

# THE “CITIZEN SAVAGE”: WHITE MASCULINE DEGENERATION IN THE INDIAN HATER NARRATIVE

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## ABSTRACT

While commonsense tells us that the 19th-century US was obsessed with individual rights and individual success, there remains evidence that civic duty continued to be a significant component of national identity. In fact, we might say that the conflict between individual rights and civic duty organizes one of the most popular forms of literature in the antebellum US: frontier fiction. In this article, I turn to James Hall’s *The Pioneer* and Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Nick of the Woods*. In these significant narratives, Hall and Bird expose the dangers of negative individualism on the frontier without the checks of civic duty and martial spirit. By closely attending to 19th-century politics, Indian policies, and military/militia history, I explore how the Indian Hater narratives of James Hall and Robert M. Bird are anxious about men whose passion for vengeance and violence transform them into the very “savage” they are hunting, and how this “degeneration” bars them from returning to civil society. Indian Haters abandon the virtues and morals stereotypical of the frontier hero; that is, their emotions and their bloodlust overtake their sense of duty to the polity; such degeneration undermines the nation because it very closely resembles the threat posed by Indians. A close look at Bird and Hall reveals that both authors are attempting to document this irony. Bird and Hall show how the Indian Hater motif highlights the reality of white degeneration of wayward/emotional men without the safeguards of martial virtue and civic duty. Even though the Jacksonian anti-Indian thought celebrates these Indian Haters, literature confronts readers with the self-destructive nature of uncontained Indian Hating. I observe that these narratives do more than present the Indian Hater as a self-sacrificial hero but rather closely diagnose how a man can become lost in his passions and become an Other from society without civic constraints.

**Keywords:** Frontier; Masculinity; Violence; Individualism.

## INTRODUCTION

Frontier literature often celebrates the heroic frontiersman as an agent of national expansion and masculine self-control. According to Richard Slotkin’s *The Fatal Environment* (1998), the frontier hero is “always masculine[,] and he enters the wilderness willingly, even enthusiastically [...]. He is the heroic agent of an expansive colonial society” (64). Later, Slotkin (1998) expands on this claim by arguing that literature invites readers to emulate and approve of the frontier hero, who enters the wilderness to both tame the dangers of the unknown and regenerate or reinvent himself (63). Therefore this character-type is known for being in control of himself and his

surroundings. In turn, however, there is a more complicated character-type in frontier literature—the Indian Hater. Indian Haters become controlled by their passions for violence and bloodshed on the frontier and degenerate from productive members of society into “savage-like” individuals. Specifically, I attend to this degeneration in close readings of Robert Montgomery Bird’s *Nick of the Woods* (1837) and two of James Hall’s Indian Hater narratives, “The Indian Hater” (1828) and *The Pioneer* (1835).<sup>1</sup> By exploring degeneration in Indian Hater narratives, I uncover how Hall and Bird narrate anxieties about misguided individualism and the subsequent need for martial duty as a moralizing agent.<sup>2</sup>

Indian Hater narratives all have a similar plot: a young man and his family fall victim to the violence of a group of “rogue” Indians, and the male protagonist becomes consumed by his passion for revenge while struggling to remain a virtuous citizen.<sup>3</sup> Bird’s Indian Hater, Nathan, is mocked by his fellow men as a pacifist and blamed for his family’s death. Unbeknownst to society, when Nathan is alone in the woods, he transforms into Nick of the Woods or Jibbenainosay—a legend (as neither man nor beast, or even the devil himself), who indiscriminately hunts and kills Indians (Bird 1837, 21). In Hall’s narratives, each protagonist responds to the death of their family by regressing into an Indian killer. In “The Indian Hater,” Monson is regarded as a man willing to kill any Indian simply for being an Indian. In *The Pioneer*, the protagonist

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<sup>1</sup> As readers will notice, this article omits James Fenimore Cooper’s Natty Bumppo. While Bumppo is indeed one of the most famous Indian killers, he is not an Indian Hater. Indian Haters are men who lose control of their emotions, become obsessed with revenge, and will murder any Indian within sight. Bumppo does not fall within these motifs. Instead, as Slotkin (1998) tells us, “Leatherstocking is a man frozen in stasis between the opposed worlds of savagery and civilization. That stasis is his protection from degeneration toward renegadery on the one hand, and social climbing on the other... Leatherstocking’s role as mediator between Indian and white is possible because he wants nothing of either world” (105). Leatherstocking, therefore, is not a man who loses “civility” because of his inability to contain his passions; he is a man who chooses to remain between worlds. Finally, whereas Indian Haters kill with murderous intent, Leatherstocking resists such degenerative actions and only kills to protect or save others.

