The literary frontier: creating an American nation (1820-1840)

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THE LITERARY FRONTIER:
CREATING AN AMERICAN NATION (1820-1840)

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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M.A., North Carolina State University, 1997
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Acknowledgements

By reading me stories about Daniel Boone and Davy Crocket when I was eight years old, my curmudgeonly dad, Walt Helton, unintentionally encouraged my fascination with the frontier. Our multiple travels across the United States and to national parks and landmarks made me much more aware of the country as a unified place. We settled, for the most part, in the foothills of western North Carolina where I could visually mark the snowline near World’s Edge. The intervening years of formal education rarely returned to frontier or national subjects, but I was hyper-aware of the effects of living in the “thermal belt,” between major highways, between cities, between the mountains and piedmont, between regions, between classes and between races.

I wanted to escape that in-between, but I can’t escape my roots. Instead, with a lot of help, I walked pathways oft trod and those newly blazed, and I tried to find my way. Most recently that help has come from my fantastic dissertation committee, which has provided important commentary and direction for my thinking and writing over the past few years. Dr. Edward White has meticulously read drafts and provided invaluable advice. He has often reminded me that manuscript production is not the only valuable “work” dissertating provides. He has always made time to discuss the details. Dr. Michelle A. Massé has supported my professional goals far beyond the dissertation, encouraging and reminding me that multi-tasking and focus are skills many mothers can transfer to academic production. She is an inspiration as a teacher and a scholar. Dr. J. Gerald Kennedy’s expertise in nineteenth-century literature and nationalism, as well as his detailed reading and insightful teaching, have been important for my completion of this project. Dr. Katrina M. Powell has also provided important feedback and encouragement along the way. These scholars all helped to build my confidence for completing this project, and that is half the battle.

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Abstract

From the perspective of the twenty-first century, it might be easy to dismiss frontier literature as a minor historical anomaly, as a descriptor limited to setting, or as an insignificant variation from a country struggling to reach the heights of British fictional “norms.” However, when American literature began to flourish in the 1820s, it was primarily a literature of the frontier. Examining what this frontier quality means for literary elements beyond setting, such as narrative voice, textual structure, and genre, more clearly explains the importance of the frontier to literary nation-building. After all, the literary frontier ranged across literary genres, inviting new combinations and formal innovations that mark some of the most underappreciated and fascinating examples of American writing. James Seaver’s *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, for example, carried on the autobiographical captivity narrative tradition by combining the personal narrative with local history, ethnography, and revolutionary legend: a perfect example of the “literary frontier.”

This dissertation examines the centrality of “frontier literature” during the Jacksonian period and its impulse to ethnographic description of nation. Thus, I consider a range of texts published between 1820 and 1840. Chapter one explains my theoretical bases and includes a brief reading of John Heckewelder’s ethnography of the Delaware Indians. Chapter two focuses upon Seaver’s narrative. Chapter three considers the paratextual elements of James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*, Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok*, and Ann Sophia Stephens’ *Malaeska, The Indian Wife of a White Hunter*. Chapter four analyzes the structural and satirical elements of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The Journal of Julius Rodman* and Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?* The concluding chapter reflects upon Walt Whitman’s poetry and Henry David Thoreau’s *Walking*. 
Chapter 1: Generic Frontier

The study of verbal art can and must overcome the divorce between an abstract “formal” approach and an equally abstract “ideological” approach. Form and content in discourse are one. --Mikhail Bakhtin, “Discourse in the Novel” (1934-35)

The advance of the frontier has meant a steady movement away from the influence of Europe, a steady growth of independence on American lines. --Frederick Jackson Turner, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893)

The two-decade period from 1820 to 1840 was vital for determining the perception of America’s character as industrious and mobile, but it also illustrated the fractious nature of the nation. Determining, then, what was American in order to write it was quite an imaginative accomplishment. The economic engine of the United States was powerfully active, and population increases encouraged expansive settlements. Even with the energy that characterized the United States, the country remained anxious about its power. For example, the 1823 Monroe Doctrine warned against European interference in American affairs. The threats from inside the United States, though, were gaining strength. During the decades of the 1820s and 1830s, the national government was actively creating policies to contain the divisive regional elements within U.S. borders, borders that teemed with activity. Industry supported such activity and mobility, creating an environment in which cultural contact occurred much more often. In 1827, for example, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, chartered to run from Baltimore to the Ohio River in Virginia, became the first westward bound railroad in America. Although frontier areas had been generally isolated up to this point, they quickly became much less so as settlers traveled relatively quickly by train. Such vast and rapid mobility inevitably changed the nation, especially the west.

Political policies were similarly responsive to the cultural clashes that came from expansion and resultant concerns about slavery in new states. According to the 1820 and 1840 United States Federal Census, the U.S. population increased in twenty years from over 9.6 million, including 1.5 million slaves, to over 17 million, including 2.5 million slaves. (National Archives and Records Administration). In addition to trying to deal with this large population increase, the country also needed to find more ways to deal with those who were enslaved and those who inhabited land the United States wanted. The Missouri Compromise of 1820, for instance, officially marked a sectional divide in

1 See Arthur M. Schlessinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson. (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1945). He says that although “the farm remained the statistical center of American life . . . business enterprise was exerting stronger and stronger claims on the imagination of the people and the action of the government. The number of persons engaged in manufactures increased 127 per cent between 1820 and 1840, while agricultural labor increased only 79 per cent. The number of city dwellers rose similarly” (8-9).
slavery policy. Still, the country struggled with what to do with freed slaves. In 1821, the Republic of Liberia was established as a “refuge” for them. Removing the unwanted or threatening elements in America remained policy, especially with the Indians. The Creeks were moved in 1829, and despite fighting on various frontiers, most Indians were moved by 1838, including most infamously the Cherokee. By 1838, Indian lands had virtually disappeared in the east. Nevertheless, in a number of narratives written from the 1820s-1840s, the idea of the Indian was becoming a part of the sentimentalized American past; in the west, Indians remained real and present reminders of the land for which America hungered (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 167). In the west, men were ordered to evaluate the Indian threat. For example, in 1831 Benjamin Bonneville “explored” the Rocky Mountains to determine the number of Indian warriors, their weapons and strategies of war.

Much of the nation was expanding, the population rapidly increasing. Wider rifts between the abolitionist North and the pro-slavery South seemed inevitable. During these two decades, slave rebellions, Indian Wars, Removals, emigration and expansion, as well as technological advances in transportation, agriculture and communications all created a society of rapid change. Perhaps it was so rapid that the country could not adjust peaceably and remain intact. Regardless, the texts published during this period reacted to these events and the cultural milieu through narrative. This literature strived to create a nation out of frontier histories.

Much of this frontier literature was a response to a call for a “unique” American literature. The call could be found in a number of publications in the early nineteenth century, but The North American Review perhaps most often focused upon the case for an American literature. In an 1818 article critical of Solyman Brown’s An Essay on American Poetry, with several Miscellaneous Pieces on a variety of subjects, Sentimental, Descriptive, Moral, and Patriotic, the editors argue that bad and imitative writing should not be praised just because it is American. However, they agree that

national gratitude—national pride—every high and generous feeling that attaches us to the land of our birth, or that exalts our characters as individuals, ask of us that we should foster the infant literature of our country, and that genius and industry, employing their efforts to hasten its perfection, should receive, from our hands, that celebrity which reflects as much honour on the nation which confers it as on those to whom it is extended. (198)

The concern was how to complete such a task without pedantic emulation of European, specifically British, writing. The editors in 1818 focus upon the style of writing down to the sentence level. However, in 1822, W.H. Gardiner states how best to write America and write American. He focuses upon classification of character and genre. In his argument against the use of the novel of manners, “which substitutes classes for individuals,” Gardiner states that “if such principles were left to their own tendency,
they would make all men so many flat-headed Indians” (251). He rails against those who believe America does not have the many class distinctions of Great Britain:

Now we do most seriously deny, that there is any such fatal uniformity of character among us, as is herein above supposed;—we deny . . . that there is not in this country a distinction of classes precisely similar in kind, and of extent nearly equal to that which exists in Great Britain; nay, we boldly insist, that in no one country on the face of the globe can there be found a greater variety of specific character, than is at this moment developed in these United States of America. . . . It would be hard indeed out of such materials, so infinitely diversified, (not to descend to the minuter distinctions which exist in each section of the country) which, similar in kind but far less various, have in other countries been wrought successfully into every form of the popular and domestic tale, at once amusing and instructive, if nothing can be fabricated on this degenerate soil. (251-52)

Gardiner then delineates regional figurations of character, including the New Engander, the Virginian, the “Connecticut pedlar,” “the long shaggy boatman ‘clear from Kentuck,’” “the Dutch burgomaster,” and “the prim settler of Pennsylvania” (252). He uses this stereotyping of character to prove that America includes classes as varied as Great Britain, yet he does so based upon the regions of the country instead of class precisely, and he does not at all mention non-white races as part of the country’s “classes” except as a negative descriptor of how non-differentiated characters would end up. Ironically, the ethnography upon which much American writing rested was invested in non-differentiation of races or cultures. A further irony is that emphasizing differentiation between Americans underscores the lack of national unity, which The North American Review had often advocated building through literature. Another irony is that instead of a novel of manners or the gothic genre, which Gardiner says is completely unrealistic, he advocates “the modern historical romance,” a genre which many scholars acknowledge often reduces character to caricature and is wholly unrealistic in its adventurous plots.

Sir Walter Scott and other writers in the early nineteenth century privileged the romance, a genre defined in part by its emphasis upon events rather than character. For writers attempting to write a national narrative, however, using this genre was not enough. Romance was, as Scott explains in his essay “On Romance,” a genre derived from previous European modes or speech and writing. It was inherently European, and, worse, British. Another popular option was autobiographical narrative, a form that could be written from an “American” perspective, dealing with the American landscape and American political concerns. However, unless the subject was a national figure, such as Benjamin Franklin, personal narrative seemed less than perfectly suited for the task, especially because of the suspicion with which readers approached autobiographical accounts. The way to adapt these genres into something distinctly American was to merge their conventions with American content.

This content, as James Fenimore Cooper and others saw it, was primarily the culture of the frontier, which included the landscape itself, as well as the aborigines who inhabited the Northeast, specifically. In order to “prove” such content, the writers I consider in this dissertation rely upon ethnography/exploration narratives. Such
narratives—as well as contemporary political concerns about the “Indian Problem”—influenced how Indians were portrayed in the novels. It also influenced how the novels themselves were constructed. Thus, in the 1820s, writers produced “mixed” genres with heavy debts to ethnography/exploration narratives. By the 1830s, the conventions of the new mixed genres were well-established so that “new” genres could be created through parody of earlier conventions. Using genre theory, I argue that the frontier texts I analyze are part of a narrative cycle that attempts to rework historical ethnography into “unique” narratives that expose ideological and political tensions within the young United States. The call for a national literature was, then, generative; it created the impetus for writers to push generic boundaries, which ultimately emphasized the scaffolding of the narratives. The textual apparatus that accompanies these frontier narratives delineate the “frontiers” of narrative and the conflicts of the country. The reliance upon prefatory matter, footnotes and appendices, all expose the structure of narrative genres and how genre participated in nation-building.

The Unique

Mikhail Bakhtin argues in “The Problem of Speech Genres” that the focus of most genre study has been upon what makes a particular genre different from another. Genre has been studied for its separateness, he says, not for its “common verbal nature” (84). Still, though, he calls for a better classification system (not an erasure of system) based upon genre’s social dimensions. In fact, Tzvetan Todorov, a theorist greatly influenced by Bakhtin, argues in “The Origin of Genres” that “[t]here has never been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation, and historically speaking the question of origins cannot be separated from the terrain of the genres themselves” (197). He and Bakhtin find the most important linguistic unit the “utterance,” which they see as a fundamental social act. Thus, as Bakhtin explicitly argues, genres are socially enacted and oftentimes complex interactions of other genres. Considering a narrative generically, then, must entail a social dimension; an analysis in social isolation is inadequate.

As a system of classification, division, and generalization, genre is important. More important, however, is the social aspect of genre or how people and genres interact—what audiences expect from certain genres, how authors re-enact genres, and how these social entities produce knowledge through generic communication. Bakhtin divides genres into two main groups—“simple” genres, which include utterances that have a very specific relation to everyday, real life, and “complex” genres, which include “novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth” (85). These genres come from “comparatively highly developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written) that is artistic, scientific, sociopolitical, and so on . . . . [T]hey absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication” (85). Although Bakhtin uses “secondary,” “complex,” and “ideological” descriptors interchangeably, he does not mean to reduce the importance of “real” speech. Instead, he argues that understanding the relationship between the “real” and the “complex” is vital. He says, “The very interrelations between primary and secondary genres and the process of the historical formation of the latter shed light on the nature of the utterance (and above all on the complex problem of the interrelations among language, ideology, and world view)” (85). Genre study, according
to Bakhtin, has a unique position of focusing on the social relations that tie the structure of texts to the reality of the world. This presumes an ability to differentiate speech types to determine what genres are influential and are ideologically marked well enough so that writers and readers can participate in the knowledge exchange and production that genre inculcates.

Although Todorov’s analysis specifies levels of discourse that illustrate generic divisions, he also justifies the worth of genre study by its social aspect. He says that “[g]enres are the meeting place between general poetics and event-based literary history; as such, they constitute a privileged object that may well deserve to be the principal figure in literary studies” (201). Ethnography is one genre that he and Bakhtin might place within the “complex” or “ideological” category because it at least poses as scientific discourse. It uses primary or “simple” discourse differently than a novel, for example, because it does not explicitly create an artificial world clearly apart from the real venues of discourse. Ethnography reports witnessed events and the direct language of interviewees, not characters. Again, its residence on a border between genres makes it unusually useful to perceive the worldviews of the ethnographer and her contemporary culture. Thomas Beebee in *The Ideology of Genre* argues that “genre is . . . the cusp between different use-values of texts and between discursive entity and non-entity. Hence, not only are genre systems ideological, but their cusps provide a most advantageous place from which to observe the workings of ideology in literature” (17). The texts that I analyze in this dissertation are often on the “cusp” of genre; they rework the expectations of ethnographic, romantic, and auto/biographical genres and create other genres through parody and satire.

Complex genres that pick up the features of ethnographic description, which categorizes peoples and cultures, translate and complicate further that worldview with a narrated parallel world. Todorov specifies the aspect of genre that most interests the ethnographer or historian is that “[g]enres communicate indirectly with the society where they are operative through their institutionalization” (200). Bakhtin argues that complex genres have within them “historical dynamics” for which a critic must “develop a special history of speech genres” both simple and complex to “reflect more directly, clearly and flexibly all the changes taking place in social life” (88). One reason I choose to focus on ethnography and antebellum writers is because of the great influence of the ethnography and how it illustrates an American obsession with classification and self-definition. It illuminates “the constitutive features of the society to which [it] belong[s]” (200), especially when incorporated into so many other narrative genres. By the early nineteenth century, for example, the ethnographic form was well known and used often in combination with historical or exploration narratives or as source for fiction writers and biographers.

Genre is not something that is classified and stable, nor is it nonexistent. Genre is a negotiation of difference and similarity, of the referential and non-referential, of absence and presence; it is numerous permeable boundaries, not unlike the frontier that classified and systematized a nation. In the early nineteenth century, there was not the rebellion against genre as a confinement for the artistic sense. Many writers generally accepted the value of genre as a method of communication with audience. Audiences understood conventions of genre, and they consciously or unconsciously transformed those conventions (and their subversion) into meaning about both textual strategies and

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social concerns. The appearance of generic stability often assisted in the apparent transgression of generic boundaries. Often writers consciously mixed literary genres for nationalist purposes. Many clearly acknowledged their debt to a certain writer and a certain genre without interrogating why genres in general exist or need to exist.

Sources

Ethnography is, in some ways, a genre about genres. Its very purpose is classification and division of physical and social characteristics of peoples. However, ethnography does not often attempt to translate the world beyond those classifications, to recognize its very genre as a way to conceptualize reality and interpret the social world. Genre is not merely descriptive, but generative; it produces knowledge and reinforces genre and social structures as we interact with them.

Thus, as a “factual” source for antebellum nationalist writing, ethnography is troublesome because it attempted to fill an informational absence with an unreflective “scientific” descriptive system. Most ethnographic accounts were flawed because they many times drew upon singular accounts imbued with colonialist purpose, specifically an aggrandizement of white culture. Thus, they often focused upon essentialized racial differences and did not account for the interrelations between the classifications described nor the differences between cultural groups. Ethnographic descriptions often focused on particularities of a very specific group, but broadened the scope of the descriptions to include all Indians, for example. Ethnography could not stand alone, however. Gordon Sayre in Les Sauvages Américains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature argues that while ethnography defined a people, freezing them in time, exploration narratives moved those individuals through space and time. The combination of the two genres was necessary during the colonial period. The ethnography/exploration genre had a perceived validity from which subsequent writers built, usually without investigating the sources or motivations for descriptions. By the early nineteenth century, the colonial ethnography/exploration narrative had often become a history cited as factual source for descriptions of Indians’ physical characteristics and social motivations. Upon these mixed genres writers built further amalgamations, including auto/biography, history, romance, etc. and eventually parody of the forms previous writers had mixed.

One of those often cited sources was Moravian missionary John Heckewelder, commissioned by Caspar Wistar, M.D., president of the American Philosophical Society, to write An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations who once Inhabited Pennsylvania and Neighbouring States (1819). His purpose, as he states it in the introduction to the text, is to repay the Lenni Lenape Indians “a debt of gratitude, which I cannot acquit better than by presenting to the world this plain unadorned picture, which I have drawn in the spirit of candour and truth” (25). This and other references to the veracity of the text indicate a belief that readers, by this point, were suspicious of ethnography as a genre of “truth.” Nevertheless, as William C. Reichel writes in his 1876 introduction to the text, Heckewelder’s account was well received generally, although “there were those who subsequently took exception to Mr. Heckewelder’s manifest predilection for the Lenape stock of the North American Indians, and others who charged him with credulity because of the reception of their national traditions and myths upon the pages of his book” (xiii). Heckewelder’s authority as an observer, which he claims to
be, could be suspect because he was a missionary whose “Christian Indians” were persecuted by the Iroquois and by the whites who found the Moravian mission threatening. Often Heckewelder’s tone is indeed defensive against those who might privilege the Iroquois and demean the Delaware (or Lenape) in their histories. He repeats his goal a number of times, which is to argue that the “Six Nations” (whose very name he argues is inaccurate) were manipulative and sneaky to the detriment of the Lenape and affiliated tribes. Clearly, Heckewelder has an argumentative purpose, not simply a descriptive or ethnographic one. And this blatant agenda is a unique feature of his account in part because it clearly delineates between Indians instead of presuming their inherent sameness.

Despite his awareness of the suspicion with which readers may have regarded ethnography, Heckewelder does not outright question the genre in which he writes, despite the need to include a chapter on “general observations and anecdotes” that he could not seem to fit in any other section of the text. He organizes the text first by history (the first five chapters), and then by classification, beginning with “General Character of the Indians” and proceeding through fairly typical classes of description: Education, Languages, Indian names, Marriage and Treatment of Their Wives, Food and Cookery, Dress and Ornamenting of Their Persons, Superstition, Drunkenness, and Friendship, etcetera. (Only one chapter is concerned specifically with missionary activities and history, although much of the account itself is underpinned with sources who were missionaries.) Sayre says that this “Manners and Customs” method of organization “remained the dominant mode of writing about American Indians through the nineteenth century” (101).

At the end of the text, however, Heckewelder spends some pages on advice to travelers before he concludes with a comparison of “Indians and Whites.” From the Table of Contents alone we might divine a major purpose of this text. Similar to many ethnographic texts, the point is to compare whites with “savages” and to offer advice. In this respect, Heckewelder’s account is not unique.

In fact, he includes at least two common conventions specifically associated with Indian ethnography: the mention of how women work and how certain Indians were cannibalistic. Heckewelder defies the expectation that women are treated as slaves:

> There are many persons who believe, from the labour that they see the Indian women perform, that they are in a manner treated as slaves. These labours, indeed, are hard, compared with the tasks that are imposed upon females in civilised society; but they are no more than their fair share, under every consideration and due allowance, of the hardships attendant on savage life. Therefore they are not only voluntarily, but cheerfully submitted to; and as women are not obliged to live with their husbands any longer than suits their pleasure or convenience, it cannot be supposed that they would submit to be loaded with unjust or unequal burdens. (142-43)

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In the observations made by captives and in previous ethnography/exploration narratives, how women were treated was a barometer of the relative civilized nature of the people studied.

Another requisite convention was a mention of cannibalism. Sayre explains that in colonial exploration-ethnographies “European travelers and readers sought the sensational in the ‘savage’ but expected to find their preconceptions confirmed. Cannibalism, torture, polygamy all had to be included even if not actually witnessed” (116). Heckewelder aligns the Iroquois with that particular “irrational” behavior, while he aligns the more reasonable Lenape with the whites. This happens despite Heckewelder’s own citation of how the Lenape, after a long period of peace, became violent with whites in the War of 1755. He writes:

The treachery of the Mengwe [Iroquois], however, having been at length discovered, the Lenape determined on taking an exemplary revenge, and, indeed, nothing short of a total extirpation of that deceitful race was resolved on; they were, besides, known to eat human flesh, to kill men for the purpose of devouring them; and therefore were not considered by the Lenape as a pure race, or as rational beings; but as a mixture of the human and brutal kinds. (36-37)

However, the Lenape were diverted from their revenge by the whites, who had rapidly increased in number and who amazed the Lenape with their methods of living. Heckewelder says that “[t]hey were lost in admiration of what they saw” (48). Repeatedly Heckewelder describes the “unmixed” Lenape race as a peaceful, rational, neutral people much like the “true” white Christians. Both peoples are unmixed, value “civilized” behaviors, and abhor acts such as cannibalism, using such behaviors to justify violence against the “uncivilized.” In his account, and later in Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, the Lenape pose little threat to whites because of their imminent extinction in the Northeast, as well as their similar “white” values.

This may be unique among ethnographic accounts in its specifics, but it not so unique in its generic characteristics. It maintains a focus upon division and upon class, and it does not directly criticize the genre or explain how ethnography itself may influence other social spheres. Heckewelder is quite aware of a contemporary audience, however. He makes oblique references to slavery, for example. He cites “a great chief of the Delaware nation” who describes whites, specifically in Virginia: “‘I admit there are good white men, but they bear no proportion to the bad; the bad must be the strongest, for they rule. They do what they please. They enslave those who are not of their colour, although created by the same Great Spirit who created us. They would make slaves of us if they could, but as they cannot do it, they kill us!’” (64-65). He offers no more commentary upon slavery than what he has attributed to one of his interviewees.

Despite the differentiated descriptions Heckewelder gives of the Lenape compared to the Iroquois, he does not at all acknowledge how the genre of ethnography itself encourages the classification and generalization of characteristics among the peoples he studies. In fact, Heckewelder reiterates a few of the “hypostasized description[s]” Sayre argues are common to colonial ethnography. Despite having experience with the Lenape (Delaware) in particular, Heckewelder will state a characteristic “which I understand is universal among all the tribes” (321). He is not
immune to the generalization method common to ethnography. The classification and
generalization method of ethnography, says Sayre,

preclude[s] any analysis of the different organization of these spheres of life in
indigenous cultures as compared to European societies and suppress the
differences in even the most ‘universal’ categories such as marriage . . . . Another
aspect of the perverse power of the categories is their neat independence from one
another. . . . Rarely did an observer limit his description of the customs of just one
nation, and rarely did he narrate a specific marriage or healing ceremony
involving named individuals. More often he restated what he had read in previous
accounts of other tribes and synthesized it with his own observations, in an
ongoing process of copying and corroboration. Each chapter invoked the
‘ethnographic present’ to create a singular, synthetic sauvage who stood in for
thousands of diverse individuals and communities. (103-04)

The conventions of the “Manners and Customs” ethnography were not completely
amenable to Heckewelder’s arguments against the Iroquois; however, to a certain extent
he molded those conventions to serve his persuasive purpose. Because of the sheer
cultural weight of those ethnographic conventions, however, the text as a whole does not
serve to radically transform the genre into what we might consider a hybrid text.
Indeed, not only does Heckewelder not attempt transformation of the genre, he
goes out of his way to support it in his “Advice to Travellers.” He lists on page 325 a
series of questions girding an ethnographic procedure in order to make more accurate and
efficient the note-taking:

1. What is the name of your tribe? Is it its original name; if not, how was it
formerly called?
2. Have you a tradition of your lineal descent as a nation or tribe?
3. To what tribes are you related by blood, and where do they reside?
4. What is your character or rank in the national family?
5. Which among the tribes connected with you is that which you call grandfather?
6. Where is the great council fire of all the nations or tribes connected with yours?
7. How do you address the chiefs and council of such a nation or tribe?
8. What is the badge of your tribe?

Despite such a heuristic, however, Heckewelder’s text reveals the inadequacy of
ethnography alone. Some things simply won’t fit into classes. The major part of
Heckewelder’s argument occurs in the first five chapters and his introduction. The next
33 chapters are devoted to classification and description of characteristics. The final
section of the text returns to the argument, but also illustrates the difficulty with how to
describe the influence of individual characters, such as Tamenend and Tadeuskund and
various preachers, how to classify “general observations and anecdotes,” how others can
best observe and interact with Indians, or how Indians and whites compare. So, whether
or not Heckewelder recognizes the theoretical problems with the genre, he certainly
understood the difficulty of some practical organizational issues.
Regardless of generic difficulties, Heckewelder was a respected authority on the “history, manners and customs” of Pennsylvania area Indians. He was a cited source for Cooper and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and the ethnographic genre he employed influenced the style of many subsequent writings in both fiction and non-fiction.

**Narrative Cycle**

Determining the extent to which particular genres affect newly created genres is complex. One must consider both the internal narrative features, as well as the external socio-historical features of texts. Genre theorists often emphasize the importance of history in the popularity and respect particular genres receive at any one time. They cite how epic poetry had at one time the pre- eminent place among genres, for example, or that the novel has become the top of the hierarchy of genres. Todorov defines genre as “the historically attested codification of discursive properties” and argues that a society chooses and codifies the [speech] acts that correspond most closely to its ideology; that is why the existence of certain genres in one society, their absence in another, are revelatory of that ideology and allow us to establish it more or less confidently. It is not a coincidence that the epic is possible in one period, the novel in another, with the individual hero of the novel opposed to the collective hero of the epic: each of these choices depends upon the ideological framework within which it operates. (200)

It follows, then, that genre analysis of particular texts should at least attempt to account for the culture through which a text was produced. It is impossible to account for all the nuances of a culture, of course, but ignoring the ideological and communicative nature of genre makes little sense. Isolating a text is not the answer. Certain genres hold favor at certain times, and that favor has much to do with the socio-cultural atmosphere into which a text is born. Even within a short period of time, a narrative cycle can occur which indicates a trend towards codification of a particular genre as most indicative of a broader ideology. During the early nineteenth century in America the frontier romance became one of the most popular ways to write America. A number of things influenced such codification of this form, but one of the most important was its ability to describe a parallel world that could be flexibly interpreted. The complexity of this novelistic genre allowed readers to take from it what they wished; it did not necessarily force confrontation with contemporary politics, most importantly, the “Indian Problem.” An analysis of both mainstream and marginal texts during this period reveals an important narrative cycle conditioned by response to the call for a national literature.

During the colonial era, argues Sayre, the exploration-ethnography was popular. He explains that it “flourished because the claims to authority of the two genres built on one another in spite of the internal contradictions” (122). Just as Sayre argues that we must “understand the dialectical and paradoxical nature of these hybrid texts” (122), I believe we must do similar textual and cultural work to understand why using (or challenging the use of) ethnography occurred when it did. The reason that the colonial combination of the exploration narrative and the ethnography worked so well, Sayre argues, is that “[e]xploration narrative depended on the veracity and autonomy of the eyewitness narrator,” says Sayre. “[E]thnography arose from Europeans’ sense of cultural
universality and depended on long traditions of intellectual authority. The clash between these two epistemologies . . . may seem crippling to the coherence of texts that combined them, but the persistence of the hybrid genre suggests that in practice the two forms worked together dialectically” (80). In the early nineteenth century, the authority to speak about Indians was coveted by a number of white writers for commercial reasons, but also because of the call for a national literature. Indians were perceived to be the only subject unique enough and indigenous enough to almost automatically make a literature American. To gain such authority, nineteenth-century writers often used “scientific” ethnographies or histories.

Colonial explorers derived from ethnography similar value as nineteenth century writers did. Some explorers “divide[d] their texts into a strictly linear, temporal narrative and an atemporal generalized description of the native peoples, flora, and fauna,” Sayre says, in order to subvert the audience’s skepticism of travel narratives’ veracity. The ethnographic portions of the text “relieved this pressure insofar as it depended not on the single observer’s reliability so much as on a cultural construction of identity and difference” (111), and so helped to dissipate the skepticism of the exaggerated reports of previous travelers.

In the early nineteenth century the authentic American-ness of sources was important to prove to Europe that the country was unique and had worthy subjects for literature. The nationalistic motivation of some writing produced interesting generic results. For example, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* is a hybrid genre; Seaver includes the eye-witness material of a captivity narrative, but uses it consciously as a vehicle for telling the history of the Rochester, New York, region, and, by extension, the nation itself. The text does not follow the conventional form of ethnography. Seaver “transcribes” the words of Mary Jemison, so the main narrative is in the first person and so would seem to be an autobiography, yet includes historical material and so could be an oddly constructed biography. The footnotes, prefatory materials, and appendices are clearly in the editorial voice. Like the features of the exploration/ethnography that Sayre describes, Seaver’s text combines dynamic narrative and static ethnography. The result is a narrative far from seamless and one that struggles to define its genre. Beebee argues that “[a]s a form of ideology, genre is . . . never fully identical with itself, nor are texts fully identical with their genres. Furthermore, if genre is a form of ideology, then the struggle against or the deviations from genre are ideological struggles” (Beebee 19). *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* is clearly a text struggling with its generic identity.

Seaver’s text is perhaps the most indicative of the complex cultural project of nation-building, and it is one of the best examples of how the drive for American authenticity produced an amalgam of other genres. Seaver’s text seems a search for the right genre through which to justify America. In Chapter 2, “Disruptive Nationalism and Auto/biographical Narrative,” I consider the narrative uncertainties of Seaver’s text, which at the very least combines two genres dramatically separated according to narrative point of view—autobiography and biography. Juxtaposed with competing narrative aims, voices, and roles is the clearly delineated, progressive and moral sentiment of antebellum nationalism. I argue that the nationalist and the narrative impulse to unity are inevitably undermined in a text that creates from a frontier life an ethnography of America and a sketch for the future of the nation. Because of the obvious tailoring in the text, we get a
clearer version of nation-building through narrative than in many other so-called transparent biographies or autobiographies in the nineteenth century. Life writing is complicated, and this regional and national narrative is a particularly illustrative example of how the editor’s and speaker’s voices participate in nationalist agendas. In the narrative fragmentation of this text are the fissures and shards evident in the borders of regional and national identity, especially in a period demarcated in part by literary nation-building. A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison provides a type of transition from the “pure” ethnographic accounts and “pure” captivity narratives into a more hybrid genre with a clearly delineated ideological stance.

Seaver’s text, despite its enormous popularity, did not create a new institutionalized genre. Todorov argues that codification through commercial and pedagogical institutions is what aligns a new genre with ideology. The novel became the most popular and codified genre through which to embed nationalism. However, early novelists, such as Cooper, Sedgwick, and Lydia Maria Child, felt compelled to justify and authenticate their sources within the apparatus of the text, including the prefatory materials and the footnotes to the texts, because the genre of American frontier romance had not yet been established. Later, that impulse was checked, as with Ann Stephens, who felt little need to justify her materials. The hybridized frontier romance had become codified by the time Stephens’ frontier romances were published.

Cooper, Sedgwick, and Child incorporated a number of sources into their novels to establish authenticity and communicate with an audience hungry for stories of nation. Bakhtin explains in The Dialogic Imagination how novels incorporate other speech genres, which indicates their social value:

The novel orchestrates all its themes, the totality of the world of objects and ideas depicted and expressed in it, by means of the social diversity of speech types and by differing individual voices that flourish under such conditions. Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization—this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (263)

In The Last of the Mohicans, Hope Leslie, and Hobomok, the textual apparatus calls attention to other genres, “social voices” and “interrelationships.” Although heteroglossia is a feature of all novels, not all emphasize those outside sources as these novels do. The question is why the authors felt motivated to write in this way. Each of these authors advocates Gardiner’s belief that “there never was a nation whose history . . . affords better or more abundant matter of romantic interest than ours” (254). In my third chapter, “Child Ghosts of the American Future: Resolving the Nation in Frontier Romance,” I discuss how the features of the frontier romance are ideologically significant for the construction of a sense of national identity. I analyze the external features of the texts and their disruptive potential for a conservative genre such as frontier romance. I focus
specifically upon the ideological importance of the mixed-race child to the conception and construction of nation through narrative. The structure of the novels is a template for considering the relative absence or presence of the mixed-race child and its influence upon national culture of the early nineteenth century.

