Assimilation and Subversion in Earlier American Literature

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Edited by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction
Robin DeRosa 1

Chapter One
Sons of the Forest: Environment and Transculturation in Jonathan Edwards, Samson Occom and William Apess
John J. Kucich 5

Chapter Two
Timothy Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York*, Samson Occom's *A Short Narrative of My Life*, and the Rhetoric of Race
Ann M. Brunjes 24

Chapter Three
Zombie Testimony:
Creole Religious Discourse in West Indian Slave Narratives
Nicole N. Aljoe 40

Chapter Four
Nothing in the Trunk: Parody in the Narrative of Olaudah Equiano
Robin DeRosa 68

Chapter Five
"Founded in Truth": William Wells Brown and The Parable of Clotel
Mary Getchell 83

Chapter Six
"I Am Not Always In Such a Frame": Gender And Community in Two Early American Criminal Narratives
Kristina Lucenko 98

Contributors 112

Index 114

INTRODUCTION

ROBIN DEROSA

Anyone who has ever taught works by one of the United States' first African-American poets, Phillis Wheatley, to a group of undergraduates understands the dilemma posed by reading early American texts by "oppressed people." Clearly unable explicitly to protest her position as slave, Wheatley, like others in her position, repeatedly chose to express her fondness for her station in life, and penned many poems about her happy conversion to Christianity after her fortuitous removal from her African homeland. Students, professors, and literary critics alike have forcefully argued over her sincerity. Did she really mean it? How pressured was she by her owners and her publisher to claim such contentment with her servitude? In what ways does she seem ironic, disingenuous, or even just plain, old sarcastic? In debates like this, the tendency is to line up on one side or the other. Either Wheatley was fully assimilated into her new American culture, and had been coerced so thoroughly by her position within it that she had virtually no quarrel with her enslavement and conversion, or she was using her only access to a public forum—which entailed the performance of complacency and even gratitude towards her oppressors—in order to make a veiled but tangible statement against her own oppression.

In some ways, both arguments are similar. They both represent the issue as a dialectic, and they both polarize "assimilation" and "subversion." Wheatley must be assimilated *or* subversive, and the reader's goal becomes to figure out which one it is. The essays in this collection offer a different paradigm, one in which assimilation and subversion are not so much oppositional as they are closely aligned, codependent, and mutually defining. Though these essays do maintain the dialectic, they offer new ways to think about dialectic itself. The goal of the collection is to give readers useful models for approaching texts by nondominant subjects, models that consider the polyphonic flow of power and the possibility of simultaneous multiple, conflicting, and even oppositional effects of oppression.

The contributors to this volume approach this goal in varied ways. In "Sons of the Forest: Environment and Transculturation in Jonathan Edwards, Samson Occom, and William Apess," John J. Kucich explores the "treacherous politics of the contact zone" in which his chosen figures dwell. Interested in delineating a "transcultured" Indian—and perhaps "American"—subjectivity, Kucich demonstrates how Christianized natives ultimately refigure the terrain of both the Christian and native landscapes. Reading his three figures as points on a continuum, Kucich traces this process of transculturation as it intersects with the synthesis of environmental writing and politics. In "Timothy Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York*, Samson Occom's *A Short Narrative of My Life*, and the Rhetoric of Race," Ann M. Brunjes continues the exploration of the Christianized Indian. By juxtaposing Dwight and Occom, Brunjes investigates how binary rhetoric works to stabilize (in Dwight) and destabilize (in Occom) the boundary between the Christian and the "other." Where Kucich looked at land, Brunjes looks at language, and discusses how the rhetorical construction of hybrid identities both undermines and strengthens the racist foundation of an emerging American republic.

To introduce Nicole N. Aljoe's "Zombie Testimony: Creole Religious Discourse in West Indian Slave Narratives," I would like to return momentarily to the brief discussion of Phillis Wheatley that I opened with, as I turn back to the topic of slavery and its effect on the rhetoric of authors who are slaves. Phillis Wheatley is one figure from the earliest era of literature that can be correctly called "American" who provokes readers to wrestle with the relationship of the assimilated to the subversive. At the later end of the early American timeline, Charles Chesnutt raises related issues, similarly linked to the rhetorical position of the slave/author. In many of his stories, Chesnutt, a light-skinned African-American who was the son of slaves and the grandson of a slaveholder, uses the story-within-a-story device to frame his tale. John, a wealthy white visitor to the south, meets Julius, a former slave who regales John with anecdotes about his past. Despite the fact that John is presumably telling us, the readers, the story, we interestingly hear Julius' dialect even when slave owners in the story are speaking. One would think that if John is actually relaying Julius' stories to us, the readers, he wouldn't retain the dialect when it is obviously not true to the speaker's style. Julius authorial voice fully co-opts the narrative voice of the novel during his story-telling segments. In addition, the titles of the stories, which supposedly reflect the most distant and therefore objectively authorial position in the novel, are a compelling mix of John's and Julius' speech. "The Gray Wolf's Ha'nt," a short story from Chesnutt's 1899 collection, *The Conjure Woman,* has a title that uses the article "the," which is pure John, *and* the noun "ha'nt," which is pure Julius. Even though the novel appears to use a frame which situates authority with the white narrator, it really suggests that such authority is more dispersed, that it fluctuates across a narrative axis distributing power from one author-figure to another. Is it possible to think of such a relationship not as a simple binary where the slave is oppressed and the slave-owner all-powerful, but instead as a complex back-andforth, where authority is won and lost a thousand times a day by each position? How can we resist simple paradigms which re-cast slaves as objects while at the same time acknowledge real circumstances which limited subjectivity? Does the post-slavery relationship between John and Julius attempt to refigure these worn power differentials, does it reinscribe the old master-slave dynamic, or does it do both simultaneously?

Contributor Nicole N. Aljoe begins her essay with a similar investigation of slave dialect, but she takes as her text the 1799 slave narrative of a Barbadian woman named Ashy, who narrates her life to a white writer. Aljoe considers the way this doubled-voice produces a collaborative effect, and she examines how British West Indian slave narratives produce a dynamic and syncretic language. By reading through this lens of creolization, she offers possibilities for how the "imbrication" of politics and religion enabled slaves to refigure religious discourse as a form of resistance crucial to the assertion of their legal rights. The figure of the "zombie" works to imbue the dual-bodied figures that Aljoe examines with a friction that complicates the notions of collaboration and hybridity.