<sup>2</sup> I use the phrase “martial duty” over military duty because, in many frontier novels, the protagonist briefly sets aside his personal interests for the greater good, often in moments of combat or war-like situations. Yet, these men do not always formally enlist in an army or militia. Then, the term martial duties encompasses a more comprehensive range of frontier-style conflicts from war to unsanctioned rescue missions.

<sup>3</sup> The term “Indian” was largely used in the nineteenth century culture and literature up until the mid-twentieth century when the term “Native American” was adopted.

(only ever referred to as the Pioneer) seeks to become the strongest warrior in the forest by indiscriminately hunting and killing all Indian men.

## THE HISTORICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FAILURE AND WHITE/INDIAN CONFLICT

While the Indian Hater as a character type is indeed a victim of crime, he is ultimately a product of his own failure to remain in control; therefore, this article’s study of the Indian Hater first begins with an understanding of the concept of failure. According to Scott Sandage (2005), “[w]e sprint as much to outrun failure as to catch success” (2). So, while the Indian Haters are sprinting to outrun their tragic pasts, they are ironically rushing towards another failure that animates these narratives—degeneration. In their monomaniacal drive for revenge, the Indian Haters perform “savage” acts such as scalping and indiscriminate killing—acts white Americans attributed to the “rogue” Indians.<sup>4</sup> In a study of American literary racism, Louis K. Barnett (1975) tells us, “[i]f the [frontiersman] carries his hatred of the Indian too far, he becomes equally cut off from the white community as an Indian hater. Although the Indian hater technically remains on the side of civilization, he, too, has effectively lost his white identity” (137). Indian Haters perform a certain kind of failure by regressing into something other than “civil,” and therefore threaten what it means to be a “civilized” man in America.

Ultimately, Indian Haters’ biggest failure is their inability to maintain self-control while pursuing vengeance, as self-control was one of the major pillars of American masculinity. According to Dana Nelson’s study on *National Manhood* (1998), “the new fraternal modeling of white manhood would accumulate imperatives for self-management and -regimentation” (11). Drawing heavily from founding father and social reformer Benjamin Rush, Nelson suggests that the demands of boys/men are often contradictory and impossible to perform: “In his seemingly inexhaustible and

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<sup>4</sup> Another difference between the Indian Haters and Leatherstocking is that Leatherstocking never kills indiscriminately nor takes the scalps of his enemy. Leatherstocking is not driven by emotions nor vengeance; rather, he kills “to make the world safe” (Pearce 1988, 202).

contradictory list of what republican boys must learn to exemplify and perform, we can see this emerging civic mandate for ‘self’ control; we can see how national political and economic concerns are handed off onto individual men, with the demand that they ‘learn’ how to internalize and balance incompatible and even antagonistic claims as an expression of their ‘own’ personal civic responsibility” (1998, 12). Specifically, Nelson refers to Rush’s claim that boys must love their family but not let that influence their duty to the nation: “Let him be taught to love his family, but let him be taught, at the same time, that he must forsake, and even forget them, when the welfare of his country requires it” (qtd. in Nelson 1998, 12). Ultimately, *Indian Haters* fail to prioritize the nation over their own need for revenge. *Indian Haters* are incapable of moderating and channeling their passions effectively.<sup>5</sup>

*Indian Haters*’ need for vengeance arguably reminds readers of darker American history episodes, such as the Paxton Boys uprising during Pontiac’s War. The Paxton Boys were a group of men who assumed it was their patriotic duty to kill all Native Americans in response to Pontiac’s War.<sup>6</sup> Believing that they were protecting society from enemy spies, the Paxton Boys massacred and mutilated Native American refugees. Yet, the Paxton Boys were responsible for damage to the nation and its relationships with the Native Americans. According to Jeremy Engels (2005):

On the morning of December 14, 1763, dozens of men “equipped for murder” from the towns of Paxton, Donegal, and Hempfield on the Pennsylvania frontier rode to Conestoga, a small hamlet 60 miles west of Philadelphia, murdered six sleeping Native Americans, and burned the town to the ground, thus coloring the snow-covered Pennsylvania hills blood red. The 14 survivors were moved by the government to nearby Lancaster, but on December 27 a second mob from Paxton broke into the workhouse where these Native Americans had been sheltered and hacked them to pieces. These broken and mangled bodies suggested to settlers that Native Americans, thought to be unnaturally strong,

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Rotundo’s (1993) study on early American Masculinity argues that a “man defined his manhood not by his ability to moderate the passions but by his ability to channel them effectively” (3).

