

Savagely Sentimental: The Creation and Destruction of the Sentimental Indian in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*

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Abstract

Lydia Maria Child, known during her time for controversial writing, has largely fallen out of focus in current feminist studies. As an activist, many of her pieces questioned the role of gender, race, and sexuality in the early nineteenth century. *Hobomok*, published in 1824, is considered one of her most radical tales. Detailing the marriage and procreation of a white woman and a Native American man, *Hobomok* shocked audiences with its content. Many critics have come to view *Hobomok* as a piece of feminine rebellion, seeing Mary Conant as an example of feminine refusal. Although such interpretations hold merit, they often ignore the role of *Hobomok*, the titular character. *Hobomok* is the first visible experimentation of the sentimental male. Other adaptations of the sentimental male do not appear in literature until Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I argue that Child attempts to create one of the first sentimental males through *Hobomok* by compounding the qualities of masculinity and femininity of the era. Child is able to attempt such a task due to the pre-established concept of the "Noble Savage," which already imbued Indians with sentimental attributes, and provides a valid and even rational justification for his extinction. Once establishing *Hobomok* as a "Noble Savage" and compounding masculine and feminine qualities within him, Child can easily and completely dismiss him so as to minimize his threat to white nineteenth century society. It is the compilation of his "noble savagery" and his feminine qualities that engenders his extermination.

Keywords: *Hobomok*, Lydia Maria Child, Noble Savage, Native American fiction

Native American stereotypes can be traced back to the early nineteenth century, when the United States was first attempting to create an American identity. The "Noble Savage"—the belief that Indians were by nature primitive, but possessed, in their simplicity, a nobleness that could be corrupted by civilization—rapidly becoming a literature staple for the nineteenth century. The popularity of the "Noble Savage" grew from a strong internal urge to understand what it meant to be American; authors and poets of the nineteenth century undertook the task to construct narratives that illuminated and classified the qualities that made people "American" and "un-

American.” While Blacks, Native Americans, and Europeans were the bedrock of American identity, they were quickly labeled “un-American,” because the “new” Americans wished to create a solely unique and individual culture. However, the traits of these “solely unique” American men and women were slower to define. Some authors, like James Fennimore Cooper, had clear beliefs on what qualities made an American man: strength, independence, intelligence and stoicism. Through historical novels, these authors attempted to rewrite the history of the United States to further their ideals of American masculinity and femininity, claiming that the traits they valued were always present in Americans. Of course, the re-writing of history also allowed for a re-writing of what was “un-American” and, in the case of Native Americans, justified the removal and extermination of those who could hold back a pure American identity.

Among the influx of new American male authors, Lydia Maria Child took her chance at writing to establish her own version of American identity. Child, while an intelligent and ambitious woman, was never allowed to pursue a higher education due to her gender and, thus, strived to find fulfillment through political and social activism as well as her literary works.¹ Her literature often strives to upset male ideas of gender, race, and religion.² *Hobomok* (2004), her most infamous work, has been noted to tackle all three of these issues in “a courageous work of fiction” which “consciously attack[s] the patriarchy” (Child, 2004). Published in 1824, *Hobomok* received heavy resistance as Child depicts marriage between a Puritan woman and an Indian man. Child’s protagonist, Mary Conant, seeks the home and marriage of the titular character, Hobomok, after she receives news that Charles Brown, her heart’s love, has died on the Atlantic passage. For its scandalous nature, Child’s work fell into obscurity until the last century.

Although literary criticism on Child’s *Hobomok* is limited, several important pieces have been written that examine the themes of religion and feminism. Most notably, Grant Shreve and Nancy Sweet’s articles look in depth at religion and Mary’s religious role. Shreve (2014) argues that Child produces a “primal scene of American secularity” that results in the disestablishment, or the taking away of a church’s status as the official church of a nation, and fragilization, “a process occasioned by the proximity and domestication of foreign alternative positions,”³ of religion in

¹ Child was raised by devoted orthodox Calvinist father. Due to his orthodox views on religion and gender, Child was largely self-educated, while her brother was sent to a university. In letters to her brother, “under the guise of tactfully deferring to her university-educated brother, she firmly reasserts her independence” (Karcher, 2012, p. 3). By the time she died, reviewers were familiar with “her controversial career as an advocate of racial, sexual, and religious equality” (Karcher, 2012, p. 3). It is noted that her choice to reject her father’s beliefs led him to claim that she would “have to burn here-after.” (Karcher, 2012, p. 8).