The apparent stability of genres can make for some fantastic commercial successes. However, “a text’s generic status is rarely what it seems to be, that it is always already unstable” (Beebee 27). As soon as Cooper, Sedgwick, Child, and Stephens articulated and reiterated the frontier romance, its parodic negation was implied, especially because of the closed nature of the hybrid genre they popularized. In Bakhtin’s “Epic and Novel: Toward a Methodology for Study of the Novel,” he explains how parody is often part of a novel; indeed, novel is parody: “The novel parodies other genres (precisely in their role as genres); it exposes the conventionality of their forms and their language; it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating and re-accentuating them” (71). Nevertheless, some novelists demonstrate more awareness of this parodic role than others. Cooper, Sedgwick, Child, and Stephens did not consciously write parody of ethnography. They incorporated it uncritically.

A mere decade or so after the publication of Hobomok writers did indeed choose conscious parody of frontier narratives and ethnographic description. By the late 1830s, the conventions of frontier travel narratives were so well established that innovative writers could now take up that form to experiment. Caroline Kirkland, for example, uses the conventions of sentimental romance Sedgwick and Child (and scores of others) incorporate into their texts to make fun of idealism on the frontier. Edgar Allan Poe similarly parodies the exploration narrative genre and its nationalist impulse to shout “I was first!” Through their parody of form, however, they satirize nationalism and, in particular, Jacksonian democracy. They are not merely playing with a form for a laugh; they are commenting upon the social troubles of the antebellum nineteenth century.

The fourth chapter of this dissertation, “Unconventional Frontiers,” explores how authors exploited the conventions of frontier writing for satirical effect. Caroline Kirkland’s satirical A New Home, Who’ll Follow? and Edgar Allan Poe’s The Journal of Julius Rodman have suffered relative critical neglect because their generic innovations have been viewed as flaws. Yet both narratives indicate some shared satirical perspectives about national sentiment, although neither author completely dismantles the tropes of frontier travel narratives. I analyze the structure of the texts and the layering of the autobiographical narrative voices. Parody, according to Bakhtin in “From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse,” is multi-voiced; at least one voice is ironic, sarcastic or otherwise humorous and the other(s) “straight.” Both are clearly part of one utterance, he says, and inflected with the speaker’s purpose and specific context (145). According to this definition, both Poe and Kirkland at least parody frontier narratives. I argue that both Poe and Kirkland go beyond parody of frontier narratives of exploration and settlement to satirize a sentimentalized view of frontier America, as well as the belief that the nation was a unified entity. Importantly, they go beyond specifying fictions of history and of uniqueness for America to create literary frontiers where artists can imagine a number of American nations.

Instead of a recovery and reformation of the eastern past, transcendental thought began changing the concept of frontier, projecting it into an abstract, utopian western and
national future. In my fifth chapter, “New Frontiers,” I examine how the west, emptied of its frontiersmen and its native inhabitants, becomes a contemplative space re-inscribed with the abstractions of nature and democracy, more troubling to the “nation,” perhaps, because of transcendentalists’ re-connection to European modes of thought as a way of achieving that abstraction. The narrative cycle of the frontier through frontier romance, auto/biography, and satire of frontier travel writing translates into the more cerebral considerations of “our” place and “our” future as “the people” of the nation, even while the prospect of secession was furthering the regional divide in the country. A new manifestation of frontier literature, transcendentalism attempted to justify the country, to offer philosophy as ethnography.

Jackson’s administration further centralized the federal government, but it did so at the expense of the lives and cultures of Indians and other marginalized nations within and among the territory claimed by the United States. Much frontier literature did the same thing, using Indians as the evidence that the United States had a unique culture apart from Great Britain. David Simpson says in “Destiny Made Manifest: The Styles of Whitman’s Poetry” that the early frontier writers, as opposed to the later Whitman, “tended to recognize the existence of a divided society, whose tensions could only be resolved in one of two ways: either by the naked assertion of the power of the stronger, or by a contractual compromise generated out of a rational admission of differences” (183). Frontier literature was central to the construction of national culture and its vast influence vital to American literature as a whole. Thus, frontier literature does not merely speak to the center; it is an important part of national mythology, a literary center and a cultural legacy.

Methods of analysis that freeze a text in time or focus narrowly on its textual characteristics without consideration for the world in which it exists are insufficient for fully understanding the culture that produced the text and the text itself. Considering the genres in and of a novel, for instance, or, I argue, any extended narrative, is crucial. Within genre are the social and cultural characteristics embedded within the textual. How authors use genre in narrative is in some ways a socio-cultural barometer.

**Conclusion**

Language and language forms are social acts, part of the play of humanity and part of how different constituencies gain and use power. Breaking narrative conventions attempts to move beyond the strictures of genre in some respects, but reiterates those conventions and the correlative ideologies associated with them. If, for example, we look at sentimental romance, we may see a closed genre highly circumscribed. Yet, within any novel, we might see the conventions of romance surrounded by other generic conventions that encourage readers to look beyond the conventions and conservative ideology associated with those conventions. Within a text are great numbers of conventions associated with genre; the extent to which a narrative accepts those conventions as definitional or as parody shows how a text is radical or conservative (or somewhere in between). Jemison’s narrative is a disruptive attempt to write the nation through the conventions of various “American” genres, including autobiographical narrative, captivity narrative, history, and ethnography. The frontier romances accept both the conventions of Scott’s “romance,” but also the impulse to ethnography because they must argue the nation’s uniqueness. Kirkland and Poe parody genre conventions and the
conventions of frontier writing specifically, but they do it as satire of the most pressing Jacksonian philosophies. There seems to be a pattern of narrative cycle that is based upon ethnography that eventually becomes more embedded within the text rather than the textual apparatus.

To a certain extent, the organization of these chapters by genre types is misleading. I do not mean to argue that these writers never cross genre boundaries. Indeed, they often use multiple genres. The methods with which they employ genre conventions—whether they adhere to, break, cross, or mix them—demonstrate important cultural dialogues. The texts, which are artifacts of a dynamic time period in American literary history, converse with the contemporary currents of nation-building at the same time as they dialogue with the previous forms of writing. In response to specific calls for a unique national literature, many writers built from ethnography to create an “American” literature. Obviously, not all narratives took as their sources or forms ethnographic texts or descriptions, but for those writers who heeded a nationalist call, the use of ethnography seemed natural, even when the purpose was to resist a Jacksonian nationalism.

My specific concern in the following chapters is how the texts in question affect and reflect the culture that produced them. I have focused my analysis upon narrative features that most clearly demonstrate that interaction. Thus, my analytical method emphasizes narrative voice and textual structure, along with genre concerns, in order to illustrate the important social, historical, and political links between narrative and culture.
Commissioned by “[m]any gentlemen of respectability” to interview and write Mary Jemison’s account of her life, James Seaver collected “the materials” (xxvi) and wrote her narrative of Indian captivity in 1824. An immigrant captured by Delaware on the Pennsylvania frontier, Jemison was a captive daughter adopted by Seneca, a wife of two warriors, one who warred with whites and with Cherokee, a mother of mixed blood children, and a sister afforded land through her adoptive brother’s wishes. The purpose of the text, according to Seaver, was to “perpetuate the remembrance of the atrocities of the savages in former times” and “to preserve some historical facts . . . intimately connected with her life” (xxv). In the Preface, he describes the text as a biography, although it is written in the first person. The text’s generic status is by no means clear, despite his categorization of it. The text incorporates ethnographic description and apparatus, as well as autobiographical and historical narration, for example. Nevertheless, the hybridization of the text did not reduce its marketability and popularity. Indeed, it is one of the most popular captivity narratives ever produced.

The struggle to define its genre is indicative of a broader ideological conflict. Mary Jemison identified with the culture of the Seneca; despite having been born white, she had been raised as part of a Seneca culture. Thus, Seaver’s production of a text with the explicit purpose of recalling “atrocities of the savages” seems at odds with the life of a woman who voluntarily remained with her Indian family even when opportunities arose to leave. Moreover, Jemison’s concerns were less nationalist than domestic. She remained most concerned about her children; Seaver imposed upon her narrative a regional and national agenda. Such conflicts are embedded within the voices in the narrative—Seaver’s editorial voice and Jemison’s narrative one. By no means, however, are the two voices separated even within the narrative of the text. Seaver, after all, has ultimate editorial control, especially because Jemison was illiterate.

By the time James Seaver had written *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* in 1824, the frontier had shifted westward away from Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania had become a state in 1787, and at least two generations had been raised since the end of the Seven Years' War. Fort Pitt had officially spawned Pittsburgh in 1758, and by 1820 the frontier was as far west as the Mississippi river, as far south as the Spanish-held Florida, and as far north as the Indiana and Ohio northern borders. America had expanded rapidly, and the area of the Six Nations, including what is now western New York, northwestern Pennsylvania and northern Ohio, was no longer the frontier. Indian wars had ceased in that area. Scholars Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier in *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* note that as Indian wars ended in certain areas, whites began to redefine those peoples and their relationships with them. They say that “along with the end of warfare came a change in the way Easterners viewed the American Indian. Attempting to discover and define a national identity, white Americans turned to their past, hoping there to find a heritage worthy of what they considered their country's future promise” (167). Indeed, definitions of America, in imaginative literature and official state documents, often used Indians and their cultures to further nationalist purposes.
One example of this phenomenon is the transformation of place names. As the frontier moved and became more “American,” the names of the places previously named by indigenous peoples and/or once held by the French and British changed. This was one way to rewrite and redefine the Indian and his/her places. This signaled that the place, which had been unstable in American history, was, by the early nineteenth century, now stable and able to be civilized and incorporated. The British and then the Americans had prevailed, claiming the places as their own, and in staking the claims, staked claim to an American identity. These places provided examples that the area west of the Mississippi, fraught with danger from Indians, would eventually fall into line. Complicated though Indian wars might be, the belief was that they would eventually end positively for the Americans. Such belief is written within the narrative uncertainties in Seaver’s text. He uses Jemison’s frontier life to create a geographic genealogy, mapping that genealogy into a regional nationalism. In the following chapter, I argue that, although told in the first-person, A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison is nevertheless a hybrid text in which Seaver’s and Jemison’s agendas, roles, and voices conflict. As a captivity narrative, it is unique because of its overtly nationalist purposes, as well as its unwitting disclosure of problems inherent in combining the auto/biographical and historical genres.

Agendas and Expectations

Readers expect that a narrative life history and a regional/national history will generally be chronological, and that is largely the case with Seaver’s text. Except for the mothers’ speeches, Seaver’s description of Jemison’s dress, and her few domestic “digressions” about the corn planting and harvest or about carrying her child as she traveled through rough terrain, the first half of the text is mostly concerned with historical events. Although certain sections of the second half of the narrative are completely outside Jemison’s experience, the majority of the narrative emphasizes domestic and local relationships. Often those relationships intersect issues of the public realm, including tribal/national, regional and national politics. Both sections, however, remain mostly chronological.

Besides the expectation of progressive time, readers may expect, especially in a first-person narrative, the exposed life to be told in the words of the subject herself. This, however, is one of the ways in which Seaver’s narrative defies reader expectations. The narrative purports to be a story little interpreted from the primary materials of Seaver’s interview with the elderly woman who talked with him about her life. Mary Jemison was mostly illiterate, unable to read the story that Seaver created from her life. Commentators on this narrative have concerned themselves with the extent to which her purposes may have crept into the narrative. As interesting as this issue is, it is less important than the problematic relationship between Jemison’s aims and Seaver’s socio-political goals. Although scholars clearly discern a narrative struggle between Seaver and Jemison, the

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8 See Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities (rev. ed., New York: Verso, 1991). He argues that the event that demarcates the need to sustain parallel development of both Old and New World white cultures from the desire to create a separate and unique nation is the Declaration of Independence (192). For Seaver in 1824, place established the uniqueness of America as well as its rights and its methods for subjugating native cultures and making them safe for settling.

9 Throughout this discussion, I use the name Jemison to denote the narrator of a text not consistently or necessarily reflecting the real Mary Jemison's thoughts and feelings.
struggle often has been mis-characterized as male vs. female or white vs. Indian ways of
telling stories.  

The friction that appears between Seaver's and Jemison's aims seems more likely
to grow out of Seaver's attempts to write a regional/national narrative of political
importance through a narrator whose main role—as Seaver has created it—is domestic.
Jemison is not a warrior bound for battles with the Cherokee, as her elderly husband is.
She is not an adventurer or explorer. Her contact with the “major” historical events is
often tangential, and she is concerned about them mainly as they affect her ability to raise
her children or tend her crops. Seaver's purpose is political, and he attempts to achieve his
political goal by portraying Jemison's stable identity as a narrator and a character. Yet her
frame of reference is clearly domestic (she most often emphasizes her family and her
home), and her identity is anything but stable, even after she “settles” on the New York
frontier. The slips and overlaps between the regional/national political goals and the
domestic frame create a disrupted and disruptive text. Thus, Seaver at some points
appears to “lose control” of the narrative in places so that Jemison’s voice filters
through. How much is a loss of control of his subject matter and how much is a
manipulation of readers’ expectations is not completely provable, although one could say
that Seaver calls attention to the form of the novel to show how, specifically with life
writing, lives cannot be controlled. Whether he was conscious of revealing the problems
with combining genres, narrative voices, and historical and domestic purposes is beside
the point. The text exists as it is, and it reveals his narrative manipulations.

As a constructed narrative based upon a life, auto/biography is particularly
difficult to define. It is also difficult to manipulate, especially if one constructs a first-
person narrator based upon an interpretation of interviews and auxiliary documents not in
the accessible to the narrator. Narrative analyst Meir Sternberg has argued using Virginia
Woolf’s comments that “the impressions we receive in life come in an essentially
unplanned, accidental, and sporadic manner” (96). He explains that we see different
persons at their best and worst and make conclusions about them based on those snippets
of information. “The question, moreover, whether our valuations of them will undergo a
change or not is also decided by chance. In the literary work, on the other hand, the
sequential manipulation of the readers’ attitudes and sympathies, norms and hypotheses,
is meaningful because it is, above all, highly controlled” (96). Such is the case in A
Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison. Sternberg distinguishes a literary work from
impressions of life, emphasizing that writers are able to manipulate the formula of a
text’s construction at will. I agree, but it may be possible that an editor cannot control
everything within his purview simply because he does not know how or is not cognizant
of how a narrator or language can escape the boundaries of his or her persuasive
purposes. Seaver’s main occupation was not as a writer; he was a man educated as a
physician, and he was later commissioned by the City of Rochester to write its history.

Thus, this auto/biographical narrative is ripe with political purpose. One of
Seaver’s goals is to use Jemison's life to tell the story of Rochester and its relationship to
American history. During the early nineteenth century, New Englanders were losing

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10 See Karen Oakes, “We Planted, Tended and Harvested Our Corn: Gender, Ethnicity and Transculturation
11 See Oakes 50.
political clout as states were added to the Union. Thus, they had to create a regional mythology that connected definitively with the nation and the State in order to garner and solidify their political base. Seaver’s purpose was similar. Sometimes the story digresses from such a mission, which is understandable considering Jemison's own sphere of influence and life experiences. Nevertheless, she is a woman who has had contact with major figures in Seneca history. Because of the frontier conflicts between Seneca and Americans, Seneca history and culture intersect those of the nation of America.

That intersection occurs in various ways, but it is in part Jemison's physical position at various places on the Pennsylvania and New York frontiers that makes her so central a figure to the history of those places. Eventually she remains in the Gardow area of the Genesee river region, but her ironic mobility as a captive endows her with narrative power. Similar to a number of literary narrators, Jemison is positioned at a border, a frontier that is a prime observation post for the lives that surround her. Her literary role in the narrative is one of a conduit between cultures, and her “place” geographically allows her a position of observing a variety of contacts between the Seneca and the Americans, which supports Seaver's main narrative objective. He wants to tell the history of the place, the land itself. Of course, there is no stable history or even stable place, and The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison illustrates this through both the content (such as a description of the mysterious origins of the original inhabitants of Gardow) and the elements of the text itself.

Seaver does not attempt to hide his political purpose. The controversy about this text continues to be whether or not Jemison participated in Seaver's nationalist argument knowingly, or if, to fulfill his mandate, Seaver through his textual maneuvering nearly snuffed out Jemison's narrative voice. Regardless of the answer one gives, however, textual evidence supports a movement towards geographic genealogy. It seems likely that Seaver found Jemison's more recent memories (about the conveyance of her land and her settling onto that land) a convenient vehicle through which to focus upon issues of geographical history and to organize the narrative.

In chapter six, Seaver's description of the treaty with the Americans immediately preceding the Revolutionary War shows his biases—and the Americans' admirable goals to be peaceable with the Indians—to establish a place of neutrality with the Six Nations. Seaver places blame upon the avarice of the Indians and the pandering of the British for the treaty being broken, thereby portraying the Americans' position as moral high ground. Using Jemison's narrative voice as the vehicle of this biased description aligns her as a patriotic American as well, and makes her apparent racial and national transgressions more palatable to the early nineteenth-century reading audience. It also establishes her

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13 Some scholars have attempted to recover Jemison's voice by identifying her as Native American and then reading the narrative for traditional elements of Native American autobiography. See Susan Walsh, “With Them Was My Home: Native American Autobiography and A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison,” American Literature 64 (1992): 49-70. Also see Oakes.
14 Scholars have observed the importance of this text in making the politics of Indian removal during the Jacksonian era palatable to the American public. See Susan Scheckel, “Mary Jemison and the Domestication of the American Frontier” Desert, Garden, Margin, Range: Literature on the American Frontier. Ed. Eric Heyne. New York: Twayne, 1992. 93-109. She observes that Jemison's narrative was
place in a distinctly American history, creating for her a more American identity and creating a patriotic genealogy for the land she inhabits. However, such a characterization shifts in subsequent chapters.

The sheer number of geographical place names is also evidence of Seaver's purpose, and the devotion to pinpointing those places in a verbal map indicates his narrative aims as well. When Jemison, her three brothers and her son travel towards Genishau from Yiskahwana, Jemison provides an itinerary. In the span of two pages, she lists those places they visit while traveling, including a town on the Upper Sandusky, French Creek, Conowongo Creek, Che-ua-shung-gautau, U-na-waum-gwa, Caneadea, Free Ferry, Fall-Brook, and Geneseo (36-37). Sometimes those place names are translated into early nineteenth-century equivalent English place names; sometimes they stand alone. Translating place names is significant because it seems to emphasize the legitimacy of Americans, as specifically opposed to the French or the British, to control these various places. Seaver’s aim is to legitimize the region’s primacy in national history, and place names that connect with the nineteenth-century audience provide authenticity. James Fenimore Cooper and Catharine Maria Sedgwick do similar work with landscape descriptions in The Last of the Mohicans and Hope Leslie that pull the wilderness through time into a tamer, industrial antebellum landscape.

Ultimately, the most personal stories for Jemison are the most political in the text, but perhaps not the most nationalistic. Her family inhabits a border between nations and cultures, and her children cannot help but be in conflict because of that contact. Although Jemison acquires her own land and thus her own power, her progeny suffer the consequences of living in that in-between. The murderers of her son John are themselves displaced because of their behavior rather than their race (117). The emphasis on geography and on home or place endows this sequence of displacement with importance. Like Jemison, the killers no longer have a home. Although the stories about the killings and their aftermath are not overtly historical, they provide a cultural window through which to peer at the history Seaver continues to insert. Seaver’s control of the narrative is suspect because of the disjunction between its apparent aims and the information that both he and Jemison bring to the text. As a reporter, Seaver intervenes too often to insert indirectly obtained historical information. As an editor, he offers little context for Jemison’s specific remarks about her family. Thus, Jemison’s voice, despite its softness, provides comment upon Seaver's narrow purposes.

Jemison’s narrative aim becomes clearer as her voice becomes stronger and as she relates more personal family stories. The old Indians’ words to John’s killers indicate that quite unconventional for a captivity narrative because Jemison remains “in the state of being between two well-defined social positions” (95) even within the typical resolution phase of the narrative. Such positioning, Scheckel says, “offered Jacksonian Americans a way to imagine a positive vision of Indian removal” (109).

15 See Harry Brown, “‘The Horrid Alternative’: Miscegenation and Madness in the Frontier Romance,” Journal of American & Comparative Cultures 24:3-4 (2001): 137-51. He argues that “a tradition of ‘hybrid texts’ . . . present alternative visions of racial mixing to those provided by the critically sanctioned historical romances. . . . Jemison’s overlooked success tells us that while reviewers strongly objected to considering miscegenation as part of the formula for a national literature, common readers were apparently less troubled by the prospect of a heterogeneous nation and less insistent on the separation of races as a necessary component of racial identity” (137). We might also consider a voyeuristic thirst as one cause of Jemison’s success rather than a blanket acceptance of a racially mixed America.
good Indians (humans) will not kill outside of war time; because they killed outside of war, they may pay the price and have no affiliation with family or with nation. Moreover, he says:

“Yes, you are very bad Indians; and what can you do? . . . . Deserving of death, you cannot live here. . . . Friends, hear me, and take my advice. Return with us to your homes. Offer to the Great Spirit your best wampum, and try to be good Indians! And, if those whom you have bereaved shall claim your lives as their only satisfaction, surrender them cheerfully, and die like good Indians.” (117)

Even this Indian moral is destabilized; Jack kills himself, which means a denial of a good afterlife, and the Doctor lives “quietly at Squawky Hill till sometime in the year 1819 when he died of Consumption” (119). Neither is punished directly for their crimes. The only constant is risk. Therefore, it appears that both Seaver's and Jemison's narrative purposes create a complex tapestry that clearly shows its stitches. As a result, the text, despite various narrative aims, encourages readers to reflect upon the impossibility of a singular, unified, stable purpose.

Jemison's tie to the land is what makes her so important to Seaver's purpose. The narrative demonstrates the temporary nature of home as it describes the various plots to claim and reclaim land from the wilderness. Although land ownership shifts according to the historical moment and to individual manipulations, the land itself rarely changes. That is what a family tree shows, and this is what the text is—a geographic genealogy.

**Proper Roles**

Jemison's narrative role is to be a useful subject for Seaver to reveal the genealogy of region and nation. She is useful because she cannot intrude upon Seaver's narrative authority as historian/biographer. The majority of the text is concerned with the genealogy of land, its possession and its relative permanence. The narrative of Jemison's life begins by calling attention to genealogy, to the “history of [her] ancestry” (1). It does not begin with a birth date, but with a time before her life began. It begins with a generation preceding her, which is important considering the nineteenth-century American need to grasp a British history only enough to demarcate distance from it. Jemison's life begins in transit and on a journey away from a place that is not yet America, a place not yet clearly defined. From that point on, Jemison's identity seems to be circumscribed by the transitory and the timeless as well, despite the historical specifics Seaver provides about the American Revolution.

Obviously, her capture and subsequent journey keep her on the move. However, Jemison's position remains uncertain and transitory even after her adoption by two Seneca sisters who had lost their brother in the previous year. After her adoption, which follows the model of Indian adoption as substitution for a family member, Jemison states that she was “now settled and provided with a home” (23), and she soon describes the physical position of the town, Wiishto, in which they all lived on the Ohio river. However, as soon as the corn is harvested—an important marker of time for Jemison—they all move to their “winter quarters” at the mouth of the Sciota River. This is repeated

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for three years. Between the two paragraphs that describe her two new homes is a single sentence that offers more history: “About the time of the corn harvest, Fort Pitt was taken from the French by the English” (25). Apparently, Jemison's own attempts at establishing history are untrustworthy, and Seaver emphasizes that such is the case by expanding in a lengthy footnote upon the narrator's statement. The footnote appears to isolate Jemison's words and memories as authentic, while Seaver appears to be an objective reporter, adding information with an academic apparatus. Thus, even while undermining her credibility as a historian, he increases his own authority. The rhetorical effects of this footnote, combined with his comments about her “treacherous memory” (25; footnote) reverberate throughout the narrative, establishing the proper role for each narrative voice. Seaver is the historian and biographer. Jemison is the subject through which Seaver tells the history. Even so, as subject, she has mobility within the story, despite Seaver's editorial control. She controls the information that she gives Seaver in his interview with her; she cannot give information about her husband Hiakato’o’s exploits in war and so does not. She tells a story of family and her affiliation with a scandalous man, Ebenezer Allen. Yet, when it comes to “serious” American history, she is mostly silent.

If anything, Jemison's frequent movements make it difficult for readers to visualize her different geographic positions without a map in front of us. One of Seaver's roles, then, is often to add information that translates the place names into map-like descriptions, much as one of Jemison's narrative roles is to translate place names through time. To do so, Seaver establishes much of his rhetorical authority within the narrative through footnotes in the third chapter. One example is when Seaver feels he must describe Wiishto in more detail than Jemison had done. He writes: “Wiishto I suppose was situated near the mouth of Indian Guyundat, 327 miles below Pittsburgh, and 73 above Big Sciota; or at the mouth of Swan creek, 307 miles below Pittsburgh” (27). The distinction between how Jemison and Seaver identify Wiishto is interesting. She says, without hesitation, “Early in the spring we sailed up the Ohio river, to a place that the Indians called Wiishto, where one river emptied into the Ohio on one side, and another on the other” (27). Her voice demonstrates confidence that she has explained the town adequately, referring to the Indian place names and to its situation on a river rather than specifying numerical distances. Seaver is hesitant. This tonal difference underscores cultural differences between the narrative voices of Jemison and Seaver. Still, the use of the footnote itself gives editorial authority and apparent objectivity and reliability to Seaver. This is despite the rhetorical hedging he does by including “I suppose” or by giving two options for the location of the town.

Jemison is rarely settled except perhaps by the routine of the planting, tending, and harvesting of corn. It is time that settles her for a while, not the place in which she resides. Despite a propensity not to fight for freedom, she is twice in danger of being ransomed or being stolen and returned to “civilization.” When the Indians go to make peace with the new British residents at Fort Pitt, her white countrymen see despite her red-painted face that she is white, and they want to take her back. When her sisters and brother realize the danger, they rush her back up the river. Jemison says that “my sisters became alarmed, believing that I should be taken from them, hurried me into their canoe and recross the river” (26). This river, and many of the rivers she mentions, are geographic markers and establish place, but they also indicate her own state of mind, marking the quality of her identity. Although generally a stable geographic feature, a
river is fluid, in constant motion while appearing steady. Jemison's role in the narrative is similar. The planting and harvest, the sheer time Jemison devotes to work, remain constant over the course of the narrative. Only her physical position shifts. Yet, the eventual settling in a single place is the change that endows her with real power among the Indians and the whites. Like a river that carves its own position into a mountain or a valley on its way to an ocean or lake, Jemison’s settling will eventually be the key to establishing a nation through regional residence and identification.

However, Jemison’s “settling”—her attachment to a single place, a single group, and a single identifying role in the narrative—often fluctuates. After she is urged away from Fort Pitt, she feels she goes through a “second captivity,” but “[t]ime, the destroyer of every affection, wore away my unpleasant feelings, and I became as contented as before” (27). She continues to work through the summer, continuing with the tending and harvesting routine. Later, in the fifth chapter, her brother refuses to let an older chief in the tribe ransom her, stating that he’d rather kill her himself than let her go. (As was custom with kidnapped children, she was a replacement for a family member.) She runs with her child to temporary shelter. Clearly, despite occasional respite, Jemison’s “settled” life is in danger. Her life remains in danger from both Indian and white men until she establishes her own place at Gardow.

Marriage, although equated stereotypically with “settling down,” does not affix Jemison's physical location nor can it settle her identity. Marrying Sheninjee, a young Delaware, does not settle her, although it contents her for a while. And despite having been adopted and having accepted her captivity, she does not feel part of her adoptive Seneca family until after she leaves Wiishto. Until that time, she had referred to her Indian family in the third person as “her sisters” or removed herself from them by specifying herself in the first person compared with “them.” She says, “At the time we left Wiishto, it was impossible for me to suppress a sigh of regret on parting with those who had truly been my friends—with those whom I had every reason to respect. On account of a part of our family living at Genishau, we thought it doubtful whether we should return directly from Pittsburgh, or go from thence on a visit to see them” (33). By this time, Jemison clearly accepts the Indians as her family, referring to them in the first person plural.

Embedded within these pages, however, is a description of the path itself: “From Sandusky the path that we travelled was crooked and obscure” (37). To Jemison's perspective her travel seemed without clear boundaries, and she had to place her faith in the knowledge of her brother “who had travelled it a number of times, when going to and returning from the Cherokee wars” (37). The path seems to take on some symbolic significance when juxtaposed against the mapping of place names. The path itself chronicles her life and her own goals at that point. She had to place her faith in others to lead her, for she had little knowledge herself. She had not yet realized a single destination, as she had been almost constantly in transit since the beginning her life; apparently, being born in transit between England and its colonies in America was portentous. Jemison's life even after her adoption, her first marriage, and the birth of her son Thomas did not settle her physically or provide her with a sense of contentment. The implication is that she had no clear sense of purpose in her own life either. She followed others along a crooked, obscure path. Not until she gets her own piece of land to work do her decisions seem more self-actualized and not dictated by the family and group with
which she traveled. So, although it may seem that her mobility was simply a typical Indian life not bound by place in the way white property laws might bind one to a titled property, it was not.

Her adoption, her marriage to Sheninjee, and the birth of her son Thomas do not tie Jemison down. Yet her crooked path eventually straightens when she finally settles upon the Gardow flats. But even as she settles physically within the story, the struggle for narrative control becomes more pronounced. After all, once Jemison has a home, she must take care of it and her family, a project that appears less historical and political than Seaver's purpose would allow. For example, Seaver does not include a description of the domesticity of Jemison's settling, although it spanned “twelve or fifteen years” of Jemison's life, a significant omission. This is not surprising considering Seaver's historical purpose and his narrative aim to portray Jemison as a patriotic woman. Seaver provides a bit of space for explaining what Indians did in times of peace, but the pronouns he uses indicate the narrative voice has shifted from Jemison to him. Indians are discussed in the third person: “They also practised in various athletic games” or “[T]heir women attended to agriculture” (48). When the narrative voice discusses the “moral character” of “the Indians,” it mentions that “[t]heir fidelity was perfect, and became proverbial; they were strictly honest….They were temperate in their desires, moderate in their passions, and candid and honorable in the expression of their sentiments on every subject of importance” (48-9). Tonally, these few passages resemble the ethnographic appendices Seaver includes at the end of the narrative, especially when juxtaposed to the paragraph following, in which Jemison's voice seems to re-enter the narrative: “. . . our Indians lived quietly and peaceably at home” (49).

Seaver's text employs sentimental rhetoric to establish roles for both Jemison and women generally. One example is when she and her sister contemplate attending a frolic and an execution. Jemison's Indian mother, “who in the most feeling terms remonstrated against a step at once so rash and unbecoming the true dignity of our sex,” uses strong sentimental language when referring to “unspeakable torments” and “poor unfortunate prisoners” (41). Like her white mother (and sentimental novels of the time), Jemison's Indian mother liberally uses the interjection “O!” The effect of the speech, besides keeping the girls from the frolic, is to clearly establish appropriate roles for them as domestic: “Our task is quite easy at home, and our business needs our attention. With war we have nothing to do” (42).

Jemison takes up the mother role as well, which becomes racially inflected. When Jemison again has an opportunity to leave the Indians and join white “civilization,” she refuses it. Her brother, Kau-jises-tau-ge-au, asks her if she'd like to leave, and her son Thomas wants her to do so, yet she says she cannot leave Thomas. Her greater reason, however, is that she had got a large family of Indian children, that I must take with me; and that if I should be so fortunate as to find my relatives, they would despise them, if not myself; and treat us as enemies; or, at least with a degree of cold indifference, which I

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17 See Elizabeth Barnes, States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel (New York: Columbia UP, 1997). She explains that “[i]n American literature sympathetic identification relies particularly on familial models” (x) and she argues that readers should approach “early American fiction and politics . . . recogniz[ing] sympathy as crucial to the construction of American identity” (2).