<sup>6</sup> The Paxton Boys were initially formed as a defense against Indian raids; members of this militia often lost friends and family during this conflict. According to Gerald Orlo Van Slyke, Jr. (2005), “[t]hey had learned to hate Indians even more because they and their families had suffered horrible, unspeakable atrocities during the last few years of the French and Indian War and Pontiac’s Rebellion, a situation they largely blamed on the Quakers” (46).

were no longer a threat to resist colonial violence. For the Paxton Boys, as they were known, this massacre was both an effort to gain political power on the frontier by ridding it of Native Americans and a play for political authority via violence. As one Paxton Boy bragged, "tell me not of Cassius, Brutus, Caesar, Pompey, or even Alexander the Great! We! we Paxton Boys have done more than all, or any of them! We have, and it gives me Pleasure to think on't, Slaughter'd, kill'd and cut off a whole Tribe! A Nation at once!" (356)<sup>7</sup>

The actions of these men not only caused political tensions, but their drive to kill all Indians animated a divide within the nation, as some men believed that the city elite cared more for their Indian refugees than the men and women on the frontier.<sup>8</sup> According to Engels (2005), "[s]adly, colonial violence like this, which was already too familiar, would repeat itself countless times in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as American politicians failed to control the violent aggression of frontier settlers against Native Americans" (357). The anti-Indian efforts of the Paxton Boys endured well beyond this episode and are replicated in the Indian Hater narratives. As this article will show, Indian Haters believe that it is their right to hunt and kill Indians to satisfy their thirst for revenge and prove their masculinity. These men are not tamed by the boundaries of civilization or the rules of military duty, but instead, they become defined by their hyperaggressive/degenerate monomaniacal need for vengeance.

In what follows, I closely examine how Indian Haters abandon the virtues and morals typical of the frontier hero. That is, their emotions and bloodlust overtake their sense of duty to the polity; such degeneration undermines the nation because it very closely resembles the supposed threat posed by the Native Americans they sought to remove. A close look at Indian Hater narratives reveals that Hall and Bird are attempting to document this irony. Even though the Jacksonian anti-Indian thought celebrates these men, literature confronts readers with the self-destructive nature of uncontained Indian Hating. I observe that these narratives do more than present the Indian Hater as

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<sup>7</sup> Engels draws heavily from *The Paxton Papers* (1957), an arrangement of Pamphlets surrounding these events.

<sup>8</sup> See Engels (2005), 371.

a self-sacrificial hero by closely diagnosing how a man can become lost in his passions and become an Other from society without civic constraints.

## REACTING TO LOSS

In literature, Indian Haters are a product of their response to personal or familial loss at the hands of enemy combatants. They become obsessed with revenge and bloodshed at the cost of their civilized self. As David Leverenz (1989) identifies, “[m]anhood functions to preserve self-control and, more profoundly, to transform fears of vulnerability or inadequacy into a desire for dominance” (73). The problem, however, arises when men are unable to cope with failure and fall into a “vortex of self-hating” that drives them to dominate (Leverenz 1989, 73). For Leverenz, dominance is acceptable as long as it is channeled into something productive. The issue, as we see with the Indian Haters, is how failure can contaminate this need to dominate to the point where it controls the entire essence of a man’s life. He further elaborates on the matter explaining that “[a]s a short-term defensive strategy in competitive situations, manhood can be undeniably inspiring. The problem develops when manhood comes to feel like one’s whole self. Then an ideology designed to manage and master fear becomes, paradoxically, a way of intensifying and burying fear, so deeply that...it generates a monstrous need to dominate” (1989, 73). Leverenz suggests that men are driven by this intense need to rectify or overcome a previous failure. In response to their humiliations, these men become dominated by revenge and spiral downward into something other than civil. Rather than using these intense emotions as a short-term coping mechanism, revenge and anger consume their whole identity.

In Hall’s *The Pioneer*, the protagonist suffers tragic losses on three separate occasions: his father is killed by Indians during a war party; his sister is abducted (and presumably killed); his mother is murdered by “rogue” Indians. The Pioneer lives in a state of anticipation, waiting for the next threat to his community. In Hall’s other Indian Hater narrative, “The Indian Hater,” the protagonist Monson loses his entire family in one dreadful event: “[t]his was my home. Here I built a house with my own labor. With the sweat from my brow I opened this clearing. Here I lived with my wife, my children,

and my mother" (1828, 11). On this night, "a gang of yelling savages" came, forced him to witness the death of his family, took him hostage, and made him feel "helpless as a child" (1828, 11-12). In Bird's *Nick of the Woods* (1837), Nathan, too, loses his family and friends at the hands of a "rogue" Indian party:

Ten years ago I was another man,—a poor man, friend, but one that was happy... There was the house that I did build me; and in it there was all that I held dear, my gray old mother...the wife of my bosom, and the child of my heart, the children, friend, for there was five of them, sons and daughters together, little innocent babes that had done no wrong; and, truly, I loved them well. Well, friend, the Injuns came around us: for being bold, because of my faith that made me a man of peace and the friend of all men, I sat me down far on the border... Friend, I had arms in my hand, at that moment, a gun that had shot me the beasts of the mountain for food, and a knife that had pierced the throats of bears in their dens. I gave them to the Shawnee chief, that he might know I was a friend...With my own knife he struck down my eldest boy! With my own gun he slew the mother of my children! ... Thee may think I would have snatched a weapon to help them then! Well, thee is right:-but it was too late!-All murdered, friend!-all-all,-all cruelly murdered! (152-153)

All three tragedies invite readers to feel anger towards the "savages" and sympathy towards these men. In fact, Nelson (1994) argues that these stories offer readers "a reason to hate Indians that arises from a sense of innocent personal loss," and that they "implicate its readers in its drive for revenge" (43-44). While I do not disagree with this statement, I do suggest that this argument does not fully acknowledge how these Haters fail to respond appropriately. Undoubtedly, readers would feel sympathetic for the Haters' loss, but the most unforgivable failure is the Indian Haters' inability to preserve their self-control as they all become consumed by their need for vengeance and bloodshed against all Indians not just those accused of murder; in general, Indian Haters constantly seek out more violence.<sup>9</sup> There is little, if any, redemption for the hyper-aggressive responses that all three of these Indian Haters ultimately adopt because they

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<sup>9</sup> According to Slotkin (2006), "[t]he myth of the hunter...is one of self-renewal or self-creation through acts of violence. What becomes of the new self, once the initiatory hunt is over? If the good life is defined in terms of the hunter myth, there is only another hunt succeeding the first one" (556).

are constantly seeking new opportunities to satisfy their thirst for vengeance. While the frontier myth invites readers to celebrate frontier heroes, these narratives do not inspire heroism in gendered terms. Ideal masculinity is always in control. None of these protagonists are ultimately able to retain a sense of self-control.

#### MILITARY/CIVIC DUTY AS A MASK

For a brief period, there is a sense that Hall's Pioneer and Bird's Nathan are able to channel their energies through military or civic duties; they are offered opportunities to both redeem their masculinity and protect society from future attacks. According to Mark Bernhardt (2016), "[t]he opportunity to fight a war that could be thought of as a masculine endeavor linked to continued westward expansion resonated with certain segments of the population concerned that the environment developing in the eastern United States due to long-term settlement and an emphasis on sober, restrained living was having a detrimental effect on men" (205-6). Military expeditions were thought to help men hone their masculine identity (206). Initially, the Pioneer is a virtuous member of the militia. In fact, in *The Pioneer*, Hall celebrates martial spirit at multiple points within the narrative. The Pioneer argues that "martial accomplishments are held up as exemplary virtues worthy of the highest admiration" (1835, 174). As a boy, the Pioneer believed that "in killing a savage [he] performed [his] duty as man, and served [his] country as a citizen" (1835, 186) and, specifically, Indians are the enemy "whose extirpation was a duty...[the] slaying of an Indian [was] an act of praiseworthy public spirit" (1835, 172). Martial duty offers the Pioneer an opportunity to develop as a man and provide value to society. Bird, too, gives moments where his narrative celebrates martial spirit and civic duty. Before being ousted as the infamous Nick of the Woods, Nathan helps Roland, a Virginian traveler, to save his sister, Edith, from Indian raids and, later, Indian captivity. In particular, Nathan expresses that "I fight to save the lives of thee helpless women!" (1837, 98). The narrator continues to express that "then as if the first act of warfare had released him for ever from all peaceful obligations, awakened a courage and appetite for blood superior even to the soldier's, and, in other words, set him entirely beside himself" (1837, 98). Hall and Bird identify how men can channel



their passions through some sort of service. The problem, however, is the way in which their passion for violence exceeds the bounds of their service. Indian Haters are ultimately unable to remain in control of their actions while serving society. Their passion for vengeance soon becomes the driving force of their actions, as opposed to a drive stemming from martial spirit.

