A Culture of Captivity:
Subversive Femininity and Literary Landscapes

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Captivity stories may have sustained their interest for . . . women readers through the connections they offer between the plight of the literal captive and less tangible forms of victimization and restriction experienced by their . . . female readers. Captivity thus gives symbolic form to the culturally unnameable: confinement within the home, enforced economic dependence, rape, compulsory heterosexuality, prescribed plots.

—Christopher Castiglia from Bound and Determined

The stories and subsequent representations of two prominent female captives—Hannah Dustan and Olive Oatman—occupy seemingly opposite ends on the spectrum of the captivity narrative and its cultural and political power. Like the stories of other captive women, Dustan and Oatman’s captivity narratives gained the status of national myths. They became a “usable” past for authors seeking to cement or undo various cultural and political agendas. Dustan’s uncanny ability to kill her Abenaki captors in a violent manner and escape with their scalps to collect the Massachusetts Bay Colony’s bounty symbolically elevated American women’s ability to defy encroachments and violations by the racial and cultural “Other” and defend white, Christian values by any means necessary. Oatman, on the other hand, received an indelible mark of her captivity through the highly visible tattoos inscribed on her chin by her Mohave captors. Her captivity, thus, represented the threat of transformation into—rather than resistance to—the “savage” Other and called for greater protection and vigilance against cultures and races on the margins of white, Anglo-American society.

Yet the eager and anxious attempts of male editors, authors, journalists, and ministers to frame and control both women’s experiences and stories of their captivities underscore the subversive potential both held
within their home culture. Racially and culturally, Dustan’s own descent into savagery suggested a dangerous and potentially essential closeness or even resemblance between white settlers living on the frontier and their Indian neighbors. Oatman’s tattoos and rumors of a marriage to and children with one of her Indian captors called into question the presumably ontological difference between “savage” and “civilized.” Her haunting post-captivity visage suggested that cultural and racial identity were only skin-deep, while the released captive’s subjectivity (as well as the account of her trials) was something more interior, more elusive, more troubling. Perhaps so many captivity accounts emphasized release as “redemption,” because the captors’ marks stamped upon the captives were evidence of a latent, pre-existing savagery that had to be, once more, buried under layers of clothing and civilization.

Dustan and Oatman’s transformations through captivity certainly disturbed and even undermined prevailing gender scripts throughout American history. Both as victims and victors, captive women and their accounts brought into high relief the restrictive gender orders captivity experiences dislodged, often granting them opportunities for transgressive agency in their dealings with and survival among the Indians. Dustan’s bloody destruction of her captors clearly usurped white men’s monopolistic claim to violence, but even the proper dress Oatman donned in a widely circulated post-captivity photograph could not contain her Indian marks that hinted at a language, a potential, and even a hidden reservoir of impulses that eluded white, male interpretation and control.

The malleable and contested tropes, sites, and discourses of the female captivity tradition burst to the fore in a recent (2011) painting by Kelly Reemtsen, entitled “Holding Your Attention” (cover art). Though not literally taking up Indian captivity as its subject, Reemtsen’s painting plays with the multiple strains of female subversion that break forth through women’s captivity narratives. Most obviously, these narratives became early bestsellers because they held their audiences’ attention—through a forceful mix of suspense, exoticism, danger, and even sexual titillation. Just as tales of white women taken by swarthy savages both excited and frightened white (especially male) readers, Reemtsen’s ax-wielding woman clad in luxurious dress and jewelry simultaneous enthralls and threatens. While the woman’s formal, feminine dress locates her in times and situations of gendered, social control (perhaps the 1950s, judging by the design?), her assertive pose and threatening tool undo any contain-
ment or calculability. Portraying her without her head moves the woman in the painting to an uncannily universal level; captivity narratives, even in the eyes of their male editors/narrators, claimed a universal import of the subject’s particular experiences (e.g. the enduring faith in God’s redeeming power in Mary Rowlandson’s account), yet this portrayal, in text and art, of a potentially dangerous Everywoman mobilizes a variety of social, cultural, and political responses. Similarly, women’s Indian captivity narratives elicited multi-valent responses from a variety of readers, thus underscoring the ability of this genre to both uphold and undo dominant cultural models—from the idea of a white, patriarchal nation to visions of gentle and demure womanhood/motherhood.

Throughout the semester, our course examined these tenets (and the many paradoxes) of the American female captivity narrative—a highly politicized genre that frequently tried to cement propagandistic, theological, and racist agendas, and thus permeated the American cultural imaginary from the colonial era to the present day. Beginning with the foundational texts of early American contact with the cultural Other, texts dominated by the experiences of women as captives, writers, and readers, our course closely analyzed the characteristics, historical roots, and nationalist impulses of this distinct genre and its employment of the female body, along with its evolution in the American literary and cultural landscape. Our primary readings ranged from Mary Rowlandson’s foundational narrative and some direct, modern responses (Louise Erdrich’s “Captivity” and Sherman Alexie’s “Captivity), to Dustan’s climactic exploits and various male attempts (Mather, Hawthorne, Whitman, Thoreau) to adumbrate its subversive potential, to early national and antebellum accounts that blended the factual with the fictive, to modern adaptations in literature and film that place captivity tropes on a wider, cultural platform (such as the captivity of the female artist in Jane Campion’s The Piano). In literary criticism, we intensively studied the seminal work by Christopher Castiglia (Bound and Determined) and Michelle Burnham (Captivity and Sentiment) in their entirety throughout the semester, applying key concepts to primary literature and examining more recent critical responses and paradigms. The eleven essays that make up this collection represent the fullness of this investigation.

In the opening piece of the anthology, Mary Catherine Lyons tackles one of the most difficult problems in scholarship on the female captivity narrative—how to determine the relationship between male editorial involvement and the authenticity of the female captives’ voices. Lyons
Dr. Rebecca Harrison argues that the transculturation of the captives to their captors’ cultures countermanded the racist agendas of the male scribes or intermediaries who prepared the women’s accounts for publication. Examining the captivity narratives of Mary Jemison, Olive Oatman, and Cynthia Ann Parker, Lyons thus traces textual examples of transculturation as evidence of female narrative agency asserting itself against the discursive hegemony of white, patriarchal scripts.

Hannah Barnes Mitchell moves the analysis of the transculturated body to film in her analysis, which examines the tension between white male claims to and investment in the virginal and culturally pure female body and the female captives’ alternative experience of savagery, inscribed physically on their bodies and linguistically in their narratives. Mitchell demonstrates that twentieth and twenty-first century adaptations of the captivity genre in film—such as Malick’s *The New World*, Ford’s *The Searchers*, and Costner’s *Dances with Wolves*—ironically reify the historical male attempt at controlling female, transcultural experiences. The female subjects’ transculturation during their captivity transgresses patriarchal constructions of femininity; these films, however, expunge the instability the “redeemed” female captives introduce into their home culture by culminating in the women’s literal and symbolical deaths.

Centering John Greenleaf Whittier’s portrayal of Hannah Dustan, Michelle Guinn further inspects the attempt of male authors to circumscribe female experiences and narrative authority in their adaptations of female captivity stories. Hannah Dustan’s uncanny ability to slay her Indian captors subsequently defeated male authors’ attempts, like Whittier’s, to frame her actions and make them fit gendered cultural and political ideals. Specifically, Guinn reads Cotton Mather’s and John Greenleaf Whittier’s versions of the Dustan tale as betraying a type of unintentional double-voicedness: while trying to square Dustan’s actions with Puritan femininity and Biblical womanhood (Mather) or the cult of domesticity and maternal sensibility (Whittier), both authors unwittingly give voice to subversive femininity.

The next two authors move into the arena of the strategic deployment of sentimental scripts. Philemon Isaiah Amos in turn reveals Harriet Jacobs’s ability to deploy her slave narrative—a version of the captivity genre—in conversation with sentimental ideals of Northern womanhood. Cunningly, Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* exposes the violation of nineteenth-century white concepts of womanhood within the slave system and thus mobilizes them to support abolitionist causes.
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Jacobs thereby targets the tacit acceptance of the slave system by white Northern women as a hypocritical violation of their own standards, while ushering them toward an activist deployment of their ideals for the sake of social change.

For Gina Riccobono, Native American adaptations of the captivity genre—such as Sherman Alexie’s “Captivity” and Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian—establish intertextual conversations with Mary Rowlandson’s formative narrative in order to critique persistent tropes and social practices of Native American genocide and dispossession. Native American authors, therefore, find themselves in a socially and politically enforced captivity that is culturally buttressed through sentimentalized scripts of white womanhood. Native Americans view themselves and are viewed through the equally distorted lenses of white female victimhood and Indian savagery established by early American captivity narratives.

Michelle Drane’s piece shifts the anthology into generic adaptations where her work finds that Nathaniel Hawthorne had a dual ax to grind—both with Puritanism harnessing powerful women such as Hannah Dustan for its providential communal politics and with the female appropriations of male authorship that plagued his public perception as an author. Hawthorne’s crass characterization of Dustan as a “bloody old hag” in his short story “The Duston Family” discredits her transgression into male roles—especially her unreflective embrace of violence—as a perversion of femininity and thus a violation of sacrosanct constructions of American masculinity and nationalism. Ironically, as Drane points out, Hawthorne thus repeats Cotton Mather’s feeble attempt at reign in Dustan’s uncanny power and exposes the ambiguities of gender that both writers worked so hard to control and disentangle.

Leaping into the twentieth century, Wayne Bell’s essay interprets how contemporary white women turned the table on earlier male appropriations of female captivity narratives. Specifically, he argues that Angela Carter’s and Caroline Gordon’s captivity narratives revert their gaze back to historical materials in order to articulate the truth or possibility that captivity offered many white women a path to personal and communal autonomy.

Wes Shelton arrives at a genre he regards as the modern equivalent of the early American captivity narrative—the horror movie. A reiteration of the female captivity plot, the horror genre redeploy the female “victim-hero” in confrontation with a variety of Others whose monstrous
or aberrant attacks serve to challenge various nationalistic constructions of womanhood. Filmic examples such as *The Descent*, *Aliens*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, and *I Spit On Your Grave* inspect enduring constructs of female virtue; rather than returning to the restitution of female captives to their prescribed roles, the central female characters in these films defy expectations of the male rescuer saving the day and thus challenge Americans to test long-held assumptions about gender and racial/social otherness.

The last section concerns communal captivity and captive landscapes and those who find ways to break the boundaries of captivity. Here, **Dorinda Purser** turns to the protagonist of Ellen Glasgow’s *Barren Ground*, Dorinda Oakley, who overcomes her captivity to Southern norms of genteel motherhood and sentimental romance plots through a period of exile in the North. A kind of extraction from oppressive gender roles, her Northern education eventually enables Oakley to return to the South and revise the mythical figure of the Southern planter. Her more sustainable practices expose the failures of male farming systems and strive to liberate both women and land from engrained systems of exploitation and oppression.

**Brett Hill** interprets a different kind of rebellion against male captivity and oppressive linguistic scripts—Ada McGrath’s haunting silence and music in Jane Campion’s *The Piano*. Hill asserts that Ada’s eventual punishment represents the violence of patriarchal control that nevertheless cannot contain her artistic power and liberating defiance. She survives cultural captivity on the New Zealand frontier—and eventually her own potential grave in the ocean—through her art and eventually breaks her own silence.

Rounding out the anthology, **Jason Cole**’s essay on Daniel Woodrell’s *Winter’s Bone* focuses on the novel’s Ozark Mountain community that is captive to a harsh environment and a depraved drug culture but reasserts itself as a male-controlled captor to its own women. Out of this stalled, mutually reinforcing culture of captivity and degradation emerges the heroine Ree Dolly, who shirks her assigned role of captive by first making visible and then transgressing the patriarchal rules and culture of abuse endemic to her community. By absorbing male violence, Ree earns the empathy of other victimized women and thus galvanizes an inner community of survivors who develop a hybrid identity that partakes of both male and female traits.
Finally, in addition to their own projects, all seminar students engaged in close collaboration as an editorial board. They reviewed and eventually edited all anthology contributions, debated title and section grouping selections, and even determined parameters for the contributor pieces. The result is a sustained, cohesive, critically engaged, and culturally relevant collection of essays that excel through their attentiveness to the continuing significance of the tropes and languages of female captivity throughout American history and today.
I. Captive Women/Colonizing Texts
“Heathenish, Indelicate and Indecent”:
Male Authorship, Narration, and the Transculturated,
Mutable Female in James T. DeShields Cynthia
Ann Parker, James Seaver’s A Narrative of the Life
of Mrs. Mary Jemison, and Royal B. Stratton’s
Captivity of the Oatman Girls

Mary Catherine Lyons

When white persons of either sex have been taken prisoners young by the Indians, and have lived a while among them, tho’ ransomed by their Friends, and treated with all imaginable tenderness to prevail with them to stay among the English, yet in a Short time they become disgusted with our manner of life, and the care and pains that are necessary to support it, and take the first good Opportunity of escaping again into the Woods, from whence there is no reclaiming them.

—Benjamin Franklin

Taken from Annette Kolodny’s The Land Before Her, Franklin’s quotation examines life as the “rescued” transculturated captive, calling particular attention to their rejection of innate whiteness and their desire to remain in the woods with the Native American captor. His observation assists Kolodny in calling into “question the Europeans’ claim to a superior cultural organization, especially because […] the reverse was never the case” (68-9). Though they do not occupy the same critical space (Franklin advocating white supremacy and Kolodny as feminist critic), both Franklin and Kolodny recognize the various issues surrounding the transculturated captive and their reverence for life in the wilderness, presenting a type of spectrum of captivity. However, other authors, such as James DeShields, James Seaver, and Royal Stratton chose to overlook these issues when they penned the captivity narratives of Cynthia Ann Parker, Mary Jemison, and Olive Oatman. Instead, they focused on the task at hand, pushing forth their shared individual agendas: the eradication of Native Americans and the subsuming of their land.
In their respective texts, James E. Seaver, James T. DeShields, and Royal B. Stratton stress the notion that white female captives suffered during their time with the Native Americans as they strayed from the strictures of proper white womanhood, thus attempting to prove the superiority of Euro-American society. Though they pen these narratives under the guise of unbiased mediums, each author presents a story in which at least one white female suffers at the hands of the “savage” Native American. These tragedies called not only for the removal of supposed uncivilized beings, but also the annexation of their vast amounts of land, notions that supported the Manifest Destiny movement westward. Seaver’s *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*, DeShield’s *Cynthia Ann Parker*, and Stratton’s *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* relate the tales of three white, transculturated, female captives. However, they attempt to portray them not as adopted tribe members but rather as vulnerable women, suffering under the brutality of the indigenous savage. Placed in tandem, the narratives establish a spectrum of transculturation, presenting three vastly different versions of the transculturated female captive: the captive who acculturates and remains for life (Mary Jemison), the captive who acculturates, experiences a forced return to white society and (re)acculturates (Olive Oatman), and finally the captive who acculturates, experiences a forced return to white society and fails to (re)acculturate (Cynthia Ann Parker).

Throughout the respective narratives, each male author attempts to assert a personal agenda while simultaneously undermining the experience of the captive female. In an effort to demonstrate the superiority of white culture, the authors exploit “all the racial assumptions of [their] era, thus making certain that the subject from whose life the lessons were to be drawn would be clearly identifiable as white,” directing their focus to the unacceptable captor and ignoring and/or hiding the willingness of the female captive to remain in her incarcerated state (72). They manipulate the captive experience through these racial stereotypes and assert that “race [is] immutably inherited at birth” (Rifkin 78). Ultimately, the narratives undermine their efforts as the captives in question employ various techniques that dispute the assertion of Euro-American culture as superior. By refusing white society altogether or literally being forced back within its confines, Jemison, Oatman, and Parker expose the true, uncivilized nature of Euro-American culture, deconstructing the civil/savage binary, while thwarting the agency and agendas of their male narrators. Their refusal to rejoin or remain in the confines of white
society not only permits the deconstruction of this binary, but it also
denies the captive female to show the mutability of identity, which in
turn leads to a reclamation of her agency.

Captured in 1758 at the age of fourteen by Shawnee Indians, Mary
Jemison is the first female captive on the spectrum of transculturation.
She was one of two family members who survived the deadly raid. Her
initial captors sold her to a Seneca tribe, located in present day Genesee,
New York. The only female member to survive the attack, Jemison read-
ily accepted her fate with the Native Americans, “irretrievably t[ying]
herself to life among the Indians [through] her marriage” (Kolodny
76). She relished her life as a member of the Seneca tribe, sitting in on
council meetings, working in the fields, and making a home for herself
among them. In fact, her only qualms with Native life involved white
men and the negative effects they had upon the Seneca men. Jemison
disapproved of the guns and alcohol they introduced to Native society
“and she blames most of the problems of her adopted culture onto the
corrupting influences of the European whom she is quick to indict
as dishonest, lascivious, greedy, and violent” (Stodola and Levernier
84). Apart from this Euro-American impact, Jemison fully embraced
Native American life, an occurrence that “few English colonials were
as yet prepared to accept the fact of apparently willing miscegenation,”
viewing it as unclean and savage, especially in comparison to colonial
unions (70). Jemison's narrative of her life, however, reveals a warm fam-
ily structure based on strong bonds of affection not unlike her colonial
counterparts, and she chose on every occasion where her release became
possible to remain with her tribe. Her extended family and fellow Seneca
people attempted on several occasions to return her to white society, yet
she preferred life as a Native woman and further feared her first child
would not be accepted into white culture. Jemison remained with her
Seneca tribe until her death in 1833, leaving behind three of her seven
children, thirty-nine grandchildren, and fourteen great-grandchildren.
Approached by Seaver5 late in life, Jemison narrated her life story orally
to the amateur historian and *Narrative* was published in 18246. Unlike
Oatman and Parker, Jemison relates her own tale with the only influ-
ence from Seaver coming in the introduction and his informational
footnotes. Both Jemison’s narrative and life served as a testament to the
unobserved amiable nature of Native American society, specifically her
Seneca tribe, asserting them as a peaceable nation and moving away
from the stereotypical barbaric view.

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Seaver’s introduction to *Narrative* immediately attempts to assert authorial control over the work, “deliberately misrepresent[ing] the content of the book” (Stodola and Levernier 74). As he provides the initial framework for the text, he establishes Jemison as “The White Woman” living in the Genesee river area of New York (Seaver 125). He emphasizes this established identity, describing her physical attributes:

Her complexion is very white for a woman of her age, and although the wrinkles of fourscore years are deeply indented in her cheeks, yet the crimson of youth is distinctly visible. Her eyes are light blue, a little faded by age, and naturally brilliant and sparkling. [...] When she looks up and is engaged in conversation her countenance is very expressive. (Seaver 127)

By referring to Jemison as “The White Woman” and proceeding to portray her physical characteristics as predominantly white, Seaver tries to eradicate her Native American qualities, stressing her “whiteness” and downplaying the extent of her “Indianness.” In doing so, Seaver constructs a paradigm in which, regardless of how she appears, communicates, or presents herself, Jemison will always be a white woman living in Native American captivity, a notion which C. Hale Sipe supported in his text *The Indian Wars of Pennsylvania.* He refers to Jemison as a “remarkable lady who preserved the sensibilities of a white woman amidst the surrounding of barbaric life,” following Seaver’s lead and presenting her as permanently white (Sipe 380). Continuing his description of Jemison’s character, Seaver comments on her mental capacity, attempting to discredit the veracity of his narrator. He notes that while it “cannot be reasonably supposed, that a person of her age has kept the events of seventy years in so complete a chain as to be able to assign to each its proper time and place” she makes “her recital with as few obvious mistakes as might be found in that of a person of fifty,” appearing to compliment her by noting the age of her mind, while simultaneously highlighting her “obvious mistakes” (Seaver 127). Seaver opts to blame Jemison’s memory as the culprit for her kind treatment of the Native Americans within the text, disregarding the actual relationship she had with her people.

He further insults Jemison by underscoring her “ignorance of the manners of the white people,” insinuating a lack of propriety within the Native American culture on the basis that it does not fit the standards
set by Euro-American society (Seaver 128). He exploits her unfamiliarity, citing it as yet another instance in which white supremacy has the advantage as a civilized culture. He uses her story to show readers that “pity for the bereaved, benevolence for the destitute, and compassion for the helpless […] may be learned” from this work, playing on the emotions of his audience and preventing them from impartially examining the text. In doing so, Seaver completely undermines the captive experience, giving him the opportunity to appropriate the narrative to justify white America’s “acquiring [of] native territory,” supporting Manifest Destiny and the colonization of Native Americans (Rifkin 53). Though he attempts to provide an unbiased introduction to the work, Seaver colors his primer with his opinion of Native culture, establishing his position in regard to the aboriginal community and concurrently influencing the audience’s thoughts prior to their engagement with the text. Through these mechanisms, he tries to confine Jemison by identifying her as a white female captive, victim of the “savage” Indian.

Though Seaver attempts to overtake Jemison’s narrative and force her into a white identity, the captive herself impedes his efforts, reclaiming her narrative and making it work in her favor. Jemison thus deconstructs the inherent civil/savage binary whilst successfully depicting the mutability of identity and regaining her agency from Seaver. She initiates her reclamation as well as her binary deconstruction by examining the distinctive differences of female life within the Native American and Euro-American cultures. Jemison notes that the work of a Native American woman “was not severe; and that of one year was exactly similar […] without that endless variety that is to be observed in the common labor of the white people” observing that the Indian woman’s “task is probably not harder than that of white women” (Seaver 149). She asserts the main difference between the two forms of labor lies in the fact that Native American women have “no master to oversee or drive [them], so [they] could work as leisurely as [they] pleased” (Seaver 149). Jemison highlights these stark disparities, depicting the amount of agency provided to a Native American woman as well as the slave-like existence of the white woman. By depicting the white male as slave driver and capturing the ease with which her female tribe members conduct their lives, Jemison begins her deconstruction of the inherent civil/savage binary, displacing the white male from a superior role to the position of uncivilized.

Jemison further deconstructs the civil/savage binary and reclaims her authority by emphasizing the agency Native American females possess.
She defends her Seneca tribe from Seaver’s biased introduction, proclaiming “it is a fact that they are naturally kind, tender and peaceable towards their friends, and strictly honest,” while clarifying that any “cruelties [that] have been practiced [are] only upon their enemies, according to their idea of justice” (Seaver 147). Rather than disregard their cruel practices, Jemison calls attention to them, noting that they are not purposely or unjustly directed toward the white man. She states “[w]ith them was my home; my family was there, and there I had many friends to whom I was warmly attached in consideration of the favors, affection and friendship with which they had uniformly treated me;” Jemison’s comments humanize those that Seaver initially deems “brute savages” (Seaver 149). As Mark Rifkin comments in his book When Did Indians Become Straight?, “the text adopts a stance of incredulity, casting as spectacle the fact that this white woman has lived and continues to live among the Indians” (49). Rather than follow in the path created by Seaver’s introduction, Jemison expresses her true feelings about her life with the Seneca tribe, spoiling his agenda and undoing the previous, stereotypical view of Native Americans held by Euro-American society.

She draws specific attention to her first husband, Sheninjee, and the relationship she built with him, shaping him into a person, not just another unidentifiable, savage brute. Jemison observes, “[H]e was an Indian. The idea of spending my days with him, at first seemed perfectly irreconcilable to my feelings: but his good nature, generosity, tenderness, and friendship towards me, soon gained my affection; and strange as it may seem, I loved him!” (Seaver 147). Her detailed description of Sheninjee illustrates him as an individual with human characteristics. Jemison establishes him as a being capable of emotion, having the ability to love and be loved, thus softening the stereotypical view of the “violent” Seneca Brave. She continues her exoneration of her Seneca tribe, asserting that Sheninjee “was ever kind in sickness, and always treated [her] with gentleness; […] he was an agreeable husband, and a comfortable companion” (Seaver 147). Having married one of the bravest warriors in the tribe, Jemison (much in the vein of Seaver) uses Sheninjee in the narrative to her advantage, presenting him as one example of the true nature of the majority Seneca peoples. This assertion allows Jemison to discredit Seaver’s all-encompassing depiction of Native American society, giving her agency over her own narrative.

Jemison’s final reclamation of agency presents itself through her identity. As previously mentioned, Seaver, like Stratton and DeShields,
asserts that identity is an immutable trait established at birth. Yet, similar to the way in which she deconstructs Seaver’s racially-driven binary, Jemison disproves his theory, proving the mutability of identity and gaining the agency denied her by the author. Her mutable identity derives from two aspects: her physical appearance and her language. Through these mediums, Jemison portrays the ability of an individual to alter his or her physical identity and mental state. Though no pictures of Jemison exist, Seaver provides a quality description of her physical attributes. He states,

In stature she is very short, [...] and stands tolerably erect, with her head bent forward, apparently from her having for a long time been accustomed to carrying heavy burdens in a strap placed across her forehead. [...] Her cheek bones are high, and rather prominent [...] When she looks up and is engaged in conversation her countenance is very expressive; but from her long residence with the Indians, she has acquired the habit of peeping from under eyebrows as they do with the head inclined downwards. (Seaver 127)

Seaver’s description in its entirety attempts to focus solely on Jemison’s “white” qualities; nevertheless, her true Native American attributes are so potent that he cannot prevent them from seeping through his façade. Born into an Irish family, Jemison loses much of her inherent white characteristics, taking on those of the Seneca culture in their stead, physically disproving Seaver’s immutability theory. Furthermore, Jemison’s inclusion of the Seneca language allows her to continue to show
the mutability of identity. She notes that her adopted sisters “would not allow [her] to speak English in their hearing” but Jemison claims “I had learned in order that I might not forget my own language” (Seaver 144). Rather than completely assume one oral identity, Jemison employs both English and Seneca in her everyday life, asserting, “I soon learned […] that I could understand [both] readily, and speak [them] fluently” (Seaver 144). Her bilingual abilities give Jemison the capacity to move between two vastly different cultures, thus providing her with separate identities that exist simultaneously. For, while she speaks the Seneca language, she also “became acquainted with English people with whom [she has] been almost daily in the habit of conversing” (Seaver 144). Jemison’s ability to exist both physically and orally amongst these two cultures not only allows her to discredit Seaver’s notions, but it also permits her to reclaim the agency he initially denies her. Ultimately, his attempts to control her narrative and agency fail due to Jemison’s deconstruction of the civil/savage binary as well as her dismantling of Seaver’s assertions regarding identity.

Olive Oatman appears next on the spectrum of transculturation, representing the transculturated individual forced back into white society. Similar to Jemison’s introduction to captivity, Native Americans captured Oatman at the age of fourteen, killing her family except for a brother, Lorenzo and a sister, Mary Ann, who would briefly share Oatman’s captivity. Taken by the Yavapai in 1851, Oatman and her sister were eventually sold to the Mohaves after a year with their initial captors. There the two transculturated into the society, where their faces were tattooed like the other members of the tribe and their hair was dyed, physically transforming them into Mohave women. Oatman’s personal life as a captive is not

Figure 2 - Olive Oatman after her rescue from Native American captivity.
as well-known as Jemison’s. Scholars speculate she married into the tribe (indicated by the tattoos she received), and gave birth to a mixed-race child while other researchers refute these assertions. However, Kolodny claims, “At the heart of such denials, […] may have been something more than the habitual white terror of interracial mixings. For, to accept a white woman’s intimacy with the Indian was well, to accept her intimacy with the forest spaces he inhabited” (70). Unlike Jemison, Oatman could not continue with her tribe for the remainder of her life. After five years of captivity, Oatman was forcibly returned to white society, after being “rescued” from captivity by her remaining sibling. She met and married a banker, John Fairchild, with whom she lived in Sherman, Texas. They adopted a daughter, Mamie, Oatman’s only recognized child.\(^7\) She died\(^8\) at her Texas home in 1903 at the age of sixty-five, having never made contact with her Indian family after her third and final captivity. Her narrative, much like her life, differs from Jemison’s in many ways. In 1857, *Captivity of the Oatman Girls* saw the first of many publications. Though Oatman was alive during the first (and subsequent) publication, she did not narrate her story. Instead, the author of the work, Stratton,\(^9\) presented the text, with Oatman narrating intermittently. Stratton’s text actually presents a keen focus on the life of Lorenzo Oatman\(^10\) (Olive’s only immediate white family member), instead of the captive females his title implies. His focus on Lorenzo rather than Olive and Mary Ann manipulates the captive experience, presenting to readers the “brutish” Natives rather than the civil tribe the girls encounter.

