

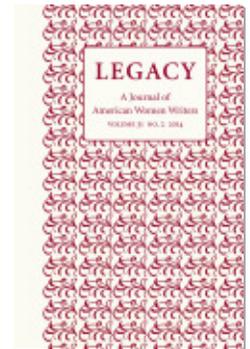


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Laurel V. Hankins

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ESSAYS

The Voice of Nature: *Hope Leslie* and
Early American Romanticism

LAUREL V. HANKINS

University of Massachusetts Dartmouth

In the preface to his 1848 anthology *The Female Poets of America*, Rufus Wilmot Griswold proposes “feminine genius” as the answer to charges that Americans are “too much devoted to business and politics” to produce a national literature (8). In the expanded preface to the second edition, published four years later, Griswold illustrates the dynamic relationship between antebellum domesticity and Romantic historiography by turning to the frontier and its narrative of American progress to make his point: “[I]t is in the West too where we look for what is most thoroughly native and essential in American character where we are struck with the number of youthful female voices that soften and enrich the tumult of enterprise, and action, by the interblended music of a calmer and loftier sphere” (8). Griswold’s faith in the possibility of a national literature depends on feminine genius to represent western expansion as a “native” instinct, even as the transcendent properties of that genius exclude women from the political rights earned by participation in the commercial enterprise of empire building. The rhetoric of domesticity established women as the source of private virtue that naturalized civic duty but also excluded them from being considered citizens. Similarly, by establishing the frontier’s wide-open spaces as the source of national character that naturalized American expansion, Romantic historiography worked to preserve rather than assimilate nature’s ever-receding possibilities. Amy Kaplan has compellingly analyzed the process by which “imperial domesticity” relies on the construction of uncivilized spaces to continue its “domesticating mission” (588). Reading Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s playful frontier romance *Hope Leslie; or, Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827) as an early Romantic experiment rather

than as a straightforward precursor to mid-nineteenth-century domestic novels, this article traces a strain of antebellum discourse that romanticizes these uncivilized spaces as extrapolitical sources of national character. The logic of this rhetoric proposes the figures it imagines circulating in these spaces as working to naturalize culture rather than domesticate nature. I begin by situating Sedgwick in the early Romantic movement by arguing that early Romantic historiography called upon feminine genius to naturalize fantasies of progressive national history. I then argue that *Hope Leslie's* cyclical concept of history poses a direct challenge to Romantic historiography's reliance on the essentializing rhetoric of domesticity. Although Sedgwick's experimental Romanticism protests the artificial confines of domesticity, it can do so only by replacing the disenfranchised white woman of domestic fiction with the forsaken Indian woman of Romantic historiography as the figure who must remain the unasimilated source of the natural values that the United States claims for itself.¹

EARLY AMERICAN ROMANTICISM AND WOMEN'S FICTION

Sedgwick's selection of poetry by Eliza Lee Cabot Follen, William Cullen Bryant, and Fitz-Greene Halleck for *Hope Leslie's* title page and chapter epigraphs situates her novel in the context of the burgeoning New England Romantic movement. Most accounts of nineteenth-century literature would not consider these authors as part of the movement, primarily because their old-world metrical arrangements and didactic sentimentalism seem hopelessly opposed to the inventive aesthetics of midcentury American Renaissance authors. Recent critical attention has begun to view early American Romanticism's transatlantic appropriations as revisionary rather than imitative, particularly by noting the nationalist agenda behind the movement's relationship with a specifically American landscape.² In their appropriation of Wordsworthian naturalism, early American Romantics preserved a jarring sense of eighteenth-century didacticism. A correspondence between the moral and natural worlds worked to naturalize expansion as an involuntary democratic impulse. Once we recognize the nationalist energies at work behind the moralizing naturalism of early American Romantic poetry, nineteenth-century literary culture realigns itself into new genealogies. The early Romantic movement troubles the false cultural divides that the American Renaissance established between postcolonial and imperial, masculine and feminine, and Romantic and sentimental literary culture.³ Although the divide between feminine sentimentality and masculine Romanticism has been challenged through a recognition of shared political and cultural work, the nationalist agenda behind early Romanticism's dual investment in naturalistic retreat and sentimental didacticism remains

underdeveloped, as does the movement's relationship to the explicitly nationalist agendas of antebellum historical romances.

Early Romanticism's exclusion from literary histories means that Sedgwick is most frequently positioned as an inaugural producer of domestic fiction rather than as a participant in the early Romantic movement. *Hope Leslie's* critical history in particular provides a snapshot of the conversations surrounding women's fiction that have developed over the last few decades; critics have argued that *Hope Leslie* typifies domestic fiction's refusal to engage with history (Douglas 184–85; Buell, *New England* 242), that it typifies domestic fiction's subversive potential to critique patriarchal discourses (Zagarell 225; Castiglia 3), and that it typifies domestic fiction's limited ability to negotiate racial difference (Nelson 192; Fetterley 492–93, 511; Ford 81–82). The endpoint of this narrative is the critical impasse that characterizes analyses influenced by separate spheres ideology, as even arguments that emphasize the permeability of the spheres ultimately reify an oppositional relationship between masculine and feminine literary traditions (Romero 19; Kaplan 581–83). Fully aware of the ways that its cultural moment exploits the falseness of this divide, *Hope Leslie's* plot is driven by a mutually constitutive relationship between patriarchal authority and feminine reform. The novel's first volume develops a close relationship between Magawisca, the captured daughter of a Pequot chief, and Everell Fletcher, the novel's white hero. This relationship climaxes when Magawisca stops her father from executing Everell, losing her own arm in the process. The novel's eponymous white female lead then helps Magawisca's friend Nelema escape from the Puritan settlement where she has been convicted of practicing witchcraft. In return, Nelema makes Magawisca promise to arrange a meeting between Hope and her sister Faith, who was captured by Magawisca's father and has married Magawisca's brother. This meeting is interrupted by the Puritan authorities, who arrest Magawisca. Hope then frees Magawisca. This cycle of favors returned ends when Magawisca decides to leave the white settlement once and for all, despite Hope's promise that the settlers will soon grow past their prejudices.