² At the height of her career, Child was praised by fellow author Edgar Allan Poe, and theologian Theodore Parker for talent at tackling and illustrating the issues of their society (Karcher, 2012, p. 12).

³ “Fragilization—a process occasioned by the proximity and domestication of foreign alternative positions—refers both to the potentially undermining effect on one’s own faith by viable alternative belief positions as well as the increased likelihood that one will change positions throughout his or her life” (Shreve, 2014, p. 658).

1620s Salem (2014, p. 658). In addition, the use of Indian religion, Shreve argues, acts as a form of disestablishment in Child's work. He claims it fragilizes the beliefs of the male characters around Mary, allowing her to develop her own secularity that involves multiple religions. Following in the theme of religious dissent, Sweet (2005) claims that "Child employ[s] the daughter's religious-based dissent as a model for virtuous disobedience in a nation in need of new paradigm of filial comportment" (p. 108). Joining the concepts of religion and feminism, Sweet addresses Child's and Catharine Sedgwick's use of "proper dissent" in domestic novels. Like Shreve, Sweet focuses on the use of religion for dismantling establishments. Neither critic, however, closely examines Hobomok as an individual, merely as an extension of Mary's religious dissention. Religion is undoubtedly a crucial aspect of the novel; however, the depth of what Child was attempting extends beyond religious questioning.

Child, contrary to some critics' argument, was not confined by her social and cultural environment.⁴ Instead, I argue, she was fully aware of her social and cultural surroundings. *Hobomok* provided a method by which Child could openly experiment with revolutionary characters, who would not truly take form until the latter half of the nineteenth century. While Mary Conant is a figure of early-nineteenth-century feminism and her role in religion is a complex issue in the novel, critics have overlooked Hobomok's character. Shreve (2014), Sweet (2005), and Shelby Lucille Crosby (2007) examine him as a supporting player to the culture-changing actions of Mary. This marginalization of Hobomok is unfortunate because it is my belief that his role is crucial in Child's attempt to create the American identity, and it should not be ignored simply due to his race, which labels him as a tragic character. It is true that Hobomok's fate, by current standards, is tragic, but the role he plays in the creation of a conceptual character is significant.

Similarly to how men of her era, like Cooper, attempted to rewrite history in order to validate the present, Child attempts to rewrite the roles and attributes of gender. While this rewriting is visible in Mary's rejection of patriarchy, Hobomok demonstrates a rejection of the nineteenth century conventional ideas of hardened masculinity. This rejection does not suggest that Hobomok is effeminate, for his masculinity is well established, but rather that Child creates the first version of the sentimental male. The sentimental male is seen frequently in the late nineteenth century, particularly in Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

⁴ Shelby Lucille Crosby (2007) argues that Child's work is an example of an "attempt" to integrate the Native Americans into American society. It is Crosby's belief that Child was restrained by her own society and was unable to break through her cultural beliefs, therefore limiting her success at integrating Indians into American society, even in a constructed historical past. It is "practical love" that Child displays through Hobomok and Mary, according to Crosby, and it is a love that is supposed to create a pathway for love between the races. Touching momentarily on the spiritual and historical significance of Hobomok's name, Crosby uses such information to justify Child's limited experience and inability to move past her cultural restraints.

I argue that Child attempts to create one of the first sentimental males through Hobomok by compounding the qualities of masculinity and femininity of the era. Child is able to attempt such a task due to the pre-established concept of the “Noble Savage,” which already imbued Indians with sentimental attributes, and provides a valid and even rational justification for his extinction. Once establishing Hobomok as a “Noble Savage” and compounding masculine and feminine qualities within him, Child can easily and completely dismiss him to minimize his threat to white, nineteenth-century society. It is the compilation of his “noble savagery” and his feminine qualities that engenders his extermination.

