Towards a Poetics of Fact

Subjugated Knowledges, Historiographic Metafiction, and the 'Terrible Truth' behind Words in Early Nineteenth-Century American Literature

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1. Introduction: Towards a Poetics of Fact

In his well-known Gothic short story "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1819),[1] American writer Washington Irving relates the following fantastic, yet allegedly historical account: A headless horseman, the restless ghost of a Hessian trooper killed by a cannonball during the Revolution, terrorizes a Dutch settlement in the New York area, haunting the town's superstitious inhabitants with his bloodthirsty appearances. Set in 1790, just one year after the U.S. became a republic, the events narrated in the tale – albeit clearly fanciful in nature – are portrayed as evidenced by fact. In a characteristic passage, Irving cites – through the voice of his narrator – "the most authentic historians" (273) who have collected and collated the "floating facts" (ibid.) surrounding the Headless Horseman. While subtly challenging the reliability of these reports (by means of conjuring up an unsettling image of volatility and flux), the reference to *floating facts* is also supported – and, on the level of narrative transmission, authenticated – by the seemingly 'factual' composition of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent* (the volume that "Sleepy Hollow" is part of).[2] In many ways, Irving's story is symptomatic of the hegemonic imagi-

1 Irving 1993 [1819]: 272–297.

2 The 34 essays and short stories of Irving's *Sketch Book* are organized in a mock-documentary fashion, with the fictional Dutch historian Diedrich Knickerbocker appearing as the actual author. In the sketches, the line between fact and fiction is constantly blurred. "So vividly and naturally are these scenes of humor depicted," Irving's narra-

nation in late-Enlightenment America that meandered smoothly between the established templates of fabulous, truthful, and satirical historiographies, all of these employing the notion of *floating facts* as a key pattern.[3]

This essay deals with the phenomenon of *floating facts* in early nineteenth-century U.S. literature.[4] My basic premise is that the paradigms of factuality and fictionality became contested in post-revolutionary America, with increasingly blurred boundaries between fact and fiction. With Romanticism becoming the dominant literary movement after the Revolution, "distinctions of genre, fact and fiction, literary and subliterary had to be reconstructed."[5] What followed – at least in the genre of historical fiction that used elements of both facticity and narrative embellishment – was, in Cathy Davidson's words, "an intentional blurring of the division between fiction and fact and an invitation to the reader to enjoy that same blurring."[6] If we conceive of post-revolutionary American literature as a dynamic field of cultural interaction, in which the texts involved readers in the playful acts of fictional fact-making, we come to the following questions: How were facts circulated and negotiated in

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tor utters in one section, "that they become mingled up in the mind with the facts and personages of real life." (Ibid.: 92)

3 According to Hayden White, three versions of historiography dominated in eighteenth-century cultural practice: fabulous (historical tales that included fictional elements), true (factually accurate representations), and satirical (accounts designed as critiques of the dominant historical discourse). (Cf. White 2014: 49–53)

4 American writing in the late eighteenth century was obsessed with 'truthfulness' as an ethical ideal. Two of the most widely received novels of the early period of U.S. literature, William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature. Founded in Truth* (1789) and Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple. A Tale of Truth* (1791), focus on 'truth' as a key paradigm, even though from a distinctly sentimental perspective. 'Truth,' in these novels, carries a notion of moral rectitude rather than an appeal to candidness. With the emergence of a more independent strain of thought in the 1820s (accompanied by the arrival of transcendentalism and the empowerment of the self), new modes of representing truth as an individualized concept became desired forms of cultural identity-fashioning.

5 Kelly 1990: 158.

6 Davidson 1986: 143. Analyzing, among others, Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1789), and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), Davidson demonstrates that the confusion of the boundaries between fact and fiction was an important parameter in post-revolutionary writing, which conveyed to readers that the sentimentalized events they were reading about were "founded on fact," as Foster already claims in the title page of her novel. (Cf. ibid.: 83–109, 140–150)

literary texts during this time? Which counter-hegemonic forms of fact-formation became viable in literary practice? To elucidate these questions, I will propose the concept of a *poetics of fact* as a hermeneutic tool. Hereby I define a counter-normative mode of representation in literary texts that encompasses and hails what Foucault has described as "subjugated knowledges."[7] It is the goal of this essay to isolate an aesthetics of what I term *poetic factuality* in early nineteenth-century American writing. One could assume that – with the arrival of Enlightenment thinking – a fully-fledged sense of rationalism had developed in the new nation around 1800. My analysis, however, contends that a *hybrid* version of factual and fictional representation was more compatible with the emergent needs of readers in the nascent republic that could only be satisfied by a combination of fact-based tales and Romanticist narrativizations.[8] Far from intimating a clearcut distinction between history and fiction in texts of the time, I want to emphasize what has been called "the problematic relationship of fact, fiction, and literariness in Romantic culture."[9] My focus here lies on Catharine Maria Sedgwick's influential novel *Hope Leslie*, first published in two volumes in 1827, and how it reconstructs the history of native people in colonial America in a poetic fashion. Employing the technique of historiographic metafiction, *Hope Leslie* – arguably one of the most unusual texts ever published in America – calls attention to the subjective reality *behind* the official version of American history, especially concerning the atrocities committed against natives.