In his introduction to *Captivity*, Stratton works to uplift and empower himself as he attempts to assert his masculine authority over this feminine text. He claims, “the writer has sought to adapt the style to the character of the narrative, and in a simple, plain, comprehensive manner to give to the reader facts, as they have been received from those whose sad experiences in adversity these pages give a faithful delineation” (Stratton 6). Though Stratton claims narrative authority and “truth,” as Margot Mifflin explains “by analyzing Stratton’s motivations in telling [Oatman’s] story, his knowledge of and attitude toward Indians and his theological and colonial vision of the West, and by examining the passages in *Captivity* that are probably false, a clear pattern of manipulation emerges” making it “possible to disentangle—to a degree—his story from hers” (7). Furthermore, Kathryn Derounian-Stodola notes:
The narrative uses of these actual captivities reveal that the women were doubly victimized: first, they were captured by Native Americans as casualties of American expansionism, then they were exploited by clergy and society on their return for the purpose of producing propagandist texts that rationalized white superiority. (33)

Stodola emphasizes the victimization and commodification of these women by those who claim to be “civil,” underlining the inherent hypocrisy that exists in the Euro-American culture. While Stratton proclaims his reasoning for writing the text is “to give a full and particular account of the dreadful and barbarous scenes of the captivity endured by [the Oatman] sisters,” he, like Seaver, writes to justify the westward expansion of Euro-American society (Stratton 6). He does so by presenting the Native American captors as brutal savages, a threat to the divinely-sanctioned expansion of white civilization. Stratton calls them “a fiendish set of men,” “merciless […] lords,” and “an unfeeling horde of land-sharks,” openly condemning them because of their racial identity (Stratton 207-8). Yet, as Stratton offers these stereotypical views, Oatman subtly works through the narrative, unweaving the story he initially wove, and presenting instead a tale akin to Jemison’s.

Although Stratton relates the narrative of Oatman and her sister, Olive artfully maneuvers through his words, using her own to nullify much of his account, thwarting his authorial agency as well as deconstructing the civil/savage binary he attempts to create. As Stratton depicts images of the Native Americans as uncivilized “miserable brutes,” Oatman, in her rare bit of narration, claims, “We are captives, and since our parents and all our kindred are dead, it matters little where we are […] We are treated better than we deserve” (Stratton 74, 158). Here, she equates the role of Indian captive with that of white daughter, highlighting the lack of distinction between the two positions, particularly in regard to their treatment. Her most convincing (and least subtle) observation of their similarities comes during her first harvest with the Mohaves: “It was to us [Olive and Mary Ann], however, an enlivening sight to see even those scattered parcels of grain growing, clothing sections of their valley. It was a remembrance, and reminded us of home, (now no more ours) and placed us in a nearness to the customs of a civilized mode of life that we had not realized before” (Stratton 172). Rather than attempt to assert the Native American’s as superior to Euro-American society,
Oatman equates the civilizations, emphasizing the similarities existing between the two cultures. By doing so, she begins the deconstruction of the civil/savage binary, placing the two societies on an equal plane before reversing their roles. Moving into her deconstruction of Stratton’s stereotypic presentation of Indians, Oatman focuses not on the overall tenets of Native American society, but on the wife and daughter of the tribe’s chief instead. Referring to them as her “Indian Guardians,” Oatman describes numerous instances in which she lacked provisions or some other necessity and these women provided for her as if she were one of them (Stratton 161). During her remove from white civilization she comments, “The nights were cool, and contrary to our expectations, the daughter of the chief showed us kindness throughout the journey by sharing her blankets with us at each camp” (Stratton 162). As Oatman and her sister enter into Mohave society, she notes that “[h]ad it not been for the wife and daughter of the chief, we could have obtained nothing,” attributing their survival during this time not to their American upbringing but to the charity of “savage” squaws (Stratton 192).

As the text progresses, she moves away from examining these varying niceties, focusing on herself, a shift in which she holds herself (and others like her) accountable for the stereotypical view of Native American society, thus completing the deconstruction of the civil/savage binary. She states: “From this circumstance [her captivity] I learned to chide my hasty judgment against ALL the Indian race, and also, that kindness is not always a stranger to the untutored and untamed bosom” (Stratton 200). Oatman indicts herself and her fellow white man as the cause for people like Stratton, who view the Native Americans as “heathenish, indelicate, and indecent,” an assertion that shifts Euro-American society from civil to savage (Stratton 168). Although Oatman “was not a defector, like some famous captives who [chose] to stay with their tribes,” she recognized the civility existing within their culture, as well as the less subtle instances of savagery present in white society (Mifflin 4). Her ability to acknowledge these elements paired with the equation of the two civilizations allows Oatman to exert some agency over her narrative, simultaneously providing her with the power to hinder Stratton’s agenda.

While Oatman ends her assertion of the savageries of white society on this note, the text goes on to highlight another instance in which Euro-American culture fails to exude the civility upon which it prides itself. As Stratton moves between the two narratives, he constantly refers to Lorenzo’s attempts to create a search party, noting that “[h]e entreated
Commander Heinsalman\textsuperscript{11} [sic], [...] to make some effort to regain them, but it was in vain that he thus pleaded for help” (Stratton 239). Desperate to recover his sisters, Lorenzo appealed to the Governor of California, “praying of [him the] means and men to go and rescue his captive sisters” only to learn that “men did not come across the plains to hunt captives among the Indians” (Stratton 247, 243). In response to Lorenzo’s pleas, Governor J. Neely Johnson responded:

> It would afford me great pleasure, indeed, to render the desired assistance, were it in my power so to do. But by the constitution and laws of this state I have not the authority conferred on me to employ either “men or means” to render this needful assistance; but will be most happy to cooperate in this laudable undertaking in any consistent way that may be presented. (Stratton 247)

Though he valiantly attempts to liberate his sisters, Lorenzo’s appeals to his fellow Euro-Americans go unheard. These “civilized” individuals disregard his numerous petitions for their assistance, informing him that “his sisters were dead, and it was useless to hunt them” (Stratton 245). The lack of compassion exuded by his compatriots underscores Olive’s notion that white society has the more savage disposition between the two cultures. Thus, by highlighting the indifference with which white culture views Lorenzo’s situation, whilst bolstering the caring disposition of Native American society, Olive deconstructs the civil/savage binary, working in tandem with the text to present a factual representation of both societies and coming closer to regaining her agency.

While her reversal of the civil/savage binary allows her to move toward reclaiming her agency, it is Oatman’s depiction of the mutability of her identity that truly provides her the ability to recover the agency Stratton denies her. Like Jemison, Oatman’s mutable identity lies in her appearance as well as her language; however, her physical characteristics differ markedly from the traditional transculturated captive. As part of their adoption into the Mohave tribe, both Oatman girls were branded with tattoos on their arms. For Mary Ann the torture begins and ends there; Olive was not as fortunate. Her entire lower jaw consisted of blue tattoos painfully etched into her skin, permanently marking her as a member of the Mohave and inextricably binding her to the tribe\textsuperscript{12}. Though these were common markers used in Native American culture, tattoos
were not as prominent in white society. Upon re-entering white society, Oatman was described as “[t]anned, tattooed, and painted, […] all but unrecognizable as a nineteen-year-old white woman” (Mifflin 110). Furthermore, she had “[t]he straight line of a vertical blue tattoo ascending each of her bare upper arms. [And] her naturally light-brown hair was as dark as a Mohave’s” (Mifflin 110). The reasoning behind Oatman’s facial tattoos remains unknown, serving as a constant reminder of how the true nature of the Indian culture eludes white society. Her tattoos, “while they faded with time and treatment […] never completely disappeared,” functioning as a mechanism through which Oatman reminds Euro-American society and Stratton of her dual identity as she simultaneously represents both cultures (Stodola 36). By keeping her tattoos long after her captivity, Oatman shows her refusal to choose between her two opposing identities, asserting her agency over white society, especially Stratton who continually attempted to portray her as solely white.

Oatman’s language also serves to show the mutability of her identity. While she and Mary Ann were among the Yavapais, they both learned to speak snippets of the language. Soon, the Oatmans were sold to the Mohave people. Mifflin notes “[t]he Mohave language was linguistically akin to Yavapai, though the two were not mutually intelligible. The girls mastered it fairly quickly, and Olive was soon having lively and sometimes contentious exchanges using it” (76). She learns and retains each of these languages, losing the ability to speak her native English in the process. Once returned to “civil” society, Olive loses her ability to speak, having for the most part completely forgotten her native tongue. An article in the San Francisco Weekly Chronicle that ran shortly after her return described Oatman to the readers: “The rescued lady is said to be very fine in appearance with agreeable manners, but has entirely forgotten her native language,” unable to communicate with anyone, including her long-lost brother Lorenzo (Mifflin 119-20). Like most transculturated captives, Oatman “lost [her] native language,” in the transition to her new culture, orally displaying the mutability of identity (Stodola and Levernier 159). Rather than retain English, Olive completely loses the language, only regaining it after her immersion into white society. By replacing English with not one, but two foreign languages and highlighting her physical attributes, Oatman refutes Stratton’s concept that identity is immutable, discrediting the author who attempted to control her narrative while taking back the agency he denied her in the text. Oatman’s mutable identity paired with her deconstruction of the civil/savage
binary allow the former captive to assert agency over herself as well as her narrative, completely denying Stratton the access he once abused.

Cynthia Ann Parker represents the final female captive on the spectrum of transculturation: the captive forced to return who refuses to (re)acculturate. In 1836, at the age of nine, Comanche Indians killed her family, taking her captive in the process. Like Jemison and Oatman, Parker transculturates into Comanche society, accepting their language and way of life, which leads to the almost complete eradication of her “whiteness.” Parker eventually marries a prestigious war chief from her tribe, with whom she has three children. However, the end of her captivity drastically deviates from that of the former captives. In the midst of a hunt, Texas rangers discovered Parker and her small band, taking all the female squaws as captives, save Parker, for they notice her blue eyes, the one element of her “whiteness” she could not erase. They “rescue” her, forcing her back into the white society she has long forgotten, and allowing her to bring only one of her children with her, Topshannah, her only daughter. During her captivity in white society, Parker attempted to escape Euro-American culture numerous times, favoring a return to her Comanche family with whom she spent twenty-four years of her life. After only a few years in white civilization, Topshannah passed away, leaving behind a distraught Parker removed from all forms of motherhood and without any connection to her true cultural identity. In response, Parker starved herself, “literally grieved herself to death,” and eventually succumbed to illness at age thirty-seven (Jones 381). Deprived of their mother, her sons remained with their Comanche family. The youngest died of illness, while his older brother, Quannah became a warrior and the final Comanche chief. Again, Parker departs from the afore-

Figure 3 - Cynthia Ann Parker with her daughter, Topshannah.
mentioned captives, this time through her narrative. Having forgotten all elements of the English language apart from her name and dying at a young age, Parker is unable to relate the story of her captivity herself. Instead, the author of her narrative, DeShields, recites the tale, as told by local white men. Ann first sees publication in 1886, nearly fifty years after Parker’s initial capture.

Taking into account that the subject of Ann died quite some time before the writing and publication of the narrative, it would appear that DeShields’s manipulation of the captive experience to suit his agenda could occur with no interference from the subject herself. However, by examining Parker’s life both during and after her time with the Comanche, a subversion of male authority becomes evident. DeShields entitles his work after Parker, yet the majority of his text focuses on the expansion westward, idealizing Manifest Destiny for his readers and ignoring the “subject” of his text until the fifteenth page. He claims, “we have laboriously and with much care, sifted out and evolved the foregoing narrative of plain unvarnished facts which form a part of the romantic history of Texas,” completely disregarding the captivity narrative his title insinuates (DeShields xiii). DeShields continues to veer from his initial subject asserting “[i]n submitting our little work—the first efforts of the youthful author—we assure the reader that while there are, doubtless, many defects and imperfections, he is not reading fiction, but facts which form only a part of the tragic and romantic history of the Lone Star State” (DeShields xiv). He appropriates Parker’s story, using it to establish himself as a credible writer, and portraying her as a helpless white child, bound by the restraints of Native American captivity. Like Seaver and Stratton, DeShields attempts to use Parker’s narrative as a means to justify the great move west, while simultaneously trying to assert himself as a prolific writer of Texan history, clearly taking advantage of Parker’s deceased state. Nevertheless, his efforts backfire, as Parker and DeShields writing itself work to thwart his attempts to reappropriate her narrative, deconstructing the civil savage binary, thus allowing her to regain the agency he tried to deny her.

Due to his inexperience as a writer, DeShields continually contradicts himself throughout Ann, presenting stereotypical representations of Native Americans and subsequently undoing them with his analysis. Stodola and Levernier note “captivity writers, while overtly anti-Indian, often reveal, usually without full conscious awareness, a positive image of Indian culture that undercuts the racist image they manifestly proj-
ect,” a trait shared by Seaver, Stratton, and DeShields (91). Yet, none accomplish this feat as well as DeShields. During the text, he tries to paint the “horrors” endured by Parker, claiming, “Cynthia Ann […] became the bride of Peta Nocona, performing for her imperious lord all the slavish offices which savagism and Indian custom assigns as the duty of a wife,” depicting the Native husband as a cruel slave driver incapable of love (DeShields 17). However, in the next sentence he mentions that Parker not only “bore him children,” but she “loved him with a species of fierce passion and wifely devotion,” entirely contradicting his previous assertions. Though he attempts to present the Natives within the work as “merciless fiends,” DeShields fails, instead offering them as somewhat “kind, generous” creatures, beginning the initial reversal of the civil/savage binary (DeShields 11, Stodola and Levernier 77). By failing to assert the stereotypical portrayal of Native culture in the text, DeShields allows Parker to initiate her reclamation of agency.

Parker’s narrative continues the reversal of the civil/savage binary, presenting white society as uncivilized and cruel. In his text *White into Red*, Norman Heard highlights a trend existing “throughout the West” in which “white persons [in captivity] painted their faces to conceal their identity from officers who would have redeemed them,” exposing the popular captive desire to remain with their captors (4). While she never painted her face, Parker executed similar schemes in order to remain with her Comanche family, “run[ning] away and hid[ing] from those who tried to ransom her,” and absolutely refusing to leave, asserting that “her husband and children, and all that she held most dear, were with the Indians and there she should remain” (Richardson 91-2, Marcy and McClellan). Despite her efforts, Parker was captured and returned to white society against her will. She never makes any direct comments in regard to this injustice committed against her. She merely states, “I am happily wedded, […] I love my husband, who is good and kind and my little ones, who, too, are his, and I cannot forsake them!” (Stodola and Levernier 76). Rather than overtly draw attention to the cruelties of white society, Parker subtly notes their savagery as she emphasizes the love she feels toward her Comanche family. By doing so, she not only humanizes her husband and three children, but she also exposes the inherent savage nature of white society, depicting them as a culture that separates families for their own benefit.

Much in the way her capture and emphasis on family served to depict white culture as savage, Parker’s role as mother also works to deconstruct
the binary, once again undermining DeShields’s attempts to control the narrative and allowing Parker to reclaim her agency. After her forced return to Euro-American society, Parker found herself “unable to bridge the chasm between civilizations” and attempted on numerous occasions to escape and return to the Comanches, “to her two sons—to what she saw as freedom” (Heard 4, Stodola and Levernier 163). Though her new captors permit her to bring her young daughter Topsannah, it is not enough. As DeShields aptly notes, Parker’s “ruling passion […] seemed to be the maternal instinct” (49). After the premature death of Topsannah, her only hope lay “in reclaiming her two children who were still with the Indians” (49). DeShields describes an instance in which Parker “was so anxious about the fate of her half-Indian sons that she sacrificed her chest, put the blood on tobacco and burned it, wailing to the spirits to preserve the lives of her children,” fully embodying her role as primary caregiver, even though distance severs her physical closeness to her children (139-40). Parker’s inability to retain her role as mother directly correlates to the efforts of the white community to confine her to their lifestyle. Their hindrance of her maternal rights unveils their truly savage nature, in turn leading Parker to “grieve[…] herself into an early grave” (Heard 4). Through white society’s denial of her maternal rights and her subsequent death, Parker successfully deconstructs the civil/savage binary, moving closer to a full reclamation of her agency.

Forced into the role of “immutably white captive,” Parker, like Jemison and Oatman, resists that label, choosing instead to show her mutability as both a white woman and Comanche squaw, characterizations that ultimately allow her to regain fully her agency. Through her physical attributes and her ability to learn (and relearn) languages, Parker disrupts the notion of immutable identity, depicting instead the duality that exists. Following the example set by Seaver, DeShields portrays Parker as fully white, trapped in the confines of Native American captivity. And like his mentor, DeShields fails to subvert Parker’s Indian qualities and present her as an imprisoned white woman. Initially characterizing her as a “white girl” who “grow up [among the] Comanche,” his description significantly changes over the course of the narrative (DeShields ix). She becomes “[a] little Indian girl in all save the Caucasians’ conscious stamp of superiority” and “[a]s thorough an Indian in manner and looks as if she had been so born” (DeShields 36, 48). Parker’s embodiment of Native American qualities prevents DeShields from portraying her as the white woman Euro-American society longs for her to be. By forcing
him to depict her as the Comanche squaw she represents, Parker asserts the mutability of her identity and also reclaims part of the agency he denied her.

Parker’s ability to learn the Comanche language and later relearn the English language provides her the final element to prove her mutable identity and recover her narrative authority from DeShields. Similar to other transculturated captives, Parker re-enters Euro-American civilization having “gradually forgot the language, manners, and customs” of her society, “a stranger now to every word of her mother tongue” (DeShields 13, 17). However, in her attempts to reacculturate to this new confinement she “gradually […] regained the use of English and became a successful housekeeper” learning “to spin, weave and to perform the domestic duties” (Heard 139-40, DeShields 49). Though she loathes her new life and seeks “every opportunity to escape” (DeShields 48), Parker successfully learns the responsibilities of the Euro-American housewife and regains the ability to speak the white language. By trying to enmesh herself within a society she considered “unfamiliar and unacceptable,” Parker evinces the ability of one’s identity to mutate and become a separate individual, adapting to the present situation (Stodola and Levernier 163). Though she elects to remove herself permanently from white culture, her efforts in learning two unconnected languages and her physical appearance allow her to prove the mutability of identity, thus giving her the ability to discredit DeShields and recover the agency he so readily denied her.

The ability of these captive women to overthrow the male authorial binds that try to restrict them exhibits not only the absolute potency of Jemison, Oatman, and Parker, but it also exposes the inability of these male authors to respect the female captive experience. Their deconstruction of the civil/savage binary further allows these women to assert their moral superiority over Seaver, Stratton, DeShields, presenting the trio as morally bankrupt on almost all accounts. Though their stories clearly differ, their purposes are very much the same. Through their respective narratives, Jemison, Oatman and Parker successfully present powerful females, capable of controlling their own lives and presenting their own stories in an unbiased manner.
Notes

1. Kolodny quotes Franklin’s letter from Frederick Turner’s Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit against the Wilderness.
2. The spectrum of transculturation represents the various versions of white, transculturated female captives, women who are taken captive and choose to remain with their captors, adopting Native American culture as their own.
3. Hereafter these texts will be referred to as Narrative, Ann, and Captivity.
4. I present the term “reacculturates” in parentheses because the women did not spend the vast majority of their young lives in white culture, and therefore were not fully acculturated to it to begin with. Thus, their transition back in to white culture is not a true reacculturation.
5. James Everett Seaver was a local doctor and part-time historian in Castile, Genesee County, New York (present day Genesee, New York) approached by antiquarians who asked him to write a book based on Jemison’s life, fearing her life as a captive would go unobserved by the outside world. The end result was A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison.
6. When she attended her meetings with Seaver, Jemison brought her trusted neighbor, Thomas Clute, so as not to be taken advantage of by the unknown Seaver.
7. Susan Thompson Parrish, a long-time friend of the Oatman family, claims that during Olive’s captivity she had become “the wife of the chief’s son and at the time of her rescue, was the mother of two little boys” (Root 18). The accuracy of these assertions remains unknown.
8. Several rumors insist that Olive Oatman died in 1878 at an insane asylum. However, these rumors were intentionally planted by E.J. Conklin to boost the sales of his 1878 travelogue Picturesque Arizona.
9. Royal B. Stratton was a California clergyman who took interest in Olive and Lorenzo Oatman after hearing their story. His purpose for writing the first (and subsequent editions) of Olive and Mary Ann’s captivity appears as purely monetary with no other motivation behind it.
10. The only other family member to survive, Lorenzo narrowly escaped death after being hit over the head with a blunt object and thrown from a cliff when he showed signs of life. He lived at Fort Yuma for a time, and proceeded to move all over the state of California, working menial jobs until his sister was recaptured.
11. Captain Samuel P. Heintzelman established Fort Yuma and was in charge of the soldiers during his time there.

12. Although Oatman does not remain with the Mohaves, her tattoos endure until her death, serving as a marker of her time spent in their presence.

13. Many critics speculate that these markings symbolize marriage or a young woman who is eligible to marry, while others argue that they act as a means of identification, preventing Oatman from running away because she is now easy to recover. Still others claim that these marks have no significance, they are merely a way for the Mohaves to distinguish themselves from other Native American tribes.


15. I use the term “foreign” here because both of these languages, though accessible to white culture, were widely unrecognized by this society.

16. James T. DeShields was a Texas historian fascinated with examining frontier life and publishing his findings for the benefit of others. His publication of Cynthia Ann Parker follows in that vein, presenting life on the frontier, more so than the captivity narrative it advertises.

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American Colonization and the Death of the Female Captive

Hannah Mitchell

“[F]ilms I analyze utilize the Native female body as a vehicle through which colonialism is continually presented visually and metaphorically, as a narrative space in which to articulate fears about interracial mixing and assimilation—often directed toward raced Others in the United States—and as a metaphorical and symbolic arena in which nationalist rhetoric about America as a white nation-state and global superpower plays out”

Historical captivity narratives place the captive female, regardless of the level of assimilation she has experienced, as ultimately having to exist within white culture. This trope of the captivity narrative is apparent not only within written narratives, but also within twentieth and twenty-first century captivity based films as well. Films such as Terrence Malick’s The New World (2005), John Ford’s The Searchers (1956), and Kevin Costner’s Dances with Wolves (1990) exhibit the notion that the acculturated female captive remains the property of white culture whether or not she desires to remain with her “captors.” What is significant about these three films in particular is the triad created between the three female captives from each text. In The New World, Pocahontas serves as the reversed acculturated captive female, in that she is a native woman taken captive by white settlers who then fully assimilates into white culture. Debbie from The Searchers embodies the resistant acculturated white female captive who, after being taken captive by Native Americans, assimilates and desires to remain in their culture though she is forcibly returned by a white man to Euro-American culture regardless. Then, in Dances with Wolves, Stands with a Fist is the fully acculturated white female who exists as a hybrid between the two cultures. She has the ability to be white and native and has the choice to leave or stay with her tribe. Regardless of their position, each female captive experiences death after her return to white culture. As Marubbio suggests,
the American landscape represents a feminine land: one that must be white and virginal. Through the deaths of these female captives, these texts represent the colonization of America through the colonized female body where each captive, ultimately, becomes symbolic of the American body itself that must, in the end, remain white, regardless of the cost.

*The New World* is a retelling of the settlement of Jamestown in 1607 and the supposed love affair between Pocahontas (Q’orïanka Kilcher) and John Smith (Colin Farrell). Pocahontas is banished from her tribe for helping the white settlers who then take her captive as leverage against her own people. After her capture, she is fully assimilated into white culture, baptized in the Christian faith, and renamed Rebecca. The Christianized Rebecca, after learning of Smith’s reported death, marries another white man, John Rolfe (Christian Bale), with whom she also has a child. Pocahontas travels to London with her new husband and is reunited with a quite alive Smith; however, Pocahontas chooses to remain with her husband, Rolfe. After rejecting the semi-assimilated Smith and choosing her fully white husband, Pocahontas falls ill and dies during the voyage returning her to her white American homestead in Virginia.

Pocahontas embodies the iconic representation of the colonization of America. Rebecca Blevins Faery states that Pocahontas represents “the continent as a female America who is virginal, seductive, open and receptive to English settlement” (128). The film depicts Pocahontas as young and innocent but simultaneously sexually attractive to the white man. Her first few scenes show her swimming naked in the river, taking part in Native American worship rituals, and childishly playing like an animal in the tall grass with a male friend. Her beauty and “savage” exoticism captivate the white settlers, especially Smith, with whom she forms a close bond that opens up the boundaries between the white settlers and indigenous people. The way in which the settlers are daunted by her natural, mysterious, and “savage-like” character parallels their observations of and response to the American landscape itself. The settlers are completely awe struck at the un-urbanized, unmapped, bountiful, alien landmass before them when they arrive; yet, they quickly conquer and devour it. Just as the land is conquered and devoured, Pocahontas herself is slowly conquered as represented by her assimilation into white society and thus, conquered by white society as represented through her death. As Karen Robertson states, “The complex representation of the native American woman’s body reveals strains in the enterprise of colonization”
(73). As the film reveals, the settlers colonize both the New World and Pocahontas, as the representative body of America, and this assimilation leads to her death.

In *The New World*, Pocahontas represents the three main stages of the colonization of the American landscape. First, the film represents America's and the settler's seduction of each other through the romantic relationship between Pocahontas and John Smith. Edward Buscombe states that, “The romance between Pocahontas and Smith takes place in an oneiric swoon, its location the untilled, unspoiled natural world, as they roll in the grass together or stroll through the woods...The beauty of these sequences is irresistibly seductive” (37). As Buscombe describes, Pocahontas and Smith’s affair takes off among the American wilderness, unfolding in scenes abundant with nature. Malick pays close attention to the natural world, where beautiful shots of tall grasses blowing in the breeze, ripples in water, birds flying and animals eating, the sun shining through the canopy of the forest, serve to portray to the audience the level of seduction present in the American wilderness and thus, within Pocahontas herself. Towards the beginning of their relationship, the pair plays a game of “footsie” in the lush, green, grass, laughing together in a flirtatious manner. In another scene as time and their relationship progresses, Pocahontas and Smith stand together in the sand and breaking waves of the bay, caressing each other and nearly kissing. Here, Smith gives Pocahontas a feather to wear in hair, which she then returns to him as a “natural” symbol of their mutual affections for each other. By setting up their romance in the American wilderness, Pocahontas becomes synonymous with America that Smith must possess. After falling in love with her, Smith himself refers to Pocahontas as “my America” in a voice-over. Later in the film, during a montage of naturalistic scenes, Pocahontas declares her love and devotion to Smith. She states, “A God he seems to me. What else is life but to be given to you, you to me. I will be faithful to you.” In this statement, we see the first shift of Pocahontas as the seductress of white culture to the captivated by white culture. Smith’s referral to Pocahontas as his “America” and her act of falling in love with Smith is representative of the way in which the American landscape and white culture equally seduced each other. During Pocahontas’ statement in referral to her devotion to Smith, the montage displays scenes of Smith and Pocahontas lovingly embracing each other in the forest. However, and as she announces her faithfulness, Pocahontas stands watching an approaching storm as lightning
strikes across the sky (Malick). This storm metaphorically suggests the turmoil that awaits her and America, now that they have been captivated by white culture, and leads the audience into her manipulation by her lover, Smith.

Secondly, the film represents America as a tricked nation, where Smith deceives Pocahontas through his abandonment and false death. After Pocahontas is taken captive by the white settlers and begins to assimilate slowly into white culture, Smith makes the decision to leave the colony in an effort to advance his personal status by leading an expedition to the Indies. He departs without even telling Pocahontas, which in turn causes her great turmoil. As Smith’s ship departs, Pocahontas stands at the water’s edge, pulling at the grass, pacing back and forth, and crying in an angry and saddened outburst in response to his abandonment. The faithless Smith even arranges for a local to inform Pocahontas, about three months after he leaves, that he has died (Malick). Just as Pocahontas is tricked by Smith, so are all the other Native Americans deceived by the white settlers. The settlers are not focused on maintaining peaceful relations with the natives as one suggested early on. The natives are led to believe that the Europeans are temporarily visiting their land, but soon they learn that the settlers plan on taking the land for themselves and building their own colony, wiping out the native people. Both Pocahontas and her people have been taken advantage of by Smith and the white settlers, deceived towards their own deaths. Now that Pocahontas has been banished from her tribe, taken captive by the white people, and abandoned by Smith, she has no other option but to begin to assimilate further into white culture, leading to her death. This idea is parallel to the fact that the Native Americans had no choice but to submit to the white settlers and sacrifice their lands, ultimately leading to the genocide of the natives and securing the American landscape as a white colony.

