any eye might have seen. That she was equal to the dangers and daring of a life in the woods, her conduct had proved; and now they added the “wise one of the earth had transplanted her to a place where she would find congenial spirits, and might be for ever happy. (343)

The only white able to understand the language of the Delaware ceremony was Hawk-eye, who is disturbed by the unifying prayers. “When they spoke

of the future prospects of Cora and Uncas, he shook his head, like one who knew the error of their simple creed, and resuming his reclining attitude, he maintained until the ceremony...was finished.” (344) But Colonel Munro is moved by the ritual, and he offers them thanks, instructing Hawk-eye to tell them “that the Being we all worship, under different names, will be mindful of their charity and that the time shall not be distant when we may assemble around his throne, without distinction of sex, rank or colour!” (347) Though Munro’s statement is not unlike Hawk-eye’s earlier speech about Uncas, the scout refuses to translate it to the Delaware.

“To tell them this,” he said, “would be to tell them that the snows come not in the winter, or that the sun shines fiercest when the trees are stripped of their leaves.” Then turning to the women, he made such a communication of the other’s gratitude as he deemed most suited to the capacities of his listeners. (347)

Although left untranslated, the words are spoken, and mourners of each culture understand the message of the other. The Delaware girls accept Cora into their culture, uniting their dead brave with Cora. Colonel Munro, ignorant of their exact words, nonetheless comprehends their sentiments. They speak in different languages, and yet the Delaware maidens and Munro engage in a dialogue, which is in itself a cultural crossing. Cooper, then, has it both ways. He allows Hawk-eye, guide to the readers and to the frontier

travelers, to refuse to translate the statements of unity, and simultaneously, he shows these statements to be understood by all parties. In this contradiction – of celebrating the blending of the races while simultaneously denouncing it as impossible – Cooper articulates both sides of a contentious social debate.⁹

Cooper's detractors argue that he abandons his progressive ideas in the *Mohicans'* conclusion by killing the noble Uncas and Cora after teasing to a possible union between them.¹⁰ They contend that he could have depicted a real-life union for Cora and Uncas and thus prevented the novel's tragic ending. I suggest that although he may not have written a novel as radical as some would have liked, Cooper created one more radical than they think. Despite adopting what Slotkin describes as an attitude of mourning for the deaths of Cora and Uncas, Cooper celebrates the lives of these beautiful and courageous characters.¹¹ He suggests that their love unites them in death, and

⁹ For an opposing point of view, see Renee L. Bergland's *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*. Bergland characterizes the union between Uncas and Cora as a "ghostly marriage" that allows the "Delaware girls and the grieving white father to imagine an afterlife where Indian men and white women, indeed all people...come together without dishonor." However, Bergland maintains that because Hawk-eye does not translate their words, "neither hears the other's speech." (95)

¹⁰ Many critics fail to see any chance of cultural accommodation in this novel. See, for example, Nina Baym, "How Men and Women Wrote Indian Stories" in *New Essays on The Last of the Mohicans*. Ed. Daniel Peck; Lora Romero, *Home Front*; Carolyn Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*, especially Chapter One; Dana Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading 'Race' in American Culture*; Susan Scheckel, *The Insistence of the Indian*; and Renee L. Bergland *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*.

¹¹ Although Cooper concedes the "future belongs to Heyward and Alice,"

he demonstrates their influence on the characters they leave behind, who are the actual progenitors of the future America. The cultural borderlines are crossed when the Delawares, welcoming Cora in death, commemorate her learning of their life in the woods. The demarcation lines are blurred when the grieving Munro thanks the Indians for their funeral service and speaks of a future of shared ceremonies. And although Hawk-eye refuses to translate Munro's words, he makes a similar remark to Chingachgook when he laments Uncas' death.

I have no kin, and I may also say, like you, no people. He was your son, and a red-skin by nature; it may be that your blood was nearer; -- but if ever I forget the lad, who has so often fou't at my side in war, and slept at my side in peace, may He who made us all, whatever may be our colour or our gifts, forget me. The boy has left us for a time, but Sagamore, you are not alone.

(349)

Hawk-eye, who would not translate the grieving thanks of Munro, offers solace to his friend by proclaiming his familial love for the heroic Uncas. The scene has double meaning for Cooper's readers, who as Rans persuasively argues, are "caught between a gratified sense of the racial union

Slotkin notes that following the deaths of Cora and Uncas – "the most beautiful and exotic characters in the novel" – Cooper "mourns [their] loss." See Slotkin's introduction to *The Last of the Mohicans*, 24-26.

projected and a sense of the fragility of the promise against...the knowledge of what the two men will face, have faced, together in *The Pioneers*. (129)

In the end, Cooper is perhaps less rigid about the question of race than many of his readers believe. He celebrates the metaphoric union of Cora and Uncas, and he emphasizes the deep connection between the scout and his Indian companions. That they are united in grief at the death of Uncas, symbolic of his people as a whole, prompts some readers to view the funeral scene as a sentimentalized justification of the Indian Removals. Cooper wants his Indians dead, they contend, and only then can he celebrate their noble lives. Rans, on the other hand, sees the sentiment expressed in the novel's conclusion as evidence of Cooper's intention *not* to provide a satisfactory resolution. Because readers of *The Pioneers* already know what happens to Hawk-eye and Chingachgook, and to the young nation, too, Rans argues the novel's final consolation scene is "profoundly qualified." While I, too, concede *The Last of the Mohicans* supports the inevitable end of the Indians in its final resolution, I also find evidence that Cooper undermined his historically accurate conclusion. Cora and Uncas die, and with them the possibility of racial blurring. But the novel's other cultural blendings remain unresolved. Hawk-eye, the novel's cultural half-breed, bridges the separate worlds of the Indians and whites. In the end, he remains with Chingachgook, forsaking the society of Heyward and Alice. He repeatedly voices his theory

that Indians and whites have different gifts and should remain faithful to their different races, and yet, he often subverts the very separations he espouses.

In Hawk-eye, as in the funeral rite, Cooper illustrates the contradictions facing the new nation. Though childless and socially marginal, Hawk-eye is a complicated and oddly paternal figure, and still a central character in Cooper's complex portrait of America's future.

WOMEN'S WORK: WOMEN, RACE,
AND SOCIAL REFORM IN
LYDIA MARIA CHILD'S *HOBOMOK*

In this novel, the white heroine marries the Indian.

The marriage is what separates “Hobomok” from many other Indian romances, and it may be the only thing some readers – and students of American literature who may not have read it – know about the work. Mary Conant, the heroine of Lydia Maria Child’s novel, marries the adoring Indian Hobomok after hearing the news that her English lover has drowned at sea. She lives with Hobomok on the outskirts of the Puritan settlement and has a son with him. Later, her white lover returns unharmed and her loving Indian husband vanishes into the western forest so that his wife and her first love can be reunited.

The first novel written by Child, who had a long career as an author, magazine editor, and abolitionist, is also concerned with patriarchal social

structures and religious feuds. But the marriage between Mary and Hobomok distinguishes it from others of its time, and it is the primary reason *Hobomok* is included in almost every scholarly discussion of miscegenation and Indian Removal. Its function within the debate takes on various roles. Child's novel is described as a "subversive" alternative to the historic record, as a "challenge to the white male ownership of the Indian-White narrative," and as updated versions of the Pocahontas myth or the Eunice Williams captivity tale.¹ But it is most often defined by the fact that it features an Indian-white union, and that marriage is either described as promoting the possibility of a blended society or supporting the impossibility of same.

And yet there is so much more to Child's story of a young Puritan girl estranged from her stern father and her patriarchal world. While I am not suggesting that the union between Mary and Hobomok is inconsequential, I will argue that it is not the heart of the novel. It is only the most extraordinary act in a work replete with surprising notions of feminist politics. It is a rebel act as much connected to gender equality as it is to racial politics, since in the truest sense, Mary's marriage to Hobomok represents the young

¹Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child*. Durham: Duke UP, 1994, 22-23; Nina Baym, "How Men and Women Wrote Indian Stories," in *New Essays on The Last of the Mohicans* Ed. Daniel Peck. Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1992, 71. The Pocahontas link is made by Robert S. Tilton in *Pocahontas: The Evolution of an American Narrative*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994, by Susan Scheckel in *The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century American Culture*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1998 and by June Namias, in relation to Eunice Williams, in *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the*

woman's power over her own life. Some readers might find this a subtle distinction, but then, for all its forced dialogue and coincidental plot turns, *Hobomok* is a subtle novel.

Note, for example, the book's title. Although primarily concerned with a young woman's struggle to define herself and her life within the limitations of a Puritan society, the novel takes for its title the name of the Indian who is a central, but certainly supporting, figure. Perhaps Child thought the title would attract contemporary readers enthralled with the "Indian stories" being published by James Fenimore Cooper and others. The Indian-sounding title might also appeal to readers of captivity tales such as the story of Mrs. Mary Jemison, a work that was a best seller the same year Child's novel was published.² But the title also offers a disguise for Child's feminist point of view. Similarly, Child obscures her feminist agenda by framing her story within a preface that presents two male friends discussing the possibility of one of them writing a New England novel. In this conversation, Child's characters draw comparisons to the most popular romantic authors of the day. "I did not mean that my wildest hopes, hardly my wildest wishes, had placed me even within sight of the proud summit which has been gained either by Sir Walter Scott or Mr. Cooper," said the would-be author to his friend. "Still

American Frontier. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

² Seaver, James E. *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. Ed. June Namias. Norman: UP of Oklahoma, 1992, 3-4.

barren and uninteresting as New England history is, I feel there is enough connected with it, to rouse the dormant energies of my soul.”³

True to her preface, Child presents a fictional Indian story at odds with Cooper’s works. Her Indian, for example, lives on the outskirts of the Puritan settlement and is more at home in the domesticated world of Salem than on the frontier. Child also couches Mary’s marriage decision in a ritual that suggests a deranged mental state, another effort at compromise. And most obviously, Child concludes the work with the reunion of Mary and her true love, Charles Brown. Despite this important capitulation, the novel is progressive, as it follows the evolution of a young woman whose faith in herself demands that patriarchal Puritan society accept her on her own terms.

* * * * *

Although readers and scholars argue over the meanings and significance of Child’s novel, most agree that it holds their attention.⁴ Its

³ Child, Lydia Maria. *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times*. Ed. Carolyn L. Karcher. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1986. All other quotations from the novel are from this edition and are given parenthetically in the text.

⁴ Carolyn Karcher, in her introduction to the Rutgers edition of *Hobomok*, advances a theory of Brown and Hobomok as doubles, and not rivals, who represent “a dichotomy between nature and culture.” (28) In *The National Uncanny*, Renne L. Bergland argues that Child uses “metaphors and plots of Indian spectralization and romantic love to assert female subjectivity and to claim the body and the political community for white American women.” (63) In *Home Fronts*, Lora Romero sees it as “an alternative to (Child’s) contemporary James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans* and other Jacksonian-era narratives about the perils of miscegenation,” (26), while in

galvanizing nature divides readers into philosophical camps, some bemoaning its structural weaknesses, others celebrating Child's brave engagement of the taboo of miscegenation. Her use of the Puritan historical setting is another achievement, and one that is often overlooked. *Hobomok* represents the first significant step of Child's abolitionist crusade, but she certainly couches her political message in a time and place that seem non-threatening – "barren and uninteresting" is her fictional author's description – and even, inconsequential. Mary Conant's plight in seventeenth-century New England would seem to have little direct meaning for readers of antebellum America. Nonetheless, Child speaks volumes for and about her age. She offers a counterpoint to the visions of nationhood presented by her male colleagues, showing both how American society would benefit from female participation, and how it could be improved by the inclusion of other races. The history of the early Puritan settlements offered her a protected environment to attack, if only gently, the inequities of contemporary America.

Obviously, Child was not alone in this effort. Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Susanna Rowson, and many others contributed as well. In her discussion of female authors and the writing of history, Nina Baym credits these and other women writers with creating a ground swell of interest in American history. Although not well known, these writers contributed to "the

Covenant and Republic, Philip Gould champions Child and Sedgwick for creating "the moral foundations of republican womanhood." (92)

vital intellectual tasks of forging and publicizing national identity by placing it in world history and giving it a history of its own.” (*American Women Writers*, 1)

Child’s forging of an American national identity is the focus of this chapter. In the following pages, I will pose questions about Child’s efforts – what she did, and what she did differently – to shape a national identity that was inclusive of women and marginalized races. I will look at how Child spotlighted problems in the past and offered her progressive solutions for them. I will examine how Child’s female perspective – her position as cultural “other” – affected her literary choices. Finally, I will address *the* issue that plagues this novel: the critical assertions that, although Child may have had the best of social intentions, in the end she failed to render a picture of racial inclusion, and she failed to offer a vision of national identity based on accommodation and acceptance.⁵

⁵ For example, in *The Ignoble Savage*, Louise Barnett argues that for Child to “accomplish the happy ending, all traces of Indianness must be obliterated; Hobomok disappears and his son becomes a well-educated white man.” (120) In *The Land Before Her*, Annette Kolodny calls the marriage “an act of desperation rather than an assertion of love or desire,” and in the end “her marriage to the Indian is obliterated.” (70-71) In *The American Uncanny*, Renee Bergland notes that Child’s novel “ultimately acquiesces to Indian Removal and to the trope of the vanishing Indian, and consigns its title character to ghostliness.” (82). Similarly, Susanne Opfermann, in her essay in *Soft Canons*, describes *Hobomok* as “daring” for its anti-patriarchal stand, but nonetheless argues that Child “displays significant ambivalence about the affiliation, since Mary Conant marries Hobomok in a fit of severe depression.” (33)

Child's novel begins, tellingly, with the narrator recalling the "glow of national pride" that always accompanies the memory of the "thriving villages of New England" and their Edenic charms. (5) Using the contrived technique of a recently discovered manuscript, the narrator describes the nonconformists who established the thriving Puritan settlements of the seventeenth century. Central to the community is Mr. Conant, head of a household that included only his sickly wife and their daughter Mary, who has recently arrived from England. The opening scenes cast Conant as one whose "once cheerful countenance had assumed an unusual expression of harshness." (8) Conversing with someone who had just arrived in the settlement, the "rigid Calvinist" reveals his lack of respect for other religions and his dominant place in the rather unhappy household. (8) Later that evening, Mary is spotted in the forest, performing a ritual that involves cutting her arm with a knife and dripping blood on a feather to write on a cloth. The "wicked thing," she later confesses to friend Sally Oldham, concludes with this invocation:

Whoever's to claim a husband's power,

Come to me in the moonlight hour.

Who'er my bridegroom is to be

Step in the circle after me. (13)

Of course, Hobomok steps out of the woods, frightening the maiden out of her girlish foolishness. But the preferred male, Charles Brown, appears

next and taking her on his arm, the “young couple proceeded homeward.”

(14) This forest ritual, with its sinister overtones, is not in keeping with Mary’s character, described as having “a habitual sweetness of disposition.”

(46) Although she spent most of her young life in England with her grandfather, Mary understands the difficulties facing her, as she watches the harsh conditions sap the spirit from her mother. And the day after her husband-hunting rite is interrupted by Hobomok, even Sally discounts her marriage prospects. “I can’t but admire ye’ve been content so long Miss Mary, considering what ye left behind you...I know of no chance a body has for a husband, without they pick up some stray Narraganset or wandering Tarateen.” (19) Although Sally is teasing – “What makes you take me in earnest?” she asks – readers understand Mary’s shudder.

The only bright spot in her New World life is the love of Charles Brown, the Episcopalian disdained by her rigid father. Brown’s love “left a bright and sunny path” in her life, and yet even that happiness was soon gone. As Salem grew and prospered, Brown and other like-minded Episcopalians who had kept their religious beliefs hidden could keep quiet no longer. After attending a rite in which the sacraments were administered, Brown is called before the Puritan leaders, questioned, and ordered to leave Salem immediately. At the tearful farewell, a sympathetic Mrs. Conant warns her daughter about disobeying her father. “Oh Mary, I would not have you suffer

as I have suffered,” she says of the severed relationship with her own father. (75) Unhappiness overwhelms Mary, whose loneliness is compounded by the death of her mother. In her grief, she grows more alone, and only remains in Salem because of the prospect of Brown’s return the next spring. When Hobomok delivers the letter telling that “an East India ship had been lately wrecked, with the loss of her whole crew and cargo, and added that Charles Brown, formerly of Salem, was among the passengers,” the whole of Salem understood the pain the letter inflicted on Mary. (117) With only “chaos in [her] mind,” Mary could think of no reason to live, of no one who cared.

In the desolation of the moment, she felt as if [Hobomok] was the only being in the wide world who was left to love her. With this came the recollection of his appearance in the mystic circle....In the midst of the whirlwind of thoughts and passions, she turned suddenly towards the Indian as she said, “I will be your wife, Hobomok, if you love me.” (121)

Once married, the couple live together like Indians at the outskirts of the village, and their union produces a son. Hobomok’s “tender reverence” awakens in Mary a sense of gratitude that appeared to be “something like affection.”(135) The union lasts almost four years, and the images of domesticity within the teepee are pleasant and loving. Mary, in fact, describes her feelings for her husband in plain language. “Every day I live with that

kind, noble-hearted creature, the better I love him.”(137) The Mary-Hobomok union is accepted as real in the Puritan community, too. In a wonderful twisting of Puritan beliefs, Mary’s friend Sally and her mother comment on Mary’s marriage, with her mother suggesting:

“There never any good come of crossing folks in love, to my knowledge. I’m sure I never would have said a word, if Sally had taken it into her head to marry a Pequod.”

“I’m sure I would, though” rejoined her husband. “A pretty piece of business it would be of a truth, to have a parcel of tawny grandchildren at your heels, squeaking powaw, and sheskikwee, and the devil knoweth what all.”

“I hope you don’t mean that folks have a free will of their own in such matters.” (127)

Here, Child turns the Puritan doctrine of predestination on its head. Sally’s mother challenges her husband’s prejudices (and by extension those of all Puritans) by questioning his faith in predestination. Noting that it was not in Mary’s control to thwart Hobomok’s advances, she quietly suggests that the colony’s religious leaders are failing in their own faith by not accepting the will of God.

Mary and Hobomok’s inter-racial marriage comes to an end, however, with the miraculous reappearance of Charles Brown, whom Hobomok meets

in the woods. Child describes the difficulty both men have confronting each other. Hobomok's first look at Brown, his eyes showing a "strange mixture of sorrow and fierceness," causes the Englishman to go for his rifle. (138) Moments later, Hobomok thinks about killing his rival, but he quickly dismisses the idea. "'No,' thought he. 'She was first his. Mary loves him better than she does me; for even now she prays for him in her sleep. The sacrifice must be made to her.' " (139)

Brown, too, is confused. He reacts to the news of Mary's marriage with distress. "Disappointed love, a sense of degradation, perhaps something of a resentment, were all mingled in a dreadful chaos of agony." When he responds, Brown refuses Hobomok's "sacrifice" and insists the pair remain together. "I will be as generous as you have been. I will return from whence I came." (139-140) But Hobomok insists and "before Brown had time to reply, he plunged into the thicket and disappeared" and "pursued with delirious eagerness every animal which came within his view." (140) He leaves the fruits of his hunt with a note, written for him by Governor Winslow, detailing his divorce of Mary. "This I doe, that Mary may be happie" is Hobomok's farewell. (146) With that, he goes off on the path to be taken by thousands of Indians during the time of Child's writing.

Thus Hobomok makes a convenient exit, and Child becomes vulnerable to charges of capitulation. Hobomok's vanishing, however,

should be viewed as appropriate to the work as a whole. His decision is presented in sacrificial terms – he leaves knowing that Mary loves Brown and will have an easier, if not necessarily better, life as his wife. Brown says as much, telling Sally Collier that Hobomok’s generosity “might make the best of us blush at our inferiority, Christians as we are.” (145) Hobomok’s selfless actions are in stark contrast to the stern Puritan leaders so aghast at the marriage in the first place. Viewed beside Hobomok’s courage and generosity, those who would rather have seen Mary commit suicide than marry an Indian appear foolish and bigoted.

Mary’s mental state alters in the course of *Hobomok*. As she recovers from her grief over Brown’s presumed death, her relationship with Hobomok evolves. Hobomok initially “fears of her insanity,” (123) and readers are warned of “a partial derangement of Mary’s faculties...a bewilderment of despair that almost amounted to insanity.” (120) Yet after all these excuses and characterizations, Child repositions herself as defender of the union once the vows have been spoken. The couple’s marriage is not portrayed as temporary nor one-sided, as Mary comes out of her “stupefied state” after only a few weeks, and Sally’s visits to her friend’s abode reveal a happy home.

One final point. Child’s representation of an Indian-white marriage contradicts many fictional portraits by not engaging other white novelists’

prejudiced belief that a white wife is a trophy for an Indian. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, for example, Magua seeks marriage with Cora. Cooper presents it as a status symbol, suggesting a white bride would bring glory and respect to him. Child counters this prejudice by depicting Mary and Hobomok both as outcasts in their respective communities. Mary is no prize in the minds of Hobomok's kin, and she is lost – dead – in the mind of her father. Neither Mary nor Hobomok gains from their union, and they live simply, in Indian fashion, on the margins of society.

* * * * *

Many readers are not appeased by Child's anti-Puritan posturing and the social accommodation. They view her novel's conclusion as extremely unsatisfying. But because Child resolves her Indian-white marriage by causing the Indian to disappear, leaving the respectable white lover in his place, has she completely undermined her radical position? Because she portrays the adult Charles Hobomok Brown – the mixed-blood child of Mary and Hobomok – as an acculturated member of colonial society, does she fail as a reformer? Child was primarily writing for an audience of women, whose previous reading was domestic, or sentimental, fiction. In *Woman's Fiction*, Nina Baym describes the American novels written by and about women

between 1820 and 1870 as “the most popular literature of their time.” These books made “authorship in America ...a women’s profession,” but more importantly, they were instrumental in the creation of a female reading public. (*Women’s Fiction* 11) And that audience held different standards for what was aesthetically and culturally appropriate. The “bonds of womanhood,” explains Elaine Showalter in *Sister’s Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women’s Writing*, represented a “female subculture (that) was the essential first phase of political consciousness and activism.” (13) Women’s fiction celebrated matriarchal institutions, and its authors “offered a matriarchal critique of patriarchal institutions from slavery to Christianity.” (Showalter 14) Showalter also notes that women were excluded from the mainstream literary community. “Instead they claimed affiliation with a ... society of sisters whose motives were moral rather than aesthetic, whose ambitions were to teach and to influence rather than to create. Although their books sold by the millions, they were not taken seriously by male critics.” (15) Nina Baym has speculated on the possible reasons for this neglect, noting that critics may simply not like the idea of women as writers, or they may overlook women authors who “have not written the kind of work that we call ‘excellent.’” (*Feminism and American Literary History* 5) Furthermore, Baym argues that women writers have traditionally not pursued the same artistic goals as their male counterparts. “There tended to be a sort of

immediacy in the ambitions of literary women, leading them to professionalism rather than artistry, by choice as well as by social pressure and opportunity.”(5) When measured against the criteria of artistic excellence established by the mostly male literary community, Child’s novel does not measure up. But when judged by what it attempted to achieve, its perceived failures become its most interesting attributes.

