
The Militarization of the Home in Sedgwick's Hope Leslie

Maria O'malley*¹

¹University of Nebraska – United States

Abstract

This paper examines Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827) to understand how she attempts to rewrite the story of colonial settlement by imaging a greater role for women in forging the Massachusetts Bay Colony, principally through the militarization of home. Rather than placing the individual at the center of the national story, she situates the married couple as the principal unit for forging the American empire. By portraying the family as the founding unit of empire, the imperialist project can code certain modes of colonization as natural, familial, and domestic; in the process, it softens the militarization that undergirds the encroachment onto new territories. But by describing the settlement of the colonies as by families distracts from the empire-building of the English and later the United States and instead codes settlements as part of "home," "domesticity," "the private sphere," or "feminized spaces." To focus on these trends in her text, I look at how women are portrayed through their ability to adapt as wives in a capitalist, imperialist country in which war intrudes into the home. In the first section, I examine old world models of married women who embody subservient loyalty to their husbands and how their subservience makes them vulnerable in the militarized zone of the frontier. In the second section, I focus on the under discussed presence of Mrs. Winthrop in the text, the fictionalized wife of the colonial governor John Winthrop, who acts as confidant and even counselor to her husband as he serves in the public sphere. In the third section, I analyze *Hope Leslie* and *Magawisca*. *Hope* represents a kind of new world woman who can adapt to unfamiliar surroundings and protect herself and others, whereas *Magawisca* rather than moving forward based on her own desires subsumes the self to promote her father's purpose. Her refusal to turn her back on her family of origin is incompatible with an American self who achieves self-agency through the loss of family and property.

*Speaker