Finally, the film displays a conquered America through Pocahontas’ acculturation and her death that follows. After Smith leaves and Pocahontas learns that he has died, Pocahontas is taught the English way of life through her female, European nursemaid. The nursemaid even informs Pocahontas to “forget Smith” because there are other men in the world. Pocahontas’ heartbreak over Smith seems to be healing, as she curiously takes in the white education being offered to her. She is then baptized and the nursemaid renames her Rebecca. She then meets John Rolfe, another white settler, and begins to help him grow tobacco. As time passes, Rolfe begins to gain feelings for Rebecca. She treats him
kindly, and the audience is led to believe that she too cares for Rolfe, but not with the same passion she once had with Smith. Faery states that “her Native identity had to be nearly erased, retained only in traces useful to the colonial project, as she was absorbed into and subsumed by white English culture via conversion, heterosexual romance, marriage, and mothering an “English” child” (103). When Rolfe asks for her hand in marriage, she responds, “If you would like.” She marries Rolfe, and the two have a son together (Malick). Rebecca’s response suggests that she no longer identifies with Native American culture—as Pocahontas—and now is fully submissive to white culture. Following acceptable codes for womanhood in white culture, she no longer lives her life according to what she wishes but, due to her assimilation, has learned to place the desires of the white man above her own. Jacquelyn Kilpatrick states that “Indian women have been sacrificing themselves and their tribal communities for their white lovers” (Kilpatrick 152). Rebecca has fully sacrificed her native identity as Pocahontas in order to exist in the white world. Thus, she has been conquered by white culture, just as the American landscape is being conquered by white settlers. The loss of Pocahontas’ native identity is symbolic in the sense that, as America is colonized, all that is “savage” must be eradicated to ensure that America is a purely white colony.

Buscombe states that often “the hero falls for a beautiful Indian woman (almost invariably a chief’s daughter), only for the relationship ultimately to be terminated by the woman’s untimely death” (36). Now that Pocahontas is conquered by white culture through her assimilation, her “untimely death” results as she can never be fully white. After traveling to London, Pocahontas reunites with the alive Smith. The two walk together side by side, in awkward silence, down the cobblestone pathways of an English garden. The well-manicured lawns and perfectly trimmed trees and bushes are a stark contrast to the untamed wilderness in which their love first took bloom. This disciplined scenery is symbolic of the assimilation of Pocahontas herself. She walks like a gentle lady as opposed to the wild, childlike manner in which she used to tumble among the ground, and she is now dressed in complete European clothing. She wears a long and modest dress with her hair pulled behind her head, constrained within a hair net and wrapped in a bun. The sounds of her high heels, as opposed to her once bare feet, tap against the stone as they walk. All of these elements in her appearance and gentility are completely opposite of her traditional native dress and behavior. During
their meeting, Smith states to Pocahontas that “what [they] knew in the forest” seems to be a dream and that he feels as though he is “speak[ing] to [her] for the first time” (Malick). Smith’s statement reveals Pocahontas’ complete assimilation into white culture that required the eradication of the native girl he once loved and associated with the American; the scenery around them along with her European clothing and “white” behavior suggests that the native within her has been tamed, just as the American landscape is in the process of being tamed through colonization. After Smith makes this observation, Pocahontas smiles and turns to leave. She too is aware of her change and realizes that her place is no longer with Smith but with her husband, Rolfe. She meets up with Rolfe in the garden, takes his arm, and asks to return home. She also refers to him as “my husband” for the first time (Malick). In doing so, Pocahontas has accepted her role as Rebecca and chooses to be property of her white husband and thus white culture. Upon their departure back to Virginia, the audience is told through the voice-over narration of Rolfe reading aloud a letter to their son that Pocahontas falls ill and dies during the voyage. Even though she rejects her native culture, her death is the direct result of her acceptance of white culture; she has been symbolically colonized just like her native land, a land that can only be white. Pocahontas is tainted by her native self because her native heritage prevents her from ever being able to be fully white. Therefore, she cannot exist within a white America due to her native-ness, and since she has been banned from her tribe, she has no place in the world and, therefore, no other option but to die.

Like the story of Pocahontas, film critics argue that The Searchers is also a retelling of a historical captive woman, Cynthia Ann Parker. Parker was nine years old when taken captive by Comanches and became fully assimilated into their culture where she married a Native American man and had children with him. After being “rescued” by Texas rangers, she attempted numerous times to escape white culture to be with her Native American family but the attempts failed. The grief she experiences—being forced from the native family that she loved to exist unwillingly within white culture—leads her to fall ill and die. Ford’s film reemploys this narrative through a captive by the name of Debbie Edwards (Natalie Wood). The story takes place in Texas during the late 1880’s, after the Civil War. The majority of the film’s plot consists of following the journey of Ethan Edwards (John Wayne), Debbie’s uncle, and Martin Pawley (Jeffery Hunter), Debbie’s half-brother, in their search to find
and “rescue” her after her abduction by Comanche Indians. Debbie is taken captive at a young age and, over a period of five years, she is fully assimilated into Comanche culture. She marries the chief, Scar, who initiated the raid on her home that led to the murder of her white family and her abduction. Upon her rescue by Ethan and Martin, she refuses to return to white culture. Infuriated over her refusal and over the idea that she is no longer white but in fact a transculturated native woman, Ethan attempts to kill her. Ultimately Ethan spares her life, and Debbie is returned to white culture. The film ends after her return, but based on Parker’s narrative and symbolic filmic evidence, the suggestion is clear: Debbie will perish in white culture.

Even though the audience sees very little of Debbie’s life within the tribe, it is strongly suggested that she easily acculturates into the Comanche tribe. When the audience is re-introduced to Debbie years after her abduction, she is in full native dress; her hair is braided, and she wears traditional jewelry embellished with beads. In one scene within Scar’s wigwam, with Ethan and Martin disguised as traders in effort to “rescue” Debbie, she holds out a pole to display to the white men white scalps that have been taken by Scar. Among these scalps are some of those belonging to her former white family members, including Martin’s own mother’s scalp, and yet Debbie holds out the pole to the white men in a manner suggesting her pride in her native husband’s trophies. Her ability to reject completely her whiteness and become a Native American states that identity is mutable—rather than innate. The idea of white woman’s identity having the ability to change results in fear associated with the colonization of a white America because this mutability may lead to miscegenation, further threatening the future of a purely white landscape.

*The Searchers* reinforces the idea that a white captive is better off dead than to exist outside of white culture, due to the danger that the acculturated white captive places upon the ability to colonize a fully white America. By remaining with the Comanche, Debbie threatens to taint constructs of racial identity and superiority in white society and on the colonized, virgin, white American frontier. James F. Brooks states that “Ethan is not intent on rescuing Debbie but on murdering her if he can find her” (Brooks 268). Ethan’s desire to kill his acculturated niece represents the idea that the white female is not allowed to blemish white American womanhood by engaging in miscegenation. As Marubbio argues, Ethan “now considers [Debbie] defiled and no longer white
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because of her miscegenational relationship with Scar” (Marrubbio 151). Since her virginity has been lost to a native man, Ethan believes Debbie has been permanently tarnished by native culture. As Scar’s bride, Debbie risks mixing white blood with native blood by having interracial children, and, therefore, she poses a threat to the progress of the “pure” white race among the American frontier. Also, according to Marubbio, Laurie Jorgenston, Martin’s love interest in the film, claims that “even Debbie’s mother would have wanted Ethan to put a bullet in Debbie’s brain” than to allow her to live among, and, more importantly have sexual relations with, the natives. Marubbio further suggests that “fear of racial taint is so strong that even a soul as gentle as [Laurie] advocates violence to a woman” (Marubbio 155). Here, the film suggests that white culture, even white women, prefers Debbie dead over existing within native culture because she is a danger to the continuation of the pure white bloodline that is pushing to colonize the west. Also, as seen with Pocahontas, Debbie is permanently stained by native culture and is no longer viewed as fully white and, therefore, she will not be allowed to exist in a solely white society either. Debbie’s only option is death, since she cannot remain with the natives nor return to white culture.

The return of Debbie in The Searchers represents the idea of the white man’s paternal right over the American landscape. Upon one of Ethan and Martin’s first encounters with Debbie since she was taken captive, she states to her brother, “These are my people! Go! Go, Martin, please!” In this statement, Debbie clearly no longer identifies herself as a white woman and claims the tribe as her family. Ethan, in response to her desires to thwart their “rescue,” draws his weapon to kill her. Martin draws his weapon in defense; he says “No you don’t! Ethan, no you don’t!” and Debbie flees as her tribe attacks the two men from the top of the hill. Ethan is shot with a bow in his shoulder, but the two men escape. After this scene, Ethan has Martin read his final will and testament in which he leaves all of his belongings to Martin instead of Debbie. Up until this point, Ethan has completely rejected Martin as his kin since he is a “half-breed” (Ford). Martin is outraged by the letter and reminds Ethan that Debbie is his blood niece and Ethan responds, “Not no more she ain’t…She’s been livin’ with a buck. She’s…” but he fails to finish the sentence. Tom Dirks states that in this scene, “Ethan cannot articulate his fears of miscegenation—that [Debbie] is having sexual relations with an Indian” (5). Brooks adds that since Debbie is fully acculturated into native culture, Ethan has a “willingness to reject
his blood kinship with Debbie and to accept the creation of kinship between Debbie and the Comanche,” but he believes she must die as the result (269). In this scene, Ethan’s fears over the loss of Debbie’s whiteness to native culture are confirmed, and therefore, he no longer views her as part of his family or white society. Since she no longer holds the status of white woman, she stands in the way of colonizing a white America and the result is her impending death. In a later scene when a group of white men, including Martin and Ethan, attack the Comanche tribe to “secure” Debbie, Ethan chases Debbie down the hillside on horseback as she runs for her life. Ethan corners her just outside the opening of a cave, where she collapses and waits for her death. Ethan jumps off his horse, picks Debbie up and hoists her in the air as he did when she was a child, then cradles her like an infant. He then states, “Let’s go home, Debbie” (Ford). She cries into his chest but not out of happiness for going “home,” for the return to the white homestead Ethan speaks of is now another form of captivity for Debbie. She has come to the realization that she has no choice but to leave her native people and go with Ethan and Martin, or her life will not be spared, and their quest to “rescue” her will never end. Ken Nolley states that, “The Western was at root an expression of white culture justifying its expansion, and Ford largely participated in that expression” (Nolley 83). By forcibly removing Debbie from her tribe, the film suggests that her return to white society is necessary to maintain the proper border of white womanhood and, by extension, a white American landscape. By giving Debbie no other option but to return to white culture or die, Ethan represents the white, patriarchal desire to preserve the white female body in the effort to preserve a white America.

Debbie’s metaphorical death after her return to white society suggests that she has been soiled by native culture, and she will not be allowed to fully re-assimilate into white culture. Just as seen with Pocahontas in The New World, her death is inevitable. Before Debbie’s home is attacked by the natives, her mother sends her out the window with her blanket and doll to hide in the family cemetery. When Scar finds her, his shadow casts upon her small, childish body as she is crouched in front of a tombstone (Ford). Ironically, this tombstone belongs to the mother of Ethan, who was killed by Comanche’s years prior, which further fuels Ethan’s desire to save Debbie, righting the wrongdoings upon his own mother. This scene, with the undertone of death along with the graves and darkness that is placed upon her, suggests that native culture will kill or lead to
Debbie’s eventual death; however, as the film reveals, she flourishes in Native society. Thus, the location of her demise must lie outside of Native culture. When she arrives at the white family home after her “rescue,” Ethan dismounts and carries the now teenage Debbie, cradled in his arms, to the front porch. She is not even given the option to walk, and he forces her to the threshold against her will. Mrs. Jorgensen wraps her arms around her and hugs her as Mr. Jorgensen welcomes her home. Debbie’s facial expressions and body language suggest that she is terrified and reluctant to enter the Jorgensen home. She pulls away from them with a fear stricken face; Debbie no longer identifies with white culture and, therefore, the white family is foreign and unrecognizable to her. They descend from the bright orange glow of the outdoors within the darkness of home’s front door. Arthur M. Eckstein states that “the doorway into the house” stands as a symbol for “civilization and community” and since Debbie now identifies herself as native, she cannot live within this doorway (199). Their figures become black silhouettes as the walk through the doorway, suggesting that death has descended upon Debbie as she forcibly crosses back within the colonized borders of the white community.

Unlike Pocahontas’ and Parker’s retellings, Dances with Wolves focuses upon the completely fictional story of Lieutenant John Dunbar (Kevin Costner), a union solider during the Civil War, who becomes acquainted with the Sioux during his time spent alone at Fort Sedgewick. In effort to make peace with the natives, he visits their camp where he encounters a white captive female by the name of Stands with a Fist (Mary McDonnell). She is mourning the death of her native husband, who was killed in battle. Her white family was killed by the Pawnee when she was a child; her white name is Christine. She escaped the massacre and the Sioux medicine man Kicking Bird (Graham Greene) adopted her as his daughter. Stands with a Fist becomes the translator between Dunbar and her native people. Through her hybridity, Dunbar learns the ways of the Sioux, becomes aware of the devastation that white culture is causing, and falls in love with her. He eventually rejects white culture completely and assimilates into the native tribe himself. He then is labeled as a traitor by his own people and becomes a target of the white soldiers. Dunbar then leaves the Sioux with Stands with a Fist in the effort to protect them. Even though Stands with a Fist is not returning to white culture, she leaves her people and is rejoined with a white man.
It is metaphorically suggested at the end of the film that both she and Dunbar die after removing themselves from the tribe.

Like Debbie, Stands with a Fist from *Dances with Wolves* represents the white man’s effort to re-claim white womanhood and, thus, re-establish white borders within the American frontier. When they first meet, Dunbar comes across Stands with a Fist alone in the prairie before he reaches the Sioux village. As he approaches her, he sees that she is covered in her own blood. The audience learns later that she is cutting herself in response to her depression over the loss of her native husband, and Dunbar immediately attempts to help her. He realizes, as she screams and runs from him in fear, that she is a white woman. Her blue eyes, big and bright, stun him as he reaches for her injured arm. Terrified, Stands with a Fist faints. Dunbar carries her, unconscious, back to her village on his horse with her arm wrapped in an American flag to stop the bleeding. The usage of the American flag on the white woman’s arm is symbolic of the white man’s desire to save and preserve the white female. The preservation of the white female is essential in the colonization of the American west. Further, by returning her to her people peacefully, Dunbar is no longer viewed as a threat to the Sioux. The natives now desire to learn of the white man’s potential “medicine” he has to offer them. In later scenes, Stands with a Fist is used as a translator by her people in an effort to learn more about the white man, and she learns that she enjoys “making the white talk” again (Costner). Edward Castillo states that “it is the white captive Stands with a Fist who mentors and entices [Dunbar] deeper into native culture, teaching him the language and thus opening up communication between the Indians and this newcomer to their lands” (19-20). Inevitably, through spending much time together, Stands with a Fist and Dunbar fall in love.

Dunbar further represents the reclamation of white borders in the American frontier by having sex with Stands with a Fist. The last person Stands with a Fist had sexual relations with was her native husband; Dunbar, thus, reclaims her body in its “proper” service to white masculinity. Her sexuality cannot remain with the “savage,” or else the white superiority in America is threatened. Dunbar, through this act, somewhat cleanses or purifies her for white society. Even Stands with a Fist’s adoptive mother suggests to Kicking Bird that her relationship with Dunbar is acceptable because “It makes sense. They are both white” (Costner). Her statement enforces the idea that the white woman must belong to the white man, even if she has been assimilated into the native
or tribe. Dunbar and Stands with a Fist then marry, which places the white female securely back into the hands of the white male which is symbolic of the white man’s ownership of the American landscape.

The metaphorical death of Stands with a Fist further suggests that no savage can exist among the soon-to-be fully colonized American landscape. At the end of the film, Dunbar is taken prisoner by the white soldiers, and he refuses to release information about the Sioux. Castillo states that the white soldiers “repeatedly brutalize Dances with Wolves, and threaten to hang him if he does not lead them to the ‘hostiles’” (17). They even kill his beloved horse, Cisco, and the wolf that Dunbar named Two Socks, who is the source of his own Sioux name, Dances with Wolves. These acts reverse the civil/savage binary clearly labeling those of the “superior” culture, the white soldiers, as “savage.” It also displays the white man’s belief in their ownership of the land and their desire to dispose of anything natural or native to the landscape in their effort to colonize. Dunbar now views the Sioux as his community, and he realizes that he must leave the Sioux in order to protect them from the threat of soldiers who have labeled him as a traitor. When Dunbar asks Stands with a Fist her opinion on leaving or staying with the tribe she responds, “My place is with you. I go where you go” (Costner). In this statement, she makes clear her role as being a possession of her husband, thus, belonging to white culture. In the film’s final scene, Dunbar and Stands with a Fist leave the tribe, vanishing up a trail in the mountain side. It is winter, and the shot exposes the snow on the ground and the duo making their way through the maze of bare, dead, tree branches, all of which symbolize death. The scene then cuts to the approaching white soldiers in search for Dunbar, with close up shots of the horses galloping feet pounding into the ground. The soldiers fly the United States Flag, torn and tattered, appearing among the barren tree branches. This image suggests that white Americans are forcing themselves upon the land in which they believe is rightfully theirs to claim, even if that means the death of thousands of natives. Robert Baird’s argues that, “By the end of the film, Dances with Wolves and Stands with A Fist have already transfigured into buckskins, the Sioux language, the Sioux way” (Baird 163). The two are in fact both white, but have both experienced some level of acculturation with the native tribe. This creates both Dunbar and Stands with a Fist as liminals. They are neither fully white nor fully native, and thus cannot live in a fully white America. There is a long shot of the duo still traveling away as night falls, and then the scene cuts
to a wolf howling to the moon, almost in agony. Dunbar’s metaphorical death is caused by his status as a traitor more so than his position as a semi-assimilated native. Stands with a Fist figuratively dies as the result of having to follow her white husband away from her tribe and due to the fact that she can never again be fully white in order to return to white culture, just as seen with Pocahontas and Debbie. Graphics appear on screen that state, “Thirteen years later, their homes destroyed, their buffalo gone, the last band of free Sioux submitted to white authority at Fort Robinson, Nebraska. The great horse culture of the plains was gone and the American frontier was soon to pass into history” (Costner). This final statement suggests that not only have Dunbar and Stands with a Fist died, but that their culture has been completely obliterated through the colonization of white society.

Gaylyn Studlar claims, “The traditional western as both literature and film aligns masculinity with a racially biased position that at all costs, even the costs of the woman’s life, maintains that white civilization and female sexual purity must be preserved in opposition to red savagery and female sexual degradation” (187). As this statement suggests, each of these films display the white man’s agenda to situate the American landscape as a white colony no matter the implications. Even if the result is the death of a woman, the white man must enforce sexual purity by fighting against miscegenation. Due to the patriarchal fear of tainting white society, the female captive must always be reclaimed by the white man or he too faces death due to the risk involved in the discontinuation of the white supremacy that plans to further colonize the American Frontier. Therefore, the deaths of the captives in these films represent America as a white, female land, where no element of the “savage” can remain.

Notes

1. For a short time, Smith lives among Pocahontas’ Powhatan people and is exposed to their lifestyle; at one point, he even considers rejecting his own white culture to remain with Pocahontas in the wilderness. Ultimately, he leaves Pocahontas and her tribe to fulfill his desire to advance his status as a British explorer, which outweighs his desire to become fully acculturated into the tribe.

2. Martin Pawley is 1/8 Native American.

3. Dunbar’s identity is mutable. For the majority of his life until his acquaintance with the Sioux, he has identified himself as a fully white
man. After experiencing life with the Sioux, Dunbar begins to assimilate slowly into the tribe. However, even though he displays his rejection of his own white culture, the fact that he has identified himself as a white for so long gives him the ability to reclaim Stands with a Fist for white culture.

**Works Cited**


I desire to be Thankful that I was born in a Land of Light and Baptized when I was Young: and had a Good Education by My Father, Tho I took but little Notice of it in the time of it: -- I am thankful for my Captivity, twas the Comfortablest time that I ever had: In my Affliction God made his Word Comfortable to me.

—Hannah Dustan

Rather than fulfilling her gender role by abiding to the elements of the cult of true womanhood such as domesticity, motherhood, submissiveness, and religion, Hannah Dustan unexpectedly describes her 1697 captivity by the Abenaki Indians as “comfortable.” Perhaps, Dustan meant the archaic definition of “comfortable” meaning “strengthening or supporting morally or spiritually” (Stodola, Levernier 135). However, she could also be indirectly rebelling against society’s expectations of the female gender, implying her comfortable nature while captive to derive from the realization of her potential power after murdering and scalping Indian men, women, and children. If so, then it is possible that male editors, such as Cotton Mather, and later writers who take up her story, such as, John Greenleaf Whittier would want to hide Dustan’s potential agency to uphold their patriarchal societies.

Dustan’s captivity was enforced by the Abenaki Indians when they invaded her home shared with her husband, Thomas Dustan, and their eight children in Haverhill, Massachusetts in 1697. During her captivity, she finds release by murdering and scalping most of her captors, which consisted of an Indian family of twelve, “Two Stout Men Three Women, and Seven Children,” while they slept (Mather 59). Upon her return to white society, she received a bounty for the scalps and was regarded as
a hero, one molded to fit male author’s, such as Cotton Mather’s and John Greenleaf Whittier’s agendas.

Cotton Mather’s 1697 narration of Dustan’s captivity accredits her physical, mental, and intellectual strength demonstrated while a captive to “God, who hath all Hearts in his own Hands, [and] heard the Sighs of these Prisoners, and gave them unexpected Favour” (Mather 59). Mather also presents her story in his sermons *Humiliations Follow’d by Deliverances*, *Decennium Luctuosum*, and *Magnalia Christi Americana* in which he implies that God was the origin of Dustan’s strength, and, thus, dismisses her agency in her own captivity narrative. Although written over one-hundred years later, John Greenleaf Whittier’s 1831 fictional account of Dustan’s captivity, “The Mother’s Revenge,” also discredits her strength in an attempt to hide her agency. He does so by first crafting women’s attributes as “generally considered of a milder and purer character than those of man. Her sphere of action is generally limited to the endearments of home—to quiet communion with her friends, and the angelic exercise of the kindly existence” (Whittier). By setting up the traditional woman, he then makes Dustan its binary by labeling her as a “demon” once she experiences the severing of motherhood (Whittier). Therefore, Whittier negates his earlier assertions and paints her negatively as a woman who breaks acceptable gender boundaries. While his fictionalization attributes her violent actions to severed motherhood, his portrayal discredits Dustan’s demonstrated strength and agency. Though the two texts are written over one hundred years apart and have different agendas, both male authors fail to accredit Dustan herself for her murderous actions and appropriate the blame to God as giving her the power or the threat of her motherhood being severed. By demonstrating the authors’ purposes, the two depictions of Dustan’s captivity can be read using the rhetorical strategy of double-voice discourse.

Henry Lewis Gates defines double-voice discourse in *The Signifying Monkey* and states that all “double-voiced relations” include a common “tropological revision in which a specific trope is repeated, with differences, between two or more texts” (xxv). Texts that implement double-voicedness, a term generally used in the context of race theory, “speak” to one group of people, while actually addressing another, seemingly “possessing two mouths” (Gates xxv). These “two mouths” have a decoded agenda where they appear to directly address an issue, but actually reveal another purpose. Differentiating from intended and unintended meaning, double-voiced texts “speak” to certain audiences.
in order to “privilege the speaking voice” (Gates 131). In other words, double-voiced texts “speak” to a certain audience to convey a distinct purpose and hide their intentions while “talking’ to another audience, implying two different purposes.

Women throughout the seventeenth and nineteenth century were captive to restrictive gender standards, which confined women to domesticity, motherhood, submissiveness, and piety; therefore, a major trope of the captivity narratives portrayed women to uphold the standards of society with the “savage” other, forcing them to signify female submission, superiority, motherhood, and piety. Yet, their actions in captivity often stand in contrast to such portrayals where they subvert the very gender codes they seek to uphold. By murdering her captors and escaping captivity without relying on a male’s assistance, Dustan becomes a figure one would expect to be redeployed to fit the gender expectations that she should desire to uphold. Examining the double-voice discourse in Whittier’s and Mather’s depictions of Dustan’s captivity reveals that each author ultimately discredits Dustan’s agency and power and intentionally depicts Dustan as a threat to society, covering any evidence of female agency; further, their texts “speak” to those who believe that women should follow the cult of true womanhood. As the two texts “talk” to both men and women, they warn society of the harm in allowing women to live up to their potential power, which could result in damaging patriarchal control. Yet, by recognizing the double-voice discourse in their depiction of Dustan’s captivity, the authors unintentionally expose their readers to examples of female power and agency in the very attempt to warn them against such behaviors.2

Both Whittier and Mather use Dustan’s captivity to establish that once the family unit is severed, the results are negative, signifying the import of the structured household in which patriarchy ruled. In captivity narratives, such as Dustan’s, “virtually every instance [include] women captives [who] were torn from a cohesive family unit,” and it “was the women who usually saw their menfolk being slain and who experienced the actual shattering of the household” (Stodola 119). Therefore, the narratives depict the women to be the only residing factor to establish patriarchy. Whittier’s fictionalization uses the trope to establish the import for patriarchy while belittling the power of Dustan herself. In Whittier’s fictionalization, Thomas Duston is the heroine who saves the children, while the infant remaining with its mother suffers from murder. This signifies the male’s ability to protect the family unit while the female is unable to
do so. Dustan is also introduced as “the wife of Thomas Dustan,” placing her title to be the property of her husband, therefore, uplifting the power of males, while also commodifying women (Whittier, emphasis mine). When applying the double-voice methodology, the two texts “speak” to both readers who find it necessary for women to maintain traditional female gender boundaries and who believe that failure to sustain such boundaries will result in the loss of patriarchal power.

By applying Gate’s definition of double-voiced discourse to Mather’s and Whittier’s depictions of Dustan’s captivity, the two authors intentionally “speak” to the culture that believes that women should maintain their gender boundaries, placing her as the male’s inferior. Both Mather and Whittier portray Dustan as confined to the patriarchy, like all females are expected to be from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, leaving her image to follow the gender expectations which marginalize women as the male’s inferior where their identity is confined to motherhood, maintaining piety, etc. For example, when the Indians attack the Dustan house, Hannah is nursing her newborn while her husband seeks to rescue the other children. In her domestic role, Dustan is unable to help herself and her children, but rather has to rely on “fate” to determine her future (Whittier). Because women from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century were viewed as the weaker sex, one incapable of independent thought and higher thinking skills, their rights and independence were hindered. These expectations consisted of maintaining the household and bearing as many children as possible, leaving “one-third of her life” to be spent “producing children” (Gavron 14). Women’s duties consisted only of domestic needs, leaving the men in public power. It was not until the establishment of the Custody of Infants Act in 1839, after both Whittier’s and Mather’s texts were written, that the father ceased full rights over his children, preventing women from owning anything, because “all her possessions including her children belonged to the husband under the ‘fiction’ of marital unit. If she left her husband he could force her to return, could refuse to support her, [and] could refuse her access to her children” (Gavron 4-6). While both stories were written before 1839, the authors’ mentalities still centered on the notion that women were confined to their gender boundaries which made them merely the possessions of men and a disposable asset to the household, therefore addressing their fictionalizations to those who also shared their beliefs.
In their depictions of Dustan, Mather and Whittier both initially characterize Dustan as weak, poor, and troubled. According to Mather, she only becomes powerful after she receives supernatural strength from God, or, as Whittier asserts, when she reacts to the overwhelming threat of the severing of motherhood. Mather’s depiction of Dustan’s captivity “speaks” to those who view women as the weaker sex by repeating that Dustan, a “poor woman” and a “prisoner” of the Indians, requires assistance from the ultimate patriarch, God, in order to be redeemed. Whittier also characterizes the typical constructs of womanhood where “a milder and purer character than those of man [… whose] virtues of meek affection, of fervent piety, of winning sympathy and of that ‘charity with forgiving often,’ are more peculiarly her own. Her sphere of action is generally limited to the endearments of home—the quiet communion with their friends and the angelic exercise to the kindly charities of existence” (Whittier). Both authors depict Dustan as weak—an object not a subject—incapable of producing such agency on her own. It is also clear that both authors were “very clearly disturbed by [Dustan’s] actions,” and that “[they] made a tremendous effort to reconcile these concerns with [their] notions of proper femininity,” placing her back into traditional expectations of femininity and addressing readers who share similar beliefs (Cutter 20). By allowing Dustan to maintain traditional female gender boundaries before she receives help from another source, the authors “speak” to those who also believe that women are inferior to men.