Continuing the theme of the figure of the doubled slave, my essay, "Nothing in the Trunk: Parody in the Narrative of Olaudah Equiano," examines how Equiano's critically troubling conversion to Christianity can be read as subversive. Drawing on theories of parody that suggest that any performance of an original changes the nature of that original—and even the very definition of "originality"—my essay argues that every empire (in particular slavery and Christianity) contains the seeds of its own abolition. Through examinations of the nature of salvation, the epistemology of race, and the "plagiarized" descriptions that Equiano provides of his African homeland, I offer a new way to read Equiano's ultimate conversion that resists the temptation to resolve the ironies and paradoxes of the earlier portions of the text.

In my essay, I read against the mainstream criticism about Equiano's narrative, which casts his conversion as a strengthening of the status quo. Mary Getchell's "'Founded in Truth': William Wells Brown and the Parable of *Clotel,"* also reads against mainstream criticism about Brown's 1853 novel. Instead of dismissing the novel's sentimentality as an unfortunate watering-down of the realistic story about slavery that comprises the core of the novel, Getchell examines how the sentimental moments actually serve to authenticate the novel's realistic scenes, how in some ways, the Clotel plot is subordinate to this sentimental, authenticating plot. Getchell uses the term "parable" to articulate how side-by-side stories—and distinct genres—work together, both codependently and ironically, and she demonstrates how Brown subversively appropriates the power of culturally dominant forms without assimilating to them.

In the final essay in the collection, "'I Am Not Always In Such a Frame': Gender And Community in Two Early American Criminal Narratives," Kristina Lucenko considers the way that early narratives by and about female criminality functioned to both construct and threaten the Puritan social order. Lucenko asks questions about narrative authority, and explores the complicated framing and ventriloquizing techniques that disperse this authority across several varied social groups, including female criminals, Puritan ministers, and the larger community. She examines how the transgressive "wordliness" of criminals such as Esther Rodgers and Patience Boston (along with their vexed relationships to the maternal, to sin, and to redemption) carved out a role for such women by which they would ironically create the standards of the communities that would ultimately judge them.

This collection spans the "long" early American period, and features texts written from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries. Native Americans, Puritan ministers and Puritan "whores," Barbadian and transatlantic slaves: the figures who populate these essays are talking about power, and creating—in writing—a dynamic and complicated relationship between the mainstream and the margin. This liminal space where assimilation becomes subversion (and vice versa) goes by many difference names in this collection: the contact zone, the transcultured, the hybrid, the syncretic, the zombie, the pardodic, the parabolic, the transgressive, the framed. Each of the contributors works to find ways to describe this space without simultaneously closing it down. It can be a significant rhetorical challenge to articulate what might ultimately be a paradox, but this collection aims not only to look at familiar texts in new ways, but also to think about the critical process in a new way. In what ways does the critic's own explication of a text undermine *and* stabilize the text's coherent meaning? This is, in many ways, a collection that investigates this methodological question even as it focuses on the nature of oppression and how "the oppressed" write their way into and out of their own oppression.

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CHAPTER ONE

SONS OF THE FOREST: ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSCULTURATION IN JONATHAN EDWARDS, SAMSON OCCOM AND WILLIAM APESS

JOHN J. KUCICH

William Apess's choice for the title of his 1829 autobiography, *A Son of the Forest,* cannily exploited the newly formed Romantic undercurrents of American identity, in which wilderness became a privileged space and its aboriginal inhabitants an icon.[1] It also marked a distinct break from earlier writings of Christian Indians. Native American writing in English begins with Samson Occom turning his back on the woods. His brief but compelling narrative of his life sketches in a few bleak paragraphs his childhood among the Mohegans in the forested edges of Connecticut before launching into the story of his English education and his call to the ministry. For Occom, the woods that sheltered his childhood remain freighted with Cotton Mather's typology of wilderness, an unredeemed blankness counterposed against the ordered, cultivated landscape of an English settlement blessed by Christian logos. The earnest, often bitter, story of his ministry among the Montauks of Long Island is colored by this tension between a living wrested from the land and the financial (and environmental) dispensations due a minister of the word. Occom's narrative makes a striking contrast to Jonathan Edwards's account of his own youth and early ministry. Like Apess's *A Son of the Forest,* the spiritual autobiography of this standard-bearer of mid-eighteenth century Puritanism is rooted in the woods, whence the young Edwards returns again and again to retreat from the snares and complications of the city and village, to meditate, and to find unmediated access to God. In order to redeem the English Puritan mission in New England, Edwards returns to the forest.

This essay will explore the shifting cultural meaning of the environment in these three Early American writers, with a focus on the social and political dimension of environmental literature. That all these writers spent much of their careers ministering to Christian Indians underscores the high stakes of their representations of the environment. The pairing of Occom and Edwards under the rubric of ecocritism is a bit unusual – Edwards is sometimes read as an environmental writer,[2] but rarely as writer engaged in social protest. Occom has attracted recent critical attention for his strong advocacy of Native American causes during his long and controversial ministry, but the role of landscape in his work has been noted mainly by its absence. Placing Edwards's writing next to Occom's, then, highlights the occluded Native presence in the former and the key role the environment played in the latter's efforts to develop a viable Indian politics.

If environmental writing and criticism is often read as distinct from (and indeed, in opposition to) a more socially engaged literary practice, these writers from the mainstream and margins of early American culture highlight the political stakes of environmental representation. These stakes are powerfully realized in the work of William Apess. His self-presentation as a "Son of the Forest" draws together the competing strands of environmental writing, predicating his claim to an American voice on his Native American roots. The forest for Apess is at once a Christian wilderness and the locus of a viable, though fractured, community. That his formative act of civil disobedience sought to reclaim the traditional rights of the Mashpees to gather wood is no accident—Apess forges at the beginning of the 19th century a new ethic in which the forest and its inhabitants are inextricable. His act, at once religious, political and environmental, may well have inspired Thoreau; it undoubtedly established a standard of social and environmental justice that America has barely begun to realize.

The link between the New England woods and its first peoples is, of course, central to the earliest Puritan writings in America – William Bradford's description of the uncolonized New England landscape in *Of Plymouth Plantation* (1630) as "a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men" establishes an environmental typology central to Puritan ideology (70). For Bradford and his successors, both forest and inhabitant are uncivilized and empty of grace, and the joy with which he greeted the epidemics that swept through New England's tribes and the massacres of the Pequot war complement his satisfaction at the steady march of settlement in Massachusetts. The same rhetoric structures Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), which exhaustively traces English settlement of New England in order to show how "Divine Providence hath Irradiated an Indian Wilderness" (1).

