



Moving Encounters: Sympathy and the Indian Question in Antebellum Literature (Native Americans of the Northeast)

Laura L. Mielke

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An old Indian woman comforts two young white children she finds lost in the woods and lovingly carries them back to their eager parents. A frontiersman sheds tears over the grave of a Mohican youth, holding hands with the mourning father. According to Laura L. Mielke, such emotionally charged scenes between whites and Indians paradoxically flourished in American literature from 1820 to 1850, a time when the United States government developed and applied a policy of Indian removal. Although these "moving encounters," as Mielke terms them, often promoted the possibility of mutual sympathy between Native Americans and Euro-Americans, they also suggested that these emotional links were inherently unstable, potentially dangerous, and ultimately doomed. At the same time, the emphasis on Indian-white sympathy provided an opportunity for Indians and non-Native activists to voice an alternative to removal and acculturation, turning the language of a sentimental U.S. culture against its own imperial impulse. Mielke details not only how such writers as James Fenimore Cooper and Henry Rowe Schoolcraft forecast the inevitable demise of Indian-white sympathy, but also how authors like Lydia Maria Child and William Apess insisted that a language of feeling could be used to create shared community or defend American Indian sovereignty. In this way, *Moving Encounters* sheds new light on a wide range of texts concerning the "Indian Question" by emphasizing their engagement with popular sentimental forms and by challenging the commonly held belief that all Euro-American expressions of sympathy for American Indians in this period were fundamentally insincere. While portraits of Indian-white sympathy often prompted cynical rejoinders from parodists, many never lost faith in the power of emotion to overcome the greed and prejudice fueling the dispossession of American Indians.

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