Whittier and Mather also “speak” to readers who view motherhood as the female’s only identity. Women at this time “could expect to spend one-third of her life producing children,” leaving them little time without being a mother, therefore, motherhood became a “prison and they then felt their freedom had been restricted before they had really been free at all.” (Gavron 14, 134). As a mother, each woman from the seventeenth and nineteenth century was expected to be “ready to sacrifice herself for her husband and […] for her children” characterizing this act as the only “nobility” found in women (Stodola, Levernier 127). Self-sacrifice as the sole heroic act expected of women, denies them any other opportunity to stand as subjects capable of delivering themselves. Mather depicts such sacrificial expectations when Dustan “order[s]” her husband to flee to save himself and the other children, while she will be left to the Indians (Mather 59). In similar fashion, Whittier too places central focus on Dustan as a sacrificial mother; he labels her as “heroic”
only after she sees the “utter impossibility of her escape” and she “bade her husband fly to succor his children and leave her to her fate” (Whittier). By obeying society’s expectations of motherhood, Dustan’s agency becomes simply the result of her choice to follow these requirements, fulfilling Whittier’s and Mather’s depiction of Dustan to “speak” to readers who believe that motherhood fully consumes the individual identity of the female.

In Whittier’s “The Mother’s Revenge,” violated motherhood acts as the force driving Dustan to violently murder her captors. Whittier “speaks” to those who view motherhood as a woman’s central identity by presenting her as a demon once the Indians violently murder her Infant. As the “wretched mother” could not keep up with the Indians, she witnesses them murder her infant which impedes her mental health as, “at this moment, all was darkness and horror—that her very heart cease beating, and to lie cold and dead in her bosom, and that her limbs moved as involuntary machinery” (Whittier). This severed motherhood breeds a “thirst of revenge [and] longing for blood” (Whittier). Therefore, Whittier depicts Dustan as not only dangerous, but also inhumane as a result to the loss of her motherhood. The murdering of her infant is what controls Dustan’s actions to seek revenge on the Indians as opposed to her own will. Further, after murdering ten out of twelve captors, she only ceases to murder “[t]he last—a small boy” because she thought to herself that it is “a poor child, and perhaps he has a mother!” (Whittier). According to Whittier’s account of Dustan’s captivity, it is only when she is reminded of her given identity—motherhood—that she chooses to spare a life. While speaking to an audience that confines women to motherhood, both authors illustrate her captivity as a story about motherhood in order to camouflage the violent agency revealed through her actions while a captive. Both Mather and Whittier “speak” to the members of society who believe that traditional gender boundaries are necessary and women are not independent individuals but rather governed by patriarchal and social restraints and motherhood.

The two authors also “speak” to those who view women as confined to piety by using Dustan as an example of religion governing actions in the context of the cult of true womanhood. Mather and Whittier depict Dustan as a weak woman who must seek prayers for strength. In Whittier’s “The Mother’s Revenge,” Dustan looks “to Heaven” for answers after her infant has been murdered (Whittier). Mather, too, depicts Dustan as a victim seeking prayer for a release; yet, he goes on
to “filter” the tale of her captivity “as a means of supporting the Puritan patriarchy” (Mulford 110). In his depiction, the Indians forbid Dustan and her fellow captors to “retire to their English Prayers,” but that did not stop God from hearing her “Sighs” which ultimately results in their release (Mather 59). According to Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, Dustan is “initially victimized in the raid” but after being molded by Mather in his depiction, Dustan maintains victory because she “exemplified Puritanism’s power over the Indians” (56). In order to attribute her murderous actions to God’s will, Mather even directly identifies Dustan as a mirror image of Jael, the murderer of “the captain of Jabin’s army,” Sisera (New King James Bible, Judges 4, ll. 7). This connection allows Mather to establish that, similar to Jael, Dustan also receives help from God in order to perform a murderous act. “Because Puritans consistently used the female body as a metaphor for the social and political body, the feminine imagery that Mather intertextually employs is not feminist or empowering but instead expresses the Puritan relationship with God,” only accrediting him for producing such power for a woman to produce such intellectual and physical strength (Humphreys 157). By comparing Dustan to Jael, Mather silences Dustan’s power by accrediting it to God in order to address his congregation and further readers, who believe that women must abide by society’s restrictions of piety.

While Whittier and Mather intentionally address their readers who view the cult of true womanhood necessary, they also intentionally “talk” to the male and female sex, warning them of the harm that will result if a potent female agency is permitted. According to Gates, the difference between “speaking” and “talking” to readers is that both actions have intentions, but “speaking” to readers is when authors try to produce a message directly, while “talking” to readers subtly conveys another message (xxv). In sum, double-voice discourse allows for two different messages to be conveyed in the same text. In Whittier’s and Mather’s accounts of Dustan, the authors directly address the readers who believe that submission, motherhood, and piety are required for women by restricting Dustan to these concepts. However, at the same time, the authors also “talk” to their readers, warning them of the harm that can occur if women step-out of their gender boundaries. By allowing outside forces such as motherhood and God’s power to be accredited for Dustan’s actions, the authors hide the fact that Dustan is capable of violent agency. According to Stodola and James Levernier, “[a]s both victim of brutality and an instrument of its perpetuation, Dustan sym-
bolizes those violent impulses within the self illustrating destructive historical patterns that will, unless checked inevitably repeat themselves in the present” (176). Dustan’s act of violence is presented in Mather’s depiction when “she thought she was not forbidden by any Law to take away the Life of the Murderers, by whom her Child had been butchered” and murders the Indians one-by-one as “they lay down; at their feel they bowed, they fell; where they bowed, there they fell down dead” (Mather 60). Whittier depicts Dustan as being dangerously violent as “the bereaved mother did not close her eyes,” but rather was overcome by “a spirit within her which defied the weakness of the body” until “[b] low followed blow, until ten out of twelve, the whole number of savages, were stiffening in blood” (Whittier). By making these possible destruct- ions evident through Dustan’s captivity, the authors allow the harm in the loss of patriarchy to be evident. In order to contain such murderous identifications, the authors “must represent other fantasized solutions to murders” and they do so by accrediting her power to the severing of her motherhood and God’s power (Toulouse 195). Both Mather and Whittier faced “anxieties” with women’s potential and what this power could create in the future; in response, they produced “strategies in retelling [Dustan’s] story to illuminate some of the problems” by belittling a woman who lives outside the authors’ definition of women by “containing” them with the help of outside sources such as the power of motherhood and help from God himself (Carroll 85).

Mather’s depiction of Dustan warns readers by casting Dustan in the role of a murderer, despite the fact that God supposedly sanctioned such deadly actions. Mather attempts to justify her actions by arguing that she “thought she was not forbidden by any Law to take away the Life of the Murderers, by whom her child had been Butchered” (60). By using this justification to validate her actions of murdering Indian men, women, and children, Mather both directly addresses the consequences of a woman who will break the law, and, yet, hides it due to the fact that she did not know that the law still applied to her. Mather makes it apparent that women who step-out of their gender boundaries can produce physical harm, possibly resulting in the degrading of the patriarchy and social constructs since she has equal or more power than men. Therefore, if men cannot contain women, then society will cease to be patriarchal allowing women to uphold the same roles as men do, rather than being confined to the cult of true womanhood.
While Mather uses the “talking” trait of double-voice discourse to present a female whose power can result in loss of social constructs such as the law, Whittier demonstrates Dustan to be a “devouring maternal avenger, who, with her consuming passions poses a threat not only to Indians, but to all of manhood” (Weis 52). In Whittier’s “The Mother’s Revenge,” Dustan represents a female who, ultimately, disobeys her femininity, leaving her the opposite of what women are expected to uphold. Whittier “talks” to his readers by demonstrating Dustan to be “a threatening presence—a woman of action, one that he wishes to remain in the past” (Weis 52). Dustan is threatening because she “[defies] the weakness of the body,” one that is normally attributed to females, and produces the violent act of murder (Weis 52). Not only does she commit murder, but she also scalps the Indians, which represents a severing that will also occur for men’s power if women abided by such an example. In other words, while Whittier “speaks” to those who believe that women should still abide by the cult of true womanhood, by portraying Dustan to be submissive, religious, and a mother who is consumed with the needs of her family, he also intentionally “talks” about a woman whose potential agency could result in damnation of the patriarchy. If a woman demonstrates agency, the male will become either equal or inferior to the female sex, therefore ultimately reducing the male’s power. Whittier desires for the display of female autonomy to be abolished so that patriarchal constructs of womanhood will continue to flourish. Whittier writes:

Such is the simple and unvarnished story of a New-England woman. The curious historian, who may hereafter search among the dim records of out ‘twilight time’—who may gather from the uncertain responses of tradition, the wonderful history of the past—will find much of a similar character, to call forth by turns, admiration and horror. And the time is coming, when all these tradition shall be treasured up as a sacred legacy—when the tale if the Indian inroad and the perils of the hunter—sublime courage and the dark superstitions of our ancestors, will be listened to with an interest unknown to the present generations,—and those who are to fill out places will pause hereafter by the Indian's burial—place, and on the site of the old battle-field, or the thrown-down garrison, with a feeling of
awe and reverence, as if communing, face to face, with the spirits of that stern race, which has passed away forever (Whittier).

In this last paragraph, Whittier wishes for women who demonstrate such agency to be hidden and, when historians discover such a woman, to regard her character with both “admiration and horror” (Whittier). He wishes for the demonstration of such agency to be abolished along with the legacy of the Indians, a legacy that will forever be passed and will cease to exist, both colonizing Indians and white female agency. Therefore, Whittier utilizes double voice discourse to warn society of women’s potential agency, a power which he desires to be forever deceased.

By having no actual first-person account of Dustan’s captivity and applying double-voice discourse to Mather’s and Whittier’s depictions of her captivity allows their stories to focus on the messages they desire to convey to their readers. While the first person account remains absent from her captivity narrative, “this absence encourages constant retelling,” disallowing Dustan’s actual account to be heard (Carroll 57). Dustan’s actions produce agency uncommon in the female sex during the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries so “she is silenced and refigured” because she “does not conform to contemporary standards of feminine behavior” who abides by the cult of true womanhood (Carroll 59). Dustan no longer becomes an example of a typical victor who escapes captivity, but she is transformed to meet the goals of Whittier and Mather. Therefore, Dustan gives the male authors “an opportunity to reimagine female behavior in order to serve the personal and professions ends of the authors writing about her” (Carroll 61). The authors take away her agency and transforms it to fit a message that they view important to convey to their readers. However, according to Michelle Burnham, Whittier and Mather use Dustan’s captivity to accidently “expose their readers to sometimes appealing examples of female power and agency in the very attempt to warn them against such behavior” (91). By exposing their readers to an example of such a powerful woman, the thought may become appealing, especially to women who are confined to gender boundaries and the cult of true womanhood. By breaking the female boundaries, women are then exposed to a power that they never knew of before and, similar to Dustan, could possibly outwit or be physical stronger than the opposing sex. As such, Whittier and Mather in their recasting of her actually expose such possibilities in the very attempt to conceal them. However, while the authors intentionally “speak” to the
readers who believe that women are still confined to submissiveness, domesticity, and piety, the two also “talk” to their readers warning them of the harm in women producing agency. While placing the double-voice lens on their retellings of Dustan’s captivity makes their intentions clear, it also becomes apparent that they expose to their readers the type of woman that they originally attempt to shield them from, ultimately allowing the question of Dustan’s “comfortable” experience while captive to be derived from spiritual and moral strengthening, or expressing power that is new to a female body.

Notes

1. Hannah Dustan is also spelled Duston, Dustin, etc.

2. According to Henry Lewis Gates, the term “double-voicedness” is often applied to race texts allowing authors to “speak” readers, revealing a specific purpose, while also “talking” to the audience to establish a separate purpose. While these purposes are intentionally made, I am arguing that Mather’s and Whittier’s depictions of Dustan embodies follows this technique, but also unintentionally reveals the very subject that they are trying to hide—a woman of agency (xxv).

3. After Sisera massacres the Israelites, he goes to Jael’s house for a place to rest. Jael’s hospitality is presented as she offers him a place to rest and milk, however, she uses her wits to murder him unexpectedly. She “took a nail of the tent, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him, and smote the nail into his temples, and fastened it into the ground [...] [s]o he died” (New King James Bible, Judges 4, ll. 21). However, although Jael murders the captain who is responsible for slaying the Israelites, his murder is accredited to “God” who “subdued on that day Jabin the king of Canaan before the children of Israel” and they “Praise[d] ye the Lord for the avenging of Israel” (New King James Bible, Judges 4, ll. 23, Judges 5, ll. 2).

Works Cited


II. Captive Others: Cutting through Sentimental Scripts
“Lors, Chile! What’s You Crying ’Bout?”: Sympathy and Tears in Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

Philemon Isaiah Amos

In 1861, Harriet Jacobs published *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which was well-received as an authentic documentation of the cruel treatment of slaves in the South. Unfortunately, many twentieth-century literary critics speculated that *Incidents* was a sentimental novel penned by Lydia Maria Child. In *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, John W. Blassingame argues, “In spite of Lydia Maria Child’s insistence that she had only revised the manuscript of Harriet Jacobs ‘mainly for purposes of condensation and orderly arrangement,’ the work is not credible...the story is too melodramatic: miscegenation and cruelty, outraged virtue, unrequited love, and planter licentiousness appear on practically every page” (11). Blassingame doubts the authorship of Harriet Jacobs and, instead, credits Lydia Maria Child, a sentimental novelist and abolitionist who provides a supportive introduction arguing Harriet Jacobs’ authorship of *Incidents*. As with Martha Griffith Browne’s *Autobiography of a Female Slave*, Blassingame concludes that Child created *Incidents* as a pseudo-slave narrative in order to advance the cause of abolitionists. Fortunately, Jean Fagan Yellin undermines Blassingame’s arguments in *Harriet Jacobs: A Life*, where Yellin provides extensive and conclusive research establishing the authenticity and authority of Harriet Jacobs as author of *Incidents*.

Although more than six thousand slave narratives exist, *Incidents* holds a special place in the literary canon as it defines the genre and furthers the tradition of black female authorship in America. William Andrews credits the text as “the major black woman’s autobiography of the mid-nineteenth century” (Gates 11). Within its pages, Jacobs records her struggles and sorrows as a slave, a runaway slave, and a freed woman in the North. The narrative documents the realities of slave life in the South and provides counterarguments against prominent proponents of slavery such as David Christy, Albert Taylor Bledsoe, Thornton Stringfellow,
J.H. Hammond, E.N. Elliott, Samuel A. Cartwright, Charles Hodge, and George Fitzhugh. Further, Jacobs’ narrative purposes “to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South” (2-3). Here, Jacobs indict gender as apathetic toward the plight of the slave woman in the South. To accomplish this objective, Jacobs borrows elements of the sentimental novel. In Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861, Michelle Burnham articulates, “Jacobs clearly employs the strategies and structures of sentimental fiction throughout her narrative in an effort to inspire her northern female readers to respond emotionally to her story and to translate that affect into moral behavior” (160). Whereas Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin operates as a sentimental novel that employs elements of the slave narrative, Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents functions as a slave narrative that uses elements of the sentimental novel to gain support for abolitionist movements.

The sentimental novel purposes to incite and manipulate the emotions of its readership primarily by employing elements of seduction, sympathy, true womanhood, and, ultimately, death to achieve the author’s intent. In Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America, Cathy Davidson asserts that “seduction is ever the focal point of these novels” (180) and that “[i]mportant social matters are reflected in sentimental plots, including the preoccupation with extramarital sex and the social and biological consequences of sexual transgressions” (190). Davidson expounds further that the “sentimental novel also portrayed, frequently in graphic terms, the deaths of many characters in childbirth” (192). In Incidents, Jacobs seeks to provoke her white audience to tears in an effort to achieve sympathy and reader identification with her white, Northern readership by focusing on womanhood, wifehood, and motherhood. In sum, Jacobs manipulates sympathy—where tears become a rhetorical strategy—by borrowing elements from the sentimental novel in order to expose the cruelty of slavery and galvanize white Northern women to support abolitionary efforts.

Jacobs first employs the element of tears from the sentimental novel in order to expose the inhumanity of slavery.¹ By the employment of tears in the context of sentiments of motherhood—a shared experience for woman regardless of color—Jacobs illustrates that the slave auction functions as a cruel transaction which decimates the slave family. Jacobs accounts:
On one of these slave days, I saw a mother lead seven children to the auction-block...The children were sold to a slave trader, and their mother was bought by a man in her own town...She begged the trader to tell her where he intended to take them; this he refused to do. How could he, when he knew he would sell them, one by one, wherever he could command the highest price? I met that mother in the street, and her wild, haggard face lives to-day in my mind. She wrung her hands in anguish, and exclaimed, “Gone! All gone! Why don’t God kill me?” I had no words wherewith to comfort her. Instances of this kind are of daily, yea, of hourly occurrence. (17)

Here, Jacobs unveils the inhumanity of the slave auction by focusing on fragmented motherhood. She spotlights how white slaveholders and traders strip slave mothers of their own children and foregrounds the slave mothers’ implorations to spare their offspring. Through mothers’ tears as an emotional rhetorical device, such passages reverse the civil/savage binary and align the slave holders as “savage” individuals, as opposed to the “civil” slave mothers desperately desiring to keep motherhood and the family intact. In this passage, Jacobs stresses that profits motivate white slaveholders to endeavor in this venture. In addition, white slave traders keep slave mothers ignorant of the locations of their sons and daughters after they have been separated. By incorporating sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacobs strategically discloses to her readership both that slaves had and desired to maintain “traditional” family units, and that slave mothers never heal emotionally from the tragedy of losing their children, in order to evoke political action, especially in white, Northern women. She writes, “O, ye happy free women, contrast your New Year’s day with that of the poor bond-woman! With you it is a pleasant season, and the light of the day is blessed.... Children bring their little offerings, and raise their rosy lips for a caress. They are your own, and no hand but death can take them from you” (16). Jacobs uses gender to cross racial barriers by appealing to the motherhood of white women with tears. She accentuates the significance of holidays and reminds white women of their privilege to enjoy their offspring. Jacobs insists that although the female slave “be an ignorant creature, degraded by the system that has brutalized her from her childhood... she has a mother’s instincts, and is capable of feeling a mother’s agonies”
Jacobs hopes that her supplication resonates with white female readership to support abolitionary movements.

Jacobs incites tears to provide further evidence of the broader decimation of the family via the slave auction. She records, “And now came the trying hour for that drove of human beings, driven away like cattle, to be sold they knew not where. Husbands were torn from wives, parents from children, never to look upon each other again this side of the grave. There was wringing of hands and cries of despair” (90). The incorporation of tears exposes the negative consequences of the slave enterprise by comparing the treatment of slaves with livestock. This passage reveals and argues against the belief that slaves do not possess any natural affection for their spouses and offspring. This association exposes the apathy of white slaveholders toward the very institutions—like family and Christianity—they purportedly supported. Although white slave traders profit from the slave auctions, the slave family suffers as a result. The transaction of slaves severs the union of husband and wife, and breaks the bond of fathers and mothers with sons and daughters. Jacobs compares the duration of the severance of spouses and offspring with the grave. This permanence of the comparison through sentimental discourse evokes tears by accentuating the commonality that black wives and mothers share with white wives and mothers in an effort to align this readership with her cause.

Tears, for Harriet Jacobs, strategically function to spotlight the sexual violation of True Womanhood of black female slaves at the hands of their white masters. Similar to the sentimental novel, Jacobs focuses on the maternal and perinatal deaths. In Revolution & the Word: the Rise of the Novel in America, Cathy Davidson articulates, “The sentimental novel also portrayed, frequently in graphic terms, the deaths of many characters in childbirth” (192). In Incidents, Jacobs writes:

I once saw a young slave girl dying after the birth of a child nearly white. In her agony she cried out, “O Lord, come and take me!” […] The poor mother turned away sobbing. Her dying daughter called her feebly, and as she bent over her, I heard her say, “Don’t grieve so, mother; God knows all about it; and HE will have mercy upon me. (15, emphasis added)

Jacobs recounts this catastrophe through sentimentalized discourse to enlighten white women that black female slaves suffer maternal and
perinatal deaths as a result of their sexual exploitation by white patriarchs. This testimony proves the victimization and violation of the slave adolescent, where the sexual transgressions of a white slaveholder bereave a slave woman of her daughter and granddaughter. As a result, Jacobs emphasizes that the consequences of sexual exploitation affect the entire slave family and community and, through the sentimental trope of motherhood, Jacobs pleads with white women to exercise compassion toward rape victims instead of contempt fostered in false accounts of black womanhood of the time.²

By implementing sentimental discourse in the context of sentiments of true womanhood, Jacobs reveals that white mistresses suffer emotional and psychological distress as a result of the white patriarchs’ sexual exploitation of the black female body. For example, Dr. Flint decides to stay in his apartment with his infant daughter and arranges for Jacobs to serve as his daughter’s nurse. This arrangement arouses Mrs. Flint’s suspensions, and she questions Jacobs to ascertain her interactions with Dr. Flint. Jacobs records:

As I went on with my account her color changed frequently, she wept, and sometimes groaned. She spoke in tones so sad, that I was touched by her grief. The tears came to my eyes; but I was soon convinced that her emotions arose from anger and wounded pride. She felt that her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted; but she had no compassion for the poor victim of her husband’s perfidy. She pitied herself as a martyr; but she was incapable of feeling for the condition of shame and misery in which her unfortunate, helpless slave was placed. (31)

Through the sentimental trope of true womanhood, the narrative highlights that white mistresses value their marriage to their husband. In the case of infidelity by the white patriarch, the sentimental narrative depicts the betrayal and bitterness that white mistresses’ experience. By incorporating the element of tears, the sentimental text establishes the purity of white mistresses within the context of true womanhood. However, the narrative amplifies and critiques through sentimental discourse the disposition of white mistresses toward slave women, the reluctant victims of adultery. In *Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century*, Barbara Welter asserts, “If anyone...dared to tamper with the complex virtues which made up True Womanhood,
he was damned immediately as an enemy of God, of civilization and of the Republic” (21). Although white patriarchs commit sexual transgressions against innocent slave women, the sentimental text uses tears to draw attention to the white mistress’ illegitimate condemnation of slave women with the sexual transgression. The element of tears within the sentimental discourse depicts the powerlessness of slave women who serve as the object of jealousy, envy, and hatred to white mistresses. By employing tears in the context of sentiments of true womanhood, the narrative demonstrates the empathy and sympathy that slave women project toward white mistresses who suffer such fates. Nevertheless, the sentimental discourse spotlights the physical and verbal oppression by the white mistress against the innocent party. In this incident, the sentimental passage proves that slavery “is a curse to the white as well as to the blacks” and “contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched” (46). Through sentimental discourse, the narrative evokes tears by appealing to true womanhood and implores its readership to examine adulterous events objectively, to rightfully accuse the guilty party, to spare the innocent party, and to support abolitionist efforts.

By inserting sentimental discourse that would incite tears, Jacobs discloses to her readership that white patriarchs violate the womanhood of black female slaves, despite the efforts of white mistresses to promote true womanhood. In Dimity Convictions: The American Woman in the Nineteenth Century, Barbara Walter states, “The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Put them together and they spelled mother, daughter, sister, wife—woman. Without them, no matter whether there was fame, achievement or wealth, all was ashes. With them she was promised happiness and power” (21). In other words, in this period, the woman must exercise integrity, protect her virginity, manifest humility, and possess fertility. Throughout Incidents, the text uses sentimental tropes to acknowledge that the cult of true womanhood clearly applies to both white and black women. For instance, Jacobs reveals that she too has been educated in true womanhood with “the pure principles” her grandmother “instilled” (26) and, along with other female slaves, through the “religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress” (45). Jacobs retells the story of a “very pious” young lady who “taught
her slaves to lead pure lives” (44). In the event that the young lady married, the new master violated the innocent female slaves. Jacobs shares:

The eldest soon became a mother; and, when the slaveholder’s wife looked at the babe, she wept bitterly. She knew that her own husband had violated the purity she had so carefully inculcated. She had a second child by her master, and then he sold her and his offspring to his brother. She bore two children to the brother, and was sold again. The next sister went crazy. The life she was compelled to lead drove her mad. The third one became the mother of five daughters. (45)

By using the element of tears, this passage stresses that certain groups of white mistresses both educate and advocate the virtues of true womanhood to slave women. Yet, as the narrative reveals, this sincere effort is futile in slave systems as white patriarchs continue to sexually violate slave women. The narrative concludes that even white mistresses cannot protect slave women from the sexual exploitation of white slaveholders, which pollutes the cultural ideals and gender scripts that both black and white women endeavor to uphold.

By employing sentimental confessions that cater toward the expectations of white, Northern women, Jacobs emphasizes the emotional anguish that slave women feel when they lose the sexual purity idealized under the moral and social constructs of the nineteenth century. Jacobs confesses, “No one can feel it more sensibly that I do. The painful and humiliating memory will haunt me to my dying…I had many unhappy hours. I secretly mourned over the sorrow I was bringing on my grand mother, who had so tried to shield me from harm” (49). Although Jacobs believes that “the condition of a slave confuses all principles of morality” and “renders the practice of them impossible,” Jacobs consistently expresses sincere remorse for her failure to adhere to true womanhood throughout the narrative (48). In Welter asserts, “To contemplate the loss of purity brought tears” (23). Similarly, Jacobs confesses, “I shed bitter tears that I was no longer worthy of being respected by the good and pure” (65). Here, “bitter tears” incites sympathy from her readership by emphasizing the extreme predicament that slave women endure and projects the regret that she feels.

Using tears as a stock feature of the sentimental novel, Jacobs informs her white female readership that black matriarchs indeed value the stan-
dards of true womanhood and reproach even slave women who fail to adhere to its standards. After she loses her virginity to Mr. Sands, Jacobs informs her readers of her grandmother’s response: “Her reproaches fell so hot and heavy, that they left me no chance to answer. Bitter tears, such as the eyes never shed but once, were my only answer. I rose from my seat, but fell back again sobbing. She did not speak to me; but the tears were running down her furrowed cheeks, and they scorched me like fire” (50). In this sentimental passage, the element of tears spotlights that both the submissive and transgressive woman understands that a single incident can corrupt true womanhood permanently; there is no such thing as undoing or unknowing. As Welter states, “Purity was as essential as piety to a young woman, its absence as unnatural and unfeminine. Without it she was, in fact, no woman at all, but a member of some lower order. A “fallen woman” was a fallen,” unworthy of the celestial company of her sex” (23). By employing sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacobs intensifies the black matriarch’s rebuke of the transgressive woman by the implementation of tears. The narrative signals to its white female readership that black matriarchs exert impartiality toward women, regardless of race or relationship.

