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Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times as a Lieu de Memoire: Revising the Image of the Puritans and the History of Early New England

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ABSTRACT

This article scrutinizes the representation of the lives of the 17th century puritans in Lydia Maria Child's historical novel *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* (1824). Based on the persona adopted by the author, the writer's project presented in the epigraph that opens the narrative, narrative voice, and the events focalized in the story, the author argues that Child's re-visitation of the early history of the puritans constitutes a lieu de memoire which corrects stereotypical images traditionally attached to them and celebrates their contribution to the construction of the American nation. To demonstrate this, a definition of the concept of lieu de memoire is first provided; then, illustrations of how Lydia Maria Child shapes her narrative in such a way as to turn it into a site of revision and tribute.

Résumé:

L'auteur de cet article se penche sur la représentation de l'histoire des puritains du dix-septième siècle dans le roman historique de Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* (1824). Se basant sur le personnage que Child construit, la voix et le discours narratifs, le projet de la romancière décliné dans l'épigraphie qui ouvre le roman, ainsi que les événements décrits, l'auteur s'efforce principalement de démontrer que le roman constitue un lieu de mémoire qui corrige l'image réductrice et stéréotypique des puritains et célèbre leur importante contribution à l'édification de la nation américaine. Pour se faire, il fournit d'abord la définition d'un lieu de mémoire avant de démontrer comment Lydia Maria Child construit le roman historique pour réviser l'image des puritains et leur rendre hommage.

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1. Introduction

In her historiographical fiction, Lydia Maria Child adopts the persona and perspective of an anonymous 19th century American who was tempted to write the history of early times (Child, 1999 p. 3). Deborah Gusman (1995), in "Inalienable rights: Fictions of political identity in *Hobomok* and *The Scarlet Letter*," (58) and John Kaag (2013), in "Transgressing the Silence: Lydia Maria Child and the Philosophy of Subversion," relevantly read this pose as a subversive maneuver giving her entry into the male dominant area of American literature without being detected. By feigning to be a man, Child avoided "the backlash against women writers that was later captured so pointedly in Nathaniel Hawthorne's description of them as "scribbling women," Kaag says (p. 51-52).

Despite the humility of the persona who declares that his intention is not to compete with precursors of the historical novel such as Sir Walter Scott and Cowper but simply to tell aspects of the early history of New England not represented in previous works (3-4), Child's *Hobomok* is no less a true historical novel that respects all the conventions of the genre and a literary masterpiece. If we follow criteria established by Edward Quin (2006, p.198) and Murfin and Ross (1998, p.157), a historical novel conforms more to standards of romance than realism; it represents a significant historical period and may include historical or fictional personages or combination of both; finally, historical events provide the authors' insights into historical figures and their influences or into the causes and consequences of historical events, changes, or movements.

Child's tale of early times conforms to most of the above-mentioned conventions. It respects more the norms of romance than

realism. Indeed, constructed from an old manuscript, the story is made of hypotexts that parody, derive, and revise antecedent poems, narratives and plays. The narrative also revisits the significant historical period of the settlement in New England against the backdrop of the crisis between the non-conformists and English Church. The action that takes place in the mid-1620s occurs in real places: Naumkeag, which will later become Salem, and Shawmut and Trimountain, which will respectively become Charleston and Boston. Besides, the narrative includes several historical personages who had played prominent roles in the management and development of New England. On the one hand, there is Governor William Bradford, Governor John Winthrop, Sir Ferdinand Gorges, Charles 1st and Thomas Morton who occupy peripheral positions as they have little visibility as actors or are simply mentioned in the narrative. On the other one, there is Governor John Endicott, a character who has a prominent position in the story. Finally, Child's novel is also a vehicle for the implied author's insights into the puritans and the settlement period as well.