18 For brief discussions of the role of motherhood in this narrative and its importance in the nineteenth century, see Annette Kolodny, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984) and Scheckel.
thought I could not endure” (77-78). She mentions her white relatives, but does not call them family. Relation means blood ties, but family is at least social, and may also be sanguine. To protect her family and her children, Jemison stays with the culture within which she was adopted. Thus, her choice is the most feminine of all choices, and it makes her miscegenation more palatable to the reading public because she is above all a mother figure, highly moral. Characterizing Jemison in this way allows Seaver to diminish Jemison's transgressive appearance. She was British, but she was captured. Even after attaining her majority and despite a number of chances to return to “civilization,” she stays with Indians who betrayed the British and then the Americans. How could she be redeemed to seem a patriot and an American before America even existed? Indeed, even after the United States existed, she saw the country as something to which others belonged, not herself. The answer lay in Jemison's ability to “go along” and “be contented.” Her mother's words after capture set the stage for Jemison's subsequent choices, especially when she advises her: “If you shall have an opportunity to get away from the Indians, don't try to escape; for if you do they will find and destroy you” (11). Within a couple years of Sheninjee's death, Jemison marries a much older Indian warrior, Hiokatoo, “commonly called Gardow” (46), and appears to settle into her role as mother and wife.

Neither Jemison's land nor her identity has been clearly fixed, although Seaver has at least provided the bases for characterizing her as a patriot. The turning point occurs after Sullivan's march, when he destroys the Genesee Flats. The result leaves the Indians without a way to provide for themselves, destroying the fertility of the soil and the game in the area; and it symbolically reincarnates (for Seaver’s purposes) the region for American occupation. Jemison finds she must move closer to whites, thereby physically inhabiting a cultural border area between whites and Indians, in order to provide for her family, which she does. The narrative shifts significantly at this point because Jemison has now come to the land that she will eventually own. The focus of the narrative rests more upon domestic and familial concerns that Seaver must then manipulate to parallel historic concerns. After Jemison establishes her residence in the narrative, Seaver can begin to tell the history for which he was commissioned, the frontier history of the Rochester region.

Characterizing Jemison as a virtuous woman was very important so that she could be a moral purveyor of the regional information and become a symbol for America itself. Despite her mobility and her miscegenation, Jemison retains her feminine characteristics. Seaver takes great pains to characterize Jemison as a virtuous female, despite her uncivilized dress that seems both Indian and white [“yankee” (xxviii)]. Repeatedly, she extols the virtues of temperance, an appropriate political issue for women in the nineteenth century in part because it was religiously affiliated. Thus, despite having little religious education or formal affiliation with Christianity—indeed she has forgotten the prayers of her childhood—she is associated with religion and morality.

19 In New York at Letchworth State Park, where Jemison is memorialized, stands a statue of Jemison commissioned by William Prior Letchworth, a New York philanthropist of the late nineteenth century. Namias reads the statue as a representation of “white and Euro-American values…: individuality, perseverance, the need to go it alone—values of late Victorian capitalist American, which would persist even when confronted by a 'savage' life” (163).
If women are associated with the domestic, Jemison's story is about that attempt for a stable home while Seaver's goal is to delineate a stable history of the region. The two are parallel endeavors, yet the stories of their different struggles are reciprocally destabilizing. The incidents with Ebenezer Allen demonstrate how the personal/the domestic intersect with the public/the historic. Jemison first describes Allen in a regional/national context: “Sometime near the close of the revolutionary war, a white man by the name of Ebenezer Allen, left his people in the state of Pennsylvania on the account of some disaffection towards his countrymen, and came to the Genesee river, to reside with the Indians” (64). At this point, Allen is implicitly important to the history of the region because of his interaction with Indians and his development of the region, yet within the chapter his personal exploits take prominence over his arrogant “meddling with [the Indians'] national affairs” (66), although such meddling precipitates much of Allen's running and hiding. Jemison's tone in this section seems odd; there is no initial, overt judgment of Allen's polygamy, for example. Only later do we learn that she identifies with the values of her tribe by accepting the morality of polygamy. Within this chapter, Allen is usually running from one person or another, hiding in “secret places” (70) and getting surreptitious assistance from Jemison herself. Because of their similar frontier positions between cultures and nations, Jemison may feel some loyalty to him. Even so, during the chapter about Allen, role struggle is most prominent. Seaver must resort to tacking his interpretations onto the end of the chapter. Without Jemison offering judgment against Allen's exploitative behaviors, Seaver must “save” his heroine's patriotism. He does this by focusing at the end of the chapter on Allen's brutality and juxtaposing it with his national affiliation as a Tory. Jemison states that “Allen was a tory, and by that means became acquainted with our Indians, when they were in the neighborhood of his native place, desolating the settlements on the Susquehannah. In those predatory battles, he joined them, and . . . f or cruelty was not exceeded by any of his Indian comrades!” (76). Jemison then describes the well-known Indian captivity motif of the “infant's head dashed upon a hard surface” (76). Notwithstanding her revelation of his confessed “sorrow” and repentance, Allen still appears a most horrible man. The implication is that Allen was a much worse “savage” than any of the Indians, cruel, avaricious, and morally corrupt, worse perhaps because he was a white man preying upon other whites. Seaver's moral: sympathizers with the British were the worst sort of betrayers. Still, however, Seaver's moral is partially undermined by Jemison's tone towards Allen and the sheer amount of space devoted to telling Allen's story.

As a founder of the Rochester mills, Allen is important to Seaver’s assignment—to write the history of the region—yet Allen cuts a scandalous figure. He interferes in national matters, he uses women as property, he acquires land fraudulently, and apparently, he murders people. Jemison's character seems tainted by her affiliation with him. She helps him hide and she holds his valuables. She does not overtly judge his actions as horrible, and she seems very forgiving of his misdeeds on the whole. Especially odd is her lack of judgment about the land fraud, merely mentioning that “[t]he Chiefs gave [Allen's Indian children] the land, but [Allen] so artfully contrived the conveyance, that he could apply it to his own use, and by alienating his right, destroy the claim of his children” (74). Considering that she believes the area of her own land reduced fraudulently by her white cousin, her ambivalent tone seems odd. Karen Oakes
argues that this tone is evidence for Jemison's racial affiliation (45). It also indicates a place where Seaver has perhaps lost control of Jemison’s narrative voice. At the very least, it seems this chapter indicates her role as cultural intercessor, albeit through her conventional female role in domesticity, established by Seaver previously in the narrative. Jemison's long journey with her husband and brothers provides an opportunity to identify more clearly Jemison's narrative role. When the Shawnee torture a “young white man,” she pleads with them to stop. “At length they attended to my intercessions, and set him at liberty” (34). She frees this man with her words, which is her province in this text. Her role as narrator and her ability to “intercede” between cultures makes her appear to have influence, but it is her eventual ownership of land that establishes her posterity.

In the first half of the text, Jemison recounts her birth on the way to America, and the narrative usually moves chronologically towards her present circumstances as a widow living on the Genesee River. Moreover, many of the chapters begin with temporal language. Chapter four begins with a seasonal appellation, “spring,” as well as an establishment of time according to the age of her infant Thomas. Subsequent chapters often begin with temporal clauses or phrases, such as “When we arrived at Genishau” (39) or “After the conclusion of the French war” (47) or “Soon after the close of the revolutionary war” (77). Often time is marked with the seasons or by a traumatic event, such as the murder of a child or of the beginning or end of a war. These distinct modes of time suggest competition of narrative voices in the text. The standard of a chronological and suggestive causal history is Seaver's main method of narrative organization. Jemison's, on the other hand, seems more likely based upon time passing according to events affecting her domestic life. Obviously, the temporal dimension of the text must exist in order for this “historical document” to demonstrate a linear, progressive history and to trace a significant branch of the family tree of America. Often those temporal words mark relations among places either geographically, such as Genishau in the above example, or time-events, such as wars. Combined, the competing modes of time serve both the narrator's aims, one nationalistic, one domestic and genealogical.

The first page of the text demonstrates that emphasis upon the relationship between time and place. Jemison states that time has diminished her ability to remember the country from which her parents traveled. Without the memory of it, place itself becomes less important—even unreal—to a person. She says: “On the account of the great length of time that has elapsed since I was separated from my parents and friends, and having heard the story of their nativity only in the days of my childhood, I am not able to state positively, which of the two countries, Ireland or Scotland, was the land of my parents' birth and education” (1). Although she believes it is Ireland, she acknowledges that time has diminished her knowledge of her family tree. Her acknowledgement of a hazy memory—especially of her family's regional history—is significant because it establishes a tenuous, but real, link to European history. That the link is as hazy as her memory sets the stage for an American story that must take precedence over the reasons why her family fled from Europe. Susan Scheckel in *The Insistence of the Indian* emphasizes the importance of memory to nationalism: “Despite innumerable attempts to rewrite the Indian as a subject of “family” history, the ghost of the Indian as the object of genocidal violence has returned inevitably to haunt the nation.
and its narratives. This haunting marks the limits of that forgetfulness out of which the nation arises” (3).

Thus, beginning the narrative in this fashion is not haphazard. Seaver establishes a link between time and place, an American genealogy, in order to write the New York region into American history. He could depend upon the American public, by 1824, to understand the conventions of the captivity narrative and use it for creation of nation. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier state that “[i]ncluding captivity narratives in historical works fulfilled an important cultural function. Insecure about its identity, nineteenth-century America needed self-definition. In the form of history, captivity narratives helped supply that definition…[and] engender regional and national patriotism” (168). This analysis, though based upon the Rowlandson model of captivity narratives, also holds true, at least in part, for Jemison's narrative as constructed by Seaver. Despite the narrative cracks where Jemison's voice and domestic aims seep through, Seaver sets up Jemison's story utilizing the traditional conventions of the captivity narrative. He creates the organizational method for Jemison's Indian captivity narrative—a geographic genealogy—to complete his mandate from the “many gentlemen of respectability” (xxv) who approached him to write Jemison's story.

Accordingly, Seaver attempts to affix with historical detail Jemison's physical “places” before her capture, during her journey and after her adoption. Seaver mixes biographical detail with historical description of the taking of Fort Necessity (5) during the French and Indian War in 1754. The detail of Jemison losing her uncle John at that battle Seaver combines with the mention of Col. George Washington, thereby giving the biographical information historical import. Washington was a patriot, although at that time a British soldier, and the valence of his name in conjunction with Jemison's makes her narrative resonate with American-ness. Some may find this reference more ambiguous because the text associates George Washington with a famous military disaster. Nevertheless, including this detail serves, at least in part, Seaver's purpose to make her a loyal American from the very beginning (she was not naturalized as an American until long after the Revolutionary War), despite her choice to stay with the Seneca even when she was allowed to return to “civilization.”

Her journey and various placements during capture and after her adoption also are carefully historicized within the text. The end of the second chapter, which details the Indians' interaction with the French at Fort Pitt/Fort Du Quesne, 20 is significant because Jemison dwells upon its name and physical position (17). This is one of the earliest incidences of Jemison telling and translating a place name so that the contemporary reader would recognize the significance of a place in American history. Throughout the text, however, Seaver, through Jemison's voice, repeatedly translates place names, effectively pulling them through time and through shifts in land possession. Translating Fort Pitt is especially important because of its physical position at the head of the Ohio (“bloody”) river, the juncture of the Monogahela and the Alleghany Rivers. Obviously a place of power on the frontier, the fort eventually and reassuringly shifts into British and then American hands. Jemison's own placement at such a juncture, even as a captive, further illustrates her narrative use. Despite her short imprisonment in a single room in

20 In 1763, Ft. Duquesne was at the very western border of the colony of Virginia, and quite close to the border of the Pennsylvania colony. It is now Pittsburgh.
the fort, she has mobility as a captive that other women certainly did not have; her life story becomes a vehicle of cultural contact.

After the seventh chapter, the narrative becomes more concerned with domestic matters, although the historical and regional subtext obviously remains. In the first half of the narrative, Seaver emphasizes a chronological, forward-moving American history through genealogy. In the second half of the narrative, Seaver focuses on history through domestic allegory. Yet even before the seventh chapter, Seaver weaves historical events with Jemison's domestic concerns, although it is a rough pairing. Many of the domestic interactions are described with the sentimental language considered appropriate to feminine storytelling and to the “moral instruction” of children Seaver cites as an objective of this text. Significantly, Jemison portrays many male characters as morally corrupt or weak, while the women remain strong—even in their designated roles as mothers or sisters or wives. The earliest incidence occurs during the initial captivity when Jemison's father is “so much overcome with his situation—so much exhausted by anxiety and grief, that silent despair seemed fastened upon his countenance, and he could not be prevailed upon to refresh his sinking nature by the use of a morsel of food” (10). Her father remains silent and does nothing to buoy his family's spirits. Nevertheless, Jemison later names her first son Thomas after her father.

Despite the matrilineal Indian culture, Jemison retains the need to identify with white culture. Her children, in addition to being of “mixed” blood, clearly identify with both cultures through their tribal affiliation and their white names. In contrast to the ineffectual father, Jemison's mother finally addresses her. She does not merely call her “daughter,” but lavishes her with “my dear little Mary” or “my sweet little Mary.” This sentimental rhetoric is a nineteenth-century convention of portraying women’s speech. Her mother also focuses upon her feelings and leads into the advice that directs Mary Jemison's many decisions. In the first sentence, she “fears.” She describes the trail as “lonesome.” Her heart “bleeds” (10-11). Her mother's focus upon remembrance of names is significant because although it could be dismissed as sentiment alone, it is also about the power of family history. The mother's emphasis on Jemison remembering “your own name, and the name of your father and mother” is important because it underscores the importance of memory to the development of one’s self. If we map that concern with self-memory and self-creation onto Seaver's purposeful plan, the insistence upon memory resonates with nationalist purpose. Through Jemison's memory and storytelling do we gain access to the past, to the region, and to the nation.

Nevertheless, through Jemison, Seaver attempts to create some stable regional history, which inevitably indicates the difficulty of such a project. Significantly, in this central seventh chapter, Seaver attempts to establish the mythic ancestry of the land itself, placing it beyond linear history and fixing it beyond historical perspective. Jemison states:

21 See Kathryn Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier. The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900. New York: Twayne, 1993. The authors argue that captivity narratives were often considered appropriate for moral instruction of children.

22 According to Namias, the present-day descendents of Mary Jemison return to Letchworth State Park for family reunions.
My flats were cleared before I saw them; and it was the opinion of the oldest Indians that were at Genishau, at the time that I first went there, that all the flats on the Genesee River were improved before any of the Indian tribes ever saw them. I well remember that soon after I went to Little Beard's Town, the banks of Fall-Brook were washed off, which left a large number of human bones uncovered. The Indians then said that those were not the bones of Indians, because they had never heard of any of their dead being buried there; but that they were the bones of a race of men who a great many moons before, cleared that land and lived on the flats. (61)

This passage creates a genealogy of the land before names, which, when considered along with the biblical allusions throughout the narrative, makes the land seem even more sacred, even older than Adam. Furthermore, unlike Mary Rowlandson's specific references to biblical passages, Jemison's narrative traces biblical stories through her children. The fratricides she describes are reminiscent of Cain and Abel, and they organize chapters 10 and 12, interrupted by a chapter that focuses on her husband Hiokatoo. The sequence of these chapters is chronological. Nevertheless, the structure inevitably breaks down. As the narrative seams become apparent, so does the instability of the family and the corollary instability of history.

The description of the ancients who lived on the flats, which appears elsewhere in the narrative, demonstrates Derounian-Stodola and Levernier's argument that captivity narratives were not only used as history, but as folklore. They say that “folk materials about [captivity] originate in the East after the threat of Indian/white warfare had passed and the folk could comfortably romanticize Indians as part of a vanishing heritage or vilify them to emphasize the fortitude and ingenuity of Yankee captives who survived and often escaped” (176-77). Yet, in *The Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, the folklore goes beyond the Indians to establish an even more ancient and mysterious past for the land. Perhaps this suited Jemison's need to make her land important; it certainly worked into Seaver's goal to establish a genealogical history of the region. In *Nations before Nationalism*, John Armstrong says, “A most significant effect of the myth recital is to arouse an intense awareness among the group members of their ‘common fate.’ From the perspective of the myth-symbol theory, common fate is simply the extent to which an episode, whether historical or ‘purely mythical,’ arouses intense affect by stressing individuals’ solidarity against an alien force, that is, by enhancing the salience of boundary perceptions” (9). One of the appendices to the text indicates more of Seaver's attempts to fill out the ethnography of the Indians, including information about their belief systems, their superstitions, dances, government, and predecessors. As much as he can, Seaver tries to fill out the family tree for the region (and America), although he relegates those ethnographic issues to the appendices. One result of Seaver’s narrative is to claim the ancients of the flats for a unique American history different from the British, thereby establishing boundaries with the British more firmly.

Obviously, Seaver's goal is to establish that a regional history inevitably intersects national history, just as ancestry in a family tree affects an individual family structure. The relationship is a symbiotic one, and the lines that demarcate national and regional histories are not completely clear. Geography is the major area of concern because the land itself rarely shifts, although histories are a matter of perspective and boundaries.
change. The text upholds this in the apparent struggle of narrative voices and in Jemison's characterization, but also in the break between when Jemison is traveling through history toward Gardow and after she arrives.

**National Implications**

Murder clearly destabilizes a family unit, and the reasons for the murders in this narrative demonstrate cultural fissures that will ultimately destabilize America. Unlike many of the other chapters in the narrative, the tenth chapter does not begin temporally but with a marker of racial difference. Jemison subtly differentiates her experience of parenthood from the whites' experience by verbally marking it as “white” and therefore not the same as hers. Jemison focuses upon the trials of motherhood, and she describes why her sons John and Thomas argued. She ultimately blames intemperance, but she implies that their hatred is in some ways the result of miscegenation. Although the Indians see Thomas as a great leader, he has obvious ties to the white community. He wants his mother to choose to go to “civilization,” although he himself knows that he cannot. Although polygamy is “tolerated” in the tribe, Thomas considers it immoral, and he taunts his brother John about it. He accuses John of being a witch, the worst sort of crime among Indians. Liquor loosens Thomas's tongue, but his rivalry with his brother had been present even as children. Each resented the other since childhood in part because they are caught between two cultures, two races. John finally kills Thomas in 1811. Compared to the potential fratricide in chapter seven, this murder is much more personal, less civil. Seaver historicizes the previous conflict, making it a virtual war between brothers who chose opposite sides in a conflict. Between John and Thomas the war is personal, and there is no restriction upon killing a brother as there is before when Little Beard kills the opposing brother during the American Revolution.

John is cleared of blame for killing Thomas, yet he ultimately ends up killing his younger brother Jesse as well. Jesse identifies more with white values than John does, and again the implication is that John resents this. Jemison explains that Jesse was “inclined to copy after the white people; both in his manners and dress . . . . With white people he was intimate, and learned from them their habits of industry” (106-07). Jesse assists her with her domestic work as well, which further de-masculinizes him as an Indian in this narrative. Jemison admits favoring Jesse, but she clearly blames cultural conflict—caused by his mixed-race status—that manifests itself on a local level. Jesse “shunned” his brothers and Indians, Jemison says, “and it was supposed that this, together with my partiality for him, were the causes which excited in John so great a degree of envy that nothing short of death would satisfy it” (107). Despite these murders, readers feel some sympathy for a superstitious John, who is later killed at his own request. After all, Jemison blames herself to an extent for creating sibling rivalry. The major source of blame for all the local violence is intemperance, but the implication is that the underlying conflict arises from the brothers not being able to clearly determine their own racial identities in relation to one another. John's position as the middle child seems symbolic as well. He is between cultures, and cannot reconcile his identity with those of his male siblings. Jemison has a role in this conflict between brothers; she is the “contaminated”

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23 Interestingly, Jemison describes the evil result of “ardent spirits” genealogically: “a poison that will soon exterminate the Indian tribes in this part of the country, and leave their names without a root or branch” (87).
mother who has lived most of her life in a conflict zone. Ironically, John's children are “tolerably white” (115), which means that they could probably pass for white. Considering the racially charged atmosphere of the 1820s, a lesson emerges from the narrative: Stick to your own kind, remain in your appropriate place, or else your family will become tragic. The historical corollary: Stick to your kind, remain in your appropriate place, or else the nation will become tragic.

To maintain a semblance of stable history, Seaver continues to insert as many “historical” events as possible, even between the very personal chapters of the fratricides. Clearly, the chapter about Hiokatoo has little to do with Jemison's relationship with him. It begins and ends with her description of him, but the central section of the chapter Seaver admits to getting from Jemison’s relative, George Jemison, and then adapting. If the autobiographical structure of the narrative were not clearly cracked before, no reader can help but see it in this chapter, which relies heavily upon hearsay evidence from George Jemison and from other “unauthenticated sources” (100; footnote). Neither can a reader help but notice the difficulties with telling a history through a narrator concerned mainly with her domestic affairs. Clearly, Seaver himself sees a need to stabilize a history of the region: “we have no doubt of the truth of [Mr. Jemison's] statement, and have therefore inserted the whole account, as an addition to the historical facts which are daily coming into a state of preservation, in relation to the American Revolution” (101; footnote). Seaver chooses to insert hearsay evidence of secondary evidence within the chapter rather than in the appendices, which he does with some other historical events, including information about Devil's Hole and about Sullivan. We may never know precisely why, but the result remains—a exposure of narrative fissures. Ultimately, Seaver's project of historical “preservation” is futile because Seaver’s “facts” come from a constructed narrator, although also a real person. (Also, nineteenth-century gender and racial dynamics interfere with a “clean” history of the region). In “The Mark of Autobiography: Postmodernism, Autobiography and Genre,” Leigh Gilmore argues that instead of seeking out how autobiography may or may not be “real,” critical emphasis more appropriately lies in “reconfigurations of autobiographical identity in relation to a variety of discourses” (7). Although the narrative does not conform well to conventions of autobiography, biography, or history, it seems merely more obviously constructed than other histories, autobiographies, or biographies that purport to be seamless.

Those seams seem even more evident in chapter seven and beyond, where nineteenth-century regional concerns take precedence. For example, two Oneida brothers meet in battle, one having joined the Americans with Sullivan, the other joining the British. From a twentieth-century perspective, it is difficult to miss the portent of the Civil War, the “war between brothers.” Only a couple of pages later in the text Jemison claims Gardow after two runaway slaves vacate the place (59-60). Later, Jemison relates the story of Corn Planter, who describes himself as “yellow” and attempts to construct a relationship with his white father. The father chooses to go back to his life among the whites (63). Each of these incidents Jemison relates quite ambivalently, especially considering the mixed-blood of her own sons. One explanation is the implicit ranking of races. Miscegenation was always scandalous, but mixing with “black blood” was much worse than mixing with Indian. Considering the growing anti-slavery sentiment and rhetoric, a reading of the text that includes an overlay of regional friction within the new United States seems reasonable as well. Moreover, westward expansion and the anti-
Indian sentiment that accompanied the inevitable skirmishes also create an intersection of racial and regional interests. However, there is no clear taking of sides in this text. Perhaps the ambiguity of the narrative upon issues of miscegenation and slavery comments more upon the instability of history itself.

Even the fiction of chronology is disrupted near the end of the narrative when Jemison relates how she became an American citizen and retained rights to her land not as a reservation, but as a conveyance to her personally. She mentions that she “sent for my son John,” whose murder has already been related in the previous chapter. Yet, breaking chronology makes sense if Seaver's plan is a genealogy of region. Jemison describes precisely the methods by which she gained her land: the economics of the exchange, the signers of deeds, and the council of Chiefs. Her final words about her land indicate the focus upon genealogy: “Whenever the land which I have reserved, shall be sold, the income of it is to be equally divided amongst the members of the Seneca nation, without any reference to tribes or families” (124). This statement indicates her national affiliations, despite her American citizenship, and it makes an entire nation her heirs and her family.

Jemison's final commentary, including her “Review of her Life” and “Reflections on the loss of Liberty,” demonstrates how she views her role in the midst of so many historical events and even within the cultural moment of the 1820s. Her comments about captivity must be read in the context of American slavery, for, as Seaver said in his introduction, one of his purposes was moral instruction of children, certainly a genealogical legacy. The moral she supports is that those who find themselves in a “[state] of slavery” must “let future days provide their own sacrifices” (125). This is not exactly a radical anti-slavery statement, and perhaps her feelings may derive from her treatment and her eventual acceptance within not one but two “states” as a land steward and then owner. She maintains her role as woman by railing against liquor and her role as American by extolling the Franklinesque virtues of hard work. After finding her place “upon the flats,” she becomes her own woman, one who, she finally reveals, was never fully accepted by all the Seneca. She states that “our people” suspected that she was a great witch who stole her children and was unfaithful to her husband. We receive none of the outside reasoning for why others may have thought this, but it certainly places her not only outside of white culture, but also neither completely within Indian culture. She ends by focusing upon her descendents and by being physically situated “in the midst of her children” (129). Her final words could be words about the region Seaver writes about: “I expect I shall soon leave the world, and make room for the rising generation…; but my only anxiety is for my family” (129). Insert “country” for “family,” and we would have Seaver's own concerns about region and nation.

The two narrators’ voices compete within the narrative so that we are able to see the textual stitches in the tapestry of Jemison’s life as Seaver relates it to us. Because of

24 See Meir Sternberg, *Expositional Modes and Temporal Ordering in Fiction.* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1978). Sternberg explores how complex goals are revealed through sequencing. He explain in an analysis of the Odyssey that Homer strives to manipulate reader response by combining “temporal structure with other principles of deformation, development, and shaping. . . . Order of presentation, however, often does the trick by itself (90). The effect is rhetorical control via the ordering of the narrative events.

25 Scheckel argues that “the story of Mary Jemison struggling to raise her Indian children on her farm midway between Indian village and white town symbolically locates the Indians precisely where Americans wanted them to remain: suspended between two worlds, belonging in neither” (108).
the obvious tailoring in the text, we get a nuanced version of nation-building through narrative, perhaps more so than in any “straight” auto/biography in the nineteenth century. Life writing is complicated, and this regional and national narrative is a fantastic example of how the writer’s and the subject’s voices participate in purposes beyond individuals. We can see in the narrative fragmentation of this text the frayed threads evident in the borders of regional and national identity, especially in a period demarcated in part by literary nation-building. The narrative illustrates David L. Johnson’s and Scott Michaelsen’s argument in Border Theory: the Limits of Cultural Politics that we must “abandon[ ], finally, any project of ‘keeping intact one’s…identity,’ as Anzaldúa phrases it (pref., n.p.), and then comprehend[ ] the cultural or linguistic self as necessarily incomplete, coming to be, held open to ‘outside’ cultures, while, at the same time, as having always already enfolded the other within itself, with the border between the inside and outside, in principle, unclosable” (15). Jemison’s life and the telling of it in this narrative illustrate the difficulty of a unified, closed identity, and demonstrate the complexity of genre formation. Questions abound while and after reading this text, and some of the most valuable questions arise about the attempt to write a nation using her life. Perhaps the result is that an auto/biography is not the best genre for such a task.

Attempting to write all Jemison’s cultural contacts must have been confounding. This narrative demonstrates how tangled the branches and roots of a national or regional family tree can be. Clearly, Jemison’s narrative is not strictly an autobiography. She did not write the narrative herself, and much of the information attributed to her narrative is hearsay evidence about events obviously outside her direct experience. The textual apparatus, the focus upon name translations, the appendices, and the footnotes clearly indicate Seaver’s multiple purposes. Perhaps the best method for analyzing the text is to view Jemison as a constructed narrator who observes both across time and across cultures and serves Seaver’s nationalist purposes. Jemison’s capture puts her in a position to compare categories of peoples, and her long life in a single geographic area provides comparisons across time. Through her voice, we get the history and mythology of the nineteenth-century frontier. Through Seaver’s editorial vision, the Indian threat remained “safe” in history, where aborigines could be conquered, integrated, or exterminated guilt-free. Jemison was in the thick of things and at least had tangential contact with many American historical figures. She is a near-perfect narrative conduit who tells her own story, but ultimately reveals the impossibility of narrative, historical or geographical stability.

Thus, A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison offers more than mere access to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American history and culture; it creates a “place” through which to read America. The opening of textual space in Jemison's narrative is much like the gradual exposure of her life and the discovery of the history of Gardow Flats, where Jemison resides at the end of the narrative. Like the land, the narrative reflects a richly textured space with a geographical genealogy dating back beyond the recollection of any single living human being. Despite Seaver's stated purpose of moral instruction, the narrative resists such confining intentionality, establishing a regional/national genealogy and demonstrating how “places” slip or evolve over the course of a single lifetime. The result is a narrative intersection, a re-visioning of the stability of regional identity and history, one with implications for national affiliations.
and definitions. As a text and life on and in the border, the narrative demonstrates significant fractures in the concept of nation in the early nineteenth century.
Chapter 3: Child Ghosts of the American Future:
Resolving the Nation in Frontier Romance

Poets are, then, the historians and often the priests of the society.

--Sir Walter Scott, “An Essay on Romance” (1824)

One may like her history served with tacit authenticity or with intangible Truth. Sir Walter Scott preferred the verisimilitude of a fictive history. His mingling of separate genres was scandalous to some, yet many authors and critics agreed with his stance that history was great fodder for fiction, that well-written fiction made history more real. Scott’s conscious overlapping of fiction and history genres, one “false” and the other “true,” was controversial. Nevertheless, Scott praises Daniel Defoe for blurring the generic lines, and he provides a critical permission of sorts when he publishes in the supplement to the Encyclopedia Britannica in 1824 “An Essay on Romance.” In this essay, Scott traces the history of the Romance from its origins in oral culture through prose manifestations of the genre. According to Scott, Romance was a masculine endeavor, derived from tales of chivalry and adventure, whether historical or spiritual. Romance induced pride in country and in battle. It moved and motivated. It was heroic. Scott explains that “pure” historical romance before long could not exist because the audience demanded more embellishment. Much concerned with the appearance of historical authenticity and “purity” of genre, Scott traces the foundations of the Romance in Europe and Asia, focusing upon national contributions to the genre. He finds, ultimately, that “Romance . . . was like a compound metal, derived from various mines, and in the different specimens of which one metal or other was alternately predominant” (176). Scott’s own work was often based upon the cultural lore of history, his method centered upon a romance plot, and his language highly stylized. His focus in this essay upon the national origins of his most favorite genre, historical romance, demonstrates the pervasiveness of concerns about what makes a nation. Nowhere in his text does he mention any literary history of the United States. There was little to say.

Scott’s focus on the national and the emergence of a genre (with no mention of the United States) characterized much of how Europeans thought of American letters. They didn’t think of it or, at least, didn’t think much of it, although there may have been strong U.S. influence on Scott via Washington Irving and others. Wanting to be noticed and to be identified with a unique and emerging literature produced anxiety among those concerned with literary culture in the United States. Shortly after the appearance of Scott’s essay came writers answering the concurrent calls for a national literature. Scholars have long acknowledged Sir Walter Scott’s influence upon American novelists such as James Fenimore Cooper and Catharine Maria Sedgwick. They, like Scott, found

27 See Martin Green, “Cooper, Nationalism and Imperialism,” Journal of American Studies 12: 161-68. Although Green’s focus is on Cooper’s sea novels and Defoe’s legacy to Cooper in that capacity, he nevertheless acknowledges that “Cooper was—despite his denials—Scott’s apprentice” (162), which he
Romance the generic vehicle most appropriate for dramatizing a “unique” nation, as well as creating a history a bit more palatable to readers hungry for a sense of pride in country. Perhaps most famously, Cooper took up the banner of American literary nationalism in the historical—or, more specifically, the frontier—romance. He, Sedgwick, Lydia Maria Child, and others attempt in the 1820s to fashion a nation from the raw materials of history. Each consciously molds America’s early history in order to create the semblance of an American nation. They clearly note their historical sources so readers can see the scaffolding for the narrative buildings they create. But the question that scholars continue to probe is precisely what such authors are trying to say about the nation, its contemporary problems and from where they spawned, as well as what the future might hold for the young country.

Literary concern about genre and historical (and regional) authenticity often demonstrated an anxiety about a number of antebellum social issues, specifically the “Indian Problem.” But it also reveals the deepest concern with the cultural creation of the nation. A good number of American writers of the time attempted to rewrite an American memory during a most difficult time to forget. During the roughly twenty years of Jackson’s popularity, the “Indian Problem” was alive and well. No longer a simple issue, the Indian was not just an untamable and thus, expendable, savage. The Indian was a complication for a nation that could not accommodate or assimilate the reality of Indian cultures, nor could the government exterminate them without at least some political repercussions. Susan Scheckel in The Insistence of the Indian: Race and Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture explains the vital importance of the Indian to the popular conception of the nation. She says, “[T]he construction of the nation as a homogeneous union of citizens also depends on an essential denial of reality. If Indians provided a crucial site of reflection on national identity during the first half of the nineteenth century, they also represented that which had to be denied for a coherent image of the nation to be recognized” (12). The Indian is undeniably an important factor in the believes was a great misfortune and made Cooper’s adventure novels bad. Many other scholars have also acknowledged Scott’s undeniable influence upon Cooper.