_Incidents_ employs sentiment to amplify Jacobs’s remorse for sexual transgression and pleas for forgiveness from her readership. After losing sexual innocence to Mr. Sands, Jacobs seeks to reconcile with her disappointed grandmother. She asserts:

I knelt before her, and told her the things that had poisoned my life; how long I had been persecuted; that I saw no way of escape; and in an hour of extremity I had become desperate…I told her I would bear any thing and do any thing, if in time I had hopes of obtaining for forgiveness. I begged of her to pity me, for my dead mother’s sake. She did not say, “I forgive you”; but she looked at me lovingly, with her eyes full of tears. (51)

Here, Jacobs’s narrative through sentimental discourse reminds its white readership of the sexual advances by the white slaveholder: “He, whose persecutions had been the cause of my sin” (51). Through the sentimental tropes sanctioned by the cultural regimes of true womanhood, the narrative emphasizes that sexual exploitation by white patriarchs coerce black bondmen to succumb to sexual transgressions. By implementing sentimental discourse that would incite tears, Jacobs discloses her con-
sternation of female rejection and desperately seeks female reconciliation. Through the element of tears from the sentimental novel, the narrative puts aside true womanhood and instead appeals to its female audience on the basis of another potent social construct of the nineteenth century—true motherhood.

In shifting her attention away from the danger slavery poses to the sexual purity of slave women, Jacobs accentuates the emotional distress that recapture and imprisonment by the hands of slave holders cause slave mothers. In describing the effect of Benjamin’s recapture and imprisonment on their grandmother, Jacobs writes, “Sobs were heard, and Benjamin’s lips were unsealed; for his mother was weeping on his neck. How vividly does memory bring back that sad night…He asked her pardon for the suffering he had caused her. She said she had nothing to forgive; she could not blame his desire freedom” (22). Here, Jacobs illustrates to her white readership through sympathetic discourse that slave imprisonment by white slaveholders serves as a barrier and burden to the slave mother. However, this exchange also induces tears by attenuating the reunification between mother and son. Through the application of tears in motherhood, this passage reverses the civil/salvage binary and aligns the slave holders as “savage” individuals, as opposed to the “civil” slave mothers desperately desiring to reunite with their children. Jacobs uses the element of tears within the context of motherhood to transcend racial prejudice and establish sisterhood with her white female audience.

Jacobs borrows the element of death from the sentimental novel and implements this component within the context of motherhood to incite sympathy from her white readership. Jacobs expresses her paradoxical sentiments as a slave mother. She recollects:

The little vine was taking deep root in my existence, though its clinging fondness excited a mixture of love and pain. When I was most sorely oppressed I found a solace in his smiles. I loved to watch his infant slumbers; but always there was a dark cloud over my enjoyment. I could never forget that he was a slave. Sometimes I wished that he might die in infancy. God tried me. My daring became very ill. The bright eyes grew dull, and the little feet and hands were so icy cold that I thought death had already touched them. I had prayed for his death, but never so earnestly as I now prayed for his life… (54)
By employing this morbid language, Jacobs unveils the emotional quagmire that slave mothers in similar situations suffer within their heart. She reasons that “death is better than slavery” because of the physical hardship and psychological trauma that white patriarchs afflict on slaves (54). Her motherly instincts rule in favor of the life and well-being of her child. Despite the paradoxical sentiments that slave mothers experience, Jacobs discloses to her white female audience that slave mothers value their child’s life more than death’s benefits. Seeking sympathy through the common concerns of mothers across racial lines, Jacobs spotlights to her white readership that slave mothers, too, do not wish for their children to suffer physically or psychologically.

Jacobs amplifies sentimental discourse within the context of motherhood and employs the element of tears from the sentimental novel to expose to her white audience the emotional anguish that the slave trade afflicts upon a slave mother’s heart. When Benjamin is “sold for three hundred dollars” by his slave master, Jacobs describes his mother’s response, “Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists; could you have heard her heart-rending groans, and seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face, daily pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, Slavery is damnable! (23). Here, this sentimental moment unveils how the harsh treatment of a slave master impacts the slave mother. The narrative uses the rhetorical device of anaphora in order to intensify the motherhood of the female slave. By incorporating sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacobs strategically discloses to her readership a slave mother’s frantic response in witnessing this slave transaction of her son. As Michelle Burnham comments, “in mid-nineteenth-century America both women’s writing and abolitionist writing were largely characterized by sentimentality. As it did in captivity narratives and sentimental novels of captivity, that discourse appealed to a reader’s sympathy through scenes of often theatrical pathos and plots of familial separation and individual trial” (160). The text also incorporates the element of tears to highlight the slave mother’s powerlessness to alter the fate of her son. She employs tears within the context of motherhood to create reader identification with her white female audience in order to gain their support against slavery.

By using tears to amplify the effects of violated motherhood, Jacobs strategically discloses to her white female audience that the extreme conditions of slavery. After Dr. Flint relocates Jacobs to the plantation...
and separates Jacobs from her children. Jacobs states that “Ellen broke down under the trials of her new life. Separated from me, with no one to look after her, she wandered about, and in a few days cried herself sick. One day, she sat under the window where I was at work, crying that weary cry which makes a mother’s heart bleed. I was obliged to steel myself to bear it” (74). Through the sentimental tropes of motherhood, the narrative reiterates to the female readership that white patriarchs possess the legal right to buy, sell, borrow, and lend black female slaves. The tears highlight that the white slaveholder’s power over slaves can lead to the separation between mother and daughter.

As a result of the cruel treatment of slavery, Jacobs escapes to the North, and, as a result, separates herself from her children. She writes of daughter’s response, “She wept, and I did not check her tears. Perhaps she would never again have a chance to pour her tears into a mother’s bosom…I hugged her close to my throbbing heart; and tears, too sad for such young eyes to shed, flowed down upon her cheeks, and she gave her last kiss” (116). Here, the narrative employs tears to stress that slave daughters do not want to lose the love and comfort of their mothers. Likewise, slave mothers do not want to lose experiencing the dependence, curiosity, and innocence of their daughters. In addition, the sentimental text uses tears to emphasize to the female audience that the institution of slavery prompts slave mother to escape from the plantation and this separation, although for the betterment of both the mother and daughter, leads to the infant’s devastation. By incorporating sentimental discourse and tears within the context of motherhood, Jacobs establishes a commonality—mothers willing to sacrifice and suffer for their children— with her white female audience to provoke them to seek the abolition of slavery so that black women would not need to take such drastic measures.

Jacobs further projects tears to emphasize to her female audience a slave mother’s affection and attachment for her children even while in hiding. Jacobs recalls, “When she repeated their prattle, and told me how they wanted to see their ma, my tears would flow” (86). The narrative uses tears to illustrate the appreciation that Jacobs’ expresses toward the third party for retelling the conversations and sentiments of her children. Nevertheless, the tears also disclose that Jacobs, as a mother, desires to hear the tones and inflations in her children’s voice. Although she creates gifts for her children, Jacobs cannot personally give these gifts to them: “How I longed to tell him that his mother made those garments, and
that many a tear fell on them while she worked” (99). When her child suffers physical harm from a savage dog, Jacobs writes:

One day the screams of a child nerved me with strength to crawl to my peeping-hole, and I saw my son covered with blood. A fierce dog...had seized and bitten him. A doctor was sent for, and I heard the groans and screams of my child while the wounds were being sewed up. O, what torture to a mother’s heart, to listen to this and be unable to go to him! (102)

Slavery forces Jacobs to suppress her natural inclinations and exercise self-restraint, although she desires to come to the aid of her child. Jacobs reinforces the common interest that both black and white women share toward their children. However, the tears also demonstrate that the black bondwoman is powerless to execute her interest in regards to her children. By incorporating sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacobs strategically appeals to white Northern women to the aid of black mothers who only desire to care of their children.

Jacobs also deploys sentimental discourse to highlight the physical abuse that white slaveholders afflict upon slaves with the whip without reason or justification. This type of physical abuse encourages slaves to run away, further fragmenting the slave family. Jacobs writes, “It appeared that Benjamin’s master had sent for him, and he did not immediately obey his summons. When he did, his master was angry, and began to whip him” (20). The physical affliction prompts Benjamin to defend himself and throw his slave master to the ground. As a consequence, Benjamin “was to be whipped for the offence” (20). The threat of a lashing provokes Benjamin to escape. Regrettably, this logical decision impacts his mother emotionally. Jacobs records, “When my grandmother returned home and found her youngest child had fled, great was her sorrow” (21). Here, Jacobs provides her white female readership with more insight into the slave mother’s heart. She emphasizes through sentimental discourse the slave mother’s attachment to her offspring. In this particular incident, the slave mother both laments the absence of her son and underscores that, for the slave, “liberty is more valuable than life” (39) and “death is better than slavery” (54). Thus, the narrative documents that slave mothers are reluctant to separate from their children and yet understand that liberty lies in the breast of every individual regardless of color. This emotional incident evokes tears by
highlighting the commonality that black and white women share for agency and union with their children.

Although Jacobs addresses primarily her white female audience, she also implores her male, Northern readership through sentimental discourse to show sympathy towards black bondwomen. After losing abandoning her virtue to Mr. Sands, Jacobs reveals her Uncle’s response:

I felt no joy when they told me my uncle had come. He wanted to see me, though he knew what had happened. I shank from him at first; but at last consented that he should come to my room. He received me as he always had done. O, how my heart smote me when I felt his tears on my burning cheeks! (53)

The narrative underlines the appropriate response for men toward women who lose or sacrifice their sexual purity. Despite losing true womanhood, however, her uncle’s tears illustrate that he does not shun her as an outcast and forgives her sexual transgression. Jacobs strategically encourages her white male audience to exercise compassion toward slave women who become victims of sexual exploitation.

Jacobs’s narrative also employs the element of tears from the sentimental novel to reveal the plight of male slaves who both desire to protect black bondwomen from the physical assaults and sexual advances of white slaveholders but who are powerless to do so. After the birth of her son, Dr. Flint summons Jacobs into his office to scorn her for her sexual transgressions in the presence of her brother, William. Jacobs declares, “Poor boy! He was powerless to defend me; but I saw the tears, which he vainly strove to keep back” (54). Again, the tears emphasize to her female readership that the black female slave cannot rely on the black male slave to protect her womanhood from the oppression of white slaveholders. Jacobs’s narrative through sentimental discourse records an incident in which a black bondman rebukes the white slaveholder for sexual transgression against the black bondwoman. Jacobs records:

I shall never forget that night. Never before, in my life, had I heard hundreds of blows fall, in succession, on a human being. His piteous groans, and his “O, pray don’t massa,” rang in my ears for months afterwards. There were many conjectures as to the cause of this terrible punishment […] the slave had quarreled with his wife, in presence of the overseer, and had accused his
master of being the father of her child. They were both black, and the child was very fair. (15, emphasis added)

The white patriarch applies the whip to black bondmen who attempt to protect a slave woman’s honor. The implementation of tears reinforces the notion to the female audience that black bondmen “have been so brutalized by the lash that they will sneak out of the way to give their masters free access to their wives and daughters” (39). The narrative unveils that white patriarchs strip the black bondman of the ability and liberty to protect the womanhood of his wife, his daughter, his sister, and his mother. Tears accentuate that the abuse of the whip by the white slaveholder “lashes manhood” out of a black bondman who would otherwise protect the womanhood of the black bondwoman (40). By using sentimental discourse and the element of tears in the context of true womanhood, the narrative achieves reader identification from the white female audience.

Further, the narrative reveals the disjunctures and their consequences between what is and what is not legally sanctioned in slave holding states. On the one hand, Jacobs stresses that the law denies the black freeman the rights and privileges of marriages to a black bondwoman: “the law gave no sanction to the marriage of such” (34). However, on the other hand, the law sanctions sexual abuse for the white slaveholder and denies legitimate unions to black people. Further, in the event that the black freeman proposes to purchase a black bondwoman as his wife, the white slaveholder can accept or reject the offer. Jacobs recalls, “My lover wanted to buy me; but I know that Dr. Flint was too willful and arbitrary a man to consent to that arrangement” (34). By using the sentimental trope of wifehood, the narrative appeals to its female audience to notice this commonality between black and white women. In so doing, the sentimental text beseeches the Northern female readership to support and defend black female slaves for the sake of wifehood.

*Incidents* accentuates to its female audience another commonality that slaves share with white women: education. In *Revolution and the Word*, Davidson writes that the sentimental novel places “emphasis on improved female education” (193). In this case, Jacobs recollects a sentimental incident in which an “old black man” desires to learn how to read in order to understand the contents of the Bible:
I knew an old black man…He had a most earnest desire to read. He thought he should know how to serve God better if he could only read the Bible. He came to me, and begged me to teach me…I asked him if he didn’t know it was contrary to law; and that slaves were whipped and imprisoned for teaching each other to read. This brought tears into his eyes. (63)

Jacobs’s narrative uses tears to depict the desperation of slaves to learn how to read and comprehend the Bible. This sentimental passage intensifies the inhumanity of slaveholders who deprive slaves of this privilege of education. The element of tears also highlights that white slaveholders promote ignorance and prohibit instruction on the slave plantation. Jacobs’s narrative arouses white women’s sympathy for slaves and the support of abolitionist causes.

By implementing a sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacobs furthermore underscores the slave woman’s gratitude toward benevolent white women. In “The Ethos of Motherhood and Harriet Jacobs’s Vision of Racial Equality in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl,” Grace McEntee writes, “She shows readers that in both the South and North she has found white women at reach across race lines to offer her love and aid” (203). When Jacobs plans to escape and seeks a hiding place, a white mistress comes to her aid. She writes, “My grandmother was unable to thank the lady for this noble deed; overcome by her emotions, she sank on her knee and sobbed like a child” (84). This sentimental text reemphasizes to the white audience that both free black women and bondwomen are powerless to provide for themselves without the aid of white mistresses. In addition, the narrative intensifies the grandmother’s gratitude toward the white mistress in order to achieve sisterhood with her white female audience. When Jacobs finds herself in danger of recapture, she records of Mrs. Bruce, “She listened with true womanly sympathy, and told me she would do all she could to protect me” (147). In another sentimental incident with Mrs. Bruce, Jacobs records, “Mrs. Bruce came to bid me good bye, and when she saw that I had taken off my clothing for my child, the tears came to her eyes…She soon returned with a nice warm shawl and hood for Ellen. Truly, of such soul as hers are the kingdom of heaven” (147). By employing tears, the narrative articulates the authentic sympathy that white mistresses demonstrate toward black women. This sentimental incident stresses that the firm commonality of motherhood transcends racial prejudices.
and biases. The element of tears underscores this incident as a positive model for white women to pattern themselves after for the benefit of black mothers.

In *Incidents*, Jacobs employs elements of the sentimental novel in order to unveil the cruelty of slavery and create sympathy within the hearts of white women to support abolitionist causes. Using the element of tears as a rhetorical device, Jacobs highlights true womanhood as well as motherhood to establish reader identification with white women in order to transcend racial and cultural barriers. In addition, the narrative manipulates the element of tears in order to dispel many misrepresentations and misconceptions about slavery and slaves. Her use of sentimental discourse and the element of tears emphasizes that the slave institution and slave trade perverts womanhood and disrupts the motherhood of female slaves. By incorporating sentimental discourse that would evoke tears, Jacob strategically incites white women to support the abolition of slavery in order to protect the womanhood and motherhood of their black sisters.

**Notes**

1. In *Captivity & Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*, Michelle Burnham asserts, “That play between concealing and revealing secrets structures the very functioning of sentimental discourse, which typically claims tears as a mark of its success. Those tears are not, as one might imagine and as sentimental texts themselves suggest, a sign of catharsis of complete confession but a sign rather of confessions’ inevitable incompleteness; it is as though the tears that are secreted (in the sense of produced) substitute for and serve as a sign of that which remains secreted (in its other sense as hidden)” (162).

2. In “Us Colored Women Had To Go Through A Plenty”: Sexual Exploitation of African-American Slave Women, Thelma Jennings comments, “all female slaves abhorred breeding. Because of the awareness on the part of many black women that they could be mated indiscriminately like livestock to increase the quality and improve the quality of the work force, they viewed the patriarch as a cruel and greedy master who had no regard for their feelings as human beings” (49).
Works Cited


When I tell you this story, remember it may change: the reservation recalls the white girl with no name or a name which refuses memory. October she filled the reservation school, this new white girl, daughter of a BIA official or doctor in the Indian Health Service Clinic. Captive, somehow afraid of the black hair and flat noses of the Indian children who rose, one by one, shouting their names aloud. She ran from the room, is still running, waving her arms wildly at real and imagined enemies. Was she looking toward the future? Was she afraid of loving all of us?

—from “Captivity” by Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie’s poem, “Captivity,” offers seemingly strange, ambiguous imagery of life on a modern Indian reservations; among his descriptors lie a direct accusation of the well-known early American captive, Mary Rowlandson\(^1\). The poem blames her seminal captivity narrative—and the early American captivity genre itself—for ultimately misrepresenting an entire people, categorizing them as savages. In response, Alexie’s modern “Captivity” highlights the consequences of such narratives of colonization on their Native American communal identity where their society does not “[know] exactly where to stand and mea- / sure the beginning of [their] lives” (21-22). Moreover, the poem argues that their identity is deconstructed with every read of Rowlandson’s text through her misrepresentation of the native people whether or not she revealed affection for one of her captors—even still, the negative effect (alcoholism, physical abuse, financial issues, etc.) tarries in Alexie’s poem\(^2\). His novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (hereafter referred to as *True Diary*) reveals similar problems within the Indian culture as Arnold “Junior” Spirit quickly comes to the realization that his community is fraught with a vast array of problems such as his father’s alcoholism, his sister’s abandonment of their family, financial instability across the entire reservation, outdated learning materials, racism from
their educators, etc., all of which are problems which arise in Rowlandson’s text. After coming to this realization, Junior discusses with his jaded white educator who explains, “if you stay on this rez […] they’re going to kill you,” and he decides to leave his reservation in pursuit of a safer, more hopeful future (Alexie 43). Thus, Alexie’s poem “Captivity” lays a foundation for the influence of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* while his novel acts as the manifestation of such influences.

“Captivity” establishes a framework that critiques Rowlandson’s text by deconstructing the captivity narrative as a marker of white, colonizing practices on the American frontier that justify that effort and white expansion and superiority. Further, Alexie’s poem underscores the historical significance of Rowlandson’s mythos in regard to America’s cultural history, particularly during the American Frontier. As such, the poem establishes a lens, or key, for reading and elucidating *True Diary*. That key, in other words, works to set up more of a reasoning behind the problems that plague Junior’s hometown as Rowlandson is not mentioned in the novel. Ultimately, Alexie’s “Captivity” and *True Diary* not only create a larger critique of Rowlandson’s captivity narrative and the genocide it marks, but they reverse significant elements of the captivity genre as a whole. This reversal is evident as Arnold “Junior” Spirit makes plans to leave the reservation—an image that denotes his captivity by a white-structured reservation.

The poem “Captivity” is, fundamentally, a captivity narrative in itself—one that critiques the genre that its title evokes while rewriting/restructuring the genre as a whole. Critic Dean Rader explains that “Native Americans see language as a viable weapon to protect cultural identity and sovereignty. When physical resistance is implausible, linguistic resistance becomes necessary; stories can be told about the white devil […] and myths can be constructed” (148). Rader argues that Indian culture is well-known for fighting back with language and, rather, Alexie works in “Captivity” to *deconstruct* the myths that Rowlandson created through her captivity narrative. More specifically, with regard to Rowlandson’s mythos in American culture, the poem’s epigraph marks her problematic relationship to her captors in addition to her later characterization of them. The epigraph employs a quote attributed to Rowlandson’s text: “He (my captor) gave me a biscuit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat / it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him” (Alexie 1-2). Here, it is evident that even in the restraints of captivity, she is
curious about the feelings of one of her captors yet spends a great deal of time warning readers of their incivility. Rowlandson’s narrative had significant cultural cache since it “was second in popularity among colonial New Englanders only to the Bible,” as critic Andrew Paynay explains, where “Rowlandson skillfully constructs her narrative to show that the experience provides an emotional and spiritual watershed in an otherwise unremarkable life” (204). In other words, Rowlandson creates a narrative that falsely depicts the entire Indian population yet becomes a part of American history due to its unrivaled popularity and readership during both the frontier and in the present-day understanding of our country’s beginnings. “Captivity” connects the lingering effect Rowlandson’s text has on Native Americans, especially in regard to life on contemporary reservations.

First, by assertively addressing her full name, the poem identifies the culprit of the Indians’ defamation clearly and directly which leaves no possibility of the victimizer being any other person besides Mary Rowlandson. He then quickly lays out the litany of issues that her text’s lingering demonization of Native American created as he writes about how “unnecessary” she has become to them. These accusations create a framework where her physical presence is not necessary in order for their struggles to be prevalent and given narrative authority. While Rowlandson died long ago, the poem argues that her text’s negative affect has lasting tenure. In reference to Reservation Blues, another work by Alexie, critic Scott Andrews explains that “[t]he novel bitingly and comically criticizes popular culture’s consumption of American Indians and the influence these pop culture creations have on American Indians who use these images to build their identities” (Andrews). In other words, his sarcasm offers his readers a critical perspective on our country’s obsession with Native American Indians and how they use their skewed ideas of that culture to build their individual identity.

“Captivity” also details their culture’s “uneasy boundaries” and their inability to measure the beginning of their lives. In other words, they are unsure about how to categorize their heritage as their land was stolen and redirected to white-constructed Indian reservations after the Trail of Tears where Native Americans become literal and, in a sense permanent, captives. The reservations are essentially white constructs of society and only emulate the native culture that they were stripped from, and, in addition, leaving said territory or “boundary” results in only one option—returning to another version of white society. In other words,
parts of Rowlandson’s mythos have stripped the natives of having any true culture left to dwell and thrive in.

Much like a captivity narrative, the poem is structured in “removes” and manipulates word denotation and connotation which ultimately critique notions of cultural difference. While some captives experience some level of acculturation into the new, Othered society, the fourth remove of Alexie’s poem exudes discomfort with the “language of the enemy” (29). Making use of oxymorons in that enemy language, he writes “heavy lightness,” “feather of lead,” “bright smoke,” “still-waking sleep,” all of which are emphasized stylistically as they appear in the stanza in italics. This stylistic approach—before understanding the actual function of the words—instantly draws attention to those specific words while also highlighting the problematic nature of their definitions. By having oxymoronic language, Alexie alludes to the issue that Rowlandson creates in her text, which calls an entire people savage, unchristian beings, yet struggles simultaneously with evidence of their kindness and her own acculturation and growing affection for her master. Additionally, the words that do not appear in italics (“house insurance,” “safe deposit box,” etc.) are all items that the white captors own; they create a sense of security that their home and valuables are protected and not subject to the will and desires of a “superior” culture. Such security is, and has never been, afforded to the captive Native Americans spotlighted in Alexie’s poem.

In the fifth remove, readers experience more manipulations of rhetorical strategies pertaining to words and their general effect on the audience. As the speaker argues that he is not a “fancydancer,” the words are literally stripped away from the poem: “Remember: I am not the fancydancer, am not the fancydancer, not the fancydancer, the fancydancer, fancydancer” (343). Each word, as he continues to emphasize what he is not, is taken away piece by piece, drawing a parallel to not only the lack of identity in his words but also the ability to have one’s words hold a specific importance or “staying power.” Much like a captive in a foreign, potentially threatening environment, the narrator’s voice is steadily removed exuding the characteristics of a stock captive figure—a person who is stripped from their culture, identity, and peers to understand their language. This reversal of language implies that the speaker, who clearly speaks the same English as white society, cannot communicate in either his hometown or during his captivity.
Narrators of traditional captivity narratives oftentimes harken back to the time in which they lived comfortably in their homes. Mary Jemison, a 19th century captive, writes, “Even at this remote period, the recollection of my pleasant home at my father’s, of my parents, of my brothers and sister, and of the manner in which I was deprived of them all at once, affects me so powerfully, that I am almost overwhelmed with grief, that is seemingly insupportable” (Jemison 132). Such reflection reveals the effect that the captivity has on the individual’s emotions and the way memory functions to mentally return a captive even when it is not possible to do so. Alexie’s narrator, in the seventh remove, reveals that he, too, remembers his home; however, he must **work** to “reassemble the house where [he] was born” (45). While on this imaginary visit home, his mother explains that the hole he notices in the wall is in fact his sister. Two issues arise here: first, that a person can be narrowed down to an object, and second, that the object becomes a vacant space devoid of an authentic soul and memory. This impulse directly relates to the American Frontier—Alexie’s sister is objectified just as the natives were stripped from their land and forced onto reservations. Ultimately, these sufferings are characteristic of a traditional captivity narrative; yet, the captor, here, is the white culture while the captive is the Indian.

Life on the Indian reservation is depicted in Alexie’s fourteenth “remove” as one where there is no “American Dream” for Native Americans; rather, the natives move into “HUD homes,” “build / dreams from scratch piece by piece,” and the only trustworthy/dependable figure in their lives is the Greyhound bus (104-105). Here, Alexie creates a lens for reading and elucidating the poem as a whole through the hopeless imagery of only being able to rely on a moving, public form of transportation—even their dreams, not their present realities, are an unreliable, hopeless idea. He writes:

> [a]ll we can depend on are the slow-motion replays of our lives.  
> Frame 1: Lester reaches for the next beer. Frame 2: He pulls it to his face by memory, drinks it like a 20th century vision.  
> Frame 3: He tells us a joke, sings another song: **Well, they sent me off to boarding school and made me learn the white man’s rules.**  
> (Alexie 96-100)

Here, that the narrator documents how Native Americans are still captive, even on their own reservations as they are forced to learn the “white
man’s rules” and drink heavily while thinking of participating in such an act—an act that critic Nancy Peterson argues should and must be qualified as genocide of Holocaust proportions as more than fifteen million Native Americans lost their lives since America’s discovery in 1492 (63). The critic also mentions that oftentimes, people are unsettled by the fact that an atrocity—even one of epic proportions like the American Frontier—would be disqualified and categorized as insignificant in comparison to the suffering of the Holocaust.

Sherman Alexie’s *True Diary* details the life “Junior” Spirit who grows up in Spokane on an Indian reservation that is described similarly to the reservation illustrated in “Captivity.” Paired with his epistolary recollection, he chronicles his journey to the all-white rival school in search of a better education through drawing cartoons of the experience. Though his time at Reardan High School proves to be a problematic, he arguably learns more about himself than he would have had the opportunity to on the reservation in Spokane. The vast array of issues that Sherman Alexie’s “Captivity” depicts ultimately constructs the appropriate lens and scaffolding for reading and elucidating his novel *True Diary*. While the beginning of the novel lays the groundwork for the sarcastic, teen-aged main character, Alexie integrates Junior’s cartoons that harken back to some of the images found in “Captivity,” written nearly thirteen years before the novel’s publication. One of the first illustrations found in the text (see Figure 1) is a self-portrait that identifies problematic characteristics of himself along with his peers versus the white teenagers he encounters in the text. Here, there is a distinct dividing line that separates the typical white characteristics he has grown to understand in comparison to the realities of his characteristics as Indian. Arnold highlights larger issues like “hope”
for white students while the Indian has “bone-crushing reality,” or, as critic L.A. Leibman argues, “the history of American genocide […] has left the Spokane in mourning for their past as well as their future,” and parses out the smaller issues such as the quality of clothes and accessories (542). Therefore, the picture illustrates Junior’s understanding of how different his future is in comparison to his neighboring white community. More importantly, however, he writes a caption with similar sentiments found in “Captivity” — “a bright future” for the white culture while the Natives have their “vanishing past.” Like many of the early, white captives who acculturate to their new territories and cultures, Junior and his community acculturate and adjust to their new society—one that crushes their dreams and forces their open abandonment of hope entirely. As Alexie creates the foundation of True Diary with Junior’s portrait of American versus Indian, it begs the question in regard to the origination of such a reality. Critic Nancy Van Styvendale writes:

As literary texts, Slash and Indian Killer both express and craft a distinct understanding of “traumatic temporality,” a term coined by Cathy Caruth (“Interview” 78). Rooted in a psychoanalytic and poststructuralist methodology, this term refers to the way in which traumatic events, because they cannot be known or integrated by the survivor as they occur, are indirectly accessible only as symptom—that is, in their belated return to the survivor as repetitive dreams, flashbacks, and reenactments of the event. (204)

In other words, the critic refers to a theory that argues those in the midst of a traumatic event do not know it until their return through dreams and flashbacks. For Junior Spirit and the members of his community, this theory is relevant in that their present-day lives on an Indian reservation act as the “release” in a typical captivity narrative. The Indians have experienced the trauma of being captured (the Trail of Tears, for example) while their “initiation” and “release” can be identified by their forced removal to reservations. Their removal functions as both the initiation and release since their only encounter with white culture is during their transport of being released to the white constructs of the Indian reservations. Through the lens that Styvendale establishes, Alexie’s text itself acts as a survivor of the trauma as Junior is able to “flashback” to the experiences he shares throughout the novel and is then able to recog-
nize the trials of his race. The present reversal is that rather than a white woman being taken captive by members of an Indian tribe and, in turn, authoring a narrative that illustrates her tribulations and trauma, Junior Spirit writes his own captivity narrative in the white constructs of an Indian reservation and cannot effectively discuss his trials as he is part of the demonized culture that Mary Rowlandson’s narrative illustrates.