In my analysis, I will pay more attention to the insights the novel brings into the puritans and the historical period of the 17th century and argue that Child revises stereotypes attached to the puritans and attempts to correct traditional perception of this period as barren and uninteresting. Basing my argument on narrative discourse, I endeavor to show that *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* humanizes the puritans and paints them with indulgence. Then, using as theoretical framework the concept of lieu de memoire and Hayden White's concept that history is subjective because it is not a neutral restitution of facts but rather a story emplotted to serve specific purposes, I argue



that the novel can be seen as a lieu de memoire celebrating the fortitude, perseverance, and hard work of people usually described as harsh, severe, and narrow-minded zealots and illustrating their great contribution to the emergence of a prosperous nation ranking among the most powerful ones in the 19th century. To illustrate this, I look at the persona Child creates, the epigraph that opens the novel, the non-narrative comments, and the shaping of the story. I argue that the project formulated in the preface and the epigraph is reinforced by the characterization and the narrative discourse. Attention will be also devoted to the poetic and symbolic language of the novel and the figures of speech.

2. Theoretical framework and methodology

It is necessary to present the key characteristics of the concept of lieu de memoire to show that it is a useful index for reading the historical novel of our focus. Borrowed from Geneviève Fabre and Robert O'Meally's *History and Memory in African American Culture* (1994), the concept designates a "historical or legendary event or figure, a book or an era, a place or an idea" crystallizing and secreting memory. In a lieu de memoire, individual or group memory unconsciously or deliberately selects "certain landmarks of the past—places, artworks, dates; persons, public or private, well-known or obscure, real or imagined—and invests them with symbolic and political significance" (p. 7). In this type of site as well, the personal is often conferred a collective meaning, and memory creatively interacts with history. It is a site loaded with signifyin(g) because myth and ideology are at play in it.

Lieux de memoire are privileged modes for the marginalized and excluded to rewrite their histories from their own perspectives,

to fill gaps left in dominant historical representations, and correct misrepresentations inscribed in them. They are motivated by the realization that despite claims that history is close to a scientific field where practitioners should provide proofs and support their objective rendering of facts with evidence, it is merely "an imperfect tale always open to revision" (p. 6). For instance, awareness of the subjectivity, ideological orientation and biases of the representations by dominant groups and the realization that some aspects have been erased and misrepresented in the latter, urged some cultural producers to tell their own stories through lieux de memoire. The remembrances of events in these lieux de memoire have helped these writers and artists to account more fully for the silenced voices and fill gaps in left traditional archives. Lieux de memoire have thus enabled them to alter the whole tone of history because the past is rewritten from their own perspectives through a creative combination of memory, imagination, and history. Lieux de memoire are thus appropriate channels of nationalistic discourse they enable writers and artists to invent histories, celebrate the past and or reclaim history from their own perspective.

Hayden White's theory about what he terms the emplotment of history helps better understand the process through which narratives are shaped into lieux de memoire. For White, histories are facts processed into stories. He considers that these stories take their shape through emplotment or "the process through which the facts contained in 'chronicles' are encoded as components of plots. Indeed, he argues that the event appears as a plotted story which only gains meaning in combination with other elements that give the history a certain tone as no historical event can itself constitute a story,



tragic or ironic " (Leitch, 2001 p.1710). In my view, literary devices and the ordering of events constitute good tools to emplot facts and shape a narrative; however, like Mieke Bal (1984), in *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, I am convinced that non-narrative comments or voice help confer tone to a narrative. For this reason, the ideological orientation of a tale can be identified through a close study of the narrator's voice, especially non-narrative comments. Consequently, my work looks at voice, plot and literary tools.

3. Child's Construction of lieu de memoire and the revision of the puritans' image

Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times (1824) is written in a period when women were reclaiming voice, and it arose from a revisionist impulse. Until then, male authors dominated the American literary landscape and New England history was mainly perceived through their lenses. James Fennimore Cooper, with his series of *Leather-Stocking Tales*, and romances about early American history such as *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Pilot* (1823), can be considered among the most visible writers. Nathaniel Hawthorne belongs to the same period, but his works revisiting New England history and allegorically painting the effects of puritanism and its decadence came out a decade or several decades after the publication of *Hobomok*: "Endicott and the Red Cross," "The Gray Champion," "Legends of the Province House," "Roger Malvin's Burial," *The Scarlet Letter*. Whereas some critics (Michael D. Bell, Neal Frank Doubleday, Daniel Hoffman, Joseph Schwartz and Marvin Fisher) consider that Hawthorne works within the myth of the founding fathers, affirms American independence or democracy, and is ambivalent towards "Puritan patriarchs and

regicides" who are sometimes even celebrated, others such as Frederick Newberry do not share these views. Hawthorne is generally known for his indictment of puritanism and exposition of its effects on American society. In my view, Hawthorne conforms to previous representations of New England tending to project the image of the puritans as harsh, intolerant, and dogmatic and which failed to truly exhibit their contribution to the construction of the American nation. Apart from Child, Catherine Maria Sedgwick with *Hope Leslie or Early Times in Massachusetts* (1827) formed part of the most canonical women scribbling about American early history. Both Sedgwick and Child bring a feminist touch to historical romances, and they also revise history.