The Disposable Indian

Most nineteenth century Americans concluded that the American identity could not thrive as long as the Indians were around to upset it. Being viewed as “the other,” a concept defined by Emmanuel Levinas (1991) as something that breaks totality because it is unknowable and uncontrollable, Indians ultimately helped create the image of a “True American.”⁵ Indians became examples of what Americans were not. They represented a historical past and cultural ties to the lands of America that the new Americans did not possess. In order to eliminate the non-American culture to make room for the rewritten history, Indians had to be removed. Since the nineteenth century represented the ideals of Romanticism, favoring the heart over the mind, emotion and intuition over reason, the concept of a “noble” but “doomed” race held enormous potential and “romance” to the new Americans.⁶

Rather than eliminating a completely bestial race, the nineteenth century Americans played to the idea that Indians were a beautiful hybrid of savage and noble, possessing Romantic qualities of honor, courage, and humility as well as a deep understanding of their eventual and inevitable deaths. Authors of the nineteenth century furthered this effort by constructing examples of these

⁵ Emmanuel Levinas (1991) addresses the concept of “the other” in his work *Totality and Infinity*. In this work, he explores the concept of totality, which is a reality that is created by and reflects the conscious. Totality represents stasis and control. It is “the other” that shatters totality, which is why people fear it.

⁶ Working against the continual efforts for originality, the concept of the “Noble Savage,” which American authors adorned, was not an American creation. The concept dates back to the Classical and Medieval Times, according to Stelio Cro (1993). During the Classical and Medieval Times, “Noble Savages” were portrayed in works of *The Odyssey* through the people of Libyans, who were “happy islanders” (p. 381). Time did not alter this image much and Cro explains that during the age of exploration natives were depicted as innocent, happy populaces of the islands discovered by Christopher Columbus, who were corrupted by the Europeans who disrupted their simple lives. Becoming a fully European idea, the concept of the “Noble Savage” found a place for itself in the arts during the eighteenth century. In 1721, inhabitants of Paris filled theaters to enjoy “*Indien philosophe*” which illustrated the “Noble Savage,” which were being eradicated in the colonies (Cro, 1993, p. 413). As more individuals immigrated to the colonies of the United States, they brought along their preconceived notions of the “Noble Savage.” A large difference between the “islander” and the “Indian” savage must be illuminated. While islanders were described as happy, innocent people, the Indians were not given such positive descriptions.

"Noble Savages,"⁷ who exhibited all the Romantic qualities assigned to them, but also accepted and acknowledged their pre-destined extinction. Brian Dippie (1982) informs us that in Cooper's novels the noble savage "declares the races to be separate species . . . and devotes . . . to defending the distinctions that justify his own extinction" and is "noble in large measure because he is continually trying to disappear into the landscape" (1982, p. 111). With the popularity of Cooper's historical novels, the belief of the "Noble Savage" permeated American society. While through a current lens such a belief structure seems "no more than narcissistic, reactionary wish-fulfillment, offering 'a return to 'Nature's simple plan' as a bogus solution to cultural problems" (Bellin, 2001, p. 41), the existence of the culturally constructed "Noble Savage" did exist and held great sway over the Romantic authors and readers.

Hobomok exemplifies the constructed characteristics of the "Noble Savage" throughout Child's work, beginning with his physical appearance. Hobomok is often described as a man of great beauty and physique. Child's narrator refers to Hobomok in complimentary terms when he informs readers that he saw "the tall, athletic form of Hobomok" during one town gathering and at another meeting says, "[a]nd lastly the manly beauty of Hobomok . . . This Indian was indeed cast in nature's noblest mould. He was one of the finest specimens of elastic, vigorous elegance of proportion, to be found among his tribe" (Child, 2004, p. 16, 36). As a "Noble Savage," Hobomok is required to reflect the best aspects of Indians, particularly the masculine outer beauty. It enables him to be appear "noble," despite his savage race, because he represents physical superiority.⁸

Continuing to emphasize Hobomok's nobleness, Child endows Hobomok with superior abilities. According to the novel, Hobomok is a skilled warrior, hunter, and storyteller. He is able to bring peace and protect the village of Salem. His superior ability to adapt to the "white ways" help endear him to the village inhabitants, increasing his nobility: "His long residence with the white

⁷ The nineteenth century concept of the "Noble Savage" evolved to quench the sense of guilt new Americans possessed:

Extermination as a policy was unthinkable, but a fully rounded version of the Vanishing American won public acceptance after 1814. By its logic, Indians were doomed to "utter extinction" because they belonged to "an inferior race of men . . ." A popular convention, premised on moralistic judgement, had become natural law. Romantic poets, novelists, orators, and artists found the theme of a dying native race congenial, and added those sentimental touches to the concept that gave it wide appeal. Serious students of the Indian problem provided corroboration for the artistic construct as they analyzed the major causes hurrying the Indian to their graves. Opinion was virtually unanimous: "That they should become extinct is inevitable" (Dippie, 1982, p. 10-11).