Of course, most genre boundaries are permeable, and these novels, while adhering philosophically to the tenets of Scott’s historical romance, also incorporate other American genres, most notably the captivity narrative. See David T. Haberly, “Women and Indians: The Last of the Mohicans and the Captivity Tradition,” American Quarterly 28 (1976): 431-43; Sabina Matter-Seibel, “Native Americans, Women, and the Culture of Nationalism in Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick,” Early America Re-Explored: New Readings in Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum Culture. Eds. Klaus Schmidt and Fritz Fleischman. (New York: Peter Lang, 2000): 411-40. She says that “the sentimental trope of the loss of kin as used by Child and Sedgwick links their novels to the genre of captivity narratives” (417).

W.H. Gardiner in his July 1822 review of The Spy in The North American Review is an important part of the culture encouraging the use of historical romance for writing America. Nevertheless, he suggests that frontier romance writers use the “three great epochs in American history, which are peculiarly well fitted for historical romance; —the times just succeeding the first settlement—the era of the Indian wars, which lie scattered along a considerable period—and the revolution” (255).

See Leslie A. Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel. (New York: Dalkey Archive Press, 1960). Fiedler correlates Scott’s conservatism with the historical romance as compared with the “sentimentally radical” gothic (164). He finds the “heroism . . . celebrated by the historical romances . . . to mean nothing more than the sum total of its differences from settled bourgeois life in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century” (165). Moreover, Cooper’s five-novel Leatherstocking series, he says, “learned . . . to play out his action on the ‘ideal boundary’ between two cultures, one ‘civilized and cultivated,’ the other ‘wild and lawless’” (179).
development of national culture. How the Indian is figured in literature is important as well. Here then is the conundrum for novelists: How to portray an American history and an American nation without overtly recognizing the complicity of the State in the extermination, removal, and erasure of Indians and their cultures.

Scheckel argues that none of the texts that imagined the Indian during the early half of the nineteenth century had it all figured out. The “symbolic,” she says, illustrates “the threshold of resistance at which meaning emerges, the very gap that the nation is imagined to fill. . . . The gap itself became the imaginative space in which the nation emerged, not as a coherent idea or a realist narrative but as an ongoing performance that repeatedly played out, without resolution, the fundamental ambivalences of American national identity” (14). Each of the novels discussed in this chapter reveals such ambivalence, but also attempts to fill in the gap and imagine the nation whole, even with its significant fissures and fractures. They attempt to resolve the irresolvable, an impossible task. Perhaps the most important marker of those cracks is in how the mixed-race child was alluded to, effaced, or revealed in the novels; as the product of miscegenation, the mixed-race child was a most feared possibility. This child could disrupt the basis of racial science, creating political fallout unacceptable to a young country that remained relatively unstable culturally and politically. Its existence could prove the potential for assimilation and acculturation between and among races—not just Indian and White, but White and Black.

Although early frontier romances, including Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times (1824), The Last of the Mohicans (1826), and Hope Leslie, or Early Times in the Massachusetts (1827), strive for a national authenticity through recovered history, their reticence about Indian-White progeny underscores the central importance of race to the construction of nation. Making the Indian part of an idealized American past was a solution that both created an America from sparse raw materials and tamed the threat of the Indian in the early nineteenth century. Thus, as Nina Baym describes in American Women Writers and the Work of History, 1790-1860, the “Indian plot” becomes popular, a cultural narrative that supported the need for Indians to vanish and make way for whites. She says: “So-called ‘Indian novels’ by women and men appeared at particular moments in the antebellum era because the topic was as central to the American present as to the American past” (154). A similar argument by Susan Opfermann states that basically, these authors justify the nation by adjusting its cultural memory. She maintains that Cooper’s contribution in The Last of the Mohicans is to create “a textual ghost, an uncanny heritage, that haunts the text and its readers” (29). A dialogue of sorts ensues between the authors, and each takes up the issue of “interracial relations . . . that underscore the complex interactions between aesthetics and politics that . . . occur across the nineteenth century” (31).

In the texts I consider in this chapter, the specter\(^3\) of the Indian-White child disrupts the frontier romance genre, revealing its inadequacies for resolving national/ethnic issues even within the relative safety of the past. Even Ann Stephens’

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\(^3\) See Renée L. Bergland, The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects (Hanover, CT: UP of New England, 1999). She says that Indian stories “Americanize American letters [and] afford them a unique claim to classic status” (153), and she specifies stories about long-dead Indians as most indicative of the fascination with how Indians make antebellum texts automatically American.
Malaeska: The Indian Wife of a White Hunter, which more completely engages the issue of the mixed-blood child, cannot resolve the “Indian Problem” without inevitable tragedy. Indeed, the ethnographic and genealogical impulse of these frontier novels, including the extensive framing devices of the frontier romances, ironically undermines a resolved unity of “nation.” The closed endings of the texts demonstrate the similarly simplified ideologies associated with the frontier romance genre. Inevitably, the “Indian Problem” is too complex for this genre, yet it had to be represented as uncomplicated in order to justify the policies of the State. Despite these texts’ popularity, they were not the only or the best ways to define the nation. Instead, the nation had to be constructed from multiple perspectives and genres. The chapter that follows focuses upon three structural disruptions that demonstrate the difficulty frontier romance as a genre has in representing the problematic mixed-race child. I have labeled them: 1) the paratextual features of Cooper’s and Sedgwick’s novels, specifically including historical/editorial intrusions, 2) the internal, textual features of Child’s novel, including the vocal layering of the text, and 3) the closed ending of Stephens’ novel. Each I connect with the novels’ relative ambivalence about the mixed-race child.

The Paratextual: Prefaces and Footnotes

Perhaps the most well-known of frontier romances today and the most popular at the time is Cooper’s The Last of the Mohicans, a novel that set a precedent for how to construct American uniqueness in literature. As Michael Butler argues, despite being dismissed by a number of critics for being too historically unrealistic and gratuitously violent, “the events of The Last of the Mohicans embody a theory of human progress. In particular, they compress into two weeks the three most crucial developments in our nation’s past: the decline of both Indian and European on the continent, and the consequent creation and rise of the American” (118). Cooper uses the setting of the frontier during the French and Indian War, displacing the immediacy of early nineteenth century political and cultural tempests. He does not completely elide them, however. The fear of miscegenation excludes potential progeny from the novel. Similarly, Sedgwick’s

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32 See Edmund Pearson, Dime Novels; Or, Following an Old Trail in Popular Literature (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1929). He says that Stephens, as an early dime novelist, “[w]as reverently following the lead of Cooper and Scott, and had not the slightest intention of composing ‘sensational’ fiction . . . . [Dime novels] were sensational in much the same sense that Scott and Cooper were sensational; that is, they were tales of adventure and combat” (4). He argues that many features of the novel made it unlike the dime novels that followed, including its title (difficult to pronounce) and its initial serialization in The Ladies’ Companion in 1839.


Hope Leslie offers a national genealogy via the mixing of history and fiction, Puritan and Pagan, White and Indian. However, no extended description of the mixed-blood child exists in the novel. The complete or relative absence of such a child speaks to the then-current state of affairs with the “Indian Problem.” Evident within the textual apparatuses of the novels are the anxieties of the time and the urgency of creating an American nation.

There is little doubt that Cooper is obsessed with the mixing of races. The plot of The Last of the Mohicans centers upon “blood,” upon the extirpation of a people, and upon the potential for race mixture between Cora, a mulatto herself, and Magua, the evil Huron, or between Cora and Uncas, the brave, “pure blood” Mohican. Also, of course, Cooper incessantly repeats references to Hawkeye as “a man without a cross.” Ancestry is important because of Cooper’s intention to write a family tree for the United States, to explain how Americans have become unique individuals in a unique land. The paratextual features of the narrative, however, including his footnotes, as well as his “Preface to the First Edition” in 1826 and his “Introduction” to the 1831 edition, when he had finished his Leatherstocking series, most clearly indicate the anxiety about his endeavor. Both his Preface and his Introduction are part of the text of The Last of the Mohicans, and so we may best see his broader intentions for the story itself.

As is apparent in the first paragraph of his “Preface to the First Edition,” Cooper is anxious about his genre and his audience, specifically the female or “more imaginative sex” (1) who might not understand the historical research that went into the novel and, specifically, the various names by which Indians are called. Apparently, men are more familiar with the seriousness of history and thus need no explanation of the “obscurities” in the text, he argues. This gendered move establishes the male audience as knowledgeable, and the female audience as ignorant of American history. Knowing that women formed a significant portion of the book-buying public, he did not want to alienate them by misleading them about the genre for which he was writing. We may find his argument insulting to women’s intelligence, but we can also see that Cooper clearly understands he is breaking with fictional form to use a scholarly apparatus and insert historical research, flawed though it may be.

How fortuitous for that research to have led him to discover a genealogy of the Lenni Lenape (or Delaware), which he says means “unmixed people,” but may be translated as “the people,” “common people,” “original people,” “ancient ones,” “real men” or “genuine men.” Here was the perfect vehicle to allegorize the racial dynamics of Whites and Indians in antebellum America. If the Lenni Lenape, the super aborigine race from whom many northeastern Indian nations sprang, were doomed to disintegration and finally disappearance due to their racial dilution and mixture, then what might whites or Indians of “pure” blood expect when they intermarried? Although Cooper’s story dramatically recreates that loss, his Preface does not. Instead, it delineates how the “pure” Lenni Lenape had been subdivided into various nations and tribes, finally including the Mohicans, the only group who had maintained their racial purity. In a summary list reminiscent of Biblical genealogies, Cooper writes:

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Peck. (New York: Oxford UP, 1992). In this interesting article, Samuels reads the melding of natural and cultural, as well as human and animal, as a mask for the gendered “violence” of identity and racial miscegenation.
It would far exceed the information of the author, to enumerate a moiety of the communities, or tribes, into which this race of beings was subdivided. Each tribe had its name, its chiefs, its hunting grounds, and, frequently, its dialect. Like the feudal princes of the old world, they fought among themselves, and exercised most of the other privileges of sovereignty. Still, they admitted the claims of a common origin, a similar language, and of that moral interest, which was so faithfully and so wonderfully transmitted through their traditions. (2)

Cooper feels it necessary to describe how the Mohicans had descended from an “unmixed people” in part to demonstrate how the land that white Americans in 1826 occupied was uniquely consecrated by racial purity. This fact automatically makes his novelistic endeavor American, distinct from those works from Great Britain. The Mohicans’ demise, Cooper notes, came at the hands of the whites who “dispossessed” these Indians of their land before other Indian lands. He emphasizes that “[t]he few of them that now remain, are chiefly scattered among other tribes, and retain no other memorials of their power and greatness, than their melancholy recollections” (2).

Although Cooper romanticizes Indians and their disappearance, his subtext nevertheless issues a warning about the legacy of white Americans. If white Americans want to remain in power, they must not be “dispossessed” of land. Considering the context of Indian rhetoric and Jackson’s inherent right of young white men to find their fortunes on lands inhabited by Indians, these words mean more than a brief memorial to the Delaware. They are implicitly a call to settle Indian lands. Further, for American culture to live on, it must become more than an individual memory. It must be collective and positive to be powerful. His novel is a contribution to that effort, and it is, in part, a result of anxiety about America’s positive and unique “purity.”

Ironically, Cooper’s novel, although structurally balanced into two mirrored halves, is generically a hybrid, a “mixed-blood” text, both a romance and a historical recovery. His Preface emphasizes the importance of its historical bases, even briefly memorializing the recently dead Moravian missionary John Heckewelder (1743-1823). Perhaps it is because of this mixing that Cooper believes he must specifically create the appropriate audience carved away from the potential readers who would pick up the book. This audience should not include, Cooper believes, women who would be “shocked,” bachelors who would be “disturbed” and clergymen who have better things to do with their time. So, what literate part of the audience would that leave? Married white men sober enough to appreciate dramatized and bloody history, a text generically mixed, a “manly” story? Creating an appropriate audience insulates Cooper to a certain extent from the scandal of creating a frontier romance to represent America’s (racial) history

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36 See Michael D. Butler, “Narrative Structure and Historical Process in The Last of the Mohicans.” American Literature 48 (1976): 117-39. He says, “Implicit in [Cooper’s] historical vision . . . lies the disquieting message that [Americans’] rule too is no more than a temporary phase. Within the circular movement of the [historical] spiral, a beginning predicts its end. In The Last of the Mohicans, therefore, inheres a promise of The Last of the Americans” (139).

37 See Jackson, Andrew, President’s Message to Congress; “On Indian Removal”; December 6, 1830; Records of the United States Senate, 1789-1990; Record Group 46; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

38 An important source for Cooper’s information about the Delaware and their interaction with the Six Nations was Heckewelder’s An Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations who Once Inhabited Pennsylvania and the Neighboring States. (Philadelphia: Abraham Small, 1819).
and warn about America’s (racial) future. It also underscores his anxiety about its reception.

His concern about audience reception, name changes, and languages shows up in the main text of the story as well, illustrated near the center of the novel when Major Heyward brings Montcalm’s repeated summons to Munro. Heyward had previously attempted linguistic duplicity to draw out the reason Montcalm wanted to meet with Munro. He is the messenger to Munro, as well as the translator between the two commanders when they eventually meet. When Munro can’t understand why Montcalm wouldn’t accept Heyward, Heyward has to explain that it is an insult to send a second in rank to a first-ranked enemy. During these exchanges, Heyward is the purveyor of information, but he is not at all in control of it, a situation any novelist might appreciate, for once the novel is published, the writer no longer controls its interpretation. The misunderstandings in verbal, textual and protocol languages focus reader attention away from the bombshell that Cora is mulatto and instead direct the reader towards a consideration of the importance of linguistics. This is parallel to Cooper’s own insistence upon the importance of language misinterpretation in his prefatory materials. Although he mentions race in these materials, it is in the service of language as the topic. Language is a site of cultural contact through both place and time and a border space that the characters and readers must negotiate to understand nation. And not having control of it is what scares Cooper most.

His 1831 “Introduction to the First Edition” was written after the novel had been received, so we can better understand how Cooper’s anxiety had manifested about the text after the novel’s initial publication. Like James Seaver’s ethnographic appendices in A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison, Cooper lists in his introduction phenotypic traits of “the Aborigines of the American continent” (5) that emphasize an essential “Indianness.” Faulting Cooper for his essentialist and garbled descriptions of Indians is not particularly useful. Nevertheless, such descriptions seem characteristic of racial science, as well as anthropology, especially the amateur anthropology that dotted so many of the narratives in the early nineteenth century.

Although Cooper begins his Introduction praising the innate and complex character of Indians, he nevertheless clumps them together in physical characteristics. When discussing symbolic uses of language, Cooper reveals a racial hierarchy where Black is at bottom, White is at top, and Indian is somewhere in the middle. This racial hierarchy is mirrored in the novel itself. Cooper argues that Indians as a race are of Asiatic origin, a popular view of Indian origins at the time. His argument rests on physical characteristics similar to “Orientals,” as well as their language. He writes: “the North American Indian clothes his ideas in a dress that is so different from that of the African, and is Oriental in itself. His language has the richness and sententious fulness of the Chinese” (5). The implication is that the African’s language use is inferior to the Chinese or Indian use of language. Moreover, because the scope of metaphor Indians use is limited, western or white symbolic use of language is superior. Cooper’s penchant for ethnographic description here is important to understanding his reflection of societal beliefs about race that then mirror the details of the novel itself. He is anxious to give hard evidence that he knows Indians and that he knows the importance of anthropology to discussions of race. He gains greater authority with his audience by including ethnographic description and “research” about Indians. He believes the worth of his book,
as he created it in the Preface, relies upon historical truths about Indians. He must buttress that for the 1831 edition of the novel.

The tone of much of this Introduction is defensive; the novel had been criticized for precisely the name confusion about which Cooper revealed his fear in the Preface. He uses the ethnographer’s pose to build up to an answer about why, again, he may have made mistakes. “Whatever may be the truth, as respects the root and the genius of their Indian tongues, it is quite certain they are now so distinct in their words as to possess most of the disadvantages of strange languages: hence much of the embarrassment that has arisen in learning their histories, and most of the uncertainty which exists in their traditions” (6). The passive voice in this statement reveals some of Cooper’s anxiety about his research. Nowhere is Cooper an agent in this statement. He goes on to blame misinformation upon the Indian penchant for overestimating their race and their culture, as well as the White penchant for corrupting the language. Cooper, apparently, is the only one with the objectivity to describe races without bias.

The ethnographer’s persona is more pronounced in the footnotes. Almost all of the 31 footnotes were inserted after the novel was first published in 1826, and most of those are ethnographic, geographic, and/or historical. Like Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia or Seaver’s A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison, the footnotes have an instructive quality that often delineates peculiar features of the American landscape. The notes for the 1831 edition were often meant to educate Americans about their own history, geography and indigenous peoples or to educate the Europeans who so avidly consumed the story. Unlike Jefferson’s Notes, however, there is little philosophical discourse about race or about history per se. Nevertheless, the subtext of the ethnographic notes in particular is that Indians are (or were) different and often inferior. When Cooper feeds the curiosity about Indian cultures that he then boils down to general characteristics of the warrior, for example, he implicitly supports their objectification in history and in the present for the service of the nation. He even encourages such a stance in a footnote in which he praises William Penn: “The American is justly proud of the origin of his nation, which is perhaps unequalled in the history of the world, but the Pennsylvanian and Jerseyman have more reason to value themselves in their ancestors than the natives of any other state, since no wrong was done the original owners of the soil” (304).39 The use of the word “native” is important because Cooper implicitly absolves current residents of these states of guilt by making them “natives.” Indians were “original owners,” a transitory state based upon trade, not a state of being entrenched in the land itself. Those places are now rightfully American.

The footnotes create Cooper’s authority as a scholar of history (although scholars have pointed out that his information sometimes was quite sketchy or just plain wrong), as well as a writer of fiction. The fictional story is often philosophically ambiguous or contradictory, while the notes attempt to establish “fact.” Yet, they also reveal the ambiguity of “fact” and Cooper’s anxiety about losing control of language in a hybrid genre. Two footnotes are translations or definitions of a word; occasionally Cooper explains customs of frontiersmen such as Hawkeye—their clothing, rifle sizes, linguistic

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39 Cooper also includes a footnote about George Washington (13), explaining upon which basis Washington was “selected to command the American armies at a later day.” This is Cooper’s way of inserting after the original publication of the novel the “unacknowledged convention that Revolutionary fictions . . . have at least one scene in which Washington figured” (Baym 169).
quirks, etc. However, the majority of the footnotes are meant to establish his authority about Indians and Indian culture. He summarizes the construction of the Six Nations (20-21), for example, or describes how Indians lectured (287) or what they ate (289). Many of the notes are intersections of Indian and American history, for that is his primary concern in the novel, although he doesn’t press forward towards the future and disturb the racial hierarchy of the nation. In one note, Cooper explains that whites used medals to “conciliate the important men, of the Indians” (95). He does not comment about what this might mean; he merely states it as fact. Letting it stand alone as ethnographic description lends a “scientific” authority to Cooper’s prose.

The tone of the footnotes is much the same as the narrative voice of the novel altogether, which is instructive—sometimes patronizing—and omniscient through time, sometimes reflecting upon how the landscape has changed since the mid-eighteenth century. The narrator says at a point when Hawkeye and the others are resting at a spring that “each of the foresters stooped and took a long and parting draught, at that solitary and silent spring, around which and its sister fountains, within fifty years, the wealth, beauty, and talents of a hemisphere, were to assemble in throngs, in pursuit of health and pleasure” (123). Or, for example, the narrator will comment upon the waging of war, and disrupt story-time: “This sort of contempt for eminences, or rather dread of the labour of ascending them, might have been termed the besetting weakness of the warfare of the period” (146). The narrative voice disrupts the escapism of the story in part to authorize Cooper’s tale. Through ethnographic description, Cooper reflects upon change and writes a historical geography for the United States. Sedgwick’s narrator is similar, pointing out occasionally how things were and are: “Where there are now contiguous rows of shops, filled with the merchandise of the east . . . and all the symbols of a rich and populous community—were, at the early period of our history, a few log-houses, planted around a fort, defended by a slight embankment and palisade” (17). Both indicate the purpose of the novels to teach and create a sense of lived American history and connection to the roots of the nation.

Cooper creates another justification for potential textual or historical errors in the 1850 Introduction to the novel when he discusses his creation of the name for Horican. He admits his poetic license: “As every word uttered by Natty Bumppo was not to be received as rigid truth, we took the liberty of putting the ‘Horican’ into his mouth, as the substitute for ‘Lake George’” (8). He emphasizes repeatedly that the novel is fiction primarily, and history secondarily. His anxiety about the genre is obvious. Why continue to protest that it doesn’t matter or why blame others for faulty information? The amalgamation of history and fiction, of the Indian frontier and romance, is a source of significant anxiety, and Cooper’s need to revise prefatory materials indicates his fears about the genre.

Why did it matter so much? What was the source of that anxiety? The novel demonstrates such anxiety, in part, by its refusal to explore the possibility of miscegenation and a mixed-race child. To support his view of the unique nation and of racial hierarchy, Cooper must offer external and ethnographic details of Indians, but avoid the potential reality of how a mixed-race child could undermine his vision of America’s moral and historical purity, as well as its clear, white future. Thus, Cora, a mix of white and black, must die. Despite her intelligence and beauty, she is flawed. She has no place in either the history or the future of the United States. The potential child of
Cora and Uncas, a mixed-race child that combines the three ancestries—“pure” Indian, black, and white—would be untenable to the new, young, white, male American nation. Cora and Uncas are the strongest of the characters, but they are doomed because of their potential mixture and, thus, their threat to the nation as Cooper has conceived of it. As Duncan tells Cora: “There are evils worse than death . . . but which the presence of one who would die in your behalf may avert” (80). What are those evils? In the context of such cultural anxiety about miscegenation, it seems one of those “evils” is mixing of races, along with rape and torture. If we map this anxiety nationally, we might read these words as a contemporary cultural concern that only the sacrificing of racially inferior peoples can purify. “There are evils worse than death . . . but which the presence of one who would die in the country’s behalf may avert.” Uncas, Cora, and, most importantly, their potential progeny die as a sacrifice to the concept of nation.

Scholars generally give more credit to Sedgwick’s research for Hope Leslie in part because she is much clearer about her sources for the text. She directly quotes a number of sources in the footnotes, although she does not always name them. They include John Winthrop’s History, John Trumbull’s History of Connecticut and Daniel Neal’s History of Boston. Her anxiety about genre is similar to Cooper’s. The first paragraphs of the Preface address the amount and use of history in the novel. She diminishes the argument that she uses history inaccurately by stating that the use of historical figures and events “was found very convenient in the execution of the author’s design, which was to illustrate not the history, but the character of the times” (5). She specifically cites two things that audiences might automatically feel are factually incorrect, including events surrounding Sir Philip Gardiner and the chronology of the Pequot War. In the next paragraph, she assures her readers that she was “a patient investigator of all the materials that could be obtained” (5). She does not attempt to construct her audience as Cooper does, yet she clearly remains concerned about how her textual authority might be undermined by audience perception of inaccurate facts. Again, these are concerns reflective of the mixed genre and the public’s thirst for American history. They are also reflective of a genre on the frontier of antebellum American culture.

Like Cooper, Sedgwick cites Heckewelder’s Account of the History, Manners, and Customs of the Indian Nations as one of her sources, and she praises him in a footnote for his “powerful admonition to Christians” (351) not to misuse their power and to practice as they preach, lest they be unable to convert Indians. The mention of Heckewelder at least implies a position about the “Indian Problem” and the potentialities from miscegenation. The question of whether or not Indians should be converted does not exist for Sedgwick. Of course they should. Perhaps Cooper’s vagueness about his use of Heckewelder (and a memorial to him) rather than specificity about conversion implies a position that Indians cannot be assimilated and, instead, must be extinguished or displaced. In the context of the major debate about Indians in the United States, Sedgwick’s use of Heckewelder in her footnotes implies a position of Indian assimilation into the nation. If they are civilized via religion, they can become a part of the nation itself, assimilated. Assimilation is more than civilization and does not imply an

40 Baym argues that Harriet Cheney’s A Peep at the Pilgrims “is much more scholarly and historically informed than Hobomok (or, for that matter, than Hope Leslie)” (163).
accommodation of different cultures, but a sublimation of those cultures. So, Sedgwick’s position is not simple and progressive.

Indeed, Sedgwick’s seventh footnote most clearly indicates her political position about Indians when she praises missionary John Eliot, who in the novel defends Magawisca when she is accused of plotting against the colony:

He was the first protestant missionary to the Indians; for nearly half a century their instructor, friend, and father; and when, during the war with the terrific Philip of Mount Hope, fear had turned every hand and heart against them, and their utter extinction was regarded by most, as necessary to the salvation of the English colonies, Eliot was still their indefatigable and fearless advocate. . . . His name has been appropriately given to a flourishing missionary station, where the principle on which he at all times insisted is acted upon, viz: “that the Indians must be civilized, as well as, if not in order to their being Christianized.” This principle has no opposers in our age, and we cannot but hope, that the present enlightened labours of the followers of Eliot, will be rewarded with such success, as shall convert the faint-hearted, the cold, and the skeptical, into ardent promoters of missions to the Indian race. (352-53)

Sedgwick had links to the Cornwall Foreign Mission School in Connecticut, whose mission was to Christianize and civilize Indians.41 Both John Ridge and Elias Boudinot attended the school. Karen Woods Weireman in an article about Sedgwick’s Indian connections describes the scandalous marriages of these men to white women connected with the school. Harriet Gold, Sedgwick’s first cousin once removed, married Boudinot in 1826, after John Ridge had married Sarah Northrup in 1824. So, during the time Sedgwick was writing Hope Leslie, the scandals at the school were raging. According to Weireman, field missionaries and Cherokees both wrote to the home office for the school. Missionaries revealed that “the taboo against Indian-white marriages was intended to reinforce Native Americans’ inferior status, while they also decried the double standard that allowed white men to marry Indian women without censure. Cherokees . . . protested . . . a racism that ran contrary to all the missionaries had taught them about Christian brotherhood” (437). As her footnote reveals, Sedgwick clearly supported the mission of the school, although we have no evidence that, when pressured by scandal, she would have stated a position explicitly against miscegenation. At the very least, her connections with and support for the mission of the school and of missionaries such as Eliot, emphasizes the underlying ambivalence in her novel about the “Indian Problem” in contemporary antebellum America.

Most of the other eight footnotes specify a source for the behavior of a character, such as Monoca, Magawisca and Oneco’s mother, or Miantunnomoh. Despite maintaining that she is not so concerned with the factualness of her novel, Sedgwick nevertheless cites numerous sources to buttress her characterizations and explain historical personages. The instructive tone is somewhat like Cooper’s, but Sedgwick

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41 See Mary Kelley, ed. The Power of Her Sympathy: The Autobiography and Journal of Catharine Maria Sedgwick. (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Association, 1993) 46. Sedgwick’s grandparents grew wealthy in part upon profits of the Stockbridge Indian School, allowing Sedgwick the means to become an independent author.
escapes a similar role of patronizing ethnographer. Her footnotes, and even her internal characterizations and descriptions, generally do not attempt to characterize an entire race or generalize about all Pilgrims. When she describes Magawisca, for example, Sedgwick is careful to describe how she is dressed differently from other Indians and from white women in the settlement: “Her hair, contrary to the fashion of the Massachusetts Indians, was parted on her forehead, braided, and confined to her head by a band of small feathers, jet black, and interwoven, and attached at equal distances by rings of polished bone. . . . Stockings were an unknown luxury; but leggings, similar to those worn by the ladies of Queen Elizabeth’s court, were no bad substitute” (23). She does not settle on the character of Indian women as Cooper generalizes about the Indian warrior and so escapes, at least in part, Cooper’s patronizing tone.

The Preface, however, does attempt a generalization of both Pilgrims and Indians. Like Cooper, Sedgwick is concerned in her Preface about how the history in the novel might function for the audience, but, unlike Cooper, she does not delve into lengthy ethnographic descriptions. Sedgwick’s attempt at ethnography begins not with Indian physical or cultural features, but with those of the pilgrims. She briefly summarizes their education and the frontier geography of settlements, “set on the borders of a dark and turbulent wilderness” (5). Emphasizing this description mirrors colonists’ fears about the unknown in the forests; the forests were not a natural, beautiful, sublime landscape, but a harbor for evil and the unnatural. Immediately, then, Sedgwick illustrates a distinct difference between the America of the early nineteenth century and that of seventeenth-century colonists. Readers must shift thoughts of America as a land of opportunity to one of survival. This then sets up more clearly one of the major organizing features of the novel, the conflict between the communal and the individual, which is much more about contemporary American society and culture. In this respect, Sedgwick’s Preface, although shorter than Cooper’s, goes to the central argument about what America should be. Cooper merely adopts a male-centered individualism as the underlying philosophy of The Last of the Mohicans. Sedgwick, on the other hand, is much more conflicted about that philosophy, as both Hope Leslie and Sedgwick’s biography reveal.

Sedgwick does, however, include a description of Indian character in her Preface, and she includes a bit more contextual philosophy than Cooper does. She anticipates the argument that Indians are racially and thus, naturally, inferior. She writes:

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42 Louis D. Rubin, Jr. writes an interesting article comparing the mythic role of the forest for William Gilmore Simms and James Fenimore Cooper in which he argues for regional considerations of the forest myth. The mythic forest, he says, does not perform the same role for the South as it does for New England. The South is mired in history, so that the frontier wilderness has already been written repeatedly and is not a blank screen on which to project an American image of freedom. See “The Romance and the Colonial Frontier: Simms, Cooper, the Indians, and the Wilderness,” American Letters and the Historical Consciousness: Essays in Honor of Lewis P. Simpson. Eds. J. Gerald Kennedy and Daniel Mark Fogel. (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1987) 112-36.

43 Karen Woods Weierman, in “Reading and Writing Hope Leslie: Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s Indian ‘Connections’,” The New England Quarterly 75: 415-43, characterizes Sedgwick’s novel as “intensely ambivalent” about Indian-White miscegenation, and she traces that ambivalence in part to her family ties. “In writing about the removals of the Pequots and the Stockbridges, Sedgwick creates a usable past, one I believe she hopes will promote a better outcome for the Cherokees. Indeed, just a year before Hope Leslie appeared, Cherokee removal had become a family matter when Sedgwick’s cousin Harriet Gold married Cherokee Elias Boudinot” (434-35).
The liberal philanthropist will not be offended by a representation which supposes that the elements of virtue and intellect are not withheld from any branch of the human family; and the enlightened and accurate observer of human nature, will admit that the difference of character among the various races of the earth, arises mainly from difference of condition. (6)

Although her argument here would seem progressive, the novel itself does not always seem so forward-thinking. The discrepancy between stated opinion and the dramatic realization of the Indian’s demise in the novel—indeed before the novel or even the preface in the short poem that introduces the text—makes Sedgwick a bit difficult to pin down. Sedgwick scholars have struggled to come to terms with her apparent ambivalence, especially when it comes to her stance on individualism. Sandra Zagarell, for example, argues that Sedgwick’s focus on communitarianism was progressive: “Sedgwick negotiated among conventions of the historical romance and other popular genres to portray the state the Puritans founded as one that exterminated Indians and oppressed women. . . . [S]ome women deliberately extended official definitions of the nation to imagine an America grounded in inclusiveness and communitarianism” (225).

Maria Karafilis, however, takes a more tempered stand upon this controversy, maintaining that *Hope Leslie* shows the complexity of the individual working within and for community well-being. Instead of individualism on the one hand and communitarianism on the other, Karafilis argues that Sedgwick instead takes a stance of “racial democratic individualism” (329). Thus, the novel demonstrates the complexity of the individual within and among communities, but it also both “critiques” and “advocates some of [Jacksonian Democracy’s] philosophies” (333). Karafilis argues that the novel shows that there can be negotiation between difference and that “each subject or citizen participates in multiple communities that change, evolve, overlap, and sometimes conflict, each community possessing perhaps a different conception of the common good” (332). The evidence she cites is from the main narrative and about Magawisca’s sacrifice and various characters’ abilities to move within and between Indian and White worlds. She does not consider the prefatory materials or external features of the text in this reading, although she acknowledges “disturbing moments of ambivalence in [the] treatment of race in the development of the US nation” (341). One of those disturbing moments is Hope Leslie’s reaction to her sister’s marriage to Oneco; another is Magawisca’s decision to leave and move westward.