As these Indian Hater narratives identify, the problem is not just the Indian Hater himself but also how society overlooks this man’s violence so long as it serves a purpose. According to Matthew Brophy (2011), “Jackson’s response [to Indians on the frontier] was that of the Indian hater’s—to not rest until all Indians were expelled or vanished. Due to a supporting culture that increasingly represented Indian-hating as a ‘necessary evil’ that was not without heroism, he was able to work towards this goal with devastating efficacy” (113). For example, in Bird’s (1837) *Nick of the Woods*, Roland appears to remain in blissful ignorance of Nathan’s “savagery.” Nathan tells Roland to “bear witness that he was shedding blood, not out of malice or wantonness, or even self-defence, but purely to save the innocent scalps of poor women, whose blood would be otherwise on his head” (1837, 101). Later, after Nathan saves Roland from capture, he again attempts to justify his violence as necessary: “thee does not altogether hold it to be as a blood-guiltiness, and a wickedness, and a shedding of blood, that I did take to me the weapon of war, and shoot upon thee wicked oppressors, to the saving of thee life?” (1837, 141). Roland refuses to see the “extraordinary metamorphosis of Nathan, the man of amity and good will, into a slayer of Indians, double-dyed in gore,” and therefore he is an example of how men are willing to overlook wicked actions so long as it serves a greater purpose (1837, 146). Roland justifies Nathan’s actions as “the noblest and most virtuous act” because of how they have served a purpose (1837, 146). But, as it is later revealed, Nathan experiences “nameless joy and exultation, and [becomes] forgetful of everything but his prey” when given opportunities to kill defenseless Indians (1837, 188). While Nathan’s violence functions within the confines of duty at this moment, his bloodlust cannot always be justified, and his true nature is revealed to society. There comes a moment in Indian Hater narratives where violence can no longer be justified

Matthew Harrington |

as an act of service, and readers begin to see how these characters are not agents of expansion, but rather wayward individuals.

#### CORRUPTED BY BLOODLUST AND A MONOMANIACAL DRIVE FOR REVENGE

Even though the frontier was believed to be a space of regeneration, Indian Haters degenerate because of their inability to contain their own drive for violence and revenge. As Slotkin addresses: “[t]he pioneer submits to regression in the name of progress; he goes back to the past to purify himself to acquire new powers, in order to regenerate the present and make the future more glorious” (1998, 63). Slotkin continues, “[i]f they can maintain their racial/cultural integrity in that world, if they can seize the natural, original power that is immanent in that world, and if they can defeat the forces that seek to prevent their return to civilization, then on their return they will be capable of renewing the moral and physical powers of the society they originally left” (1998, 63). Slotkin argues that young men were encouraged to enter the wilderness to progress themselves and, subsequently, society. Indian Haters do not fit this mold because they are not concerned with their civic virtue, but rather are driven by an intense passion for revenge that can never be satisfied; they do not seek to progress society or themselves, only retribution.

If masculinity is about self-control, these men fail at even the most basic level. Indian Haters do not control their actions; their emotions and bloodlust control them. In both of Hall’s narratives, Monson and the Pioneer repeatedly admit that the rules of civilization do not contain their revenge. Indian Haters believe they have a “right to destroy the savage” (Hall 1835, 186). These Haters kill not as an act of civil service but as a way to serve themselves. In *The Pioneer* (1835), Hall argues that these men relinquish self-control to their passions:

I had supposed, previous to this event that the gratification of my revenge would give peace to my bosom; but this is a passion that grows stronger by indulgence; and no sooner had I tasted the sweets of vengeance, than I began to feel an insatiable thirst for the blood of the savage. Resuming my secluded habits, but without rejoining my former companion, I now lived entirely in the woods,

occupied with my own thoughts, and pursuing, systematically, a plan of warfare against that hated race whom I regarded with invincible animosity. (183)

The Pioneer's inability to see beyond his feelings of revenge causes him to lose control of his own actions and therefore represents this fear that individualism without guidance can decimate a man's ability to remain a virtuous citizen. Once the Pioneer rejects the constraints of his militant duty, he chooses to view all Native Americans as his enemy, even if they are innocent bystanders. Thus, The Pioneer regresses into an immoral, unvirtuous combatant who does not feel "obliged to meet an Indian on fair terms" (1835, 183). He begins to hunt and kill indiscriminately and therefore begins to resemble a "savage" more than he resembles a civilized, white man.