By the time Jonathan Edwards began to reflect on his own history in his "Personal Narrative" (1765), the work of divine irradiation largely had been accomplished. The Indian wars had receded to the frontiers of upstate New York and northern Maine, while the native population of southern New England clung to a handful of tiny reservations or scraped a marginal living on the edges of English settlements. The landscape of Edwards' boyhood, East Windsor, Connecticut, was by the early 18th century a thickly settled agrarian patchwork – the kind of landscape that Puritan divines pointed to as the environmental counterpart of a society imbued with grace.

Nowhere is this landscape of grace more apparent than in Edwards' personal narrative. It was written in 1739, when Edwards held the pulpit in Northampton just as the tide of the Great Awakening was breaking over the American colonies. Edwards' account of his own youthful conversion is remarkable not so much for its mystical ardor – in its tone and theology, it is typical of the countless conversion narratives penned by devout New Englanders – as it is for the deep roots it sinks in the New England landscape. Once awakened to "a sense of divine things," Edwards finds

> the appearance of every thing was altered: there seemed to be, as it were, a calm, sweet cast, or appearance of divine glory, in almost every thing. God's excellency, his wisdom, his purity and love, seemed to appear in everything; in the sun, moon and stars; in the clouds and blue sky; in the grass, flowers, trees; in the water, and all nature; which used to fix my mind. (285)

John Gatta, in *Making Nature Sacred,* notes that Edwards here recapitulates the medieval notion of the Book of Nature, a source of revelation second only to the Bible in offering religious insight, and Gatta notes further that Edwards' epiphany in his father's pasture is carefully subordinated to a point of doctrine (the absolute sovereignty of God) and a verse of scripture (I Timothy i.17) (64). Even his first description of the divinely irradiated New England environment is framed by a biblical landscape: "Those words of Canticles ii I used to be abundantly with me: I am the Rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys" (284). These biblical verses are the prism through which he views the New England landscape, a typology in which local environment signifies Hebraic theology. Thus most of the environmental details that appear in his narrative are generic in nature – when Edwards lowers his gaze from the moon and stars, he sees "such a little white flower, as we see in the spring" (287) as a metaphor for a Christian believer; that is about as precise his descriptions get. The scientific writings for which Edwards is also celebrated, though marvels of careful description, still fall under the same rubric of natural theology that structures his narrative.

Yet while the New England environment remains remarkably indistinct in Edwards' narrative, it is present in a way unimaginable for Bradford. The wilderness spaces so bereft of grace for the Pilgrim colonist are a powerful locus of Edwards's spiritual identity. His narrative returns again and again to the woods, from the "secret and retiring place" (281) in a swamp where he and his boyhood friends pretended to preach, to the "solitary place on the banks of the

Hudson" where, during his first ministry in New York, he would go for "contemplation on divine things" (289), to his habit, in Northhampton, of riding out into the woods for his health. Edwards continually seeks out the forested edges of the New England landscape and claims them as sacred ground for the Puritan mission. If at one point, early in his conversion experience, he fantasizes about fleeing the concerns of the world to live "alone in the mountains, or some solitary wilderness, far from mankind, sweetly conversing with God" (286), in this spiritual narrative written at the height of his power Edwards brings Bradford's "savage and desolate wilderness" squarely into the orbit of the pulpit; indeed, woods and meetinghouse serve here as equal axes of Puritan ideology. As Edwards finds Jesus in the woods as well as in the Word, he casts himself as a son of the forest, utterly at home in the woods and, indeed, depending on the mystical insights of his woodland meditations for his power in the pulpit. In his personal narrative, Edwards approaches a philosophical monism more typical of the Native understanding of the relationship between humans and nature than the traditional Christian dualism – in the woods, the boundaries between Edwards, the environment he lives in, and the God he worships begins to dissolve in a manner that would have been recognizable to the Algonquian peoples he had displaced.[3]

Yet in bringing this sublime, epiphanic landscape to the center of the Puritan mission, Edwards performs his own irradiation of the woods. If wilderness, to Edwards, is no longer hideous and desolate, neither is it full of wild beasts nor (more significantly for our purposes) wild men. Native Americans were certainly present in eighteenth century New England – as a minister in a succession of frontier towns, Indian wars were both a vivid memory and a palpable threat – but they had no place in Edwards' typological landscape other than as ciphers for Satan's power.[4] His work in Stockbridge in the 1750s is notable both for his efforts to salvage the Housatonic Indian mission from land-hungry settlers and for the energy he devoted to his formal theological treatises. Certainly Edwards continued to observe and enjoy his environment – George Marsden, in his biography of Edwards, speculates that as the minister approached Stockbridge for the first time, "he could see the beauties of the setting on the Housatonic River in the Berkshires as communications of Christ's redemptive love" (374). Yet as Edwards moved to a New England landscape very much inhabited by natives, his Puritan environmental typology vanishes from his writings. The Stockbridge Indians themselves do not – they occupy hundreds of pages of Edwards' correspondence with colleagues, sponsors and officials, and they clearly claimed his intense and sustained energy. Edwards political maneuvering among the settlers of Stockbridge, his larger strategic concerns about the role of the Iroquois nations in the ongoing struggle with France, his detailed plans for reforming Indian education and his commitment to

Indian missions as a key element of the work of Puritanism all testify to the central role Natives played in his Stockbridge years. While he had little interest in Mahican language and culture, he clearly admired many of his Indian neighbors, took Indian children into his home and encouraged his own children to play with them. Yet rather than incorporate Indians into his environmental typology, Edwards banishes the environment itself from his spiritual landscape. His writings from this era have a schizophrenic quality, a sharp divide between the material conditions of his life and the theological productions of his pen. As he confronted a living Indian presence in his beloved New England landscape, the proto-Romantic typology of his "Personal Narrative" proved untenable. The woods became a solely social space.[5]