The concept of a *poetics of fact* is not limited to the nineteenth century but can be viewed as a diachronic parameter that helps us understand the constant struggle in Western culture between fact and fiction, history and rumor, truth and gossip. Consider the following citation from a science-fiction classic written more than a century later, namely Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969):

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7 Foucault 1980: 82.

8 In Davidson's words, many post-revolutionary novels suggested, at least partly, "a kind of covenant between the reader and the text" by mentioning, in the frontmatter to the books, truth and fact as reference points. (Ibid. 1986: 96) Likewise, Kelly, in his reading of Walter Scott's popular historical novel *Waverley* (1814), points out that "[t]he combining of fact and fiction delighted most readers and critics […]." (Kelly 1990: 172) Similar to the British writer Scott, who related the history of Scotland in a fictional manner, American writers such as Sedgwick inspired readers to explore the in-between territory of historiography and fiction.

9 Ibid.: 166.

> I'll make my report as if I told a story, for I was taught as a child on my home-world that Truth is a matter of the imagination. The *soundest fact* may fail or prevail in the style of its telling: like that singular *organic jewel* of our seas, which grows brighter as one woman wears it and, worn by another, dulls and goes to dust. Facts are no more solid, coherent, round, and real than pearls are. But both are sensitive.[10]

In the passage, the first-person narrator Genly Ai, a male Terran explorer, ponders about his mission to go to the planet Gethen to negotiate a collaboration of humanoid worlds. By choosing this quote from Le Guin's 1960s sci-fi novel as a reference point for my essay on literature of the 1820s, I want to draw attention to the *diachronic* dimension of the fact/fiction conjunction. Truth, we learn in *The Left Hand of Darkness*, is no more than a cultural construct, designed to tell stories and create a sense of communal identity.[11] The 'facts' taken for granted in a given culture are likened in Le Guin's novel to the beads of a necklace worn by a woman. This reference evokes the established image of native women in colonial America greeting the white explorers, yet representing their own versions of history and culture. It is no coincidence that the English ethnographer and translator Thomas Harriot uses a similar image (see figure 1) in his "Brief and True Report of the New Found Land of Virginia" (1590) when describing native women: "They wear a chain about their necks of pearls or beads of copper, which they much esteem […]."[12]

Harriot's graphic depiction of indigenous people as *factual*, yet at once also *fictionalized* creatures allows him to interconnect what he calls "the greatness of the facts" (5) to the natives' (mostly unknown) "traditions and stories." (Ibid.) These passages from Harriot's early treatise illustrate how closely interwoven factuality and imagination have traditionally been in the dominant Western imagination since its colonial beginnings. The interpretational sovereignty regarding the 'truthfulness' of *established* facts on the one hand and the abject nature of *unacknowledged* facts on the other is linked to what, in

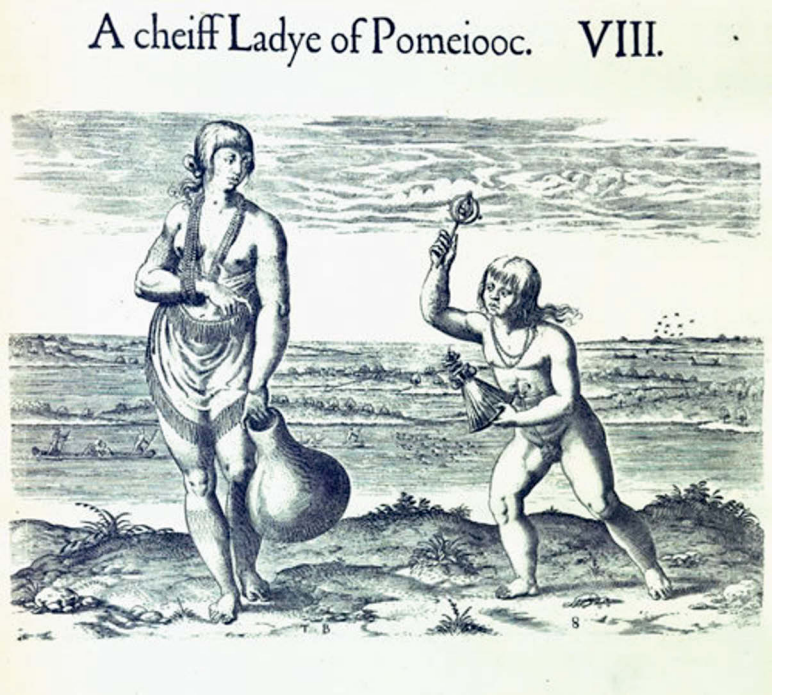
10 Le Guin 2010 [1969]: 1, emphasis added.