These narratives suggest that men who become estranged from society and civilization are more susceptible to degeneration and wayward individualism. This fear is repeatedly documented in frontier history. Arthur K. Moore's (1981) study of the frontiersman tells us some frontiersmen "lacked moral and intellectual means to behave independently and yet rationally in a civilized state" (247). Nearly fifty years before Hall and Bird published these Indian Hater narratives, J. Hector St. John De Crevecoeur (1782) observed that without the "power of example and check of shame," some men on the American frontier "exhibit the most hideous parts of our society" (72). This, of course, is reflected in Indian Hater narratives. As the Pioneer tells us, "It [the drive to hunt and kill] kept me estranged from society, encouraged a habit of self-torture, and perpetuated a chain of indignant and sorrowful reflections" (1835, 187). In his mission of vengeance, the Pioneer continues to stray further and further from society and "began to discover the injurious effects of [his] mode of life upon [his] own character" (1837, 186-7). Without the checks and balances of society, the Pioneer attempts to justify his killings because of his family's death; in response to his tragic childhood, he pursued a "systematic plan of destruction, which kept [his] hand continually imbued in blood, and [his] mind agitated by the tempest of passion" (1835, 186). According to the Pioneer, the "right to destroy the savage...was a principle deeply ingrained in [his] nature" (1835, 186). Without the moralizing safeguards of civilization, the Pioneer becomes consumed by his thirst for vengeance: "My thirst for revenge was unbounded. It filled up my whole

soul. I thought of little else than schemes for the destruction of the savage” (1835, 180). By leaving the military, the Pioneer becomes further estranged from society and its moral code and begins to replicate the very “savage” he sought to remove.

Bird’s *Indian Hater*, too, explores how isolation is a component of individual regression: “The soldier had heard that injuries to the head often resulted in insanity of some species or other; he could now speculate, on better grounds, and with better reason, upon some of those singular points of character which seem to distinguish the houseless Nathan from the rest of his fellow-men” (1837, 153). The tragic death of Nathan’s family, Roland finds, ended with a violent blow to his head, causing him to have seizures and, according to Roland, to transform into something different than the civilized man. Nathan’s lack of self-control is a symptom of being dominated by the “savage” Indian.<sup>10</sup> Yet, while readers are sympathetic to his injuries, we cannot ignore how he can remain civil within society and turn into the *Indian Hater* while secluded on the frontier.<sup>11</sup> Nathan is able to perform being civil but even admits that he is consumed by an obsession to kill: “by night and by day, in summer and in winter, in the wood and in the wigwam, thee would seek for their blood” (1837, 154). Even after getting revenge and killing the chief, Nathan is described as having moments of “insane fury” (1837, 220). *Indian Haters* lose control of their passions and therefore are only motivated by this belief that they have a *duty* to murder any Indian.

However, in both *The Pioneer* and *Nick of the Woods*, the protagonists must face the realization that their actions resemble “savagery” more than civility when confronting their bloodlust through the eyes of white society. In Hall’s pivotal scene, the Pioneer finds a secluded home of a Native American and his wife. The Pioneer’s bloodlust is most evident when he “felt a malignant delight in the idea of invading this family as mine had been invaded” (1835, 188). The Pioneer plans to torment this family, making him no better than the “savages” of his childhood. While planning how he will

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<sup>10</sup> For more on this see John Bowen Hamilton’s “Robert Montgomery Bird, Physician and Novelist,” which does attribute some of this regression to Nathan’s physical trauma and head injury.

<sup>11</sup> In fact, most of Chapter 4 consists of Nathan’s fellow citizens criticizing him for being too much of a pacifist.

kill the Native American, he finds out that the wife is his long-lost sister, who he had believed was murdered at the hands of Indians. After realizing that he was about to harm his own sister, the Pioneer begins to reflect on his actions: "if they were murderers, what was I?" (1835, 195). The Pioneer starts to realize that he is also not innocent: "I began to think it possible, that mutual aggressions had placed both parties in the wrong, and that either might justly complain of the aggressions of the other" (1835, 196). In this scene, the Pioneer contemplates how his revenge/aggression only continues the cycle of violence: "But had *they* suffered no injury? Was it true that they were the first aggressors? I had never examined this question" (1835, 195). However, these thoughts only arise after realizing he nearly killed his own sister, another white person. Likewise, after being ousted as Nick of the Woods by his companions, Nathan struggles with his "savage" way of life. In a pivotal scene, Nathan has the opportunity to kill an old Native American woman but hesitates: "With knife in hand, and murderous thoughts in his heart, Nathan raised a corner of the mat, and glared for a moment upon the beldam. But the feelings of the white-man prevailed; he hesitated, faltered, and dropping the mat in its place, retreated silently to the door" (1837, 190).<sup>12</sup> Both of these protagonists have what we might call a "civil awakening" after their identity as an Indian Hater is revealed to their peers. Again, this might suggest that the checks of civilization and civic duty can mitigate the degeneration of Indian Haters. They are embarrassed by their actions only when their fellow white men (or family members in the case of the Pioneer) find out about their new identity.