Yet while none of Edwards' later work conveys the rich environmental sensitivity of his "Personal Narrative," works like "Freedom of the Will" and "Original Sin" are an important corollary to his earlier efforts to reimagine Bradford's wild woods. Perry Miller argues that Edwards' efforts to systematically assess human nature in his time in Stockbridge brought him "his most profound insight . . . the unity of the race." Edwards' message to the river gods and merchants who profited most from the cleared New England landscape was that "in the nature of things God treats them all as one, along with Negroes and Houssatunnucks" (279). By shifting the locus of savagery away from the uncleared borders of the New England colonies and towards the hearts of men, Edwards prefigures one aspect of Romantic landscape typology that would fully blossom in the nineteenth century, in which the sublime landscapes of the American wilderness offered an antidote to civilization's ills. While Edwards certainly didn't idealize traditional Native culture or devote himself to wilderness raptures – his mission in Stockbridge was, after all, to bring the remnants of a defeated tribe into the fold of European culture and thereby secure the allegiance of the Iroquois nations to the west – his work nevertheless marked an environmental rupture from his Puritan fathers. The forest, for Edwards, was both a locus of spiritual insight and a refuge from the corruption of a more "civilized" society. Most importantly, his Stockbridge writings, though thoroughly bifurcated, begin to shift the terms "Indians" and "woods" away from devilishness on the one hand and spiritual retreat on the other and towards economic, cultural and political exchange. It would remain for Indian writers themselves to weave those two registers into a more coherent whole.

Samson Occom begins his own personal narrative, written in 1768, by reproducing the landscape typology of Bradford and Mather. "I was born a Heathen and brought up in Heathenism," Occom writes. "My Parents livd a wandering life, for did all the Indians at Mohegan, they Chiefly Depended upon Hunting, Fishing and Fowling for their living, and had no Connection with the

English" (730). For Occom, the Mohegan's religious beliefs are inextricable from their relationship to the environment: "They strictly followed their Heathenish Ways, Customs and Religion," he notes; despite some perfunctory preaching and teaching, life on the Mohegan reservation remained fully separate from the English settlements, tied to subsistence patterns and cultural practices that long preceded European contact. While Occom's account is remarkably lacking in any description of the physical environment, he makes it clear that it is, typologically, a wilderness – Occom stresses that "there was not one amongst us, that made a Profession of Christianity – Neither did we Cultivate our Land, nor keep any Sort of Creatures except Dogs, which we used in Hunting" (731). Raised in an environment bereft of cultivation and Christianity, Occom had to leave Mohegan to follow the Word of God. What was planned as a short visit to Eleazar Wheelock's to learn to read becomes a four-year initiation into European Christian life, and what appears to be a complete break from his woodland upbringing.[6] Occom's remove from the woods to the parsonage enacts in miniature the arc of Mather's *Magnalia*, his years studying with Wheelock irradiating his Mohegan heritage and leaving him ready to spread the Word among those natives still in New England's pockets of wilderness.

Yet Occom subtly reworks the wilderness typology of Bradford and Mather, carefully avoiding the terms "wild," "wilderness" and "savage" in describing the Mohegans. Those terms were synonymous, for Mather, with the devil; by substituting "heathen" in their stead, Occom shifts the terms from a moral to a social register – his people are not evil, but simply unconverted, and the blame falls squarely on the paltry efforts of New England ministers. Similarly, by focusing his description of Mohegan not on the resonant symbolism of the woods, but instead on the subsistence patterns of the people who lived there, Occom moves from the moral typology of wilderness to the more value-neutral realm of economics. The Mohegan environment is defined here not by landscape but by land use – a marked contrast to Edwards's description of empty woodland environments. For Occom, the environment is primarily a social space, and his description is in line with mainstream European attitudes towards cultural evolution, in which Christianity, cultivation and civilization are synonymous terms. The Mohegans are not Christians, Occom suggests, because they are not farmers. Occom's remark that the Mohegans didn't cultivate their food is striking, given the historic importance of agriculture to the Algonquians of Southern New England, and it may be laced with irony – farming in the Mohegan villages declined in the 18th century mainly because English settlers had seized most of the Indian land.[7] His omission is certainly consistent with his effort to represent the Mohegans not simply as the wild people of a wild landscape, but as pre-Christian and pre-agrarian. In this tactic, Occom looks back towards the praying Indian villages founded by John Eliot and forward to the cultural evolution thesis fully developed by Lewis Henry Morgan. In contrast to Edwards, however, Occom remains unable to represent the forested edges of New England as an epiphanic landscape, a site of contact with the Holy Spirit, for it is decidedly not empty. The forest, for Occom, is not a spiritual space but a social one, and in this, his ideology aligns neatly with Wheelock's own missionary ideology. Occom was the first to begin to execute Wheelock's grand vision of an army of Christian Indian missionaries converting the savages on New England's borders, moving them along the path to Christian civilization and, not incidentally, smoothing the ground for European settlement.

Occom wrote his narrative in the aftermath of his fund-raising tour of England on behalf of Wheelock's Indian Charity School, and the opening quite sensibly summons Wheelock's missionary vision (78). Yet as Occom continues the story of his early work among the Montauks, Wheelock's vision begins to break down. The main reason is financial – the hardships imposed by Occom's pittance of a stipend gradually convince Occom that even the most diligent and cultivated of Indians would remain second class citizens. The economic conditions of Occom's mission transform Occom's environmental vision as well. While the Long Island section of the narrative is as lacking in descriptions of landscape as is the Mohegan section, Occom sketches an ecological vision that is vastly different from that proffered by Wheelock. For while Occom carefully details his success as a missionary, teaching children their letters and sparking a revival among the Montauks, he makes it clear that his success depends as much on his deep familiarity with Native culture as it does on his English education.[8] This much, at least, is in line with Wheelock's vision.

His "manner of living," however, suggests that Occom wasn't so much guiding the Montauks towards European civilization as forging a middle ground between them. Occom lives in a wigwam, but travels by horse and ox-cart; he raises pork, but also plants the traditional corn and beans; he keeps a cow, but also hunts and fishes to feed his family; to raise cash, he trades in feathers, but also binds books and makes spoons, pails and churns. On one level, this is clearly a catalogue of complaint – Occom makes it clear that he is forced to draw on a variety of European and Native subsistence strategies because he is grossly underpaid for his work, especially compared to white missionaries. On another, though, Occom constructs an identity at odds with Wheelock's ideal of the Christian Indian missionary. The detailed description of his life in Montauk reads like more like autoethnography than biography, as if Occom were negotiating the terms of his cultural difference as he pleads his case. Forced to negotiate the treacherous politics of the contact zone, Occom's writing grows increasingly transcultured.[9] The absence of landscape prospects may in fact be an indication of Occom's Mohegan sensibility – such an aesthetic distance is more typical of European writing, in contrast to a more intimate and practical view of nature shared by most natives.[10] The famous end of the narrative, where he claims he has been poorly treated by white sponsors "because I am a poor Indian," is an affirmation of his racial and cultural distinctiveness. "I can't help that God has made me so; I did not make myself so," he writes. Occom, sincere in his Christianity and justly proud of his European education, is clearly no traditionalist. Yet the life he describes at Montauk, seamlessly incorporating Algonquian and European subsistence techniques, is well adapted to a reservation on the margins of European settlement. Occom's short narrative sketches a transcultured Indian subjectivity poised between the forest of his childhood and the village of his youth, a subjectivity grounded in a relationship to his environment that is neither Puritan nor Indian, but that transfigures the terms of each. The environment, for Occom, is not an empty screen upon which he can project a theological typology – forced to turn to the environment to feed his family, he can't afford such a purely theological relationship to the land. For Occom, the environment is, instead, a space of intense negotiation, where competing cultures intersect in terms that are primarily social and economic.