In his comprehensive *Covenant and Republic: Historical Romance and the Politics of Puritanism*, Philip Gould takes Showalter’s position even further, suggesting that the nascent political activism of this era’s female subculture is the underlining message to be found in the Hobomok-Mary marriage. Rather than a call for racial intermingling and harmony, *Hobomok* is a radical treatise on a new brand of republican marriage. If, as Gould persuasively argues, the marriage is presented as “a function of gender and not of race,” then the significance of the son’s European qualities and Hobomok’s disappearance is lessened. (128) What is left, according to Gould, is a marriage in which the husband is acculturated into the domestic order, and the paternal controls – represented by Mary’s father and the religious establishment – are at least partially diminished.

As I argued earlier, the marriage between Mary and Hobomok is not the only radical aspect of this novel. Child’s other rebel cause engages the question of race. Gould is correct in emphasizing the marriage’s status as a

power-sharing union. But Child's focus on women's struggle for their place in the public sphere serves also as a surrogate for the issue of racial equality. A closer look at the domestic peace shared by Hobomok and Mary, and the actions of Mary and her "roguish damsel" friend, Sally Oldham Collier, exposes Child's efforts to support a racial agenda, as well. The future abolitionist makes no overt mention of the injustice of slavery in this early novel, nor does she take a stand against Indian Removals. As Lucy Maddox points out, "Child wrote *Hobomok* in 1824, when she was only twenty-two and when the Indian Removal program was still only a possibility." (102) As she grew older, and the Removals evolved from policy to police action, Child's position against them also changed to include "more direct attacks on the government's policies." (102) Although not overt in this early novel, Child's reformist leanings are certainly apparent. Clearly embedded in the novel's call for an America more accepting of women is the suggestion that the young nation must repair its relationship with other races as well. Maddox argues that Child (and Catharine Maria Sedgwick) contributed to "a process of reform" by returning to the past. They invented a history of reformers "begun nearly two hundred years before by the small rebellions of a few spirited and intelligent women against the Puritan patriarchy." (96) Establishing a similar history for the Indian is, of course, another matter. Because of contemporary conflicts, Child would find it "very difficult to

rewrite, in any significant way, the history of the Indians in America.” (96)

As Maddox notes, Child and her contemporaries could revise Puritan characterizations of the Indians as savages and violent, but they could not “reinstate the Indians in the trajectory of American history as easily as they could reinstate women; all they could do was try to account for the Indians’ decline.” (96-97)

But if they could not rewrite the past completely, they could surely influence the future. Child accomplished this objective by focusing on women, the most malleable category of “other.” In a series of scenes paralleling Mary’s defiance of her father by encouraging the advances of Charles Brown, Sally shows herself to be another confident female character. First, she dismisses several would-be lovers, beginning with Mr. Thomas Graves, “the man of wo-begone countenance.” Sally plainly shows her distaste for this suitor, saying “there is no danger of our forgetting the dolours while we have your visage amongst us.” She underscores these feelings with “a blow, which occasioned a sudden and involuntary retreat” when Graves put his arm around her. (17-18) In the next chapter, Sally’s determination is again on display. She is intent on controlling her fate, as is evidenced when she receives a visit from the pleasant John Collier. Sally becomes annoyed when he offers her a written proposal of marriage from the despised Mr. Hopkins. Irritated by Collier’s passivity, Sally broadly hints that she wishes

the messenger and letter writer to switch places. Collier, confused, sits silent, but Sally “burst into her usual laugh,” calling him “the stupidist fellow I ever looked upon” before carefully explaining her feelings for him. (27) Collier finally grasps her intentions, and they go together to tell her parents, who take the news with good cheer.

Sally’s actions lead to her desired end of having Collier as her husband, but they also create trouble for her with the Puritan elders. Collier returns to Hopkins to explain how he, the messenger, ended up with the bride. Hopkins is disturbed by this turn of events, and his resentment pushes him to complain to the church. A formal proceeding is scheduled and “the elderly men assembled at Mr. Brewster’s...with serious aspects discussing so important an affair.” (53) Sally and Mary describe the situation as a “great fuss” and resolve to write Sally’s version of events. (55) In her letter, Sally accepts all blame. “This cometh to certifie that he did faithfully performe his dutie and moreover that his great modestie did prevente his understanding many hints, until I spoke even as he hath represented...If there be oughte unseemly in this, it lieth on my shoulders.” (55) Satisfied by testimony “so simple and decisive,” the elders agree to Collier’s right to marry, but not without noting their consternation. “Although we deem it unseemly for young women to pursue such like courses (indeed were she within our jurisdiction, we should give her public reproof therefor).” (56)

In these passages, Child is participating in a broader cultural effort of the nineteenth century to recast the dour perception of the Puritans into a softer image of courageous patriots struggling for religious freedom. Collier joins the ranks of Longfellow's Miles Standish and others in the transformation of the Puritans from the intolerant figures of their own early histories into open-minded characters more suited to the enlightened readers of the early nineteenth century. As Lucy Maddox notes, the male historians of the Puritan era were forced to "reaffirm Calvinist theology, including its unofficial valorizing of male supremacy." (95) But Maddox argues that women writers, including Child and Sedgwick, were free to adopt a more flexible attitude, one that may have been influenced by their own Unitarian faith.

In addition to softening the Puritan reputation in a humorous manner, these scenes highlight Child's effort to portray two women completely and proudly engaged in their worlds. The formal action against Collier resets the reputation of the Puritans, but it also brings women into a male-dominated social arena. It gives them voice in a setting where they would have had none. Similarly, the courting scenes offer Child an opportunity to show a woman who knows and voices her own mind, and to portray that attribute as one to be embraced in a post-Revolutionary culture. Child and other women writers understood their role in encouraging their readers' social engagement.

As Nina Baym has argued, the fiction published by women in the first half of the nineteenth century “contains much explicit and implicit social commentary” that helped its readers to form opinions and take action on a wide range of issues, including slavery, poverty, religious reform, and politics. According to Baym, female writers such as Child “imagined that if each woman rose to the opportunity that history was putting in her hands...then women collectively would make a peaceful revolution. Women could change others by changing themselves.” (*Women’s Fiction*, 49) Child provides two strong characters to advance that process. Sally’s on-going and nurturing friendship with the settlement’s outcast represents a strong statement of Child’s feminist agenda. Mary’s marriage to Hobomok places her at the margins of the Puritan society. Nonetheless, Sally continues to visit her friend, despite the likely social repercussions her visits might engender. “While all (Mary’s) English acquaintances more or less neglected her, her old associate, Mrs. Collier, firmly and boldly stemmed the tide, and seemed resolved to do all in her power to relieve the hardships of her friend...(and) in less than a year Sally became a frequent inmate of her wigwam.” (136) Even Mary marvels at her friend’s constancy. “Sally, you have never said one word about my marrying Hobomok,” she says, to which Sally makes this reply: “I always thought he was the best Indian I ever knew.” (137) Sally does not discriminate against Mary’s Indian husband, and extends to him an

equality not generally offered to the Indian race. The marriage is viewed by both Sally and Mary as real – not as a mistake, or a trance-induced misjudgment. By not refuting or questioning her friend’s marriage, Sally effectively validates the Hobomok-Mary union. In addition, her relationship with Mary demonstrates Child’s belief in women’s superior capacity for acceptance and accommodation. The men are in councils, deciding reparation for a lovers’ quarrel, while the women are doing the cultural work that will grow the next generation. If judged in this context – of novels as cultural tools that offer road maps to the future – Child’s work is as important as that of Hawthorne and Melville. As Jane Tompkins argues, female writers such as Child attempted to “reorganize culture from the women’s point of view,” and in doing so, they created a body of work that “offers a critique of American society far more devastating than any delivered by better-known critics.”⁶

(125) Like others writing what has been labeled domestic fiction, Child created a world that gave women a central place while simultaneously pushing Puritan male leaders to the margins.

Sally Oldham’s marriage foreshadows Mary’s situation, also created by her own rebellious actions. While helping Sally write her confession to the Puritan leaders, Mary acknowledges her friend’s daring. But a short time

⁶ In *Sensational Designs*, Tompkins decries the long-standing critical tradition that equates “intellectual merit with a certain kind of argumentative discourse and certain kinds of subject matter,” which in turn has established cultural contrasts that pit feminine against serious, domestic against public – “the

later, Mary finds it within herself to be equally daring, to take her life into her own hands and make her own decisions. Child is subtle but sure in her depiction of these two women. Moreover, she hints at her future as abolitionist, Indian defender and women's activist. *Hobomok* serves as a precursor of the author Child would become – a life-long reformer who voiced the Indian's cause during the Cherokee Removals, advocated against the miscegenation laws of the 1830s, and, finally, campaigned passionately for the end of slavery. In every aspect of her life, including her own, difficult marriage, Child demonstrated how women could take charge, live fully and forcefully, and make a difference. It is not surprising she would place her heroine in a similarly reformist light.⁷

Child carefully outlines the results of such reform by detailing what happens when Mary and Sally actively participate in their own lives and within their communities. First, Mary does not have to share the fate of her mother, also a rebellious daughter who died still estranged from her father. Progress is made between Mary and her father, who reconsiders his harsh judgments of her and is reconciled to her future with Charles Brown only after the worse possible scenario – life with an Indian – unfolds. Furthermore, Mary returns to the settlements to enjoy a place not on the margins but central to her family life. And third, the seed is planted that her

'dammed mob of scribbling women' vs. a few giant intellects, unappreciated and misunderstood in their time." (125)

educated son – Hobomok’s “high souled child of the forest” – may grow up to marry Sally’s daughter Mary, and continue the crossing of racial boundaries through marriage vows. (141) If Child’s rebellion against patriarchy is at the very heart of her novel, her rebellious attitude nonetheless spills over into matters of race. With subtlety, she makes the case for the connection between male dominance and racial domination.⁸

* * * * *

Although many discount the significance of Child’s book, there are many others who appreciate its complexities. Carolyn Karcher, the preeminent Child scholar, describes Child’s influence in this sweeping sentence: “She devoted her life and writings to transforming the United States into a multi-racial egalitarian republic.” (xv) In *Hobomok*, the author selected the earliest of American societies – those of Plymouth and Salem in the first part of the seventeenth century – for her depiction of an imagined future in which the child of a mixed-race marriage would be accepted in the world. Writing in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, she faced the challenge of creating a national literature and of giving life to a collective American identity. But like her contemporaries, she had to overcome a

⁷ See Karcher’s exhaustive biography for more on this point.

⁸ See Chapter One of Karcher for a more detailed argument.

central American contradiction: to establish a unified cultural identity during a time of fractured social order. The debates over Indian Removals were peaking, and abolitionist fervor was growing strong. The former colonies, who had united under the call to overthrow the unjust colonizer, were now the dominant, conquering race. Further, the role of women and religious leaders in the new American society were being re-examined, and re-defined. In the midst of all these contradictions and conflicts, Child and many other authors found voice in the historical novel. Distance from current strife was a benefit, as was a clean slate. Child saw the opportunity to color the past in her own beliefs, presenting a bold view of the nation grounded in its Puritan past but not shackled to it. Nonetheless, some critics have characterized her historic setting as an escape. Her progressive ideas about race and gender are rendered irrelevant because they serve to justify the future obliteration of the Indians. Nina Baym, for example, offers this judgment: "Child's approval of Indian-white intermarriage is piquantly provocative, albeit presented as a lost opportunity rather than a present-day possibility." (*American Women Writers* 40) Baym's suggestion that Child fails to change the course of history, as it affected Indian Removal, does not account for the novel's progressive undertones. Child recognized the tolerance of her readers and worked quietly but powerfully to promote her radical views. Her realization that the Puritan patriarchy was connected to the white supremacy of her contemporaries is

evidence of this. By revisiting the Puritan history of the new and culturally incomplete nation, Child could articulate her ideas about women, male dominance, Indian rights, and social reform.

The notion of cultural blending with Native Americans through marriage had always been unthinkable. Consider Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, or the Reverend John Williams' depiction of his daughter Eunice's Indian captors as devils and monsters. These are just the most famous examples of a recurring Puritan image of the Indians that reflects the deep hatred and fear of the "savage." Even Catholics, who promoted intermarriage on the frontier as a means of religious conversion, believed in the inferiority of the native races and saw conversion as the first step in saving souls. For them, intermarriage was not an acceptance of Indian culture, but rather its subjugation. Outside religious circles, the superiority of the white race informed interaction between the colonists, who later became citizens of the United States, and the native people. Intermarriage between whites and Indians was predicated on the notion that the European blood would overwhelm the Indian. Miscegenation was also proposed, if only in theory, by Enlightenment thinkers such as Jefferson and Franklin. Writing in his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson acknowledged the Indian people may not seem as highly developed as the Europeans, but "we shall probably find that they are formed in mind as well as in body, on the same module" with

their European brethren. (59) This, as well as Franklin's call for intermarriage, were only hypothetical ideas, as unsuited to the mass society as the Catholic theory of converting one Indian squaw at a time was to the Canadian colonial effort.

Miscegenation was also proposed as a manner of acquiring land, although there was no doubt that the way of life of the new land owners aligned itself with the dominant white culture. Robert Tilton describes this secular miscegenation theory as an "Enlightenment fantasy of absorption...nothing less than a quiet genocide of the native population." (25) By the early nineteenth century, the need for land for a burgeoning American population and the need to protect the use of slavery in the South complicated the idea of miscegenation. As Tilton explains, the eighteenth-century notion that Indian-white marriage might be a useful tool in a legitimate acquisition of land had given way to a more direct approach. "The need for land...had become much more immediate...(and) when the Indians had to be dealt with immediately, force was still the method of choice." (25-26) Although some white families could be justifiably proud to trace their bloodlines back to the Pocahontas-Rolfe union, similar pride did not extend to the blending of other races. As Tilton notes by quoting a medical treatise of 1834, the distaste for an amalgamation of blood involving a certain Indian princess is "by no means as strong as exists in regard to Africans." (31) Especially in the South, where

laws defined racial categories in terms of fractions – quadroons and octoroons who “looked white” were still black, for example – the idea of inter-racial amalgamation was abhorred.

Inter-racial marriage remained controversial but not impossible. The public had a deep interest in Indian culture and the possibility of inter-marriage, as shown by their response to the 1823 publication of *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. The narrative is an “as-told-to” story of a captive who stayed with her adopted Indian family, married twice and gave birth to several children. A sort of cautionary tale, it reveals many hardships, including a brutal husband and mixed-blood children crippled by alcoholism. The biographical account presents a positive view of Indian women sharing their workload and living comfortably together, but it does not advocate wide-spread inter-marriage or call for a social shift toward the wigwam. Readers intrigued by the topic could vicariously experience this way of life while simultaneously moralizing against it.⁹

Given this social and literary climate, Child’s “barren” New England setting becomes a logical choice. Similar to the Jemison narrative, *Hobomok* allows readers to witness an inter-racial union that, by the novel’s end, comes undone. Like the brutal tales of Indian massacres and captivities, a white

⁹ For more on the contradiction between Jemison’s life and its representation in Seaver’s edition, see June Namias’ introduction to the University of Oklahoma Press edition, and Annette Kolodny’s *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers: 1630-1860*, 68-92.

woman's marriage to an Indian was both shocking and alluring, argues June Namias. "Nineteenth-century captivity materials offered mixed messages for women: excitement, possible romantic bliss, but the chance of sexual harassment." (109) Child understood the social contradiction, and she constructed a plot that would show readers an example of bold ideas of racial and feminist reform but also protect them from its lasting effects. She could not resolve within the confines of the historical novel the enormous contradiction that defined American life. The brutal Removal policies of Monroe and Jackson were decimating the Indian people. The future was not one of accommodation between whites and Indians, or of inter-marriage and cultural amalgamation. As Karcher points out, it is impossible to expect Child to find a fictional solution to an insurmountable social problem.

Instead, Child chose to promote her cause using the power of the surrogate. Child repeatedly equated the places of women and Native Americans as beneath that of white men. According to Jean Yellen, in 1841 Child wrote that "the woman question" was "vexed" and "distasteful" and that she preferred to "fight for 'the rights of others,' rather than my own." (57) She understood, however, that by fighting "patriarchal restrictions on women's public debate" and actively participating in "the public sphere," she could elevate the place of the other "others" in America society, the black slaves, and the Native Americans. The seeds of her future abolitionist beliefs

can be found in this early novel. Child wrote about the connections between the oppression of women, slaves, and Indians in the following decade, when her passionate abolitionism became public. In the preface to *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1835, Child combines “a woman’s plea to be heard with a text that is a well-researched argument for immediate abolition.” (Yellen 54) Five years later, while serving as editor of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Child wrote an essay, “Coincidences,” which highlights the connection between women to African slaves. “With regard to women and slaves, men take away rights, and then make a great merit of granting privileges.” The next year, in another essay published in the *Standard*, she grounds the condition of women and slaves as an issue of class. “The comparison between women and the colored races as *classes* is striking. Both are exceedingly adhesive in their attachments; both, comparatively speaking, have a tendency to submission, and hence, both have been kept in subjection by physical force.”¹⁰ Child does not articulate these ideas in *Hobomok*, but they are present nonetheless. By portraying women in the early settlements who are models of strength and compassion, who are characterized by both motherly love and civic action, she clearly intends to

¹⁰ “Coincidences” by Lydia Maria Child, *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 2, 18 (6 October, 1842) and “The African Race,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 3 (27 April 1843). See Jean Fagan Yellin’s discussion for insight into Child’s attempt to balance the views of anti-slavery advocates who sought reforms for women with her more conservative readers. See also Chapter 12 of Karcher’s *The First Woman in the Republic*.

help elevate the other oppressed classes, the nation's African slaves and indigenous Indians. As argued by Carolyn Karcher, American abolitionists championed both "other races," the Native Americans, and the African slaves. "Abolitionists insisted that all races had the capacity to attain the level of 'civilization' whites had reached through favorable historical circumstances" (213). Though the leaders of the movement took up "the cause of the Indian before taking up the issue of slavery ... they continued to plead for justice toward both Indians and blacks until the intensifying crisis over slavery absorbed all their energies." (213) Therefore, it is reasonable to find in Child's Indian novel a vision of America that condemns the domination of white men over those perceived inferior because of race *and* gender. In re-writing the Puritan past to include independent women and mixed-race children, she is defending the future of all classes. By giving voice to Mary and Sally, and by showing the Native American to be more noble than his often-petty white male counterparts, Child offers a portrait of America that empowers all people.

Karcher makes a strong case for the novel's overall calls for reform by emphasizing Child's new interpretation of the colonists' interaction with the Indians. Karcher argues that in her contribution to the creation of a national literature, Child breaks free of the constraints of the genre of Puritan captivity narratives.

“In *Hobomok* the threat of Indian hostilities occupies little more than two out of twenty chapters and is quickly dissipated. Moreover, that staple from the captivity narrative which garnishes virtually every historical novel set in the early colonial period -- the scene of Indians swooping down on a helpless community, barbarously murdering most of the inhabitants, and carrying them into captivity-- is absent...In these respects, *Hobomok* is ... revolutionary.” (33)

Still, there is the difficulty of the son, born to Mary and Hobomok and raised by Mary and her second husband, Charles Brown. The boy, who becomes his grandfather's “peculiar favorite,” is raised an Englishman, sent to the motherland to complete his education, and “his father was seldom spoken of and by degrees his Indian appellation was silently omitted.” (150)• This is not assimilation, as Child would have us believe, but “a betrayal of the alliance with people of color that had allowed Mary to liberate herself” in the first place, argues Karcher, who is harsh in her judgment of Child's happy ending. “Despite insights into the connections between male dominance and white supremacy, and despite daring revisions of the patriarchal script...Child ultimately succumbs to the familiar white fantasy that the Indian will somehow disappear.” (32)

And so we come again to the contradiction of Child's remarkable novel. Even the novel's supporters – and there is not a stronger advocate for Child than Karcher – hesitate at the ending, allowing the “cultural genocide” represented in Charles Hobomok Brown's outward appearance to hold sway over the rest of the work.¹¹ Karcher and others acknowledge its successes – *Hobomok* does present “a more progressive vision of race and gender relations than the one ultimately encoded in the American literary canon,” concedes Karcher (32) – but always at the fault of its fantasy end. The fact remains that the ending, while difficult, is not a failure. Charles Hobomok Brown grows up to be an Indian-American who successfully assimilates into the majority society. He is the favorite of his prickly grandfather, the staunch Puritan who abandons his intolerance. Unlike his Indian father, Charles Hobomok Brown is not forced to live on the margins of society. He is the precursor to the racial theory later described by Child as “the difference between trees in a forest, not as between trees and minerals.” (185) The differences between the races' skin colors “are the *effects* of spiritual influences, long operating on character, and in their turn becoming *causes*. Thus intertwining, as Past and Future ever do.” (185)

In the end, I believe Child accomplished much in her lively reworking of a “barren and uninteresting New England history.” She presents a daughter

¹¹ As mentioned earlier, Karcher, Gould, and Bergland, among *Hobomok's* staunchest supporters, nonetheless rue its ending.

who succeeds where her mother failed, and a Puritan father who changes his views through the actions of his stubborn child. She depicts a society where women participate in the public sphere and dominate in the domestic one. She envisions a community able to accommodate a mixed-blood son, even as it could not find a place for his father. It is true she achieves all this while also supporting the inevitability of the Indians' demise, as represented by Hobomok's sentimentalized exit into the western forest. But as Jane Tompkins persuasively argues, the novel accomplished a "certain kind of cultural work" and thus should not be measured by the same "modernist critical principles" applied to Melville, Hawthorne, and others. Tompkins writes, "I see (these novels) doing a certain kind of cultural work within a specific historical situation, and value them for that reason. I see their plots and characters as providing society with a means of thinking about itself, defining certain aspects of a social reality which the authors and their readers shared, dramatizing its conflicts and recommending solutions." (200) Child's novel should not, in short, be criticized for its lack of formal coherence but rather championed for the cultural work it accomplishes in re-imaging important social issues, including the role of women in society. And as Philip Gould points out, readers who doubt Child's achievements, as well as those who celebrate them, are led to the same conclusion: "The female mind is

necessary to social and political order. Lose it and the stable boundaries of a pure republic will collapse.” (130)

FEMINISM AND CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION
IN CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK'S *HOPE LESLIE*

In her preface to *Hope Leslie*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick acknowledges that her readers may find her story and the central Indian character, Magawisca, difficult to accept. Perhaps her portrayal of the Native Americans as something more than the “surly dogs” found in other works will surprise her readers. Perhaps her audience will rebel against the brave young Indian Magawisca, whom Sedgwick introduces as having “no prototype among the aborigines of this country.” Sedgwick, however, has a ready answer to these imagined objections. “It may be sufficient to remark,” she writes, “that...we are confined not to the actual, but the possible.”¹ This explanation underscores Sedgwick’s vision of the novel as a whole. Writing about the Puritan settlers of the seventeenth century, she uses the past as the

¹Catharine Maria Sedgwick. *Hope Leslie, or Early Times in the Massachusetts*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1987, 6. All future references are from this edition.

gateway to a future of possibilities. Her portrait of Magawisca, as well as her depiction of the Pequod skirmishes, are not limited by what appeared in the history books or in the best-selling fiction of her day. As she explains in her preface, “In our histories, it was perhaps natural that [the Indians] should be represented as ‘surly dogs,’ who preferred to die rather than to live... Their own historians or poets, if they had such, would as naturally and with more justice, have extolled their high-souled courage and patriotism.” (6)

Sedgwick made a “patient investigation” of the historical period, and crafted a story filled with characters and events to be interpreted as what may have been, and also what might be to come. Admitting her novel is not “intended as a substitute for genuine history,” she nonetheless argued “the observer of human nature” will come to see that “elements of virtue and intellect are not withheld from any branch of the human family.” (6)

Many of the issues Sedgwick pursues in her historical novel were hotly debated during the early nineteenth century. Claims on the lands of the Cherokees, for example, and racial questions resulting from the growing abolitionist movement were debated and discussed in political and religious circles as well as among private citizens. How Americans would work out these challenges had not yet been determined. Sedgwick, who later acknowledged in her autobiography the efforts of writers in the creation of an

American culture, clearly understood the possibility of shaping the nation's future through a thought-provoking work of historical fiction.