#### CAN THEY BE REDEEMED?

These protagonists ultimately degenerate to the point where they resemble the "savage" they set out to obliterate more than the "civilized white man" they are supposed to embody/symbolize. Indian Hater narratives expose this fear that white men are not

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<sup>12</sup> Even though the Indian Hater character-type critiques the wayward frontiersman, Bird's novel still participates in nineteenth-century racism by suggesting that it was Nathan's *whiteness* that prevents him from murdering the Native American woman.

immune to the dangers of the frontier; instead, these narratives are anxious about a man's ability to govern himself and remain virtuous while removed from the checks and balances of society. Monson, for example, is the only character to return to civilization, but he is never entirely accepted as part of the community due to his regression while on the frontier. Monson's fellow citizens think that even though he performed heroic acts, he cannot turn off his bloodlust within the boundaries of society. A farmer tells the narrator that while Monson is "a very good neighbor," "he is rather too keen with his rifle" (Hall 1828, 3-5). The farmer continues to contemplate the Indian Hater's place within society:

But is it possible, that in a civilized country, within the reach of our laws, a wretch is permitted to hunt down his fellow creatures like wild beasts; to murder a defenseless Indian, who comes into our territory in good faith, believing us a Christian people?

Why it is not exactly permitted; we don't know for certain who does it, nor is it any particular man's business to inquire more than another. Many of the settlers have had their kin murdered by the savages in early times; and all who have been raised in the backwoods, have been taught to fear and dislike them. Then Monson is an honest fellow, works hard, pays his debts, and is always willing to do a good turn, and it seems hard to break neighborhood with him for the matter of an Indian or so. (1828, 5)

Here we are presented with an anxiety about aggressive masculinity and its place in civilization. There was this concern that hyper-masculine men might not be able to contain their passions nor embrace the morals of society. In this passage, Hall's (1828) quote questions Monson's ability to let go of his bloodlust. Bird's Nathan, too, is often described as a devil or creature, something antithetical to a civilized man (21-22). In these examples, we see a character trope wherein Indian Haters are viewed as less than civil by their own societies due to their violent treatment of Indians.

In *The Pioneer*, Hall's Indian Hater attempts to redeem himself by becoming one of the "circuit-riders": "hardy tenants of the wilderness," who preach to frontiersmen and help them curb "their licentious spirit, and [tame] their fierce passions into submission" (1835, 149). These circuit-riders function to guide men and women through

the wilderness, and therefore the Pioneer can work at making amends for his violence by serving others in the name of religion:

They are the pioneers of religion. They go foremost in the great work of spreading the gospel in the desolate places of our country. Wherever the vagrant foot of the hunter roams in pursuit of game-wherever the trader is allured to push his canoe by the spirit of traffic-wherever the settler strikes his axe into the tree, or begins to break the fresh sod of the prairie...They carry the Bible to those, who, without their ministry, would only "See God in clouds, or hear him in the wind." They introduce ideas of social order, and civil restraint, where the injunctions of law cannot be heard, and its arm is not seen. And these things they do at the sacrifice of every domestic comfort, and at the risk of health and life. (1835, 149)

The Pioneer seeks to prevent others from becoming as wayward as he had by instilling a sense of order and guidance in the frontier. Without constraints, he became "savage-like," but the Pioneer and the circuit-riders use religion to instill order on the frontier. Hall's protagonist voices this anxiety that law and order need to be present for men to remain civil; thus, we return to this fear that men cannot govern themselves. For Hall, specifically, men need other men to check and balance their actions. At the start of his narrative, the Pioneer was kept in check by his community and other hunting parties. As an Indian Hater, he was only guided by his passion for becoming and remaining the best hunter and his own personal vengeance. Therefore, the only appropriate act of redemption for the Pioneer is to guide those without guidance: "I had trod through life; and I determined, by the usefulness of my future years, to endeavor to make some atonement for my former guilty career of crime and passion" (1835, 197). The Pioneer is an outcast; he rejected social constraints and regressed. He can only hope that his new sense of duty—helping others—will atone for his actions and help prevent more white men from regressing, as he himself did.