One place to view this transcultured landscape is Occom's journals. They remain unpublished, gathered among the collected papers of Eleazer Wheelock at Dartmouth College. The entries are notoriously sparse. For years at a time, they simply catalogue Occom's travels, where he lodged, who he visited, upon what text he preached. There are precious few extended reflections, and, compared to such vivid travel accounts as Sarah Kemble Knight's or Timothy Dwight's, virtually no descriptions of landscapes. Yet there are some important glimpses of Occom's very distinct environmental sensibility.

Among the papers from his Montauk years, for example, are a dozen or so herbal remedies for common ailments, drawing on a wide variety of native plants (sweet fern, elder root, pecquawoss, weecup) and a few European invasives like burdock. The list illuminates yet one more way Occom turned to environment to help feed his family – he worked for years as an herbal doctor – and how he adapted a traditional native relationship to the environment to new conditions. This section of the journal ends with a receipt: "Ocus has now learnt me 52 roots & I have this day paid him in all 27 York money." It seems safe to conclude that Occom learned this craft from a local Montauk or Shinnecock healer, gaining traditional herbal knowledge through an entirely European contract and applying it in a context carefully stripped of native religious rituals. Yet while the nature of the journals suggest little connection between his role as minister and doctor, Occom nevertheless occupied the position of a traditional medicine man, blending the roles of spiritual and physical healer. Occom had to tread carefully in developing this role. His "Account of the Montauk Indians, on Long-Island," written in 1761, some seven years after his receipt to Ocus, contains a typically Puritan account of the Montauk "Powaws . . . who get their art from the devil." While he lends some credence to their power, he carefully distances himself from their craft: "I don't see for my part, why it is not as true, as the English or other nation's witchcraft, but it is a great mystery of darkness" (109). Occom clearly places his herbal knowledge, though rooted in traditional Algonquian culture, within the Christian fold. His apprenticeship to Ocus also anticipates the career of Samuel Thomson, the influential herbalist of the early 19th century who combined evangelical Christian fervor with a deep faith in the healing power of the nature.[11] If Occom is clearly not an Algonquian shaman, neither is he a European doctor – his relationship to the plants of the local woods, swamps and fields situates him, once again, between these two identities, mingling discrete categories of social identity, religion and economics.

At other moments of the journal, Occom clearly challenges the conventional Puritan typology of savage wilderness and civilized village. The spare travel entries, for example, often record Occom's journeys to Mohegan to help fight for his tribe's land claims – a long-standing battle that was a constant source of tension between Occom and his white sponsors. The journal, then, offers an oblique but powerful statement of the central role the Mohegan reservation played in Occom's professional life – not as a site for spiritual meditation or religious rhetoric, but as the very locus of protracted political struggle. His travel entries, too, systematically undermine the wild men/wild woods formulation: he is, first, an Indian himself ranging widely over New England, visiting with Indian and white friends in villages and towns throughout the land and preaching wherever he finds an audience. In the process, he lays a claim to the land that at once recalls the wandering existence of his Mohegan ancestors and the itinerant preaching of the Great Awakening. His journal, then, proclaims his welcome across the northeast, establishes his credentials as a Christian minister, and records his success in a missionary version of counting coup.[12]

At times, Occom self-consciously opposes the Puritan landscape binary. On a visit to New York City in 1761, he offers this account of the inhabitants' behavior, noting

> all sorts of evil noises carried on by some Drunkards who were realing and staggering in the streets, others tumbling off their horses, there were others at work in their farms, and if ever any People under the Heavens spoke Hell's language, these people did, for their Mouths were full of cursing, profaning God's Holy Holy Name. . . . I have though there was no Heathen but the wild Indians, but I think there is some English Heathen, where they Enjoy the Gospel of Jesus Christ too. Yea I believe they are worse than any Savage Heathens of the Wilderness.

This is, interestingly, the first mention of “wild Indians” in Occom’s writing, and he uses the term here to deconstruct this crucial binary of Puritan ideology. For Occom, the savage wilderness is not on the forested edges of the English colonies, but in the heart of the metropolis. This move echoes the trajectory of Edwards’ writing in Stockbridge, where close contact with an Indian community highlighted the evils of nearby white settlers. The passage is also one of the earliest examples of satire in Native American writing – the rhetorical mode that would dominate Indian writing for at least a century.

The irony of this passage is deepened by the fact that Occom was then en route to the Oneida on New York’s northern frontier – the Iroquois nation then most receptive to Christianity. The journey likely marked the beginning of Brotherton, Occom’s plan for a Christian community of Indians from across the Northeast, established on Oneida land and hence free from white control. The founding of Brotherton would occupy the rest of his life, and it ran counter to the evolving (or, from Occom’s perspective, devolving) mission of Wheelock’s Charity Indian School: rather than educate and Christianize natives under the strict control of whites, Brotherton would allow Indians to forge a new identity on their own terms. Occom wasn’t able to establish the community until the eve of the Revolutionary War, and wasn’t able to settle there until the war’s end. But the journal that records the founding of the community in July, 1774 captures both the transcultured Indian identity he hoped to nurture and the role the environment would play in that process. “The good Lord be praised,” he writes, “that he has safely brought us to the place of our Defense and that we have found our poor Brethren so well. . . . Spent the week with an agreeable Sense of the Situation and hopeful Prospect of the Indian’s future Happiness.” Land – independently held and separate from white settlement – is crucial for Indian survival, but this is hardly a typical reservation. It would be, for one, pan-Indian, relying on Christian ritual and the English language for social cohesion; for another, it would support itself with European-style agriculture. Yet it was a far cry from the praying Indian villages like Stockbridge, whose entire purpose was to establish European cultural and political hegemony. Brotherton was, in Occom’s term, a “prospect” – not an aesthetic rendering of landscape, but an environmental and social vision at once, neither heathen wilderness nor white civilization, but a middle ground between European and Indian, between traditional native forest and New England town – a charged space that was highly religious and decidedly political, a place where cultural identity could take root in a carefully structured relationship to the environment. Brotherton’s success was fragile but remarkably durable – though the community removed to Indiana and, finally, to Wisconsin after Occom’s death, it remains to this day.