In her Preface, after a short description of the characteristics of the pilgrims, Sedgwick describes “the Indians of North America,” another non-differentiated description of Indian character and history. She admits anti-Indian bias in the histories she has consulted, saying that “[t]heir own historians or poets, if they had such, would as naturally, and with more justice, have extolled their high-souled courage and patriotism” (6). Rather than idealizing either pilgrims or Indians, she recognizes the bias in history and takes neither side. This move is strategic in a Preface, of course; she wants her readers to actually read the text. However, it also creates an encompassing history for the nation that elides the injustices and inhumanities done by both colonists and Indians. It is precisely the ambivalence Sedgwick demonstrates in the Preface that makes her dramatized history palatable and digestible to her contemporary audience. Taking a side and dramatizing that side would mean remembering too much. Ambivalence makes
forgetting and (re)membering easier for the nation as a whole. Of course, in the story itself Sedgwick dramatizes history, but the story is a house of mirrored conflicts and characters, and when completed, a certain disruptive ambivalence remains in the novel.

The Interior Preface

My main concern so far has been to examine the paratextual features of two frontier romances and to argue that these fairly standard features hobble, and perhaps completely undermine, the genre’s ability to portray the racial complexities of antebellum America. Both *The Last of the Mohicans* and *Hope Leslie* reveal anxieties about racial mixture and about their selected genre in the paratextual features of the texts. Child’s *Hobomok*, which receives a healthy amount of critical attention but less than either Cooper’s or Sedgwick’s novels, also reveals within its multiplicity of narrative voices the difficulty of portraying a racial history in a particularly contentious racial present. However, the character of her prefatory material (there are two prefaces) is much different than the other two novels. The material is more a part of the story itself than a historical preface, and thus more appropriate to consider as an interior part of the story rather than a paratextual element. Child’s narrative more directly engages the issue of the mixed race child. If nothing else, a mixed child exists in this frontier romance where it does not in *The Last of the Mohicans* or *Hope Leslie*. Still, however, the narrative voices in *Hobomok* illustrate how the frontier romance as a genre is unsuited for challenging the status quo about miscegenation.44

The genre anxiety Cooper and Sedgwick evidence in their prefatory materials and footnotes is similar for Child, but not nearly as pronounced. In part, this is because in *Hobomok*, Child creates vocal layers that instead creatively do the work of Cooper’s and Sedgwick’s external materials. (Cooper and Sedgwick also incorporate different editorial layers in their novels, but they also use external materials). It may also do so because the genre of this text incorporates yet another genre, the gothic, so that the mysterious beginnings of the pilgrims and Indians on the New England frontier are justified. Historical precision is not necessary when hazy mystery is primary.

The title page announces the nationalist import of the novel, proclaiming the nationality and not the actual name of the author. This is the first in a series of masks Child wears, although her authorship was known in Boston soon after its publication. We know from Child’s biography and her own comments about writing *Hobomok* that she decided upon writing a book after reading John Gorham Palfrey’s review of *Yamoyden: A Tale of the Wars of King Philip*45 in *The North American Review*.

Not only does Child mask her own authorship of the novel, but she also masks her sex in her Preface for a number of reasons, says Molly Vaux. One of the most important reasons, she says, is Child’s authentication of her own endeavor. This authenticity is achieved, ironically, through a voice not directly her own. Instead, in the Preface, two men authenticate the novel historically and literally, a move that at that point Child could not have made herself, at least not with much success. Instead, she ingeniously

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creates two framing characters that bridge the gender gap associated with writing serious literature about America. These characters encourage us “to read her preface and her novel as multi-layered texts in which the male personae present . . . a story . . . potentially disguising other stories that more closely reflect the writer’s own cultural experience” (131). The two male friends discuss the project of writing a novel about the early history of America. The one, an editor/agent is the first-person narrator named Frederic,46 and the unnamed male is the writer. Their dialogue provides the typical apologia and praise of previous writers, but by making this a creative dialogue instead of a direct address of the audience, Child achieves authenticity once removed, a safer haven for her as female author of a first novel.

The men’s first important exchange, where Frederic, the skeptical narrator, discusses novels with the writer, describes and acknowledges the literary forbears of the genre—the historical romance—that Child has chosen to use. Frederic says, “‘A novel!’ quoth I ‘when Waverly is galloping over hill and dale, faster and more successful than Alexander’s conquering sword? Even American ground is occupied. “The Spy” is lurking in every closet,—the mind is every where supplied with “Pioneers” on the land, and is soon likely to be with “Pilots” on the deep.’” (3). The endeavor, this narrator-editor believes, is crazy. Paired with this skeptical voice, however, is the response humbly acknowledging the current masters of the genre, Sir Walter Scott and James Fenimore Cooper. The praise heaped upon these two is quite hefty, a near idolization that feels not quite authentic, although traditional prefatory fare. Nevertheless, the writer carves out his own historical and literary space, noting that the history of New England is worthy and has not been covered. Moreover, the motivation is to write both the region (and, by writing the region, write America) and serve as an epitaph. Indeed, the latter motive seems self-serving, and it is a typical literary goal to create novels that are a writer’s legacy for time immemorial. However, we might consider that these two voices make up the narrator of the novel and, perhaps, the self-described “American” as the author. Thus the words ‘I would fain deserve some other epitaph than that “he lived and died”’ (4) may indicate a broader perspective as well, not just the voice of the writer of the preface or the two-voiced narrator of the preface, or even the multi-voiced narrator of the novel as a whole, but instead the cacophonous voicing of “an American” that stands for the American. If this is the case, then the multiple, mirrored narrators in the preface and the novel itself are quite symbolically complicated. They are many versions of America, but they are all white and all male. The ending of the novel, then, should come as no surprise. Neither should the irony that the title character, Hobomok, is relatively minor in importance except as a mirror that reflects Mary Conant or Charles Brown. However, in terms of genre, the multi-voiced narrator is the American author proving his/her worth and value on a literary frontier.

Like Sedgwick in her preface and Cooper in his (and many other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novelists), Child also reveals anxiety about how the text might be read once it has left her hands. The writer in the preface states how the language in the novel has been researched from “the old and forgotten manuscripts of those times” (4), and Child does include a very few footnotes in the novel, usually brief and historical or cultural. The anxiety about language and reception is embedded within the mini-narrative

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46 Child’s correspondence and biography indicate that she traveled to Boston and spoke with her brother, Convent Francis, about writing a New England novel.
of the preface. Generally, the writer in the preface, while concerned with the portrayal of history, is mostly worried about the reception of the novel. Child, through this “young author” reveals her ambition to “rise to the surface with other ephemeral trifles of the day” by stating that such could probably never occur (4), especially because the author has been secluded away from culture (although this was not strictly the case).

This is a crafty way to request a sympathetic reading of the novel, to soften its reception a bit, and to safeguard a female author’s “feminine” reputation because the ambition is negatively stated. The writer-narrator also says to Frederic, “‘If I succeed, the voice of praise will cheer me in my solitude. If I fail, thank Heaven, there is no one, but yourself, can insult me with their pity’” (4). What a challenge! An anonymously written book that practically demands someone figure out who the author actually is. Still, the anonymous author has some time to get a sense of the novel’s reception before owning up to its authorship. It is a brilliant rhetorical move to protect her identity and reputation as an author, as well as carve out space to become the author of America, despite Cooper’s dominance of the frontier romance genre.

The second preface, the first half of Chapter 1, provides further framing strategies that remove the author herself once again from the controversies that might attend the novel. Child’s task, through the narrative voice of male writer of the first preface, is to bridge the historical gap and, in some way, make more believable the tale of New England. Also, her task is to make the narrator an American, to define him nationally and give him the authenticity to describe and comment upon the landscape and history of New England. His first words are: “I never view the thriving villages of New England, which speak so forcibly to the heart, of happiness and prosperity, without feeling a glow of national pride, as I say, ‘this is my own, my native land’” (5). (The embedded quotation is from Scott). There can be little doubt that this novel is a project that Child understands might be popular because of its nationalistic appeal. The narrator appeals to nationalist sentiment through a description of an Edenic national wilderness more suited to nineteenth-century sensibilities about nature than seventeenth-century ones. The description is regional. The narrator includes nature in both the country and the “cultivated environs of her busy cities” (5) as part of an America that is inclusive, although regional. Child creates a sense of inclusiveness and national pride, as well as a connection between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries that, notably, does not include an eighteenth century full of Indian wars.

The narrator also again attempts to carve out literary space for himself in the genre by implementing another national argument, subdued though it may seem. He says:

In most nations the path of antiquity is shrouded in darkness, rendered more visible by the wild, fantastic light of fable; but with us, the vista of time is luminous to its remotest point. Each succeeding year has left its footsteps distinct upon the soil, and the cold dew of our chilling dawn is still visible beneath the mid-day sun. Two centuries only have elapsed . . . . (5)

47 See Molly Vaux, “‘But Maria, did you really write this?’: Preface as Cover Story in Lydia Maria Child’s Hobomok,” 17 (June 2000): 127-40. She argues that the young author “also seems to speak for child when he refers to the seclusion of his life, a possible cover for the sense of marginality that Child would later describe openly in her letter to Rufus Griswold” (132).
Much of Scott’s “Essay on Romance” considers the relative antiquity of stories that inform romance, the folklore upon which it is based. Child’s narrator reacts to the belief that good literature must come from this fount, and he rejects it, as many critics of the time did as well. Genres based on that sense of antiquity, especially including the gothic, were often deemed inappropriate for American literature. Ironically, the “old, worn-out manuscript” (6), old storytellers, and witchcraft in Hobomok are all romantic and sometimes gothic. There may have been no old Italian castles of Otranto, but there were ruins in the form of written language itself. Tapping into a linguistic national memory makes the endeavor of the fiction writer even more important to the project of writing America.

The narrator’s description of the landscape and argument for historically-based fiction transitions into a description of the pilgrims. Like Sedgwick in her preface, Child’s narrator generalizes about the pilgrims and attempts to justify their behavior. Child clearly anticipates a Unitarian argument about the morbid and dour characters of the pilgrims as opposed to the “enlightened” and positive religion of Unitarianism that encouraged good works over predestination. The narrator says: “In this enlightened and liberal age, it is perhaps too fashionable to look back upon those early sufferers in the cause of the Reformation, as a band of dark, discontented bigots. Without doubt, there were many broad, deep shadows in their characters, but there was likewise bold and powerful light” (6). Throughout the text of the novel, however, the narrator clearly struggles with trying to see the pilgrims in such a light and, instead, finds more interesting the conflict that arises because of their “deep mixture of exclusive, bitter, and morose passions” (6). In this early chapter, such struggle shows itself. The “ancestor” of the narrator explains how Mr. Conant found religion, explaining that “the spirit of God moved on the dark, troubled waters of his mind” only after Conant’s ambitions were defeated in England (8). Religion seems to have become an opportunistic disease feeding on his defeat and “troubled mind” instead of being adopted for positive reasons. Another irony in the novel is that it does not completely mitigate the bigotry attributed to the pilgrims: although it portrays miscegenation and even the birth of a mixed-child, the novel quickly excludes its racial identity from national memory.

The narrator reveals a concern for history within the second preface. He cites “authentic” documents (in a style that Poe later parodies) to explain how the story of Hobomok came to him, through “one of my ancestors who fled with the persecuted nonconformists from the Isle of Wight, and about the middle of June, 1629, arrived at Naumkeak on the eastern shore of Massachusetts” (6-7). Of course, the narrator (and Child) feel free to amend the language of that history and translate it for the readers so that we have a version of “authentic” history and not the thing itself. Most important, however, is the relationship between the narrator and the voice of the ancestor, whose story acts as a transition to the main narrative. The voices of the narrator and the ancestor are different, one confident about his place and space in the nineteenth century, the other just trying to get his bearings in a new world. The ancestor is confused, lonely, and anxious about the “new world, whose almost unlimited extent lay in the darkness of ignorance and desolation” (7). He describes how the ship waits outside of the settlement for a wind to bring them into harbor, but there is none. They are dormant, as if in a mystical in-between place between old and new England, which quarantines and then

expunges Old England. When he awakens, the day—and the world—is new and possible. The combination of these narrators in the second preface is important because it makes the seventeenth-century culture more accessible for the reader. For example, the writer-narrator who so clearly delineated a landscape description of the area in the nineteenth century “translates” the ancestor’s seventeenth-century anxiety about the wilderness into positive nineteenth-century descriptions of nature. The reality of the colony, however, changes the ancestor-narrator’s positive disposition into a more ambivalent, observational tone appropriate for a cultural commentator. Together these voices underscore the ambivalence about a topic important to antebellum cultural politics, namely the mixing of races. The novel’s ambivalent tone towards the sexual relationship, however, is less than satisfying.

After a few paragraphs of uninterrupted narration, the reader begins to accept the ancestor-narrator as the primary narrator. But then the writer-narrator interrupts the story to mention editing out an argument between Oldham and Conant, as well as the “detailed business of the day . . . and lastly the theological discussions of the evening” (12). This disruption is odd, especially as it deletes religious discussion where it had so far made it a major topic of the narrative. One effect of the disruption is to remind readers of the multiple narrators involved in the construction of this text; another is to push the story towards the main characters and personal conflicts instead of philosophy. It practically announces that philosophical discussions are absolutely not the point of this novel; relationships that show the character of the nation at that time and during the early nineteenth century are.

So, rather than the Puritan religion, the writer-narrator chooses in the final section of the chapter to dramatize superstition and to create a gothic landscape infused with lore—a direct argument against those who would say (as the narrator-writer likewise asserted at the beginning of this second preface) that America is not old enough to have such stories in its past. The description of Mary Conant’s superstitious chant is decidedly gothic. The narrator, struggling between wanting to stay in New England and wanting to go home—a liminal position—finally decides to pray outside at night. The setting description is gothic: “A shadow was one moment cast across the bright moonlight; and a slender figure flitted by the corner of the house. All that I heard of visitants from other worlds fell coldly in my heart” (12-13). The description of Mary Conant is also dipped in fear: “She rose with a face as pale as marble, and . . . she stept into the magic ring. . . . She looked around anxiously as she completed the ceremony; and I almost echoed her involuntary shriek of terror, when I saw a young Indian spring forward into the centre” (13). Almost defiantly, Child creates an historical lore worthy of the gothic and the frontier romance, yet her adherence after this chapter to the historical romance is what undoes the novel, at least in respect to the portrayal of Indians and their disappearance. The ending the frontier romance requires is previewed at the ending of this chapter: “the sound of [Hobomok’s] heavy tread . . . lost in the distance” (14).

The two prefaces and their three vocal layers ingeniously create ways for Child to bridge the centuries, mold a version of America through history, manipulate the novel’s reception, and carve a place for herself in the frontier romance genre. However, the complicated layering also calls attention to the character of each of those voices. On the one hand, an argument could be made that Child is stating that any story of America takes multiple voices to tell; on the other hand, one might point out that none of those
literate voices are anything but white. The ultimate ambivalence reflected by the multiple but exclusionary voices in the novel emphasizes the difficulty of using one American historical moment to map and create a homogenous nation. Child’s writer-narrator saw a more positive nation during his time, especially compared with the colony during the seventeenth century. However, the novel’s vocal ambivalence also reveals that “historical progress” is a matter of perspective.

**Beyond the Endings**

Such ambivalence is sometimes difficult to accept, and scholars struggle to find an answer rather than embrace the ambivalence. Sabina Matter-Seibel in “Native Americans, Women, and the Culture of Nationalism in Lydia Maria Child and Catharine Maria Sedgwick” argues that the endings of these texts are less important than their interiors because of their use of the sentimental. She worries that so much focus on the novels’ endings may re-inter these novels into the time capsule from which feminist scholarship helped them emerge. Specifically, she believes that reading the endings without considering the subversive and complicated centers of these texts does a disservice to their importance in revealing how the American nation was constructed literarily. She argues that the “common reading practice” for sentimental novels “is to ignore the predictable outcome (marriage) and to concentrate on the development of the independent female character and the subversive subtext of the work” (413). I cannot disagree with her that novels in their entirety should be considered when explaining how they might contribute to a progressive stance especially when considering gender. However, these novels are not primarily sentimental, although they certainly used elements of the sentimental novel (the gothic and captivity narrative). The novels are primarily frontier romance, plot-driven tales in which the end is very important to understanding the political import of the novels. We cannot simply dismiss those endings as less consequential because they used sentimental tropes.

The structure of the novel’s ending—how much it integrates with the style of the rest of the novel—might indicate the relative importance of the ending to the meaning of the text. Also, the textual apparatus, such as prefaces and footnotes, indicates the tenor of the editing and provide context for the novel. In *Hobomok*, for example, the ending seems much less integrated than in either *The Last of the Mohicans* or *Hope Leslie*, so we should consider what that might mean. But we cannot dismiss the ending or even diminish its importance when it comes to a most important characteristic of the novels and the nation—race. More important than miscegenation is the product of such a union, a child that symbolizes the future of the nation.

A cultural fear of miscegenation meant narrative absence for the mixed race child. Either the child was never born, was incorporated into Indian culture, was incorporated into the white society, or was killed. Cooper refuses to allow even the potential for such a child to exist in *The Last of the Mohicans* (he does in *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*). Sedgwick will not let her main characters mix racially, although the potential for a mixed-race child exists in *Hope Leslie* with the marriage of Hope’s sister, Faith, and Oneco. However, that relationship cannot exist within the white colony. Child, on the

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49 Opfermann says that *Hope Leslie* and “Sedgwick’s revisioning of Cooper’s ending through the inclusion of a successful interracial marriage could have teased him into answering with the marriage plot of *The Wept of Wish-ton-Wish*” (37), originally published in 1829.
other hand, scandalously describes the union of Hobomok and Mary Conant, which produces a child problematic for the nation. It is precisely the “tacked on” nature of Child’s ending that emphasizes the primary nationalist purpose of her novel. The ending emphasizes the problem with the mixed-race child rather than integrating and, perhaps, burying its significance within the story. The ending’s textual nature, like the incorporated prefatory materials, calls attention to the mixed-race child’s problematic presence. In this section, I consider two novels that create the presence of a mixed-race child, as opposed to its absence in Cooper and Sedgwick. Hobomok’s conclusion allows for more national potential than Malaeska. However, Ann Sophia Stephens’ very popular, very non-paratextual Malaeska, goes beyond the ending of Hobomok to portray the life of a mixed-race child.

Stephens’ beliefs about politics were tempered and conservative. Direct confrontation was not her style. She believed that getting involved with politics would, according to critic Paola Gemme, “deprive [women] of the moral superiority that had until then constituted their power. If the home was sacred and the world corrupt, it made no sense for women to step into the world” (50). Stephens herself gets involved with public officials, however, and Gemme believes that Stephens's conservatism “may be intended to pacify the qualms of hostile readers rather than being a sincere expression of her mind” (50). Her conservatism may be one reason why her novels are not widely available and why little scholarship, especially of her Indian novels, exists. She was very popular as editor and contributor to Ladies' Companion, in which several of her novels were serialized, including Malaeska (1839; reprinted in 1860 as the first Dime Novel) and Mary Derwent (1838; 1858). Considering the controversy about the “Indian Problem,” we must read Malaeska as a response to building a nation upon Indian bodies, an enterprise often excused by racial science.

On the surface, Malaeska, The Indian Wife of a White Hunter submits to those who would read Indians as “savages,” as Stephens often names them. Before the events of the novel, a white man, Danforth, has married an Indian woman. The novel begins with a group of hunters walking through a serene portion of the forest called “The Straka.” When one of the hunting party presumes an Indian has shot at him, the hot-headed hunter proceeds to follow, brutally kill and scalp the lone Indian. The Indians (whose tribe is never named) then presume Danforth, the titular “white hunter,” has either killed the Indian, condoned it, or helped to cover it up.

The Indians form a mob to capture Danforth. Danforth appeals to the Indians with a tribal bond he feels entitled to through his infant son: “‘Am I not your son--the father of a young chief--one of your own tribe?’” (36). His father-in-law, Chief Black Eagle, cannot see past his anger to consider Danforth’s plea. So, he and his tribe act without

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50 See Edgar Allan Poe, Essays and Reviews (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1984). Interestingly, Poe’s opinion of Stephens’ literary talent was tepid at best. He calls her style “verbose and florid” (1160) and her method “melodramatic” (1159). He says she is “not unskillful in delineations of character,” (1160) although “her plots are not so good as are their individual items” (1160). His praise of Child, however, is strong (1198).

51 Although primarily known as a humorist, Anna Sophia Stephens wrote five novels about Indians. The first, Mary Derwent, was revised between 1838, when it was first serialized in the Ladies Companion, and 1858, when it was drastically revised and republished as a novel. The second, Malaeska was serialized in the same periodical in 1839. Stephens also wrote an Indian trilogy, Ahmo's Plot (1860), Mahaska (1863) and The Indian Queen (1864).
consideration of the facts and are unreasonable and “savage.” We know, however, that Danforth only uses such an appeal to effect his immediate escape. His initial motivation for approaching the chief is to secure the white village, not to mitigate the vengeance the Indians seek by giving up the real killer, Jones. Except for the unnamed chief, Danforth sees the Indians as a group of red men who act *en masse* and represent savagery; they see him as a representative of evil whiteness, which killed one of their own and is part of a town sprawling upon their hunting grounds in “The Straka.” Stephens portrays neither party as particularly honorable or particularly reasonable.

But not all Indians are bad in the novel. During the exchange between Danforth and the Chief, Malaeska remains in the wigwam with her infant son. When Danforth returns and she realizes his intention to abandon her to her tribe rather than introduce her to the white settlement, she endeavors to persuade him to take her with him. Finally, Danforth agrees to return in a week. During the exchange, she accepts her husband’s motivations without question. Although Danforth is embarrassed to claim her as his wife, she is not embarrassed to claim Danforth as her husband. She seems much nobler than either of her father or her husband because her motives are not about greed or pride. Juxtaposing the irrationality and savagery of men with the quiet persuasion and reasonableness of women, Stephens indicts both white and red men’s savagery. The outcome of the battle between the white settlers and the Indians is that at the lakeside, Danforth and the Chief each inflict a fatal wound upon the other. Both sides lose.

Although Malaeska seems nobler, she is at this point still quite innocent. She does not understand hatred and how it is manifested from father to son. When she goes to Manhattan, however, she quickly discovers hatred. Danforth's father assumes that she brought the boy to be left at his house. He assumes the mother will have no further contact. Only under the reasoned urgings of Mrs. Danforth is Malaeska allowed to stay at all so that she can be near her child. The grandfather Danforth cannot understand the mother's bond, and he demands that contact be very limited, for he hates Indians and specifically wants his grandson to reject all that is Indian. This sets up the ending, where the younger Danforth kills himself rather than accept his heritage.

Again, on the surface, having his life, the product of “an unnatural marriage” (253), as Stephens’ narrator calls it, end in suicide seems to advocate a belief that miscegenation is “unnatural” and will end in tragedy for all involved. Sarah Jones, the younger Danforth’s wife, loses someone she loves; Malaeska dies of heartbreak. Danforth's inheritance goes to distant British outsiders because no American relatives exist. Any subversion of the pervasive Indian hatred occurs because we are aware that the grandfather, a representative of many men of that time and of the time Stephens is writing, inculcated the hatred within his grandson. The younger Danforth even acknowledges this after Sarah pronounces his feelings “strange”: “‘It is no prejudice, but a part of my nature . . . . An antipathy rooted in the cradle, which grew stronger and deeper in my manhood. I loved my grandfather, and from him I imbibed this early hate. His soul loathed the very name of Indian . . . . Save for [Malaeska] there is not a savage, male or female, whom I should not rejoice to see exterminated from the face of the earth” (222). It became a “part of his nature” because it was learned, not because it was genetic.

The voice of reason comes with Sarah when she says to her husband, the “baby” Danforth: “You would not have me neglect one of the kindest, best friends I ever had on earth, because the tint of her skin is a shade darker than my own?” The narrator describes
her voice as “sweet and persuasive” (223) and says Danforth would have been “a savage indeed, had he resisted her winning ways” (223). The savage is the man who will not listen to the gentle, subtle persuasion of a woman. The exchange between Sarah and Danforth implies that savagery is defined by how one treats others, not a natural condition of a race, although Stephens certainly adopts essentialist identifiers for her characters, especially when describing Malaeska’s child’s struggles to accept or to deny his “savage” nature. At this point in 1839, Malaeska implies that “savage” is a state of mind, despite the obvious theme of the novel—that Indian blood would taint the nation and result in its suicide. Gemme argues in a Legacy profile of Stephens that she “regarded her novels as instruments of social change” and that she believed it perfectly feminine to suggest. In this power of modest suggestion, if we could but understand it, lies an influence more beautiful than the power we evoke. Men will cheerfully and respectfully act for us, when they would recoil from the incongruity of acting with us; and there is no reasonable project of benevolence that we can devise, which the men of America will not, in their own sphere, carry out. (qtd. in Gemme 50; my italics)

Malaeska, when she speaks with the father Danforth in the wigwam before the major battle, exemplifies this stance, persuading Danforth to return to her despite his embarrassment (among whites) at having an Indian wife. Sarah is also exemplary; she persuades “baby” Danforth to see Malaeska, even though she is an Indian, and to mitigate his response to Indians, at least in her presence.

Nevertheless, because of this savage, hateful “state of mind,” Danforth commits suicide. His death is ironic because his father, when dying near the lake, tells his young wife, Malaeska, that she must not commit suicide as it is a mortal sin. His deathbed wish is that she take his mixed child to its grandfather Danforth and that they both “find God” so they can be together for eternity. Here we have a child who can pass for white, as in Child’s Hobomok. In that text a positive, although hazy, future is posited for the child—as long as its heritage remains buried. But what if that child is forced to remember? In Malaeska, the product of miscegenation, a symbol of the integration of Indians into the nation, remained emblematic of an impossible, doomed future. “Baby” Danforth chooses his fate, in his mind the only option—an unnatural death for the product of an unnatural marriage. Again, inevitably, the Indian and her progeny, no matter the apparent whiteness, are doomed to erasure—this time by a horrific, damned choice.

Even so, neither the white nor the Indian women in this novel have much problem with racial mixtures. Their concerns are the interpersonal bonds of friendship or of mother and child. The men, with their irrational hatred and their homogenization of peoples, remain brutes and savages. For Cooper in Last of the Mohicans, miscegenation was a taboo that could only be hinted at. He would rather kill off his characters than allow them to intermarry in full view of readers, much less have children. In Malaeska, Stephens represents miscegenation, but the overall message seems at least as depressing and as closed as Cooper's. Still, Stephens manages through her female characters to at least partially subvert the apparent message, advocating quiet resistance over outright rebellion.
Stephens’ novel implies that because of the pride and greed of men, celebration of racial difference (and the Jeffersonian notion that America would be a mixture of races) was doomed to failure. In 1839, the opportunities of Hobomok’s offspring were fewer than in 1824. Apparently, the fear of miscegenation had worsened, and so the only outcome for one who learned of his mixed heritage was to make himself absent, since that was only right for the nation. Danforth chooses tragically, but rightfully, to kill himself in the service of nation. Malaeska dies on his grave, a tidy ending for all the ones who dared breech the racial chasm. This ending is much more closed than Hobomok, for the child no longer exists in any form. Nevertheless, as I describe in the following paragraphs, the child in Hobomok never confronts his heritage. He is swallowed up within national history. Neither outcome is particularly good for Indians.

Still, there is a bit of room to consider the fate of Hobomok’s child, especially considering his inclusion in the novel almost as an epilogue. Hobomok, at the end of the novel and through his exchange with Charles Brown, becomes an Indian ghost that haunts the nation. In Malaeska, there is no ghost, no lingering memory except in the form of the story itself. Hobomok reverberates with Hobomok’s present-absence, especially within his son, the embodiment of a story and a sacrifice that cannot be iterated except in the “found” manuscript of the author-narrator’s ancestor. The history that girds this story is important because it authenticates the story, which cannot be done in Stephens’ novel.

Mary must exchange Hobomok for Charles very quickly, although their interaction is marked by a reluctance to speak of the events. Mary admits, “‘My temptations were many . . . . I cannot tell you all now. But at home all was dark and comfortless; and when I heard you too were gone, my reason was obscured. Believe me I knew as little as I care, whither I went, so as I could but escape the scenes wherewith you were connected; but to this hour, my love has never abated’” (148). Mary summarizes her state of mind three years before this time, and the state of her heart at the present time. However, she is unable to re-tell the length of the story. Indeed, she is unable to say much at all, and making her mute is rhetorically necessary to retain sympathy for a woman who married an Indian. “Temporary insanity,” says Matter-Seibel, “followed by regret improves the chances that the reader will forgive Mary’s transgression” (431).

Maddox notes that although Hobomok’s absenting himself suggests that the best and only solution for the “Indian Problem” of the 1820s was removal, Child’s portrayal of the “half-breed child” shows another possibility (102). Charles quickly responds to Mary’s confession of “sin” by turning towards Little Hobomok and echoing the lines Hobomok last says to the child: “‘He is a brave boy’” (148). For what, precisely, is he brave? How can he tell such a thing from looking at him and feeling his hair? Most likely, he is brave for being what he is rather than any particular action of his own, and this is the legacy of his father, the honorable ghost that haunts the novel and the nation. Shortly after this statement, Mary “turn[s] away to conceal her emotion” and Charles announces, “‘Let’s talk no more concerning this subject’” (148). This willful silence does triple duty. It invites sympathy for Charles, who knows Mary is shamed by her marriage to Hobomok, it begins to incorporate Mary’s evidence of miscegenation, Little Hobomok, into the new nuclear family, and, most importantly, it announces a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy for the nation. “‘This subject’” or, later, “‘a subject which was almost equally unpleasant to both [Mary and her father]’” is no longer discussed; the transgressive miscegenation is sublimated, as it is through Hobomok’s sacrifice. Charles describes
Hobomok’s absence as “[t]he sacrifice that has been made” rather than naming the man and resurrecting his ghost (148). The passive voice in this statement underscores the attempt to absent Hobomok from the history of the nation, and, therefore, from the nation itself. Instead of dwelling upon Hobomok, Charles asks the name of the child, Charles Hobomok Conant, an offspring marked by all three participants in the love triangle. He will be called familiarly “Charles” or, formally, “Mr. Conant.” Hobomok’s name remains in the middle, but it is embedded and less likely to be uttered. His name symbolizes how America can incorporate its own Indian history without proclaiming its political problems. Indeed, “[h]is father was seldom spoken of; and by degrees his Indian appellation was silently omitted” (150).

Knowing that the child can pass only in America and not England, Charles “exclaim[s]” that “[h]e shall be my own boy” (149). That ability to pass is the method by which to incorporate Indianness. Child hints at this when her narrator describes how Little Hobomok, at his mother’s wedding to Charles, “peep[s] . . . upon his favorite companion, the laughing little Mary Collier” (149). The implication is that he will perhaps marry her one day, and Indian assimilation will be even further along. Yet, Child also makes a point that the text is a remembrance of the Indian in the nation, a strong part of “a mighty tree, [which] the nations of the earth seek refuge beneath” (15). America, then, is the best, the strongest because of its ability to assimilate difference and memorialize it. Even so, Child could not allow difference to challenge the nation; instead, Hobomok removes himself, sacrificing his happiness conveniently so that whites would not have to dirty their hands and remove anyone themselves. Hobomok’s child forgets his heritage; and that is as it should be, according to the novel.

Again, the ending of the novel is closed. The “right” marriage occurs with the hint of another union that further dilutes Indian blood. Still, Hobomok and his son leave a legacy, buried as it is. Because she breaks conventions of the sentimental novel by not destroying the “fallen woman” (Opferman 33), the quick resolution in the novel is even more emphatic for its departure from the norm. It calls attention to the problems of the mixed-race child; it emphasizes the disruptive potential of Little Hobomok, even though he gradually forgets his heritage. Stephens’ novel leaves little room for discussion. Transgress, it argues, and pay with lives. Transgress in Hobomok and live, but annihilate Indian culture. Not much of a choice.

Closure

Child, Cooper, and Sedgwick each devised methods by which they could be on the literary frontier. They used the forms they knew, conventions of the captivity narrative, the sentimental novel, the gothic, and the historical romance to create a hybrid genre that grew into codification over the next several years. Each self-consciously created and re-created the genres in which they wrote, but their primary form was the frontier romance. Their stories were popular, their subjects relatively new. Their purposes were the same: to create a nation through their literature. Generally, they were successful in creating within novels a heteroglossic space that fostered cultural dialogue about nation. The frontier romance genre in some ways freed them to explore contentious subjects, but it also provided challenges because of its form, particularly to Child and

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52 Opfermann states that “Child’s awareness of the political implications of the Indian question was still undeveloped when she wrote Hobomok” (33).
Sedgwick who wanted to challenge the nation’s patriarchal legacy. These early New England novels created templates from historical materials in order to map their own moment in history, and they participated in a regional creation of the nation. Their participation was problematic, however, and the novels could not weave all cultural threads together using such a conservative genre.