Some critics addressed the subversive dimension of the novel and Child's pose to enter the sphere of literature dominated by men. Indeed, Child gives voice to women in her narrative through the main protagonist, Mary Conant, Mrs. Conant, and Sally Oldham. However, this work goes a step higher by arguing that the novel results from a realization that they were gaps in the previous representations of New England and the puritans, and it is a lieu de memoire that fills them and revises traditional interpretations. Lydia Maria Child adopts in her tale of early times the persona of an anonymous American who wants to re-write the history of New England because he considers that most people view the region's early history as "barren and uninteresting" (p. 3). He is also aware that puritans were negatively perceived. He states that people looked "back upon those early sufferers in the cause of the Reformation as a band of dark, discontented bigots" (Child 6). His intention is to revisit history to revise these two traditional ways of reading the history



of the puritans and New England. Indeed, the narrator presents the defects assigned to the puritans as determinisms when he explains “the peculiarities of their situation occasioned most of their defaults, and atoned for them” (Child, 1999, p. 6). He also pays tribute to the puritans who made the advances of the colonies possible through hard work, perseverance, and faith. The old manuscript of the ancestor who landed on the Isle of Wright in 1629 contained the facts that could help him achieve such a revision of history: it contains “the varying tints of the tablets of history” (Child, 1999, p. 6-7) concealed by ivy clusters around them.

To revise the stereotypes attached to the puritans and correct traditional perception of the period, the implied author had to shape these facts into a lieu de memoire. The first emplotment of the story is the use of the epigraph from William Cullen Brown’s poem, “The Ages,” and I shall come back to its function in the part dealing with the celebration of the puritans’ contribution to the national construction. Crucial emplotment can be also situated at the level of voice. Narrative voice reveals that the persona Child selectively focuses on some events or parts of the manuscript to the detriment of others to avoid repetition. It reveals that the implied author performed editorial changes such as improving the style to make it more legible for the contemporary reader. It also demonstrates that he also omits events that he considers insignificant. The following passage illustrates this:

I shall, therefore, pass over the young man's dreary account of sickness and distress, and shall likewise take the liberty of substituting my own expressions for his antiquated and almost unintelligible style (Child, 1999, p. 7). He says in chapter I. Some pages later, narrative voice also illustrates omission of

some events when it says, in reference to a dispute between Oldham and Roger Conant,

I willingly omit the altercation which followed, which is given at full length in the manuscript; and I likewise pass over the detailed business of the day, such as the unloading of vessels, the delivery of letters, &c., &c., and lastly the theological discussions of the evenings (Child, 1999, p. 12).

Thus, the anonymous American deliberately selects certain parts of the manuscript for his counter-narrative. But how does the novel revise the image of the puritans and how does it celebrate their contribution to the building of a prosperous nation?

The novel’s revision of the puritans’ image is mainly achieved through the characterization of Governor Endicott and Roger Conant, although other figures such as Mr. Johnson are representative. The representation of the historical figure of Governor Endicott illustrates the revisionist impulse of Child’s historical novel. The dominant image of Governor Endicott in literary and historical representations has been the one of a bold, dogmatic, intolerant, and zealous puritan who persecuted people with different religious beliefs. Governor Endicott’s fame grew after an intense offensive he led in 1636, an assault which practically destroyed the whole Pequot tribe. History has it that he enforced strict discipline in the settlement: women had to dress modestly and men kept their hair short; in addition, he was said to issue judicial decisions banishing individuals who held religious views that did not accord well with those of the Puritans. Penalties such as ears and tongues cut off, public lashings, and bread and water diet jail sentences were pronounced when he was governor. Indeed, Endicott had four Quakers put to death for returning to the colony after their