Reading *Hope Leslie* within the context of the early Romantic movement's progressive national histories allows us to recognize its cyclical concept of history as a skeptical critique rather than a failure of imagination. The end of the novel establishes that what makes Magawisca most vulnerable to Puritan violence is her friendship with Hope, whose liberal impulses make her a nearly irresistible force of reformative discipline. The novel's ambivalence about its white heroine's natural impulses unsettles the essentializing rhetoric of domesticity, but its preservation of the American Indian woman as a transcendent figure of exceptional national virtue upholds the fundamental logic of early

Romanticism's desire to naturalize national ideology. Rather than signifying the domestic novelist's failure to incorporate her Indian sister into a newly democratic community, this specific iteration of the Vanishing American nationalizes democratic virtue by locating it in the American wilderness.

Hope Leslie's preoccupation with who is able to heed "the voice of nature" directly aligns Sedgwick's project with the early Romantic movement (97, 310). William Cullen Bryant, a member of the same liberal New England community as the Sedgwick family, reviewed at least one of Sedgwick's novels in *North American Review*, and two poems from his 1824 collection *Poems*, "Monument Mountain" and "An Indian Story," appear as chapter epigraphs in *Hope Leslie*. The false cultural divide established by the American Renaissance limited Bryant as well as Sedgwick; it informs a critical approach that views incongruity between *Hope Leslie's* tentative cultural relativism and its investment in the cult of the Vanishing American as a symptom of the inevitable failure of the domestic novelist's imagination. Similarly, this critical perspective sees the incongruity between Bryant's naturalism and his didacticism as a symptom of postcolonial conservatism. Although he was one of the most highly respected poets of the early nineteenth century, twentieth-century critics viewed Bryant's Shakespearean sonnets and Spenserian stanzas as US literature at its most imitative and unoriginal, and the utilitarian claims he made for the aims of literature now seem hopelessly outdated (McDowell lxi; Buell, "American Literary Emergence" 605–9; Jackson 188; Meyer 196–97). One thematic convention that makes early American Romanticism seem particularly divorced from the midcentury Romanticism of Emerson and Melville is its moralizing tone. Bryant argued in his *Lectures on Poetry* that "it is the dominion of poetry over the feelings and passions of men that gives it its most important bearing upon the virtue and the welfare of society. Everything that affects our sensibilities is a part of our moral education, and the habit of being rightly affected by all the circumstances by which we are surrounded is the perfection of the moral character" (16–17). Bryant works to naturalize the moral utility of literature, claiming that poetry should avoid being "merely didactic" by "teaching truths which the mind instinctively acknowledges" (11). What makes Bryant's didacticism Romantic is its understanding of the close relationship between the moral and the natural world. For Bryant, "among the most remarkable of the influences of poetry is the exhibition of those analogies and correspondences which it beholds between the things of the moral and of the natural world" (19). He holds that these correspondences are universally recognized: "the simplicity and clearness of the truths with which [poetry] deals prevent any mistake in regard to their meanings or tendencies. They strike the mind by their own brightness and win its assent by their manifest and beautiful agreement

with the lessons of our own experience” (19). This unmistakable clarity about a naturalized code of morals is not limited to lyric poetry—for Bryant it is the standard by which all literature should be judged. In his review of Sedgwick’s 1824 novel *Redwood*, Bryant outlines his general views on the American novel and concludes by congratulating her for writing a novel, “the design of which is professedly to instruct,” that manages to avoid being didactic:

It is not enough to say of this novel, that the reader is relieved and refreshed at due intervals, by being let out from the instructions of the author into the great world about him, to amuse himself with what is going on there; and is then gently recalled to the lesson, which the author wishes to teach. It is doing it better justice to say, that the world itself is only then made to the reader, what it ought always to be, the great school and place of discipline, the experience and observation of which should form us to virtue. (270–71)

According to Bryant, *Redwood* is particularly successful in teaching its lesson because it trains readers to take their instruction from the world around them—rather than imposing its own artificial code, the novel teaches readers how to read for the lessons that already exist in the natural world.

Bryant’s review seems only tangentially interested in Sedgwick’s novel, and most of the essay is spent promoting his own theories about the formation of national literature. Although he praises the naturalness of *Redwood*’s instruction, he quickly commandeers nature’s lessons and the successful literature they generate to support a narrative of American progress. According to Bryant, reading is a naturally democratic enterprise, and the simple character traits that all readers crave “are to be found abundantly in the characters of our countrymen, formed as they are under the influence of our free institutions, and shooting into a large and vigorous, though sometimes irregular luxuriance” (253). Like most critics of his day, Bryant argued that American history, landscape, and diversity provided ideal subjects for the novelist. Most inspiring for Bryant is the history of American progress:

It is hardly possible that the rapid and continual growth and improvement of our country, a circumstance wonderfully exciting to the imagination, and altogether unlike anything witnessed in other countries, should not have some influence in forming our national character. At all events, it is a most fertile source of incident. . . . The hardy and sagacious native of the eastern states, settles himself in the wilderness by the side of the emigrant from the British isles . . . and then you see cornfields, and roads, and towns springing up as if by enchantment. In the mean time pleasant Indian villages, situated on the skirts of their hunting grounds, with their beautiful green plats for dances and martial exercises, are

taken into the bosom of our extending population, while new states are settled and cities founded far beyond them. (254-55)

I cite this passage at length both because it is so typical of the early-nineteenth-century evaluations of US literature that gave rise to historical romances like *Hope Leslie* and because it is such a clear statement of Romantic historicism. Anglo-American farms, roads, and towns appear “as if by enchantment,” American Indians do not face removal policies but are “taken into the bosom of our extending population,” and Anglo-American settlements exceed even indigenous claims to the land. Inevitable, exceptional, and already the stuff of romance, American progress is a source of both “national character” and literary “incident.” In his poetry Bryant might mourn the Vanishing American and protest industrialization through pastoral nostalgia, but the theory underlying these sentiments is clear: indigenous people will disappear in the face of American progress, and literature is the best way to feel good about this disappearance.⁴ In the same way that “a sense of the foreign is necessary to erect the boundaries that enclose the nation as home” (Kaplan 582), the opportunity for “continual growth” provided by the frontier is necessary to inspire a national literature that will in turn naturalize the violence of this expansion through the “enchantment” of romance.