The larger question to ask, then, is in regard to what Junior wants to leave behind and, moreover, how those implications function in regard to Rowlandson’s text. A few chapters into *True Diary*, Junior opens his textbook in Mr. P’s geometry class and notices his mother’s name, Agnes Adams, written on the front page, which indicates that she was one of the previous owners of the book that must, at least, be thirty years older than he. Junior writes:

> I couldn’t believe it. How horrible was that? My school and my tribe are so poor and sad that we have to study from the same dang books that our parents studied from. That is absolutely they saddest thing in the entire world. And let me tell you, that old, old, old, *decepit* geometry book hit my heart with the force of a nuclear bomb. My hopes and dreams floated up in a mushroom cloud. What do you do when the world has declared nuclear war on you? (Alexie 31)

Junior essentially experiences the struggle and hardship it is to be not only captive in a reservation that is fraught with poverty, but even their tools that could help them to be successful and more intelligent are held captive in the schools without the possibility of being upgraded. Shortly after this thought process, Junior throws the book and accidentally hits Mr. P in the face and he, as discussed earlier, visits his home during his suspension and explains that he must leave the reservation if he wants to have a hopeful future. The imagery of a thirty-year-old book full of outdated material harkens back to the image in Alexie’s “Captivity”:

> In this story there are words fancydancing in the in-between, between then and now, between walls in the alley behind the Tribal Café where Indian boys smoke old cigarettes at halftime of the all-Indian basketball game. (51-53)
Both texts reveal the poverty-stricken circumstances that the Indians on the reservation suffer from on a regular basis—if there is a desire to be successful, the materials are desperately out of date, and when the youth on the reservation want to misbehave, even those materials are old and decrepit. This depravity is precisely what Mr. P refers to and what Junior needs to escape from as he explains to him that “the only thing [he’s] being taught is how to give up” (Alexie 42). Luckily, Junior’s plan does quite the opposite.

*True Diary* additionally exposes the white society’s intentions to reframe the Indian experience on the reservations. Later in the text, Mr. P explains during his conversation to Junior the motivation of the white teachers who came to the reservation to teach the Indians. He says, “I didn’t literally kill Indians. We were supposed to make you give up being Indian. Your songs and your stories and language and dancing. Everything. We weren’t trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture […] I can’t apologize to everybody I hurt (Alexie 35). This implies that Junior is not the only Indian victim. While we will never truly know Rowlandson’s intentions in writing her captivity narrative, she fits securely into the category of an Indian culture killer just as Mr. P explained he was forced to be. She, like Mr. P, did not physically murder the Indians who held her captive. Instead, her narrative solidified the national assumption that the natives were savage, uncivilized individuals who deserved to lose their land and cultural heritage. As Critic Caroline Woidat writes, “[…] Native Americans have themselves been subjected to government conspiracies to take away their land, their children, their livelihood, their culture. But the dual identity of Indians as both threats to and victims of American empire building is embedded in myths that remove them from the realm of political conspiracies by depicting noble savages who simply vanish in the face of manifest destiny” (457). Just as Rowlandson’s seminal text illustrated and accused Indians of being savage brutes who deserved their plight, the expectations placed upon Mr. P were to treat his Indian pupils no differently, even hundreds of years later. Moreover, as Sherry Smith argues in reference to Anglo fictions of Native Americans, “To acknowledge that they often failed to grasp the complexities of Indian peoples; that they often failed to transcend their own ethnocentric and even racist assumptions; and that early twenty-first century Indian and Anglo readers might find their works sentimental, romantic, and simple-minded does not negate their cultural power (4)” (qtd in Norman 253). Smith alludes to the fact that the racist literature
about Native Americans has ultimately had as much of an impact on our country’s culture as the Indian culture itself. In other words, Smith argues that both topics are equally (and unjustly) powerful. In terms of how this information works to reverse elements of the captivity narrative in *True Diary*, it is then necessary to understand that the initial spark of interest about the genre began after Rowlandson’s captivity narrative was published and literally read to pieces. Therefore, Alexie’s text works as a catalyst to refocus Indian culture from being illustrated as savage to worthy of being redefined.

Alexie’s text also deals directly with the American impulse to unjustly claim Indian heritage. “Ted the Billionaire” is a figure who enters near the end of *True Diary*. Speaking at the funeral of Grandmother Spirit, Junior’s beloved grandmother, he “was yet another white guy who showed up on the rez because he loved Indian people SOOOOOOOO much” and gives what he believes to be one of her powwow dancing outfits back to her family (Alexie 162). After detailing a drawn-out story about the outfit, all of the members of the family learn that Ted falsified the entire story, and, afterwards, “hurried over to his waiting car, and sped away” (162) as if he were caught in his unauthenticity and had no choice but to leave. Junior draws an illustration (see Figure 2) that captions Ted stating that he is not an Indian, but he “feels Indian in [his] bones” (162). Ted essentially explains that his nationality does not have to be Indian in order to have such a fascination with what he believes to be their culture, albeit his cultural artifacts are store-bought, falsified,
or purchased directly from the internet. Critic Susan Castro argues that Susannah Johnson’s captivity—along with the majority of English colonists—had an odd preoccupation with clothing and, ultimately, pushes the argument that True Diary functions at many times as a reversal of a captivity narrative. She notes that Johnson laments the fact that, upon being taken from her family by a group of Indians, her children were completely naked during the attack. Castro writes, “What did Susannah Johnson mean by nakedness? Were she and her children literally without clothing? Were they scantily clad by eighteenth-century standards and therefore nearly naked? Were they metaphorically naked in that they were exposed to their captives with nothing to protect them?” (105). While the quote parses out how early English citizens—even in the midst of a chaotic abduction—care deeply about their dress as it metaphorically represents their lack of control and protection against the Other, Castro highlights the issues of vanity and the impulse to fear how those Others might handle their moment of vulnerability. For Ted in True Diary, then, the reversal in effect is Ted’s impulse to not only have a preoccupation with the Indian culture and their artifacts, but that it represents a white society that rejects Indians through placing them in the reservations and counterintuitively attempts to identify with them as well. Many critics take notice of the many American citizens who, throughout the years, completely ignore the country’s problematic beginning that deal directly with captivity narratives and the mass-misunderstanding of an entire people yet so quickly reconstruct their understanding of the Indians to include it into their national identity just as “Ted the Billionaire” did so publicly. For Junior, he addresses the issue that juxtaposes Ted’s behavior. After leaving his reservation in Wellpinit and bravely transferring to the all-white school in Reardan despite many warnings and doubts from his peers, Junior succeeds tremendously on the basketball team with much notoriety. Unlike Ted and his artificial association with the native people, Junior struggles with the way in which his peers accept (or do not accept) his culture. He writes in reference to his budding basketball skills “[…] no matter how good I was, I would always be an Indian. And some folks just found it difficult to compare an Indian to a white guy. It wasn’t racism, not exactly. It was, well, I don’t know what it was” (181). In Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative, she discusses her acculturation in her narrative upon returning to her home culture—an experience that brought on emotional depression and struggle. The reversal of the captivity narrative, then, is present in that True Diary
shows the inability of the Native American male captive to acculturate into a white society. By examining Arnold and Mary Rowlandson, it becomes evident that Native American society readily accepts anyone while white society only allows those who are white, regardless of their level of acculturation.

Ultimately, Alexie’s poem “Captivity” offers readers an abundant amount of moments to not only understand how deeply Mary Rowlandson’s seminal text effects even the present-day Native American culture, but it also offers a glimpse into how that culture could potentially function without her lingering categorization of their people. Through his work in the poem, it is evident that True Diary is a rewritten, partially-reversed captivity narrative in the sense that it offers no stereotypes nor ministerial editing that serves a political agenda and, moreover, it offers a social and cultural critique of American society in the elements Alexie chooses to reverse. As Arnold “Junior” Spirit leaves his problematic Indian reservation in Reardan, it is unmistakable that the trials he leaves behind exist not simply because of human’s tendency to be deviant, but rather as a result of the ethos Mary Rowlandson’s narrative created in her ever-present characterization of the Indian impulse and culture. While we may never know the absolute cause of the genocide that founded our country’s existence, the hope that the Indians lack in both “Captivity” and True Diary can ultimately be traced back to Mary Rowlandson’s The Sovereignty and Goodness of God—the potent text that scarred the image, truth, and influence of the Native American Indians.

Notes

1. Mary Rowlandson was a Puritan woman from Lancaster, Massachusetts. In 1676, she was abducted by Wampanoag Indians and was ransomed nearly three months later. In 1682, she authored the seminal captivity narrative titled The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.

2. Rowlandson’s narrative spent much time categorizing her captors as uncivilized and barbaric, yet many moments in her text reveal her acculturation in their society and her acceptance of a Native lifestyle.

3. A “remove” in Rowlandson’s text functions in two ways: first, as a section or chapter of her captivity story, and second, as a metaphor for moving further and further from her home culture.
The Absolutely Real Ramifications of a Full-Time Genocide

Works Cited


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III. Generic Adaptations & Dislodging the Narrative Tradition
Transgressing the “Bloody Old Hag”:
Gender in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Duston Family”

Michele Drane

The work being finished, Mrs. Duston laid hold of the long black hair of the warriors, and the women, and the children, and took all their ten scalps, and left the island, which bears her name to this day. According to our notion, it should be held accursed, for her sake. Would that the bloody old hag had been drowned in crossing Contocook river, or that she had sunk over head and ears in a swamp, and been there buried, till summoned forth to confront her victims at the Day of Judgment; or that she had gone astray and been starved to death in the forest, and nothing ever seen of her again, save her skeleton, with the ten scalps twisted round it for a girdle!

—from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “The Duston Family”

When Nathaniel Hawthorne coined these words in 1836 in his short story entitled “The Duston Family,” he revealed a disdain for Hannah Dustan, a lauded seventeenth-century woman who procured her own escape after murdering her captors. Hawthorne’s narrative aligns Dustan with a nineteenth-century anxiety of self-reliant and defiant female identity, one he demonized as a “bloody old hag” (Hawthorne). As Lorayne Carroll eloquently states, “[r]ejecting passivity, sensibility, and sentiment to save herself, [Dustan] symbolizes the dangers of a public woman who assumes personal authority, thinks herself, and, worse, acts on her decisions” (98). For Hawthorne, Dustan is an exceptional example of a public woman free from the confines of domesticity and ungoverned by a rational and valiant husband, the preferred figure of masculinity. His disdain for Dustan’s subversive femininity transfers to his contempt for the Puritan ideology present in the original seventeenth-century narrative. Cotton Mather, who originally penned Dustan’s captivity A Notable Exploit; wherein, Dux Faemia Facti, characterizes her as a tool of God working for the Puritan cause against a Native American threat. For Hawthorne, who exemplifies Dustan as a cold blooded murderer, Mather’s assertion of her acts as that of a Judea Capta fails.
Hawthorne’s text, in a narrative slip of sorts, offers his own preferred ending to this female protagonist’s captivity—her death—and, ultimately, he retools her captivity for his own agenda. Rather than celebrating Hannah’s courage and prowess, “The Duston Family” shifts the reader’s focus to Thomas Dustan, who is painted as the “tender hearted, yet valiant[,]” (Hawthorne) morally superior, heroic figure as a way to reaffirm nineteenth-century masculinity. Interestingly, Hawthorne’s predecessor, Mather, uses Hannah Dustan’s violent acts to demonstrate divine providence, in which she serves as a heroic figure for his agenda. In doing so, both writers appropriate Dustan’s agency. Hawthorne removes her narrative authority entirely by shifting it to her husband, while Cotton Mather places it in the hands of God; in both accounts, however, Dustan evades their containment.

In 1702, when Cotton Mather published his larger history *Magnalia Christi Americana,* Hannah Dustan’s captivity served as a propagandist tool for both political and religious aims. More specifically, Mather wished to promote western expansion as well as Puritanism as the “right” religion. In his account, Dustan and her nurse, Mary Neff, were taken captive from her Haverhill home by Abenaki Indians in 1697 shortly after Dustan had given birth to her eighth child. While her husband, Thomas Dustan, ushered her other seven children to safety, Dustan’s Native American captors killed her new-born baby and sold her to another Native American family. In reaction to the knowledge that they would be forced to run the gauntlet, Dustan, Neff, and Samuel Leonardson, an English boy captured earlier, bludgeoned and scalped ten of their sleeping captors and returned to “civilization.” Mather’s portrayal of Dustan depicts the Indians as satanic and heathen creatures who threaten the ideologies of white male agency, and it upholds the binaries of civilized and uncivilized, Puritan and savage, English and Indian, and male and female. Further, it lifts up Dustan’s violent acts as ordained by God. While Mather’s text tries to contain her transgression of acceptable gender roles through arguments surrounding providence, her actions ultimately disrupt his containment.

In fact, it is Mather’s push for Dustan as a representative of Puritan superiority that many later writers of the nineteenth century such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Timothy Dwight, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Henry Thoreau found problematic and began to question. These authors find fault in Mather’s reasoning and question both “the morality of Duston’s actions” and come to see her “more as a villain than as
an example of heroism and courage” (Levernier 110). Ultimately, Hawthorne retools Cotton Mather’s multiple retellings of Hannah Dustan’s captivity experiences. He attempts to re-affirm white masculinity through the glorification of Thomas Dustan and the demonization of Hannah Dustan; further, in so doing, Hawthorne removes all religious import used by Mather to critique Puritanism. As he tries to contain Hannah Dustan and assert that Puritanism and Mather are responsible for colonization and its negative impact on an American character, Hawthorne actually retools the gender ideologies of Puritanism in his attempt to subvert Dustan’s transgression of gender roles. In the process, he ultimately reveals the ambiguity of gender binaries while becoming the “bigot” he characterizes Mather to be (Hawthorne).

For both Mather and Hawthorne, Hannah Dustan transgresses the social and theological gender binary of masculinity through the narrative’s exertion of a masculinity that defines America. In other words, through Dustan’s active role in the murder and scalping of her captors, she works outside the realm of passive femininity by entering that of privileged masculinity conventionally defined by the male; Dustan’s crossing of this gendered border results in her acquisition of female agency. David T. Haberly illustrates the role of masculinity as he states, “one typical route to both cultural nationhood and literary masculinity is to utilize the Indian to achieve both goals” (294). As Haberly asserts, the English white male’s role as the vanquisher and valiant hero of the stereotypical savage Indian creates a literary masculinity. Contrary to Haberly’s definition of American masculinity, it is the woman who secures her own freedom in both Mather and Hawthorne’s text by taking up “a tomahawk” and killing the “fated slumberers” (Hawthorne). As a result, Dustan transgresses the gender binaries by becoming the masculine, violent vanquisher leaving the bounds of preferred femininity.

Dustan deconstructs Haberly’s assertion that “cultural nationhood and literary masculinity” are created through the use of the Native American through violence (294). As Haberly infers, American masculinity is defined traditionally by the male as the protector and vanquisher of what is stereotypically categorized as morally evil and savage. Haberly further states that “the Puritan capacity for violence, moreover, had created and defined American masculinity…[and] could restore true manhood” (295). Thus, Dustan’s violence reflects “American masculinity” as it becomes an instrument for God and Puritanism, illustrated through Mather’s justification. She becomes the vanquisher of what the
Puritan community deemed evil and savage, and her acts of violence place her within the sphere of masculinity as she actually represents Haberly’s “true manhood” (245). As a result, her actions threaten the validity of the construction of gender binaries. Dustan’s transgression of gender roles ultimately reveals the ambiguity of white male agency and implies that there is no innate construction of gender. As a result, the societal woman can act in both masculine and feminine gender fashions simultaneously. With no set gender construction, women are free to act within and without the binaries of civilized and savage as well as masculine and feminine. Like Mather, Hawthorne later exudes an anxiety for potent female agency as Dustan deconstructs gender in both texts.

Dustan also transgresses the gender binaries because she becomes the public woman acting independently. Hawthorne’s view of Dustan as a “bloody old hag” mirrors his disdain for the public woman of the nineteenth century represented through the female writer (Hawthorne). Hawthorne illustrates his demeaning opinion of women writers, a “damned mob of scribbling women” who, he believed, corrupted the literary community (Mott 122). In his response to Fanny Fern’s newly published novel, *Ruth Hall*, he writes:

> I have been reading *Ruth Hall*, and I must say I enjoyed it a good deal….The woman [Fanny Fern] writes as if the Devil was in her; and that is the only condition under which a woman ever writes anything worth reading. Generally women write like emasculated men, and are only to be distinguished from male authors by greater feebleness and folly; but when they throw off the restraints of decency and come before the public stark naked…then their books are sure to possess character and value….If you meet her [Fanny Fern], I wish you would let her know how much I admire her. (Wood 3)

As seen in his protest, Hawthorne is both intrigued and appalled by women’s writings as he “admire[s] her” after belittling her work (Wood 3). There is no doubt that his language of Fanny Fern is harsh as he compares her writing to that of an “emasculated m[a]n” and one who “writes as if the Devil was in her” (Wood 3). Like women writers, Hannah Dustan’s violence and the consequential valiant masculinity she exudes place her within the public sphere designated for the male during the nineteenth century. In effect, she becomes the public woman as she
Transgressing the “bloody old hag”

secures her own freedom without male assistance, just as nineteenth-century women writers entered the public sphere through their writing. Both Dustan and these women writers become a threat to white masculinity as they become active agents demonstrated through Hawthorne’s discriminating thoughts of the novelist Fanny Fern.

Haberly summarizes the male writer’s anxiety of the nineteenth century by stating, “Male writers and intellectuals appear to have had a general sense that the rules and the roles of gender had somehow been altered…and worried that there was no place for them in this new America” (293). Mather’s rendition of Hannah Dustan’s captivity experience fuels male writers’ anxieties rooted in the rise of women writers in the public sphere. As Dustan’s violence, as well as Mather’s justification of them, place her within the public masculine sphere, many authors of the nineteenth century saw a correlation between the incredible violence she displayed and the transgression of women writers to the public sphere of letters, traditionally dominated by male authors. As a result, Hawthorne, along with Timothy Wright, John Greenleaf Whittier and Henry David Thoreau respond by discrediting and condemning Hannah Dustan and Mather in an attempt to re-vitalize the America and the American masculinity they once knew.

Hawthorne and Mather relinquish Dustan’s authority through the narrative structure, thus providing the threshold for their re-affirmation of America’s masculinity and the re-alignment of gender. In particular, Mather relinquishes Hannah Dustan of all narrative authority through his text’s structure, thus creating the framework for the promotion of Puritanism as the language of civilized people. In Mather’s second recasting of Dustan’s story, his history of New England entitled Magnalia Christi Americana, her “I” is absent from the text suggesting that Mather is the authority through the use of a third-person voice. Additionally, in his first rendition of her story, Humiliations Follow’d with Deliverance, “the quotation marks and third-person voice publicly remove the text from her provenance as the woman who experienced the events and therefore [was] the one who has the authority to shape her experiences through a narrative” (Carroll 57). The quotation marks and third-person voice publicly strip Dustan outside of the narrative; she is stripped of the agency associated with storyteller, and she is encapsulated and captivated into quotation marks and the voice of a Puritan minister. As a result, Mather purges Dustan of her authority and becomes a passive viewer and consumer of Mather’s authorial voice. Lorrayne Carroll further suggests that
“[s]he is rendered an instrument, already transformed from subject to object of the lesson, alienated from the right to tell her story” (57). In other words, her active agency is reduced to an “instrument” interpreted and manipulated by a male authorial voice that uses her story in the promotion of western expansion and Puritanism.

Hannah Dustan becomes the divine instrument for Providence through Mather’s use of religious reference. The biblical story of Jael employs an unlikely heroine, Jael of Israel, as God’s own instrument of destruction; similarly, Mather uses Dustan as an unlikely instrument of God in promotion of Puritanism. After his army is destroyed, “the Lord…sell[s] Sisera into the hands of a woman” (Johnson 20). Though Sisera believes he is being hidden in safety, Jael takes Sisera into her home and kills him by “hammering a nail through his temple and into the ground” while he is sleeping (Johnson 20). Through her violent act, Jael becomes a heroic figure as she serves the Israel nation by conquering the Canaanites. Paralleling this use, Mather employs Jael in his description of Dustan’s incredible acts of violence; he explicitly links the two women, stating that Dustan “took up a Resolution to intimate the action of Jael upon Sisera” (Derounian-Stodola 60). Mather’s explicit use of Jael suggests that, just as Jael is justified in her violence, Dustan, too, is justified in murdering the enemy of the Puritans. Dustan’s exploit becomes one of notability, suggested in Mather’s title, A Notable Exploit, which connotes not only Dustan’s justification in her violence, but also the glorification of her violence. This biblical reference further justifies western expansionism. As Dustan’s violence works in service of nation through the Native Americans’ representation of the biblical Canaanites, and the Puritans become the Israelites. As a result, Mather’s text asserts the Native Americans as the enemy of God’s people and their murder a service to providence. Thus, her violence suggests that the colonization of Native Americans is justifiable and religiously sanctified because Mather uses Jael as biblical precedent in his depiction of the Native American’s murder.

Although Hawthorne follows Mather’s account of Dustan’s captivity experience in his short story, he makes authorial changes that reveal anxieties about potent female agency and identity. Contrary to Mather’s justification of Dustan’s violence as an instrument of Puritanism, Hawthorne’s text condemns her violence in an attempt to subvert her appropriated masculinity and re-establish America’s masculinity as strictly male. Hawthorne’s text implies that Dustan is the evil and ultimate sav-
Transgressing the “bloody old hag”

age instead of Mather’s Indians as seen through her “hardened…heart” (Hawthorne). During her murder of the Native American captors, the text portrays Dustan as a “raging tigress” (Hawthorne). No longer is Dustan a lady; instead, she is transformed into an uncontrollable violent predator. Hawthorne’s language of the murder scene conveys Dustan’s violence as the result of revenge in his statement, “the thought nerved her arm; and the copper colored babes slept the same dead sleep with their Indian mothers” (Hawthorne). The language in this section further denotes Dustan as the savage and killer of children. Consequently, he attempts to subvert her masculinity through his presentation of her as an animalistic murderess and the text’s subsequent condemnation of her.

While Hawthorne’s depiction of Dustan also gives the allusion of a stable nation, the violence of his text further deconstructs the stability of nation. In Christopher Castiglia’s analysis of Indian captivity narratives, he suggests that “in challenging the fixity of race and gender, the captives ultimately subvert their intended function as symbols of the stable nation” (9). As Castiglia argues, through Hawthorne’s display of Dustan’s violence, she becomes the masculine figure and simultaneously deconstructs the supposed fixity of gender. Thus, through the deconstruction of the gender boundaries of masculinity and femininity, Dustan’s textual representation further deconstructs the image of a stable nation. It is exactly this threat of gender liminality that Hawthorne’s narrative seeks to contain. Ultimately, Hannah Dustan acts outside her mandated sphere, and Hawthorne refashions her image as that of a conniving murderer in order to thwart Dustan’s transgression of gender roles.

Hawthorne also retools the character’s stream of consciousness in his description of the Native American’s death to restore white masculinity. His tale recasts the killing scene with the thoughts of Dustan inserted, suggesting that the loss of motherhood caused her transformation into the animalistic “raging tigress” (Hawthorne). Hawthorne reveals Dustan’s thoughts as she “quoth…to herself. ‘Eight children have I borne – and where are the seven and where is the eighth! [and] ‘The thought nerved her arm” as she commenced in the act of murder (Hawthorne). Although there is no record of what Dustan contemplated at the time of her captivity, Hawthorne uses Dustan’s figurative stream of consciousness in his assertion that the loss of motherhood creates the animalistic violence Dustan portrayed in his text. Thus, his interpretation of Dustan’s subconscious furthers his attempt to restore white masculinity because it reveals the importance of motherhood, which is distinctly feminine, for
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the reader and according to accepted standards of gender characterized by his own historical moment.

Contrary to Hawthorne’s recasting of Hannah Dustan, Mather further justifies Dustan’s violence towards the Native Americans as an influence upon western expansion but also as a signifier of Dustan as an instrument in his promotion of Puritanism, what he believed to be the supreme religion. Interestingly, Mather’s condemnation of the supposed violent acts of Dustan’s sister, Elizabeth Emerson, compared with his adorning praise of Dustan’s factual acts of violence against the Abenaki Indians, suggests that Emerson’s violence posed a threat to motherhood and white masculinity while Dustan’s violence was in service to white masculinity and God. Ultimately, both women’s violence threatened white masculinity and the family unit from within; the only difference between them is that Dustan actually murdered the Native Americans who Mather stereotypically signified as “formidable Salvages,… furious Tawnies [and],… the raging Dragons,” clearly denoting barbarism, sub-human, and evil characteristics; there is no evidence that Emerson committed the crime for which she was executed (Derounian-Stodola 58). Mather’s portrayal of Dustan’s captors, “devoid of nearly every characteristic valued by white civilization” and white masculinity, further justifies her violence toward them because they were seen as animalistic and subhuman (Levernier and Derounian-Stodola 63). His stereotypical depiction of the Native Americans uplifts her actions as a heroic service to the nation. Elizabeth’s violence is one against nation and the family, as women were seen as the nurturers of the family in both eighteenth-century social constructions and Puritan codes of gender. On the other hand, Dustan’s is a service to nation and the aims of Puritanism because this belief considered the Native Americans as innately evil and thus, dispensable. As a result, the Native Americans’ annihilation was justifiable.

Hawthorne’s retelling, alternately, attempts to re-affirm masculinity by placing Elizabeth Emerson and Hannah Dustan into the same category, because they both represent the potent female’s threat to motherhood. Through the language of his text, it is clear that Hawthorne has empathy for the Native Americans. Hawthorne’s story depicts them as civilized innocents. In his characterization of the Native Americans he states, “the barbarians sat down to what scanty food Providence had sent them and shared it with their prisoners, as if they had all been the children of one wigwam” (Hawthorne). In his re-appropriation of the Native Americans, Hawthorne does not depict them as the animalis-
“Salvages” Mather asserts (Derounian-Stodola 58). Instead, Hawthorne’s text illustrates charitable and civilized Native Americans “still keeping up domestic worship, with all the regularity of a household at its peaceful fireside” (Hawthorne). By illustrating Dustan’s captors as a civilized family unit who shares their possessions and are “peaceful,” his text condemns Dustan for her violence against them (Hawthorne). Simultaneously, Dustan becomes the “Salvage” as she murders innocent sleeping Native Americans (Derounian-Stodola 58). The text’s portrayal of Dustan’s Native American victims aligns both Elizabeth Emerson supposed and Dustan’s actual violence as “murderous attack[s] on the (Indian) family itself” (Carroll 92). Hawthorne’s text innovatively parallels the Indian family with the nineteenth-century patriarchal family as “[d]omesticity reconstitutes itself in the woods” (Carroll 95). Consequently, Dustan’s violence against the civilized family of Native Americans becomes a further attempt to re-affirm masculinity, because she represents a potential threat to the American family unit and, more specifically, passive motherhood.