The prefatory materials, the footnotes, and the voicing in the narratives have the potential to disrupt the message of their stories, but, by and large, those materials end up feeding into the popularity of ethnographic description or historical frames. The authors want to inform and to persuade, to glorify and to challenge in order to solidify a nation and create its literary heritage. As relatively conservative novels, they instead often reflect the contemporary popular sentiment about Indians or about race. They do not, as Frank Bergmann says, reflect a progressive ideal of race relations. He believes that “Cora’s being part black in a world that sees the white man triumph over the redskins can have but one message: let us not do unto the blacks as we have done unto the Indians” (125). He believes the enduring friendship of Hawkeye and Chingachgook “becomes the symbol of mutual racial acceptance, an acceptance which today’s ‘black is beautiful’ echoes in calling for not a problematic merging but a rightful coexistence” (125). Bergmann misses the point of the racial politics of the novel. There is no “rightful coexistence” when a nation means eliminating a race, removing it out of sight, memorializing its former greatness and, in fact, specifically denying the possibility of mingled blood and coexistence.
Chapter 4: Unconventional Frontiers

Fortunately, in every age there are readers who prefer the margins to the center.

--Tzvetan Todorov, Genres in Discourse, 1978

By 1839, when Caroline Mathilda Kirkland published A New Home, Who’ll Follow? or Glimpses of Western Life, the western frontier had shifted towards and past the Michigan wilderness in which she and her family settled temporarily. The sheer number of travelogues and romantic adventure stories of the frontier, the “history” and mystique upon which those stories were built, and the myth they created for a “unique” America, were great fodder for satirists. In the frenzy of capitalism (crystallized by Jacksonian democracy) that characterized nation-building in the early nineteenth century, satiric subjects were abundant. Both Kirkland and Edgar Allan Poe used the frontier as scaffolding for their humor. The frontier for Kirkland was an early settlement zone and for Poe a contact-exploration area, although for both the frontier was a geographical space in which the future of the nation was projected. Both writers demonstrate within the structure and voices of their texts, as well as their use and parody of certain genre conventions, the ability to recognize and satirize an American nationalism. The texts themselves, although set in specific frontier spaces, articulate the kind of national hybrid space Homi K. Bhabha describes in “Narrating the Nation.” These narratives, even with their specific critiques of national sentiment, “turn[] boundaries and limits into the in-between spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated” (4). A New Home and The Journal of Julius Rodman open the imaginative space of writing America through parody of frontier writing and satire of nationalism.

Kirkland usually has been regarded as a literary and historical realist for her fragmented novel while Poe’s unfinished serial novel The Journal of Julius Rodman has generally been dubbed a failure in its “imagination.” What accounts for the difference in their critical reception may be that perceived completion is the standard by which they are judged, as well as the gendered expectations leveled at each. Defining the genre into which Caroline Kirkland’s text fits has been a scholarly preoccupation since early reviews of A New Home. Is the text proto-realistic? Is it moralistic satire? Is it romance? Nature-writing? Is it a novel or a series of haphazard sketches? Has she done anything innovative in her rendition of frontier life? Indeed, Kirkland herself specifically attempts to define the contours, context, and thereby, genre, of her own work, offering her influences in the prefatory materials of the text. She seems concerned, even anxious, about her writing and its place in literature. Each chapter, or “sketch” as she calls it, is prefaced with one or more literary quotations, and the literary allusions within each

53 See Steven Watts, The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1987). Watts lists features of early nineteenth century culture that also characterized the country mid-century: “an economy of entrepreneurial capitalism, a social structure rooted in free labor and achieved status, a politics of liberalism, and a bourgeois culture of possessive individualism and self-control” (6).

54 See Annette Kolodny, The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860 (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1984). She maintains that Kirkland’s text was “the first realistic depiction of frontier life in American letters” (133).
chapter are prolific. Apparently both Kirkland and her reviewers have struggled with the
text’s generic placement. Without a literary “place,” Kirkland’s work remained largely
unnoticed or easily condemned by early critics, called simplistic or unnecessarily
scattered. Her text was virtually ignored until the late twentieth century, but surging
interest in female writers and their contributions to American literature has brought A
New Home more positive attention and analysis. Feminist scholars such as Annette
Kolodny, Dawn Keetley, and Judith Fetterly have recovered Kirkland’s work,
discovering worth in Kirkland’s domestic realism and her satire of the male ethos of
exploration and pioneering.

Garnering even less scholarly attention has been Poe’s The Journal of Julius
Rodman, despite Poe’s canonical status in American literature. A similar pressure to
place the text into a particular genre has been the focus of much of the critical work
completed upon the fragment. Early critics of the text trace its sources, and a smattering
of more contemporary critics have attempted a reading of it in the context of
psychoanalysis or in terms of its nineteenth-century satirical targets. Little has been said
about Poe’s satiric fragment beyond tracing its sources in other texts, such as Alexander
Mackenzie’s Voyages (1801), Lewis and Clark’s History of the Expedition under the
Command of Captains Lewis and Clark (1814), Washington Irving’s Astoria: Or
Enterprise Beyond the Rocky Mountains (1836), and Irving’s The Adventures of Captain
Bonneville: or, Scenes beyond the Rocky Mountains of the Far West (1837).55 Rather than
attending to Poe’s satirical commentary of the frontier and parody of frontier writing,
influential Poe scholar Burton R. Pollin has focused upon Poe’s sources for the text, as
well as his failure to produce a travel story as strong as The Narrative of Arthur Gordon
Pym. No extended discussion of the text has addressed how its generic satire—indeed its
generic marginality altogether—underscores its biting cultural commentary.

Scholars have never compared the two works textually, although they have often
mentioned Poe’s admiration of Kirkland in his column in Godey’s Magazine and Lady’s
Book entitled “The Literati of New York City.”56 There is no evidence that Kirkland
influenced Poe or vice versa; nevertheless, commonalities exist between Poe’s Journal of
Julius Rodman and Kirkland’s A New Home that indicate some shared satirical
perspectives about nationalist sentiment. Both texts are glorious failures in some respects
because, although they utilize conventions of frontier narrative, they cannot completely
dismantle those conventions. They are mired in the quicksand of genre and cultural
expectations.57 Nevertheless, through fragmentary narrative, as well as embedded,

55 For reviews of Poe’s probable sources, see Burton R. Pollin, Collected Writings of Edgar Allan Poe
(Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981); Wayne R. Kime, “Poe’s Use of Irving’s Astoria in ‘The Journal of
Julius Rodman,” American Literature 40.2 (1960): 215-22; Polly Pearl Crawford, “Lewis and Clark’s
Expedition as a Source for Poe’s ‘Journal of Julius Rodman,’” University of Texas Studies in English 12
(1932): 158-70; Arlin Turner, “A Note on Poe’s ‘Julius Rodman,’” University of Texas Studies in English
10 (1930): 147-51.

8. Poe says, “Unquestionably, she is one of our best writers, has a province of her own, and in that province
has few equals. Her most noticeable trait is a certain freshness of style, seemingly drawn, as her subjects in
general, from the west. In the second place is to be observed a species of wit . . . . Her perceptive faculties
enable her to describe with great verisimilitude. Her mere style is admirable, lucid, terse, full of variety,
faultlessly pure, and yet bold—so bold as to appear heedless of the ordinary decora of composition.”

57 In fact, Tzvetan Todorov says in Genres in Discourse (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990) that “Poe is . . .
in every sense a writer of limits—which is at once is principal merit and, if one may say so, his own limit.
constructed autobiographical narrators, both Poe and Kirkland exploit writing conventions of frontier travel narratives of exploration and settlement to satirize a sentimentalized view of frontier America and the flawed philosophies of homogeneity and power upon which such nationalist sentiment was based. Further, these narratives serve to highlight the importance of writing the frontier and of molding the west for the creation of multiple American nations. A century and a half after their publication, we can appreciate how these texts illustrate the frontier and literary chaos that characterized an America struggling to define itself beyond its official state documents. I divide this chapter into three main sections. The first focuses upon how Kirkland and Poe structured their texts in mimicry of the frontier genre. The second section emphasizes how narrative voices disrupts the narrative and serves to satirize frontier politics. The final section illustrates how the texts reflect upon genre and its ideological connection to the frontier.

**Fragmenting the Frontier**

The frontier in Poe’s text is imagined as place of contact with other cultures; Kirkland’s text imagines it as a place where very little order exists until imposed upon it by “civilized” people. Both Poe and Kirkland create a frontier in which chaos reigns, and this content is revealed in the structure of their texts. The structures of both *A New Home* and *The Journal of Julius Rodman* rely upon episodes, a system that has often worked to create verisimilitude in autobiographical texts, whether apparently fictional or seemingly non-fictional. Kirkland’s narrative stands as a completed work, yet uses sketches as an explicit strategy of textual construction. Because of the satirical nature of both of these novels, the use of the fragment should be as suspect as the “straight talk” of the characters. That strategy of fragmentation underscores the satires of Kirkland’s text, emphasizing the chaos of the frontier itself and the disordered lives of pioneers. Poe’s text, despite its reliance upon the diary format of dating entries, generally relates the action of the narrative in short adventurous encounters or Rodman’s digressive philosophies, often broken into by the “editors” of *Gentleman’s Magazine*. Structural fragmentation in these texts may have other purposes as well; however, because satire is so important to these texts, it makes sense that the structure of the narratives emphasizes the satire. Like Kirkland’s text, *The Journal of Julius Rodman* underscores how the conventions of western writing idealize the physical and philosophical difficulties of exploration and settling. One effect of satire is to emphasize the contradictory nature of narrative, and when the explicit subject of the satire is the quirks of frontier life, we should consider the broader implications of the satire as well. Because the frontier was a space through which the nation was written, its ties, as a genre, to the nation are important. Both Kirkland’s and Poe’s disruptive satires of the conventions of western writing illustrate the complex relationship of frontier to nation; and the satires ultimately reveal a construction of the nation.

*A New Home* is difficult to categorize, and every reviewer of Kirkland’s narrative has attempted to do it or explain why it cannot be done. One reason is because

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A creator of new forms, an explorer of unknown spaces, yes; but his production is necessarily marginal” (102).

Kirkland’s narrator self-consciously tries to categorize her own text as uncategorizable, thus calling attention to its genre and form. Nathaniel Lewis says that “Kirkland did not break established forms of writing so much as quietly defamiliarize them. The result is an author who positions herself among a number of different discursive models, and a text that resists easy codification” (63). Is it early literary realism? Historical realism? Autobiography? Fiction? Non-fiction? In a Legacy profile about Caroline Kirkland, Stacy Spenser labels A New Home “autobiographical in its outlines,” but “concerned more with social conflicts than with Kirkland’s personal experiences in Michigan” (133-34). Partially because of a wiggly narrator who “humbly” refuses to acknowledge any genre beyond the sketch (as if Irving and others did not help establish this genre as well), and partially because of many critics’ predisposition to prefer the “unified” text, A New Home defies categories and uses many.

Henry Nash Smith comments in his book Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth that Kirkland’s structure in any of her western writings was not “adequate . . . . She could not discover any dependable plot structure except a love story, and her lovers develop toward the stereotypes of the sentimental tradition” (227). Moreover, he argues, Kirkland “demonstrated that the agricultural West offered interesting and even challenging themes for fiction but she could not find a satisfactory method for dealing with them” (227). Although noting Kirkland’s use of romance stories is a valid observation, Nash reveals his own bias towards a “unified” text through his commentary, and he ignores the narrator’s commentary about structure. Caroline Gebhard, on the other hand, maintains that the “bold” mixture of “genres and styles . . . suggests that social and psychic dislocation are finally only representable in a form that allows for anger and grief to be transmuted into laughter” (163). (The “anger and grief” the narrator would have felt from leaving all she had known in the east to “rough it” on the frontier). The book, she says, “is more than the sum of its parts: assimilating travel writing, sentimental fiction, and literary and social criticism [that]…enabled [Kirkland] to claim the right to satirize democratic nation-building” (163-64). Indeed, A New Home remains a marginal text, because of its structure, not because of its satire. If anything, the satire made the book more marketable because of controversy regarding its perceived personal attacks.

Successive chapters in the narrative are not chronological. In fact, the narrative persona, Mrs. Clavers, bemoans her own ability to write in such a fashion. Not until Chapter 21 does she mention the rival town, Tinkerville, although it figures into the conception of Montacute early in the town’s history. In the preface, Mrs. Clavers admits that the episodic nature of her narrative comes from Mary Russell Mitford, an English woman who writes in a similar style of sketches and focuses upon a small-town, domestic frame. Later she says she “wish[es]…that so fertile a theme had fallen into worthier hands” (4), and then again names Mitford. She claims no other sources influenced her structure. Indeed, the text is episodic and sketchy even within the sketches. With most
she consciously sets out with a lesson to impart, and if she appears to get off-topic, she announces that she has done so, as in a chapter about lending. Yet even in her tangents Mrs. Clavers sticks to the lesson. In fact, the digression—the story—often is the lesson. In Chapter 18, the epigraphs give away the topic of the sketch. From William Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* is “Lend me your ears” and from Charles Colton’s *Lacon* is “Grant graciously what you cannot refuse safely” (67). Mrs. Clavers begins the body of the chapter with a grievance about borrowing that illustrates her disdain for the communal mode of living: “Whoever comes into Michigan with nothing, will be sure to better his condition; but wo [sic] to him that brings with him any thing like an appearance of abundance” (67). She then lists a number of decontextualized examples—very short sketches—of neighbors who borrow. Basically, they take the form of biting jokes. She interrupts this tirade of jokes stating her intention not “to write a chapter on involuntary loans” (68). Of course, by stating her lack of intention, she emphasizes just that topic. The example following is simply another extended joke that ends with a shockingly rude request to the baby’s mother: another woman wants to “borrow” her baby. This chapter encapsulates a series of shorter sketches and one longer sketch within the entire textual framework of sketches. The final direct lesson is indeed about involuntary loans; the indirect lesson is about disjointedness of writing. Mrs. Clavers teaches a better lesson by offering a lot of evidence and keeping readers from the sympathy a more involved story might create.

Many lessons follow from the fragmentary and episodic texture of the narrative. One of the most important is to teach or warn about the reality of the frontier, to strip idealism from typical descriptions of the frontier. In Chapter 12, for example, Clavers explains the construction of a frontier home. Like adventurous episodes that pepper frontier writing, this chapter is another requisite convention because it centers upon the methods by which a log cabin is constructed. Typically for this narrative, however, Kirkland makes the episode less about the how of construction than the why of the frontier at all. She bitingly describes the stops and starts of building, as well as the haphazard planning and workmanship of the house. The lurching movement of this work seems a commentary about the form of *A New Home*, and reveals, perhaps, Kirkland’s own frustration with writing in fits and starts while also juggling work of the home. Then Mrs. Clavers changes the focus onto a domestic task of putting her household in order. After moving into the home of the builder while he transfers to the cabin he raised, Clavers, in her haste, orders her family’s belongings taken to the recently vacated “cottage.” She comments upon the details of the scene and her own role as someone “engaged in the seemingly hopeless task of calling order out of chaos” (42). This stands as a frontier philosophy indeed, where most of the book is an attempt to demonstrate the chaos of the frontier and to impose a type of control over it. Ultimately, Clavers says she fails in this task because she can only write in sketches. Settling the frontier means creating civilization or imposing order upon chaos. The writer’s task is similar—to create an ordered narrative world from the multitude of what Bakhtin calls “extraliterary” forms

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60 Fetterly argues that when Mrs. Clavers says “the bent of my genius is altogether towards digression. Association leads me like a Will-o-the-wisp,” Kirkland “parodies the assumption that women’s art has no form because women have no wills, and she suggests instead that one consider the special ‘genius’ of digression” (123).
(such as letters or anecdotes, for example). The form of this narrative mirrors the content of the frontier life and demonstrates a realistic struggle to civilize raw country.

In this task she finds she must have help, and so she calls upon settlers already able to determine necessity from desire. Mr. and Mrs. Jennings assist her in creating some order in her temporary domicile, yet Clavers finds herself exhausted and displeased with the chaos in her home. Mr. Jennings returns to help the next day, commenting how he thought she’d be wishing that she had waited for her husband to return from the city before embarking upon “calling order out of chaos.” Clavers again digresses about Jennings’ quaint description of Mr. Clavers as her “old man.” This digression is important because, again, Clavers calls attention to the verbal, to translation errors among classes, and to her own text by breaking into the short episode of her domestic organization. The focus of this short digression is language, but also the respective places of men and women. Men are generally absent from the home; the home is woman’s province. Although only a few sentences long, the digression ripples recursively at the end of the chapter when Clavers admits to being glad for her husband’s return. This episode demonstrates, like much of the text, that the genius of the story-telling is in the digressions, the story-breaks, and the embedded philosophical commentaries about frontier survival and settling. The repetition of breaks seems a method of text unification, although the digressions are not precisely regular. Regardless, we can take her lesson about the frontier and America, about how through national “digressions” about the frontier, the nation has defined itself.

Although Poe’s text is unfinished and is not intentionally fragmented (Poe’s break with William Evans Burton ended the Rodman series), it nevertheless exists as a fragment. Stephen Mainville argues that “the literal and metaphorical ‘frontiers’ of [The Journal of Julius Rodman and The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym] are crucial if we are to understand their fragmentary form, their ‘enactment of meaning, and the conjunction of form and action—the self-consciousness of writing’ (347). Beyond the fact of its serial publication, the text exists dually as journal/diary and edited document. Diary entries marked by date indicate the episodic nature of the document, which the editorial apparatus enhances because of its intrusiveness. The entire first chapter is devoted to setting up the frame for the narrative journal, and so it ironically calls attention to the createdness of the text itself. This does not make it appear false; instead, it may seem more authentic because of the complex prefatory material. However, it does make the frame an important part of the satire, and it is the line between what seems real and what is clearly false that Poe attempts to straddle here. Most important to the first chapter is the description of the text’s fake history, created to establish the document as authentic. The first chapter also creates the space both literally and figuratively to define a nation. The “editors” call attention to maps and the great “unexplored region” upon them (521) and the “wide tract which is still marked upon all our maps as unexplored” (524). Indeed, the “editors” directly address the reader to consider current maps of North America (524). The narrative frame provides the imaginative space for Poe, through the “editors” and Rodman, to create a satiric frontier history for a more contemporary 1830s nation.

The initial frame, besides providing a chronological, spatial, and imaginative map for the “journal” that follows, also provides the sources for the text. No matter how these sources are framed as evidence that Rodman was the first to traverse the continent towards the Pacific Ocean, they offer up Poe’s sources and, in the case of using “Mr. J”
(Thomas Jefferson), provide Poe room to maneuver the fiction within a history frame. The hoax, then, is set through the beginning frame of history. The history, of course, is on the whole false, yet it is cobbled together with established historical facts drawn from Lewis and Clark, John Jacob Astor, and Stephen H. Long, among others. The lengthy listing of sources and the establishment of dates is presumably to establish the truth of the fiction following, yet it also ironically calls attention to how Rodman’s “journal” cannot stand alone. The explanation must occur before it can be revealed to readers in part because of Rodman’s mental condition, but also because of its textual history and the many other “fake” very first travels (as Rodman’s “editors” call them) across the country by “civilized man.” There was obviously a market for such accounts, so the need to establish the factualness of this journal was paramount.

In addition to the editorial frame is Rodman’s biographical frame. It is unmarked by dates as is the journal itself. It generally flows chronologically and follows Rodman’s family history and connection to exploration. Then Rodman introduces his crew and describes his starting place on the Missouri River. Not until the third chapter does the “story” begin. Until then, the frame has emphasized as the text as an edited object. This serves Poe’s purpose to make the story seem real, but, again, it is potentially disruptive to that verisimilitude. At the beginning of the third chapter the “editors” begin the narrative, summarizing the first portion of Rodman’s journey. Thus, by the time we should have been reading the thing itself, we instead have been reading editorial versions of it. The effect is that we become hyper-aware of textual issues at the same time we feel editorial wheels spinning. Perhaps this is a reason why Poe’s hoax ultimately failed; this awareness of structure ironically underscores the createdness of the text. Besides the prefatory and summarized material, the footnoting apparatus lends apparent objective credibility to what Rodman merely describes. If readers also consider Rodman’s narrative voice, they should gradually come to realize the hoax is part of the satire.

Hoax and satire are not necessarily antithetical, although they appear to be because satire must seem invisible if a hoax is to work. They can be parallel objectives if one conceives of the audience as at least dual. One would get the “inside joke” of the satire and recognize that the hoax is also a joke on readers who can’t recognize Poe’s satiric targets. (I argue that those targets are associated with the greed and crassness of Jacksonian political philosophy). The other audience would accept the hoax as true and probably be quite irritated when, if the hoax was ever revealed. And, of course, there would be all types of readers in between. If readers recognize the satirical import of the text, then they can map the complex structure of the text onto the targets of his satire, particularly the writing of the frontier and the relationship of that writing to the writing of the nation. Poe attempts a hybridization of hoax and satire genres; clearly it did not work well enough to be codified into a new genre. Perhaps part of the reason is that it would take a great number of very patient and sophisticated readers to recognize the frontier genres Poe parodies and the associated ideologies associated he satirizes.

61 See Edgar Allan Poe, The Brevities: Pinakidia, Marginalia, Fifty Suggestions, and Other Works (New York: Gordian Press, 1985). Consider his comment upon truth and history in his marginalia #31: “It is a deeply consequential error this:--the assumption that we, being men, will, in general, be deliberately true. The greater amount of truth is impulsively uttered: thus the greater amount is spoken, not written. But, in examining the historic material, we leave these considerations out of sight. We dote upon records, which, in the main, lie; while we discard the Kabbala, which, properly interpreted, do not” (138; Poe’s italics).
Often the narrative the gaps are filled partially by the “editors,” again calling attention to the text although summarizing the story. A case in point is when the “editors” relate the beaver episode. The intrusion is embedded within a chapter, and it is extensive despite the “editor’s” statement that Rodman’s “account of this singular animal is highly interesting—the more so as it differs materially, in some points, from the ordinary descriptions” (544). A beaver episode, a standard trope for the western exploration/anthropological journal genre62 (not unlike Lewis’s and Clark’s *History*), is requisite for Poe’s hoax. At the same time, however, Poe does not allow it to be told in Rodman’s voice. The editorial intrusion, then, again emphasizes text over the embedded adventure story, and it further fragments the overall document. After summarizing the beaver incident, the “editors” emphasize the text again, ironically calling attention to one of Poe’s sources. “The account given here of the method employed by the beaver in its wood-cutting operations, is more circumstantial than any we have yet seen, and seems to be conclusive in regard to the question of design of the animal’s part . . . . Captain Bonneville, it will be remembered, discredits the alleged sagacity of the animal in this respect, and thinks it has no farther aim than to get the tree down” (546). A bit later in the same extended editorial intrusion, the “editors” mention Lewis and Clark as well. The remainder of the chapter includes three dated entries in Rodman’s voice.

The journal is obviously broken into tiny pieces via dates, but those mini-fragments do not elide the gaps in time between the dates. The chapter following the beaver account63 begins with a lengthy editorial intrusion. The journal entries are embedded. The chapter ends with a significant editorial comment: “We omit the adventures of Mr. Rodman from this period until the tenth of April. By the last of October, nothing of importance happening in the interval, the party . . . built a log fort and took up their quarters for the winter” (560). The “editors” then quickly summarize how Indians visited them during the winter in “perfect friendliness” (560). This intrusion is significant because it shows that Indians, unless violent, are virtually ignored in stories of the west. The amount of text-time devoted to the friendliness is minimal, edited out of our experience of Rodman’s story. In this way, the structure emphasizes Poe’s consistent satiric message about Indian policies. As Susan Scheckel argues, it is the Indian that America writes about in order to write itself (*Insistence* 4).

The text acknowledges also the fragment as a Romantic concept, as well as its relationship to a pre-history for America. If such a pre-history is acknowledged, then the moral ramifications of a policy of wiping out the bearers of that pre-history (the Indians) must be considered. Although set in America’s early history, the narrative reflects Poe’s contemporary culture, specifically policies regarding Indians and their “removal.”

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Whether Poe intended the Journal to be a fragment or not does not matter. The result does. As both hoax and satire, the text illustrates through its structure a complex culture with contradictory polities and moral codes embedded. In part because of its satiric goals, categorizing the text as journal or novel or series of fragments is difficult, defying strict categorization via genre and reflecting a greater inability to categorize the frontier as easily conquerable or easily American. Thus, this Poe text will likely always remain marginal, despite the canonical status of its author.

Also marginal, A New Home’s fragmentary structure seems particularly appropriate considering Kirkland’s satirical targets, especially individualism and its relationship to a unified concept of America. The ethos of individualism presupposes that a single entity exists unified—if mentally healthy. The same is true of a text. It seems healthier if unified, better if without gaping cracks exposing its fictionality. Through her narrator, Kirkland calls attention to the createdness of her text, its very fragmentary nature. Poe, on the other hand, fills inevitable narrative cracks by using a narrator with a flawed psyche (as we’ll see in the next section), although evidence of the cracks remains. Both narratives, then, acknowledge—at least implicitly—the impossibility of wholly unified narratives. The effect of the combination of the satire of language and writing with the satire of political philosophy is a biting reflection upon the mythology of a unified, egalitarian, individualistic America. These two frontier texts show, in the parallel between their satirical subjects and their structures, a fragmentation of nineteenth-century culture, the impossibility of a strictly equal society, and the importance of articulating the ambivalence and “in-between” Bhabha insists is so important to defining the nation as a whole.

Hearing Voices

Both Poe and Kirkland satirize extreme individualism and western idealism through the voices of their narrators and the authors’ own distance from the texts that they create. Too many critics have ignored how the narrative voices in each of the texts interact with the satire itself. Thus, they miss critical information that points to satirical targets in the case of Poe’s Rodman or they unnecessarily conflate narrative voice and author in the case of Kirkland’s Mrs. Clavers. In The Journal of Julius Rodman, both the “editors” and Rodman establish distinctive voices that create the cultural satire, yet no one considers either the voice of Poe himself. On the other hand, critics have had a difficult time placing Kirkland’s text generically in part because Kirkland’s biography generally coincides with Mrs. Clavers’ experiences. Thus, most have decided that A New Home, Who ’ll Follow? or Glimpses of Western Life is generally realistic, thinly-veiled autobiographical satire. Regardless of the authors’ relative distance from the subject matter, however, both texts emphasize voice to achieve their satiric aims. Kirkland’s text

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64 Often such conclusions about the relative distance between author and narrator are stated or implied. Gebhard, in “Comic Displacement: Caroline M. Kirkland’s Satire of Frontier Democracy in A New Home, Who ’ll Follow?” begins her article by focusing on the distance between author and narrator. However, while discussing class issues in the text, she assumes that the author is the narrator: “[W]hat is clear is that the ‘republican’ attitude [the maid] represents arouses strong and contradictory feelings in the author” (171). David Leverenz in Manhood and the American Renaissance designates “Mrs. Clavers” as “Kirkland’s pseudonym” (151) and calls the narrative a “thinline fictionalized portrait” (152). Nancy Walker, in The Disobedient Writer: Women and Narrative Tradition, labels the text “thinline disguised autobiography” (174).
employs a single narrator, unlike Rodman where the mock editors of the journal create at least one more additional layer. That layer is another type of authoritative source, and both texts rely heavily upon literary sources to add veracity to their fictions. Using intrusive narrators and abundant sourcing, both Poe and Kirkland satirize the nationalist tendencies of the United States and demonstrate through language how uneven voices mock the morally uneven policies of the state. The result is to untether readers enough from the fiction of a single narrative voice to confront and consider the disjointedness and the marginality of frontier policies, as well as frontier narratives. Beyond the specific policy satire, however, the voices open a space in which it is possible to ponder the importance of the west to a stabilized definition of America.

Kirkland’s Mrs. Clavers shows her growth from a naïve, idealistic easterner to a more realistic advice-giver and westerner. Her mental state is never in question, but her many motives show a complicated identity. Although David Leverenz unnecessarily conflates Mrs. Clavers’ voice with Kirkland’s intentions, he convincingly argues that the narrator’s “voice is double . . . . Within that doubleness lies further doubling, as she positions herself above as well as within the world of fashion, while touting the common sense of her new neighbors” (154). I would argue that the doubleness Leverenz describes indicates a narrator between “the world of fashion” and the “common sense of her new neighbors,” not simply “above” and “within” it. The space between is difficult to negotiate without annoying someone, and both the narrator in the text and Kirkland anger her Michigan neighbors. Also, Mrs. Clavers is on the margin as she is literally on the frontier between physical places, social classes, written genres, and narrative authorities. At times Mrs. Clavers finds herself a negotiator between neighbors, as when a neighbor wants to borrow another neighbor’s baby. By writing this text, Kirkland is a negotiator between the eastern fantasy of the west and its reality. The narrator’s and author’s “in-between” positions are similar, but they are not the same person. Furthermore, Leverenz maintains that Mrs. Clavers/Kirkland “is hospitable yet superior to everybody . . . and that should be the mark of a true lady . . . . [T]rue ladyhood can thrive on the egalitarian American frontier” (154). Yes, Kirkland creates Mrs. Clavers in part to show how healthy pride and ladyhood can coexist on the frontier—but not without serious issues. Those serious issues—specifically the image of egalitarianism of the frontier—are the major targets for laughter. Kirkland also creates Mrs. Clavers as multi-vocal in order to parody the many problems with 1830s American beliefs about the western frontier. Regardless Leverenz’s claim that Kirkland’s novel was a survival manual for “ladies” on the frontier, Mrs. Clavers’ voice is not Kirkland’s voice.

Moreover, the doubled doubleness of the narrator’s voice is not static and simplistic, as Leverenz implies. Mrs. Clavers develops; she does not simply slip on different hats according to her satirical target at the time or in a particular sketch. Robert Bray notes the development of her character, “though she is not vouchsafed much awareness of this process” (13). He explains that “[a] woman who regards migration on the frontier as a sentimental journey in the mode of Sterne, Mrs. Clavers has quite a bit to learn. But learn she does” (14). Mrs. Clavers is at once patronizing and self-effacing, sometimes recognizing her own growth from naïve eastern immigrant to more experienced settler and sometimes not. We can tell from the tone of the following passage that Mrs. Clavers is reflecting upon her experiences as she relates them, and that she is giving advice from experience, often appearing patronizing. In her frontier
adventure with a snake, she reflects upon the lesson the incident taught: “The entire limb [of the snakebite victim] was frightfully swollen and covered with large livid spots ‘exactly like the snake,’ as the woman stated with an air of mysterious meaning….I found it difficult to trace the resemblance between its brilliant colours, and the purplish brown blotches on the poor boy’s leg. But the superstition once received, imagination supplies all deficiencies” (17). Apparently, Mrs. Clavers’ new neighbors are stupid, uneducated fools. At another time Mrs. Clavers relates this important advice, especially for surviving public opinion: “I have since learned many ways of wearing round which give me the opportunity of living very much after my own fashion, without offending, very seriously, any body’s prejudices” (52). In this instance she clearly marks the time between her early naïveté and her later awareness of frontier reality. She appears to be the expert.

Yet notably in the preface, Mrs. Clavers calls the forthcoming narrative a “rude attempt” (2) and in the first chapter maintains that she writes only because her friends’ questions motivated her. Mrs. Clavers professes external motivation for writing. She continues to appear humble as a writer, calling the narrative “ordinary pen-drawing” and “desultory sketches” (3). Moreover, throughout the text Mrs. Clavers continues to disrupt the continuity of her own narrative and her authoritative voice by using self-effacing speech. She occasionally breaks into her own story to announce how she had not written well enough: “I feel conscious that the truly feminine sin of talking ‘about it and about it’” (82); or how she must maintain a moral silence on certain matters: “[W]e must draw a veil over what followed—as the novelists say” (70); or how she rambles in her writing: “But this is mere wandering. Association led me from my intent” (132); or how she tends to “colour” her writing: “I like to amplify” (132). She, apparently, cannot consider herself a novelist, either because she is relating “true” events or because she is only a writer of rambling “sketches,” unworthy of the title of novelist. Nothing was stopping Kirkland from rewriting those ramblings into a more unified sketch, despite Mrs. Clavers’ announcement that she does not feel she can escape a “feminine” way of telling stories in a “rambling, gossiping style” (82). During sketches about the Hastings family, in which Mrs. Clavers relates the story of their elopement and travel to Michigan, Mrs. Clavers comments upon Cora Hastings’ age at the time of the elopement and begins to judge Cora’s mother, but stops herself from doing so. Interrupting her own interruption to the story is strange, but the effect is to lend immediacy and to support her statement that she has not revised anything. Mrs. Clavers’ voice is characterized by “wandering talk” (82) and an apparent lack of need to revise her own thoughts. As author, Kirkland certainly had the ability to revise.65 In fact, having Mrs. Clavers emphasize that she cannot go back to revise her thoughts calls attention to the divide between Mrs. Clavers, narrator, and Kirkland, author.