Bryant’s views on US literature and history illustrate why Griswold refers to the West when introducing *The Female Poets of America*. If American values are rooted in the frontier’s untouched wilderness, then the woman author’s responsive relationship to nature makes her uniquely qualified to represent these values—not only because liberal theory associates women with a pre-political state of nature (Dillon, *Gender of Freedom* 21), or because uncivilized spaces provide the greatest potential for the work of domesticity (Kaplan 582), but also because antebellum critics like Griswold associated feminine genius with artless instinct rather than artful creation (Richards 38). Bryant’s privileging of Sedgwick’s ability to record her “experience and observation” of the natural world is characteristic of a more general discourse that coded women’s literary and domestic productions as natural, emotional impulses. Feminine genius provides an escape from the anxiety surrounding the corrupting forces of ownership that plague Bryant’s own representations of the land (Meyer 196). Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues that nineteenth-century sentimental discourse identifies women with a domestic space that “is also figured as determined by free will, love, and desire rather than by material need or compulsion”; the discourse thus constructs women’s work as a “moral and aesthetic endeavor” divorced from the legal protections of the market (“Sentimental Aesthetics” 509-10). *Hope Leslie*’s Romanticism revises this construction by portraying

the American wilderness rather than the home as a space of free will divorced from institutional demands. Kinereth Meyer notes that nineteenth-century authors like Bryant struggled with dual conceptions of land as commodity and as “moral emblem” (198). The rhetoric of Indian removal policy was grounded in arguments that did not recognize tribal relationships to land as conforming to liberal notions of private property rights (Wald 86). Doubly disenfranchised by a discourse of natural rights rooted in property ownership, the American Indian woman becomes a fantasy figure who provides the ultimate access to the spiritual resources of the land, untouched by the corrupting influence of the material world. In *Hope Leslie* the Indian woman rather than the white woman becomes the figure whose work—the nativizing of a new generation of Americans—is sanctioned by natural impulses that transcend both the limits and the protections of citizenship.

HOPE LESLIE'S CRITIQUE OF GENRE

Although the occasion for Bryant to outline his theories about the relationship between US fiction and history is his review of Sedgwick's novel *Redwood*, her next novel disrupts fiction's appropriation by the forces of nationalist history and challenges the generic expectations of women's fiction in the early nineteenth century. As Bryant's review of *Redwood* demonstrates, the primary purpose of antebellum history-writing was to capture national essence, a principle supposedly privileged with much consensus following the War of 1812 and the bipartisan rhetoric of the Era of Good Feelings. As George Callcott explains, because “it was the purpose of history to strengthen society by supporting the basic principles in which men believed—society's concepts of morality, religion, and nationalism . . . it was not falsifying the past to select those facts which illustrated a particular principle, for principles were certain and the facts of history were not” (177). In the preface to *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick's narrator tells the reader that although the novel is not “in any degree an historical narrative, . . . [r]eal characters and events are, however, alluded to . . . [in order to achieve the author's aim] to illustrate not the history, but the character of the times” (3). Like any good early national historian, Sedgwick selectively blends history and fiction to illustrate her idea of national character. Jeffrey Insko, one of the few critics to recognize the irony that characterizes Sedgwick's narrator, argues that the novel undermines historical authority by revealing its inherent fictionality: “[I]n an extraordinary admission of historiographical partisanship, [the preface] frankly draws attention to the inevitable (often willful) blindnesses that always attend historical investigations” (186). Given the fact that this “historiographical partisanship” was considered an important aim

of early national history-writing, Sedgwick's preface does not only challenge the authority of history; the shared goals of history and fiction in this period suggest that it also challenges the authority of fiction. If *Hope Leslie* seeks to undermine historical authority, it also works to undermine literature's authority as the mode best suited to appealing to the era's naturalized concept of national essence. Throughout the novel, the narrator's sarcastic interjections and manipulative plot devices never allow readers to forget that they are reading a work of fiction. If, as Lawrence Buell argues, "the utilitarian cast of American critical thought" meant "a strategic forgetting of the fictional element" in historical fiction, Sedgwick makes use of a heavy-handed, ironic narrator constantly to remind her readers of this fictional element (*New England* 241).

Sedgwick's sarcastic narrator is her primary method for challenging the generic expectations of Romantic historiography. Sedgwick's novel invites readers to interpret its tale of the seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay Colony through their own contemporary understanding of US history, but it also undermines any confidence readers might feel in their modern superiority (Insko 191). The novel first describes Hope through a comparison to its 1827 readers: "Nothing could be more unlike the authentic, 'thoroughly educated,' and thoroughly disciplined young ladies of the present day, than Hope Leslie; as unlike as a mountain rill to a canal—the one leaping over rocks and precipices, sportive, free, and beautiful, or stealing softly on, in unseen, unpraised loveliness; the other, formed by art, restrained, within prescribed and formal limits, and devoted to utility" (126). This description of the women of Sedgwick's present, characterized by artifice, discipline, and utility, hardly represents the progressive history that Bryant thought the native Anglo-American author should capture. The narrator's unfavorable comparison also alerts readers to the possibility that any claims she makes about the progressiveness of the present age might be disingenuous: "The character of man, and the institutions of society, are yet very far from their possible and destined perfection. Still, how far is the present age in advance of that which drove reformers to a dreary wilderness!—of that which hanged quakers!—of that which condemned to death, as witches, innocent, unoffending old women! But it is unnecessary to heighten the glory of our risen day by comparing it with 'the preceding twilight'" (15). Lucy Maddox cites this passage as evidence that Sedgwick accepts "without question the view that the intellectual and psychological narrowness of Puritan culture has given way to the enlightened liberalism of the nineteenth century" (94). Maddox's eagerness to contrast Sedgwick's "zeal for reform" unfavorably with Hawthorne's "skepticism about the validity of reform movements" misses the narrator's own skeptical parenthetical insertion two para-

graphs later (111–12). The narrator tells us that when William Fletcher decides to move his family from Boston to the isolated settlement at Springfield, “Mrs. Fletcher received his decision as all wives of that age of undisputed masculine supremacy (or most of those of our less passive age) would do, with meek submission” (15). This sarcastic comment makes it impossible to read the previous passage as a straightforward statement in support of American progress.