Sedgwick also recognized the opportunity to provide a different version of the frontier story being written by James Fenimore Cooper, especially *The Last of the Mohicans*. *Hope Leslie*, published a year after *Mohicans*, was written in response to Cooper's wilderness tale, with a capture-and-rescue plot so similar Nina Baym suggests it should have been titled, *The Last of the Pequods*.² It also engages some of the religious and gender issues prevalent in Lydia Maria Child's Indian story, *Hobomok*, published three years earlier. *Hope Leslie* takes a decidedly different approach than these two novels, however. Whereas Child calls attention to the inequality of the Puritan patriarchy by moving her heroine outside its purview, Sedgwick tells the story of independent women voicing their resistance to the rigid confines of their society. And unlike Cooper, whose characters speak repeatedly about the difference between genders, races, and even locations such as the settlements and the frontier, Sedgwick presents a tale that conflates such borders and boundaries, examining the similarities as often as Cooper notes the contrasts. Her characters – men and women – move from the outlying settlements to the heart of Boston, from the public

² Nina Baym, "How Men and Women Wrote Indian Stories," in *New Essays on Last of the Mohicans*. Ed. Daniel Peck. New York: Cambridge UP, 1992, 81. See also Susanne Opfermann's essay about the influences that Cooper, Child and Sedgwick had upon each other in *Soft Canons: American Women*

spaces of courtrooms to the domestic realm of the parlor. Her females are the captives and they are also the rescuers. Her story gives voice to the Indian side of the horrific stories of bloodshed and battle as well as the version told by the settlers. And while her final vision does not feature a future of blended races, neither does it sanction the violence and hatred that contributed to the demise of the Indian people. Her characters Hope, Magawisca, and Esther celebrate the strength, independence, and centrality of women within their societies. They represent the possibilities that Sedgwick envisioned for a future America.

* * * * *

Sedgwick's novel opens in 1630, in one of the outlying settlements of the Massachusetts colonies, where the Fletcher family lives in fear of Indian attack. Living with them are two Indian servants – a son and daughter of a Pequot chief – and a distant cousin, Faith. Hope, who is Faith's sister, is traveling home with Mr. Fletcher from an extended stay in Boston. Martha Fletcher has two young servants, the Indian siblings Oneco and Magawisca, who live with her and her children. Before Hope and Mr. Fletcher return, however, the father of Oneco and Magawisca attacks their home, killing Mrs.

Writers and Masculine Tradition. Ed. By Karen L. Kilcup. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1999.

Fletcher and the youngest children, and taking both Faith and Fletcher's son, Everell, captive. The novel's frontier scenes, which span only about a third of the entire work, conclude with Magawisca's Pocahontas-like rescue of Everell. The scene is reminiscent of the climax of *The Last of the Mohicans*; it takes place on a precipice, where Everell is made to lay prostrate before a vengeful Mononotto. Having failed to convince her father to spare her friend's life, Magawisca climbs the face of a rock in a final effort to help her friend.

There were crevices in it, but they seemed scarcely sufficient to support the eagle with his grappling talon, and twigs issuing from the fissures, but so slender, that they waved like a blade of grass under the weight of the young birds that made a rest on them; and yet, such is the power of love, stronger than death, that with these inadequate helps, Magawisca scaled the rock and achieved her generous purpose.

(94)

Her attempt to save Everell's life costs her her arm, which is severed by the ax meant for Everell's head. Everell escapes, and Magawisca, Faith, and Oneco remain with the Pequods. The next scene opens seven years in the future, in the civilized settlement in Boston. Sedgwick transforms the novel into a domestic tale, albeit one that includes several exciting capture-and-

rescue episodes. Substituting a colonial settlement for the frontier allows her to revise the history of the early Puritan settlements, especially by presenting women as active members of civic life. This part of the novel focuses primarily on the love-triangle among Hope, the virtuous Esther Downing, and Everell, although there is a secondary plot involving a Roman Catholic provocateur out to harm the settlement and win Hope's heart. Also noteworthy is the return of Magawisca, who introduces Hope to her sister before she is captured. She stands trial, but is freed by Hope before a verdict is rendered. Both Faith and Oneco are briefly captured, but in the end the Indians go free, to make their forced journey west, and Hope and Everell marry.

From the outset, Sedgwick takes great care to picture the Puritan homestead as harmonious. Magawisca is described as accomplished in English and "beautiful even to an European eye," (23) and the Bethel homestead is shown to be a pleasant, loving home where the Indian servants are treated as members of the family. Sedgwick emphasizes Magawisca's importance within the family by introducing her as an Indian princess of noble stature – she is the daughter of a Pequod chief – and great intelligence. Sedgwick reinforces Magawisca's unusually strong character by having Everell – who is obviously smitten with her even as a youth – describe her in masculine terms. She "had a habitual self-command that hid the emotions of

her heart from common observers and veiled them even from those who most narrowly watched her.” (45) Hard to decipher, Magawisca is portrayed as a woman of action rather than words, and as such she is set in opposition to the title character, who is described by Governor Winthrop as “a wild bird” who “rests too much on performances.” (153-55)

The Indian maiden’s quiet confidence is especially obvious in her account of the battle between the Pequods and the Puritans. It is one of the most important, and progressive, passages in the novel. Overcome with emotion, Magawisca fears that “speaking of the wrongs your people laid on mine” will harm her friendship with Everell. Nonetheless, she describes the scene.

Oh! The dreadful fray, even now, rings in my ears!

Those fearful guns that we had never heard before – the shouts of your people – our own battle yell – the piteous cries of the little children – the groans of our mothers, and oh!, worse – worse than all – the silence of those that could not speak...their leader gave the cry to fire our huts...Then was taken from our hearth-stone, where the English had been so often warmed and cherished, the brand to consume our dwellings...

Some of our people threw themselves into the midst of the crackling flames, and their courageous souls parted with one

shout of triumph; others mounted the palisade, but they were shot and dropped like a flock of birds...Thus did the strangers destroy, in our own homes, hundreds of our tribe. (48-49)

After Magawisca recounts the Indian's version of this war, Sedgwick carefully describes Everell's reaction. The boy is intrigued by the different version of the story he knew, told to him in "the language of the enemies and conquerors of the Pequod." From Magawisca's perspective – one blessed with "inspiration from heaven" – the same tales "took a new form and hue," and he was able to see how "the courage of the Pequods was distorted into ferocity," and their fortitude translated to madness. (54)

This new version of an old story reminded him of the man and the lion in the fable. But here it was not merely changing sculptors to give the advantage to one or the other of the artist's subjects. It was putting the chisel in the hands of truth, and giving it to whom it belonged. (53)

That is, Everell recognizes that Magawisca's version is not a superficial change but one that affects its very truth. Everell expresses "his sympathy and admiration of her heroic and suffering people" and Magawisca listens to his reaction with "a mournful pleasure, as one listens to the praise of a departed friend." (54) And then she describes the long-term effect of the surprise attack, which altered her father's nature. Before the battle, "when

the Pequods were proud and prosperous, he was more noted for his humane virtues, than his warlike spirit.”(57)

Sedgwick accomplishes several things through the telling of this early tale of frontier violence. She offers a point of view that contrasts sharply with Cooper’s belief in different gifts to different races. She shifts some of the blame for the violence to the English, who ambushed the Pequot village. Most importantly, she pointedly emphasizes Everell’s sympathy for the plight of Magawisca’s people. She shows both English and Indian youths deploring the violence, while also accepting shared blame. Furthermore, Sedgwick portrays Everell as having benefited from Magawisca’s insight, thereby suggesting her contemporary readers might also benefit from the perspective of the Indians who at that time were being pushed off their lands and moved west. Sedgwick does not sugar-coat the historic event – nor the next scene in which Mononotto and his band of marauders attack the family, killing Mrs. Fletcher and her baby. In a scene echoing Cooper’s Fort William Henry ambush, an Indian seized the helpless baby, “tossed him wildly around his head and dashed him on the doorstone.” (65) However, Sedgwick offers a more complex context for all this violence than does Cooper. Contrast Mononotto’s reason for vengeance – his village ambushed by the English – to Magua’s beating for drunkenness by Colonel Munro, and Sedgwick’s sympathies become clear. Also, Sedgwick blurs the lines of loyalty by



portraying Magawisca's confusion over the impending attack on the Fletcher home, and her and Oneco's attempt to protect the Puritan family. Whereas in Cooper's frontier the lines between good and evil are clearly delineated, in Sedgwick's fictional world there are many areas of gray.

Sedgwick's retelling of the Pequod story further accentuates her broader message that history holds many truths for the future. Another character might have told a different story, and the history would have been different. So it is crucial to note that Sedgwick, a woman writing about a time of the past well-known to her readers, presents in her novel a woman telling a story well-known to her listener. Both stories re-cast well-known events by telling them from alternative points of view. Just as Magawisca's version of the Pequod battle takes on "a new form and hue" for Everell, Sedgwick's retelling of the colonial history may surprise her readers.

Although Sedgwick's novel is in many ways a response to Cooper, its story moves from the woods to the settlement after only a hundred pages. The shift from the wild outskirts of the settlements to the drawing room of the Winthrop home gives Sedgwick an opportunity to discuss the domestic issues of the period. As Sedgwick moves her story to the civilized world of the Puritans she demonstrates that they behave neither as charitably nor as trustworthy as their so-called savage neighbors. The best example of this contrast comes when Magawisca is captured while arranging the meeting

between Hope and her sister Faith, now the Indian (and Catholic) wife of Oneco. Despite Magawisca's earlier bravery in saving Everell's life, the Puritans lock her in prison. The Puritan leaders, who hide behind their proclamations of justice, appear petty and weak. Magawisca, on the other hand, is noble and honorable. This nobility is paramount in the court scene. Rather than plead her innocence, the outraged Magawisca challenges the entire proceeding, saying "I deny your right to judge me...not one of my race has ever acknowledged your authority." (286) Referring to her mother's fate – another attack on Puritan hypocrisy – she demands they kill her or set her free.

"Take my own word, I am your enemy; the sun-beam and the shadow cannot mingle. The white man cometh – the Indian vanisheth. Can we grasp in friendship the hand raised to strike us? Nay – and it matters not whether we fall by the tempest that lays the forest low, or are cut down alone, by the stroke of the axe...Thou didst promise...to my dying mother, thou didst promise, kindness to her children. In her name, I demand of thee death or liberty." (292-93)

Her speech brings Magistrate Winthrop to tears, and causes the assembly to cry out for her liberty. Although her speech echoes Hawk-eye's beliefs that every race has its own gifts, it is different in one important aspect.

Here it is the native who insists the cultures cannot coexist. Sedgwick allows Magawisca to speak for her people, including those being forced from their lands in the early part of the nineteenth century. It is, in the end, a meaningless gesture, since the novel supports the inevitability of the Indians' disappearance in the same way that Cooper's work does. But Sedgwick's decision to allow Magawisca to voice her disdain represents an advance over Cooper. While she may move her captors with her words, Magawisca does not win her freedom, and instead returns to prison to await her fate. Everell and Hope, repaying her courage of years earlier, rescue her before the legal proceeding reconvenes. In a final ironic flourish, Sedgwick shrewdly notes that, had the court proceeding continued, the Puritans would probably have released her anyway. Reports of hostilities brewing among their Indian neighbors would have prompted them to avoid an antagonizing action. Having forced a trial on principle, the Puritans are exposed for lacking the integrity to resolve the matter on its merits.

Another major theme addressed in the second half of the novel is miscegenation, specifically the marriage of Faith to Oneco, and the possibility of a union between Everell and Magawisca. Unlike Child, Sedgwick does not use intermarriage as a symbol of the absolute accommodation of two races. Instead, the marriage of Faith and Oneco provides an opportunity to discuss the prejudices and fears about native peoples prevalent in Sedgwick's world.

Here again is a minor step toward reforming contemporary notions of miscegenation. Never is Faith's childless union portrayed as the model of the future. The younger sister is shown to be infantile, protected by her Indian husband in the same way she would be protected by a parent. As Mary Kelley notes in her introduction to *Hope Leslie*, the marriage between Faith and Oneco is presented as "an aberration" rather than "a viable alternative in the face of a repugnance that nearly all of Sedgwick's contemporaries would have felt."³ (33) While it is not a strong defense of miscegenation, Faith's marriage is an important element of the novel because it provides an opportunity for Sedgwick to explore Hope's reactions to her sister's choice to remain among the Indians. Hope first hears about Faith's circumstances when she secretly meets Magawisca in the town graveyard. At first Hope is repulsed by her sister's circumstances, and Magawisca is indignant over her reaction. Faith, she says, married an "Indian in whose veins runs the blood of the strongest, the fleetest of the children of the forest...and whose souls have returned to the Great Spirit, stainless as they came from him. Think ye that your blood will be corrupted by mingling with this stream?" (188) Magawisca further supports this "one children" theory by mentioning their mothers, who both lie buried in the cemetery. "I think the Great Spirit looks

³Carol Singley describes the Faith-Oneco marriage as having "a sterile frozen quality," and Nina Baym argues that Faith's marriage to Oneco represents her rejection of the white world, and it "offers no social alternative to acculturation." See Singley's essay in *The (Other) American Traditions*:

down on these sacred spots, where the good and the peaceful rest, with an equal eye; think ye not their children are His children?" (189)

Ironically, the Puritan Mr. Fletcher earlier articulates this same sentiment. Referring to Magawisca, Mr. Fletcher insists that all people are equal in God's eye. In a scene preceding the attack on the Fletcher homestead, Mr. Fletcher tells his wife, "Surely you do not doubt, Martha, that these Indians possess the same faculties that we do. The girl...has rare gifts of mind – such as few of God's creatures are endowed with." (21) He goes on to tell the story of Magawisca's mother, a friend to the English, whose "innocence and good deeds" he assumes will be rewarded in the after-life. "I would gladly believe that we may hope for her, on that broad foundation laid by the Apostle Peter – 'In every nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him.'" (22) Sedgwick's repetition of this same theological argument, this time voiced by the heathen Indian, is another example of her successful undermining of Puritan hegemony.

Hope is swayed by her friend's argument, as her stepmother was by Fletcher's lesson. Nonetheless, Hope is unmistakably disturbed when she finally meets her captive sister five days later. Seeing Faith in "savage attire, fondly leaning on Oneco's shoulder," Hope is repulsed. "Her heart died within her; a sickening feeling came over her, an unthought of revolting of

Nineteenth Century Women Writers, 49; and Baym's essay in *New Essays on 'The Last of the Mohicans'*, 84.

nature.” Rather than follow her instinct – her first impulse, writes Sedgwick, was to spring forward and clasp Faith in her arms – Hope recoils. She “retreated to the cliff, leaned her head against it, averted her eyes and pressed her hands on her heart, as if she would have bound down her rebel feelings.”

(227) In this reaction, Sedgwick shows Hope’s aversion to her Indianized-sister is not her natural response, but one that is learned. If she were to follow her heart, she would embrace her sister. But her learned prejudices force her to recoil. Tellingly, Magawisca senses that Hope has repressed her natural feelings and she begs her friend to take her sister’s hand. Familial affection is unleashed. “The energies of nature awoke, she threw her arms around her, folded her to her bosom, laid her cheek on hers, and wept as if her heart would burst in every sob.” (227)

Hope seems surprised by Faith’s appearance and marriage, a reaction that Magawisca does not understand. The love between her brother and his white bride took root when they lived together in the Fletcher household, as Sedgwick carefully depicts. But Hope is absent from these early scenes. While she remained in Boston, her younger sister lived with Magawisca and Oneco. The young Faith is depicted as “the spoiled child” whose “shrinking timid character doth not promise, in any manner, to resemble that most potent of the Christian graces” represented by her name. (34) And Faith is immediately captivated by the graceful and caring Oneco. Only he could

shake her out of her spoiled moods by bringing “home the treasures of the woods to please her.” (34) Hope, however, has not the heart to remember the past in this light. She clings to the memories of their lives in England with their mother. Since she did not experience her sister’s earlier relationship to Oneco, Hope cannot fathom the change that has come over her. She is further upset by Faith’s silence, her only words being “No speak Yengees.” But Hope begrudgingly accepts Magawisca’s help as interpreter, and in a poignant exchange, she tries to convince her sister to resume her rightful place in Boston. Hope tries to change their future by recalling the past they shared.

“Ask her if she remembers the day when the wild Indians sprung upon the family at Bethel like wolves upon a fold of lambs. If she remembers when Mrs. Fletcher and her innocent little ones were murdered and she stolen away?”

“She says, ‘She remembers it well, for then it was Oneco saved her life.’”

Hope groaned aloud. “Ask her,” she continued with unabated eagerness, “if she remembers when we played together and read together and knelt together at our mother’s feet?”

“She remembers something of all this, but she says, ‘it is faint and distant, like the vanishing vapour on the far-off mountain.’” (229)

In this exchange, Sedgwick dramatizes the effect she hopes her novel will have on her readers. Hope returns to their shared past in search of common ground that would serve as a foundation for a shared future. She asks Faith to remember the massacre, but Faith remembers only her own rescue at Oneco’s hands. Hope asks her to recall their mother, but the memory is lost in the cloud of distance. The experiences shared by Hope and Faith are the same, and yet they remember them differently. In this passage, Sedgwick casts Faith as a symbol of a multifaceted past, which lives through those who tell its stories. In this way, the meeting of the sisters in the graveyard is similar to Magawisca’s retelling of the Pequod battle. In both scenes, Sedgwick clearly emphasizes her novel’s over-arching message: The nation’s brief history has many perspectives and each should be studied in preparation for the future. Just as Everell had not contemplated the outcome of the Pequod battle from the perspective of his enemy, neither had Hope considered Faith’s capture from her sister’s point of view. She had never imagined that Faith’s impressions of the Indian attack on the Fletcher home would be different from her own. But meeting her years later, and listening to Faith describe how Oneco saved her life, Hope begins to revise her own

impressions of the event. In turn, hearing her sister's version of the past prompts Hope to reconsider her feelings about Faith's marriage. Eventually, Hope took "a more youthful, romantic, and perhaps, natural view of the affair" and came to "the conclusion that this was a case where 'God had joined together, may no man put asunder.'" (338) The marriage that had seemed unnatural becomes sanctioned because Hope is able to look to the past with a new set of eyes.⁴

Another important theme in the second part of the novel is the active civic role performed by Hope, and in a different way, by her friend Esther. If Hope is the symbol of America's future – a role inferred in her name – she is a very different maternal figure than Cooper's Alice Munro. Hope is no trembling, passive daughter. She is even more willful than Child's Mary Conant, who after her rebellious union with Hobomok returns to her father's house and lives as an obedient wife. In fact, Hope is celebrated for her lack of passivity, as shown in an exchange between Mr. Fletcher and Governor Winthrop. The two men, discussing the futures of Everell, Hope, and Esther, make clear their preferences. "You must allow, brother, that [Hope] hath not, I speak it tenderly, that passiveness, that next to godliness, that is a woman's best virtue," says Winthrop. Mr. Fletcher is happy to allow this, since he sees

⁴ Judith Fetterly advances the ideas that Magawisca, and not Faith, is the sister whom "Hope has the opportunity to recover." That she fails to win back either of them shows Sedgwick "does not choose to use her text as an opportunity to challenge American complacency and complicity in removal." (509)

the folly of Winthrop's statement. "I should scarcely account...a property of soulless matter, a virtue," he answers impatiently. (153) Smiling at what he considers Fletcher's loving indulgence, Winthrop nonetheless presses that a husband should be found for the "lawless girl" who he believes would benefit from "the modest authority of a husband." (155) Tellingly, Winthrop suggests that Sir Philip Gardiner, later shown to be a fraud, is a suitable mate for Hope. Fletcher is skeptical but not adamantly opposed. Hope, on the other hand, sees through his scam, thereby demonstrating that the natural instincts of women are superior to those of their supposed guardians. Whereas Winthrop cannot see through the guise of Gardiner, Hope immediately senses his secrets. The Puritan fathers, though of the best intentions, are blind to human nature.

Just as she rebels against their choice of husband for her, Hope also confronts the patriarchal restraints of the broader community. Like Mary Conant, she finds the social climate claustrophobic, and the authority of the men overpowering. Hope tells her friend Esther of her impatience with the strict guard kept over her. Esther, however, tells her it is deserved. "You do allow yourself too much liberty of thought and word: you certainly know that we owe implicit deference to our elders and superiors. We ought to be guided by their advice, and governed by their authority." Hope's reply – "Esther you are a born preacher" – is another strike against the religious leaders.

“...Really I do not agree with you about advice and authority. As to advice, it needs to be carefully administered, to do any good, else it’s like an injudicious path...As to authority, I would not be a machine, to be moved at the pleasure of anybody that happened to be a little older than myself.” (180)

As Judith Fetterley notes, Hope’s challenge to “established authority” allows Sedgwick to accomplish “nothing less than the deployment of biological woman as the representative American. Witty smart, compassionate, gutsy Hope Leslie...is a remarkably ‘American’ figure.” (501)

Despite bristling at unjustified authority, Hope does submit to a husband by marrying Everell. Esther, on the other hand, remains single, and it is her situation that receives Sedgwick’s final attention. After all the captivities and rescues are completed, and Magawisca goes west with her brother and his white wife, the novel concludes by looking to the future. Its final image is of Esther Downing, who refuses to marry anyone after Everell chooses Hope. After their marriage, Esther travels to England, but she soon returns to the settlements and receives a warm and tender welcome from her friends. “Her personal loveliness, Christian graces, and the high rank she held in the colony, rendered her an object of very general attraction,” Sedgwick explains. (349) She does not marry by choice. “[Esther] illustrated a truth, which, if more generally received by her sex, might save a vast deal of misery: that marriage is not essential to the contentment, the dignity, or the

happiness of woman.” (350) In this, the last section of the tale, it is Esther who serves as Sedgwick’s role model, a woman whose “disinterested devotion” made those in her acquaintance better and happier. Esther is not be the matriarch of future generations, but neither is she marginalized. The single woman, be her Esther or Sedgwick herself, holds a respected place in America’s future.