Mrs. Clavers also occasionally abdicates responsibility for her own gossip and attitude, as when she vaguely relates the Newlands’ scandal or points out her neighbors’ “disease brought on by working” by saying she can only “say the tale as ‘t was said to

65 See Nathaniel Lewis, “Penetrating the Interior: Recontextualizing Caroline Kirkland’s A New Home, Who’ll Follow? American Literary Realism 31.2 (1999): 63-71. He states that western writers “explained that they relied on their own letters (and diaries, notes, and journals) written soon after—or even during—the related experience. Such letters implied textual immediacy, an unvarnished relationship with the land and the people, and thus legitimized the author’s work (and self) as authentic” (64). He maintains that Kirkland used this writing context to situate herself as a western writer in addition to writing in a women’s tradition. This does not negate Kirkland’s ability to revise, however.
me’” (62). Mrs. Clavers struggles as advice-giver to determine her appropriate literary voice—should it be self-effacing or should she appear a complete expert? Obviously, her voice is on the border, and it vacillates on each side. Although Kirkland herself may have struggled with a similar position for herself, ultimately giving up and using a pseudonym, I believe the layering of voices is a bit more sophisticated. Mrs. Clavers learns to live within the community by “wearing round”; the negative response to the book by her neighbors indicates that Kirkland may not have learned that lesson as well as Mrs. Clavers. Nevertheless, Kirkland creates a narrator sometimes unaware of her own naiveté and anxious about her own writing ability, indicating that, despite the autobiographical impetus for the text and Kirkland’s surprise that her Michigan neighbors did not appreciate its satire, Mrs. Clavers and Kirkland are not the same entity.

Miss Fidler, a very naïve traveler to the frontier and a relative of one of Mrs. Clavers’ neighbors, serves as a contrasting character to the much more experienced Mrs. Clavers. The contrasts between them illustrate a distance between Kirkland and her narrator as well. Miss Fidler seems a reflection of an earlier Mrs. Clavers. As whimsical as Mrs. Clavers paints Miss Fidler, so Mrs. Clavers was herself at one time. Both wore inappropriate shoes, for example, and both romanticized the nature around them at the expense of providing themselves realistic frontier comforts. Certainly Kirkland may have gone through these experiences, but we simply do not know if she did so in exactly the same way, or if she simply observed a dozen Miss Fidlers. Regardless, Mrs. Clavers does not see herself in Miss Fidler while Kirkland clearly shows the connection between the two. In this way, Kirkland illustrates at this point in the text a continued blindness in Mrs. Clavers that Kirkland herself does not and cannot have at any point as the author in control of her characters and narrative. Thus, although Mrs. Clavers does not see the irony in her description of Fidler, readers do. Kirkland treats her narrator with a bit more distance than most reviewers credit her for.

Mrs. Clavers’ constant reminders of the writing of her text indicate a concern with reception perhaps, but also emphasize the createdness of her realistic text. Leverenz suggests that “Kirkland comes close to acknowledging a certain deliberate falseness in the ‘realism’ of her own style” (163). Yes, Mrs. Clavers admits this is the case not only in chapter thirty, which Leverenz cites, but also in the preface when she admits to “glosses, and colourings, and lights, if not shadows” of the truth (1). Mrs. Clavers then walks the fine line of morally acceptable female writing about a typically male subject, the west. She is at once an observer and a participant in her own text, and she never lets the audience lose themselves completely in one of her “sketches.” Although from Eloise Fidler’s book she “transcribes” (100) collected poetry for the reader, obviously it is Kirkland’s construction. Not only are readers not allowed to lose themselves in the poetry because Mrs. Clavers undermines its quality, but each is interrupted by Mrs. Clavers’ voice and descriptions of the markings in the book. She makes the book seem trivial, yet devotes much space to copying it for the reader. Emphasizing the markings, “a wreath of flowers of gorgeous hues, within whose circle appears in a miminee piminee hand” (100), or “finished elegance, and very sweeping tails of chirography” (101), or a poem “tastefully headed by an engraving of Hero and Ursula” (101), Mrs. Clavers asserts her own authority for textual creation and thereby refuses to allow readers to escape into the story, regardless of its first-person narration. Interestingly, this collection of poems and sketches embedded within the narrative is a mirror of the collectivity of the narrative
itself (and its extolling of community), much as Mrs. Clavers and Fidler are mirrors of one another. Kirkland’s mirroring technique emphasizes the authority of Mrs. Clavers’ voice, yet ironically undermines it as well by calling attention to the fractured structure of the text. In this way, the structure mitigates Mrs. Clavers’ patronizing voice.

Without the distance between narrative voice, the subjects of narration, and the readers, the satire might be less detectable or less pointed, which seems to have been the case with Poe’s text. Nevertheless, even within Poe’s fragment there is enough development of Rodman’s voice for the reader to see the correlation between the instability of Rodman’s psyche and his motives for exploration. This is a method typical for Poe—to show the slow progress of psychological disease. Rodman begins his journal with motives of exploration and commercial success as a fur trader, but eventually adopts exploration as an “idle amusement” that affords him the opportunity to reflect romantically about landscapes, for example. By May of the year following the journey’s commencement the previous fall, Rodman had given up crass commercialism and consciously adopted the guise of a gentleman adventurer. Obviously, such an attitude was a silly way to venture out into uncharted and sometimes hostile territory. Exploration is not “idle amusement”; it takes planning or it can be deadly.

His description of the Sioux illustrates how Rodman’s mental state is unsteady, but also how the U.S. Indian policy is morally decayed. Rodman’s unbalanced voice offers a chance for whites to see the contradictions so important to satire. Rodman insists upon Indians’ savagery, and then demonstrates their friendliness. Supposedly based upon Rodman’s words, the “editors” describe the Sioux as “an ugly, ill-made race” (551), yet Rodman subsequently states they have a “very noble and picturesque appearance” (554). What accounts for discrepancies such as this? One that follows the text’s internal logic is that Rodman’s mind is going further and further astray. Another is that, as Weissberg argues, the doubleness is necessary to reflect satirically upon whites as “liars and double-dealers” (569), a charge leveled at Indians who report about the black crew member, Toby (424). Indeed, Rodman seems to express a “reliable” or unprejudiced viewpoint, while the Eastern “editors” reflect a cultural bias.

We can perhaps more easily see Rodman’s unsteady psychology because of the intrusiveness of the “editors” of his journal. They are supposedly the objective, trusted authority, and Poe appears to be only one of the “editors” who sign their intrusions into the text with the initials “Eds. G. M.” (Gentleman’s Magazine) (528). The “editors’” authority is derived intrinsically from their intrusive “historical” tone, but also from revealing Poe’s sources. And those editors establish a very American persona in that they recover an American colonial and exploration history, a distinct Americanizing activity. The “editors” open the text with an authoritative announcement of its singularity as “an account of the first passage across the Rocky Mountains of the north ever achieved by civilized man” (521). As is usual for Poe, however, these “editors” and publishers of Julius Rodman’s journal allow no way to breach the rhetorical walls of the narrative tower. The “author,” Julius Rodman, has written a text with certain inconsistencies, they

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maintain, which may only be explained by his mental state. That said, almost anything goes. After all, the “peculiar character of the gentleman . . . has imbued what he has written with a vast deal of romantic fervor, very different from the luke-warm and statistical air which pervades most records of the kind” (521). Thus, the “editors” distance themselves from the inconsistencies any reader could find (and does find, especially in the case of Pollin) and ostensibly announce the inescapable fictionality of the text. The apparent editorial distance (of which readers are occasionally reminded when they comment upon Rodman’s prose in various places in the text, sometimes “correcting” spelling or defining terms such as cache) creates a distinct vocal layer that complicates the satire. The editors also establish an authoritative tone by intruding upon the narrative journal entries, adding encyclopedic information where appropriate. For example, the purpose of one intrusion is for the “editors” to explain how Indian mounds “indicate the position of the ancient city of the Ottoes” (540).

The “editors” use the sources ironically to show the supposed factualness of Rodman’s exploration and adventures. In chapter five, for example, the “editors” intrude to comment that a Minnetaree chief “is mentioned by Captains Lewis and Clarke, whom he also visited” (566). Again, the “editors” seem objective because they add factual information, yet they ironically emphasize a source from which Poe draws material. This editorial voice is much the same as James Seaver’s in A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison. It derives authority by providing supplementary, sourced material. Thus, the “editors” seem to be detached, objective scholars. Ironically, the “editors” appear to stabilize audience reactions to the hoax, but they end up destabilizing it by creating a near cacophony in the very first chapter. After this chapter, readers maintain knowledge of the great number of sources that contextualize the journal. Thus, the source listings add to the cultural chaos Poe attempts to illustrate, as well as emphasizing Rodman’s fluctuating mental capacity. Weissberg concludes that “Poe holds the notions of editor and author before the reader’s eyes but produces a game of interchanged identities that create with Rodman an author who has to confirm and cite given texts” (430). As a result, the multiple voices work together to create the text, destabilizing the narrative and any single entity’s authority over it. The text, then, becomes a potentially incredibly complex work of satire or, as Weissberg argues imprecisely, a joke.

Poe must have laughed about the numerous jokes in the text. As an “editor” of the text, he raves over Rodman’s writing style, calling the manuscript a “rich treasure” (524). Of course, this is Poe’s self-worship as author, and it adds another vocal layer to the entire piece, for once the hoax is divined, the jokes and satire abound including poking fun at Rodman’s idealistic, emotion-filled writing. Idealizing nature is the mark of Rodman’s writing style, his voice, in this narrative. In chapter six, for example, Rodman describes “remarkable cliffs” that “their effect upon [his] imagination [he] shall never forget. They had all the air of enchanted structures, (such as I have dreamed of)” (573). He maintains that the cliffs “left upon my own mind an impression of novelty—of singularity, which can never be effaced” (574). “Never” is extreme and indicates perhaps a bit of his irrationality. He describes the sublimity so treasured by the romantic literary movement and devotes a significant amount of text to such descriptions, waxing poetic about “immense and magnificent country” or “glorious verdure” or “countless herds” or “enchanting” rivers (575). Alone these descriptions may seem true, maybe realistic, and not worthy of parody, yet the idealism of Rodman’s voice is often paired with horrifying
rationalizations of violence and murder—all in the name of exploring a blank, white man’s map. The narrative river is full of contradictions between a romantic voice and inhuman/immoral actions, thus destabilizing Rodman’s authority—his trustworthiness—as a realistic explorer and representative American.

Destabilizing the authority of Rodman’s voice serves Poe’s satirical purposes, but it also demonstrates that the west, with the national projection made upon it, must include multiple voices and frontier character types. The western region and its associations with the frontier are crucial for identifying competing interests in the new nation in a way not possible in texts that focus too narrowly on a single region or a single person. Rodman’s character grows more unstable. Clavers’ apparent defensive arrogance, evidenced by how she both belittles her neighbors and extols their ability to reveal the reality of the frontier to the green easterner, becomes a satirical voice often wrongly aligned too closely with Kirkland herself. The vocal texture of both narratives illustrates more of their satires of the frontier and its association with the constructed unity of nation.

**Borrowing**

The emphasis on the created nature of narrative—especially frontier narrative—is perhaps nowhere so clearly delineated as when both Poe and Kirkland borrow from other genres in order to satirize the nation. To different extents, both authors employ the conventions of western writing, especially including the over-praise of nature. However, Kirkland’s focus on the romance genre and the sketch, not surprising due to her perceived female audience, is pronounced while Poe emphasizes, in *The Journal of Julius Rodman*, the conventions of western writing, specifically the obligatory contacts with Indians and wildlife. Poe’s satire of western writing has been minimized, however, by critics focused upon textual sources and “plagiarisms.” Kirkland includes a couple of Indian contact sketches, but the absence of Indian presence in *A New Home* is startling. Moreover, any wildlife contact is minimized, although what is included is hyperbole, common to western adventure tales but translated into the domestic sphere. The project of satire is made most difficult when authors must use and abuse conventions to parody form and nationalistic motives. Associated difficulties may explain why neither text was overwhelmingly successful and why their legacies remain negligible.

Although she announces that Mrs. Mitford (and her use of the short sketch) is the model for the form of her narrative, Kirkland occasionally extends sketches when romance is the subject. Thus, sometimes she creates a series of sketches in which a reader is more likely to fall into the story and disregard the arguments it makes. Yet readers’

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68 See Dawn Keetley, “Unsettling the Frontier: Gender and Racial Identity in Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home, Who'll Follow?* and *Forest Life*,” *Legacy* (1995): 17-37. She notes that Indians are nearly completely absent from *A New Home, Who’ll Follow?*, not surprising because “[t]he cultural work of most frontier writing was to establish and police a rigid separation of the two races, absolutely precluding any kind of movement between them by inscribing the Indian as ‘immobile,’ as crystallized into a certain fixed position and thus—because unable to adapt to change—doomed to extinction” (28). Further, she says, “Kirkland was writing in the context of this mandated separation of the races and so, not surprisingly perhaps, she does not portray her frontier as a place of mutual interchange in terms of race” (29). Evidence of Kirkland’s concerns about the Indian Problem exists in her preface to Mary Eastman’s *Dahcotah: Life and Legends of the Sioux around Fort Snelling* (1849; Minneapolis, MN: Ross and Haines, Inc., 1962) v-xi. Unapologetically patronizing, Kirkland re-stakes literary claim to “aborigines” and their culture in order to preserve and construct America from the remnants of a disappearing race.
escape into the story is impossible. Henry Nash Smith might consider this a lapse into sentimentality, but it is nevertheless a satire of the romantic using a form most familiar to her female readers. After all, it is not as if readers are allowed to escape into the characters and their situations for more than a brief time if at all. Keeping the scaffolding of the story visible, then, calls attention to structure as a concept and makes readers more aware of story-building and, in the frontier context and satire of *A New Home*, nation-building.

Both of the main romance tales Mrs. Clavers relates are hearsay, as she reminds the reader at the end of a series of sketches focusing on another frontier resident, Henry Beckworth. Beckworth’s story focuses upon his romance with his wife and the numerous missed opportunities he had to marry her before finally succeeding and moving to Michigan. Mrs. Clavers introduces readers to the Beckworths in Chapter 23, marking the border of her text and the embedded Beckworth story at the end of the chapter. She says: “I shall here recount what he told me; and, as I cannot recollect his words, I must give this romance of rustic life in my own, taking a new chapter for it” (89). The three subsequent chapters, if extracted from the overall text, would read as a romance tale and nearly remain masked as such. However, Mrs. Clavers cannot help but call attention to the story’s construction. At the end of Chapter 26, she does not close the love story solely with “happily ever after.” Instead, she emphasizes Beckworth’s inadequate story construction with the embedded dialogue between him and his wife, saying that when he finally was able to propose to her, he “began at the wrong end of the story, as most people do in such cases, talking as if it were a thing of course that his twice-widowed love should become his wife” (98). Mrs. Clavers herself does the same thing, showing how happy the Beckworths are in Michigan before relating their story. At the end of the story, Mrs. Clavers again emphasizes its constructedness, and implicates her own story’s potential fictionality: “[B]ut why should I tell the rest, when the reader of my true-love story has already seen Mrs. Beckworth . . . Mr. Beckworth . . . Mary Jane Harrington . . . and George Boon—all flourishing on an oak opening in the depths of Michigan?” (98). Why indeed? What is left for the imagination if readers are told everything? What is left to discover if the frontier becomes a closed space written by nationalism? Asking a question leaves an opening in the closure of the story.

Mrs. Clavers goes on, however, to further open up a story type that is generally closed tight.69 We again are reminded of the potential for fiction in stories: “Let none imagine that this tale of man’s constancy must be the mere dream of my fancy. I acknowledge nothing but the prettinesses. To Henry Beckworth himself I refer the incredulous, and if they do not recognize my story in his, I cannot help it. Even a woman can do no more than her best” (98). This statement is significant when considering the structure of the text altogether and its implications for larger cultural issues. Obviously, this statement regards gender. It makes Mrs. Clavers and Kirkland (as the ultimate story-teller) appear humble women who would never presume to step on male writers’ toes, but also appear to be masters of story-telling intimately aware of the form a romance story takes and how to abridge it. The reader is to blame if s/he cannot see where Mrs. Clavers has embellished. The reader is to blame if s/he cannot see where Kirkland has embellished. The reader is to blame if s/he cannot see the structure of the text, its

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potential failings at telling a “true” story, as well as its satirical targets. How can Smith—or anyone—regard Kirkland’s methods as less than adequate for her purposes?

The second major series of romance sketches regards the Hastings. Like the Beckworths, the series is marked textually in the preceding chapter: “I shall tell, in all due form, what I have gathered from Cora’s many talks” (153). Note the choice of “form” rather than “time,” which underscores her concern about the subject of form. Unlike the Beckworth sketch, the tone is more moralistic and less escapist. Mrs. Clavers is trying to show the best kind of frontier settlers. Thus, she not only frames the story by calling attention to her own construction of it, but she also interrupts the tale many times to comment upon the morality of a certain situation. She sermonizes a bit about parenting: “’T is pity parents can so seldom stop at the juste milieu between weak compliance and severe requisition; but then I should have had no story to tell so it is better as it is” (154). She then interrupts the flow of the story again by relating a bit she heard about how an 80-year-old still thought of his children as “boys” and then calling attention to her digression: “But to return” (155). Mrs. Clavers also inserts fiction into the tale supposedly “based on a true story.” She clearly makes up diary entries for Everard Hastings: “His diary in those days, if he had found time to keep a diary, must have run somewhat on this wise…” (154). At other times she interrupts to go back and fill in a story gap: “I forgot…to say [Cora] was even more deeply tinged with romance than Everard himself” (156). She later comments upon Cora’s storytelling, saying “Oh! What a pretty variety of paradises she wove out of these slight materials” (156). How can any reader make it through the sketch without being reminded of its structure? Not only do many of the interruptions take a reader out of the story to consider Mrs. Clavers’ voice and the form of the sketch itself, they are also reflective of story-telling as a theme so that the entirety of Kirkland’s enterprise must be considered as well. Although the ending of the four-chapter Hastings sketch is more closed than the Beckworth sketch, it nevertheless ends in happiness because of luck, not love. Indeed, Mrs. Clavers leaves open the “most happy” ending: “[The Hastings] imbibed a taste for the wilderness….Visionary still! says the reader. Perhaps so, but to Michigan they came and…they find it possible to exist and are, I had almost said the happiest people of my acquaintance” (169; my italics).

Despite being at the approximate center of the text, these romance tales dismantle themselves and call attention to the createdness of the overall narrative. Moreover, Kirkland devotes an enormous amount of space to relating second-hand romance stories, presumably because she knew her female audience would appreciate such stories. Although the romantic relationships serve moralistic purposes, they nevertheless consume text-time, which inevitably makes them, even with the moralistic context, more important as romances. Realistic the entire narrative might seem, but that is not because of the individual stories Mrs. Clavers relates. The realism exists in the arguments and the satire Kirkland constructs. If readers were allowed to ignore Mrs. Clavers’ interruptions and her own emphasis on writing and form, then the text would not seem realistic at all. Although Mrs. Clavers claims “a veritable history; an unimpeachable transcript of reality; a rough picture, in detached parts, but pentagraphed from the life” (1), she immediately dismantles such statements in the preface and then in the text itself. The “truth” of the narrative comes from its satire derived in part through disjuncture between embedded stories and Clavers’ discourse about text construction or between Mrs. Clavers’ voice and
the subjects upon which she comments. Readers never allowed to lose themselves for long in the stories or in the textual arguments, yet the most cohesive sketches—the romances—are most memorable. We have to face the “reality” of a sketchy physical and literary frontier whose boundaries are ever-changing.

Kirkland exploits the conventions of western writing, especially the idealization of nature. Mrs. Clavers describes the discomfort of settlers who have come from plenty and expect to maintain that lifestyle on the frontier: “They soon find that there are places where the ‘almighty dollar’ is almost powerless; or rather, that powerful as it is, it meets with its conqueror in the jealous pride of those whose services must be had in order to live at all” (52). Kirkland educates her readers about consumerism by ridiculing idealism whenever and wherever she can. Even Mrs. Clavers reveals herself to be idealistic about the west and nature. She wants to observe and record all the wonder of nature in Michigan during the survey of Montacute, but her mission is foiled. She finds herself instead hungry, waiting for men to eat her more “ladylike meal,” when her husband and the surveyor arrive telling her that she has no time to eat and must go away to an inn. She attempts to idealize nature on the way, describing the “softest and stillest of spring atmospheres, the crimson rays yet prevailing” (15). Instead, her hunger darkens her mood and reality crashes in: “[B]ut alas! Who can be sentimental and hungry?” (15). Later she reflects a similar view when she editorializes in the Hastings’ sketch: “To wander over the woody hills all morning with—the poet or the novelist the reader loves best…only makes the unsympathizing body prodigiously hungry” (160). Mrs. Clavers occasionally recognizes her idealism verbally, calling her thoughts about the frontier “floating visions…full of important omissions, and always in a Floridian clime, where fruits serve for vivers” (49). Another time, in a sketch about the weather, Mrs. Clavers describes the sun with a “jolly red face…casting a scarlet glory,” but stops herself before getting too dramatic. Still, though, she acknowledges her textual creation, saying “I will make an effort to regain the floating end of my broken thread” (112). Juxtaposed, these passages underscore how readers are never allowed to wallow in Mrs. Clavers’ (or their own) penchant for romanticizing nature. Mrs. Clavers illustrates a reality of the western frontier.

Naïve women who travel to Montacute to write about and romanticize nature are also ridiculed. Mrs. Clavers is one of these women who insists upon trying to put a romantic spin on nature in the Michigan backwoods. For example, Mrs. Clavers, writing retrospectively, occasionally hints at her naïveté. At one point early in her family’s endeavor to reach Montacute, she mentions, “Much was yet to be done this morning, and I was much too fatigued to wander about the hills any longer” (13). Her choice of “wander” rather than “explore” seems telling. The connotation is an action without purpose instead of the focused work so necessary to settling the frontier—as Mrs. Clavers clearly relates later when she attempts to move her belongings into her own home or to find use for many of the kitchen and dining items she has brought. Perhaps more indicative of Mrs. Clavers’ silly romanticism of nature occurs when she and her family attempt to cross a swampy area on the return to Detroit after the initial survey. Rather than downplaying her idealism, she acknowledges it at the beginning of the chapter: “Our return to Detroit was accomplished without any serious accident, although we were once overturned in consequence of my enthusiastic admiration of a tuft of splendid flowers in a marsh which we were crossing by the usual bridge of poles, or corduroy as it is here
termed” (22-23). And she further contrasts this episode of idealism with the reality of economics. The “hard featured, yellow-haired son of New England” (23) who helps them out of the bog is a traveling salesman whose reward for being a good Samaritan is a sale to Mr. and Mrs. Clavers. His occupation is not ridiculed as harshly as many others who are traders, such as the French trader or Simeon Jenkins, perhaps because of his affiliation with New England.

A later example of nature idealism comes with sketches about Miss Eloise Fidler, an older sister of Mrs. Rivers. Fidler, who Mrs. Clavers implies is an old maid at twenty-eight years, is clearly associated with the Roman Emperor Nero through her name and the saying “Fiddling while Rome burned.” She is also quite unaware of everything that goes on around her; her head is full of romantic notions about the frontier. She visits Montacute and considers it a “peaceful retreat” (99). Of course, by this point, Mrs. Clavers cannot think of the place as such because of the work she must do, yet she was much like Miss Fidler when she arrived. Mrs. Clavers, despite having read much, implies that Fidler’s massive reading explains in part why she is unmarried and flighty. She writes: “Certain it is that it must have taken a good while to read as many novels and commit to memory as much poetry, as lined the head and exalted the sensibilities of our fair visitant” (99). Clavers’ descriptive choice of novels and poetry “lining the head” of Fidler implies that her head is empty save for these words, which seem to be mere wallpaper. Even the description of Fidler’s journal is melodramatic and gaudy: “Her album—she was just the person to have an album—was resplendent in gold and satin, and the verses which meandered over its emblazoned pages were of the most unexceptional quality, overlaid with flowers and gems—love and despair” (99-100). This is a metaphor for Fidler herself, a romantic, unthinking, superficial collector. Mrs. Clavers specifically mentions “Ainsworth and James…and Bulwer’s works,” which, she says, Fidler had only skimmed, as well as Cooper, who Fidler says is “pretty” and Catherine Maria Sedgwick, whose “characters are such common sort of people” (103). Again, this reportage demonstrates Fidler’s lack of critical discernment in Mrs. Clavers’ opinion, as well as her romantic tendencies. She is precisely the type of personality that should never move to the frontier or attempt to write anything about it; Fidler is too idealistic and too unaware of the chaotic frontier. She, and other idealists who write about the frontier, Kirkland implies, are laughable.

Her romanticism of nature, however, comes from her attempts at poetry. Mrs. Clavers describes her ridiculous endeavor: “It was unfortunate that she could not walk out much on account of her shoes. She was obliged to make out with diluted inspiration. The nearest approach she usually made to the study of Nature, was to sit on the woodpile, under a girdled tree” (103). (Mrs. Clavers herself had been a wearer of the wrong shoes when she arrived as well, but she learned from the experience. Fidler does not.) She then mentions how many locals thought Fidler was “‘kind o’ crazy’” (103) because of her single-minded and useless employment while in Montacute. Mrs. Clavers, apparently finding no irony in how she herself has idealized nature in her own writing, decides Fidler is “like a cat in nutshells, alone useless where all are so busy” (103). By this point in the text, Mrs. Clavers knows she must be useful or else risk failing her frontier—and heroic—goal of settlement. Even Mrs. Rivers at this point has grown into a type of frontier Eve through experience, recognizing her sister’s flights of fancy as silly and abnormal. Worse for Mrs. Clavers’ opinion of Fidler is when she acts out of character,
coming to an intellectual debate and going on a walk to the store. She does this because she is enamored with a store clerk because of his last name, Dacre, which appeared in a Benjamin Disraeli novel. Mrs. Clavers disabuses Fidler of the notion that the name is somehow pure, listing a number of corrupted names adopted by frontier Americans, yet Fidler’s crush is not obliterated. Mrs. Clavers becomes the conduit of realism despite her initial naiveté, but this time her negotiating skills do not work because Fidler falls in love. Nevertheless, Mrs. Clavers implies that the whimsical Eloise Fidler, a newlywed at the time of Mrs. Clavers’ writing, has not yet faced the realities of the frontier, much less adopted the realism that Mrs. Clavers and Mrs. Rivers have done. Because Eloise Fidler’s adaptive abilities are untested by marriage, her recognition of the real frontier—a work-intensive, uncivilized place—is blank. Her future is unclear, despite the apparently finished (because married) romance story between her and Dacre.

We might take this as an indication of how to imagine the west—as an always-open space ready to be written beyond the ending of Cooper’s historical romance and western idealizations. Or it could be a warning to expose what Easterners are doing when idealizing nature and the west. After all, Mrs. Clavers' obsession with flowers in the marsh ends up overturning their carriage. The western landscape, the imaginative force behind western expansion and the west itself, is generally swampy, which seems beautiful but may be tedious and treacherous.

Kirkland’s descriptions implicate nature in conflict, but more in the sense of philosophy than violence. She barely mentions the standard adventure tropes of Indian savagery or about how to kill and cook a bear. In only two episodes does Clavers mention Indians. (Thus Clavers appears to have no awareness of intruding on tribal and no social consciousness of westward expansion as imperialism.) One is at a dilapidated and dirty trading post, and one is when a riding companion states what Clavers feels is an irrational fear of Indians. Kirkland cleverly manipulates the wildlife trope, writing an episode about killing a snake: “Next to having a cougar spring at one, the absolute killing of a rattle-snake is peculiarly appropriate to constitute a Michigan heroine;—and the cream of my story is, that it might be sworn to, chapter and verse, before the nearest justice. What cougar story can say as much?” (59). Cousin Fanny kills the snake, although it “haunts” Mrs. Clavers for days afterward. She seems silly to get so upset. However, the episode reveals, perhaps, more reality about the frontier life than those many western stories that narrate so many cougar or snake or bear episodes they become fantastic. Thus, Kirkland defines the western hero as more realistically local than romantically national, as was the case with reports of the prowess of western heroes being attacked by yet another bear. Even Poe in Rodman relates his own stock bear story to satirize the overuse of such tales in western writing. Clavers’ purpose is to educate eastern women, and one of her first tasks is to define the frontier spirit as it should be 70 in order to later compare other manifestations of it that are too individualistic, too selfish.

For decades before Poe’s narrative was published, exploration journals had been available, and they had clearly been valued by the state as reconnaissance intelligence about the territories soon to be incorporated into America. Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia (1780), for example, lists in its “Queries” various territorial (and racial) features of the United States in part as a way to identify the uniqueness of an

70 Fetterly notes that Mrs. Clavers’ abhorrence of bad manners “reflects the worst faults of the frontier character: aggressiveness, irresponsibility, pretentiousness” (9-10).
American land. Other western writings, commissioned by the state, often used similar constructs, listing vegetation, wildlife, land formations, minerals, and aboriginal inhabitants for the expansionist machine. Lewis and Clark’s expedition churned out scientific-sounding descriptions of the land and its various inhabitants as they explored it. Other texts used that descriptive paradigm as their method as well. Poe plays with this set of conventions as well as the way writers had used them to produce a distinctive American literature focusing focus on the natural world and its philosophical import. Writers had by 1840 constructed some “American” features of literature of contact; the methods by which to survive on the frontier were common features of western writing. Poe’s text incorporates at least two of these conventions—how to deal with Indians and how to deal with wildlife. Both narrative conflicts emphasize American-ness, and their overlap in *The Journal of Julius Rodman* is not completely haphazard. The public hungered for exploration tales, for historical recovery texts, and Poe enjoyed at once both feeding and ridiculing that hunger in his *Journal*.

Of those who have written about Poe’s text, few have acknowledged his game. Some have, however. In 1972, John J. Teunissen and Evelyn J. Hinz recognized Poe’s method as parody. (Although it uses the imitation of parody in its form, it is also satiric in the biting criticism of humanity). They argue in “Poe’s *Journal of Julius Rodman* as Parody” that the *Journal* is not the anomaly others have suggested, but is “characteristic of Poe” precisely because it is parody and not plagiarism. “The apparent plagiarisms are the means to a satiric end” (318), they argue, and they suggest that Poe’s main satiric targets are plagiarism, “the gullibility of his public and their uncritical taste for strange adventures,” the awful writing that characterized western descriptions, and the “true motives” (mainly greed) of those who moved westward (321). They argue that his parody is subtle, but definite, and they point out details in both the editorial and diary levels of the *Journal* that prove Poe’s motives through source commentary and character analysis of Rodman. Specifically, the authors mention Poe’s comments about plagiarism immediately preceding his publication of the *Journal*. They say that the comments show how in replicating plagiarism in the *Journal*, Poe satirizes it in western writings. Importantly, they emphasize how the “editors” of the *Journal* call attention to its createdness and its reliance upon sources, thereby stressing the “differences as much as the similarities between Rodman’s account of the staple facts of travel narratives and those of others” (329). Those differences point to the *Journal* as satire; the similarities point to the *Journal* as hoax.

The double intention makes for a difficult analysis of the text because Poe had to make the text seem realistic but also subvert cultural premises to effect a satire. Nevertheless, he manipulates tropes of western writing, specifically the requisite adventure episodes, to reveal inconsistencies in policies of the State, as well as demonstrate how imagining a specific past for the west serves the mission to define America.

Indian contact episodes are *de rigueur* for western writing. Rodman’s views are virulently racist. Despite Poe’s own pro-Indian sentiments,71 the ethics of exploitative policies remain equivocal in the text, not surprising considering its status as hoax and the

71 See Poe’s Marginalia #184. In his argument for naming the country “Appalachia,” Poe asserts that “in employing this word we do honor to the Aborigines, who, hitherto, we have at all points unmercifully despoiled, assassinated and dishonored” (310).
prevailing racial attitudes during the early nineteenth century in America. In the paragraph subsequent to the introduction of his crew, Rodman describes his plans to “pass through the heart of a country *infested* with Indian tribes…whom we had every reason to believe *ferocious* and *treacherous*” (530, my italics). Later, in chapter four, the intrusive editor also describes the region as “infested” by Indians. Because we cannot equate Poe with the editor’s voice, we cannot determine that such diction means Poe himself held Indians in this regard. But neither can we dismiss it. Poe may simply be playing with language and manipulating readers with an ambiguous stance, yet still readers want to laugh at the ridiculous interactions between Indians and Rodman’s party.