Occom’s work is an important corrective to both traditional Puritan environmental typology and Edwards’ revision of it – the forest, for Occom, is neither a simple opposition to the cultivated landscape of grace nor a blank cipher on which to project Christian mysticism. Occom's work of environmental transculturation instead contests these categories, presenting the wilderness edges of New England as place to construct an identity that mingles the political, religious, social and racial norms of the Puritan mission and the people that mission displaced. Occom's work has important implications as well for environmental writing in the 19th century: it foregrounds the tensions between the Romantic appropriation of the forest as a symbol of a new American identity and the increasing environmental and social exploitation upon which this new American identity was founded.

These tensions are especially visible in the writings of William Apess, the Pequot/Mashpee minister and activist who drew far more heavily on the woods in crafting his public identity than Occom ever dared. By the time Apess began writing in the late 1820s, the woods had lost the savage hue they wore in the representations of the earliest Puritan writers. In the hands of early national writers like Philip Freneau, Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant and James Fenimore Cooper, the wilderness did not howl; it affirmed instead a distinct Americanness that nevertheless carried the cultural authority of European Romanticism. Native Americans, in this cultural logic, were cast as fast-vanishing ancestors of a new American race.[13] Apess's self-presentation as a "son of the forest" made use of a cultural form unavailable to Occom, whose ability to negotiate the borderlands of New England depended on his status as a "civilized" Christian. The power of the noble savage as a cultural ideal for white Americans depended on his or her ties to a wilderness landscape untouched by cultivation and European influence. Long a carefully cultivated persona for elite European Americans, the noble savage became by the nineteenth century a mask through which a Native American could speak.

Apess captures the complexity of this process in the opening of *A Son of the Forest*. While the title of his autobiography trumpets his credentials as a Romantic icon, his geneology quickly complicates his forest origins, using a dizzying array of terms to (dis)locate his ethnic identity. "My grandfather was a white man who married a female attached to the royal family of Philip, king of the Pequot Indians" (3), he writes, carefully framing his "Indianness" through his white heritage and his royalty. Apess both summons and undermines the Romantic Indian as formulated by Irving, his mixed blood challenging mystique of "pure" Indian as his assertion of royal lineage brings the artifice of geneology to the forest itself.[14] In quick succession, Apess then unfurls a string of different identity markers, calling himself a "native," claiming kinship in the Adamic human "family," and then speaking of the "red men of the woods" (4). Apess's status as a "son of the forest" clearly doesn't sit easily, mixed as it is with credentials that tap into alternate value systems: whiteness, Christianity, royalty, native status. The trend continues as he describes his birthplace in "the back settlements . . . in the woods of a town called Colrain, near the Connecticut River, in Massachusetts" (4). Apess locates his origins not in a forest primeval but instead in the frontier woods, a colonized landscape that bears the raw marks of stolen land. The term "son of the forest" retains its value – a few pages later, Apess recounts his early sense of the term "Indian" as a slur, denouncing the white who threw this "opprobrious epithet at the sons of the forest" (11). Rhetorically, at least, the phrase is equivalent to Apess's preferred term for his people, "Natives."

The equivalence of the two terms underscores how deeply, for Apess, Native identity is rooted in the environment. The episode that follows illustrates that connection. Apess describes how his white foster parents controlled him by threatening to send him away "among the Indians of the dreary woods" (10), and then retells a story of his childhood terror when he mistakes a group of white women for Indians. The paragraph traces the doubled alienation Apess experienced in his Connecticut childhood, from his native identity and from his native environment. He makes it clear that this alienation was culturally determined, the effect of countless stories of Indian atrocities that associated the woods with savagery. Apess can reclaim the woods, however, by carefully attending to politics. "But the whites did not tell me that they were in a great majority of instances the aggressors – that they had imbrued their hands in the lifeblood of my brethren, driven them from their once peaceful and happy homes – that they introduced among them the fatal and exterminating diseases of civilized life" (11). The rest of the narrative, then, recounts Apess's efforts to overcome these diseases – not least of which is the psychic dislocation from his ethnic and environmental identity. Apess, caught in the web of Bradford's environmental ideology of "wild woods and wild men," frames his narrative as an effort to reclaim his patrimony as a son of the forest.

A crucial tool in this process is Romantic ideology. The narrative builds steadily towards Apess's journey to the frontier. While his service in the War of 1812 reads as equal parts military burlesque and patriotic bombast, his travels in the North Woods in the year or so afterward mark his coming of age and his reclamation of a transcultured Indian and environmental identity. Destitute and dissolute after his discharge, Apess comes to an epiphany:

> My brethren were all around me, and it therefore seemed like home. I was now in the Bay of Quinte; the scenery was diversified. There were also some natural curiosities. On the very top of a high mountain in the neighborhood there was a large pond of water, to which there was no visible outlet – this pond was unfathomable. It was very surprising to me that so great a body of water should be found so far above the common level of the earth. There was also in the

> neighborhood a rock that had the appearance of being hollowed out by the hand of a skilled artificer; through this rock wound a narrow stream of water: It had a most beautiful and romantic appearance, and I could not but admire the wisdom of God in the order, regularity, and beauty of creation; I then turned my eyes to the forest, and it seemed alive with its sons and daughters. There appeared to be the utmost order and regularity in their encampment. (32-33)

Apess here achieves what Edwards and Occom did not – the full integration of natural theology and Native American identity. The order and regularity Apess finds in this epiphanic landscape applies equally to the Indian community that lives within its fold. [15] Apess thus alludes to a Romantic ideology that places a sublime wilderness in a tense binary relationship with civilization, but he resists its force; for him, the sons and daughters of the forest are as orderly, regular, in a word, as civilized, as the hallowed environment they inhabit. While he views the scene from a typically Romantic distance, seeing the hand of God on a sublime landscape and looking at the Indian settlement from a similarly magisterial perspective, Apess manages here to join Romantic notions to Indian solidarity.[16]