Sedgwick depicts a community welcoming of independent women but resigned to the Indian’s westward march – as represented by the marriage of Hope and Everell – and marked by racial purity and European domination. Sedgwick’s novel stresses community over Jacksonian individuality, as it is celebrated in Cooper’s independent Natty Bumppo. Furthermore, it addresses the violence of the races in terms of responsibility and not inevitability. Like Child’s nonviolent reworking of the captivity narrative, Sedgwick’s novel does not celebrate the violence of the Indian-white clashes in the same nationalistic tones employed by Cooper. Instead she humanizes racial strife, as demonstrated by Magawisca’s cry as she leaps to save Everell: “Oh my father, has your heart become stone?” (87) Sedgwick’s past – and by extension, her vision of the future – is peopled by Indians who risk their lives for their European friends, who are violent but only when pushed, and then not without remorse. Her heroine suffers from the need for revenge, a stereotypical characteristic of the Indian race, but Magawisca is also

concerned with justice. Whereas Cooper kills off Uncas, the last of the great race, Sedgwick gives Magawisca the opportunity to demand a different future, albeit one separated from the white man and his treachery. Unlike Child, who depicts Hobomok as sacrificing his happiness for the sake of the white woman he idolizes, Sedgwick allows her Indian heroine to act for her own happiness, placing her on equal footing with her white counterpart, Hope. Magawisca does demand the separation of the races, which is undeniably the solution sought by the land and gold-seeking white colonists. The solution to the Indian question here benefits the whites rather than the Indians, and therefore is viewed as a failure. But, as Lucy Maddox and Jane Tompkins both argue, the fate of the Indian was sealed when Sedgwick was writing her novel. Nonetheless, Sedgwick employs one of the hoariest excuses for their total disappearance from the Northeast. The decision to go west is Magawisca's, and therefore the whites are exempted of responsibility. Nina Baym sums up Sedgwick's perspective in this way: "It does not matter to this interpretation that the New England settlement meant the displacement of Indians, because the Indians chose to go." (84) Lucy Maddox presents a more detailed argument in favor of Sedgwick's position "on the side of the reformers and assimilationists." (109) She shows an author re-casting the Puritans in "a benevolent, enlightened form," and imagining two female characters who can alter their community.

Sedgwick is more successful in cultivating a new order for women than she is in carving out a future for the tribes. As the mother of the future, Hope is presented as intelligent, thoughtful, engaged in civic life, and an active participant in society. As a single woman who chooses not to marry, Esther is a valuable member of society who cherishes her independence.

Magawisca, on the other hand, is unable to break her ties to her father and his wishes, and therefore leaves her white friends to be with him. As Maddox notes, “the potential is clearly there in Magawisca to become a part of the new feminized realignments of family” at the heart of Sedgwick’s novel.

(107) But Magawisca chooses otherwise, removing herself from the picture. Hope and Esther are the women of the future, and America will be better off for them.

Nina Baym offers a different interpretation of the novel. In *American Women Writers and the Work of History*, she argues that Sedgwick and other women authors “contributed to the vital intellectual tasks of forging and publicizing national identity by placing the new nation in world history and giving it a history of its own.”⁵ She congratulates these novelists for highlighting the plight of women by making them central characters who “participate[d] in the patriotic work of establishing and affirming national

⁵Nina Baym, *American Women Writers and the Work of History*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1995, 1. All citations in this discussion are from Baym’s work, 155-159. Baym also argues she is “even more forthright than Child about the inevitability and morality of Indian Removal.” (158)

origins, characters and values.” (155) However, Baym insists that these writers participated in this cultural work not by creating “a model of female national character” but by establishing a standard of behavior that personified the “cultural refinement of America.” (155) Baym maintains that in tranfering the Sir Walter Scott adventure to the drawing room, women writers – specifically Child and Sedgwick – faced a difficult dilemma.

If the woman was to be the central character herself, she had to be imagined as participating more directly in historical events than as somebody’s girlfriend. How was this to be done? The solution...(was) in making her act to preserve or forward some historical trend that was only embryonic in her own time. The trend that she was chosen to stand for, curiously, was the cultural refinement of America, which preserved the good aspects of aristocracy.” (155)

It is all about class, argues Baym. And that means that if the heroines are standard-bearers of a new American ascendancy, they cannot also be rebels. In opening her discussion to include *Hobomok* as well as *Hope Leslie*, Baym supports her thesis by noting that the heroines of both novels “are in fact aristocrats” representing “enlightened Christian gentility” and who contribute to America’s progress through “good manners, taste, graciousness, refinement, wit, spirit, and other values at once aristocratic and feminine.”

(156) The aristocratic Mary Conant, for example, does not adopt the social customs of her husband's people. Rather, she lives as she did before, only on the margins of the Puritan settlement and not at its center. Prior to his marriage to Mary, Hobomok had recognized the superiority of the Puritans and had left his community to live on the outskirts of theirs. (159) And Hope, who lived her early childhood in "aristocratic luxury in England" is "portrayed as a much classier character than everybody who surrounds her."

(156)

Their class origins prevent them from being rebels, but not from criticizing their Puritan surroundings, if only in a superficial way. Baym maintains that the novels focus on "the long (religious) road traveled from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century" and Mary and Hope "perform no culturally subversive acts when they deplore Puritan shortcomings." According to Baym, then, the novelists succeed in only softening the harsh reputations of the Puritans and, as a result, their novels present the same inevitable outcome.

Notwithstanding Mary's dalliance with an Indian chief (the Indian connections in these books are always aristocratic), the outcomes of both novels show that the Indians were destined to be supplanted by a civilization that was not only stronger than, but also morally superior to, theirs." (159)

Baym also cautions “a white feminist reader” against believing that “women authors, more than men, offered a vision of egalitarian and respectful relations between white women and indigenous people.” Baym glosses over Magawisca’s tale of the Puritan assault on the Pequods, and she dismisses Sedgwick’s portrayal of her as predicated on an “assumption of white cultural superiority.” Moreover, the friendship between Magawisca and Hope, like those presented in other antebellum women’s historical novels, are “seldom egalitarian and never resonate emotionally like the tie between Cooper’s Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook.” (159) But Baym’s thesis rests on a very narrow reading of both *Hobomok* and *Hope Leslie*. It is too easy, for example, to dismiss a central plot-line such as the marriage between Mary and Hobomok with the phrase, “notwithstanding Mary’s dalliance with an Indian husband...” That dalliance produces several poignant scenes between Mary and her friend Sarah, and it offers a sympathetic domestic portrait of an Indian to counter the usual depiction of a blood-thirsty warrior. Moreover, the dalliance produces a child, a son whose Indian name may be lost but whose Indian blood flows in his veins. Similarly, Baym also overlooks key character developments and plot lines in Sedgwick’s historical tale. While she may be correct in pointing out the preservation of class lines in the novel, she ignores Hope’s rejection of them. She sees no cultural significance in the role of Esther as a single woman who leads a valuable, and valued, life. Living

within male-dominated Puritan society – one that Baym acknowledges has little room for women other than as wives or mothers – Esther carves out a progressive place for herself in society. In so doing, she refutes the confines of the patriarchal community and creates exactly what Baym says is not present in Sedgwick's work: "a model of female national character."

Finally, I would take issue with another of Baym's critiques: that had Sedgwick truly wanted to revise history and change the course of the future by re-envisioning the past, she would not have had Magawisca reject the mingling of the races as impossible. "The mingling...had in fact been occurring all along the frontiers, producing a substantial mixed-blood population" argues Baym. However, the novels by Child and Sedgwick depict the same mingling previously discounted by Baym as marginal, and therefore, unimportant. Mary and Hobomok, who live on the outskirts of Salem, and Faith Leslie and Oneco, who live with Oneco's tribe on the frontier, are summarily rejected as evidence that these women envisioned a future America that is different from its past. Baym wants readers "to be careful about claiming that antebellum women demonstrated a multicultural sensibility." These inter-marriages should not be interpreted as hearty endorsements of the blending of races, but neither should they be summarily dismissed.

Curiously, in his much broader discussion of antebellum literature, David S. Reynolds uses the word “rebel” – the very same word Baym refuses to accept – in his description of the main female characters in Sedgwick’s novel. Noting that *Hope Leslie* has, “with some justification, been called the finest novel about Puritan times published before *The Scarlet Letter*,” Reynolds describes it as “a remarkable novel...(about) two feisty women, Hope Leslie and the Indian Magawisca, who brashly rebel against male authority.” (348) Reynolds claims the novel celebrates female independence above all, and that the actions of the main female characters demonstrate that the young women of the colonies were developing characteristics not found in the women of England. In addition, Reynolds understands the importance of Sedgwick’s portrayal of the unmarried Esther as a strong, independent woman. “Here Sedgwick becomes the first American author in a line that would later include Margaret Fuller and Louisa May Alcott who used the old maid as a symbol of womanly self-reliance.” (349)

Carol J. Singley takes a similar, appreciative approach in her essay “Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*: Radical Frontier Romance.” Countering Baym’s discussion, Singley argues convincingly that Sedgwick deserves “as prominent a place in an American literary canon as Cooper...for

her alternative vision of the American woman (and) American culture.”⁶ In her essay, Singley notes that Sedgwick achieves three important objectives: she exposes Puritan injustice; she contextualizes the Puritan experiment – the roots of the American culture – in a novel that links the issues of the past to those of the present; and she creates an adventure romance in which the characters actively participate in society.

Hope’s actions support a history that Singley believes exposes past injustices to Native Americans. Hope first befriends the Indian princess, acts kindly to the elderly Indian Nelema, and later saves Magawisca’s life while risking her own. Singley contends that through these actions Sedgwick confronts the Puritan social, religious and legal systems and partially dismantles them. The novel’s independent, courageous and benevolent women represent the possibility of American womanhood, and of a republic built on their contributions. Secondly, Singley argues that Sedgwick emphasizes the problems of her world by “linking her era’s concerns about expansion to the original project of the Puritan founders.” (42) The plight of Magawisca and her lecture on white dominance would ring true to readers concerned with Jacksonian Removal policies and the ethical crisis they created. Moreover, Sedgwick’s radical story re-positions the New World myth of dominating the wild. She establishes her plot squarely in a

⁶Carol J. Singley, “Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*: Radical Frontier Romance” in *The (Other) American Traditions: Nineteenth Century Women*

community and not in the wilderness where old social traditions did not apply. “Unlike Natty and Chingachgook, Hope and Magawisca do not retreat into nature together, isolated but free. They participate in society, serving as its critics, mediators, and healers” and also as female role models of the future. Singley hedges, noting that *Hope Leslie* is “by no means a book of reconciliation or progress.” And yet she demonstrates that Sedgwick goes beyond Cooper in imagining a future society in which women “must play active and essential, not passive or second roles.” Sedgwick stops short of an ending that “would both subvert and rewrite the white patriarchal plot,” Singley argues, but still there is a victory. For *Hope Leslie* “strains against its conventions as surely as its female protagonist struggles against injustice.” (50)⁷

In his book-length discussion of captivity narratives, Christopher Castiglia offers an entirely different perspective. Castiglia regards *Hope Leslie* as an important work that deconstructs what he calls the domestic prison that restrained women of the nineteenth century. Castiglia, who centers his discussion around captivity narratives, includes an interesting interpretation of Sedgwick’s novel, a work he believes envisions a future role

Writers, 40.

⁷ Dana Nelson describes *Hope Leslie* as “a mixed bag,” noting that while “Sedgwick goes far toward suggesting a relative cultural standard and an alternative model for cross-racial relations, she is not able to resolve fully the implications of her critique for her contemporary audience.” (76)

for women that “exposes the coercive and debilitating power of religion and romance and seeks to loosen their hold on women.” (161)

Castiglia offers several broad perspectives about captivity narratives in general before discussing the importance of gender. First, he argues that frontier adventures written by men use the trope of capture and rescue to underscore man’s quest for freedom and dominance, and to a lesser degree, to sustain the importance of chivalry. Women writers like Sedgwick, however, see captivity as an opportunity for “resolution through revision ...rather than freedom” because in the case of most female captives, freedom was not an option. (164) Thus captivity allows movement between races and cultures that involves negotiation and not domination. As an example, he notes that Hope and Magawisca are unlike the freedom fighter Natty Bumppo, a man constantly re-affirming his blood-purity as he moves between the margins of two cultures. Instead, he insists, they fight for acceptance and peace within a single community. Furthermore, Castiglia argues that women writers like Sedgwick use their narratives to “contradict authorized national history.” In her novel, Sedgwick’s white female characters refuse to “serve their civilization” in the same exploitative manner as Cooper’s heroes; they do not battle the Indians, but join with them to resist the white male’s control. (165)

Unlike Baym, Castiglia finds in the novel both a progressive vision of America and an imperfect portrait of that vision. Sedgwick was writing at a

time when the Indian Removals seemed both morally acceptable and inevitable, and yet she was able to go back in time to create a scene that depicted opportunities for movement between races and social classes. The opportunities did not prove long-lasting, but still their mere existence refuted the intractability of the Removal process. Although Castiglia is interested in the cultural negotiations of captivity, his close reading of *Hope Leslie* is primarily gender-based. He views the novel as a metaphoric jail-break featuring women whose “dissatisfaction with conventionally-defined ‘womanhood’” leads them to re-envision marriage and religion. Sedgwick presents alternatives for women of the future by showing Hope Leslie, Magawisca, and Esther forging a different path in the past. Castiglia supports his thesis in several, convincing ways. He argues that the independent streak found in Hope – and in her creator, Sedgwick – resulted from “the unconventional life promised by an unsettled landscape” which in turn prompted “both Sedgwick and Hope Leslie (to) refuse the scripts that created their overburdened yet silently suffering mothers.” (162)

Significantly, both Sedgwick and her fictional surrogate found comfort and strength in women of color, notes Castiglia. “Hope Leslie, at the death of her mother, seeks companionship in Magawisca, an Indian servant in her adopted home. Catharine, after the death of her mother, turned to freed slave Mumbet, for comfort and support.” (162) By modeling the Indian princess on

her real-life servant, Sedgwick successfully transfers the Natty Bumppo-Chingachgook frontier friendship to the domestic front. Sedgwick provides her heroine with a role model unlike any from her own society – and simultaneously bridges the racial divide. The notion of a future filled with independent women freed from the prison of marriage is further emphasized by Hope’s adventures in the world outside the domestic circles usually reserved for women, and by the novel’s final note, which is devoted to the future of single, independent and valued Esther. Together, the components make up what Castiglia called a “revisionary adventure” that follows a heroine who moves between home and frontier, “thereby refuting the notion that the public and private spheres were ever, as they are popularly labeled, separate.” Further, Sedgwick authored a work which offered women “strategies to resist restriction in their everyday lives” and more importantly “granted (them) permission to enter the world.” (178-9)

While Castiglia believes Sedgwick promoted women’s independence by figuring a plot that saw them crossing into the public domain of the religious service and legal courtroom, Philip Gould argues the historical novel is a call for political action. In his book *Covenant and Republic*, Gould suggests that in every historic work there is an “implied cultural critique,” and that Sedgwick wrote a fictional cry for “a revision of citizenship” that rethinks

the model of republican manhood resonating in the pre-Revolutionary times as well as during the Jacksonian period.

Classical *virtu* still retained currency during this era, especially in tales of Puritan military heroism that anticipated the Revolutionary War. Certainly Andrew Jackson exploited this cultural phenomenon of frontier republicanism, as he cultivated a political persona out of a series of private and public battles he fought to secure both personal honor and political independence. In many ways it violated the self-consciously modern notions of gentility to which the Revolutionary generation aspired. (114)

These types – the rough-and-tumble frontiersman and polished gentleman – competed for the role of hero in Sedgwick's time. The novelist takes advantage of the conflict, argues Gould, by creating "androgynous reformulations of hero and heroine" that simultaneously feminize republican manhood and masculinize the domestic front. Through her rescue of Magawisca, Hope redefines female heroism by showing "benevolence as an active virtue rather than a passive abstraction." By quoting Patrick Henry, Magawisca re-envisioned herself as patriotic hero. In both cases, their words and deeds cast a decidedly female quality on the traditionally masculine realms of protection and patriotism.

Gould even finds a political message in the marriage between Everell and Hope – as well as that between Hobomok and Mary Conant. Acknowledging “the endings of these books...disappoint just about everyone,” Gould nonetheless suggests the novels’ idealized marriages serve as models “of modern republicanism. They do so by staging a free, natural exchange of affections and respect between men and women, one that significantly implied an egalitarian politics of gender. (125) In fact, Gould sees Sedgwick’s union of Everell and Hope as pushing “domestic virtue to its most empowering ends” because their marriage is based on “reciprocal emotions.” (125) The power base that was once the husband’s domain is now shared by husband and wife. This “subtle shift,” argues Gould, reverberates across the entire republic. “As a literary convention, then, marriage becomes the site of the historical translation...a change signaling the escape from the necessity of a patriarchal brand of republicanism.”⁸ (132)

The persuasive interpretations presented by Castiglia, Singley, and Gould support the idea that Sedgwick’s historical romance created a blueprint for the future. Her women are blessed with intelligence and courage, with sharp instincts and true emotions. They behave as well in the public sphere as their male counterparts. They do not fear to listen to the stories of others

⁸ For Fetterley, the relationship between Everell and Hope is “decidedly antiromantic...Sedgwick’s argument for the inclusion of women as equal partners in the American republic, whether now or in the future, depends about the rhetoric of identity between brother and sister.” (498)

who shared their experiences but perhaps interpret them differently. They learn from each other – no matter what their ages or races – and they approach life with loyalty and reason. Contrast these traits with Alice Munro, the first among women in Cooper's world, and it is hard to deny the revolutionary aspects of Sedgwick's Indian tale.

“AN *AMERICAN* ROMANCE:” INDIAN REMOVALS, SLAVERY
AND THE SOUTH IN *THE YEMASSEE*
BY WILLIAM GILMORE SIMMS

Midway through William Gilmore Simms’ Indian tale, *The Yemassee*, the novel’s hero, Gabriel Harrison, is captured by an Indian tribe, and brought to their camp. Tied to a tree, Harrison is “destined to the sacrifice.” But first he must watch as “a thousand enemies, dark dusky, fierce savages, half intoxicated with that wild and physical action which has its drunkenness, not less than wine,” perform the ritual dances that always accompany an important tribal event. Simms vividly describes the scene, the Indians engaged in “wild distortions – their hell-kindled eyes – their barbarous sports and weapons – the sudden and demoniac shrieks from the women – the occasional burst of song, pledging the singer to the most diabolical achievements...the clatter of the drum, and the long melancholy note of the

bugle.”¹ The captive Harrison, despite recognizing the hopelessness of his situation, “could not help feeling the strange and striking romance of his own situation” and a sense of “wonder and admiration” for his captors. (268) The reason for his admiration is intuitive, as Simms explains in a long but important digression. The ritual war-dance “is one of the most familiar practices of Indian education” which Harrison recognizes as a record of their past.

Among many of the tribes these exhibitions are literally so many chronicles. They are the only records, left by tradition, of leading events in their history which they were instituted to commemorate. An epoch in the national progress – a new discovery—a new achievement – was frequently distinguished by the invention of a dance or game, to which a name was given significant of the circumstance. ...In this way, handed from tribe to tribe, and from generation to generation, it constituted a portion, not merely of the history of the past, but of the education of the future. ...The Lacedaemonians went to battle with songs and dances, a similar practice obtained among the Jews; and one particularly, alike of the Danes and Saxons,

¹ William Gilmore Simms. *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina*. 1835. Ed. John Caldwell Guilds. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994, 269. All future references are from this edition.

was to usher in the combat with wild and discordant
anthems. (267-8)

The war-dance of the Indians, then, is not just a prelude to bloodshed, but an important cultural statement. As the warriors are recounting the glories of past battles and the heroics of noble tribesmen, they are preparing for the future. Like great cultures before them – and like those to follow when they have vanished – the songs and dances of the tribe are the annals of their people, the blueprint of what was, the map to what will be.

I begin my discussion of Simms' 1835 work *The Yemassee* with this dramatic passage for several reasons. First, its dramatic flourish is typical of this border tale, a work that Simms went to great pains to define as a romance. Second, it highlights the dual perspective of the novel, which strives to give Indian culture as much significance, motivation, and empathy as it gives the white colonists on the other side of the conflict. This perspective distinguishes it from the *Leatherstocking Tales* of James Fenimore Cooper, who influenced Simms in his choice of subject. The violent and unsympathetic portrait of Indians found throughout *The Yemassee* distinguishes it from the novels of Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, as well. Further, this passage illustrates Simms' self-conscious attempt to forge an American cultural identity. Echoing Sedgwick's remarks about the cultural work of authors in shaping the past, present, and future,

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Simms envisioned an American culture that did not “confine itself to what is known, or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible.” (30)

A staunch Southerner, Simms advanced a vision of the future that is very different from the views presented by Cooper, Child, and Sedgwick. Simms is not motivated by the conflict between Nature and Civilization that forms the foundation of Cooper’s Leatherstocking tales. Nor is he as concerned as Child and Sedgwick are about the role of women in society and the diminishment of the power of religious leaders, although these themes do surface in his Indian story. Rather, Simms advances a social blueprint that champions the class-based plantation society.

Simms was a prolific writer but not one with staying power. Scholars have praised him – “Simms is to the South’s literary birth what Faulkner is to the region’s literary renaissance: a central figure,” maintains David Moltke-Hansen (4) – but he does not enjoy a wide audience today. Born in Charleston April 17, 1806, Simms was the son of a Scots-Irish tavern keeper named William Simms and Harriet Ann Augusta Singleton, who came from a well-known family in Virginia. Simms’ mother died in childbirth when he was just two years old, leaving him in the care of his maternal grandmother. When he was a teenager and again when he was a young man, Simms made several trips west to visit his father, who left South Carolina to find work. He went west again when his father died. These journeys informed his

understanding of Indian settlements and rituals.² Simms published his first volume of poetry before his twentieth year, but he did not immediately pursue a literary career. He studied law and was admitted to the South Carolina bar. In 1826, he married Anna Malcolm Giles, with whom he had one daughter. For a few years he edited a Charleston newspaper, and published a number of poems. In 1832 his wife died, and in his grief, he traveled north to New York to visit his friend James Lawson. The trip was a turning point for Simms. As Guilds notes, "It was at this time that he must have become acquainted with William Cullen Bryant, Edwin Forrest, Prosper Wetmore...and William Holland." The effect upon his already insatiable literary ambition must have been enormous." (*Literary Life* 36)

In 1833, Simms published his first full-length novel, *Martin Faber*, which was followed in quick succession by his first border romance, *Guy Rivers*, (1834) and his Indian tale, *The Yemassee* (1835). This story of the Indian uprising of 1715 was a great success, and several comparisons to Cooper's novels were made in the press. The next year, the widowed Simms married again, this time to Chevillette Eliza Roach, the daughter of a South Carolina plantation owner. Simms and his second wife had fourteen children.

² See Guilds' *A Literary Life* for a discussion of the trips Simms made to see his father, first in Mississippi, and later Alabama, where they visited the Creek and Cherokee nations. Guilds argues that Simms may have remained with his father in "the challenging and invigorating Southwest" had he not already decided on pursuing a literary career in Charleston. (17-18).

Over the next thirty years, Simms created a literary legacy that, by J.V. Ridgely's account, numbered eighty-two books, including thirty-four works of fiction, nineteen volumes of poetry, three of drama and three more of history, and twelve collections of reviews and addresses. (1) He served as a member of the South Carolina legislature between 1844-46, and in 1856 embarked on a disastrous lecture tour of the North, where his pro-slavery remarks invited attacks. His last book was published in 1859, and he died in Charleston on June 11, 1870.