⁸ Furthermore, by making Hobomok such a specimen, it alienates Hobomok from those around him, making him appear as an other-worldly being, who cannot truly exist among the whites. He becomes an object of visual appreciation, instead of a human. This physical beauty does not stop the narrator or the characters of the novel from continuing to refer to Hobomok as a savage, securing the concept that beauty and physical prowess does not eliminate or compensate for race.

inhabitants of Plymouth had changed his natural fierceness of manner into haughty, dignified reserve" (Child, 2004, p. 36). Due to being an Indian, Hobomok is naturally more bestial or fierce, but, since he is an excellent example of Indian nobility, he is able to adapt more "white" qualities. His "white" qualities, which Hobomok obtained through his long term interaction with the colonists, specifically Mary, is crucial to Child's development of his character for it partially aligns him with his white audience.⁹

The introduction of the savage Corbitant creates a clear contrast by which readers are to judge Hobomok's nobility. Corbitant acts as both Hobomok and the whites' enemy. When Corbitant is first introduced, he is established as a foil to Hobomok:

Accordingly, the second day after his arrival from Plymouth, Hobomok proceeded to Saugue, carrying presents from the English, and a message from Massasoit to Sagamore John. At this wigwam he meet Corbitant, a stubborn enemy to the Europeans, and all who favored them. (Child, 2004, p. 30)

Through the introduction to Corbitant, readers learn two crucial pieces of information. First, it establishes that Hobomok works with both the European settlers and the Indians to establish and maintain peace. Second, Corbitant is an enemy, not only of the European, but Hobomok, due to Hobomok's efforts to maintain peace. A key word to illuminate in this passage is that Corbitant is stubborn. Hobomok, throughout the novel, is fluid and flexible, while maintaining his honor, which prevents him from being ambiguous. In contrast, Corbitant is frozen in his ways, unable to see beyond his dislike of the Europeans.

Representative of their opposite natures, Hobomok always wins battles fairly, while Corbitant attempts cowardly attacks. Initially Corbitant attempts to provoke Hobomok into a battle by insulting his honor as a man and then when his efforts fail, he follows Hobomok into the woods:

He [Hobomok] stood thus some moments, when a rustling sound broke in upon the stillness, and an arrow whizzed past him, and caught in the corner of his blanket. He turned around suddenly, and saw Corbitant advancing towards him with an uplifted hatchet. (Child, 2004, p. 34)

Unlike his noble counterpart, Corbitant attacks Hobomok and the village from the shadows, hoping to defeat his enemies without any real fight. While he does not back down when he is discovered, Corbitant attempts to win by means that would be considered dishonorable, only further highlighting Hobomok's nobleness. In the conflict mentioned, Corbitant is knocked

⁹ By granting Hobomok with the ability to evolve, even a small amount, Child begins to combat against "the self-aggrandizing tales that mainstream America told themselves about the nation's origins." Previously these tales had been supported by "fictions of Natives peoples' aggression and inherent malevolence" (Huhndorf, 2001, p. 20). Despite using the concept of the "Noble Savage," Child appears to be acting with conscious thought to make her Hobomok separate from the "savages" of popular culture. She proves this separation by placing Hobomok in stark contrast to Corbitant, a savage Indian, who acts as Hobomok's rival.

unconscious by Hobomok, who spares Corbitant's life. Corbitant's overt aggression suggests that too much masculinity can lead to savagery. Meanwhile, Hobomok's compassion, a typically feminine quality, makes him "noble." By combining the positive physically and personal characteristics of Hobomok and then contrasting them with the savage Corbitant, Child creates a beautiful example of a "noble Indian."