11 Le Guin's emphasis on a *floating* connection between fact and fiction is underpinned by the book's transgression of oppositional corporeal and spatial spheres. Not only are the Gethenians marked as androgynous creatures that know no clear gender boundaries, the novel also bridges the gap between the terrestrial and the extraterrestrial as well as that between present and future.

12 Harriot 1590: 12.

13 Picture taken from ibid.: 13.

Figure 1: A native woman's pearl necklace as a symbol of the conjunction between fact and fiction.[13]



a Foucauldian sense, could be called the power/knowledge dynamics.[14] Facts and truth cannot be claimed to encapsulate some atemporal essence or purity. Rather, in Hayden White's words, history itself must be considered

> a construction of those who already enjoy membership and indeed privileged positions in already formed communities. No appeal to "the facts" alone can touch this construction, because these same constituencies control what will count as the appropriate kind of science for determining, not

14 Foucault's coinage of power/knowledge suggests that our conception of the world is deeply conjoined with questions of hierarchy and privilege. "Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true […]." (Foucault 1980: 131)

only "what are the facts" but also and most important "what can count as a fact."[15]

Living in an era in which words can quickly assume the force of a firestorm through social-media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, we are well aware of the extraordinary power that language has over our imagination. In a way, we are what we 'hear.' Or, in the Derridean sense: "*There is nothing outside of the text*."[16] Our understanding of the world is fundamentally shaped by the dominion of words. And the written or spoken word, endlessly reiterated in chains of autopoietic systems of reduplication, is able to substitute our sense of the 'factual' and effectively replace first-hand experience.[17]

A *poetics of fact* – a retelling of seemingly 'factual' events in a way that acknowledges the subjective quality of all representation – can embolden us to expose the *personal* dimension of history and recognize the constructedness of official versions of reality. The idea of a *poetics of fact* is akin to what Jacques Rancière has called "poetics of knowledge,"[18] whereby he defines "a study of the set of literary procedures by which a discourse escapes literature, gives itself the status of a science, and signifies this status." (Ibid.) Following Rancière's approach, I propose the idea of a *poetics of fact* as a literary strategy in Romanticism that challenges the paradigm of factuality and melds it with an alternative model of poetic articulation. Davidson postulates in *Revolution and the Word* that the "usual prescriptions for fiction and history"[19] were not seldomly reversed in the literary imagination of the early nineteenth century. Analyzing James Fenimore Cooper's euphemistic 1822 response to Royall Tyler's historical novel *The Algerine Captive* (1797), Davidson

15 White 1994: ix–x.

16 Derrida 1997: 158, emphasis in the original. Due to the difficulties of translating this sentence accurately, Spivak adds both the original quote and an alternative in square brackets: "[there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]." (Ibid., emphasis in the original)

17 In his iconoclastic polemic *Kindly Inquisitors*, Jonathan Rauch uses the term "knowledge industry" to describe a social system that autopoietically produces its own facts and truths, following the mission "to tell us how things 'really' are." (Rauch 2013: 38) The result of such biased knowledge production is not a sober and truly objective version of reality but, as Hans Rosling et al. have postulated, an "overdramatic worldview" that shows a blatant lack of what the authors call "factfulness." (Rosling 2019: 16)

18 Rancière 1994: 8.

19 Davidson 1986: 200.

summarizes Cooper's viewpoint as follows: "History is a fiction and the novelist is the true historian." (Ibid.) To conceive of literary texts as harboring a *poetics of fact* also means to challenge the opposition between fact and fiction and intimate that 'fact' itself is an essentialist category that should be rethought.[20] In the following, I will showcase how such a poetics of fact can operate in literary works to interrogate what Foucault terms "the order of knowledge."[21] Catharine Maria Sedgwick's novel *Hope Leslie* shall serve as a key example to illustrate how 'knowledge' can be inventively re-interpreted in literature and equipped with a sense of poetics.