banishment. He notoriously defaced the English flag because he saw St George's Cross as a symbol of the papacy.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's (1837) "Endicott and the Red Cross" that Robert Lowell will later adapt in verse represents Endicott's famous tearing of the sign of the British ensign. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's (1868) "New England Tragedies" portray his persecution of the Quakers. The image of a zealous and hardheaded intolerant dominates in portraits of Endicott. James D. Hart draws the following picture of him: "Endicott emigrated from England in 1628 and was governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony until the arrival of Winthrop. He held other important posts in the colony and was several times governor. Although an able administrator, he was stern and intolerant, and persecuted Quakers, followers of Thomas Morton, and others who differed in creed" (Child, 1999, p. 199). Endicott is emblematic of the general negative perception of the puritans, a stereotypical image which buries their heroic deeds.

Through the characterization of Endicott, Child brings rather new insights to the representation of the governor and the puritans in general. Indeed, even though the depiction of Endicott mirrors in some respects the contours of the historical personage, it debunks at the same time the myth of his total bigotry and blind intolerance. In the story, Endicott is described as a man with a "fine, bold expression" (Child, 1999, p. 36), a courageous leader who successfully protected his colony against the coalition of the belligerent Pequods and Narragansetts. Although Endicott is described as fervently religious and strict in his behavior and management of the colony, he is humanized by Child's historical novel. His zealotry

is not refuted but rather adorned as an effort to protect the colony from the alienating power of Satan. In the historical novel, he argues that people should observe a strict conduct to prevent Satan from keeping them under his influence: He had found by experience that "the more doubts we let in the floodgate, the faster gripe Satan hath upon our souls" (Child, 1999, p. 38).

Child's historical novel does not textualize Endicott's bloody repression of the Quakers presented in historical accounts; it however shows that he bluntly rejected the doctrine of "inward outpouring" the Quakers espoused and which holds that the Holy Ghost dwells in the sanctified believer, making him privy to direct revelations from the Deity. His struggle to counter the progress of the Quakers is described as a reflex of protection, for the narrative explains that he believed that if that "egg laid in the Netherlands" was "kept warm" would represent a viper that "will hereafter spring out of its shell and aim at the vitals of the Church" (Child, 1999, p. 39-40, emphasis mine).

Furthermore, *Hobomok* softens the portrait of Endicott and exhibits his humanism. For instance, narrative discourse illustrates that although he had for a long time banished wine at his table, he offered some bottles to celebrate Sally Oldham's wedding because it was the first wedding they had in the colony (Child, 1999, p. 58). The narrative thus debunks traditional stereotype of Endicott as an extremely intolerant bigot. His behavior towards Mary represents another example debunking his image as an extremely dogmatic and intolerant figure. Though Endicott knew that Mary had a penchant for the Anglican Church, he did not reject her "for zealous as he was, he was not the man to look on so fair and so young creature and hate for her creed" (Child,



1999, p. 118). Thus, *Hobomok* humanizes the chief magistrate who is presented as a modest, kind-hearted, “bolde and undaunted person, yet sociable and of a cheerful spirite, loving or austere, as occasion served.” The historiographical fiction also paints the historical personage as humble: “he unbent his stateliness on the day of the wedding and talked courteously with people” (Child, 1999, p. 58). Child’s tale of early times thus corrects traditional images attached to the governor.

Beyond Endicott, the novel revises the negative perception of the puritans. The characterization of Roger Conant partakes in the revision of the puritans’ image because it explains the puritans’ attitude as determinism of their environment and mechanisms to build strength that enabled them to transcend the limits of their milieu and hardships. The characterization of Roger Conant, the founder of Naumkeak and epitome of the rigidity of the puritans, obeys the logic of indulgence towards the puritans announced by the narrator at the onset of the story. The narrator draws references from nature, particularly water and plants, to capture with strength the causes of Mr. Conant’s sadness, rigidity and harshness of Mr. Conant’s character. Conant who used to have “a cheerful countenance had now assumed an unusual expression of harshness” as a result of the frustrations, privations and losses he experienced during his settlement in Salem. A young Calvinist who had married the daughter of the Earl of Rivers without the blessing of the latter, he had moved to the New World to build a better life and flee oppression and isolation in England; however, he had been so much afflicted by a combination of factors that he became sullen, sour and harsh. As a matter of fact, Conant lived in poverty and want; he had lost two of his boys and Mary, his single