Yet Apess does not reclaim a lost Indian identity; he instead forges a transcultured one. The language of Christian conversion and pan-Indian politics form a seamless whole, and together form the basis of his sharp critique of white efforts to "civilize" the natives in the following pages. "The forests of Canada and the West are vocal with the praises of God, as they ascend from the happy wigwams of the natives" (34), he writes, finding no conflict between Christianity and traditional Indian lifeways. For the rest of the narrative, Apess moves easily among both white and Indian society, living the itinerant life of the landless poor of the era while maintaining his ties with his Pequot relatives and his Methodist community. The environment remains a spiritual touchstone for Apess. Lost in a swamp on a visit to his father, he finds that "once he prayed to the Lord to set me free, I found a small piece of solid earth" (43); his call to the ministry comes in the form of a dream-journey through a "miry place in a dark and dreary way" to a sun-lit plain (44). The difficulty in deciphering how much these episodes owe to the rhetoric of Christian vocation and how much to traditional Algonquian spirit-visions illustrates the depths of Apess's transculturation.

The environment returns to the very center of Apess's mission in his account of the Mashpee Revolt, *Indian Nullification* (1835). The text opens with Apess's first visit to Cape Cod reservation's meetinghouse, a description of a New England landscape gone awry:

> The sacred edifice stood in the midst of a noble forest and seemed to be about a hundred years old, circumstances which did not render its appearance less

> interesting. Hard by was an Indian burial ground, overgrown with pines, in which the graves were all ranged north and south. A delightful brook, fed by some of the sweetest springs in Massachusetts, murmured beside it. (170)

The setting suggests the kind of social and religious harmony that had proven so elusive in Apess's own life – a Christian Indian community whose regularity and order (to borrow from his description of the Bay of Quinte) is manifest in the blessed landscape, the union of forest and civilization. Apess offers this idealized and highly aesthetic prospect, however, only to undercut it:

> After pleasing my eyes with this charming landscape, I turned to meet my Indian brethren and give them the hand of friendship; but I was greatly disappointed in the appearance of those who advanced. All the Indians I had ever seen were of reddish color, sometimes approaching yellow, but now, look to what quarter I would, most of those who were coming were pale faces, and, in my disappointment, it seemed to me that the hue of death sat upon their countenances. It seemed very strange to me that my brethren should have changed their natural color and become in every respect like the white men. (170)

The passage is unsettling, both for the growing sense on Apess's part of the dark politics that lurk behind this charming landscape and for the inversion of this iconic New England scene – a stream of white settlers on their way to church suddenly seems completely unnatural. Apess forces his readers to ask a question completely elided in works like Edwards' "Personal Narrative": where are the Indians? And as we look for answers, Apess helps us realize that they will not fit seamlessly into a white-washed Puritan landscape.

A fierce struggle for control of the Mashpee's land ensues. Apess helps the Mashpees overcome the prejudice against "the poor children of the woods" and organize a political response "suited to the spirit and capacity of freeborn sons of the forest" (179). The semantic shift is crucial: the whole struggle centers on shifting white perceptions of Indians from a backwards, undeveloped race who depend on white stewardship to an equal and independent people whose ties to the land merit a separate homeland. If the logic of the Mashpee mission was to bring the Indians into the fold of European American civilization, to make them, essentially, white, then Apess offers a counter-logic that seeks a middle ground between the European and the Indian. By terming the Mashpees the "freeborn sons of the forest," Apess at once alludes to Indian difference (with their unique ties to the environment) and to their equality (as freeborn Americans).

In addition, Apess's formulation casts the exploitation of the reservation environment as an assault on Mashpee culture. Taking Indian land equals taking Indian identity. The revolt hinges on whether the white overseers or the Mashpee themselves can determine how to best use their land, and it crystallizes when Apess and some of his brethren prevent a group of whites from removing wood from reservation land. Apess's phrasing is significant: "As I was walking in the woods, I discovered them in the act of removing some of our property" (181). "Wood" has become a richly overdetermined word, its meaning extending beyond is use value as fuel and its spiritual value as a place of retreat to encompass a broader system of economic exchange, political rights and cultural identity. Apess's language mediates between the European discourse of property and a more traditional Native American relationship to the land. The Mashpees own the land and claim their rights within the broader system of European American jurisprudence, but they act collectively, based on their tribal relationship to the environment. While the struggle to win control of their reservation would unfold along European lines, with front lines in the legislature and the popular press, Apess and the Mashpees would ultimately succeed in carving out a space apart from the broader trajectory of European American culture and development, a space that depended upon a unique relationship to the environment. Reclaiming their wood not only restored the Mashpees to their rightful title, but transformed them from children of the woods to the sons and daughters of the forest.

While Edwards and Occom proved unable to fully synthesize the discourse of landscape with Native American rights, Apess was more successful in joining environmental and political protest. In his work, nature becomes a locus of alternative value, a source of social protest and identity that serves as a powerful counterweight to the mainstream ideology of progress that flourished in the 19th century. Apess builds on this in his "Eulogy on King Philip" (1836), where he uses the memory of this older "son of the forest" and "hero of nature" (277) to launch a withering critique of America's founding myths and expansionist politics. Other writers would pick up the thread, launching critiques of materialism and injustice from the wooded margins of American life. Henry David Thoreau in particular has become the poster child of the effort to root American identity more firmly in the forest, championing a more ecologically responsible relationship to the environment, and inspiring as well successive generations of political protest. Yet Apess offers an important corrective to *Walden's* portrait of a greener America. His self-presentation as a "son of the forest" draws together the competing strands of environmental writing, predicating his claim to an American voice on his Native American roots. His work forges at the beginning of the 19th century a new environmental and political ethic, in which the rights of the forest and its native inhabitants are inextricable.

Notes

1. Washington Irving, while hardly the first to formulate this view, gave it powerful expression at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His "Traits of Indian Character," which Apess includes verbatim in the appendix to *Son of the Forest,* argues unreservedly that America's native inhabitants were as noble before contact with Europeans as they were hopelessly corrupted afterwards. Apess's use of this ideology has received remarkably little attention, though Bernd Peyer, in *The Tutor'd Mind,* notes the irony of the title.

2. John Gatta, in *Making Nature Sacred*, offers a concise summary of environmentally-minded scholarship on Edwards (55-56; 254-55).