2. Subjugated Knowledges, Aural Aesthetics, and the Politics of Denunciation

Designed as a historical romance, *Hope Leslie* bestows a powerful voice to two groups that were widely misrepresented in antebellum literature – women and Native Americans. Sedgwick's book shows how in early American culture – that is, the Puritan Era – a *semblance* of veracity often replaced truth.[22] It demonstrates how defamation and social exclusion became the basis for communal knowledge. At the same time, *Hope Leslie* also teaches us how a *poetics of fact* can be instrumental in overcoming rumor and hearsay. Set in seventeenth-century New England, the novel revolves around the twin figures of Hope Leslie (the English immigrant William Fletcher's affable stepdaughter) and Magawisca (a Pequot chief's passionate daughter adopted by the Fletcher

20 The term 'knowledge' has been widely applied to systems of thought and belief in general. Foucault's coinage of power/knowledge, for example, suggests that our conception of the world is linked to the microstructures of empowerment and hierarchization. In postmodernist theory, 'knowledge' is often used in the plural form, thus hinting at the complexities and oftentimes subjective appearance of 'knowing.' Donna Haraway, for example, speaks of "situated knowledges," thus indicating that knowledge is always subject to change, dependent on its cultural and temporal context. (Cf. Haraway 1991: 111)

21 Foucault 1980: 128.

22 In a private letter (written as a response to a reader), Sedgwick articulates her "filial reverence" for the Puritans, simultaneously underlining that "their bigotry, their superstition, and above all their intolerance, were too apparent on the pages of history to be forgotten." (Sedgwick, quoted in Nelson 1992: 193)

family). Hope and Magawisca are caught in a whirlwind of increasing tensions and armed conflicts between the white settlers and the natives in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. *Hope Leslie* distances itself decisively from the Puritans' "self-righteous historiography,"[23] which seems burdened with misrepresentations and a lack of authentic voices from women and natives. Truth, the book suggests, can hardly be found in the authorized historiographies presented by Puritan annalists but rather in forgotten counter-histories.

The character of the native Magawisca is a key figure in this rejection of conventional historicism. Magawisca's first appearance in the second chapter already marks her as a non-conformist character, "clothed in her Indian garb"[24] and "having shewn a loathing of the English dress." (22) In the novel's preface, Sedgwick clarifies that there can naturally be no authoritative model for those portions of historical practice that remain unwritten: "The writer is aware that it may be thought that the character of Magawisca has no prototype among the aborigines of this country." (4)

Portrayed as a subaltern figure who gradually emancipates herself from the yoke of hegemonic ascriptions, Magawisca is an example of what Foucault has described as "subjugated knowledges."[25] By this term, Foucault defines "something which in a sense is altogether different, namely, a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate […]: naïve knowledges, located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity." (Ibid.) "[L]isten to me," thus Magawisca addresses both the readers and the Puritan characters in one of the novel's key scenes: "[W]hen the hour of vengeance comes, if it should come, remember it was provoked."[26] Through the voice of Magawisca, the passage juxtaposes the common stereotype of the irrational Indian with a new narrative pattern that, despite being marked as different, evokes reason, empathy and understanding.

The credibility of the Magawisca character is further enhanced by her counter-figure in the novel, the sinister Jennet, a busybody in the village who personifies malevolent talk as opposed to facts. Jennet is the archetypal Puritan fanatic who raises testimony against socially ostracized individuals such as Nelema, an old native woman who helps both Magawisca and Hope Leslie. Jennet's disparaging characterization of Nelema as "the old heathen witch"

23 Pelegri 2009: 136.

24 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 22.

25 Foucault 1980: 82.

26 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 48.

(107) and "that mother-witch" (69) is presented as symptomatic of Puritan hypocrisy. As Jennet denounces natives as "offspring of a race that are the children and heirs of the evil one," (39) the novel reminds us that her "tongue far outruns [her] discretion." (Ibid.) Jennet is associated with the harmful practice of eavesdropping that produces half-truths and lies rather than an accurate representation. At one point, she feels "tempted beyond what she was able to hear, drew nigh to the door with a cat's tread, and applied her ear to the aperture." (312) The novel here explicitly mentions the "interesting relation" between "speakers and listener." (Ibid.)

Hope Leslie interrogates the accuracy of 'historical truth' by employing a compositional technique I describe as *aural aesthetics*. Instead of showing the reality of New England Puritans in the form of visual images, the book takes recourse to the motif of the 'ear,' a key metaphorical device in discourses of denunciation and defamation. Using the typical narrative techniques of sentimental fiction (focus on individual agency and imagination), Sedgwick draws the readers' attention to the harmfulness of "fables" (106) and "gossips." (112) Through its aural aesthetics, *Hope Leslie* debunks denunciation as a tool of Foucauldian power/knowledge in the Puritan era. Life in Colonial America can be seen as a textbook lesson about the dangerous effects of denunciation. The trial against Ann Hutchinson and her ensuing banishment from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 stands as an example of defamation as social control. After Hutchinson was banned, women were – by law – no longer allowed to speak in churches. Puritan society went along with these practices out of fear of persecution. As Sedgwick's novel showcases, there are always alternatives to conformist behavior. The book's ambiguous title alludes to the main character, the rebellious Hope Leslie, but also functions as a pun to the word 'hope*lessly*,' alluding to situations in which we feel trapped, but hope is still a reference point.