Although an early work, *The Yemassee* is arguably his most popular novel.³ Contemporary reviews in the New York press were enthusiastic. *The New York Times* found it delightful, while the *Advocate* declared "it will not be passed away and forgotten." Capitalizing on the public's hunger for Indian tales, Simms created a highly dramatic work of fiction that included many daring rescues and escapes. Critics congratulated him for his portrait of Indians, saying they were more complex and human than Cooper's noble savages. The novel's warm reception, Guilds notes, helped with sales. "The

³ That it was a best-seller has not influenced current critical opinion. Simms presents problems for modern readers because, as Guilds notes in his introduction to *Long Years of Neglect*, "the chief deterrent to a sympathetic reappraisal of the man and his work is that, measured by present-day standards, Simms is a racist." (4) Current scholarship more often cites his revolutionary tales rather than *The Yemassee*. See Annette Kolodny's essay in *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*, as well as three recent collections, *Long Years of Neglect: The Work and Reputation of William Gilmore Simms*, *William Gilmore Simms and the American Frontier*, and *American Letters and the Historical Consciousness: Essays in Honor of Lewis P. Simpson*. Only one chapter in these three works is solely devoted to *The Yemassee*.

first edition of twenty-five hundred copies sold out quickly, requiring two other printings before the end of the year.” (*Literary Life* 60)

The Yemassee takes for its historical setting the Yemassee Uprising of 1715, a skirmish waged in the colony of South Carolina. The Yemassee people had lived peacefully with the European settlers, but as the white settlers began encroaching on their hunting lands, they became discontent. The Yemassee were also encouraged to revolt by the Spanish, who were building settlements in what is now Florida. The uprising was a bloody event; hundreds of whites were slain by the hostile tribes. Eventually, the white settlers conquered the natives, clearing the way for their settlements to move west from the South Carolina coast into the back country of the southern state.

The novel opens with Sanutee, the leader of the Yemassee, deciding to fight his neighbors with the aid of the Spanish and Richard Chorley, a white pirate and avowed criminal. As the Indian chief plans his revolt, the novel’s hero, a frontier fighter named Gabriel Harrison begins plotting a defense. Harrison is actually the colony’s governor, Charles Craven, who has been masquerading as a soldier and who led the settlers in an earlier fight against the Coosaw Indians. Craven successfully defends the frontier settlements against the Yemassee assault. Although several characters familiar with his true identity almost disclose his secret, Craven is blindly accepted by the

border people, including Bess Matthews, the daughter of a Puritan missionary living in the border settlements. Bess falls in love with the gallant stranger, despite knowing little or nothing about him. In between visits to Bess, Craven calls together the Green Jackets, his band of loyal bordermen, and orders all the settlers to be brought to the Block House for their safety. He sends Sanutee's son, the drunken Oconestoga, to spy on his tribe, and when he doesn't return, Craven goes himself in search of information about a possible attack. Meanwhile, his band of militiamen round up the settlers and bring them to the Block House. Some, including the Reverend John Matthews, refuse to believe the Indians may revolt, and they remain unprotected in their homes.

Meanwhile, the wise Sanutee seeks support for an attack against the gift-bearing but dishonest English. He incites a mob's fury within the Indian settlement, and then directs that unrest at the Yemassee chiefs who do not support his plan of attack. Rather than kill the traitor chiefs, however, Sanutee suggests they be stripped of the arrow tattoos symbolizing inclusion in the tribe. Among those sought is Oconestoga, who is captured while spying for the English. But before he can be exiled from the tribe by the removal of his tattoo, his mother, Matiwan, kills him with a hatchet blow to his head. Through this outrageous act – one of the great passages of the work – Matiwan sends her son off to the Yemassee afterlife, thereby preserving his

place within the tribe. Having followed Oconestoga to the Yemassee encampment, Craven is captured and locked up as the Yemassee prepare to attack. But Matiwana recognizes him as Governor Craven, who had been kind to her father, and in her grief at her son's death, she rescues Craven from his Indian prison.

The action shifts again to the settlers, who are being attacked on all fronts. The Matthews, having refused to take safe refuge at the Block House, are attacked by the Indians, and are only saved when Chorley arrives. However, he in turn makes them his captives. The Indian attack on the Block House puts at risk the women and children hiding on the third floor. They are saved by the daring of the trapper's wife, Mary Granger, who in a particularly grisly scene, kills an Indian by breaking his arm over the window sill, causing him to fall to his death. While the battle rages at the Block House, Craven makes his way back to the frontier battleground. At the Block House, Craven, Hugh Grayson, and the army of settlers defeat the Yemassee warriors. Then, they pursue the pirate Chorley, who has saved the Matthews from the Indians, only to take them captive himself. After Craven frees them, he discloses his true identity as the aristocratic Governor.

From the first notion of an Indian uprising against the encroaching settlers to the death of Sarutee, the novel presents both sides of the conflict. It illustrates the disappointment and sense of betrayal of the Indians toward

their white neighbors, and the fears of the white settlers who do not understand the Indians' discontent. Like Cooper's novels, Simms' work includes a series of daring rescues and escapes, bloody battles, and domestic scenes that flesh out the lives of both the Indians and the frontier colonists. Perhaps there are too many coincidences for the modern reader, such as the snake that strikes at Bess just as Oconestoga is passing through that part of the woods. But the swift movement of the passages and the vivid imagery of the battle scenes compensate for such weaknesses. For example, consider the passage following Craven's escape from his Yemassee prison. Moving through the woods toward his band of foresters, fatigued from hand-to-hand combat and still in flight from his captors, Craven hears the "huzzas of the Carolinas" and so plunges into the brush toward them. But he immediately realizes he has entered the rear of a brigade of Indians.

Never was desperation more fortunate in its consequences...the Yemassees conceived themselves beset front and rear. They rose screaming from their hiding places, and yielded on each side of the fugitive. With an unhesitating hand he struck with his knife one of their chiefs...the fierce and forward advance of that portion of their own allies who had been pursuing Harrison, still further contributed to impress them with the idea of an enemy in the rear; and before they could

recover he had passed them, followed by the obedient dog. In another instant, almost fainting with fatigue, to the astonishment but satisfaction of all, he threw himself, with a laugh of mingled triumph and exhaustion, into the ranks of his sturdy band of foresters. (347)

Simms' nineteenth-century audience almost certainly cheered for Craven and his "sturdy band of foresters." His hero's feats, like Hawk-eye's waterfall rescue and Magawisca's edge-of-the-cliff sacrifice for Everell, appealed to readers who were fascinated with the frontier. Simms may have chosen his setting and plot in response to the public's interest in Indians, but he did not sacrifice his novel's theme for the sake of popularity. Simms wanted to engage serious issues, including promoting the South as a important region of the country, supporting its system of slavery, and defending the plantation society against an ever growing abolitionist outcry. He used this historic romance as a vehicle for advancing his views.

As J.V. Ridgely points out, "Simms throughout all his fiction portrayed Southern society as in the process of *becoming*." (28) And the heavy work of building a culture is especially obvious in this novel. Simms' self-awareness of the Southern writer's responsibility to his culture is apparent even before the adventure tale unfolds. In an important preface, Simms defines the term romance and describes why it is, as a literary form, better suited to his work.

You will note that I call "The Yemassee" a romance, and not a novel. You will permit me to insist upon the distinction...The modern Romance is the substitute which the people of the present day offer for the ancient epic. The form is changed; the matter is very much the same; at all events, it differs much more seriously from the English novel than it does from the epic and the drama...

The Romance is of loftier origin than the Novel. ...it does not confine itself to what is known or even what is probable. It grasps at the possible; and, placing a human agent in hitherto untried situations, it exercises its ingenuity in extricating him from them, while describing his feelings and his fortunes in his progress. ... "The Yemassee" is proposed as an American romance. It is so styled as much of the material could have been furnished by no other country. (30)

Though Simms obviously felt strongly about the distinction between a novel and a romance, cynical readers may interpret his argument differently. Writing for the second edition, published in 1854, some 20 years after the American reading public first became enamored of Cooper and his frontier tales, Simms' defense may be a shield against critics who would find the action too outlandish, the style unrealistic, the plot rickety and contrived.

Reviewed within the strict parameters of the romance, however, these criticisms are irrelevant. If the work is judged as a symbolic treatment of the past, which is how Simms wanted it to be read, it withstands such criticism, as well as changes in literary taste and political climate.

But in his preface, Simms does more than guard against negative critical response. According to John Caldwell Guilds, Simms recognized that Americans embraced “heroic, dramatic, purposeful portrayals of national themes in their fiction.” Therefore, Guilds notes, Simms invokes the rhetorical form that best fit his purpose: the epic. “*The Yemassee*...is Simms’ first attempt to write an American epic – the Great American Novel, as it were – dealing with American history in its initial, most savage form...and depicting an era fraught with irreconcilable competing purposes, cultures and philosophies of strikingly different peoples.” (“Introduction” 18) For Simms, the great American novel of the 1830s had to be distinctly Southern. He sought to make Charleston the “jewel in the South’s crown, in much the same way that Boston was the jewel in New England’s crown.” (*Literary Life* 3) Creating a distinct Southern historical epic was a way to accomplish this. Perhaps he was driven by his position as a literary outsider, which he acknowledged after visiting Lawson and recognizing that literary reputations “were made in New York and the North, not in Charleston and the South.” Perhaps it was a response to the anti-slavery rhetoric heating up in the North.

(Literary Life 37) Whatever the cause, his desire was clear; writing an epic tale set in the early part of the eighteenth century allowed Simms to emphasize the deep historic roots of the South, roots he believed to be as significant as those of the North.

Simms was not alone in his attempt to establish cultural parity for the South. Robert Tilton points out in his discussion of the Pocahontas myth that many Southern citizens sought to trace their bloodlines to the Indian princess. The Pocahontas legend was important to Southerners, and to Virginians especially, because it offered a link to the earliest colonies, a bond to the birth of the nation. Indeed, Simms would later discuss the Pocahontas legacy in an essay criticizing the painting of Pocahontas by John Gadsby Chapman that is displayed in the nation's Capitol. In an essay published in 1845, Simms argues that in painting the Baptism of Pocahontas, Chapman chose the wrong scene for his work. Tilton suggests that Simms, whom he describes as "a leading Southern literary figure," was disappointed at what he viewed as a lost opportunity to promote Southern society. "The Rescue would have recalled for every American the importance of the Jamestown colony, the young woman who with a wondrous display of courage ensured its survival and the brave captain without whose sagacity the entire British colonial enterprise might well have failed." (123)

Simms may not have been the only voice of Southern pride, but he was one of the most important. And his use of the preface to *The Yemassee* to emphasize his epic goals was a significant salvo in his battle for respect. As Elliott West explains,

Epic can be used in another sense, this one historical...An epic is a statement of collective identity. Through it, a people retell their history in a particular way and for a special purpose. In its historical sense, an epic is a story that a people tell about themselves to proclaim that they are distinct and different from all other people. With it they explain where they have come from, who they are and how they have gotten that way. (27)

Annette Kolodny also notes that through the epic Simms encouraged his readers “to seek out in his novels underlying symbolic and psychological structures that give meaning to history.” (116) And these symbols always pointed to the plantation, Kolodny notes. “Simms makes the eventual return to plantation life both a thematic and a geographic focus of his romances.” (121)

Simms’ southern setting also provided an opportunity to capitalize on his audience’s penchant for Indians. As Guilds explains, Simms realized that “by concentrating upon the wars between the early white settlers and the Indian tribe indigenous to coastal Carolina, he was able, while using notably

different locales, theme, and philosophy, to take advantage of the great interest aroused by Cooper's Leatherstocking novels." (*Literary Life* 60) Yet he tells a very different story of the frontier than Cooper. Simms was interested in civilized society, not life on the margins. Where Cooper chose a lonely guide/trapper as his fictional hero, Simms cast his hero as an aristocrat who is blessed with great leadership abilities. Cooper was concerned with the conflict between Nature and Civilization, but Simms' natural conflicts are limited to one mesmerizing snake and a pair of timely crocodiles. He evoked the landscape of the frontier – especially in scenes of Indian encampment and rituals – but his frontier was little more than a backdrop for a study in social difference. And while Child and Sedgwick went back in time to create alternative histories that could be viewed as the foundation of a multi-racial society, Simms strongly supported the status quo. As Mary Ann Wimsatt notes, the past of the Southern colonial era "inspired Simms to forge through his fiction an optimistic statement about the reader's past – a statement that is predicated on his ardent belief in its equally proud future." (45) Child tried to diminish Puritan authority with her unsympathetic portrait of its gossiping leaders and petulant parents, and Sedgwick suggested the possibility of cultural accommodation. To the contrary, Simms saw little in need of adjustment in plantation society.

Simms also used his novel's setting to advance his view that the South deserved the same respect as New England received for its role in the nation's birth. Simms wanted to deconstruct the myth that the Puritans were the nation's legitimate forebears, and he was zealous in his campaign. As Alexander Cowie's notes, his disdain is apparent in the novel, which "requires that the reader's feelings should be anti-Puritan." (27) Simms focuses most of his attacks on the Puritan faith on the Reverend John Matthews, who is introduced with an authorial footnote clearly establishing Simms' views of Matthews and his church:

One of the express conditions upon which the original patent of Charles II was granted to the lord proprietors of Carolina, was their promulgation of the gospel among the Indians. Upon this charitable object the mission of Mr. Matthews was undertaken, though it may be well to add that one of the grounds of the objections made subsequently to the proprietary charter was the neglect of duty. (15)

Simms begins undermining Matthews' character from the moment he introduces him. Matthews calls out to Sanutee, who is passing in the woods on his way to meet with Chorley, but the Indian "resolutely avoid[s] the house until he had gone around it, took no manner of heed of the friendly hail which the old pastor had uttered on seeing him approach." (16) The minister is not

disturbed by the Indian's anti-social behavior. "Sanutee and the preacher had always before maintained the best understanding. The unctuous exhortations of the latter had frequently found a profound listener in the red chief, and more than once had the two broken bread together...the good pastor, however, did not suffer his surprise at Sanutee's conduct to linger in his memory long." (16)

A few chapters later, the Puritan again appears foolish when he fails to correctly measure the character of Craven. Matthews is "somewhat stern of habit and cold of temperament – a good man in his way, as the world goes, but not an overwise one – a stickler for small things – wedded to old habits and prejudices." (50) His bitterness toward the colony's indulgent government is focused on his daughter's suitor, whose "dashing, free, unrestrainable carriage" was "directly adverse to Puritan rule" and "particularly offensive." (50) It may be true, as Louis Rubin suggests, that "the laughing Cavalier Puritan dichotomy he is using was a staple of the rhetoric of the sectional division of Simms' own time." (129) Still, Simms seems to take pleasure in portraying the minister as dense and prudish. When Matthews returns home to find his daughter with Craven, his "cold deportment...had the effect of somewhat freezing the warm exuberant blood of the cavalier." (49) And when the two men discuss their differing beliefs, the older Matthews seems harsh in comparison to the younger Craven.

“Your church is not mine; and that is probably a fault in your eyes; but I offer no scorn or disrespect to yours.

“That I shall never be a Puritan, however, you may be assured, if it be only to avoid giving to my face the expression of a pine bur. That I shall never love Cromwell the better for having been a hypocrite as well as a murderer, you may equally take for granted; and, that my dress unlike your own, sir, shall be fashioned always with a due reference to my personal becomingness, you and I, both, may this day safely swear for. These are matters, Mr. Matthews, upon which you insist with too much solemnity. I look upon them, sire, as so many trifles not worthy the close consideration of thinking men.” (55)

That Matthews is not a thinking man – he seems to be the only character in *The Yemassee* who does not sense Craven’s innate nobility, for example – is further demonstrated by his refusal to heed Craven’s advice about the Indian plot. Despite repeated warnings, Matthews is too bigoted to see beyond the cavalier attitude, dress, and arrogance of Craven, and so he refuses to comprehend the most obvious signs of Indian discontent.

“I have no fears! This danger of Indian war is always the cry among those who have *popular* objects. So far as my experience goes, the Yemassees were never more peaceable than at this moment.” (133) Further,

he argues that if he leaves his home, he will not be able to accomplish his missionary work, efforts already cast in doubt by Simms. The minister's foolishness is again emphasized when he tells Craven he does not need the safety of the Block House because he already is "guarded by the watchful Providence." (135) His God does not help him when the Indians attack; instead of divine intervention, the pirate Chorley comes to his aid.

Craven may have little respect for Matthews, but he is in love with the Reverend's daughter, the fair Bess. From the early passages, Simms is clear that he envisions Bess and Craven as the progenitors of the future South. Bess is suited for the role because she is shown to be aware of her father's foolishness. She ignores her father's disapproval of Craven – "It's true he talks hardly of the cavaliers – and I think well of those he talks ill of," she says – but she remains the loyal daughter. "He loves me; and that's enough to make me respect his opinions, and to love him, in spite of them." (47)

Bess' treatment of her father aligns her with Hope Leslie. Sedgwick's heroine is more sharply drawn than Bess, it is true, but Hope is more central to that story than is Bess in Simms' Indian tale. Like Hope and Simms' other female character, Mary Granger, Bess recognizes the power she wields in manipulating her father for her own gain. Moreover, Simms' echoes Sedgwick's knowing authorial stance in his admission that women always maneuver their men. Briefly, consider the character of Mary Granger, wife

of the frontier scout. Through his portrait of Mary, arguably his best-drawn white woman, Simms sounds like a feminist. She is the “single spirit in the Block House” whose “genius soared infinitely beyond (her husband’s).” (333) It is Mary Granger who prompts the Block House fighters to establish a defense, although none of the men is aware of her cunning. “Knowing that any direct suggestion from a woman, and under circumstances of strike and trial, would necessarily offend the *amour propre* of the nobler animal, and provoke his derision, (Mary) pursued the sort of management an experienced woman is usually found to employ.” Like an unseen angel, Simms remarks, she advises Wat Grayson how to take command, making him think her suggestions are his ideas. As Simms predicts, she “does her business...the world all the while knowing nothing about it.” (333) Later, in the exciting battle scene cited earlier, Mary single-handedly defends the upper floor of the Block House by breaking the arm of an Indian intruder and causing him to fall to his death. Thus she proves she has courage equal to her admirable restraint. While Bess Matthews could not be expected to act with that same courage and violence – Simms makes it clear that such behavior is acceptable only among the rough border settlers – she nonetheless shares Mary Granger’s cunning and command. In this, as in his anti-Puritan attitudes, Simms continues the work of Sedgwick and Child.

Not all of Simms' female characters are brave and insightful. In his portrait of the foolish Mrs. Grayson, mother of Wat and Hugh, Simms' bias against the Puritans resurfaces. As the settlers are leaving the burning Block House and seeking refuge in the woods, the old woman risks the lives of her sons and all the other settlers with her loud prayers and songs of Thanksgiving. Mrs. Grayson "mouthed and muttered continually, and every now and then burst forth into starts of irrepressible psalmody, sufficient to set the entire tribe of Indians unerringly upon their track." (368) Ignoring her son's warnings, she "likened her escape...to every instance of Providential deliverance she had ever read of in the sacred volume." (369) As Wat continues to shush her, the indignant mother responds: "Oh my son, beware of self-conceit and pride of heart; and because you have here commanded earthly and human weapons, think not, in the vanity of your spirit, that the victory comes from such as these. The Savior of men, my son, it is he that has fought this fight." Wat's impatient response is a practical one.

"Do you want to see my scalp dangling upon the long pole of a savage?...Put some stop on your tongue and move along as if death lay under every footstep. If the savages surround us now, we are gone, every mother's son of us – and all the saints unless they are accustomed to Indian warfare, can do nothing in our behalf."

His mother is still not satisfied.

“The saints are blessed mediators for the sinner, and may move eternal mercy to save. Have they not fought for us already to-night – and are we not saved by their ministry from the bloody hands of the savage?”

“No – it’s by our own hands, and our own good handiwork, mother. I owe the saints no thanks, and shall owe you still less, unless you stop that howling.” (370)

The howling of the Reverend Matthews and Mrs. Grayson is not only misplaced, it is dangerous. These foolish characters place their non-believing neighbors at risk, and by depicting their actions, Simms continues his attack on the Puritans and their prominent place in national history.

In addition to establishing the South’s historical lineage, Simms utilizes his historical setting to create a model for a future America based on the Southern plantation ideal. That system, of course, was predicated on white superiority and privilege. Like Jefferson, however, Simms reserves a place in the ruling class for natural leaders, those men whose character was the warrant for their authority.

The novels I have discussed in the three previous chapters focused on miscegenation, but Simms’ novel rigorously avoids that theme. According to Louis Rubin, *The Yemassee* “is even less relevant to the historical situation”

of the clash of cultures and the idea of blending races. Simms' unflinching position supported both the Indian Removals and the Southern commitment to racial purity. As Rubin points out, "...clearly Simms was thinking of the Indian-white relationship of the early 1700's in terms of the slavery controversy that was beginning in the 1830s." (117) Child and Sedgwick also deployed the Indian as a metaphor for blacks, but Simms' use of this metaphor is counter to theirs. While Child infers the possibility of black and white marriage in her tale, Simms inscribes the Indian's destruction and the inferiority of the black man. Child and Sedgwick focused on racial similarities; Simms on their differences. He viewed both the Indians and black slave as inferior to his own race. And yet, as Cowie points out, Simms believed the blacks "could be successfully incorporated into the white man's civilization" while the "inflexible red race" could never live peacefully with the white." (29) This distinction is made clear in Simms' view of the emerging frontier. The Indians needed to be pushed West as the path of progress tamed the wild land of the frontier. Simms did not believe they could live peacefully with whites, and thus supported their removal. On the other hand, Simms believed the black slaves served a vital social and economic role in the South – both in the colonial past and in the unfolding future – and he believed they benefited from the plantation society.

His beliefs are advanced in his text. The Indians are portrayed as tragic figures endowed with humanity and dignity, and the black slaves are portrayed as loyal children. As Cowie points out in his introduction to *The Yemassee*, Simms was a slave owner, so “he naturally believed in the institution of slavery ... It is clear from *The Yemassee* that even in 1835 he was convinced of its beneficence quite apart from its economic importance to the South.” (29) Simms supports the plantation system in a scene at the end of the work, when Craven thanks his loyal slave Hector by giving him his freedom – as well as money and a house of his own. Hector refuses.

“No maussa; I can’t go. I can’t be free,” replied the negro, shaking his head... “Wha’ Hector done, you guine turn um off dis time o’ day?”

“Done! You have saved my life, old fellow – you have fought for me like a friend, and I am now your friend and not any longer your master.”

“Ki, maussa! Enty you always been frien’ to Hector! Enty you gib im physic when he sick, and come see and talk wid um, and do ebberty ting he want yo for do! What more yo guine do, now?...Tis ompossible, maussa, and dere’s no use for talk ‘bout it. De ting aint right and enty I know wha’ kind of ting freedom is wid black man? You make Hector free he turn

wuss more nor poor buck-rah...he git drunk and lie in de ditch...No maussa – you and Dugdale berry good company for Hector. I tank God he so good – I no want any better.” (397)

The honest Craven is Hector’s friend and his master, and Hector is dependent on him for his existence. Like the other slaves, Hector “no want any better” than a house, food and livelihood. That it comes at the price of his personal freedom, is, in his mind, fair. But Hector is only one example of the happy slave. Simms implies that it is not only the house servant slave who is happy with his lot. At the novel’s end, he describes a battalion of black slaves fighting with their masters against the attacking Indians. In the final scene of the work, as Matiwan cradles the body of her husband, who is, metaphorically at least, the Last of the Yemassee, the slaves pursue the retreating Indians “scouring the field of battle with their huge clubs and hatchets, knocking up on the head of all the Indians who yet exhibited any signs of life.” Almost as wild as the Indians, “they luxuriated in a pursuit to them so very novel – they hurried over the forests with a step as fleet and a ferocity as dreadful.” (412) Simms’ point is obvious. The institution of slavery, and the role model of a decent master, prevent black slaves from exhibiting this sort of ferocious behavior. They need the plantation life as much as the white landowners need their labor.