Hope Leslie does not encourage its readers to look back at the Puritans from a more progressive point in US history. Although the novel’s younger generation, represented by Hope, Magawisca, and Everell, is characterized by an increased understanding of the common humanity shared by men and women, whites and Indians, Magawisca’s voluntary exile at the end of the novel reiterates the cyclical nature of history that Sedgwick is proposing—American Indians will not disappear for the first time with Andrew Jackson’s 1830 Indian Removal Act; instead, they are disappearing yet again. This formulation is slightly different from the iteration of the Vanishing American that Lora Romero finds in James Fenimore Cooper’s preface to *The Last of the Mohicans*: “The elegiac mode here performs the historical sleight of hand crucial to the topos of the doomed aboriginal: it represents the disappearance of the native not just as natural but as having already happened” (35). If the historical romances and Romantic poetry about the decades of Indian removal policy portray the Indian’s disappearance as “both spontaneous and ineluctable,” by suggesting that Indian removal is a repetition, Sedgwick’s version of the Vanishing American also presents Indian removal as a national character trait that has very little to do with modern progress and industry (Romero 35).

The criticism leveled at Sedgwick for being unable to imagine a progressive ending for her revisionist history misses the fact that in 1827, history did not seem particularly progressive. Readers disappointed with the novel’s ending for precluding the progressive possibilities at its beginning have missed the lesson its skeptical narrator points out over and over again: there is nothing progressive or exceptional about US history. Despite *Hope Leslie*’s skepticism toward early Romantic histories of American progress, literary historians place *Hope Leslie* squarely in a tradition of women’s fiction that takes the possibility of progress as its founding tenet (Douglas 181–85; Maddox 107–10; Barnes 78–79). The palpable critical disappointment with Sedgwick’s reliance on the Romantic convention of the Vanishing American to resolve her otherwise progressive novel demonstrates our conflicted investment in both the transgressive Otherness of women’s fiction and its inevitable conventionality.⁵ The ease with which this novel’s contradictions are accounted for as symptomatic of the limits of domestic fiction suggests that our critical labor continues to naturalize

a gendered divide in the antebellum literary canon. One recent example of this mode of reading comes in Ezra Tawil's *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, where his understanding of frontier romances as "anticipatory" of midcentury domestic fiction predetermines his reading of *Hope Leslie* (93–96).⁶ Tawil argues that the racial logic of the novel excludes Magawisca from becoming a sentimental heroine because she is unable to adapt to the Fletcher household's domestic scene (124). The novel presents domesticity not as a positive but, rather, as a restrictive value that interferes with natural impulses. The difference between volume 1 and volume 2 of Sedgwick's novel can be characterized as a shift from the *vacuum domicilium* of the frontier to the "petty domiciliary tyranny" of the urban (131, 315). While the frontier's lack of domestic spaces allows Hope to act on her natural impulses, the Winthrop's civilized Boston "government-mansion," where Hope is sent after helping Nelema escape, forces its "inmates" to act according to the artificial codes of domesticity (149). Jennet and Mrs. Fletcher are the novel's two unpromising representatives of domesticity. Both die spectacular deaths that can be read as symptomatic of their relationship to the domestic: the silently submissive Mrs. Fletcher is killed in an Indian attack after refusing to remove her family to the fort until her husband returns home, and the aggressively tyrannical Jennet is killed in an explosion after trying to derail Everell and Hope's plan to liberate Magawisca. As Christopher Castiglia argues, *Hope Leslie* is an example of women's fiction that is hyper-aware of domesticity's potential collusion with patriarchal conquest (4–5).

Because our contemporary critical narrative maintains a divide between feminine domesticity and masculine Romanticism, it primes us to read women's fiction like *Hope Leslie* as morally earnest rather than playfully skeptical. *Hope Leslie*'s deliberate resistance to the rhetoric of domesticity suggests that we have inherited this critical impulse from the antebellum literary establishment. *North American Review* used its review of *Hope Leslie* as an excuse to welcome women to the realm of novel-writing: "The purity and the goodness of women have here done their proper work. They are seen and felt in the elegant literature of the times. They have greatly contributed to chasten the morals of literature, and establish a code of laws, by which offences against decency are condemned as offences against taste" (410). The woman author, the review continues, "cannot be false to her nature. The cause of virtue must always find in her an advocate" (411). In a slightly different vein, the *Western Monthly Review* congratulates Sedgwick for recognizing her own limitations: "At present, the aim of all, who write for the imagination, is to produce an effect. The author cares not what established rules he violates, in making his book, if, by so doing, he can create a sensation in his readers. This mania does not seem

to have touched our authoress. Her story presents a regular account of well regulated people, who figure only in still life” (290). According to this review, Sedgwick “was probably aware” that the “many powerful minds” who novelized the Puritan character before her left nothing new to say, and so she “confined herself” to reality, with the exception of her unrealistic portrayals of “the savage mind” (290). Although neither of these reviews should be considered the last word on how *Hope Leslie* was received by nineteenth-century readers, they both locate the success of women’s fiction in its moral realism rather than in its imaginative potential.⁷

Hope Leslie’s narrative playfulness challenges the limitations imposed on women’s fiction by these reviews and reminds us, in Romero’s words, “to exercise sufficient skepticism towards the antebellum period’s narrative of itself” (7). The novel’s most explicit rejection of these generic expectations occurs in the final chapter, when the narrator carelessly glosses over the details of Hope’s hard-won domestic bliss: “We leave it to that large, and most indulgent class of our readers, the misses in their teens, to adjust, according to their own fancy, the ceremonial of our heroine’s wedding” (369). If the marriage plot is one of the clearest markers of domestic fiction (Tawil 93), this dismissal is a striking moment of genre confusion, as the narrator appears completely uninterested in the domestic portion of her tale. In his review of *Redwood*, Bryant claimed that unlike romances, when writing domestic novels, “it will not do to trust to the imagination of the reader to heighten the interest of such a narrative; if it ever attempts to fill up the sketch given by the writer, it is not often in a way calculated to increase its effect, for it is done with plain and sober hues, that color the tissue of our own lives” (247). Whether or not Sedgwick’s decision to leave the details of Hope’s wedding to “the imagination of the reader” is a playfully defiant response to Bryant’s instructions about writing domestic fiction, it is clear that as Magawisca disappears into “the deep, voiceless obscurity” of the “far western forests,” the narrator loses interest in her tale (359). One might argue that Sedgwick rushes through the novel’s final domestic details because once Magawisca disappears, Hope’s marriage is beside the point, that what matters is that Magawisca’s disappearance enables Hope and Everell’s marriage. But the narrator’s dismissive tone also corresponds to a growing skepticism toward the white heroine’s natural impulses that directly challenges the rhetoric of domesticity’s essentializing assumptions about women’s moral natures. As Hope moves into a position of power in the newly democratic community, the secondhand nature of her limited moral impulses is precisely what allows her to replace Puritan patriarchs as the new force of American discipline. This coup, however, depends on preserving Magawisca outside the national enterprise as an unadulterated source of Hope’s revolutionary dissent.