The Sentimental Indian

As an avid reader, Child would have been intensely aware of the literary "Noble Savage" and the plight of the Indians.¹⁰ As a new author, though, Child restrains her underdeveloped beliefs in order to further other cultural ideas: "Child found in this national 'other' a means of confronting questions much closer to home" (Ryan, 2010, p. 34). Like many of her century, Child uses her novel to explore issues of race, religion, and gender. Yet, in *Hobomok*, Child is experimenting with the concept of gender through a socially constructed belief of race. Child's methods were not original in themselves, for donning Indian clothes and coloring to politically or socially protest was a common practice in the United States during the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It provided a method by which an individual could safely express opinion without the threat of repercussion. Philip Deloria (1998) explores the tradition in *Playing Indian*, claiming that "Indians represented instinct and freedom" (p. 3). By disguising themselves as Indians, colonists, and eventually Americans, could freely discuss social and political issues. The most famous donning of the Indian persona occurred during the Boston Tea Party.¹¹

By playing Indian, colonists and Americans found a way to become more active in social and political change, no longer hindered by the expectations of their race. Child, following in the footsteps of her predecessors, employs Hobomok as her Indian mask. Through him, Child can safely act out culturally feminine qualities in a male persona so that she may explore the concept of gender in a socially accepted manner. Since Hobomok is already deemed as a "Noble Savage," such untraditional qualities would be more tolerable.

For a nineteenth century man, true masculinity was to combine Enlightenment reason with a Romantic acknowledgment of feeling. True happiness could only be achieved when a proper balance was maintained. A virtuous man could obtain such a balance while "cultivating a sense of duty" and overcoming "the impulse of self-love" (Burstein, 1999, p. 10-11). Through the binaries

¹⁰ Her view of Indians varied from her comrades in writing, for she was far more sympathetic to Indians and Blacks. Later in her life, Child was known for her abolitionist work and her petitioning for Indian rights.

¹¹ "In the years before the American Revolutions, colonial crowds often acted out their political and economic discontent in Indian disguise . . . By playing Indian, the rioters evoked and invented local understanding about freedom, naturalness, and individualism of native custom . . . The feeling of moral detachment that came . . . was amplified, however, when the mask was not simply an anonymous blank but rather the sign of an Indian Other who existed outside of social boundaries" (Deloria, 1998, p. 12, 25-16).

created by the separate spheres, women were expected to act in opposition to men. Women were expected to be emotional, full of sensibility,¹² or the capacity to feel pain, both physical and emotional.¹³ Women's emotions influenced their mental and physical states to such a degree that their emotions would alter their decision-making abilities. Hence, many male sentimental fiction writers created their novels in order to assist in defining acceptable female behavior: "Under the system of thought then prevailing, this sensible heart would restrict female sensuality and soften the masculine one" (Burstein, 1999, p. 16).

With clear definitions of masculinity and femininity in the early nineteenth century, the creation of a sentimental male would have been a challenging task.¹⁴ Sentimental males can be succinctly defined as men who possess emotional sensitivity and personal closeness to women, rather than men. They still exhibit masculine traits, but also project numerous "feminine" ones. Such feminine qualities have received a negative stigma, however, and a sentimental male can often be misconstrued as feminine or emasculated. For the purpose of this essay, a sentimental male should not be considered overtly feminine, but rather to possess "the spontaneity, the sincerity, and the legitimacy of emotion" which are authentic to expressing human experience (Howard, 1999, p. 65). Hobomok, as a sentimental male, is fully equipped with masculine reserve and prowess, while he is simultaneously subject to his emotions in a sincere and authentic way. His masculinity is monitored and curbed by his sentimental qualities, not in a method that is detrimental to his masculinity, but in a fashion that endears him to Mary. Contrary to Beth Piatote's (2013) interpretation that "Hobomok's virility—his ability to not only marry a white woman but also to procreate with her—is tempered by his homosocial relationship with Charles," Hobomok's masculinity is tempered by his sincere feelings for Mary, which result in her socially unacceptable feelings towards him (p. 28-29).