This sense of hope that shimmers through in *Hope Leslie* is connected to the body's ability to adapt to its environment, especially when it comes to organs linked to the senses. Sedgwick's novel suggests that all forms of gossip and denunciation rely on the ear as an organ of reception. Following this narrative trajectory, the book proposes a rediscovery of the 'ear' as a metaphor for communicative exchange. We have to listen *differently*, the novel tells us, in order to reach a point of true insight and understanding. *Hope Leslie* is a stunning and courageous text that debunks the insidious nature of denunciatory practices which in many ways have built the fundament for modern-

day America.[27] Gossip – as a trivial, community-based form of denunciation – is negotiated in the novel as a malicious counter-discourse to science.[28] As Rachel Brownstein notes, "[g]ossip is a way of turning life into story."[29] In this sense, it resembles fiction. While gossip cannot be classified as literature in the classic sense, it encapsulates elements of the narrative. And, of course, not all forms of gossip are pure denunciation. There is what one scholar calls "serious gossip,"[30] a form of intimate verbal exchange between two or more people that is meant to "reflect" about the speakers and "reflect their knowledge of one another."[31] Yet, there is also gossip as "distilled malice."[32] This form of gossip denunciation aims at "circulating truths and half-truths and falsehoods," (ibid.) playing with reputations, and attempting to purify the community through social exclusion. In the logic of denunciation, such accusations speak on their own, even though their substance may long have crumbled. The English philosopher Francis Bacon noted more than 400 years ago that rumors contain an eerie power that can hardly be invalidated once released into the world: "Slander boldly, something always sticks."[33]

Denunciatory practices can be an effective tool of social control. Most importantly, denunciation can become an apparatus of cultural formation, by manifesting a divide between the 'self' and the 'other.'[34] Denunciation culture may manifest itself in drastic events such as the Salem Witchcraft Trials of 1692/93 and the McCarthy Era of the late 1940s and early 50s. But it also

27 Another influential text from the early nineteenth century dealing with the detrimental effects of denunciation is Washington Irving's 1807 short story "The Little Man in Black." Similar to Irving's "Sleepy Hollow" in its equivocal narrative structure, "The Little Man in Black" relates the story of an innocent small-town pariah whose existence as a "poor outcast" is shaped by "the gossips of the neighborhood" that make any objective evaluation from his fellow citizens impossible. (Cf. Irving 2011 [1807]: 6, 1)

28 Following Block and Madden, I am using the term 'science' not in the sense of the word that is attributed to it today, but "in the more general ways it was understood in Sedgwick's day." (Block/Madden 2003: 23)

29 Brownstein 1982: 7.

30 Spacks 1986: 5.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.: 4.

33 Bacon 1597: 392. This translation is provided in Bacon's text itself. The original Latin phrase appears thirty pages earlier: "Audacter calumniare, semper aliquid haeret." (Ibid.: 362)

34 Cf. Butler 1997: 129.

presents itself in the seemingly trivial practices of denigration and non-fact-based accusation in everyday life. "*Everyone knows you can't disprove a rumor*,"[35] the ill-fated protagonist Hannah in Jay Asher's *Th1rteen R3asons Why* (2007) informs us. When another character tells Hannah that she "*knows the rumors*," (65) Hannah replies: "*You can't know rumors.* […] *You can hear rumors* […], *but you can't know them*." (65–66) Discourses of denunciation are deeply interwoven with acts of storytelling. Denunciatory practices usually pick up an already existing narrative and extrapolate on it in order to augment its credibility. This brings us to three fundamental questions: Why are such stories told in the first place? Why do we listen? And what can we do when we become the subject of unjustified denunciation?

As an answer to the third question, namely, what we can do about the spreading of falsehoods, *Hope Leslie* proposes a revision of existing narratives through a *poetics of fact*. This revision needs to counter the schemes and stratagems of denunciation that operate on a fine level. Semi-fictional characters in the novel, such as the powerful governor John Winthrop, communicate to the public a devious kind of truth that unfolds its true force in the people's imagination. They do so by using innuendo and suggestion as tools of manipulation. This rhetoric in the receptive mind evokes "much more than [meets] the ear,"[36] to cite Sedgwick's novel. The author's reinterpretation of the phrase "more than meets the eye" is indicative of the *Hope Leslie*'s aural aesthetics that connects the Puritan discourses of witch-hunting and missionizing not only to the "abusive ceremonies" (207) of sermon culture but also to the judgmental aspects of eavesdropping and defamation, especially bigotry and chauvinism. (Cf. 312)

The written or spoken word, endlessly reiterated in chains of autopoietic systems of reduplication, is able to substitute our sense of the '*factual*' and effectively replace it by hearsay. Derrida describes this process of de-factualization as follows: "At the origin there is a rumour, an 'it is said,' an 'it is said that he is supposed to have said.' The origin of a rumour is always unknown. Indeed, this is how a rumour is identified."[37] Derrida's description of rumor as a source of non-factual meaning-making may remind us of the prototypical Trumpist mantra of subliminal denunciation: "A lot of people

35 Asher 2017 [2007]: 30, emphasis in the original. The title of Asher's book is stylized as "Th1rteen R3asons Why" to highlight the number 13.