Simms' representation of the Indian race – of their removal to the west and the white encroachment on their land – is more complicated. Examples of his unwavering support for Indian Removal can be found in Hugh Grayson's statements of the Indian's inherent inferiority. However, Simms' portrayal of the Indian characters, and his willingness to voice their perspective, have prompted disagreement among scholars. Alexander Cowie argues that "He had a high opinion of the Indians as a race, much higher than (Robert Montgomery) Bird and somewhat higher than Cooper." (27) Writing more recently, Mary Ann Wimsatt suggests "his sympathy is almost equally divided between the two sides." (*Major Fiction* 48) Sanutee, Matiwan and Oconestoga are not stereotypes – the grunting Indian scout, the brooding Indian chief – but rather are fully realized characters. Sanutee, the friend of the English who is saddened by their insatiable desire for land, is a consummate politician who understands how to guide his people. His skill at public speaking is evidenced in the passionate plea he makes to his people not to sell more of their land to the settlers.

"Why comes the English to the lodge of our people?

Why comes he with a red coat to the Chief – why brings he beads and paints for the eye of a little boy? Why brings he the strong water for our young man? ... He wants our lands. But we have no lands to sell. The lands came from our fathers –

they must go to our children. They do not belong to us to sell – they belong to our children to keep. We have sold too much land.” (81)

His wisdom is proven by his ability to master the crowd. He persuades his people not to kill the traitorous chiefs but to exile them forever from the tribe. And though he fuels his people’s lust for revenge, Sanutee is a thoughtful leader. After agreeing to the uprising, for example, he goes home “gloomy and distracted – his mind brooding over schemes of war and violence.” The choice to fight was not an easy one, and Simms allows his readers to see the toll it exacted from the Indian chief. “He had, however, well deliberated the matter, and arrived at a determination, so fraught with peril not only to himself but to his people, only after a perfect conviction of its absolute necessity. Yet, such a decision was a severe trial to a spirit framed as his – a spirit which...desired peace rather than war.” Here, then, Simms presents an Indian warrior diametrically opposed to Cooper’s brooding, revengeful Magua. Magua is angry at a beating from Colonel Munro, and so he plots his revenge. Sanutee, on the other hand, is concerned about the future of his people, and he sees the problems that will come with the encroaching European settlers. His is a noble cause, and yet it ends in the same fashion as Magua’s ignoble revenge.

Matiwan, too, is a richly drawn character. The loyal Indian wife and mother outshines all the women in the book, even the powerful Mary Granger. Matiwan navigates between her two roles, as wife of the tribal chief and mother of the outcast son, Occonestoga. Her motherly love is demonstrated on several occasions, but never more vividly than when she acts to save her son from eternal shame and exile.

The masses gave way and parted, and, rushing wildly into the area, came Matiwan, his mother – the long black hair streaming – the features an astonishing likeness to his own, convulsed like his; and her action that of one reckless of all things in the way of the forward progress she was making to the person of her child. She cried aloud as she came – with a voice that rang like a sudden death-bell through the ring –

“Would you keep the mother from her boy, and he to be lost to her for ever? Shall she have no parting with the young brave she bore in her bosom? Away, keep me not back – I will look upon, I will love him. He shall have the blessing of Matiwan, though the Yemassee and the Manneyto curse.” ...

“Thou art come, Matiwan – thou are come but wherefore? To curse like the father – to curse like the Manneyto?” mournfully said the captive.

“No, no, no! Not to curse. Not to curse. When did mother curse the child she bore? Not to curse, but to bless thee. To bless thee and forgive.... Shall not the mother say farewell to the child she shall see no more?” And she waved Malatchie back, and in the next instant drew hastily from the drapery of her dress a small hatchet which she had there carefully concealed.

“Wouldst thou slay me mother” asks the shocked Oconestoga.

“I strike thee but to save thee, my son: since they cannot take the totem from thee after the life is gone. Turn away from me thy head, let me not look upon thine eyes as I strike lest my hands grow weak and tremble. Turn thine eyes away – I will not lose thee.” (198-99)

Brutal as her actions may be, Simms manages to make her sympathetic. As Guilds notes, “It is indicative of how well the author has entered the mind and character of the Yemassee that to the reader of the novel the actions of Matiwan seem heroic and tragic, inspiring and not repelling.” (Afterword 423) Simms’ depiction of Oconestoga is similarly sympathetic. Oconestoga is shunned by his father because of his weakness for the white man’s liquor, and yet he is adored by his mother. Simms resists making him a

cardboard cut-out of the self-destructive Indian warrior. Occonestoga has his proud moments – such as his saving of Bess Matthews from the snake – and he is shown in his lowest despair. He is portrayed with compassion, as a strong brave who crumbles under the influence of liquor. He is a younger, more pathetic version of another drunken Indian, the sad Indian John, formerly the brave-hearted Chingachgook, of Cooper's *The Pioneers*. Daniel Peck describes Occonestoga as the embodiment of Indian dispossession, the character who “testifies to the corrupting influence of the European colonists’ presence.” (243)

The reasons for Simms’ sympathetic portrait of the Yemassee are complex. Perhaps, as David Moltke-Hansen suggests, he was projecting his own grief on his characters. “Reared without mother or father, a widower at twenty-six...Simms knew firsthand and poignantly, when he came to write, the meaning of home and family...This knowledge helped (him) write fiction which treated Indians, blacks, woodsmen, planters, preachers, conquistadors, and others all as characters with homes, families, and sufferings.” (134) Perhaps his sympathies resulted from the trips he made west to visit his father. As poignantly described by John Caldwell Guilds, Simms traveled to Mississippi in 1824-25 to see his father, who was living on a plantation near the busy town of Columbia. “At this plantation, the impressionable youth came to know his father really well for the first time.” His father, having just

returned from the heart of the Indian country, told his son stories of his exploits, and in addition, the two “rode together on horseback to various settlements on the frontier of Alabama and Mississippi.” (*Literary Life* 17) Such first-hand observation of the Creek and Cherokee nations, combined with memories of his father, may have influenced his treatment of the Indians. According to Mary Ann Wimsatt, the “underlying sense of the injustices done to the Indians ... helps move the reader’s emotions toward the Indian side of the story.” (56)

The fact that Simms tells so much of his story from the Yemassee perspective is often cited as evidence of his pro-Indian viewpoint. The brave Sanutee adequately defends his instigation of the mob; the grieving Matiwan tries to protect her son from the consequences of his association with the whites. The action of the story shifts between the Indian and white settlements, as each side offers its own perspective of the events as they unfold. These passages, coupled with the virtuous portrait of Sanutee, advance a pro-Indian reading of the novel. In the afterword to the newly published edition of *The Yemassee*, John Caldwell Guilds mistakenly suggests the work’s “major appeal...to the modern reader is as we have seen, Simms’ masterful treatment of the Native American.” (424) Notwithstanding this praise, Simms’ dual perspective is not entirely progressive. Like Sedgwick, he allows his Indian characters to speak of their own pasts. Unlike Sedgwick,

he gives them a history but absolutely no hope. In Sedgwick's earlier novel, *Magawisca* invokes the tale of the Pequod massacre to change Everell's view about her Indian tribe. Simms has no such goal in mind. His portrayal of the Yemassee is tragic, but his depiction of the disappearing Indian culture is not rueful. The guilty undertones found in Sedgwick's prose are absent from Simms' novel. *Magawisca* takes the Puritans to task for their arrogance and delusions of superiority. She decides it is in her best interests to avoid the settlers. Sanutee, on the other hand, recognizes the white's superiority, and dies fighting the inevitable.

There is much more in the text to dispute Simms' high regard for the Indian people and his sympathy for their plight. First, the same passage that showcases Sanutee's wise leadership also presents his awareness of his people's inferiority.

He was one of those persons, fortunately for the species, to be found in every country who are always in advance of the masses clustering around them. He was a philosopher not less than a patriot, and saw, while he deplored, the destiny which awaited his people. He well- knew that the superior must necessarily be the ruin of the race which is inferior... (14)

Coming so early in the work, and in the wise chief's own thoughts, this philosophy of Indian inferiority can only color the events that follow. In this

passage, and in others in the text, Indian inferiority is never questioned.

Whereas Sedgwick's more progressive work provides the chance for the white heroine Hope and the Indian princess Magawisca to discuss the possibility of a blended community – with both white and Indian characters on equal footing – Simms dismisses that notion from the outset. The scene in which Occonestoga is asked by Craven and the trapper Granger to spy on his people offers more evidence of Simms' belief in the Indian's inferiority, as well as his support of those who took advantage of his weakness. Occonestoga, who is questioning the motives of his friends, becomes enraged when Craven calls him the young chief of the Yemassee.

“Young chief of the Yemassee!’ exclaimed the savage, repeating the phrase of Harrison as if in derision – “said you not the young chief of the Yemassee should hunt his people like a dog in the cover of the bush?”

“...The English must look to his own scalp,” cried the young man. “The hand of the Yemassee is ready;” and as he spoke, for a moment his eye lightened up, and his form rose erect from the place where he had been sitting, while a strong feeling of nationality in his bosom aroused him into something like a warlike show of an eloquent chief inspiring his tribe for the fight. But Granger, who had been watchful, came forward

with a cup of spirits, which, without a word, he now handed him. The youth seized it and hurriedly, drank it off in a single effort, and, in that act, the momentary enthusiasm which had lightened up...the otherwise desponding and degraded features, passed away. (170)

The white characters, with Simms' obvious approval, manipulate the poor youth, taking advantage of his drunkenness to further their own agenda. In this scene, Craven and Granger do whatever they must to convince him to help their cause, regardless of the outcome to the Indian youth. That, it seems clear, is not a sympathetic portrait of the Indian, but rather a sympathetic depiction of the inevitable progress of Southern society.

Further, when Simms defends the Indian race against claims of inferiority, he employs Matthews to argue his position. Matthews is already one of the work's most discredited characters, so when he defends the Indians it is from a position of weakness. Matthews chastises the white man for his greed and violence, and insists the Indians are peaceful and dignified. "Why do we thus seek to rob them of their lands? When O Father of mercies, when shall there be but one flock of all classes and colours, all tribes and nations, of thy people and thy blessed Son..." Taken out of context, this declaration appears to be a boldly progressive statement for inclusion and accommodation. Actually, the speech serves as an opportunity for the novel's

hero to defend the white settlers' march westward. Craven's response goes on much longer than Matthew's initial question.

“The prayer is a just one, and the blessing desirable; but while I concur with your sentiment, I am not willing to agree with you...Until they shall adopt our pursuits, or we theirs, we can never form the one community for which your prayer is sent up, and so long as the hunting lands are abundant, the seductions of that mode of life will always baffle the approach of civilization among the Indians.” (134)

Craven's position is repeated by the passionate Hugh Grayson, who also tries to convince Matthews of the dangers of remaining in his house in the face of an Indian attack. Listing the signs of possible revolt – their visits to the Spanish, the fury unleashed against the chiefs who favored another land treaty, Sanutee's restrained manner – Grayson says the days of peaceful coexistence are over.

“...it is utterly impossible that the whites and the Indians should ever live together and agree. The nature of things is against it, and the very difference between the two, that of colour, perceptible to our most ready sentinel, the sight, must always constitute them an inferior caste in our minds. Apart from this, an obvious superiority in arts and education must

soon force upon them the consciousness of their inferiority...and to my mind the best we can do for them is to send them as far as possible from communion with our people.”
(293-4)

This passage begins with an echo from Magawisca’s plea in the courtroom scene of *Hope Leslie*, but it quickly changes course. Here a white man and not an Indian differentiates between the cultures. Simms illustrates the indignities meted out to the Indians, and the tragedies they suffered at the hands of the colonists. By doing so, he makes his battle scenes more poignant, his romance more engaging. The author’s presentation of the Indian characters, with “its unusual deftness and restraint,” merely fuels his epic story, contends Guilds.

The epic tradition that the fall of a worthy enemy is an event of tragic proportion – not a cause for rejoicing – is preserved in Simms’ skillful handling and the mood and tone of solemnity he conveys. The inevitability of the defeat of the Yemassee and the ascendancy of the white settlers evokes a sense of national tragedy in keeping with the epic dimensions of the Romance. (*Literary Life* 62)

Clearly, Simms offers a poignant portrait of the Indians not because he foresees their role in the future, but because it makes for a better, fictionalized

past. This rationale is at odds with Child and Sedgwick, both of whom struggled to present a picture of accommodation with the Indians in the future. Conversely, Simms uses a sympathetic portrait of what he considers an inferior Indian race to improve his work's drama, and to add texture and emotion to his tale of the past. As Nancy Grantham points out, Simms' views of the Indians' future are not in accord with his sympathetic depiction of the past. The novel, she writes, shows "a growing disillusionment with the hope of cultural compromise. In *The Yemassee*...the cultural separation is clear, the conflict is inevitable, the cultural ideologies are clearly incompatible." (116) There is no role for the Indians in the nation's future. His place is in the past.

Simms sees no possibility for a multi-racial society in the future, but he does allow for the possibility of the blending of classes. The model society is that of the plantation, with its etched roles for the ruling class, the middle-class borderers – such as the hardy, honest men of Craven's Green Jacket brigade – and slaves. In *The Yemassee*, argues Mary Ann Wimsatt, "(Simms) urges us to agree that what happened should have happened: that the lovers who married should have married; that the rivals they defeated deserved to lose; that the social system they protected should have persisted; and that the wars the colonists fought were rightly won." (46) Simms supports this model foremost by crafting a hero who is aristocratic but also a natural leader, one

whose innate gentleness and authority is recognized by the South Carolinians even though they know nothing of his true identity. Many of the novel's characters immediately sense his aristocratic character. Bess Matthews, for example, tells a flirting Craven that she knows he is no trader. "By look, language, gesture, manner – your face, your speech. – All satisfy me that you are no trader, but a gentleman – like the brave cavaliers that stood by King Charles." (47) Bess' mother, too, recognizes his aristocratic roots. She tells her minister husband, "Captain Harrison is a nice gentleman – always so lively, always so polite and so pleasant...I'm sure I know everything I want to know about the captain." (217) Others in the border settlements respond to his charms. "It was strange how people loved him – how popular he had become, even while in all his individual relations and objects so perfectly unknown. He had somehow won golden opinions from all the borderers..." (203) Some favorable opinions were focused on his leadership abilities, and some on his abilities in battle. "With an audacity that looked like madness...he fearlessly led forth a small party, taking the initiative, in an encounter with the Coosaws...His valor on that occasion, obtained from the Indians themselves the *nom de guerre* of Coosah-moray-te, or the Coosaw-killer." (203) These signs prepare readers for the revelation of his real identity. Simms did not conceal Craven's ambition or class-consciousness, argues Jon Wakelyn. "He believed there were natural aristocrats who had to

have power, while the masses surrendered their independence in pursuing material gain.” (26) One important exception, however, is the ability for those with natural authority to enter the ruling classes. As Louis Rubin notes, Simms was a self-made man who entered society through literary circles and married into a plantation family. Wimsatt and others believe Simms employs Craven’s aristocratic background to emphasize his attachment to the Cavalier ideal. But Rubin argues that, viewed alongside the portrayal of Hugh Grayson, Craven’s role as the novel’s hero illustrates that true leaders can move between classes. If Simms could fashion an aristocrat as a frontiersman on par with Cooper’s Hawk-eye, Rubin argues, “then does it not also follow that he could envision a frontier figure as Lord Carven – *an aristocrat?*...In other words, it was possible for a man who was an effective leader of middle-class settlers, a vigorous fighter, intelligent and able to out-think his savage foes, and thus a person of proven practical virtues, to *be* the lord palatine.” (122) Further, as Rubin deftly notes, Simms is modeling his hero on real life. “(Craven) only confirms a status that he has *already earned* through his accomplishments as a frontiersman. A century later, instead of an English lord, he might have been Andrew Jackson.” (119)

Precisely. The double-identity of Gabriel Harrison and Governor Craven reflects the possibility of a frontier soldier who becomes President. And if the novel celebrates the success of Jackson, it can’t truly be

sympathetic to the Indians. *The Yemassee* reinforces the personal, self-made-man history of President Jackson, most obviously in the character of Hugh Grayson, a hot-headed but brave soldier. As noted earlier, it is Grayson who voices the need for the Indian Removals, arguing that “the nature of things is against it.”

When this relationship is considered, in connexion with the uncertainty of their resources and means of life, it will be seen that, after a while, they must not only be inferior, but they must become dependent. When this happens and it will happen with the diminution of their hunting lands, circumscribed, daily, more and more, as they are by our approaches, they must become degraded and sink into slavery and destitution. They lose by our contact in every way. (294)

Grayson’s statements echoes those made by President Jackson in 1829, in his first annual message to Congress.

Our conduct towards these people is deeply interesting to our national character. Their present condition, contrasted to what they once were, makes a most powerful appeal to our sympathies....Surrounded by whites with their arts of civilization, which by destroying the resources of the savage doom him to weakness and decay, the fate of the Mohegan, the

Narragansett, and the Delaware is fast overtaking the Choctaw, the Cherokee, and the Creek. That this fate surely awaits them if they remain within the limits of the States does not admit of a doubt.⁴

Jackson's message concludes with the suggestion that the government set aside "an ample district west of the Mississippi...to be guaranteed to the Indian tribes as long as they shall occupy it." The two speeches are virtually identical, with Hugh's account predicting degradation and slavery for the Indians, and Jackson's suggesting they will die as their brothers the Delaware already had. Later, Jackson called the removal of the Indians from their lands a kind of philanthropy, notes Michael Paul Rogin. Through the actions of the benevolent white government, the "ill-fated race has at length been placed beyond the reach of injury and oppression." (246) The same pattern of arrogance that Rogin details in his book on Jackson's relationship with the Indians is personified by Craven throughout Simms' tale. Craven demonstrates a paternal demeanor in his interaction with the Green Jackets, in his manipulation of Oconestoga and, to a lesser degree, Sanutee, and in his paternal stance as protector of the border people. In this sense, Craven is Andrew Jackson, a founding father for the future America. But Hugh

⁴ Francis Paul Prucha, ed. *Documents of United States Indian Policy*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990, 48.

Grayson, also, underscores Simms' vision of the future as linked to Jacksonian democracy. Grayson, like the president and Simms himself, who attained the social stature of a plantation farmer through marriage, is frustrated by the constraints of his place in the world. He unleashes his anger to his mother, saying,

“(Harrison) is a gentleman – who knows, a lord in disguise – and is therefore superior to the poor peasant who is forced to dig his roots for life in the unproductive sands? Wherefore should his hands be unblistered and mine sore?...Mother I am a slave – a dog – an accursed thing...They keep me down – they refuse to hear – they do not heed me, and with a thought of command and a will of power in me, they yet pass me by.” (230-31)

But Grayson does not get passed by. Rather, he is given a commission in the army, after his natural leadership abilities and courageous action in battle help save the Block House and put down the uprising. In the end, both characters suggest the Indian-fighting President Jackson. Both are able and both are deserving to be the nation's leaders. Like Jackson, both Craven and Grayson are able to view the violence of Indian Removal within a broader context of the inevitable defeat of the Indians. The future America will be born of this stock.

In the end, then, Simms' vision of the future is distinct from those offered by Child, Sedgwick, and Cooper. For this Southern writer, the future is a racially separated Utopia based on the strict social codes of the plantation system. As David Moltke-Hansen suggests, Simms could reinforce the benefits of frontier battles by showing that "the equality of the frontier must give way to the hierarchy of evolved society." (132) Despite the empathy Simms expresses for the Indians, and the careful portraits he paints, he believes the obliteration of the Indian race is inevitable. His guilt-free celebration of their tragic demise is fueled by the policies of Jackson's Removal plans, and made even more tragic by the victims' infantile nature.

“BLOODY NATHAN IN THE WOODS:” VIOLENCE AND THE
POLITICS OF WESTERN EXPANSION IN
ROBERT MONTGOMERY BIRD’S *NICK OF THE WOODS*

Robert Montgomery’s brooding frontier novel, *Nick of the Woods*, serves as antidote to the sentimental and noble portrait of the Indian race found in most antebellum literature. This frontier story – a violent tale of captivities and rescues set in the Kentucky forests – advances a different perspective of the white-Indian conflict. Although published just two years after *The Yemassee* and in the decade following the publication of *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Hobomok*, and *Hope Leslie*, Bird’s novel represents a complete departure from them. While there is a suggestion of miscegenation in Cooper’s work, and actual white-Indian marriages in Child’s and Sedgwick’s novels, Bird’s *Nick of the Woods* offers no such accommodation. His novel is a brutal condemnation of the Indian race and of the idea of two cultures existing side by side. It supports the wars with the Indians and the

usurping of their tribal lands, and it argues stridently that these actions were necessary. In addition, the novel suggests that the violent conflicts on the frontier were the defining moments of the nation.

Set in Kentucky ten years before statehood, the novel focuses on the frontiersmen who cleared the wilderness. In the fire of the clear-cutting and the violence of battle, the earliest sparks of American greatness were found. Unlike the more domestic novels of Child and Sedgwick, Bird's work examines the violence of the frontier. While the intense violence depicted in *The Last of the Mohican's* battle of Fort William Henry stands out in that novel, similar savage actions – on the part of the Indians and the settlers – are found throughout Bird's fierce tale. For example, there is Nathan's account of the Indian attack on his family, told with unbridled and bloody detail.

“...With my own knife he struck down my eldest boy! With my own gun he slew the mother of my children. If thee should live till thee is gray, thee will never see the sight I saw that day...a wife that clasps thee legs in the writhings of death, her blood spouting up to thee bosom, where she has slept — and old mother calling thee to help her in her death struggle...all murdered friend, all – all – all – cruelly murdered!”¹

¹ Robert Montgomery Bird. *Nick of the Woods*. 1837. A. L. Burt Company, 1937, 240. All future references are from this edition.

Although similar in format to Cooper's frontier novel, Bird's work is radically different in many respects. His soldier-hero Roland is not the courageous counterpart to the novel's frontiersman Nathan, as Heyward is to Hawk-eye in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Bird's forest setting is not the natural refuge that Cooper's is for Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas. Bird's Indian-white relationships are not as fleshed out as Cooper's; his Indian characters lack the nobility and natural goodness of Cooper's native figures. *Nick of the Woods* departs from the Indian novels of Child and Sedgwick in several other ways, as well. It is set not primarily on the margins of society, but in the thick of the forests. And although religious zeal is important to *Nick*, it is not as central a force as it is in *Hobomok* and *Hope Leslie*. Moreover, the importance of women and their social roles is not part of Bird's work. His focus remains on the rough men who carved their livelihoods from the Kentucky wilds; his female characters are weak and secondary, the victims of the Indians. While Cooper offered Cora in opposition to the weaker Alice, Bird presents the sickly Edith as his main female character. Bird's work also contrasts with *The Yemassee* in its refusal to grant any dignity to its Indian characters. The indigenous characters of *Nick of the Woods* talk little, fall off their horses in drunken confusion, and are thwarted at every turn by an avenging white outcast who preys on their superstitions.