daughter had just returned to live with them. To capture the deterministic forces that have altered the life of Conant, Child compares his life to a fountain the water of which is polluted by the turbid soil. Using romantic metaphors, the narrative reads: “the stream of life gushed from the fountain within him, but it received the tinge of the dark, turbid soil, through which it passed; and its clear, silent course became noisy with amid the eddies of human pride” (Child, 1999, p.8).

Plants and flowers are often used as vehicles in direct and indirect metaphors, and they not only contain a strong suggestive power, but they also help the reader visualize situations with clarity. For instance, Child uses flowers as vehicle to paint accurately the situation of the Conants in Naumkeak: “the rigid Calvinist, in that lone place, surrounded by his lovely family, seemed like some proud magnolia of the south, scathed and bared of its leaves, adorned with the golden flowers of the twining Jessamine” (Child, 1999, p. 8). Mr. Conant is associated with a proud magnolia of the south, which suggests his displacement and transplantation, but also his countenance. The effects of the environment on his appearance are shown through the barrenness of the magnolia. The description of Mary and her mother as golden flowers adorning the magnolia conveys their beauty and nobility. The phrase “twining Jessamine” shows how close they are and illustrates the touch of sophistication and joy that they bring to the wild area of Naumkeak. The Jessamine is indeed known for its scent. Roger Conant’s rigidity and intolerance results in Mary’s abandonment of the family nest and her marriage with Hobomok when Charles is tried and expelled from Naumkeak and though to have died in a shipwreck. Conant suffers, but does not externalize his pain,

which illustrates his humanity hidden beneath his shell. Roger Conant transcends his intolerance and forgives her daughter at the end of the novel. He blesses her union with Charles Brown, the young Episcopalian who had by then returned to New England.

The characterization of Governor Endicott and Roger Conant follows the discourse of rehabilitation of the puritans at the onset of the novel. It shows that Child invites readers to revise traditional perception of the puritans and rather look at their intrinsic qualities because despite their defects, they were bold people who brought light to the New World and allowed building a strong and powerful nation. "Without doubt," says the narrator, "there were many broad, deep, shadows, in their characters, but there were likewise bold and powerful light" (Child, 1999, p. 6).

4. The Celebration of the puritans' contribution to the national edifice

The main project of Lydia Maria Child's historical novel seems in fact to construct a lieu de memoire celebrating the great achievement made in America thanks to the sense of sacrifice, courage, fortitude and perseverance of the puritans. A study of the intertextual relationship between the epigraph that opens the historical novel and the narrative discourse supports this reading of the novel. It was pointed out earlier that the historical novel opens with an epigraph taken from William Cullen Bryant's poem "The Ages." The lines of the epigraph read: "Then all this youthful paradise around, / And all the broad and boundless mainland, lay / Cooled by the interminable wood, that frowned / O'er mount and vale" (Bryant, 1832 p. 585). They describe the New World as virgin and vast land. Like Bryant, Lydia Maria Child writes about the New World. The epigraph constitutes a text within the historical novel because it mirrors

the description of Naumkeak in the 17th century. Like the space Cullen alludes to, Naumkeak is a vast and virgin land waiting to be exploited.

A closer study of the link between the epigraph and the historical novel reveals influences in terms of approach and discourse. In this 1821 poem, Bryant makes a survey of past eras of the world and the successive advances in knowledge, virtue, and happiness to confirm the hopes of philanthropist concerning the future of the humans. Child's narrative has a more or less similar project. Animated by a sentiment of nationalism and pride about the colonies in the 1800s, the anonymous America celebrates the memory of the brave, hard working, and disciplined puritans. He indeed invites the reader to measure the progress made through a comparison between 19th New England and 17th century New England. In the first chapter of the work, the narrator looks at the colonies and marvels over the progress made since the 17th century. He wonders:

Who in those days of poverty and gloom, could have possessed a wand mighty enough to remove the veil which hid the American empire from the sight? Who would have believed that in two hundred years from the dismal period, the matured, majestic and unrivalled beauty of England, would be nearly equaled by a daughter blushing into life with all the impetuosity of youthful vigor? But though Johnson and his associates could not foresee the result of the first move which they were unconsciously making in the great game of nations—a game which has ever since kept kings in constant check—he, at least, was amply rewarded by an approving conscience, and the confiding admiration of his brethren, which almost amounted to idolatry (Child, 1999, p. 100).