Bird's Nathan also recognizes his failures to maintain civility; rather than making amends and rejecting his actions as un-Christian, he chooses to remain outside of society. Nathan's solution for his hypermasculinity is that he, too, must vanish so as not to disrupt society:

"I, friend!" exclaimed Nathan, with a melancholy shake of the head; "thee would not have me back in the Settlements, to scandalise them that is of my faith! No, friend; my lot is cast in the woods, and thee must not ask me again to leave them. And, friend, thee must not think I have served thee for the lucre of money or gain: for, truly, these things is now to me as nothing. The meat that feeds me, the skins that cover, the leaves that make my bed, are all in the forest around me, to be mine when I want them; and what more can I desire?...all that I ask is, that thee shall say nothing of me that should scandalise and disparage the faith to which I was born." (1837, 237)

Nathan's response offers a few significant points of view. First, Nathan reminds Roland that he has not "served thee for the lucre of money or gain" (1837, 237). Nathan has regressed so much that he does not need the comforts of money, shelter, etc. Second, though, he still feels obligated to serve, protect, and redeem himself. Even though he is embarrassed when found out to be Nick of the Woods, he feels no remorse for killing Native Americans. Nathan's regression leads him to disappear and remain behind as society progresses; his "lot is cast in the woods" (1837, 237). The only aspect of civilization that Nathan seeks to hold on to is his faith and his community remembering him as faithful. He asks Roland not to tell anyone about his degeneration, so society may still view him as a peaceful Quaker. He would rather be remembered as a useless pacifist than a heroic, though wayward, "savage."

The endings of Hall's and Bird's narratives present an interesting debate. Both authors argue that these men who live in excessive violence and are unrestrained by civic or martial values cannot participate in the polity. Neither Nathan nor the Pioneer re-enters society at the end of their narratives. What is problematic, however, is that only one is blatantly apologetic. While Nathan disappears into obscurity, Hall's Pioneer chooses to redirect his skills to serve society better. The Pioneer attempts to make amends through a renewed sense of civic duty that seeks to alleviate tensions on the border and, more importantly, protect America's moral identity. Hall's protagonist functions to keep the peace and offer mediation on the frontier, allowing the nation to expand without sacrificing the sanity/civility of its citizens. Interestingly, by alleviating his guilt, the Pioneer seeks to lessen the guilt of the nation's expulsion of the Indian race. Hall argues that a moral code should contain American masculinity on the



frontier; the Pioneer not only becomes a guide for readers through his failures but also becomes a guide for future men on the frontier within the narrative.

In contrast to Hall's narrative, Bird's novel does not signal any remorse or desire to change; Nathan simply disappears into the wilderness. Nathan "was never more beheld stalking through the gloom; nor was his fearful cross ever again seen traced on the breast of a slaughtered Indian" (1837, 241). Like the Indians in America's fantasy of Manifest Destiny, Nathan too must vanish. According to Jared Gardner (1998), "[t]he black or India...represents the fate of the hero should his claims ultimately be unsuccessful. Denied a national identity, the white American thus risks becoming marked as racial other—in the racist imagination of the late eighteenth century, marked as uncultured, unpropertied, uncivilized, unknown, and unknowable" (2). If the threat of race and the presence of racial Others threatened the myth of America's foundation and brought white men together "to recognize each other as Americans," then the presence of these Indian Haters undermined the common denomination. Men like Nathan, though by birth a white American, had degenerated into something other than "civil" and therefore must follow the fate of all other "savages"—expulsion.

In answer to the question "can they be redeemed," these narratives argue "not entirely." While Monson does rejoin civilization, even his peers view him as an outsider, thus preventing him from being fully welcomed back into the fold. On the other hand, the Pioneer must remain outside of civil society, but finds some self-forgiveness in helping ensure others don't fail in the same ways he did. Finally, Nathan is completely without redemption: he is neither allowed back into society nor finds a way to atone for his actions.

## CONCLUSION

James Hall and Robert Montgomery Bird explore the complicated relationship between masculinity, nationhood, and the "savage" frontier. By focusing our attention on the avenging Indian Hater, a character-type present in many frontier narratives during the Jacksonian era, we see a common denominator—failure. These men fail to protect their families and fail to maintain control of themselves. Hall and Bird use these characters

Matthew Harrington |

as a warning against the violent and often uncontained actions taken against the Native Americans in the name of the American nation, and for personal retribution. Their narratives expose what happens when martial spirit goes from civic duty to a method of perpetrating personal prejudices. American men sought to establish a unique identity—something separated from both the Old World and the Native Americans that occupied the new nation. These Indian Haters are not participating in the nation’s development; instead, their selfish, uncontained actions are antithetical to the “civil” or “virtuous” American citizen. Bird and Hall, then, comment on the violent nature of hypermasculine men; these Haters embody the hero who is unsuccessful and therefore denied a national identity. It would be wrong, of course, to suggest that Bird and Hall were against westward expansion. Still, their narratives are animated by this anxiety that men can lose their virtue and civility, and become destructive to themselves and society.

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Matthew Harrington |

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