Bird's novel offers valuable insight about the changing social climate of the new nation. Set just 55 years in the past, it illustrates the complications arising out of America's Indian policies and its westward push. Writing before the Removal Act of 1830, Child and Sedgwick offered optimistic albeit unrealistic visions of the future of race relations. But Bird's novel was published after the Removal debates had erupted across the states and territories, and in the year before the tragic forced march of the Cherokees on the Trail of Tears. His work grapples with the confusion and uncertainty resulting from the federal government's Indian policies as well as the state's nullification movement and the South's pre-war stance against the growing abolitionist movement in the North. Bird does not envision accommodation nor does he mourn the inevitable extinction of the Indian. He does not situate the future of the nation on the eastern seaboard – despite having his hero Roland return to his family's Virginian plantation. As Nancy Buffington points out, Bird, a Whig doctor who lived much of his life in Philadelphia, co-opted the notions of natural law to support his anti-Indian, pro-slavery politics. Convinced that he was writing in the interests of the country, Bird used his novel to “foster national unity and mold national character.” Like the four novelists previously discussed, Bird recognized the importance of building an American literary tradition, and he believed the frontier was the ideal locus for “fostering an identity for the developing nation.” (188) His

vision of a national identity, however, was one which celebrated the Indian-hating, western-looking frontiersman who tamed the frontier. In an effort to combat the Romanticism of other frontier novels, Bird grounded his text in violence. *Nick of the Woods* does not retreat into past centuries, but addresses the immediacy of the actual frontier. Whereas the two centuries that stretched between Child's own era and her fictional world provided a buffer between what actually happened and what the novelist wanted to portray, Bird's more immediate setting did not allow for a softening of historic fact. His complex novel embraces difficult social issues as they were unfolding. The contradictions of his frontier world were not so easily revised, and the incongruities of his historical setting not easily erased. As a result, Bird's novel, in both theme and style, is a complicated vision of both the recent past and a possible future.

The novel is ambiguous in its very structure. It simultaneously tells the story of a pair of Virginian cousins cheated out of their plantation inheritance, and the Kentucky frontiersmen who are wresting the territory from the Indians. Richard Slotkin provides a useful terminology for the dual story-lines. He calls the typical romantic stories – found in *Nick*, *The Yemassee*, all of Cooper's *Leatherstocking Tales* and in countless other novels – the “plot,” while the stories of the marginal characters, their relationships to each other and the natural world are the “saga.”

(*Regeneration* 486) As Slotkin explains, “the two parts...interact at various points but are in many essentials independent.” (486) The independent stories of *Nick of the Woods* are even more disjointed than the plot-saga relationships found in Cooper and Simms. Confusion reigns in Bird’s plot. Characters frequently mistake each other’s identities. The forest is both threatening and welcoming, an enemy and a safe haven. The saga, on the other hand, is a more straightforward tale of revenge, albeit one featuring a complicated hero, Nathan Slaughter.

The novel chronicles a series of captivities and escapes with heroic frontiersmen fighting the Indians in the wild forests of Kentucky. But its plot-line, as defined by Slotkin, is a twisting jumble of mistaken identities and convoluted con games. In 1782, ten years before the territory of Kentucky wins its statehood, cousins Edith and Roland Forrester and a band of emigrants are traveling west to make new lives. They stop at the frontier settlement overseen by Colonel Tom Bruce, where Edith and Roland are separated from the larger group because Roland’s horse is stolen by the local horse thief, Roarin’ Ralph Stackpole. The Forresters, who were robbed of their inheritance by Richard Braxley, their late uncle’s confidante, are taken captive by Indians, and split up. But the capture is orchestrated by Braxley, who has set up an elaborate scheme to become the owner of the cousins’ plantation. His first plan involves a fake will that leaves the estate to an

illegitimate daughter of their uncle. But Braxley also tries to force Edith to marry him, which coupled with the arranged death of Roland at the hands of his Indian partners, would leave him the Virginian plantation. His partner in the plan, Abel Doe, has second thoughts, and he tries to tempt Roland into marrying his daughter Telie in exchange for his freedom. Roland refuses, thereby ensuring his death at the stake. But before he is killed, the Kentucky militia ride into the Indian camp and rescue them all, saving the plantation for its rightful owners.

The saga is both less confusing and more interesting. Central to this story is Quaker Nathan Slaughter, a pacifist scorned by Bruce's station men for his peaceful ways. Nathan's family was ambushed by Indians, and in his grief, he has led a double life as the solitary Quaker and the mysterious Jibbenainosay, an Indian-killer who strikes at night, and who carves crosses on the chests of his dead victims. Nathan's story intersects with the romantic plot early in the novel when he encounters the Forresters and their guide Telie Doe, who are lost and under attack by a small band of Indians. Although unwilling to shoot at the attackers, Nathan leads the helpless cousins to a burned out homestead – the site of an earlier Indian massacre – where he believes they will be safe. But when they are attacked again, Nathan slips past the Indians to get help from Colonel Bruce, leaving his companions to attempt a dangerous escape down the river. Still on their own, they

immediately walk into another ambush and are captured. The Indians – whose actions are orchestrated by Telie’s father and his partner Braxley – divide their captives: Roland and his guards move west and Edith and Telie Doe are taken north to the village of Chief Wenonga. When Nathan returns, he rescues Roland by killing his captors, and together they go in pursuit of Edith. Nathan devises a plan that sends him, dressed as an Indian, into the village to find Edith, while Stackpole uses his skills as a horse thief to secure mounts for their escape. Roland is left to wait in the shadows. But the greedy Stackpole cannot steal just three horses, and Roland is not patient enough to wait, so after a wildly chaotic scene, all three end up as captives. The saga ends with Nathan killing the village chief, who was responsible for the bloody attack on his family, just as Colonel Bruce’s cavalry comes riding into the village. At this point, the saga and plot connect. The true will leaving Edith and Roland the Virginia estate is discovered, the villainous Braxley is killed, and Nathan is no longer ridiculed as the Quaker who would not fight. Roland and Edith return home to their patrician surroundings, Nathan resumes his lonely exile in the woods, and the Bruce clan prospers as they continue to reclaim the violent frontier.

In his preface to the novel, Bird discusses his attempt to offer a portrait of the frontier different both in its depiction of the Indians and of its white heroes. Contrasting Simms’ portrait of the aristocratic Craven, who leads the

settlers against the Indian uprising in *The Yemassee*, with Cooper's rendering of Duncan Heyward, Bird insists the "true fathers of the state" of Kentucky were "ignorant but ardent, unpolished and unpretending, yet brave, sagacious and energetic." (iv) "It is not to be denied that men of education and refinement were to be found among the earlier settlers of Kentucky," he concedes, but he notes that they played secondary roles to the men from "humbler spheres of life." (iii-iv) Robert P. Winston interprets the preface as targeting Cooper and his Romantic vision of the frontier. Winston suggests Bird's characterization of Roland is "a deliberate slap at Cooper's more conventional heroes," (77) and he argues that Bird offers Nathan Slaughter as a counterweight to Nathaniel Bumppo. While Natty seeks the solitude of the forest, finding peace and harmony in the Indian's natural existence, the Quaker Nathan Slaughter finds just the opposite. Bird's woodsman, argues Winston, is "the embodiment of the effects of utter isolation" of the "demonic world" of the frontier. (89) ² Bird's preface also contrasts his

² Joan Joffe Hall offers another, primarily religious, interpretation. She argues that the novel is about Nathan's redemption, from his own guilt at being passive when he needed to be defensively violent, and from the judgment of the settlers, who only value him after he saves Edith and Roland by killing Wenonga. She frames the work's conflict in terms of religion, first noting that "Bird makes it plain that the destruction of the Indian is a religious duty." (173) Hall claims the novel "makes the optimistic statement that evil can and will be exterminated" because Nathan is successful "not only in his quest for vengeance and hence in partially expiating his guilt, but also in gradually augmenting his human sympathies by his repeated aid to the Forresters." (177)

characterization of the Indians to the idealized portraits found in Cooper's novels. "We owe, perhaps, some apology for the hues we have thrown around the Indian portraits in our picture – hues darker than are usually employed by the painters of such figures. But we confess the North American savage has never appeared to us the gallant and heroic personage he seems to others." (v) Sacvan Bercovitch characterizes the novel as "overtly dissenting from Cooper's vision of the nobility of the American Indians," (*Cambridge*, 60), and Daniel Peck agrees, noting that "Bird wrote *Nick of the Woods*, in part, to correct what he regarded as Cooper's fraudulent rendering of the frontier, particularly the latter's treatment of the Indians." (240)

Bird's wish to counter James Fenimore Cooper's popular and Romantic portrayal of the frontier as an Edenic forest was reinforced by a more personal need. Bercovitch and Curtis Dahl argue that Bird's novel was written in response to John Augustus Stone's Indian play, "Metamora," a play Bird re-wrote at the insistence of the actor Edwin Forrest, who portrayed the noble Metamora with great success. Bird, who was born in Delaware in 1806, actually began his literary career as a playwright and poet. His father died when he was young, and he moved to Philadelphia when he was a teen to be with his mother and his brother. At age 18, he enrolled in the Medical School of the University of Pennsylvania, where he studied and wrote poetry published in local newspapers. By 1827, he had set up a medical practice in

Philadelphia, which he gave up within a year. Success as a playwright came three years later, when his play, "Pelopidas," won Forrest's annual play contest. During the next four years, his friendship with Forrest blossomed, and he wrote several tragedies for the actor, including "Orollossa," "The Broker of Bogota," and "The Gladiator," one of Forrest's most successful roles. Bird also re-wrote several plays, including "Metamora," and toured the country with Forrest and his productions. By 1835, Bird had tired of drama and turned his energies to writing novels. In the next five years he published several works, including *The Hawks of Hawk-Hollow*, *Nick of the Woods*, and *The Adventures of Robin Day*. He began corresponding with James Lawson, the northerner who also befriended William Gilmore Simms, and with Simms himself. In 1840, at age 34, he suffered a mental breakdown. He bought a farm in Maryland and worked the land for a few years, until physical and financial strains forced him to sell. He returned to Philadelphia to teach at the Medical College, and died in 1854, just 48 years old.

"Metamora" was a turning point in Bird's life for several reasons. The play, regarded as one of the best of the popular Indian plays of the 1820s and 1830s, presented the wise Indian Chief, fated to be killed, battling the forces of civilization. According to William Coyle and Harvey G. Damaser, who include "Metamora" in *Six Early American Plays: 1798-1890*, the play gave audiences "colorful costumes, religious ceremonies, burial customs and other

picturesque details that appealed to the romantic imaginations. Beautiful Indian princesses, defiant warriors, and wise old chieftains...spoke with natural eloquence.” (50) Part of the “Indian vogue” that spread across the nation in the 1820s, the play was a huge hit for Forrest, who paid Bird \$2,000 to rewrite the script. This led to financial quarrels between the two, with Forrest wanting the \$2,000 returned because Bird’s version was never performed, and Bird insisting Forrest owed him an additional \$6,000 on an oral promise. The result of the disagreement, contend Coyle and Damaser, “was that Bird, who was developing into an accomplished dramatist, turned to writing fiction and verse and seldom even attended a theater for the rest of his life.” (49) Bird even sued Forrest later in life, but his suit was unsuccessful. And in 1869, after Bird’s death, Forrest would not allow the playwright’s son to publish his father’s plays. (Coyle 49) Bercovitch maintains that Bird’s anger with Forrest not only caused Bird to give up playwriting, but pushed him to write *Nick of the Woods*, which contradicted “Forrest’s endless successes with John A Stone’s ‘Metamora.’” (60)

In his preface, Bird announces his literary intentions and prepares his readers for the novel’s brutality. Describing his account of the Indians, Bird notes that

The single fact that he wages war – systematic war – upon
beings incapable of resistance or defense – upon women and

children, whom all other races in the world, no matter how barbarous, consent to spare, has hitherto been, and we suppose to the end of our days will remain a stumbling block to our imagination. We look into the woods for the mighty warrior, the 'feather-cintured chief' rushing to meet his foe, and behold him retiring laden with the scalps of miserable squaws and their babes. (v)

Battling the Indians are the Kentucky settlers from the "humbler spheres of life" who Bird celebrates as "the very men for the time and the occasion." By calling attention to his depiction of the Indians, his attempts at realism in battle and action, and his rough-hewn heroes, Bird alerts his readers that his novel is not what they might expect. Although he uses traditional romantic plot structures, Bird does not intend to present a traditional romantic tale.

If Bird's preface describes the hardships of the wilderness, the novel's opening chapters describe the chaos and confusion of frontier life. Many characters introduced in the opening section are mistaken by the others. Colonel Bruce, for example, originally believes Roland and Edith Forrester are siblings, a judgment Roland finds offensive. "They lady whom you have several times called, I know not why, my sister, claims no such near relationship, being only my cousin." (23) Then Roland mistakes Telie Doe – daughter of Abel Doe, a former captive who "turned Indian" – for a daughter

of Colonel Bruce. Nathan Slaughter, who emerges from the woods just after the Forresters arrive, is greeted in mockery by the station residents, who deride him for his pacifist beliefs. Just after Bruce tells Roland that Nathan is a Quaker who refuses to harm a soul, Nathan picks up the teasing Stackpole, throwing him into the air in a show of strength that baffles Bruce and the crowd. Compounding the confusion of these mistaken identities and misjudgments is the dual personality of Nathan Slaughter. Nathan is introduced as a pacifist, but he is soon shown to be a secret Indian-killer. Nathan's secret violence overtakes his public pacifism in a transformation that is apparent to readers but one that goes undetected by the frontiersmen and by the station's new arrivals. Finally, there is confusion about the Indians who capture Edith and Roland. They are not marauders, but are the pawns of the treacherous Braxley operating outside the accepted rules of the frontier. None of the characters on the frontier is aware of their many misunderstandings and misjudgments.

Bird's depiction of the natural world deepens the confusion established in the early chapters. His Kentucky setting is at once wildly violent and seductively bucolic; its values shift throughout the novel. For example, the settlement's "fertile fields and ever-blooming forests" attract a continuous flow of new settlers, who pass by "waving maize fields" on their way to the station. Colonel Bruce's encampment, a community of homes protected by a

defensive ring of pickets, reminds visitors that the sunny scene is also the setting of ongoing and ferocious battles with the Indians. Echoing Simms' South Carolina frontier, where the border settlers allow the Block House to deteriorate because of years of relative peace, Bird shows the Kentucky settlers to be similarly complacent. "A sense of security, arising from increase of numbers and the absence of hostilities for a long period, had begot a contempt for the confined limits of the stockade and a dozen or more of the settlers had built their cabins without the enclosure, on the slope of the hill." (13) Their complacency is misguided, however, as the action in the "dark and solemn wilderness" soon demonstrates. (13)

The notion of the American west as a place of solitude and natural beauty is absent from this novel, providing another example of Bird's divergent intentions. James C. Bryant describes Bird's setting as "a fallen world: the mythical Eden transported to the Kentucky wilderness is a world of evil, a place of violence, brutality, blood and death, which Bird portrays in dominant images of darkness." (353) Bryant also notes the Gothic qualities of Bird's portrait of the dark forest, and he calls attention to the use of weather – the tempest brewing during the clash at the Ashburn ruins, for example – as another element of the novel's dramatic technique (354). "Bird, then, has portrayed in hues of darkness and blood the conflict between good and evil as it appears in freeing new Eden from the domination of evil,"

argues Bryant, who concludes that the novel's struggle between good and evil should be interpreted on several levels, including Christians versus barbarians and, more individually, as "The plight of the fallen man who usurps the prerogatives of God [Nathan] and installs himself as the avenger." (364)

Daniel Peck and Richard Slotkin also view Bird's natural world as darkly symbolic, unlike Cooper's natural setting, which Slotkin describes as "a refuge from reality." Slotkin notes that Cooper's portrait of the natural world as "a wilderness setting" where characters "search for values and identity" surpasses Bird's use of nature as the place where one culture merely exhibits its superiority over another. (*Regeneration* 515) Peck, too, maintains that Bird "draws an all too simple contrast between white 'civilization' and red 'savagery,'" (241) while Cooper presents a broader vision of the conflict that encompasses historic and social forces as well as racial ones. Moreover, the two characters who live in the natural world – Hawk-eye and Nathan Slaughter – illustrate their creators' dramatically different views of nature.

Hawk-eye, as Joan Joffe Hall points out, "embraces the forest as a bride and with whom we feel the nostalgia of the vanishing wilderness." (180) Nathan Slaughter, however, seeks the solitude of the forest out of grief and anger at the deaths of his family at the hands of Indians. He uses the forest not only as a refuge from society, but as a hunter's blind, where he sits in wait for his prey. Without the forest and the secrecy it extends to him, Nathan could not

exact his vengeance. The same secrecy is advanced by his Quaker persona. If Nathan were to admit to his violent tendencies, as he does gradually in his adventures with Roland, he would not be able to hide his role as the Jibbenainosay. This conflation of deception and disguise furthers Bird's portrait of the frontier as a constantly shifting, confusing world.

The nexus of obsessive revenge and religious zeal also characterizes Bird's treatment of Calvinist theology. Child and Sedgwick both attacked the Puritans by portraying them as petty, power-seeking men who were often hypocritical and frequently merciless, despite their claims to piety. Bird presents a similarly negative portrait by cleverly inverting the central Puritan belief, found in the captivity narrative, that the Puritans were the unwitting victims of the Indians. As Slotkin points out, "Nathan Slaughter is called Nick of the Woods because he has become like the wilderness devil of the New England nightmares, Old Nick himself. Bird deftly turns the Puritan belief that the wilderness brings out the devil in the man against the Puritan captivity mythology." (514) The Puritans viewed themselves as victims who shouldered no responsibility for "their morally questionable acts on the Indians," Slotkin contends. "Nathan Slaughter's self-pity leads him into a similar moral barbarism, giving partial justification to a revenge that expresses the suppressed dark passion for violence inherent in all men." (514) While I agree with Slotkin's representation of Nathan, I nevertheless perceive

him in more complicated terms. Nathan's psychological transformation – from peaceful Quaker to secret Indian-killer to a more publicly courageous rescuer of emigrants Edith and Roland – documents Bird's understanding of the very complicated issues of western expansion and Indian removals. Nathan's religious hypocrisy advances Bird's contempt for religious arrogance. However, Nathan's personal struggles with grief and vengeance also provide insight into how religious communities could become responsible for so many atrocities. Recall how Magawisca's account of the Pequod ambush gave voice to her people's experience, and thereby changed Everell's views on the historic event. Consider also how Mary Conant's life with Hobomok pictured a gentle domesticity in opposition to the Indian's violent, childlike stereotype. Nathan's family tragedy, and his response to it, must be viewed in the same manner, as an alternative view that illuminates the situation. Nathan's disintegration from faithful servant of God to killer elucidates how the early settlers could become the cruel combatants of the Pequod battle and other skirmishes. The solitude of the forest, which offers refuge for Hawk-eye, poisons the grieving Quaker's troubled mind, pushing him to violence on par with his Indian enemies. By recounting how grief becomes bloody revenge, Bird provides an important, often untold, perspective.

Bird emphasizes the chaos of the frontier – and by extension of American society at large – by the disconnected reaction of the Kentucky settlers to the dangers and violence surrounding them. Their high spirits and enthusiasm belie the struggles facing them. An example of this disconcerting incongruity is Colonel Bruce's son, Tom, who is introduced as a strong and healthy youth with "a visage of such serene gravity and good-humored simplicity." (14) The good-humored Tom is nonetheless a brutal killer, who "did actually take the scalp of a full-grown Shawnee before he war fourteen y'ar old, and that in fa'r fight, whar thar war none to help him." As his proud father continues to boast,

Tom war out in the range looking for a neighbor's horse, when, what should he see but two great big Shawnees astride of the identical beast he war hunting ! ... 'Now,' said Tom, 'this won't do, no how;' and so he let fly at the mounted feller; but being a little skeary, as how could he help it, the young brute being the first time he ever banded at an Injun, he hit the horse, which dropped down in a flurry and away comes the red devil over his head, like a rocket, end on to a sapling. Up jumps Tom...and he blows out the first feller's brains, just as he is getting up, and runs into the fort, hard chased by the other.

(14-15)

Bruce concludes his boast by admitting that he questioned why his son hadn't killed his second attacker. "And with that (Tom) blubbered all night, to think he had not killed them both. Howsomever, I war always of opinion that what he had done war good work for a boy of fourteen." (15) The violence of the Indian's death is celebrated in the tale, told as gleefully and proudly as the account of a hunting expedition. It emphasizes the violent society of the frontier by contrasting it to both the natural surroundings and the settlers' indifference to the danger around them.

The Kentuckians' unfounded complacency is further evidenced in their dismissal of Nathan's news of Indian attack. When Nathan tells Colonel Bruce about "a great gathering of Injuns with their men of war in the Miami villages...marching into the district of Kentucky with a greater army than was ever seen in the land before," (50) he shares with them information they already heard from Stackpole. Yet Bruce pays neither any heed, and Nathan leaves with a warning: "Persons should have a care, for there is Injun sign all along the Kentucky." (51) It is also surprising that Nathan's warning does not change Bruce's opinion about "the openness and safety of the road" upon which Edith and Roland are about to embark. (60) "The road's as broad and cl'ar as a turnpike in the Old Dominion. It leads you, chock up, right on the Upper Ford, whar thar's safe passage at any moment." (67) Newcomers Edith and Roland are not completely convinced by Bruce's optimism, another

example of the chaotic world Bird has established. That the naïve Roland should have better instincts than the frontier veteran Bruce is additional proof that in Bird's frontier forest, little is as it seems. This theme of bewilderment continues as Edith, Roland, and their guide, Telie Doe, set out into the dark wilderness. Telie immediately tries to change their route, the first indication of trouble to come. Shortly after, however, she becomes lost as "the hills and swamps had confused her." Roland takes the lead, but he, too, is confounded by the forest. "He was once or twice inclined to suspect that he was actually retracing his steps, and approaching the path by which he had entered the depths of the woods." (104) They continue in circles until Telie notices an Indian lying dead behind a log, the primitive cross of the devilish Jibbenainosay on its chest. Just then, they spy the evil spirit's outline in the woods. Bird plays beautifully on the mythic proportions of the spirit as he describes the figure

stalking through the woods at a distance, looking as tall and gigantic in the growing twilight, as the airy demon of the Brockden...(although) as it drew nigh, its stature appeared to grow less and less colossal, and the wild lineaments with which fancy had invested it faded from sight, leaving the phantom a mere man, a tall frame indeed, but without a single characteristic of dress or person to delight the soul of

wonder... The transformation was so great and unexpected that...(Roland) could scarce forbear a laugh as Nathan came stalking up.

“Friend ! does thee think thee is in thee own parlor with thee women at home, that thee shouts so loud, and laughs so merrily? Or does thee know thee is in a wild Kentucky forest, with murdering Injuns all around thee?”

“I trust not,” said Roland, much more seriously. “But in true, we all took you for Nick of the Woods. You must allow that our terrors were ridiculous enough, when they could convert a peaceful man like you into such a blood-thirsty creature.” (107-8)

The irony of their miscalculation is that Nathan actually is the mythic figure they feared him to be. The circular logic of this mistaken identity mirrors the circular path the travelers make in the forest. They do not recognize either of their mistakes, and they continue to be clouded in their judgments about their new companion as well as their forest journey.