36 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 156.

37 Derrida 1994: 176.

are saying …"[38] This type of slander is capable of obscuring the more complicated realities of what the philosopher Edmund Husserl has called "life-world" [*Lebenswelt*].[39] What people *say* and what they *hear* often conceals whatever realities lie behind the gossip – power games, social control, and survival instinct. The following section deals with how *Hope Leslie*, operating as historiographic metafiction, salvages fragments of a subjugated 'life-world' and thus enables access to what the novel discloses as the 'terrible truth' behind words.

3. Historiographic Metafiction and the 'Terrible Truth' behind Words

In his philosophical study *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge*, Rancière provides a vivid example of how 'facts' are often rendered indistinguishable from acts of imagination. "[T]here are facts," he observes, "that do not belong to the discursive order but require a discursive act, none other than interpretation."[40] Many subjective and individual 'facts' are disguised from the public view and have to be excavated by means of literary revisionism. "[B]etween the facts and the interpretation," Rancière maintains, "there is an obstacle to overcome, a thick cloud of words to dissipate."[41]

Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* manages to penetrate this 'thick cloud of words' in order to reveal what is described as the 'terrible truth' *behind* words. As stated in the novel's preface, the author's goal was "to illustrate not the history, but the character of the times."[42] In a procedure that would be called 'constructionist,' had the novel been published in our day, *Hope Leslie* creates an *alternative history*[43] with "delineations [in which] we are confined not to the actual, but to the possible."[44]

38 Johnson 2016: n.p.

39 Husserl 1970 [1936] : 103–189. Cf. Käufer/Chemero 2015 : 39.

40 Rancière 1994 : 32.

41 Ibid.

42 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 3.

43 I borrow this phrase from Jeffrey Insko's essay on *Hope Leslie*'s revision of conventional historicism. (Insko 2004: 179) Discussing "the novel's many historical and temporal entanglements," Insko concludes that "*Hope Leslie* provides an alternative conception of what history is." (Ibid.: 180)

44 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 4.

Intentionally blurring the lines between "our histories" (3) – that is, the white, hegemonic view of the nation's past – and various hidden versions of history, *Hope Leslie* functions as "historiographic metafiction."[45] By this, Hutcheon defines a type of popular text that is "intensely self-reflexive" and "paradoxically also lay[s] claim to historical events and personages." (5) In historiographic metafiction, the lines between fact and fiction appear obscured. "[R]ather than asserting the unique possibilities of fiction as compared to history proper," one scholar observes, "the preface [to *Hope Leslie*] actually calls attention to their *affinities*."[46] As a result, readers of Sedgwick's novel face the challenge of uniting the actual historical events and personae (the Pequot War, John Winthrop, and so on) with their imagined – and often mythologized – literary versions. *Hope Leslie* suggests, in Amy Dunham Strand's words, that "both history and fiction are forms of representation with ongoing rhetorical and political effects."[47] In the book's preface, an invitation is directed towards readers to become actively involved in the process of historical meaning-making: "These volumes are so far from being intended as a substitute for genuine history, that the ambition of the writer would be fully gratified if, by this work, any of our young countrymen should be stimulated to investigate the early history of their native land."[48]

In its rejection of claims of writing 'genuine history,' *Hope Leslie* demonstrates a self-conscious, almost postmodernist approach.[49] The novel subtly delegates the responsibility for a truthful comprehension of history to an implied reader stylized as an "enlightened and accurate observer of human nature."[50] Following Strand's argument, the novel here not only "reconstruct[s] the past by 'putting the chisel' into new hands," but also employs "reverberating rhetorical effects, simultaneously constructing and impacting the present,

45 Hutcheon 2000: 105–123.

46 Insko 2004: 186, emphasis added.

47 Strand 2009: 19.

48 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 4.

49 On the novel's use of self-conscious imagery – especially its "complex preoccupation with language" and the inclusion of "conflicting levels of signification," see Ford 1997: 81–92. Cf. Pelegri 2009: 140.

50 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 4. Sedgwick's reference to the 'enlightened reader' recalls the famous phrase in the "Declaration of Independence": "[L]et Facts be submitted to a candid world." (Jefferson et al. 2008 [1776]: 54, emphasis in the original; cf. Ferguson 1994: 127)

[…] to re-make history, but also, perhaps, to make history happen."[51] Similarly, Insko characterizes the set of appellative narrativizations in *Hope Leslie* as "anachronistic imaginings"[52] that disrupt a traditional conception of history. The novel's tightrope act between historicization and fictionalization allows its author to demand a new, alternative mode of history-making[53] that subverts the conventional boundary between *myth* and *science*.