3. Lawrence Buell makes a similar point about Henry David Thoreau in *The Environmental Imagination* (211-12). Edwards' spirituality would have been recognizable, but essentially different – his view of the environment remained firmly anthrocentric, even in his natural history essays, and remained well within the tradition of Puritan wonder-working theology. The most thorough account of the relationship between Puritan and Algonquian theology is Neal Salisbury, *Manitou and Providence*.

4. Gerald McDermott's recent study of Edwards' long engagement with non-Christian theologies, *Jonathan Edwards Confronts the Gods,* affirms his lack of interest in and respect for Native religious traditions and his typically Puritan view of unconverted Indians as firmly under Satan's sway.

5. Another factor may have tempered Edwards's landscape typology. Marsden notes that one of his visitors in Stockbridge, Ezra Stiles, was at that point in his career strongly influenced by Deism; he expressed "no other religion but Nature and the Bible," with an emphasis on former (378). This encounter with incipient nature religion may have nudged Edwards back towards more orthodox theological investigations.

6. While Occom and Edwards never met, Wheelock had close ties to the eminent Puritan divine. Edwards praised Wheelock as one of the most promising young New Light preachers, and Wheelock was staying in Edwards' Northhampton home in 1747 – the year when Occom was completing his studies with Wheelock – when David Brainerd arrived on his way to Stockbridge (Marsden, 378).

7. In 1714, when the Mohegans living in New London complained of English settlers squatting on their planting grounds, the Connecticut government acted to protect some three hundred acres "for the use of the said Indians in planting" (Johnson, 223-34). Such success was limited, however. Jean M. O'Brien details the cultural dislocations that combined with outright land theft to "divorce" the Algonquians of Southern New England from their land.

8. Occom's transculturation extends well beyond his representation of his environment. His pedagogy depends on the nurturing, child-centered, kinesthetic methods more typical

of Native education than the strict methods of Europeans; likewise the “mild” approach of his conversions. His teaching methods, interestingly, share a great deal with the ideas for Indian education Edwards outlined in his letters from Stockbridge written at the same time (*Works* 16: 404; 407-13).

9. My discussion of transculturation, autoethnography and the contact zone draws on the work of Mary Louise Pratt in *Imperial Eyes*. In his “Account of the Montauk Indians, on Long-Island,” written in 1761 but published after his death, Occom adopts a more ethnographic perspective, sympathetically but somewhat distantly describing the traditional culture of the people he served. His subsequent frustrations with his English sponsors may have contributed to the shift towards autoethnography in his personal narrative.

10. See N. Scott Momaday, “Native Attitudes to the Environment” in *Seeing with a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion*, ed. Walter Holden Capps (NY: Harper and Row, 1976). Ake Hultkrantz quotes a Seneca, who told him that a white man, moving to a new region, is impressed by the appearance of the landscape, and meditates on its beauty, whereas the Indian first of all asks, ‘where are my medicines?’”. Both citations are from Buell, p. 212; 501.

11. Thomson and his many followers held a deeply spiritual view of nature that stressed a harmonious relationship with the environment. Herbal remedies were one element in what Catherine Albanese terms their “nature religion” (128-33). Thomsonians drew eagerly on Native American herbal knowledge to supplement widely shared European American folk remedies. For a recent thorough account of Thompson and his movement, see John S. Haller, Jr. *The People’s Doctors: Samuel Thomson and the American Botanical Movement, 1790-1860.*

12. Occom devotes several entries to his visits to Stockbridge, where he developed strong ties to the Indian community Edwards himself had served. While Occom doesn’t mention his predecessor, he did succeed to recruiting a large number of Stockbridge Indians to join his community at Brotherton.

13. Renee Bergland’s *The National Uncanny* offers a thorough account of the complex psychodynamics of the native presence in American identity through the middle of the nineteenth century. Philip Deloria’s *Playing Indian* takes a longer view of the process by which white Americans have resolved their own cultural tensions by performing Indian roles.

14. Apess’s assertion that Philip was Pequot has attracted some recent critical attention. See Roumania Valkinov’s “Philip, King of the Pequots” for a full discussion of Apess’s nascent pan-Indian politics.

15. In his detailed notes to Apess’s work, Barry O’Connell doesn’t identify the mountain setting of the episode, but he does note that there was a Mohawk reservation on the

northeast side of the bay and a Mississauga village on the southwest. Both count as "brethren" for Apess.

16. Other Native American writers of the era tended to fall on one or other side of this Romantic divide. George Copway, for example, stakes his claim to authenticity on his wilderness origins: "I was born in nature's wide domain! The trees were all that sheltered my infant limbs—the blue heavens all that covered me. I am one of Nature's children" (1480). His difficulty in resolving his traditional Ojibway past with his European education make his autobiography particularly contradictory. In stark contrast are the writings of Cherokees like Elias Boudinot, whose writings are firmly anchored in elite European American discourse.

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CHAPTER TWO

TIMOTHY DWIGHT'S *TRAVELS IN NEW ENGLAND AND NEW YORK*, SAMSON OCCOM'S *A SHORT NARRATIVE OF MY LIFE*, AND THE RHETORIC OF RACE

ANN M. BRUNJES

Timothy Dwight (1752-1817) and Samson Occom (1723-1792) were both committed to the power of education and of Christianity. And each man, in his own way, was concerned with understanding and shaping the reality of what it meant to be American in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Their approaches to this "shaping"— spreading Christianity and supporting education—were not radically different. Both were ordained ministers, and both understood the centrality of education in the future of the republic, Dwight at Yale College, and Occom through his fundraising for Eleazar Wheelock's Indian school (the present Dartmouth College). Furthermore, both men understood that the existing situation for Native Americans was intolerable, for the Indians themselves and for the future of the Republic. This is where their similarities end. In Dwight's view, Native Americans represented all that was wrong in the body politic: their perceived indifference to hard work; their inability to assimilate successfully into white communities and white institutions; their lack of interest in Christian values and institutions. Occom, too, recognized the marginal position of Native Americans in the United States, but he recognized it because he lived it as a member of the Mohegan tribe. While Dwight's vision never approaches the violence and destruction of Cotton Mather's "irradiated wilderness,"[1] he is ultimately, despite some glimmers of possibility, unable to find a workable solution to the Native American "problem." Occom's response to this marginalization departs radically from Dwight's: as Keely McCarthy argues, Occom's *Short Narrative* makes a passionate and compelling argument for the inclusion of Indians in Christian