The narrator overtly invites the readers to take stock of the progress achieved since



brave men, strong hands and noble hearts such as Mr. Johnson landed in Naumkeak to build a new plantation in the wilderness. The purpose of this invitation is to prove that puritans were the ones who laid the foundation of the progress because not only were they the ones who first landed in this wilderness, but also they worked hard to develop it.

The non-narrative comments clearly illustrate the ideological function of the narrator in several passages. In the one below, the narrator's intent to show the great contribution of the puritans to the rise of a free and prosperous American nation is clear:

Whatever merit may be attached to the cause of our forefathers . . . and whatever might have been their defects, they certainly possessed excellences, which peculiarly fitted them for a vanguard in the proud and rapid march of freedom. The bold outlines of their character alone remain to us (Child, 1999, p. 6-7).

The puritans' great contribution to the edification of the powerful and prosperous 19th century American nation is further acknowledged in these lines as the narrator comments that the puritans were the ones who kindled the development of the colonies with their desire for freedom, faith, courage, and perseverance:

That light, which had arisen amid the darkness of Europe, stretched its long, luminous track across the Atlantic Men, stern and unyielding brought it hither in their own bosom and amid desolation and poverty they kindled it on the shrine of Jehovah (Child, 1999, p. 6).

Whereas the epigraph and non-narrative comments illustrate the writer's project and the ideological bend of Child's reconstruction of the lives of the puritans in 17th century Salem, New England, the selective focus on events in the story serves

as a means to carry out the revisionist project.

As a matter of fact, the narrator emplots the facts drawn from the ancestor's manuscript in such a way as to illustrate not only the progress made since those days, but also implicitly pay tribute to the puritans' contribution to the edification of the prosperous American Nation by focalizing their sacrifices, fortitude and hard work. A key strategy to better show the achievements of the colonies consists in showing the state of extreme poverty, unhealthiness, and danger the puritans lived in when they came to the New World. The narrative exhibits how they lived in want and how much bread was scarce. The puritans lived on hunting and simple meals drawn from their immediate environment—"roasted pumpkins, clams, and coarse cakes made of pounded maize" (Child, 1999, p. 9). They hardly had any tobacco to smoke because King James had discountenanced "the culture of the 'base weed tobacco'" in the colonies. The first settlers had left comfortable homes to live in shacks. Mary Conant apologizes for receiving Lady Arabella in such austere and modest apartments. Like Mrs. Conant, "who had left a path all blooming with roses and verdure, and cheerfully followed his rugged and solitary track," (Child, 1999, p. 16), the latter had left the comfort of her English mansion to courageously follow her husband in the austere and unhealthy plantation of Naumkeak. The climatic conditions coupled with the poverty and bad nutrition in the colony caused great prejudice to both ladies' health. The narrative vividly paints their state using similes and metaphors comparing them to a lamp. Announcing Lady Arabella's death, it states: "the flickering lamp of life was extinguished" (Child, 1999, p. 112). The use of the adjective flickering in



the indirect metaphor creates a visual image of vacillation that paints with accuracy the state of fragility the aristocratic lady.

Hobomok shows that mortality rates were really high in new plantations through the juxtaposition of the losses that strike the settlers in Naumkeak. Before Mr. Johnson who died shortly after her spouse had perished from sickness a day after Mrs. Conant passed away, Roger Conant had lost his two boys as a result of the harsh conditions of life in Naumkeak. To top it all, settlers lived under the threat of constant deadly attacks from the Indians, as the narrative illustrates in the scene where some Indians led by Corbitant are caught ambushing the Conants' dwelling.