Notably, science is portrayed in *Hope Leslie* not as a monolithic block of rationalist truisms but rather as a set of "scientific truths – about medicine, race, or gender" that "individuals may accept or reject."[54] While dealing with many scientific insights (for example, regarding progress and human rights), Sedgwick's novel also suggests that individuals may well "come to discover new ones."[55] In the context of nineteenth-century literature, science cannot be limited to 'natural science' (as our contemporary mindset would suggest); on the contrary, science was perceived, according to *OED*'s definition, as "a connected body of demonstrated truths […] which includes *trustworthy methods for the discovery of new truth* within its own domain."[56] In his study of denunciatory speech, Jonathan Rauch invites us to interrogate the conventional distinction between 'subjective' myth (as relying on imagination) and 'objective' science (as sticking to "good old hard facts"[57]):

> The difference between a scientific society and a mythmaking group is not that one relies on imagination while the other does not; it is that the skeptical and empirical rules set up a tension which makes imagination its own watchman.[58]

In a similar fashion, *Hope Leslie* encourages its readers to look skeptically at the facts, events and personae they know from history books. By overtly deviating from the official version of historiography, the novel invites us to challenge the

51 Strand 2009: 20.

52 Insko 2004: 179.

53 Hutcheon points out that historiographic metafiction often uses the "conventions of historiography" (e.g., the use of paratextual devices) to "both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations." (Hutcheon 2000: 123)

54 Block/Madden 2003: 22.

55 Ibid.

56 Quoted in ibid.: 23, emphasis added by the authors.

57 Rauch 2013: 69.

58 Ibid.

'facts' as we know them, thus elevating imagination itself to a kind of "watchman,"[59] to borrow Rauch's phrase. While questioning the claim to absolute truth often attributed to science, *Hope Leslie* also sets apart science from gossip and denunciation. In the opening sections of the first chapter, the book clearly speaks out against "vain speculation and idle inquiries"[60] that may lead to an infinite process in which one is forever "inquiring and inquiring, and never coming to the truth." (6) The character of the native woman Magawisca is presented as the novel's narrative linchpin, who, by virtue of her heroic resistance to the repressive culture of Puritanism, stands above the evils of denunciation: "I am your prisoner," she tells the British rulers, "and ye may slay me, but I deny your right to judge me." (302) The hierarchy between the colonists and Magawisca, *Hope Leslie* indicates, is grounded in superficial judgment. This judgment, naturally linked to the ear as a receptive organ, is conveyed through hearsay but is not substantiated by what actually happened in colonial history, especially during the Pequot War of the 1630s.

The relation between Magawisca and Hope Leslie is equally signified through the contact of mouth and ear. But this time, the transfer of thoughts is marked as ingenuous and deep, for example, when Magawisca, in the eighth chapter of the second volume, "lower[s] her voice for Hope's ear only." (282) A similar scene of a truthful exchange of words occurs in the following chapter when Hope's half-brother Everell "whisper[s] words into Magawisca's ear." (310) Not only does the novel conjure up a situation of intimacy and "kindness," (ibid.) it also lets us share the reactions of Magawisca who *rises* as Everell whispers in her ear. The intimate exchange of thoughts – as opposed to the spread of hearsay – is staged as an act of true understanding and a deeper visceral knowledge. Magawisca also appeals to her father, the deluded Pequot chief Mononotto, to listen not to the sounds of destruction engendered by his blind hatred, but to what she calls the "song […] of happiness." (87) Magawisca's emotional speech is garbed with a sense of aural aesthetics, expressed through the interplay between ear and mouth: "Nay, father, listen not to the sad strain; it is but the spirit of the tree mourning over its decay; rather *turn thine ear* to the glad song of this bright stream, image of the good." (Ibid.)

Hope Leslie does not fundamentally reject the power of the ear as a receptive organ, but it urges us to rely upon real stories, told by real people, and not

59 Ibid.

60 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 5–6.

upon hearsay. In one of the novel's key scenes, Magawisca is equipped with an authoritative voice that allows her to give a dramatic recitation of "the last acts in the tragedy of her people." (48) Her performance, the novel suggests, is a "new version of an old story" (55) that replaces the stereotyped version of native identity in the readers' imagination. As such, it stands in drastic contrast to the "pernicious lore" (6) of Puritanism, in which natives are often "represented as 'surly dogs.'" (3)

Notably, Sedgwick's novel conveys this *new version of an old story* through the focalizer of a white character, Everell Fletcher, who has already heard all circumstances about the Pequot tribe and their allegedly causal role in the war of 1636 to 1638. Or so he thinks. However, as the novel reminds us, the character had only "heard them in the language of the enemies and conquerors of the Pequods [sic]; and from Magawisca's lips they took a new form and hue." (55) When Everell listens to the native woman telling *her* version of the gruesome battles between settlers and natives, it seems to him that her narration "was putting the chisel into the hands of truth, and giving it to whom it belonged." (Ibid.)