THE VOICE OF NATURE

As numerous critics have noted, *Hope Leslie* portrays Hope and Magawisca as sisters who share a spiritual connection to the American wilderness and act on a natural code of morals written on the heart (Zagarell 237–38; Castiglia 4; Fetterley 505). This connection with the Pequot native seems to authorize the English settler with the crucial indigeneity sought by early Romanticists (Meyer 195; Karafilis 338–39). Magawisca's belief in the Great Spirit and Hope's own vague religious sentiments, "pure and disinterested" and unbound by "the contracted boundaries of sectarian faith," are conflated into the Romantic deism that finds expression in Bryant's theories of poetry (*Hope Leslie* 128). Critics frequently describe Magawisca and Hope's sisterhood as evidence that Sedgwick deliberately codes the novel's progressive, reformative values as feminine (Zagarell 238–39; Maddox 103; Gould 649–50). Although Magawisca and Hope both challenge the artificial laws enforced by Pequot and Puritan patriarchs, their race and gender determine their ability to recognize natural law. Throughout the novel, acts of transgression signify an unnatural, unjust system that can be subverted only by characters who listen to their natural impulses. *Hope Leslie* attempts to nationalize these transgressive, democratic impulses by linking them to the values of the American Revolution. Digby, a minor character who is a frequent enabler of Hope's schemes, responds to her self-consciousness that she has perhaps been "too headstrong in [her] own way" by telling her, "why this having our own way, is what every body likes; it's the privilege we came to this wilderness for" (235). Digby's rhetoric suggests that the spirit of revolution is somehow a natural resource of the American wilderness that will soon triumph over the "pretty tight rein" held by "the gentles up in town there, with the Governor at their head" (235). But it is also clear that the values claimed by the American revolutionaries did not descend from Puritans, but from Indians, as Sedgwick reverts to what by 1827 was an almost outdated conflation of American Indian with American rebellion.⁸ As Insko observes, when Magawisca anticipates Patrick Henry and demands that Governor Winthrop grant her "death or liberty," "the fervor of the Revolutionary fathers, their oratorical authority, suddenly appears autochthonous, as if somehow *native* to the land itself, while the native Magawisca becomes a protonationalist, less an enemy than a source of founding principles" (179). Magawisca's "contagious" call for liberty leaves the Puritan audience feeling conflicted, "their reason, guided by the best lights they possessed, deciding against her—the voice of nature crying out for her" (310). National essence, it seems, can skip a generation. When Magawisca saves Everell at the sacrifice rock, this scene is doubled, but with an important difference. Before

Magawisca intervenes, although there were “some whose hearts moved them to interpose to save the selected victim,” like the Puritans who watch Magawisca’s trial, “they were restrained by their interpretation of natural justice, as controlling to them as our artificial codes of laws to us” (95). But after Magawisca sacrifices herself for Everell, “the voice of nature rose from every heart, and responding to the justice of Magawisca’s claim, bade him ‘God Speed!’” (97). Unlike the Puritans, the “savages” are able to act on their sense of natural justice (96–97). *Hope Leslie*’s Romanticism anxiously circles around the white settlers’ secondhand knowledge of natural law via a nostalgic pathos for a mythic time when natural law was the law of the land.

Representing a more progressive generation than the Puritan authorities they consistently disobey, Hope and Everell’s natural impulses must be cultivated by someone indigenous to the land, and Magawisca serves as their conduit to the natural world and its lessons of personal freedom and cross-cultural understanding. When Hope argues with William Fletcher for Nelema’s freedom, she uses a secondhand paraphrase of Magawisca’s words: “I repeated what I had often heard, you, Everell, say, that Magawisca believed the mountain, and the valley, the air, the trees, every little rivulet, had their present invisible spirit—and that the good might hold discourse with them. ‘Why not believe the one,’ I asked, ‘as well as the other?’” (111). Similarly, at the end of the novel, Hope can only accustom herself to her sister’s marriage to Oneco after considering Magawisca’s parting words: “[T]he suggestions of Magawisca, combining with the dictates of her own heart, produced the conclusion that this was a case where ‘God had joined together, and man might not put asunder’” (359). The novel ends reminding its readers that Hope must struggle to feel correctly, or as Magawisca dictates that she should.

By presenting Magawisca as the source of Hope’s good feelings, the novel suggests that Hope’s transgressive impulses might be second nature after all. Importantly, Hope is more receptive to Indian naturalism than Magawisca is to English domesticity. While Mrs. Fletcher despairs that one might as well “yoke a deer with an ox” as compel Magawisca to help Jennet with “the drudgery of domestic service,” Hope takes naturally to the American wilderness (32). No scene implies Hope’s natural affinity for Indian culture more than her theatrical entrance following the Bethel massacre. As Magawisca retreats into the forest with her father and his captives, Hope enters playing the part of Indian Princess:

Mr. Fletcher was attended by two Indians, who followed him, bearing on a litter, his favourite, Hope Leslie. When they came within sight of Bethel, they shouted the chorus of a native song. Hope inquired its meaning. They told her, and raising herself, and tossing back the bright curls that shaded her eyes, she clapped

her hands, and accompanied them with the English words,—“The home!—the home!—the chieftain’s home!”— “And my home too, is it not?” she said. (71)