Dustan’s threat to motherhood also becomes a larger one to nation. Hawthorne’s portrayal of Dustan mirrors the anxieties of the nineteenth century characterized by a newly separated, independent America where “men turned their attention to gender rather than national identity and enforced with renewed vigor the ‘essential’ differences between men and women” (Castiglia 138). Women’s containment, as well as author’s depictions of female captives, was necessary in the nineteenth century, resulting in the American man’s distinction of woman’s domestic (private) space, characterized by passivity and the tending of children, and the man’s public, highly politicized outer world. Dustan’s violence, although it took place one century earlier, represented a threat against Republican Motherhood, which encompassed the nineteenth century preferred women’s gender roles. Linda Kerber illustrates this ideal stating “the Republican Mother insured the division between public and private spheres” by “demonstrating her patriotism through domestic self-sacrifice” (Castiglia 151). As a result, the gender binaries relate motherhood closely with the national identity and virtue of America. In other words, this ideal inferred that women showed their patriotic duty through their devotion to their children within domesticity. Consequently, any woman, like Dustan, who went against or threatened these values of Republican Motherhood, deconstructed the national identity of America. As Dustan acts violently against the family unit of “two stout
warriors, three squaws, and seven children,” she poses a threat to the nation (Hawthorne). Instead of exemplifying Republican Motherhood by sacrificing herself for her children, she becomes a murderer of Native American children and the dismantler of the family unit. Not only is she a threat to her Native American captors, but Hawthorne also sees her as a threat to national identity and, as such, “offers Thomas Duston’s experiences as the crux of the tale” in an attempt to uphold white male agency and subvert the anxieties of potent female identity outside of domesticity (Carroll 94).

In addition to his demonization of Dustan, Hawthorne furthers his attempt to re-establish white masculinity through the narrative by framing Thomas Dustan as a potent valiant masculine figure. Hawthorne’s text displays Thomas Dustan as the ultimate heroic figure as he, “being on horseback, immediately set off full speed to look after the safety of his family” (Hawthorne). The language Hawthorne uses to depict Master Dustan connotes an old world masculine virtue; he embodies potent masculinity as the savior and “swift as the wind” protector of his family (Hawthorne). Hawthorne’s language coupled with the magnitude of narrative space, as he spends almost a page and a half primarily on a brief story of Hannah Dustan’s male authorial figure, Thomas Dustan, illustrates his attempt to reclaim masculinity through the patriarchal figure. Additionally, the valiant language seems overwhelming to the reader conveying Hawthorne’s subversion of Hannah Dustan’s masculinity through the focus of Master Dustan’s valiancy. Carroll also suggests that “Hawthorne shifts the focus to certify the true hero/heroine…. ‘Tenderhearted yet valiant,’ Thomas Duston embodies an array of morally superior characteristics notably deficient in his wife” (98). Thomas Dustan becomes the illustrator of American masculinity in his violence toward the Native Americans, asserting Hawthorne’s attempt to realign the binaries of gender. As Carroll suggests, in contrast with Hannah Dustan’s violence against family, Thomas Dustan becomes the valiant savior of the family as Hawthorne’s tool for white masculinities’ re-alignment.

Hawthorne’s story suggests that Mather and the Puritanism he promotes have culpability in western expansion and the annihilation of Native Americans. His disuse of the religious justification Mather implements suggests that Hannah Dustan is simply a “blood old hag” and a calculated murderess as opposed to Mather’s portrayal of her as the hand of God (Hawthorne). Hawthorne’s contempt toward Mather in his short
Transgressing the “bloody old hag”

story indicates that he struggled with his Puritan ancestry and his family’s use of Puritanism as a justification for genocide. As Kathryn McCulloch Nowell argues, “one of the Hawthorne ancestors was a prominent judge in the Salem witch trials, and he was to figure largely, if indirectly, in Hawthorne’s later interest in the Puritans” (9). As a result, Hawthorne criticizes Mather’s use of Hannah Dustan as a religious instrument suggesting that Puritanism is the supreme religion and its justification for the murder of innocent people. By removing the religious import Mather uses through his biblical parallel with Jael, Hawthorne eradicates all divine justification of Hannah Dustan’s violence against the Native Americans. This narrative reveals both the hypocrisy Hawthorne sees in Mather’s use of Puritan ideologies and re-affirms white masculinity through his demonization of Hannah Dustan’s subversive femininity, combined with the glorification of Thomas Dustan’s valiant manliness. Dustan becomes, for Hawthorne, “the bloody old hag” and an “awful woman” in opposition to “that tender hearted, yet valiant man, her husband” (Hawthorne). Ultimately, Hawthorne offers no justification for Dustan, and his text holds both her and Mather—and the Puritan character—accountable for her violence.

Hawthorne’s direct reference to Mather also illustrates his suggestion that not only is Dustan a conniving murderess of the innocent Native Americans, but that Mather and Puritanism are also culpable. Hawthorne calls attention to Mather’s disapproval of the Abenaki Indians as worshipers of Catholicism; he states, “Mather, like an old hardhearted, pedantic bigot, as he was, seems trebly to exult in the destruction of these poor wretches, on account of their Popish superstitions” (Hawthorne). Mather equates the Indian captors to Catholics to assert Puritanism as a supreme religion. Hawthorne sees Mather as a culpable accomplice in the annihilation of the Abenaki Indians because he “ex[alts] in [their] destruction” and justifies the annihilation by representing them as Catholic (Hawthorne). Additionally, “through Hannah Duston, Mather’s cruelty is literalized in the murders of the ‘touching’ Indians” (Carroll 95). Thus, Hawthorne’s text illustrates Hannah Dustan as an instrument of Puritan violence and intolerance as she and Mather are aligned through Dustan’s “hardened” heart and Mather’s portrayal as “an old-hearted pedantic bigot” (Hawthorne). Through their literal connection, Mather, as well as the Puritanism he promotes, becomes culpable for the Native Americans’ death, although it was Hannah Dustan who committed the murders. As Johnson states,
“Hawthorne’s condemnation does focus on Hannah; but for him, Hannah is Mather’s creation and Mather’s symbol, used for Mather’s ends” (31). As a result, although Dustan wielded the ax, it is Mather’s editorial voice which Hawthorne finds culpable because Mather’s text promotes Puritanism (and Dustan as the instrument of Puritanism) through her loss of narrative voice and Mather’s justification of her violence as a service to divine providence.

Mather’s text also suggests that Puritanism holds culpability for the annihilation of Native Americans as he justifies Dustan’s violence toward them. Levernier and Derounian-Stodola suggest that “[c]aptivity narratives provided Puritans an opportunity for confirming and then publicizing their suspicions about the character of the Indian, who was generally depicted as hopelessly beyond the pale of civilization and therefore deserving of annihilation” (61). Dustan’s violence toward the Native Americans fueled Mather promotion of the Puritan’s stereotypical depiction of the Native American as one so evil that they were beyond saving. As a result, Mather’s text justifies Dustan’s violence toward them because she is God’s instrument in purging the land of evil. Mather’s justification of Dustan’s violence ultimately deconstructs Puritanism as the one civilized religion. Mather justifies her violence by comparing her with the biblical Jael where the Native Americans become the evil Canaanites who “would be subdued in the name of the Puritan Jehovah” (Levernier and Derouninan-Stodola 17). In Mather’s text, Dustan is not the calculated murderess Hawthorne describes, but God’s instrument in the promotion of Puritanism. As a result, in Mather’s use of the biblical story of Jael, Puritanism becomes culpable for the annihilation of Native Americans because it condones the violence she exhibits as necessary.

Contrary to Hawthorne’s intent, he contradicts the image of Dustan’s husband because of Thomas Dustan’s ultimate feminization. As Haberly asserts, the male’s violence toward the Indian is an important aspect of American masculinity. However, in Hawthorne’s text, it is Hannah Dustan who assumes the role of American masculinity as she violently murders and scalps ten of her Indian captors. Instead of acting as the masculine figure, Thomas Dustan acts as the maternal figure as he shepherds his children to safety. The language in this scene such as, “he felt his heart yearn towards these seven poor helpless children, as if each were singly possessed of his whole affections,” suggests a feminization of Thomas Dustan (Hawthorne). His text’s feminized language of Thomas
Dustan coupled with Haberly’s definition of “American masculinity” reveal contradictions to the perceived fixed gender roles. Dustan's transgression of gender and Thomas Dustan's feminization imply that man and woman can exhibit both feminine and masculine characteristics resulting in the ambiguity of gender roles. Johnson further asserts the text’s deconstruction of gender as he notes “[i]ronically, Hawthorne’s favored hero, the ‘tendered-hearted’ Thomas Dustan, also appears to cross gender boundaries by adopting a feminine role in the story” (28). Instead of helping his wife and facilitating Dustan’s ability to conduct her maternal duty by ushering her children to safety, Thomas Dustan takes her responsibility and flees from the Native Americans with his children, leaving his wife and new born child to fend for themselves against the “savage threat.” As a result, Hawthorne’s attempt to re-affirm white masculinity and the fixity of nineteenth-century gender boundaries becomes problematic through the text’s feminization of Thomas Dustan, Hawthorne’s attempt at a potent masculine focus.

Thomas Dustan's fictionalized stream of consciousness further complicates the restoration of gender binaries. While attempting to subvert Hannah Dustan's transgression of accepted gender roles, Hawthorne gives Dustan the masculine authority for the procurement of her own safety through its justification of Thomas Dustan's abandonment of his wife and child. Upon leaving his wife, Thomas Dustan was “afforded…a comfortable hope that she would hold her own, even in a contest with a whole tribe of Indians” (Hawthorne). Here, the text assumes that “she would hold her own” and, as such, implies that it is Hannah Dustan who has the physical strength and masculinity needed to fight against the threat of the Abenaki Indians—clearly not the description of passive femininity (Hawthorne). Through Thomas Dustan’s stream of consciousness, Hawthorne’s text places Dustan into the realm of masculinity and gives her the agency and independence to protect herself in the face of a potent adversity. Weis suggests that “[c]ontemporary readers may be more suspicious of Duston’s motives for not defending his wife: Leslie Fiedler, for instance,…points out that Duston abandoned his wife because he deemed her too weak to be moved” (58). According to Leslie Fiedler, Thomas Dustan’s abandonment of his wife reveals Hannah Dustan’s feminine weakness. However, Hawthorne’s use of stream of consciousness actually suggests that the abandonment of Dustan was due to his confidence in his wife’s strength and agency. As Hawthorne
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attempts to uphold gender binaries, his text instead intimates that Hannah Dustan can represent masculine agency.

Thomas Dustan's stream of consciousness may also serve as a foreshadowing of Hannah Dustan's violence toward her Indian captors as a transgression of gender boundaries. The language he uses suggests that Dustan can “hold her own” displaying Haberly’s “American Masculinity,” and its masculine violence associated with the Native American (Hawthorne). As Haberly establishes, American masculinity is designated for the male. Thomas Dustan's proclamation connotes violence: she has to “hold her own” through violence against the Native Americans and her transgression of masculinity (Hawthorne). This phrase also signifies strength associated with the male. Hawthorne's interpretation of Thomas Dustan's justification for the abandonment of his wife signifies the foreshadowing of not only her violence against her captors but also her exertion of white masculinity.

Ultimately, Hawthorne becomes the “bigot” he defines Mather as. As Mather's multiple recastings of Hannah Dustan were used as a foregrounding and influence upon Hawthorne's retelling of her story, he also uses Mather's text to comment on Puritanism. But, interestingly, it is the same ideologies of gender which Puritanism upheld that Hawthorne tries to reaffirm in his rendition of Dustan's captivity. Essentially, Hawthorne uses the same ideology of Puritanism (which he despises) in his re-establishment of white masculinity in the nineteenth century. Both the gender ideologies of Puritanism and those of the nineteenth century uphold the male as the authority figure and the female as the passive figure, held captive to domesticity and providence. Both Hawthorne's and Mather's texts attempt to uphold white masculinity through their framing of Dustan's narrative in the third person, thus reducing Dustan to enacting the role of a passive listener. As a result, her narrative becomes controlled and protected from her transgression of gender roles by Hawthorne and Mather, as the narrative male authority. Hawthorne's text also “decidedly turned the father into the hero of the story” in an attempt to subvert Hannah Dustan’s transgression of gender roles and places masculinity within the hands of the male (Weis 58). In sum, both texts attempt to contain Hannah Dustan within passive femininity and within the realm of domesticity: Mather by way of asserting Dustan as an instrument of providence and Hawthorne by reducing her to a “bloody old hag” who was innately evil (Hawthorne). As a result, while Haw-
thorne attempts to contain Dustan’s masculinity, he is simultaneously trying to uphold the gender ideologies of a patriarchal Puritan system.

According to Carroll, Hawthorne’s text asserts that Dustan commits a “social rather than theological” crime (92). Contrary to Carroll’s assertion, Hawthorne exerts white male agency through his use of both the theological and social ideologies because they are one in the same. He sees Dustan’s violence as a failure of domesticity as she acts in the wilderness, a public space, away from figures of white male agency, like Thomas Dustan. In other words, “Hawthorne’s disgust is not that Hannah Duston slaughtered Native Americans, but that she rescues herself, meaning that she transgressed against her gender” (Humphreys 159). As Sarah Humphreys asserts, the text’s discomfort with Dustan is her transgression into the public sphere as she procures her own safety instead of passively waiting for rescue from the male authority. Thus, her crime becomes a social as well as theological one because the “theological” ideologies for which he condemns Mather are essentially identical to the “social” ideologies Hawthorne tries to reaffirm in his recasting of Hannah Dustan. Within both Puritanism and the gender ideology of the nineteenth century, the public woman was detrimental to society and innately evil resulting in the need of their containment within passive femininity. Hannah Dustan becomes the public woman and threatens the stability of both the social and theological gender ideologies through her violent acts. Thus, Mather’s and Hawthorne’s respective texts contain her within passive femininity by stealing her agency. While Mather proclaims that her captivity is one of providence by asserting that she “took up a Resolution to intimate the Action of Jael,” Hawthorne presents Thomas Dustan as the narrative’s hero (Derounian-Stodola 60). Although their treatment of Dustan’s narrative is different, they both align in their preservation of white male agency through their containment of her transgression against gender roles, governed by masculinity. While he condemns Mather for using Puritanism politically, Hawthorne becomes the “bigot” he calls Mather, because he uses the same ideological theology in his own re-affirmation of white masculinity (Hawthorne).

Hannah Dustan’s captivity experience has fascinated audiences from its introduction into the literary community, beginning with Cotton Mather’s Magnalia Christi Americana (one of the three renditions of Hannah Dustan he published). She has since become an exceptional muse for later re-tellers of her captivity, such as, Nathaniel Hawthorne.
Because she did not author her own captivity narrative, her story becomes one which authors re-appropriate to serve their own agendas. For that reason, Dustan has become a representation of many ideals within the Indian captivity canon. Yet, the universality of her story lies in the common goal of these renditions: to uphold white male agency.

Both Mather and Hawthorne attempt to uphold white male agency but take different narrative paths. While Mather fashions Dustan’s captivity experience for the purpose of justifying western expansion and exalting Puritanism as the supreme religion, Hawthorne’s disdain for Hannah Dustan, as the “bloody old hag,” aligns with the nineteenth-century anxiety of the public woman who represented potent femininity (Hawthorne). For both authors, Dustan represents a defiant femininity which they attempt to contain: Mather, through his religious import signifying the justification of Dustan’s violence, and Hawthorne, through his condemnation of Dustan and his focus, narratively, on Thomas Dustan. Overall, by glorifying Thomas Dustan and demonizing violent femininity, Hawthorne reveals a critique of Puritanism and attempts to reaffirm white masculinity in his short story, “The Duston Family.” By removing religion from his text, he also shows both Puritan culpability for the violence of colonization and simultaneously attempts to uphold the gendered theological ideologies of Puritanism. Additionally, Hawthorne tries to contain Dustan, simultaneously critiquing Mather’s exultation of Puritanism. However, by doing so, he actually re-appropriates the gender binaries of male and female, active and passive, and civilized and uncivilized. As a result, by attempting to subvert Hannah Dustan’s transgression of gender roles, Hawthorne deconstructs the gender ideologies of both the nineteenth century and Puritanism.

Notes

1. *Dux Faemina Facti* literally means a woman leader in the deed; also characterized as a heroic woman.

2. *Magnalia Christi Americana* is Mather’s ecclesiastical history of New-England, in which Hannah Dustan’s narrative is one of many.

3. During the eighteenth century, women were seen as inferior to men and passive in their societal roles. Hannah Dustan becomes Mather’s tool in the Puritan goal to cleanse the culture of the Americas of what the Puritans perceived to be sinful, uncivilized practices.

5. Biblical story found in Judges 4 and 5 depicts how Jael, wife of Heber the Kenite, offered hospitality to Sisera, the Canaanite general, and then killed him. Sisera sought refuge with the Kenites, who had ties with the Israelites, following a series of Israeliite victories over the superior Canaanite army.

6. In 1693, Dustan’s unmarried sister, Elizabeth Emerson, was found guilty of infanticide and hanged. Cotton Mather preached the execution sermon and chastised Elizabeth for tainting the community; the accused protested that she was innocent of killing her newborn twins, but admitted that she was guilty of rebellious behavior (Derounian-Stodola 55).

7. Republican Motherhood is an ideal of women’s societal role created in the nineteenth century. The Republican mother ensured the separation of the private and public spheres of society as she demonstrated her patriotism by sacrificing herself to domesticity.

8. Alternately, in the original, Mather only devotes half of the narrative’s first page to Thomas Dustan.

9. Puritan gender ideology of the eighteenth century surmised that because the woman enacted the original sin all women were innately bad or had the tendency of being evil. Additionally, the women’s primary role in Puritan society, like that of the nineteenth century, was domesticity and the moral preservation of the family. Authority was also reserved for the male both in the public and private spheres of Puritan society. Consequently, women of both Puritanism and the nineteenth century were held captive in domesticity in patriarchal economies.

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Creating the Autonomous Early American Woman: Angela Carter and Caroline Gordon (Re) Employ the Female Captivity Narrative Genre

Wayne Bell

Annette Trefzer in her work *Disturbing Indians: The Archaeology of Southern Fiction* writes, “In rewriting the Wiley captivity [Gordon] therefore purposely foregrounded precisely those questions about race, blood, and sex central not only to the suspense and meaning of a narrative about captivity but also to a society that was struggling with problems of racial assimilation and miscegenation” (72). Trefzer lists several reasons how and for what purposes Gordon moves away from the standard female captivity narrative formula as a means of critiquing the genre’s agenda. The same strategies Trefzer credits Gordon with challenging the female captive’s role are evident, as well, in Angela Carter’s “Our Lady of the Massacre.” By narrating their stories from the point of view of the female captive, Gordon and Carter allow the story to unfold from the subjective female perspective, which provides their captives with the majority of agency for their survival, escape, and acculturation into either Native American or white American cultures. Trefzer continues, “Because sexual control and reproduction affect the very nature of colonial relations, the captivity of a white woman endangers the hierarchies of authority and potentially contests the very power structure of colonial society itself” (73). Highlighting “repressed anxieties about sexual violation, possession, and desire…Gordon dramatizes not only her character’s personal vulnerability and the danger to the integrity of her body but also the potential vulnerability of the American space” (73). Lastly, Gordon’s and Carter’s suggestion of sex between white American women and Native American men touches on the national anxiety on sex and race. In doing so, this sexual and racial anxiety would further encroach upon the European American belief in its self-assumed, manifest right to possess and rule America rather than to share it with the indigenous population.
This paper examines the ways in which both Angela Carter and Caroline Gordon deem it important to use their reemployed female captivity narratives as tools for critiquing the agendas of early American female Indian captivity narratives which highlight paternal heroism as the only hope for rescue and religious faith as the only means for salvation for the captive female. Ministerial editors of the original female captivity narratives, such as Cotton Mather, avoid assigning any of the primary aspects of the agency for survival and rescue into the hands of the captive female. For these figures, the woman’s faith in God is the ultimate source of redemption and return to the white American community the primary goal. The manifestation of the God-ordained return must ultimately be at the hands of the white American male, either by physical rescue or payment of a ransom. Angela Carter and Caroline Gordon resist such framing and present their female captives as individuals capable of taking responsibility for their own survival and acculturation into Native American society. Both authors spotlight their narrator’s efforts towards autonomy. In doing so Carter and Gordon deconstruct the paternal, religious and nationalistic agendas present in the early American genre. Carter and Gordon, as they approach their critiques of the genre, remove the agency for the captive female’s survival, rescue, and restoration away from the male hero and the religious community, assigning it to the captive female, proving her to be an intelligent and autonomous agent of her own eventual fate.

Kentucky author Caroline Gordon wrote her account of the Native American captivity of Jinny Wiley, incorporating a mixture of events from the historical record as related by William Elsey Connelly in The Eastern Kentucky Papers with her own fiction. British writer Angela Carter gives her reader a purely fictional captivity narrative in her short story. Both Carter and Gordon, in reemploying the American female’s Indian captivity narrative, challenge the genre’s traditional role for the captive white female in which the author regards her as a commodity that can be assigned or “othered” to fulfill various roles for the purpose of highlighting paternal rescue and return back into the protection of the white religious community. According to the original examples of captivity narratives, therein resides the path to redemption and the return to the restoration of lost purity. The white female, once restored, becomes a symbol of white national strength over Native American culture and white America’s alleged destiny to expand its borders regardless of the cost to the Native Americans’ rights to their homelands and way
of life. An important aspect of the white female’s return is the symbolic restoring of her to a state of purity through confession of sin and the ultimate redemptive power of the church. The symbolic act of restoring the returned captive woman to a state of purity allows the redeemed captive woman to once again fulfill her role as the representative of the sanctity of the white man’s ordained right to claim all of the American lands for himself.

An unrepentant white woman captured and held by Native Americans was deemed ruined and unfit for proper society if suspected of having sex during her captivity. Colin Callaway offers insights into the historical impression among white men concerning sex between whites and American Indians. There was a general belief that “mixed bloods inherited the worst rather than the best characteristics of both parents” (118). Yet, “Indians do not appear to have been so concerned about racial purity. A significant number of mixed-blood...rose to positions of leadership in Indian society” (118). Carter’s fictional minister Jabez Mathers refers to the supposedly violated female captive as “a morsel plucked from Satan” (Carter 54). The minister tells Mary “to thank God that I have been rescued from the savage and beg the Good Lord’s forgiveness for straying from His ways” (54). Mary realizes “that repentance is the fashion in these parts and the more of it I show, the better it will be for me” (55). Mary is returned to what she perceives as her tainted standing in the white community as “the same skivvy as I’d been in Lancashire and no openings for a whore in the Community of the Saints, either, if I could have found in my heart the least desire to take up my old trade again. But that I could not; the Indians damned me for a good woman once and for all” (Carter 56). As a part of her adopted Native American family, Mary found that the guilt and stigma of her former life—as a thief and a whore—no longer existed.

The genre of the female captivity narrative underscores the subservient state in which white women found themselves in their own communities. Yet, the captivity narrative did provide a somewhat disguised vehicle through which these women could sometimes demonstrate the heartfelt dissatisfaction they felt towards their treatment as a gender that was believed to be mentally and emotionally inferior to their white male counterpart. This message of dissatisfaction most often found its voice as the captive expressed a sense of comfort in the respect and freedom she realized amongst the Native Americans that was sorely lacking for women in white American societies. The “rescued” white woman often,
inwardly, and seldom openly, expressed a sense of remorse at her return and redemption back into the Eurocentric white male dominated culture. Lorrainey Carroll, in the epilogue to her book *Rhetorical Drag*, compares the status of the white American female to that of the African American slave: “White women, although not enfranchised, might speak to the public (provided the appropriate dispensations were in place), while most people of color held a different social or even ontological status; indeed, in many cases, they were not granted the basic acknowledgement of personhood” (186). For the early American white female, whatever agency of expression existed for her placed her at the very bottom of a list where African American slaves, the next in line, were not even acknowledged as persons.

The social positioning of the early frontier woman places her barely above the victims of American slavery. In Gordon’s narrative “The Captive,” however, the main character Jinny Wiley early on displays some degrees of resistance and disaffection with her status within her own society. Prior to the attack on the Wiley household by a band of Native Americans, Jinny reflects about her husband Tom’s plans to make a trip to sell ginseng: “I knew if he got to studying about it he wouldn’t go and I was bound he should make the trip, Indians or no Indians” (Gordon 175). Jinny’s words bear a sense of strength that is not evidenced by women in most of the original female captivity narratives. White women were most often regarded as little more than property and often subjected to slave-like servitude to their husbands, having little or no effect on her own fate or that of her family and community. Many subjects of the female captivity narrative during their period of captivity became aware of the captive nature of their lives as members of the white community. Anne Jones writes: “Whereas southern manhood could be demonstrated by obtaining an ideal southern woman, southern womanhood had to be shown by becoming one” (qtd. In Manning 80). In Jinny’s case, demonstrating strength through the language of an early southern frontier woman was Gordon’s method for allowing her character to insert herself into the struggle for existence amongst the dangers and hardships of this trying period of history. Such a role for the captive female was most often lacking in the editorialized versions of early captivity narratives.

Carter’s “Our Lady of the Massacre” tells the story of an orphaned British girl who, in order to survive, is forced in to a life, in England, as a thief and a whore. The girl is eventually sent to America to serve a
sentence as an indentured servant. Carter’s fictional work builds upon an exclusively American genre in order to critique its use of the female captive’s story as a tool to further the ideals of female inferiority and dependency upon men and the church for salvation. In the introduction to *Critical Essays on Angela Carter*, Lindsey Tucker analyzes Carter’s critical (re)employment of the captivity genre:

Carter also rewrites the captivity narrative, creating, in “Our Lady of the Massacre,” a speaker who is no maiden but instead an English prostitute who finds her life among the Indians a civilizing experience, while her rescue by the Puritan “community of the Saints” is characterized both by violence and intolerance. Carter’s politics is evident in these stories. (6-7)

“Our Lady of the Massacre” originates in a fictional British cultural background. Mary tells us by way of introducing her history, “But I first saw light in the county of Lancashire in Old England in the year of Our Lord16_—” (Carter 41). Unlike Gordon’s Jinny Wiley, Mary possesses little or no agency at the beginning of her story, except that she manages to survive as a thief and a whore. In fact, the story begins with Mary admitting that “My name is neither here nor there since I used several in the Old World; then there is my, as it were, wilderness name, that now I never speak of; and, now what I call myself in this place, therefore my name is no clue as to my person nor my life as to my nature” (41). Mary has lived as a homeless orphan, a criminal, a slave, and eventually as an adopted and respected Native American woman before being returned to the oppressive position of a woman in white culture. Mary lays no claim to any agency based upon her past, either in England or in America. The only episode of Mary’s life in which she knew herself to have acquired respect was as a Native American woman. Therefore, Mary’s Native American name identifies her as an autonomous being.

Carter, as she embarks upon the creation of this work of reemploying the American genre that is, by tradition, a narration depicting an American Indian captivity of an American white female, has started with a completely unique point of view from which to build the characterization of her captivity victim. Carter creates from this poor and orphaned British girl, abandoned and literally kicked out by her mother country, a classic female victim of Indian captivity. As the story progresses, Carter’s tale of Mary’s captivity is virtually indistinguishable from
those of Wiley, Rowlandson, Duston, or any other of the number of American females who return from Native American captivity to relate their story to the public. The primary departure for Carter’s story lies in the fact that Mary is British. Mary’s story does take on the trappings of a typical Indian captivity narrative after she has been banished to America to serve as an indentured slave and makes her escape from her overseer by “whack(ing) off both his ears” after his attempt to rape her (Carter 43). He tells Mary “that, since I had been a whore in Cheapside, I should not play the honest maid with him in Virginia” (43). The fact that Mary must escape from white culture and her standing as a white woman within that culture is a significant departure from the editorialized early American female captivity narrative. Gordon departs as well from the basic formula of the genre since Jinny must escape from her Native American family and beg for the protection of the white people at the fort from the angry Mad Dog as he calls to her from outside the fort’s fence: “Whoopee!...whoopee!...pretty Jinny! (209), trying to entice her back to him so that he can kill her for running away. Beyond these departures from the basic captivity genre formula, both Carter and Gordon follow the pattern of removal, assimilation, and eventual return that the reader would expect to find unfolding in the original captivity narrative genre. Carter and Gordon have created in Jinny and Mary strong women who take charge and create their respective autonomies. By creating characters that work at cross purposes to the ideas of the female in need of rescue and dependent upon the providence of God and male protectors for her survival, Carter and Gordon are requiring the reader to relinquish their preconceived notions on the Native American as a brute savage and the white female captive as stolen property in need of recovery. Carter’s and Gordon’s captivity narratives refocus the readers’ attention upon the autonomy of the women captives and away from the nationalistic, racial, and sexist agendas of the early captivity narrative.