What *Hope Leslie* here effectively accomplishes is a *poetics of fact*. It capitalizes on the real suffering of native American people and invites us to sympathize with this subjugated voice. In doing so, the book urges us to rely not on second-hand knowledge of exchanged words but rather on our own perception. The "terrible truth" (10) of real life-experiences, the novel suggests, is not only invisible to the fleeting eye, it is also inaudible to an ear that only listens superficially.

My analysis of *Hope Leslie* has demonstrated that a *poetics of fact* can be an effective literary strategy to engage in an interpersonal dialogue on historical events and personages. In contrast to mere gossip knowledge, historiographic metafiction combines an interest in the personal with the desire to stay true to the life-world, the *Lebenswelt* of actual people.[61]

The literary strategy of a *poetics of fact* is thus not so dissimilar from the method of *epochē* – sometimes described as the *bracketing* of natural phenom-

61 For Husserl, actual experience is the crucial factor that fills the 'life-world' with its essential component – namely life. "To live is always to line-in-certainty-of-the-world. Waking life is being awake to the world, being constantly and directly 'conscious' of the world and of oneself as living *in* the world, actually experiencing [*erleben*] and actually effecting the ontic certainty of the world." (Husserl 1970 [1936]: 142–143, emphasis in the original)

ena – employed by transcendental phenomenology.[62] "In carrying out this epochē," Husserl explains, "we […] continue to stand on the ground of the world; it is now reduced to the life-world which is valid for us prescientifically; […] we may take the sciences into consideration only as historical facts, taking no position of our own on their truth."[63] Magawisca's recital of her people's hidden history in *Hope Leslie* is a good example of how this "life-world" can be revealed in literature as the "realm of original self-evidences."[64] While the official Puritan historiography – that legitimized sphere of "secure facts" that seems "undisturbed by any noticeable disagreement"[65] – is exposed as a non-feasible "theoretical-logical substruction,"[66] Magawisca's own story points to the field of "the subjective" which is "distinguished in all respects precisely by its being actually *experienceable*."[67]

By inspiring an "ontology of the life-world"[68] – in other words by invoking and reanimating a set of untold stories of colonized people in the Americas – *Hope Leslie* gives voice to an abject discourse that is not part of the history books and thus commonly banned from the discursive order. In its consequential "historical relativism,"[69] the novel makes us aware that the difference between official historiography and narrative fiction is always skin-deep. The search for the underlying 'truth' of a native American 'life-world' [*Lebenswelt*] that permeates Magawisca's narration leads us *beyond* the barriers of hearsay and rumors into what New Historicist Stephen Greenblatt has termed a "poetics of culture,"[70] namely the study of the collective production of cultural practices. To recover and reanimate the "poetics of everyday behavior in America"[71] means, for Sedgwick, to endow indigenous people, whose lives have long been subjugated by hegemonic practice, with an unequivocal and empowered voice.

62 Cf. Käufer/Chemero 2015: 34–35.
63 Husserl 1970 [1936]: 147, emphasis in the original.
64 Ibid.: 127.
65 Ibid.: 138.
66 Ibid.: 127.
67 Ibid., emphasis added.
68 Ibid.: 173.
69 Cf. Gould 1994: 641–662.
70 Greenblatt 1990: 1.
71 Ibid.: 8. Greenblatt borrows this phrase from literary scholar and historian Juri Lotman.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, Sedgwick's novel *Hope Leslie* teaches us that there is, in fact, an alternative to simply accepting and replicating denunciatory practices. We "*can't know rumors*,"[72] to cite once again from Jay Asher's novel, but we can try to understand how they work. The characters of Hope Leslie and Magawisca are powerful literary examples of counter-discourses that tell a "new version of an old story"[73] and replace the superficial truth of hearsay by the "terrible truth" (10) of the life-worlds of actual people.

In this sense, the novel encourages us to search for the *subjugated knowledges* behind the talk, to listen to a *poetics of fact* that surpasses the foul talk of defamation. This kind of truth, symbolized by Magawisca's retelling of her people's story, may be shocking at first. Yet, it renders a deeper sense of historical practice that manifests itself not in rumor or hearsay but on a visceral and poetic level. This *poetics of fact* is ultimately more satisfying to the reader, since it endows us with a deeper understanding of reality, a type of understanding that is founded not in the circulation of rumors but in actual, firsthand practice.

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72 Asher 2017 [2007]: 65.

73 Sedgwick 1998 [1827]: 55.

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