Hope, “who had left a palace in England,” translates the “native song” as easily as she translates the isolated “rustic dwelling in the wilderness” into home (71). Unlike the Indian Princess of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century iconography that figured America as primitive, fertile, and available, Hope is an Indian-Columbian hybrid.⁹ Bethany Schneider argues that Sedgwick’s first novel *A New England Tale* (1822) “proposes that belonging to and being of this particular land is the prize for those white people who can read its special sacred status. . . . Indigeneity in a sacred landscape, like salvation, is conferred in a moment of passionate recognition” (354). Part of Schneider’s point is that recognizing this strategy allows us to read an “Indianless novel as an Indian novel” (355), but when Sedgwick employs a similar strategy in her explicitly Indian novel, Magawisca’s original presence never fully allows Hope to achieve white indigeneity. Although Hope easily becomes the novel’s substitute for Magawisca, a move that subdues the threat of interracial marriage posed by Magawisca and Everell’s adolescent attachment, this act of substitution also forever marks Hope as once removed from the natural law written on Magawisca’s heart.¹⁰

Hope’s triumphant entrance following the Bethel massacre marks the beginning of the end of the potential romantic attachment that the novel suggests has been developing between Magawisca and Everell. This potential attachment is one example of how Sedgwick’s narrator uses her readers’ instincts against them through willful acts of diegetic misdirection.¹¹ The narrator first describes Everell and Magawisca together as “no unfit representatives of the people from whom they sprung” (22). Physically representing the best of their respective races, Everell and Magawisca appear to be a natural pair. This appearance is soon confirmed by the development of an intimate friendship that does not go unnoticed by their guardians. In one of the two letters included in the first volume, Mrs. Fletcher warns her husband: “[T]wo young plants that have sprung up in close neighbourhood, may be separated while young; but if disjoined after their fibres are all intertwined, one, or perchance both, may perish” (33). Given that Mrs. Fletcher’s “vague forebodings” and “fearful thoughts” of Indian attacks are quickly fulfilled, her speculations about Everell and Magawisca also promise to come true. Later in the novel, Digby confirms the reader’s initial impression by recalling that Everell and Magawisca were once “as good as mated” (224). Everell replies that he “might have loved her—might have forgotten that nature had put barriers between us” (224). An attachment that was once described as being as natural as two young plants joining fibers is later characterized as barred by nature.

Magawisca's friendship teaches Hope and Everell how to be American, and her timely disappearance at the end of the novel sanctions the democratic community founded by their union with a native blessing. What is less clear is why a novel that insists upon the morality of natural impulses would so deliberately mislead its readers' sympathetic instincts. In an era of historical writing defined by "a general consensus about essence, morality, progress, and national character," where "the most pervasive single assumption was the existence of moral law" (Callcott 173, 156), what would it mean for a historical novel to make the reader question her ability to read for this moral law, particularly when national identity is at stake in its recognition? In his review of *Redwood*, Bryant argued that romances set in the past are easier to write than domestic tales set in the present:

In reading narratives of the romantic kind, our curiosity comes in aid of the author. We are eager to learn the issue of adventures so new to us. The imagination of the reader is also ready with its favorable offices. This faculty, always busiest when we are told of scenes and events out of the range of men's ordinary experience, expatiates at large upon the suggestions of the author, and, as we read, rapidly fills up the outline he gives with bright colors and deep shades of its own. (247)

In *Hope Leslie*, readers' imaginations work against them, as the narrator's "outlines" and "suggestions" lead readers toward a fantasy of interracial marriage that is then emphatically described as unnatural. Readers are punished for the same desire they imagine Magawisca and Everell must feel for each other. Just as what happens on the frontier enables what can happen in the Winthrops' parlor, carefully disciplining readers' imaginations in the first volume prepares them to appreciate the necessity of Magawisca's disappearance in the second volume. But by using the conventions of romance writing to play with readers' feelings, the novel also de-naturalizes appeals to sympathetic instincts by presenting the possibility that these appeals can be duplicitous rhetoric. If the historical romance gained legitimacy because of a national consensus about human nature, then Sedgwick's novel resists this standard by constantly undermining her readers' instincts about what is and is not natural.

Because her arrival coincides with Magawisca's retreat, Hope becomes the figure who disciplines the reader's expectation that Everell and Magawisca are "as good as mated." Although Hope is a figure of unruly transgression, at the end of the novel her transgressions have instituted a new order that seeks to banish figures like Jennet, who do not have the appropriate natural impulses, and to incorporate figures like Magawisca, who do. Just as the American Revolution established a more natural government, by the end of the novel,

Hope works to establish a democratic order founded in the good feelings of friendship and equality.¹² One of her final orders of business is to convince Magawisca to return to the white settlement. Hope once again tries to paraphrase Magawisca, promising “as you would say, Magawisca, we will walk in the same path, the same joys will shine on us, and, if need be that sorrows come over us, why, we will all sit under one shadow together” (349). In this final rhetorical battle of natural metaphor, Magawisca has the last word, replying that “the Indian and the white man can no more mingle, and become one, than day and night” (349). Recognizing no difference between Puritan theocracy and Hope’s democracy, Magawisca continues to resist efforts of inclusion that rest on assimilation. By refusing Hope’s insistence that they can in fact “walk in the same path,” Magawisca disrupts the process whereby sympathy naturalizes reformatory discipline by making it appear to coincide with the reader’s own feelings (Barnes 9). *Hope Leslie*’s opening premise that “the difference of character among the various races of the earth, arises mainly from difference of condition” is confirmed by the reader’s sympathetic impulses but denied by the novel’s resolution (4). According to Elizabeth Barnes, Sedgwick’s novels are typical of the ways that antebellum domestic fiction domesticated the uncontrollable nature of sympathetic attachment that haunted early republican seduction novels: “Sympathy proves the golden rule of Sedgwick’s domesticity . . . in converting the hapless protagonist of seduction fiction into a new and virtuous heroine, Sedgwick attempts to reform the role of sympathy itself—to teach by *positive* rather than by negative example” (80). In *Hope Leslie*, however, Hope’s triumph over the authorities and her simultaneous adoption of their disciplinary language coincides with the narrator distancing herself from her heroine.