Child uses the symbolism of nature in this simile drawing analogy between the plantation of Salem and the olive tree to paint vividly the losses settlers underwent. Reacting to the ancestor of the implied writer's good wishes from the king and lamenting over the decrease of numbers in the colonies, Conant replies:

I have little to say about our troubles, but as for numbers, the besom of disease of those disease and famine hath been among us, and we are now as an olive tree 'with two berries or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof. The lord's will be done. He hath begun his work, and he will finish it. But it grieveth me to see the strange slips which are set which are set upon our pleasant plants, and when I think thereof, I marvel not that they wither (Child, 1999, p. 10).

The image of the olive tree with hardly any fruits remaining on it helps the reader visualize the situation in the plantation of Naumkeak: it is characterized by human losses and desolation. The symbol also helps illustrate the puritans' resilience because the olive is an evergreen tree able to grow on

rocky soil and resist drought, disease and fire.

Narrative discourse shows that although conditions were harsh and difficult and they faced death, want and sickness, these puritans held on to hope and stayed resilient. This hope and faith is expressed in this synecdoche, as Lady Arabella responds to Mary Conant apologizing for the modesty of the apartments they offered their noble guests:

No doubt, no doubt, Lady Mary," answered her guest; "but there are strong hands and firm hearts, as well as noble blood engaged in that cause. I have heard my husband say our mighty kingdom was once a remote province of the Roman empire,-- and who knows where these small beginnings may arrive (Child, 1999, p. 93).

She agrees that they used to have better apartments in England, but she is sure that the hardworking, courageous men, and noble men that were in charge of bettering their conditions would turn the new plantation into a prosperous place. The phrase "strong hands" refers to these puritans ready to toil to develop their new plantation and transform the wilderness into a civilized environment. As for the phrase "firm hearts," it exhibits their courage and fortitude built thanks to their faith. Finally, the expression "noble blood" refers to such aristocratic men as Mr. Johnson who came to build the new settlements from scratch. The fortitude and resilience of the puritans is also symbolized by Roger Conant's persistence to pursue his way to Naumkeak, the plantation where he wanted to settle, despite all his trials and tribulations.

5. Conclusion

Most scholars who analyzed Lydia Maria Child's historical novel stressed her "significant arguments against patriarchal authority and racism" (Sderholm, 2006, p. 553) leaving aside her revisionist project.



Indeed, Lydia Maria Child intended *Hobomok* to be a lieu de memoire correcting the image of the puritans and revising traditional ways of reading New England history as “barren and uninteresting.” The shaping of the story into a site is signaled through the use of several tools, including the epigraph, the adoption of a persona, narrative voice and the events focalized in the story. The persona’s declarations in the preface and his voice in the opening chapter illustrate his awareness that the true history of New England had been misrepresented or misleading in historical records and literary works. He had realized that 17th century New England history is traditionally perceived “as barren and uninteresting.” Narrative voice also shows that he is aware that puritans are loaded with stereotypes. They are viewed as a “band of dark, discontented bigots.”

The implied author had found facts countering these perceptions of the puritans and their history in the manuscript, and he emplots them to revise previous perceptions. The story paints with indulgence the puritans; though it does not debunk the myth of the puritans’ zealousness and rigidity, it argues these defaults constituted determinisms of their environment and tools that enabled them to build strength, fortitude, and resilience to survive in the wild and savage New World where poverty, want, sickness, constant threats of Indian attacks prevailed.

The story pays as well tribute to the boldness, hard work, discipline and sense of perseverance of the puritans who braved all sorts of obstacles to transform the wilderness into a prosperous nation two centuries later. Drawing inspiration from William Cullen Bryant, whose poem “The Ages” serves as epigraph opening the narrative, the narrator invites the reader to

share the sentiment of pride he has whenever he sees the “thriving villages of New England, which speak so forcibly to the heart, of happiness and prosperity” (Child, 1999, p. 5). He also invites the 19th century American audience to look back to the 17th century as a form of tribute to the puritan heroes that laid the foundations of a nation that would later compete with its former metropolis. The puritan made it possible to transform the wilderness where “beautiful villages reposed in the undisturbed grandeur of nature” into busy cities “with cultivated environs..., which seem every where blushing into a perfect Eden of fruit and flowers” (Child, 1999, p. 5).

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