The new emigrants are not the only ones who miscalculate their surroundings. In an attempt to help them, Nathan actually leads them into an Indian trap. Then Stackpole, after saving them from the Ashburn assault by leading them in a daring river escape, blindly emerges from the woods and

walks right into a second Indian ambush. Fifteen natives, guns ablazing, quickly take hold of Edith, Roland, Telie, and Emperor, Edith's black slave, as Stackpole saves his own life by fleeing. The errors do not end there. Roland, hearing the sound of horses, watches the approach of the gallant Kentuckians. Over the hill comes "Tom Bruce, a worthy scion of a warlike stock, brandishing his rifle in one hand, and with the other pointing his nine remaining followers down the road." (190) With the patriotic cry, "Show fight for the honor of Kentucky and the love of woman. Every man to his bush and every bullet to its Injun," (190) Bruce leads the attack, and quickly the "heavy losses the Indians had sustained...turned the scale of battle entirely in favor of the Kentuckians." (195) But Stackpole emerges from the woods and "snatched the victory from the hands of the Kentuckians" as Bruce and his companions mistake the horse thief for the ghost of a man they had hanged for his crimes. (195-6)

These are just a few of the novel's passages that emphasize Bird's unconventionally complicated world view. In *The Last of the Mohicans*, Cooper's ordered world of successful rescues and knowledgeable woodsmen rarely turns chaotic. In Simms' *The Yemassee*, the mistaken identity of Craven does not cause harm, and Craven's miscalculation about Chorley's motives is resolved before any real damage occurs. But in *Nick of the Woods*, the frontier is far more perplexing and unruly. Guides repeatedly lead their

charges into danger and brave soldiers unafraid of riding straight into a band of well-hidden Indians are nonetheless spooked by the idea of a ghost. Important news of Indian battles is ignored, although past killings are celebrated. Perhaps most notably, Roland fails to learn the ways of the frontier from his guide and rescuer, the capable Nathan Slaughter. The relationship between Roland and Nathan is, in many ways, another antithetical response to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*. In that novel, Hawk-eye is mentor to Duncan's student. As a role-model and teacher, Hawk-eye prepares the young soldier to be the patriarch of a new America. As the novel progresses, Duncan learns from his guide, and in the end aids in the rescue of the Munro sisters. His transformation from stiff colonial soldier to scrappy frontier fighter helps shape him for his role as the patriarch of future generations. Bird, however, offers no such transformation in his novel. Just as the landscape continues to shift from welcoming to dangerous, so the relationship between Roland Forrester and Nathan shifts between teacher and student. And not surprisingly, neither man is good at either role. Roland masters few of Nathan's backwoods skills. Conversely, Roland's moral standards of warfare are not adopted by his revengeful companion. Consider the early scenes between Nathan and Roland. Nathan is willing to help Roland master the basic frontier skills of following a trail and recognizing horse tracks – skills Nathan is appalled the young captain has not mastered –

but he is unwilling to teach him how to kill, which is critical to their survival. In the ambush at the Ashburn cabin, and in the stand-off that follows, the captain needs prompting from the Quaker at every turn. The Quaker even holds the rifle for the soldier, although Nathan refuses to squeeze the trigger of the gun.

Like Cooper's Duncan, Roland witnesses for the first time the skirmishes of frontier fighting. "In all conflicts in which he had been engaged, the adverse ranks were arrayed face to face, looking at each other as they fought; but here, no man saw his enemy, both parties concealing themselves so effectually in the grass and among the rocks and shrubs." (191) But unlike Duncan, who learns the lessons of the frontier, and adapts to frontier warfare following the massacre at Fort William Henry, Roland fails to learn. Therefore, at the novel's climax, Nathan orchestrates the rescue of Edith and leaves Roland watching from the margins. Unable to understand the rules of the frontier rescue, Roland disobeys Nathan's command and ends up in need of rescue himself.

But if Roland is not a good student, neither is Nathan a successful teacher. After Nathan rescues Roland by killing his captors, he does not boast of his feats, as Hawk-eye might have, but instead he accepts no responsibility. "My gun went off in my hands, as it might be of its own accord, and truly it blew the two evil creatures' brains out...and truly as I had done so much, I

though I might as well do all – the killing of three men being but a little worse than the killing of two.” Because he acted to save Roland’s life, Nathan is not accountable. “[S]eeing that it was all over and over again on *thee* account and nobody else’s...it is quite amazing thee ill thing they hast brought me to.” In this rationale, Nathan shifts his responsibility for the killing to Roland by saying, in effect, when it comes to violence, he learned his skill from Roland. Nathan’s penitent attitude quickly shifts back to ferocity when the Quaker mentions Wenonga, the Shawnee chief who killed Nathan’s family and who has taken Edith captive. In this passage, the soldier who cannot master the most basic skills nonetheless learns the lesson of revenge. Responding to Nathan’s suggestion that Edith might be dead, Roland unleashes his anger.

“I call heaven and earth to witness that I will pursue the race of the slayers with thrice the fury of their own malice – never to pause, never to rest, never to be satisfied with vengeance, while an Indian lives with blood to be shed and I with strength to shed it.”

“Thee speaks like a man,” said Nathan, grasping the soldier’s hand and fairly crushing it in his grip.” (233)

Outlining his potential action, Roland exactly describes the tactics of the Jibbenainosay, Nathan’s alter ego. Roland may not have the skills to be Nathan/Nick, but he shows in this passionate outburst that he has the will to

carry out a bloody revenge. Meanwhile Nathan, out of character as a Quaker but in keeping with his night-time persona, urges his student on.

Despite this passionately violent outburst, Roland is unable to learn the other lessons Nathan wishes to teach. Following his rescue, for example, Nathan wants the soldier to take the scalps of his dead captors. Nathan insists, "You are a man of war...and thee fights Injuns even as the young men of Kentucky fights them, and thee may think it but right and proper, as they do, in such case made and provided, to take the scalps off the heads of these same dead vagabonds..." Roland refuses to embrace this frontier tradition. "Their scalps? *I* scalp them!" cried Roland with a soldier's disgust. "I am no butcher. I leave them to the bears and wolves which the villains in their natures so strongly resembled. I will kill Indians wherever I am, but no scalping, Nathan, no scalping from me!" (245) Here, then, Bird has turned the tables on the violent and peaceful, making the soldier refuse to engage in frontier brutality encouraged by the formerly peaceful Nathan. Commendable as he is to refuse Nathan, Roland cannot convince his guide to leave the men alone. Nathan sneaks back and does the dirty deed himself. The shifting roles of teacher and student are apparent later in their adventure, and again it is Roland who tries to prevent the Quaker from shedding unnecessary blood. After the pair rescues Stackpole from the stake, Roland "for want of skill" misses an easy kill but nevertheless tackles the last Indian, who is still alive.

...And when Nathan, rushing to assist him, cried aloud to him to move aside, that he might “knock the assassin knave’s brains out,” Roland replied by begging Nathan to spare his life. “I have disarmed him,” he cried – “he resists no more – don’t kill him.”

“To the last man of his tribe!” cried Nathan, with unexampled ferocity; and, without another word, drove the hatchet into the wretch’s brain. (264)

Readers certainly will recall earlier scenes when Roland tried unsuccessfully to get Nathan to fight in defense of Edith and Telie Doe. “We will charge them – cut them to pieces, and so rid the wood of them! Four strong men like us fight, too, in defense of women –” “*Four!*” echoed Nathan, looking wonder and alarm. Do thee think to have *me* do the wicked thing of shedding blood?” (119) In this earlier scenes, Nathan would not even pull the trigger in self-defense, and Roland could not convince him to change his mind. But now, Roland attempts to save the Indian’s life – therefore placing himself in Nathan’s earlier role as Indian sympathizer – and the Quaker/Jibbenainosay refuses, thereby adopting Roland’s previous position. Such a shifting of roles and attitudes continues until the very end of the work, when Roland’s skill in combat is dismissed by the blood-thirsty Quaker. The soldier is left on the sidelines, to baby-sit Nathan’s dog, as the Quaker and Stackpole venture into

the village. Nathan's poor judgment of Roland's skills, and Roland's inability to learn the lessons of the frontier warrior, cause the planned escape to fail. Clearly, Bird is using these shifts in his characters' relationship to emphasize the complexities of living and fighting in the Kentucky woods.

Furthermore, Roland and Nathan lack the trust that is evident in the relationship between Hawk-eye and Duncan. Roland's suspicions are first apparent after Nathan leads them to the Ashburn house. Cornered and outnumbered, Nathan proposes that he sneak through enemy territory to go for reinforcements. Roland mistakes this brave suggestion as an attempt on Nathan's part to save himself. The patient Quaker denies the charge. "If thee knew what it was to creep through a camp of warring Shawnees...thee would allow that the cowardly and betraying man would look for some safer way to escape." (159) Such mistrust is understandable when they first meet in the woods, but it does not disappear as the men travel together. In the end, Nathan's mistrust of Roland destroys their initial attempt to rescue Edith. Miscalculating Roland's abilities, Nathan insists the cousin stay on the edge of the Indian camp, out of harm's way. Roland is incapable of such inaction, however, and he follows Nathan into the Indian settlement, an error that leads to their capture.

The fact that Roland fails to learn the lessons of the frontier is important not only because it distinguishes Bird's vision of the frontier from

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his contemporaries, but because it further underscores his dim view of the future. In Simms' Indian tale, the disguised aristocrat Craven teaches Hugh Grayson to be a leader, and the young frontiersman learns the lesson and helps defend the settlers against the attacking Yemasseees. As a result of his personal growth, Grayson receives a commission from the governor, a symbolic extension of authority from an aristocrat to a born leader of the people. Likewise, Cooper's Hawk-eye prepares Duncan to be a leader of the future by teaching him how to adapt his skills as English soldier to those of a frontier fighter. Again, a transfer of authority and leadership is made. But the same dynamic is not available in Bird's more complicated vision of America. Nathan is not the leader that Craven and Hawk-eye are, and as an outcast of his social world, he cannot transmit any meaningful authority to the young Virginian. But even more important, Roland demonstrates that he is unable to learn the lessons of the frontier, and therefore can not be read as a patriarch. Cooper places the mantle of the future on the shoulders of Alice and Duncan, as Simms does on the shoulders of Craven and Bess Matthews. Bird, on the other hand, does not envision the soldier as the inheritor of the land, nor does he foresee the captain and his cousin/lover to be the forebears of the great nation. Having been rescued by the Bruces and Nathan, Edith and Roland learn about the recovered will, which leaves them their uncle's

estate. Immediately, the pair prepares to return to Virginia to “a tranquil life of enjoyment.”

[Roland] joyously, and with Edith still more joyous at his side, turned his face towards the East and Virginia – towards Fellhallow and home – to enjoy a fortune of happiness to which the memory of the few weeks of anguish and gloom passed in the desert, only served to impart additional zest. (378)

This passage reduces the entire novel to “a few weeks of anguish and gloom.” Roland leaves Kentucky to return to Virginia, to live his life in the manner of his uncle, the Loyalist whom the young Revolutionary soldier had previously disdained. Bird has his hero and heroine retreat to the past, to the “tranquil” existence of pre-Revolutionary days.

In his essay focused on the incestuous relationship between the cousins, Gerard Sweeney maintains that the future of the nation is not left with Edith and Roland. The cousins are “in some measure burlesques of such characters as Alice Munro and Duncan Heyward, just as Nathan Slaughter is Bird’s answer to Nathaniel Bumppo.” (49) Sweeney sees the relationship as poisoned, and thus contends that Bird did not see the couple as progenitors of the young nation. In fact, he interprets their incest as proof that Bird viewed

white colonists, as symbolized by the Virginian cousins, to be as corrupt as their Indian counterparts.³

In her recent dissertation on Robert Montgomery Bird, Nancy Buffington offers a different point of view, describing Roland as a father of the American future. She claims that Roland's stoicism "allows him to rise in the reader's esteem." (226) She maintains that Roland eventually defeats his "outmoded dedication to honor," which initially makes him unsuited to frontier combat, and she contends that Roland "dismisses his passive endurance and his dislike of violence, escaping and helping to save his cousin Edith from captivity." Yet the action of the novel undermines Buffington's argument. The scene Buffington cites, for example, depicts the soldier as incompetent, just as he was at the start of his adventure. His role in the rescue is as the baby-sitter of Nathan's dog, and his failure to hold his position results in the capture of Nathan and Stackpole, not the rescue of Edith. Buffington also views Roland's adventure as a "narrative of

³ See "A Strong Family Likeness: The Love Plot of *Nick of the Woods*," *Markham Review* 9 (1980): 48-52. While I agree with Sweeney's characterization of the Forresters as lovers, I find fault with several of his arguments. Most notably, I disagree with his reasons for Roland's refusal to marry Telie Doe. (Telie's father offers Roland his freedom in exchange for marrying Telie.) Sweeney contends that Roland "knows intuitively that something is wrong – both morally and socially – in his relationship with Edith" and that this belief and his "upper class snobbery" cause him to refuse Telie's hand in marriage. I think other reasons are preferable to this psychological interpretation, most notably that it is unlikely that the chivalrous Roland would save his life by sacrificing Telie's future.

nationhood” in which the soldier represents “not just other settlers, but...the entire developing nation.” (183) Again, the text does not support this reading. Bird limits Edith and Roland to the past, and does not allow them to participate in the future. In turning their faces “toward the East and Virginia,” Roland and Edith literally and figuratively turn their backs on the West. The cousins choose to leave the frontier to return to their inherited plantation and its colonial way of life. In doing so they relinquish their place as progenitors of the nation. Bird’s novel locates the future in the west, and acknowledges the efforts of the Kentucky settlers, and not the Virginian plantation owners, in writing the national tale.

Bird makes several other statements about his vision of the future. For example, his position is clear regarding the racial conflict between the white settlers staking claim to the territories and the Indians who inhabit the land. The novel supports the Removal policies, since the land is shown to be rescued from its Indian captors by the brave Kentucky settlers. Bird’s views regarding racial differences are similar to Simms in that he supports the separation of the races, even to the point of Indian extinction. But the Indians in *Nick of the Woods* are denied the dignity, and certainly the intelligence, of Simms’ characters. Their society is primitive, lacking the trials and oratory found in the novels of Cooper and Simms. They are not given the opportunity to voice their stories, as the Indians in Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* do. And

finally, they are denied the humanity, the loving nature, of Mary Conant's Indian husband, Hobomok. Bird contrasts these earlier portraits with a series of violent characters who are repeatedly maligned by the white settlers. The Indians are "crawling reptiles in spirit as in movement," (118) "murdering dogs," and "red niggers." (151) Unlike the Indians found in other frontier novels, they have no lessons to offer, no behaviors to model. The American Indians in *Nick of the Woods* speak rarely, and in the same style of grunts and broken phrases as Cooper's native villains. For example, listen to Piankeshaw accept Roland as a prisoner who will replace his dead son.

"Lost son!" he ejaculated; "good huntaw; kill bear, kill buffalo, catch fish, feed old squaw, and young squaw, and little papoose – good son. ...kill man Kentucky, kill man Injun-man; take scalp, squaw scalp, papoose scalp, man scalp, all kind of scalp – debbil good fighting man." (212)

The melancholy Indian then proceeds to get drunk and fall off his horse, breaking the cask of alcohol and infuriating his companions. The ensuing scene is one of bitter infighting. The only other major Indian character is Wenonga, whose real-life reputation as a brutal Shawnee chief is not borne out in Bird's adventure. He, too, is portrayed as a pathetic drunk whose arrogance gets the best of him. For example, when Nathan seeks to rescue Edith from her prison, he trips over Wenonga's unconscious body lying prone

outside his hut. The chief is made to look even more foolish when he demands the Jibbenainosay be summoned by his captive, whose foaming mouth and fit-like seizures make the Indian think he is a supernatural spirit.

Not only does Bird portray his Indians in a negative manner, but he offers disapproving commentary about them as the novel progresses. They are a “barbarous race, which contact with a civilized one cannot invest; and the dreams of poets and sentimentalists, have invested with a character wholly incompatible with his condition. Individual virtues may be, and indeed frequently are, found among men in a natural state; but honor, justice, and generosity, as characteristics of the mass, are refinements belonging only to an advanced stage of civilization.” (200) It is clear from this passage that Bird positioned himself with the Whig politics of his time. His thoughts on racial inferiority stretched from Indians to slaves, who play only a small role in his frontier novel. Emperor, Edith’s black slave, accompanies the small party into the woods and helps stave off the Indian ambush. But he is killed by the Indians during the next skirmish and is never mentioned again. Given Bird’s Whig politics and the clarity with which he presents his views on race in the novel, it is surprising that Buffington links the Indians with the Forrester cousins, who are also disenfranchised. Buffington’s interpretation is based on the false notion that the Forresters lose their estate because their fathers – brothers who supported the Revolution – disagreed with their other

brother, who was loyal to the King. In point of fact, the Tory brother repents his mistreatment of his brothers, and he changes his will to leave his fortune to their two children. That will is subsequently stolen by his business partner Braxley. Buffington neglects to note that it is eventually restored to Roland, allowing the couple to inherit the plantation. Thus they are never disenfranchised. Despite her unusual reading, Buffington carefully notes that Bird's political beliefs and personal correspondence support the novel's commitment to white supremacy. Bird's plan for the inevitable emancipation of the slaves was similar to the Indian Removals. Although he predicted that an end of slavery would be "miserable," he was prepared for it: "March them west of the Stoney Mountains and form a colony & nature at the mouth of the Columbia. Build them towns...give them a white governor, to preside in a council of their own representatives...They will make good friends...they are bad foes." (Buffington 86)

Writing about *Nick* and *Gone With the Wind*, Margaret E. Stewart argues that the so-called "American Chivalric Myth" that is the preferred rationale for frontier violence is directly tied to racist behavior. "Racial polarity" that is the basis for Bird's pro-expansion novel, "inevitably leads to white ascendancy," Stewart maintains. She finds a definitive link between Bird's Shawnees and emancipated blacks, since racial violence and hatred were directed against both.

The future of the nation, in Bird's view, does not rest in racial accommodation, nor with the Virginian couple returning to their plantation. Rather, the forebears of America are found on the frontier, in the "unpolished and unpretending yet brave, sagacious and energetic" settlers of Kentucky. The patriotic hues surrounding the arrival of the Regulators and victory at Wenonga's village underscore Bird's faith in Manifest Destiny and the westward march of American settlers. The death of Tom Bruce at the close of the big battle is a rousing anthem to the importance and divinely mandated victory of the settlers over the Shawnee. In a scene that suggests he is the novel's real hero, Tom Bruce says that witnessing Edith freed from her captors is a "sight worth dying for."

"...And so, father, if you'll jist say I've done as much as my duty, I'll not make no fuss about going."

"Going, you brute," iterated the father, clasp[ing] the hand of his son, while the others, startled by the young man's sudden fall, gathered around to offer help or to gaze with alarm on his fast changing countenance. "Why, Tom, my boy, you don't mean to make a die of it?"

"If – if you think I've done my duty to the stranger and the young lady...and to *you* dad – to you and mother and the rest of 'em."

“You have, Tom,” said the colonel, with somewhat a husky voice – “to the travelling stranger, to mother, father and all – ”

“And to Kentucky?” murmured the dying youth.

“To Kentucky,” replied the father. (362)

Bruce’s dying words are of encouragement and celebration. “Hurrah for Kentucky!” The young man – and since he is one of a seemingly endless stream of Tom Bruces to come, he can be seen as representative of a whole generation – happily sacrifices his life to rescue a white woman. The young Bruce symbolizes the characters on the frontier who learn and adapt, who experience a conversion in the wilderness. Unlike Roland, who fails to learn these lessons before he abruptly leaves the frontier, Tom Bruce is able to adapt, learn and conquer. His lesson, and that of the wave of settlers before him and to come, is summed up in the dying son’s words of advice to his father. “...never let a poor traveler go into the woods without some dependable body to take care of him.” (362)

Nancy Buffington claims that Bird uses these patriotic scenes to promote his beliefs in western expansion and Indian Removal. *Nick* and Bird’s two other frontier novels, *Hawks of Hawk-Hollow*, and *A Belated Revenge*, “illustrate the transformation of natural law tenets into what would soon be called manifest destiny,” Buffington argues, noting that the patriotism

of the Bruce clan disguises the genocide of Indians and justifies the violence of their white oppressors. The novels are “parables of American politics” that support the correlation “between the heroic complex – honor, reliance on divine will, and an initial aversion to violence followed by a final embrace of genocide – and the national rhetoric of expansion.” (183)

Once again, Bird’s complicated narrative precludes such a neat interpretation. Buffington’s reading of a narrative of expansion does not consider a resolution for Nathan Slaughter, now exposed as Nick/Jibbenainosay. This central figure has no role in the society that will thrive in the reclaimed Kentucky woods, but neither does he have a comfortable place in the frontier to the west. His farewell to Edith and Roland, when he declines to return with them to Virginia, demonstrates the ambiguity of his position. “Thee would not have me back in the settlements, to scandalize them that is of my faith? No friend, my lot is cast in the woods, and thee must not ask me again to leave them.” (381) He continues, “The meat that feeds me, the skins that cover, the leaves that make my bed, are all in the forest around me, to be mine when I want them.” Although his claims of self-sufficiency echo those of Hawk-eye, Nathan is no Natty Bumppo. Rather, Nathan is an exile, a crushed man whose quest for vengeance, just as his earlier quest for peace, offers him no solace. His return to the woods is “mournful” and melancholy” because he has “none to welcome me from the

field and the forest with the voice of love.” (381) Bird casts Nathan as the lonely outsider, whose misery is not alleviated by his heroics. In Nathan, Bird demonstrates the human cost of the nation’s march west. He has no pity for the fate of the Indians, but he is sympathetic to Nathan, who suffers from his existence on the frontier. Years after his celebrated exploits, Bird’s narrator explains, Nathan continues to shun society since “the cheers and hearty hurrahs in token of respect for his valiant deeds at Wenonga’s town... [were] more embarrassing and offensive than the flings and sarcasms with which they used in former days to greet his appearance.” (381)

Bird, then, resolves some of his story and leaves parts of it unsettled. The final battle scene, coupled with Edith and Roland’s return to their plantation, emphasizes that *Nick* is concerned primarily with the justification of America’s march westward. The Kentucky Regulators, through bravery and violence, have wrested an American Eden from the Indians for the benefit of future Americans. Here, again, he distinguishes his work from Cooper. For in *The Last of the Mohicans*, the death of Uncas emphasizes the novel’s dominant theme of dispossession and nostalgic loss. Bird’s novel, on the other hand, celebrates the death of the Indians because it results in the taking of their lands. Kentucky is the liberated captive in this work, and Tom Bruce the true hero. The marriage of Telie Doe and Dick Bruce, who will be the next Tom Bruce, as each son who becomes the oldest takes the name of their

father, supports this reading, as does the Forresters' successful escape from the frontier. Unlike the death of Uncas in *The Last of the Mohicans* and Sanutee in *The Yemassee*, the death of Wenonga has no nostalgic weight. Rather, the annihilation of the Shawnees undergirds a patriotic theme, suggesting that the Indian battles, violent as they are, are for the ultimate good of the nation. And the law of the frontier, with its vigilante justice, is suited to its wild setting. The frontier law only breaks down, in fact, when Edith forces her Eastern notions on the frontier society. (Her insistence that Roland free Stackpole leads to some good, but also much chaos and misfortune.) In the end, Bird makes it clear that the Kentucky settlement will be transformed from a wild and grim wilderness into a more civilized society. The forest, currently held captive by the Indians, will be freed, cleared, plowed, and farmed by the settlers. Still, there is a cost associated with this progress, and it is emphasized by the fate of the heroic Nathan. The little melancholy found in the novel is focused on Nathan's return to the woods. Still an outcast, Nathan symbolizes the underside of the march west. His actions are necessary to the nation's future, and yet they are not celebrated as are the deeds of the Bruce clan. By demonstrating that Nathan's place in society is unchanged despite his courageous deeds, Bird assesses the price to be paid for the nation's dreams of expansion. The novel leaves no doubt that the western frontier must be wrested from the Indians for the benefit of future

generations. But *Nick's* shifting plot and contradictory portraits suggest that Bird understands that the road to the future is difficult, indeed.

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