Magawisca’s refusal of Hope’s final request forces Hope to reveal the reformatory agenda behind her appeal to good feelings, in turn reinforcing the novel’s cyclical plot. Perhaps most troublingly, Hope, who once defended Magawisca’s belief in the Great Spirit, now wishes “that a mind so disposed to religious impressions and affections, might enjoy the brighter light of Christian revelation—a revelation so much higher, nobler, and fuller, than that which proceeds from the voice of nature” (352). Hope also begins to speak the language of public good that she has resisted throughout the novel. When she asks Magawisca how she can win over her sister, still in captivity in the Winthrop mansion, Magawisca asks her “if any charm could win [her] affections from Everell Fletcher” (350). Hope, “summoning all her courage,” “answered in a tolerably firm voice, ‘yes—yes, Magawisca, if virtue, if duty to others required it, I trust in heaven I could command and direct my affections’” (350). Of course the reader knows that commanding and directing affections is precisely what

Hope's attempt at disinterested matchmaking has demonstrated to be impossible. After Hope impulsively thrusts Esther and Everell together, although she is "exulting in her victory over herself," she actually has "put the happiness of all parties concerned in jeopardy," and Esther ends up feeling "cruelly, fatally injured" (225–26, 290). Hope's insistence that her sister should learn to "command and direct" her affections when "duty to others required it" sounds all too similar to the appeals to the greater good that throughout the novel have signaled the avoidance of superior moral claims. Governor Winthrop, for example, responds to Everell's outrage that Magawisca has been imprisoned with the reminder that "private feelings must yield to the public good" (245). When Hope meets her sister, the reader understands for the first time that the novel's heroine is capable of dishonesty. As Insko points out, Hope at last resorts to trying to bribe her sister with jewels, the same strategy employed by the villainous Sir Philip to persuade Magawisca to take Rosa into the wilderness (196).¹³ This is not the first time in the novel Hope has acted the part of seducer. When Hope and Magawisca first meet, Hope zeroes in on Magawisca's primary vulnerability, her feelings for Everell. In turn Magawisca recognizes Hope as a force to be resisted: "'They tell me,' she said, 'that no one can look on you and deny you aught; that you can make old men's hearts soft, and mould them at your will'" (199). By coding Hope's persuasive charms first as the rhetoric of seduction, and then as the rhetoric of Puritan theocracy, Magawisca reveals the artifice behind Hope's benevolent democracy and disrupts the process of domestication that threatens to assimilate her.

Recognizing that Hope's appeals to sentiment at the end of the novel are in fact empty rhetoric—a symptom of her own secondhand knowledge of the natural law written on Magawisca's heart—allows us to read Magawisca's refusal to stay in the white settlement as resistance toward Hope's efforts to domesticate her rather than as evidence that she lacks the proper sentiment for domestication.¹⁴ Hope tries to assimilate Magawisca by naturalizing consent through the good feelings of friendship, gratitude, and equality. By refusing Hope's invitation to join this new community, Magawisca insists upon a republican conception of citizenship grounded in consent, a concept that Hope's involuntary impulses work to erase.¹⁵ In the years leading up to the Indian Removal Act, debates about American Indian citizenship reflected an anxiety about "the potentially anarchical implications of pure consensualism"; American Indians were denied citizenship not only because, like women, their lack of private property rendered them incapable of consenting to state protection, but also because of the dangerous implications of considering expatriation a natural right in a broader sense (Smith 158, 167). At stake in these debates were larger questions about national unity; as Priscilla Wald argues, "these cases call atten-

tion to the symbolic processes through which the United States constitutes subjects: how Americans are made” (77–78). Magawisca represents the right of individual dissent throughout the novel, as she refuses both the protection and the authority of English law. In her trial scene, for example, she declares, “I am your prisoner, and ye may slay me, but I deny your right to judge me” (302). Because we tend to read women’s fiction as always making an argument on behalf of a liberal model of citizenship that argues for inclusion based on universal rights, it is easy to overlook moments when the assimilationist pressure of this citizenship is presented as a threat to be resisted.¹⁶ As Lauren Berlant argues, “whether consensually or passively transmitted, national identity requires self-ablation” (4). For Magawisca, this “self-ablation” would mean assimilation. Magawisca’s final farewell challenges the fantasy of belonging that is supposed to be at the center of the relationship between the sentimental novel and disenfranchised readers, as her insistence that “the Indian and the white man” are as fundamentally different as “day and night” resists the trajectory toward sameness that defines sympathetic identification.¹⁷

By constantly challenging its readers’ sympathetic instincts, *Hope Leslie* critiques the cultural agendas disguised by the essentializing naturalism of discourses like domesticity and exceptionalism. Magawisca’s decision to leave the settlement might force Hope’s hand, exposing her as just another version of the Puritan patriarchy she eclipses, but it also forces Magawisca to serve as the source of the very values claimed by the American exceptionalism that romanticized Indian removal as essential to the development of national character. Even as *Hope Leslie* denaturalizes gender difference, it continues the Romantic project of naturalizing culture, as it promises that fundamental American values—“death or liberty”—have always been and always will be available on the frontier. By idealizing Magawisca as the source of Hope’s Americanness, the novel positions the Indian woman, rather than the white woman, as the figure whose natural proclivity for forming a virtuous national character necessarily excludes her from the corrupting interests of Griswold’s “business and politics.” Magawisca’s voluntary disappearance fulfills the conventions of the Vanishing American by erasing the historical violence of Indian removal, but there is an additional potential for irresolution that her disappearance enacts. Although “that which remains untold of [her] story is lost in the deep, voiceless obscurity of those unknown regions,” the fact that an untold story remains prolongs the fantasy of discovery (359). The American historical romance novel works to domesticate human nature into a force of national cohesion, but this act of domestication functions through an exclusionary principle that conserves nature’s possibilities rather than as a colonizing principle that works

to assimilate them. By refusing assimilation, Magawisca's legacy becomes raw material for the construction of national character, a natural resource whose availability must be guaranteed by her disappearance.