Before readers are introduced to the masculine Hobomok, they are first introduced to his sentimental side. After the magical ceremony performed by Mary and subsequent conversation between the future couple, Hobomok displays his genuine emotions: "Hobomok looked after them

¹² Sensibility is being used as defined by Andrew Burstein (1999) in his book *Sentimental Democracy*.

¹³ Many feminist theorists have discussed in depth the creation of the idea that women were prone to hysteria, fainting spells, and other such illnesses as a result of their "feminine constitutions." References to female frailty and "feminine" diseases are discussed in Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar's (2010) "Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship" from *The Madwoman In the Attic*, and Susan Bordo's (2010) "The Body and the Reproduction of Femininity" from *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*.

¹⁴ In the latter half of the nineteenth century Stowe underwent the task with Uncle Tom, creating a sentimental male in the tragic character of the noble slave. Jane Tompkins discusses the sentimental qualities of Stowe's novel, focusing on little Eva and Uncle Tom. What is critical from this article is that Uncle Tom is recognized as a sentimental male. His role as the sentimental male is reinforced in Cynthia Griffin Wolff's essay (1995), in which she discusses Stowe's "radically revisionist notions of 'masculinity'" (p. 597).

[Mary and Charles] with a mournful expression of countenance, as he said 'Wonder what for be here alone when the moon gone far away toward the Iroquois. What for squaw no love like white woman'" (Child, 2004, p. 14). In this moment of vulnerability, Hobomok expresses his love and loneliness for Mary. He ponders how an Indian woman can ever compare to Mary and it is his feelings that make him wander so late at night. Yet a man at that time period is not supposed to languish after a woman. Lamenting and pining were female whims. His love for Mary is not a fanciful whim, however. Hobomok's love is as valid as Mary's feelings are for Charles. While Mary goes to the woods to practice magic to gain Charles's love, Hobomok performs his own magic to cure himself of his love.

The novel establishes Hobomok's love for Mary as an emotion that has developed prior to the events of the novel. We are informed that Hobomok originally came to respect and adore Mary after she saves his mother's life from a sickness that no shaman could cure:

As he walked on in a hurried, irregular pace, love, resentment, and wounded pride, were all busy at his heart-strings. He had left Pokanocket's daughter, because he loathed the idea of marriage with her; but he never had thought, and till now he never had been told, that Mary Conant was the cause . . . Mary had administered cordials to his sick mother . . . and ever since that time, he had looked upon her with reverence, which almost amounted to adoration. (Child, 2004, p. 33)

Sentimental males are recognized for their close relationships to women, especially to their mothers. Since Hobomok's love for Mary spawns from her rescue of his mother, his connection to his mother can be viewed as significant. The fact that Child refers to Mary's relationship to Hobomok's mother repeatedly only confirms this conclusion and adds to his sentimental qualities. As is traditional in sentimental males, Hobomok has a close relationship to his mother, but no information is known about his father, aligning him with women rather than men.

Several times throughout the novel, Child refers to Hobomok's heart and heartstring, signifying the power and emergence of his emotions. Following Howard's sentimentality, though, Hobomok is experiencing such emotions as they occur and cannot just openly accept them. Emotions and Hobomok's acceptance of them appear as in real life, gradually with time. Raised in a "traditional" world, Hobomok must first reject the emotions in order to validate them as authentic, furthering his characteristics as a sentimental male: "If any dregs of human feelings were mingled with these sentiments, he at least, was not aware of it . . . he rejected it, as a kind of blasphemy" (Child, 2004, p. 33). Thus, Hobomok's rejection of his emotions deepens their reality as he accepts them and their influence on his actions.

Yet the sentimental male is not complete without both sides of its definition. While the acceptance of emotion is inseparable from the idea, so is the notion of masculinity. Hobomok cannot abandon his masculine traits to be a sentimental male. He must combine them with his emotional influences to be labeled as a sentimental male; otherwise he is merely "feminine." Such a combination is possible due to his "noble savagery." As discussed previously, Hobomok is a "noble savage"

because he possesses positive masculine traits. Therefore, his “noble savagery” is crucial to his categorization as a sentimental male. It is his “noble savageness” that balances out his feminine emotions. When Corbitant insults Hobomok’s honor by saying, “Hobomok saves his tears for the white-faced daughter of Conant,” Hobomok retaliates with violence, lifting “his tomahawk in wrath” (Child, 2004, p. 31). This instance of male aggression validates both Hobomok’s feminine emotions and his masculine “noble savagery.” In order to be a successful male, Child had to maintain a sense of honor in Hobomok. He has to maintain his masculine identity in a socially acceptable way for a “savage” Indian, through violence.