Rodman comes into conflict with the Sioux and writes in his journal how he might respond to them:

I reflected that it was nearly impossible to keep on good terms with these Sioux, who were our enemies at heart, and who could only be restrained from pillaging and murdering us by a conviction of our prowess. Should we comply with their present demands, go on shore, and even succeed in purchasing a temporary safety by concessions and donations, such conduct would not avail us in the end, and would be rather a palliation than a radical cure of the evil. They would be sure to glut their vengeance sooner or later, and, if they suffered us to go on our way now, might hereafter attack us at a disadvantage, when it might be as much as we could do to repel them, to say nothing of inspiring them with awe. Situated as we were here, it was in our power to give them a lesson they would be apt to remember; and we might never be in so good a situation again. Thinking thus, and all except the Canadians agreeing with me in opinion, I determined to assume a bold stand, and rather provoke hostilities than avoid them. This was our true policy. (555)

Rodman presumes these Sioux are “evil.” Considering the attitude with which Rodman approaches Indians, even the “friendly” ones, is it any wonder that Rodman’s policy seems justified to himself? One method of dealing with the Indians is to “inspire awe,” which is again quite arrogant and doomed to eventual failure, especially when Rodman abdicates his own power to act by describing his cannon as a sort of god. This is quite the phallic symbol, and Rodman certainly wields this weapon as such, yet his subsequent discussion of it with the Sioux is telling. Thus, Rodman in his policy statement—significantly without the Canadians’ supportive opinion—decides to teach the Indians a lesson. The paternalism with which Rodman makes this statement indicates yet another way to deal with the “Indian Problem” on the American frontier.

Juxtaposed to this platform of Indian policy is a most absurd image—the cannon as a large green grasshopper. Rodman presumes that he can manipulate the “great stupidity of the Indians” (554) to believe that the cannon is a god. Using stereotypical rhetoric of Indian manipulation, Rodman calls the cannon his “great medicine,” which he does not want to anger. After the Sioux describe the cannon as a grasshopper (thereby minimizing its ferocity and deadliness), Rodman states to them that they are lucky that the “great medicine” did not hear what they called it, or it would be mad and take out its anger upon them. Rodman appears angry, perhaps because the Sioux had insulted his manhood and/or because he is worried they won’t fall for his intimidation techniques.
Rodman’s strategy is typical in western adventure tales regarding encounters with the Indians and justification of violence against them: blame the gun. After the Indians listen to Rodman’s response to their questions about peaceful trade and acting as guides through the wilderness, they become more hostile. Rodman attributes this hostility to him calling the Teton Sioux “greater rascals than the Ricarees” (556), but it seems just as likely that it was this insult in addition to the insults to the Indians’ intelligence that motivated the Sioux.

Hostilities soon break out and six Indians are killed. Rodman reports that he explained to one Sioux why he shot first, although his real reason was simply a surprise attack to protect his own people. He produces a litany, ending with the “intolerable insult in calling [the cannon] a green grasshopper” (558). He then extends the explanation, saying that only through his own interaction with the cannon was he able to prevent further decimation of the Indians. A significant amount of space in the text is taken listing these “reasons” for the attack. They are clearly lies, the largest and most absurd being about the “green grasshopper.” Having a battle over a green grasshopper seems idiotic, and it implies the idiocy goes to the policy behind the attack as well. Poe’s placement of Rodman’s policy statement and his strategy for dealing with the Sioux demonstrates how manipulative and absurd interactions with the Indians could be. We cannot ignore this absurdity as we consider how this text straddles the border between satire and hoax.

The obligatory “how to kill game” episodes also resonate with potential satiric purpose to destabilize definitions and tropes of western writing. Rodman explains that the three hunters of their crew are out to find game for supper when Saonie Sioux capture them. They are taken to a camp in which a number of antelope are enclosed. There was a large fire around which most of the Indians congregated and a smaller fire around which the Canadian and two Indian wardens sat. The Americans sat at some distance away, bound tightly. At midnight the antelopes escape the enclosure, go crazy around the fires, injuring many Sioux and knocking out the Canadian. Rodman describes the “furious mêlée”:

The beasts were apparently frantic, and the velocity and impetuosity with which they flew, rather than leaped, through the flames, and through the midst of the terrified savages, was . . . . a terrible spectacle. They carried every thing before them in their first plunges; but, having cleared the large fire, they immediately dashed at the small one, scattering the brands and blazing wood about; then returned, as if bewildered, to the large one, and so backwards and forwards until the decline of the fires, when, in small parties, they scampered off like lightning to the woods. (562-63)

After the Canadian becomes conscious, he frees the other two hunters and they head back towards the river, find an injured antelope from the herd, and “put it at once out of its misery,” bringing it for everyone to eat. Here is a simple hunting episode gone far afield from the traditional way of relating a hunter’s story, and it takes up a significant amount of space in the text, which endows it with importance. The episode resonates with nationalist policies and/or Indian Removals. At least two readings are possible. The antelopes seem to symbolize whites who dash madly towards the west, inciting violence by their mere presence, hurting themselves and others in the process. The Canadians are
oblivious to the fighting and unlikely to become involved in violence. The Indians are hurt, but America itself, represented by the survivors, John Greely and the Prophet, remains unscathed and actually profits from individuals’ pain and sacrifice. Second and perhaps more likely is that the antelopes stand for the Indians who were and had been rounded up by Jackson and enclosed in concentration camps. If this is the case, then the antelopes, which had been free and then suddenly captured, go crazy in desire of their freedom. They do not try to hurt their captors, but they do nevertheless. Poe thus implies that the antelopes and so the Indians, are not at fault for the violence used against whites who attempt to imprison them in various territories, or even in specific camps. Antelopes/Indians naturally go crazy under such conditions and policies of the Jackson administration. And when they hurt themselves so badly they can’t be saved, it is the moral duty of the Americans to “put them out of their misery.” Neither reading is positive for policies regarding manifest destiny. In both readings, individuals suffer unduly for the American “team.” Even with this reading, however, it is difficult to say definitively that the text does not at least in part support racist State politics. If we could determine the point of the genre hybridization, we might have a better potential for determining the extent and definition of its underlying ideology. Poe manipulates the genre conventions, the expectations of the audience about race, Indian policy, and western writing. His satiric point may never be unequivocally decided, but that the entire text is an elaborate lie carried out using genre conventions proves that the truth of the west did not matter in the creation of literary texts with the west as their subjects.

The satire of nationalism is often embedded within the satire of idealistic writing about the west. For Poe’s Rodman, western travel is a romantic affair. There are few “scientific” lists of flora and fauna as those that characterize travelogues from Lewis and Clark, for example. In chapter three is an extended description of the waterway upon which Rodman’s crew travel and an island upon which they camp. The diction is evokes Eden. Rodman writes:

This island was one of the most fairy-looking situations in the world, and filled my mind with the most delightful and novel emotions. The whole scenery rather resembled what I had dreamed of when a boy, than an actual reality….All round the island, which was probably about twenty acres in extent, was a complete fringe of cotton-wood; the trunks loaded with grape vines in full fruit….The whole bore a wonderful resemblance to an artificial flower garden, but was infinitely more beautiful—looking rather like some of those scenes of enchantment which we read of in old books. We were all in extacy with the spot, and prepared our camp in the highest glee, amid its wilderness of sweets. (543)

Note that the garden, the “wilderness of sweets,” resembles artifice. If we attend to the details of the description, we must notice the irony in Rodman’s description of the American Eden as “more beautiful” than a lush paradise, a dream and not “actual reality.” An American Eden cannot be real, can’t exist. Moreover, it is typically

72 For a historical account of one of those removals, the Trail of Tears, see Gloria Johoda, The Trail of Tears: The Story of the American Indian Removals 1813-1855 (New York: Random House, 1995).
73 In a subsequent parenthetical intrusion, the “editor” of the Rodman’s journal describes the island as a “little paradise” (547), calling attention to the name they give the island (“Beaver Island”). Similar to James
described in the most overblown, idealistic terms. The point of most of the western travelogues was to extol the greatness of the American landscape, not to reveal its realities as Kirkland does. In this description Poe calls attention to the artifice of western descriptions on the purely physical level, but also implies that such artifice creates “extacy” in the traveler—almost a drunkenness—while also perpetuating a utopian myth of the American west. Imagine droves of settlers drunk on dreams fed by writers of western “heroes” such as Kit Carson or Buffalo Bill Cody. Idealism is dangerous, but it is also quite ludicrous. This is the Jacksonian nationalist purpose taken too far.

Furthermore, Rodman’s description of the lush landscape goes beyond Edenic. When he describes the smell of the place, he specifically compares it to “common English sweet grass,” which, he says, “is no doubt of the same genus, but greatly inferior in beauty, and fragrance” (543). The nationalist nature of the comparison is important because Rodman offers what Lewis and Clark do not—the imaginative corollary of Americanness as seen through the eyes of a high-strung Virginian with questionable ethics. Rodman, as a composite character, stands in part for the American, including the American’s political and national ideals. Poe implies through a psychologically flawed narrator that American ideals during this time—and the translation and transmission of those ideals via western travel writing—are not as utopian and beautiful as Jackson might have pioneers believe.

Like Kirkland’s, Poe’s intention is likely to parody idealized descriptions of a harsh landscape. We may infer that the parody of the writing is also a satire of the culture because often those descriptions are juxtaposed with strident anti-Indian statements, or with shocking sentiments of killing without much remorse. One example of such relative remorselessness comes when Rodman and his crew fight the Teton Sioux. Six are killed and many wounded. After the fight and farther down the river, Rodman reflects briefly upon having taken lives, which “had never, before this epoch, been shed at [his] hands” (558). During Rodman’s brief turn inward, he mentions how “conscience…whispered pertinaciously within my ear—‘it is human blood which thou hast shed’” (559). Poe reminds readers that conscience should play a part in the “logic” of westward expansion. A vital portion of conscience is memory. If one does not remember the bad act, one cannot feel guilty. Rodman soon gets over his melancholy, for example. Although he finds it difficult to sleep that night, he awakes with the dawn, “with its fresh dews, its fresher breezes, and smiling flowers,” and finds “a new courage, and a bolder tone of thought” (559). It takes little text time—a mere one sentence—for Rodman to rationalize his actions and determine them “urgent necessities” (559). Such a shocking rationalization couched in terms of a “fresh,” romanticized new morning suggests to Rodman that nature supports such actions, but we may consider it evidence of parody as well, especially when the comments come from the abnormal personality of an idealistic Julius Rodman.

Conclusion

Neither Kirkland’s narrative nor Poe’s text has found a comfortable home in critics’ generic categories. Perhaps one explanation for this is that the content of their

Seaver’s and Kirkland’s narrators, the editor/narrator of Poe’s text seeks to translate place names, pulling them through historical events and indigenous cultures, making them familiar to a white American audience and essentially providing the opportunity to collectively own those places as American.
narratives emphasizes the cultural marginalia that is often the frontier. Neither text conforms precisely to the pressures of a typical frontier narrative, conventions well established by the late 1830s. Yet both texts use genre expectations to focus on the form of the frontier both geographically and imaginatively. Considering the genre requirements for frontier journals, including features such as chronological sequencing and a single and stable narrative voice, as well as numerous adventures with wildlife and Indians and philosophical pondering about nature, these narratives both adhere to and break the rules. Although Kirkland and Poe use tropes of the frontier narrative in order to satirize tightly-bound genres, they do not completely dismantle them. Writers of the frontier remain tethered to genre expectations, but can move beyond them and move beyond the bounds of national definitions. Importantly, they go beyond specifying fictions of history and of uniqueness for America to create literary frontiers where artists can imagine a number of American nations. These texts demonstrate some of the earliest attempts at re-imagining literary and national frontiers. Neither was particularly popular. Thus, the narratives and the authors, at least in these instances, reside in a liminal narrative space of nineteenth-century culture.
Chapter 5: New Frontiers

We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go the Moon in this decade and to do the other things, not because they are easy but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win . . . This is in some measure an act of faith and vision, for we do not know what benefits await us . . . But space is there and we are going to climb it.

--John F. Kennedy, Address at Rice University on the Space Effort, September 12, 1962

It may be the warriors who get the glory, but it's the engineers who build societies.

--Star Trek Voyager, final season episode

Termed the Jacksonian Age, America between the War of 1812 and the Civil War was defined partially through Jackson’s political policies. His fervent politics of the “common man” and his “youthful” vision of the nation helped to solidify the progressive notion of the country’s purpose and future. However, his presidency was only one of the institutions that came together to form a unified idea of the nation. Literary culture was also important to the perception of the United States as historical, unified, and strong. The artifacts of literary culture did not, however, portray only the sweet or the utopian. Some of the earliest novels described the disparate factions within and on the borders of the United States historically and contemporaneously. David Simpson compares Walt Whitman with earlier authors and says that

Whitman’s ebullience is not to be found in the writings of Fenimore Cooper, or Brackenridge, or Bird, or Paulding, or Irving. In their different ways, these writers and others like them face up to and record the strident divisions of interest and opportunity that constituted their ‘America’ . . . [T]he earlier writers are aware of the degree to which the national identity seems likely to consist in an uneasy collection of factions, each competing with the others for recognition and for basic rights. (182-83)

I have argued in this dissertation that dealing with the differences of the nation sometimes caused writing to pull apart—to expose the stitching of the tapestry—and to disallow readers the escape associated with adventurous frontier writing. After Jackson left office in 1837, the United States did not have to prove so strenuously how it was different and better than its mother, Great Britain. Instead, it had to justify further egregious policies of progress the State and the nation supported. Jackson’s political legacy to literature was, at least in part, his vision of the United States as a country for the future and for the young, adventurous, self-serving, white entrepreneurial individualist.

Despite an apparent distaste for this Jacksonian version of the frontier and the frontiersman, Henry David Thoreau—and Ralph Waldo Emerson—embrace a
progressive expansionist vision. “Emerson,” says Gay Wilson Allen in “Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and the “Frontier,”” “believed as strongly as anyone that American writers must create a literature to match the country’s fabulous natural resources” (113). Still, though, he says that Emerson maintained a “moral revulsion against the frontier movement” (113). A disciple of Emerson, Thoreau’s views about nature and about the nitty-gritty of frontier politics were similar. However, although in “Walking” Thoreau refuses to be sucked into those politics, Emerson has no problem commenting upon them. Compared to Thoreau’s philosophic vision of the Mississippi compared with the Rhine, for instance, Emerson says in his Journals that “this Mississippi River warps the men, warps the nations” (qtd. in Allen 115).

Published posthumously in 1862, Thoreau’s “Walking” is a prophetic document that uses the metaphor of frontier to unify a sense of nationhood for the United States. According to Allen, for Thoreau the frontier is metaphorical (116). He quotes Thoreau’s words from A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers: “The frontiers are not east or west, north or south; but wherever a man fronts a fact, though that fact be his neighbor” (116). “Walking” illustrates the cyclical nature of the frontier’s importance both formally and symbolically to the nation. Thoreau saw frontier as an imaginative landscape whose main worth was as ahistorical metaphor for the nation. Ironically, although his writing often lambasted the industry of society that threatened the harmony of nature, Thoreau embraces expansionist and progressive sentiment by recycling British histories and philosophies. Walt Whitman’s sympathies were more democratic in the Jacksonian sense, although often not bogged down in the particulars of politics. Rather than recovering and reforming the New England past, Thoreau and Whitman reshaped the concept of the American frontier into an abstract western utopia. The western frontier was less a fodder of specific historical-national interpretation than a metaphor for the progressive American future. These authors illustrate how the frontiers of literary culture had shifted towards transcendentalism, providing more directed—and expansive—philosophy for literary nationalism.

**Recycling England**

How fitting it is that once Europeans had effectively conquered the Indians in the eastern United States, writers had the opportunity to reflect upon nature’s meaning instead of solely its use. Now that property laws of whites had literally become the law of the land, whites could philosophize about how the inhabitants of a place could be in the woods but not of the woods. Thoreau, for example, could write how abusive most non-walkers had been to nature, and he could imbue the landscape with British colors without much trepidation about being called a national traitor.

The vague boundaries and mobile, seasonal Indian communities that were synchronous with nature (and seen as more indigenously American) Thoreau does not use to open his essay. His opening strategy for “Walking” is to trace the etymology of the word “sauntering” to its medieval roots in England. The heft of British history adds intellectual weight to his essay. Thoreau shows no qualms about the urge towards the mother country; he does not seem anxious about using a very British example to make his point about the religiosity of the saunter, about its spiritual purposes. He justifies himself (and his ambling about the countryside while he thinks) with British history, specifically equating the walker with the crusader. “For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by
some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the infidels” (1737). He figures himself and his companion as “Walker[s] Errant,” again playing upon the idea of chivalric quest, something heroic and with a goal divinely given (1738). He quotes Chaucer and Milton in various places in the essay. He even cites the British legend of Robin Hood instead of recalling or creating any American legend. Perhaps recalling this history masks America’s own colonialism by redirecting the reader’s attention towards England as it was becoming a nation itself. Or, perhaps it slyly marks contemporary American brutality by drawing parallels between Crusaders and Infidels and Americans and Indians. Either way, Thoreau’s use of British history makes the case that walking is a worthwhile pursuit. He anticipates the attacks the essay often received—about how walking is unproductive and, thus, un-American. From the beginning of the essay, then, Thoreau shows his distance from the need for all pursuits to be specifically useful, a common tenet of Jacksonian politics.

This distance is even more emphatic when Thoreau begins discussing wildness and the west. In West of Emerson: The Design of Manifest Destiny Kris Fresonke focuses upon how Thoreau extols the wide-ranging principles of democracy while disdaining the individual “roughness” of Jackson’s democratic tenets. She argues that “Thoreau praises America” (133), although not everyone could perceive the patterns of society in order to appreciate wildness. Instead, “the cognitive elite” (134), rather than the “common man,” has the ability to perceive the world most clearly. This elitism has been one of the most important features of the essay to which readers object, despite its praise of nature and general democratic principles. Fresonke agrees that “[t]he straightforward egalitarianism of “Walking”—where ‘no man owns the landscape’—is difficult to sustain in the face of this bracing insistence on social distinctions” (136). In fact, Thoreau derides the “common man” as a working automaton (1738), a slave to the schedule of the day and the ruts of the main road.

Although Fresonke argues that Thoreau begins with sweeping democratic philosophy, specifically an “egalitarian wildness,” she notes that Thoreau “just as frequently . . . objects to features of democratic politics, such as nativism, wars of aggression, and the raw drive to make money” (134). Thoreau’s emphasis was the breadth of philosophy, not the narrowness of politics. He says, “From many a hill I can see civilization and the abodes of man afar. Man and his affairs . . . . even politics, the most alarming of them all,--I am pleased to see how little space they occupy in the landscape” (1741). Yet, we know that the philosophical is political, and thus we should be suspicious of Thoreau’s explicit separation of the two, especially when he has figured himself as a poet-prophet of nature, the wild, and the west.

Ironically, to prove the importance of walking to America, Thoreau turns away from the popular advice of the previous four or five decades and turns away from Cooper-like use of American materials. Indeed, he chooses to un-name America in favor of a more philosophical space: “You may name it America,” he says, “but it is not America: neither Americus Vespucius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were the discoverers of it. There is a truer account of it in mythology than in any history of America, so called, that I have seen” (1741). Nature cannot be discovered or claimed, Thoreau insists, except within one’s mind as a poet-prophet. (It is standard Romantic practice for poets to perceive of themselves as prophets. Thoreau is no different in that regard.) America is a quest, a story of the collective, with truths embedded like so much mythology. Taken
further, we might consider how Nature, then, is a reflection of the writer’s mind. Mapped onto the collective culture of “America,” we might also think about how the frontier—mainly the west—becomes a reflection of the nation’s desire for identity.

Instead of using indigenous materials, Thoreau recycles the English Romantics, particularly the elevation of nature and the individual, an idealism Caroline Kirkland makes fun of in *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?*. Not wanting to trouble himself with the reality of women’s lives, for example, Thoreau blithely recounts his companion’s supposition that “womankind, who are confined to the house still more than men,” probably sleep in the afternoons. I rather think that these women, as Kirkland so aptly and realistically observes, work constantly, keeping out of Thoreau’s philosophical sight. Beyond mentioning women’s “confinement” and the “thinness of skin, accompanied by an increased sensibility to certain impressions,” however, Thoreau says little (1739-40). Instead, he prefers to philosophize about nature. He cites Wordsworth as an exemplar of the inspirational power of nature: “when a traveler asked Wordsworth’s servant to show him her master’s study, she answered, ‘Here is his library, but his study is out of doors’” (1739). Thoreau likewise prefers nature’s study, and he takes a similar view of wild, bucolic, and urban landscapes. From the wilds, he can more clearly see the institutions of man. He gains perspective as he contemplates yonder large roads leading towards towns. Like Wordsworth’s contemplative speaker in “Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798,” Thoreau gains through nature an ability to remember and see life more clearly. Also, like the British Romantic poets, Thoreau reveals an interest in ruins, for “old roads” that are discontinued, such as Old Marlborough Road. He includes a poem in the essay with the road as its subject, and describes the road as “a living way” deserted, but full of possibilities (1742).

Thoreau turns this Romantic fascination with the old and deserted towards an obsession with geography as a concept, instead of as an inspiration, or, put another way, nature as pure knowledge instead of applied knowledge. The expansionist policies of the United States were at the forefront of American cultural concerns, and Thoreau attends to this as an appropriate Romantic subject. Movement westward is inevitable, even if “west” is an ill-defined landscape of the mind. (“Who but the Evil One has cried, ‘Whoa!’ to mankind?” Thoreau asks (1752)). This metaphorical geography Thoreau describes when making a decision of which way to walk: “Eastward I go only by force; but westward I go free . . . . I must walk toward Oregon, and not toward Europe” (1744). Yet this is precisely what Thoreau has done in the beginning stages of the essay. He has gone to Europe, and mostly to England. He undercuts that “retrograde” motion, however, by equating the Old World with history, art, and literature and the west with “the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure” (1744). The latter movement is preferable, and it is marked as an instinctual movement, an adventurous itch that must be scratched. He compares the Rhine with the Mississippi River and finds himself reflecting upon chivalry with the former and feeling that “this was the heroic age itself” with the latter (1747, Thoreau’s italics). Thoreau expressly links the British Romantics with American movement in order to show America’s progression beyond them.

Thoreau connects the wilds of nature with strength in mind; and America, he believes, is much more suited to this because it has within it so many frontiers not conquered. The borders of towns are what give the towns their strength: “A town is
saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it. A township where one primitive forest waves above, while another primitive forest rots below,—such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages” (1749). Implied here is that the over-cultivation and urbanization of Great Britain has weakened its arts; America retains those wilds and thus the raw materials for the next and best generation of thinkers.

Using those British sources such as Milton, Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare would seem to undercut Thoreau’s purpose, yet his goal is not to banish them or to praise them; it is to interrogate them and praise America. In short, he recycles them in the essay. “English literature, from the days of the minstrels to the Lake Poets, . . . . breathes no quite fresh and in this sense wild strain” (1751). But no writer has effectively harnessed nature, Thoreau argues; they have merely added to the fertility of the literary earth. In Thoreau’s estimation, the American west, because it is wild, has the raw materials from which British writers could not draw. It, then, can create a mythology as original as the Greek. That mythology is what Lydia Maria Child, James Fenimore Cooper, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, James Seaver, Edgar Allan Poe, Caroline Kirkland, and many others had been creating for decades before Thoreau wrote “Walking,” although because of their reliance upon forms grown from a swampy literary soil, he most likely would have considered them unworthy national mythologizers. “We cannot afford not to live in the present. He is blessed over all mortals who loses no moment in the passing life in remembering the past,” Thoreau says (1757), yet he reuses the past as much as any other author has done. He cannot escape a similar literary and historical conundrum, despite attempting to undermine British literature’s primacy.

Many into One

Like Thoreau, Whitman was abstract and philosophical about the west and the frontier. In fact, until late in his life when he traveled to Colorado, Whitman had never visited wilderness or the wild.74 His politics were, at least when younger, more in line with Jacksonian democracy than with Thoreau and Emerson’s elitist, abstract notions of democracy. Allen says that “[i]n his early manhood Whitman was a Jacksonian Democrat . . . . thrilled by the visions of the hordes of restless Americans moving across the Mississippi, invading, taking possession of, and ‘civilizing’ western lands” (Allen 123). Clearly, Whitman created a persona as a poet who was America, literally being Man and demonstrating within the body of his poetry the land and people of the nation. David Simpson says in “Destiny Made Manifest: The Styles of Whitman’s Poetry” that “in any examination of the relation between formal expression and political content, between narrative and nationality, Whitman must be a central case” (178). When it came to expansion, Simpson says, “Whitman seemed to have no complex doubts at all” (183).

Whitman’s vision of America is inevitable and progressive, and he does not condemn the destruction of Nature. Instead, in “Song of the Redwood-Tree” from Leaves of Grass (1891), he embraces swarms of people devouring natural resources: “Fresh come, to a new world indeed, yet long prepared, / I see the genius of the modern, child of the real and ideal, / Clearing the ground for broad humanity, the true America, heir of the past so grand, / To build a grander future” (169, lines 64-69). Whitman’s tone is not

ironic, and Allen argues that he achieves “in this poem his great ambition to be the poetic spokesman of his nation” (127). Simpson finds in other ways that “Whitman’s capacity to remain totally unaware of any difference between self and other marks him out as the voice of manifest destiny, and of the most confident period of nationalist enthusiasm” (192). Exploiting nature for the good of the nation was not only acceptable, but encouraged. The frontier consumption that Thoreau or Emerson loathed, Whitman loved because it showed the great enterprise and industry of humanity organizing itself into busy and productive groups to build the nation.

Thoreau, of course, would have been quite disturbed by this inappropriate vision of the west and the frontier, finding that the lack of reflection and the busy-ness counterproductive to the life of the mind. It would also undermine the nation. Myra Jehlen argues in American Incarnation: The Individual, the Nation, and the Continent that “[a]s the creators of the New World, [Americans] would henceforth be vulnerable to political challenge and to the erosions of the historical process . . . . The settler’s implementation of the continent’s permanent contours and conditions, in contrast, vivifying the land from the inside . . . places the emerging social structures beyond debate, in the realm of nature” (57). Nature, and the west as the imaginative corollary of nature and nation, must then become the province of American writers. To be natural is to be powerful.

Whitman’s vision of the west was at times as metaphoric as Thoreau’s. Thoreau’s west was always west; Whitman, on the other hand, wondered what happened when one reached the end of the west. In “Facing West from California Shores,” Whitman imagines the journey of dichotomous circumnavigation, and it is appropriate to consider this a crisis poem for the limits of imagination. If there was no west—no frontiers—from what new fertile ground could writers spring? The beginning of the poem preficates this dichotomous finish. The speaker is “a child, very old” (line 3) who stands at a limit, at the Pacific shore, still seeking, but not naming, or perhaps even knowing, what he has sought for so long. He takes his directive from Thoreau to become a walker, “Long having wander’d since, round the earth having wander’d, / Now I face home again, very pleas’d and joyous” (95, lines 8 and 9). Yet he ends his quest with more questions than answers: “(But where is what I started for so long ago? And why is it yet unfound?)” (95, line 10). Thus, the speaker, at the end of the journey is joyous, but not particularly productive. He is a seeker, not a finder. He reaches an end, but not an ending.

The speaker or poet or prophet or multitudes in one that Whitman impersonates is singly identified by his purpose as student or as seeker, not by any settlement in any particular geographic space. He is likewise not particularly plagued by not knowing; it is a process of frontier being that defines him, although there is a sense of urgency within the final question. It is not “what” is “yet unfound,” but “why is it yet unfound?” The poet has, like Thoreau in “Walking,” taken from the east and gone west, learned cultures “from Hindustan, from the vales of Kashmere, / From Asia, from the north, from the God, the sage, and the hero, / From the south, from the flowery peninsulas and the spice islands” (lines 5-7). He has picked up information, but has not apparently found transcendence or the answers to fundamental questions. Apparently, the journey is not done, despite nearing the geographic end to the trip. This continual process of becoming characterizes identity generally, but it also emphasizes a fundamental quality of what America wants to be at all times—a frontier nation.
The issue is, of course, what sort of trouble is stirred up when multitudes are seeking and trampling whatever nature and cultures are in their way. This is why, perhaps, so many in the world resist and rebel against empire—whether it is American, British, Roman, Aztec, Mughal, Han, etc. Thoreau in his elitism did not consider the materiality of walking westward, and Whitman in his “uninhibited self-projection on the part of a dominant culture or individual” (Simpson 184) did not seem to care either. As Simpson argues, Whitman barely considered the “languages and identities of those ethnic groups with whom white America was coming into anxious contact” (185). Thus, Whitman is a poet of the nation, not so much of the individual people except as that national collective.

Towards Nation

Thoreau describes the inevitable westward movement of humanity as if it is a geographic dream that demands fulfillment. How different this is from when Child’s Hobomok or Sedgwick’s Oneco disappears into the western lands, conveniently never to be heard from again. The west in such a configuration is not a utopia, but a chasm into which undesirable elements are pushed. Thoreau’s west is a progressive and inevitable movement towards enlightenment as much as it is also a practical settlement of land for the increase of the State. Thoreau disdains the latter. Fresonke argues that Thoreau believes “it was far from good to insist on [America’s] being explored, even—perhaps especially—for the purpose of useful knowledge” (136). Thoreau, for example, says that “[a] man’s ignorance sometimes is not only useful, but beautiful,--while his knowledge, so called, is oftentimes worse than useless, besides being ugly (1754). It is precisely this sentiment of progress that had already pervaded the American nation far before Frederick Jackson Turner described it in his frontier thesis.

The practice of aligning regions with frontiers to vie for political power during the Jacksonian Age coincided with the literary impulse to do the same via writing. Frontiers both metaphorical and political converge in practice long before Thoreau uses transcendental philosophy to support the frontier as an American utopia. And Turner writes his obvious thesis far after literature had explored the topic. Still, Thoreau somehow condenses the breadth of expansionist literature into the depth of regional and nationalist philosophy when he states that “[o]ur sympathies in Massachusetts are not confined to New England; though we may be estranged from the South, we sympathize with the West” (1747). He writes specifically of the Civil War divisiveness, but indicates as well the importance of the western region—both in its real and metaphoric dimensions—to the nation. The west, the “Wild,” is a vast frontier space, not a moving line as is shown on maps. The frontier, by this point, had become the west, and the technicalities of the northern, southern, or interior frontiers no longer applied. Thoreau’s verbalization of such a cultural shift marks the importance of the west as a nationalist geographic symbol beyond the materiality of physical frontiers. But this was only possible because the literary culture had already produced artifacts supposing or reacting to this philosophy of nationalism.

75 Thoreau did, however, realize in 1846 when he traveled to Maine that Americans “have advanced by leaps to the Pacific, and left many a lesser Oregon and California unexplored behind us.” See The Maine Woods Vol. 3 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1893): 111.
How well Whitman achieved his goal of speaking *en masse* is debatable, for, as Simpson argues, Whitman’s poetry demonstrates exclusivity. He says that Whitman’s “appetite for identity is so omnivorous that there is nothing it will not assimilate and hence explain or justify” (177). This is the nature of colonial expansion and manifest destiny, and the legacy of Jacksonian Democracy to the nation. While such a stance appears inclusive of all difference, it ends up eliding difference and boiling it down to the One, Man, Nation. This is the precise difficulty that faces nations—how to cohere individual constituents under a fiction of their overarching commonality. Truly there is power in unity, and similar to how we believe printed paper money is valuable, we like to believe the nation is something tangible and powerful. We plunge mass-produced flags in the soil of our yards after extremist factions take action against a State they believe has wronged them. Yet, most of us would seem to have no personal stake in the Oklahoma City bombing or the World Trade Center attacks. Now that the fiction is so entrenched within American society, one wonders what it would take to splinter that belief that the nation is whole. Perhaps manifesting destiny omni-directionally—all over the globe—like so many empires before us, would fracture it.

Writers who choose frontiers as their subjects or who position themselves upon a border as Thoreau says he did, often perceive of their project as participating in a greater cause, whether that be national, regional, or other. Often they perceive of their endeavors as contributing to literary or historical cycles, eventually contributing to the fertile, swampy mud that Thoreau admires. But, as often, writers try to deny the cyclical nature of their work, which shows up in how they write as much as what they write—whether they recognize it at the time or not. Those who create policy and allocate money to implement those policies also perceive their positions as cutting edge. Where are the frontiers now? After exploration and exhaustion of the American west as an imaginary national space, the direction “west” becomes meaningless. “West” then means the unexplored, which becomes directionally up or down, in or out—not points on a compass. Frontiers may remain somewhat geographic—urban or rural, interior or exterior, oceanic or landmass. Or, they become even more metaphorical, political, gendered, classed, or racial. The rhetoric of the frontier continues to stir Americans towards the unknown and to solidify America’s identity as a country of frontiersmen, living on the edge, prepared for anything, and crack shots.


---. *Narrative of the Mission of the United Brethren among the Delaware*


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Vita

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