NOTES

1. Throughout this article I use the term *Indian* to refer to the fictional characters and stereotypes of antebellum literary culture. I use the terms *American Indian* and *indigenous* to refer to the historical referents of this fiction. The term *native* is especially slippery in this context. As Griswold's preface demonstrates, its connotations of indigeneous and innate are difficult to separate, particularly since early Romanticists worked to appropriate indigenous status for white Americans by inventing national character traits that could be imagined as derived from the American landscape and its original inhabitants. In this article I use the term *native* to capture this desire for an indigeneity that both legitimizes settlement and signals exceptionalism.

2. See Jackson, who notes that one lingering symptom of the American Renaissance tradition is a privileging of "metrical innovation" (187). See also Meyer's claim that "the aesthetic touches the political" in representations of American land and landscape (199).

3. As an example of the critical consensus I am addressing here, consider Buell's characterization of Bryant's new-world pastoralism as postcolonial, still "affected by the European gravitational field," whereas Whitman's "anxious patriotic hubris" has an imperialist trajectory. I argue below that despite Bryant's "bondage to old-world language and form," his theory of national literature is closely related to the imperialistic narratives of progress Buell identifies in Whitman and Thoreau's "fully Americanized art" ("American Literary Emergence" 605-9).

4. For examples in Bryant's poetry of the Vanishing American, see "The Ages," "An Indian at the Burying-Place of His Fathers," and "The Prairies." For this convention in antebellum verse culture, see Flint 64-65.

5. More-recent criticism has tried to move beyond what Fetterley calls "the alternating phases of celebration and critique" by arguing that the novel's conventional resolution shouldn't shut down analysis of its progressive possibilities (492). Emerson argues that Magawisca's disappearance signals the limit of what "nineteenth-century society" can imagine, and Miller argues that despite "Hope's racism," her overall development as a character constitutes "narrative progress" (32, 133, 122). Even these more nuanced arguments, however, continue to contrast the novel's conservative resolution to its larger narrative of progress, rather than considering that the resolution might signal Sedgwick's skepticism of these narratives of progress.

6. Part of Tawil's purpose is to challenge the critical history I have just described, where the recovery of women's fiction "seems to have reproduced the central terms

of the antithesis between domestic and frontier fiction” (93). Although I share Tawil’s interest in the ways that sympathy and racism operate together in both men’s and women’s frontier fiction, his understanding of the frontier romance as “anticipatory” also predetermines his reading of *Hope Leslie* as supporting conventions and values that were not as firmly established for Sedgwick as they would be for Stowe midcentury.

7. Consider, for example, Lydia Maria Child’s assessment of Sedgwick’s “kind and playful humour” in her review of Sedgwick’s fiction in Sarah Hale’s *Ladies’ Magazine* (234).

8. Deloria argues that when colonists played Indian to protest British rule (the Boston Tea Party is the most obvious example), they “solidified their common understanding of themselves as Americans, their freedom an ancient thing linked intrinsically to the continent, its custom, and its nature” (32). Post-revolution, these performances “signified an American identity based upon republican order rather than revolutionary potential” (56).

9. Deloria explains that early-nineteenth-century national iconography replaced the Indian Princess with Columbia, who “signified the dignity and gentility of civilization” rather than “primitivism, sexuality, and miscegenation” (53).

10. Karafilis argues that Magawisca serves as Hope’s “host” and notes that the “darker side” to their friendship is Hope’s “pernicious appropriation” of Magawisca’s indigeneity (339). I agree, but it seems important to examine the borrowed nature of this indigeneity—Hope is a substitute but never becomes the original. Magawisca’s disappearance from the Puritan community is crucial, not only because Hope’s successful hybridity renders “the presence of Magawisca at the close of the novel less ‘necessary’” (341), but also because, as I will argue below, maintaining the purity of the original is a crucial component of the novel’s project of naturalizing nationalist ideology. See also Wald’s reading of Lydia Maria Child’s frontier romance *Hobomok*, especially page 92.

11. Nineteenth-century reviews of *Hope Leslie* also remark on Everell and Magawisca’s relationship, and Lydia Maria Child’s frontier romance *Hobomok*, a novel that also experiments with interracial marriage, would have been on Sedgwick’s readers’ minds.

12. See also Bradfield, who notes that that in the early national period “transgression began to be conceived of as a disciplinary activity” (xi).

13. Insko also notices this separation between the narrator and Hope and argues that although it is clear that “the otherwise ‘progressive’ Hope views her sister as transgressing against ‘natural’ racial boundaries,” what is less clear is “that this view is shared by Sedgwick” (196). This is an overly generous reading, as it is the narrator, not Hope, who tells us that Faith’s face, “pale and spiritless, was only redeemed from absolute vacancy by an expression of gentleness and modesty” (240).

14. For critics who remain invested in the feminization of American culture narrative, Magawisca’s refusal signifies that she is racially unsuited for the proper sentiment required for membership in Hope and Everell’s enlightened community. See Maddox

107–10: “Although it might have been reasonable, even admirable, for the Indians to resist submission as long as white culture was controlled by Puritan males, continued resistance makes no sense now that the culture has become enlightened through its feminization” (110). To me, the point of this final scene is that Everell and Hope cannot see that their friendship is what has endangered Magawisca all along.

15. Schweitzer argues that recognizing the choice Magawisca makes at the end of the novel allows its characters to recognize the “limits of their comprehension—and thus control—of the other.” This recognition “clears the way for the future possibility of ethical friendship across difference” (205). I agree that Magawisca’s choice opens up a space for equality with difference, but I’m not so sure Hope and Everell are in favor of keeping this space open. Hope, for example, belies sympathy’s trajectory toward sameness when she wishes that she might retain Magawisca in order to teach her Christianity.

16. Warner argues that women in the early nineteenth century argued for equal rights “through the normative language of the liberal tradition” and “appealed to the ideal of a disinterested, abstract, universal public—just the kind of public in which particularized views and the gendered body would always seem matter out of place” (*Publics and Counterpublics* 41).

17. Again, see Warner: in the same way that the early nineteenth century’s rhetoric of nationalism allowed for “imaginary participation” that could be extended to women “as symbolic members of the nation,” the sentimental novel allowed women “to attribute public value to reader identification” (*Letters of the Republic* 173–74). See also Barnes: “sentimental politics reveals itself to be a politics of affinity rather than of democracy” (98).

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