Motivated by hate, Corbitant’s actions against Hobomok stresses the selfless actions of the noble Indian: “[B]ut if I should be killed in these woods, who will be left to tell *her* [Mary] of her danger. ‘T’would be pity so young a bird should be brought down in its flight” (Child, 2004, p. 33). In this instance, Hobomok wanders through the woods before Corbitant cravenly attacks Hobomok from behind. Foreshadowing the attack, Hobomok worries not about his own safety, but that of Mary. If he were to die then the village of Salem would not know about the raiding party that was going to attack. These thoughts show the depth of his positive, selfless feelings for Mary and it is those feelings that help fuel him during the following fight with Corbitant. His emotions are projected in an appropriate fashion, because he is not crying, or wailing about his love, but participating in a masculine defense of her. Child successfully couples Hobomok’s emotions with the nobleness of his character, further enforcing the codependency of Hobomok’s stature as a “Noble Savage” and a sentimental male.

Unlike Ann Douglas’s (1977) view that such sentimentality was a shallow and excessive use of emotion¹⁵, Child creates Hobomok as a positive example of sentimentality. Her positive intentions are proven by the fact that Mary, a Puritan woman, chooses to marry Hobomok and even, with time, falls in love with him, breaking all social customs for both Mary and Child’s eras: “She [Mary] remembered the idolatry he had always paid her, and in the desolation of the moment, felt as if he was the only being in the wide world who was left to love her” (Child, 2004, p. 121). After the loss of her beloved Charles, Mary is distraught and unable to live with her religious father. It is Hobomok’s sentimentality that draws Mary to him. Instead of being an emotionally conservative man, Hobomok makes Mary feel loved and desired through his actions and expressions of reverence. It is these actions that persuade her to marry him, even when he has never dared to ask. Working conversely to her self-degradation, Mary is able to find solace in her marriage to Hobomok, birthed from his sentimental characteristics. Unlike other mixed relationships in nineteenth century literature, unhappiness does not spring from Hobomok and Mary’s marriage. Contrarily, they manage to obtain a form of happiness during their short relationship. Their marriage and happiness are only achievable through Hobomok’s sentimental nature.

¹⁵ Ann Douglas’s view (1977) is clearly exhibited in her book, *The Feminization of American Culture*.

The Forgotten Indian

By choosing Hobomok, a vividly “Noble Savage,” Child provides herself with a socially acceptable escape from the negative social backlash that resulted from her radical literary choices. While the public was angered by her decision to have an Indian and Puritan woman marry, their anger was mitigated by the fact that Hobomok is exiled at the end of the novel. It is this same exile that allows for Hobomok’s character to be so unique in the novel. Since Hobomok is predestined for extinction, his new sentimental qualities could be viewed as extinct with him. Child’s attempt did not force society to accept the sentimental male, but rather gave her chance to begin her experimentation.

Therefore, Hobomok’s complete disappearance was required, not only by society, but by Child herself. Shortly after Mary and Hobomok reach a form of happiness, give birth to a son, and settle in their new lives, Charles, previously believed to be dead, reappears looking for Mary. His appearance provides a rebirth and cleansing for Mary, who has been considered degraded by her marriage to Hobomok, and a noble exit for the “Noble Savage.” Just as Cooper’s Chingachgook is noble “because he is continually trying to disappear into the landscape” (Gardner, 1998, p. 111), Hobomok proclaims his own end, solidifying his noble qualities by nineteenth century standards. Hobomok tells Charles of his honorable plans when he says, “Hobomok will go far off among some of the red men in the west. They will dig him a grave, and Mary may sing the marriage song in the wigwam of the Englishman” (Child, 2004, p. 139). Acutely aware of his role as the “other,” Hobomok compensates for his “unnatural marriage” to Mary by providing a solution that allows nineteenth century readers to find solace. He, continuing the tradition of “Noble Savages,” will leave and never return, gracefully accepting his extinction with honor. Hobomok even denies the opportunity to stay, which is the custom of “Noble Savages.”¹⁶ Like his predecessors and descendants, Hobomok is intensely aware of the end of his race:

The purpose of an Indian is seldom changed . . . My tracks will soon be seen far beyond the back-bone of the Great Spirit. For Mary’s sake I have borne the hatred of the Yengees, the scorn of my tribe, and the insults of my enemy. And now, I will be buried among strangers, and none shall black their faces for the unknown chief. (Child, 2004, p. 140)

While Hobomok is clearly discussing his pre-destined death, the purpose of an Indian was not only to die, but to create great change, reform, and freedom. Indians were used to experiment

¹⁶ Gardner (1998) and Dippie (1982) talk in detail about the traits of the “Vanishing” and “Noble” Indian. One trait that is repeatedly seen is the desire to and the understand that they must disappear. When discussing one of Cooper’s “Noble Savages,” Gardner (1998) states that “[t]his Indian, the Pawnee chief Hard-Heart, is the novel’s noble savage, noble in large measure because he is continually trying to disappear into the landscape, in spite of the whites who keep interrupting his vanishing” (p. 111). Often times, it is the whites who interrupt the “Noble Savage” while he is trying to disappear. Hobomok upholds this tradition as he attempts to disappear but is waylaid by Charles.

and project ideas of political and social conflict that whites were normally afraid to enact. For Child, Hobomok provides this freedom as a tool for change. Through Hobomok, she is able to make a social commentary on masculinity and femininity that is so subtle it can be chosen to be ignored.

Even at his disappearance, Hobomok, while noble, has not lost his sentimentality. His motivations are not purely born from his inevitable extinction, but rather stem from his heart: “ ‘No,’ thought he. ‘She was first his. Mary loves him better than she does me; for even now she prays for him in her sleep. The sacrifice must be made to her.’ ” Hobomok chooses to end his marriage and his life out of sentimental feelings for Mary. He desires her happiness above all else, allowing, yet again, his emotions to control his actions, instead of his rationale.

From there, Child is able to properly erase him to the standards of her society. His exit is noble and savage, while containing an unusual display of emotion. What is left of Hobomok, his son, is adopted and assimilated into white society. Mary marries Charles and Charles adopts her son, whose full name is Charles Hobomok Conant. At the revelation that Hobomok’s son is only named secondarily after Hobomok, it becomes apparent that Hobomok’s own son was never truly his. Since his birth, Hobomok Jr. has belonged to Charles, the man he is actually named after, encouraging the total cleansing of Hobomok and his qualities from the bloodline. As would be expected Hobomok “was seldom spoken of; and by degrees his [Hobomok Jr.] Indian appellation was silently omitted” (Child, 2004, p. 150). In time Hobomok Jr. becomes Charles Jr. after his adopted father and the boy is never associated with his Indian heritage again. Ultimately Hobomok Jr. returns to his English roots by moving to England, showing a complete abandonment of Hobomok and his culture.

Child “shows that the sacrificing Indians and women in Puritan America annihilated themselves and will be forgotten because the white men relied upon and exploited their gifts” (Hoeller, 2012, p. 50). Their gifts were the sacrifice they made so that the nation of America could be created and that Indians and women “exemplified a more moral and responsible outlook on life” (Hoeller, 2012, p. 51). As the sentimental male Hobomok exemplified the unity of masculinity and femininity in a genuine expression of emotions and devotion. However, as in her other works, Child requires his sacrifice in order to appease the public opinion of gender roles and race. Her sacrifice does not demean the work Child does in the novel to create a new conceptual character, like the sentimental male, but merely reflects on her awareness of society. She manipulates social expectations to experiment with a radically new idea.

Although some may question why a savage like Corbitant can live while the sentimental Hobomok must die, Child provides a consolation. Hobomok as a “Noble Savage” has to die for the greater good, not of America, but the sentimental male. Corbitant represents no threat to the nineteenth century as he is a rubber-stamp image, the “Savage Indian,” which is feared, but knowable. Yet

Hobomok, in his noble life and death, instills in the village of Salem a legend. The legend of Hobomok. Indians would eventually die out in Child's world, but legends will never be forgotten.

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