W. J. Stuckey, in the preface to his book *Caroline Gordon*, quotes the author’s thoughts concerning reading works such as her own with an open mind:

The reader who wants to read understandingly—whether he is reading *War and Peace* or the admirable detective stories of Raymond Chandler—must perform an act of self-abasement. He must lay aside his own opinions for the time being, and ask
himself not why Mr. Chandler or Count Tolstoi didn’t write the kind of book he would like to see them write, but what kind of book they have actually written. That is, he must try to understand what the fiction writer has accomplished before he allows himself to express an opinion on how—or why—he went about accomplishing it. (5)

Gordon’s and Carter’s readers, in other words, must lay aside ordinary notions of paternal rescue and religious faith as the common roads for salvation and return that are the standards of the original female captivity narrative. Both authors no longer cast the captive female as a national representative of a subservient and repressed gender whose beliefs in the providence of God and paternal strength are the only paths to salvation and rescue. Stuckey tells the reader that “[i]n getting rid of the old fashioned style with its stilted construction and abstract language, Miss Gordon turned a rather flat narrative into a story of personal heroism” (Stuckey 114). Carter and Gordon create, in Jinny and Mary, characters that allow the reader to become sympathetic to these women’s struggle in navigating the difficult terrain between Native American captivity and white patriarchal culture. Jinny, wondering about her assimilation into the Native American tribe that she was becoming a part of asks a question of the old chief: “I asked him wouldn’t I still be a white woman after I was adopted into the tribe but he said no, the white blood would go out of me and the Spirit would send Indian blood to take its place, and then I would feel like an Indian and know all the Indian ways and maybe get to be a wise woman like his old granny” (Gordon 195). After being taken captive, Jinny learns that Native American women are revered for their wisdom and as keepers of tribal traditions such as the medicinal uses of “yarbs and roots” (195). Carter’s narrator lived among white culture, both in England and in America and suffered as a part of the dregs of both societies. She never knew what it was like to be respected as a woman until she became part of Native American culture. Mary is told by her Native American “mother” concerning her life before becoming part of her Native American family, “If you were no good, nobody would have had you” (Carter 49). By strategically circumventing the readers’ conventional expectations of a successful, paternalistic rescue and a return of the white female to the redemptive care of white culture, both authors successfully highlight the feminist
ideals of equality, intellect, and emotional stability, as their fictional narratives chip away at the notion of female inferiority and male superiority.

In addition to recasting the role of the white female in their captivity narratives, Carter and Gordon must also contend with a homogenized American culture. June Namias writes concerning the new European American: “As Europeans and their descendants moved onto successive frontiers, they confronted their own gender and sexuality in new ways. Gender had to be viewed in the context of a competing culture” (1). The many white European cultures that were coming to America were bringing with them the idea of white superiority; in America, this notion took on new and horrifying meaning when confronted with the “danger from a group they consider ‘other’” (Namias 1). Those that comprise this new white culture see themselves as superior to all other non-white cultures, including Native Americans, depicted as savage and depraved creatures. The savage representation of Native Americans resulted in many ways from the white male’s need to cast women as helpless and gullible creatures requiring male protection. Namias writes:

Capture as seen by most whites in North America was an act of brutality and savagery against an innocent, civilized, and superior foe, one aspect of what was labeled ‘savage war’. It employed elements not found in European warfare in the early modern or modern periods—a forced, prolonged imprisonment with the enemy, a fearful contamination, a separation from one’s community, a loss of spouse and children, and communion with or at least relentless exposure to representatives of the devil. (2-3)

Native Americans were painted as nonhuman to justify their removal from their lands when, in actuality, attacks upon white settlers were in response to the white encroachment upon their lands and interruption of their traditional way of life. Mary’s first encounter with Native Americans after she fled from her overseer occurs when she sees her soon-to-be adoptive mother in the woods: “I heard a woman singing and saw one of the savage tribe in a clearing … I saw she had no weapon but was picking herbs and putting them in a fine basket” (Carter 45). Carter creates a peaceful image of a Native American woman, helping to counter the traditional image of Indian savagery. Gordon provides a description of the “rock house” and its paintings of “deer and buffalo and turtles as big as a man, painted in red and in black on the rock”
(Gordon 187). This description helps to develop for the reader the idea of a civilized and artistic people who desire to preserve their heritage in these paintings versus the bloodthirsty savage image that plays out in early captivity narratives.

As white American settlers moved further into territories that the various Native American tribes had claimed as their land for generations, incidents of violent confrontation rose sharply. In attacking white settlement, Native Americans usually killed white men immediately, as they posed the greatest threat. Their prisoners of choice were the easily removable women and children. Some settlers were taken as retribution for tribesmen lost in battle or for their possible value in negotiating a ransom payment. Captives that survived and were rescued or returned for ransom, for what Norman Heard describes as “restoration” into white culture, varied in their ability to fully accept their return to white society, with some preferring to remain with their Native American captors. Heard writes, “it would seem that [such] restoration would result in rapid reacclimation for all save those captured at a very early age. [. . .] There is evidence that for many former captives the readjustment to white civilization was exceedingly difficult. Some redeemed captives died without ever losing their desire to return to the Indians” (138).

Carter’s fictional character Mary laments her removal from her Native American kinsmen saying that she will “but sit and weep by the waters of Babylon” (Carter 56). Mary tells her adoptive “mother” that among the Native Americans “neither desire nor want can make a thief of me, here…As for my whoring…the Indians exchange it for free or not at all.” Mary’s mother then reminds her daughter: “Then you are a good woman in spite of yourself among the Indians and so I think you will remain” (Carter 49). Mary’s “rescue” removes her from a culture in which she is given respect as a human being and learns to recognize her worth as a woman and returns her to the white culture where no female is respected or is revered for her role as a woman.

In Gordon’s fictionalized captivity account, we read of Jinny’s return to white society, not as a result of white paternal rescue or in response to a ransom payment but as an act of survival on the part of Jinny herself. She knows that, as a runaway, she is destined to die if recaptured by her new owner Mad Dog. Jinny must quickly convince the white people at the fort that she stumbles upon while fleeing Mad Dog and his group that “I’m Jinny Wiley…Jinny Wiley that the Indians stole” (Gordon 208). Once the safety of the stockade fence separates Jinny from Mad Dog,
Jinny’s exclamation of “‘Lord God,’ I said, ‘I was lucky to git away from them Indians!’” (209), helps to further secure Jinny the protection of the white settlers. Jinny tells the reader concerning her life with the Native Americans: “The old chief was like a father to me, and the young ones knew I belonged to him and didn’t bother me” (Gordon 194). However, Jinny was no longer secured by the knowledge of the protection she had enjoyed as the adopted child of the old chief. As the “property” of Mad Dog, and her life in jeopardy as a runaway, Jinny had to forsake her life among the Native Americans in return for protection from white Americans. Jinny and Mary both would have chosen life within the Native American culture over a return to white American culture. Jinny would have, at one time, agreed with Mary’s sentiment of having “more dread of the white man, which I knew, than of the red man, who was at that time unknown to me” (Carter 45). Many returned female captives in the original narratives would have shared this sentiment.

Carter and Gordon navigate past the standard trappings of the original female captivity narratives that would involve successful rescue by the white male hero, resulting from the captive female’s faith in the providence of God, or as a ministerial editor like “[Increase] Mather implies, that it was the prayers of the churches that had moved God to effect the safe return of these captives. It was not individual courage and heroism but faith in the power of God that had proved efficacious” (Ebersole 65). According to Mather’s reworking of the captive’s ordeal, faith in God alone was the only guarantee for safe return to the community and the symbolic restoration of purity. Gary Ebersole further explains that “[i]n Mather’s hands historical events in New England, including Indian captivity, continued to be represented as signs from God of His displeasure with the waywardness of His people, while the redemption of captives signaled the possibility of communal ‘deliverance from calamity’” (63). For the returned captive “[s]urviving Indian captivity was deemed a sign of God’s favor, perhaps an indication of election” (Levernier and Cohen xviii). Christopher Castiglia states that Carter places “Our Lady of the Massacre” outside of this standardized formula for the genre writing that “Angela Carter imagines what an Indian captive’s tale might have been had her narration not been supervised by ministerial editors” (Castiglia 16). The editorialized female captivity narrative depicting the bloodthirsty Indian carrying out heartless brutality against children and women served to propagate the stereotypical Native American savage imagery. This savage image served further to justify the white American’s
right to run roughshod over the Native Americans, taking their land at will and barely avoiding genocide as the Native American is eventually forced to a life on the reservation. Castiglia writes about Carter’s efforts to challenge these stereotypes of both the captive white American female and the Native American:

Refusing the binary logic of civilized/savage by showing the ‘conquest’ of the Indians to be the result of Anglo chicanery and brutal violence, Carter’s heroine, like numerous captive white women, challenges the innate moral superiority of white culture and hence justifies the ambivalence narratives almost invariably express about their authors’ return. (19)

Carter’s narrator tells the reader that Jabez Mather fabricates his own vision of her capture in his editorialized version of her experiences with the Native Americans: “In this way, no other, was I ‘taken’ by ‘em although the Minister would have it otherwise, that they took me with violence, against my will, hauling me by the hair, and if he wishes to believe it, then let ‘im” (Carter 46). Jabez Mather must satisfy his own desire and the Community of the Saints (56), need to envision Mary as forcibly removed from the white community by Native Americans. In no other way can he continue to promulgate the national image of Mary as the innocent victim of the bloodthirsty savage Native American devils necessary to justify the white American theft of Native American land and murder of their people. Yet, the reader of Carter’s text is privy to the true nature of Mary’s comparatively pleasant life with her “adoptive mother” and how she was “‘cured’ of her desire to whore and to thieve, for she now has self-esteem and lives where property is communal, shared even with women” (Castiglia 17). Carter’s narrator tells us that Indian men “are taught to love their wives and let them have their way no matter how many of them they marry” (Carter 50). The love and care by the Native American husband for his wives must come as quite a shock to a white American female. Castiglia writes that the white woman brought into Indian society is “devalued within her home culture’s hierarchies of class and gender… [she] brings with her no racial privilege. Indian society thus represents for the white heroine the ‘freedom’ she has been denied at home” (Castiglia 19). The white American female that was adopted into Native American society realized that she had status and autonomy in that community because she was a woman. She is never
afforded this status as a female or as a part of the effort of the white man’s westward expansion.

During the time of westward expansion, settlers and pioneers exhibited extraordinary toughness and a fearless and resilient nature. Traditionally, the role of protector and provider was solely that of the husband. As a settler in an untamed wilderness, the wife, in her already culturally assigned place of domestic servitude, found herself facing a life without privilege. Her life and the lives of her family took on a new dimension of danger because of the threat of attack by angered Native Americans. White Americans exercised what they perceived as the divinely ordained right to take possession of any and all of the lands of North America. Native Americans, by way of protecting their right to their lands against the white man’s efforts to remove their people by force, retaliated by attacking white settlements and often taking women and children as hostages. To justify the removal of Native Americans from their lands, the stories of returned female captives were editorialized by religious leaders like Increase and Cotton Mather to show the female as a helpless victim against the barbaric physical and mental brutalities of bloodthirsty and sexually depraved bands of Native Americans.

In actuality, many of the captured white women found their lives among the Native Americans to be an improvement over their previous lives in white society. Once accepted as part of a Native American tribe, they received the same respect afforded to Native American women. Carter and Gordon thus recast the captives as autonomous women who, by choice, find life among their tribes preferable to life in white society. The two authors unravel the female captive’s story from its purposeful intertwining with the preordained captivity and rescue and the nationalistic requirement for a helpless victim used as a backdrop to show the Native American as a heartless savage. Carter and Gordon offer a critical examination of the original female captivity narrative genre by freeing the female captive from the image of helplessness and servitude. While assigning Mary and Jinny personal autonomy, Carter and Gordon expose both the white American female and the Native American as pawns in the white culture’s self-proclaimed destiny of expansion and Indian removal.

Note

1. For the sake of clarity, I refer to Angela Carter’s returned captive by the name she chose for herself after her return to white culture. She
Wayne Bell tells us “I give ‘em the name of my old Lancashire lady which was Mary” (Carter 55).

Works Cited


I always believe in the following advice of the playwright Sardou. He said “Torture the women!” The trouble today is that we don’t torture women enough.

—Alfred Hitchcock

Hitchcock’s retort, when asked whether he enjoys jeopardizing the women in his films, points to a historically-driven trope of female victimization within suspense genres. For centuries, awe-struck readers have clung to the victimized female archetype for support as they ventured down murky trails toward inescapable peril. In contemporary American horror film, this archetypical woman relies solely on herself, as her male protectors die off, leading to her epitomic clash with the “monster” by the end of the film, as defined through Carol Clover’s description of the “Final Girl” (Jancovich 79). Her audience grimaces in fear for her safety as she stands in defiance of the cultural Other. As horror critic Gregory A. Wallace puts it, the American horror film genre offers “a thoroughgoing critique of American institutional values. It depicts the failure of the nuclear family, the private home, the teenage couple, and the resourceful individual hero” (qtd. Gelder 258). Thus, when the Other gazes upon the Final Girl through the bushes, the audience recognizes what is truly at stake: American institutional values. By adding an abject Other to terrorize the Final Girl, traditional femininity must make an argument for the national institutional values she represents. To better understand this female modality, Indian captivity narratives also provide a similar victimized female archetype grounded by American anxieties.

With the omnipresent threat of Native American incursion upon white settlements, colonial America reeled in ecstatic horror over the victimization of their women. For these early Americans, domestic women represented the continuation of their young national body as
pillars of civilization and feminine duty. Linda Kerber defines this exceptional model of womanhood as Republican Motherhood. To Kerber, the Republican Mother was a woman dedicated to the service of civic virtue. The Republican Mother stood as the ideal mode for female service within politics as she educated her sons to be model citizens, corrected her husband whenever he erred, and freely chose her social superiors, all despite her inability to participate in matters outside of her private sphere. Once captured, these archetypal women were thrown into a world of insecurity among cultural Others. Victimization by racial deviants thus plagued the colonial subconscious. Through the genre of the captivity narrative, the roles of early American women were adapted to protect the national assets they possessed, allowing them to survive via an agency akin to their masculine counterparts. However, as they explored the wilderness of the Other as women, they found themselves victimized by their captors until their return, often provided by male rescuers. The survival of the Republican Mother meant the defeat of the Other in the eyes of the colonists. As such, the Republican Mother provides an integral stepping stone for the Final Girl—both stand for the same American institutional values.

Locating the origins of the Final Girl in Indian captivity narratives serves to show how suspense writers have utilized these victimized women as a trope for critiquing national institutional values through the centuries. To prove the parallels between the Final Girl and the Republican Mother, I will refer to the overarching trope of female victimization and return as “victim-hero.” Next, the ideologies of a victim-hero story must be elucidated to better understand its basic structure; i.e. the wilderness, the paradox of sentiment, and gender performance. Lastly, an array of summary-based analyses will prove the definition of the victim-hero. To do this, Zabelle Derounian-Stodola’s list of categories, originally used to identify portrayals of women in captivity narratives, will serve to organize pairs of texts from both the Indian captivity and horror genre. These categories include mothers (Jennie Wiley and The Descent), substitute mothers (Emeline Fuller and Aliens), victims (Mary Smith and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre), and vanquishers (Hannah Dustan and I Spit On Your Grave) (Stodola 115). This analysis demonstrates how each category critiques specific national institutions as elucidated by victim-hero ideologies. Republican Motherhood and the Final Girl tie together under the moniker of victim-hero to reveal an
in-depth legacy of female victimization utilized to critique American institutional values.

The ideology of wilderness provides the drama needed to promote victimization within victim-hero tales. Merriam-Webster defines wilderness as both a tract of land uncultivated by human beings and a bewildering situation (Merriam Webster). The definitions prove worthwhile in their own right, but both allude to the more important usage of wilderness as an inhuman space threatening civilized logic. While wilderness generally relates to a tangible landscape, the landscape only holds the name wilderness by setting it apart from civilization, showing that wilderness is a by-product of cultural binaries. The binary function behind this separation leaves wilderness defined as the unknowable, falling prey to civilization’s anxieties. When writers invoke wilderness, they give the reader a choice of either suspending their disbelief of the unknown or believing in the wilderness portrayed in the story. To further engage their readers, writers often inscribe imaginative traits of the unknown on the known, embellishing reality with fiction. Tzvetan Todorov’s theory of fantasy provides insight on how civilized audiences react to the unknown, stating “either the devil is an illusion, an imaginary being, or else he really exists […], with this reservation, that we encounter him infrequently” (qtd. Gelder 15). The example of a devil personifies the wilderness within the concept of the Other, an unknown being that both inhabits and is inhabited by the wilderness. Stodola reiterates the Other as “devoid of nearly every characteristic valued by […] civilization, epitomizing instead every degradation of the human personality that the [civilized] imagination could devise” (Stodola 73). Though Stodola speaks of the Other within Indian captivity narratives, her description defines what it means to be characterized by wilderness. As this characterization binds only to the bounds of the unknown, the wilderness inhabits everything past subjective logic. Wilderness marks one’s perception of the unknown, whose definition is vulnerable to imaginative corruption.

Pleasure derived from female suffering may seem perverse; however, the ideology of sentimental paradox elucidates the curiosity feeding the victim-hero’s audience. Noel Carrol believes that the unknowable Other provides one of the main draws of horror (Jancovich 34). The inability to understand the Other creates a vehicle for curiosity that cannot be overcome without full recognition. As full recognition rarely occurs, when the victim-heroes break down in tears, the sentimental audience sympathizes with their plight, since they too cannot comprehend the
Michelle Burnham remarks that “tears historically have signaled a sensation of belonging that is felt as pleasurable, quite in spite of the representation of suffering that inspires it” (1). For the sentimental audience, kinship develops between those wondering ‘who could do such a thing?’ With virtuous women set as their institutional protectors, the sentimental audiences identify with the torture of the victim-hero and form an investigative community devoted to understanding the Other. Pairing Hitchcock’s epigraph of “torture the women” with his later equation of “victim = audience,” we see the writer’s utilization of female victimization to add thrill to their tales (Jancovich 77, Clover 52). Since the victim represents the viewing audience, she must both fend for her sentimental audience and reveal the Other with her first-hand experience. However, torture permeates her dealings with the Other, leaving the audience with only her victimization as evidence of the Other’s intentions. Unimpressed critics of the victim-hero tales condemn the grotesque spectacle of her victimization as perversion, implying that the audience identifies more with the Other than the victim. One critic cites the horror genre as a “hard-core pornography of violence made possible by the virtual elimination of censorship” (Gelder 260). While his comment upon the lack of censorship represents a reasonable condemnation of the abnormal, he fails to recognize the communal audience cheering more for the defeat of the Other rather than the victimization of the victim-hero. Through her sentimental sufferings, the victim-hero reveals the Other for its abnormity, thus solidifying the normative definition of the national audience.

While trekking through the wilderness with the sentimental audience in tow, the victim-hero relies on the ideology of gender performance to get her through the night. By separating our victim-hero moniker, we find that gender performance defines the victim-hero’s arrival into wilderness as feminine and her heroic escape from wilderness as masculine. The victim-hero’s initial femininity, sponsored by her sexuality, leaves her open to victimization. Once she recognizes her femininity as a target for victimization, she adapts her gender for survival. While not all adaptations of gender equate a full shift to masculinity, performing an adapted gender proves more worthwhile than its abstinence. Though Carol Clover focuses more on the viewer’s identification with gender, her statement that “gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane” connects to the victim-hero through Hitchcock’s “victim = audience” (Clover 46, 52). While permeable during the victim-hero’s venturing,
Carol determines that “the decisive moment, as far as the fixing of gender is concerned, lies in [the climax]: those who save themselves are male, and those who are saved by others are female” (59). However the gender roles may adapt, the victim-hero’s path to freedom fixes their gender role. The necessity of the victim-hero’s gender alteration between their victimization and escape separates them from being damsels in distress. In victim-hero tales, damsels in distress often die because of their feminine fixation as male rescuers cannot save them within the integral plot structure formed by the wilderness. Wilderness demands survival through gender performance before the concluding gender fixation. The following categorical investigation will prove the necessity of the victim-hero’s gender alteration while they survive the unknown wilderness alongside their sentimental audience.

**MOTHERS**

Motherhood ties intimately with our concept of nationhood as mothers connect otherwise individual citizens into a cohesive family unit through maternal bonds. Projected on the national scale, maternity’s usage as a sentimental connective tissue holds the nation together since everyone can relate to its protective archetypes. When utilized as victim-heroes, mothers serve as protectors of the national institutions they symbolically protect. Unfortunately, the destruction of the family unit defines the mother’s mode of victimization; the pursuit of destroying the maternal bonds that set them as mothers. However, in the mother’s survival lies the key, as Stodola writes that the destruction of Jennie Wiley’s family “was a traumatic interruption to their family lives, but not necessarily an endpoint” (148). By surviving the wilderness through adaptation, motherhood follows suit and continues in new capacities. In the following texts, the women find peace by adapting their severed maternal bonds to survive, taking the form of halcyon phantasms—ghosts. Edgar Allan Poe explains his use of phantasms as “a simple environmental determinism: to dwell in ‘phantasmagoric space’ is to become vulnerable to the maddening phantoms of the mind” (Gelder 15). As the transformative boundaries of the wilderness mold victims into heroes, so too does it take hold of the bereaved minds of the mothers. Since victimization entails the destruction of the family unit, motherhood must adapt to compensate for the loss, represented in Jennie and Sarah’s stories as phantasms.
The Eastern Kentucky Papers include Jennie Wiley’s captivity alongside the history of Harman’s station, highlighting her maternal moral story as an integral piece of the national landscape (Connelley). The story opens with Jennie’s husband having left for the market, placing Jennie in the role of Republican Mother over the domestic homestead. Native Americans assail her farmhouse, killing all but one of her children. With Jennie and her child in captivity, the group journeys toward the Native American encampment, a journey made more expedient by dashing the child’s brains out. Halting the journey due to the winter season, Jennie bares a child in a rock cave, only for it to be killed off after the Native Americans’ “three moon” trial by water (49). When the time comes for Jennie’s execution, her motherly demeanor falls, as read in her description: “concern for her life and all earthly things departed from her, leaving her calm and collected” (61). A chieftain recognizes her state of mind as vulnerable to the wilderness, and he buys her life. During the night, Jennie’s despair takes the form of a guiding phantasm, showing her the path to a white settlement. In the morning, she breaks her bonds to effect her escape. Following her return to civilization, the chief calls to her from outside the settlement, “honor, Jennie, honor,” citing Jennie’s transformation was meant to acculturate the woman (75). However, Jennie’s motherhood, adapted by the wilderness, led to her return rather than the chieftain’s assumption that her maternal bonds were broken. Upon concluding, the editor notes that she “[left] a large family […] [who] are numerous and respectable,” serving as a sentimental moral to the audience that motherhood’s interruption need not end (77). Contemporary victim-heroes re-iterate similar transformations of interrupted motherhood, as we shall uncover in The Descent (2005).

The Descent ties motherhood to a sentimental dream of normalcy, though the film mainly centers on the wilderness of betrayal underlying a tight-knit community of women. Sarah and her friends white-water raft through the opening scenes, denoting their bond formed around high-stakes adventure. Juno, Sarah’s friend, betrays Sarah’s trust by having an affair with her husband. When Sarah catches a strange look in her husband’s eye on the ride home, he replies “I’m fine” to her investigation, but veers into an oncoming truck, alluding that the affair led to her husband and daughter’s deaths. Years after the accident, Juno brings the friends back together for a caving adventure to reclaim the bond they once shared. During the expedition, the cave collapses behind them and
Juno reveals that she led the group into an unexplored cave, thus marking her as wild to the other women. After cave monsters destroy the group, Sarah learns of Juno’s betrayal and transforms into a vanquisher. Once Sarah dooms Juno, Sarah’s re-occurring dream of her daughter sitting behind her birthday cake calms the woman with whispers of “Mommy” as the encompassing darkness concludes the film. While alluding to her death, Sarah’s phantasm proves that her maternal bonds kept her from accepting defeat on Juno’s terms, in spite of the destruction wrought by the wilderness of betrayal.

Through the two stories, transformed maternal bonds re-encapsulate the women’s role of motherhood, only interrupted by the wilderness. Though taking on a fantastic guise, their maternal bonds invigorated the women to return to their roles of motherhood once lost. The wilderness thus proves a testing ground for mothers to define their civilized roles with faith that the institution will live on in spirit. As much as a tangible child cements their definition as mothers, the imaginative phantasms remind the women that their maternal bonds define them just as well. In the wilderness, the illusions fostered by motherhood give the women faith that their maternal bonds may live on. Faith, then, provides the moral character for sentimental audiences to rally behind. The investigative audience infers that the Other has no faith in civilized motherhood, proven through the institution’s destruction and transformed reincarnation. Next, victim-heroes take on the maternal instincts of motherhood to protect the nation’s children rather than their own, as defined by the term “substitute motherhood.”

SUBSTITUTE MOTHERS
Substitute motherhood centers on the institution of possession; either victim-heroes possess the national progeny, or the Other will come to possess them. The term captivity entails one being possessed by another, often relating to the Other taking captive Republican Mothers. However, substitute mothers wish to take captive their nation’s children in order to protect their national possessions. The moral binaries of possession relate that possession by the Other means a loss of nationhood while the possession by the victim-hero brings salvation. Salvation does not necessarily tie to possession, as taking responsibility for those possessed leaves their salvation up to the possessors. While protection from the Other seems more feasible when painting the Other as a destroyer, survival in the wilderness grants no pardons to those who cannot take
full responsibility over their possessions. By fixating on protecting the nation's children from the Other, the victim-hero's moral bindings skew their priority of "saving" the children apart from ensuring their survival. The sentimental audience applauds their victim-hero's morale, but the national institution of possession demands salvation. Emeline Fuller and Ripley both protect their assumed children from the possession of the Other despite putting their lives and their children's lives at risk. Whether captivity or "alien possession" ails them, substitute mothers argue that national protection holds priority over survival amidst "unclean spirits" (Clover 66).

*Left by the Indians* tells the story of Emeline Fuller, "then a girl of 13 years, and with a heart untouched by cares," who saves her young siblings after a Native American attack, only to fail to ensure their salvation (*Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* 321). During her family's relocation to Oregon, Native Americans kill most of their wagon train. Emeline takes her weeping mother's place as a substitute mother figure over her siblings, escaping with them into the wilderness. Here, they regroup with other survivors but cannot find food enough for the whole party. After an accidental meeting with the Native Americans, Emeline's brother takes their offer of captivity, which he believes will save his siblings from the Native Americans. The rest of the group refuses their offer, for they have a "great horror of being taken captive by them" despite their numbers decreasing mainly due to starvation (329). At first they try to solve the food shortage by killing off the family dogs, then larger animals, but nothing ensures their survival. "Then an idea took possession of our minds which we could not even mention to each other"—cannibalism (330-1). Strength waning, they eat the dead bodies, then kill off the children one by one, including Emeline's "darling little baby sister, whom [she] had carried in [her] arms through all that long, dreary journey and slept with hugged to [her] heart as though if possible [she] would shield her from danger" (331). Upon rescue, only Emeline and a few others survived, leaving her a "broken-hearted woman" with a cynical eye to blame others for the tragedy (332). The sentimental audience sympathizes with her sufferings, but through fixating on the horror of Native American possession, Emeline effectively doomed her siblings. *Aliens* provides a successful resolution to the substitute mother plot by allowing its protagonist to both possess the story's national child and ensure their salvation (Cameron 1986).
The film *Aliens* offers many symbolic allusions to accentuate the binaries represented within the two cultures, both of which vying for possession (1986). Ripley’s return from her alien encounter locates her 57 years into the future, as she had been cryogenically frozen and lost in space, to find her daughter dead and colonies planted on the alien-infested planet she escaped from. Nightmares of the possessing creatures influence her to return and exterminate the species, hoping to save the colonies on the planet. Upon arriving, Ripley and the colonial marine contingent find the colony in ruins with only one little girl surviving, Newt. Newt’s name alludes to her survival through acculturating to the reptilian xenomorph’s ways, hiding in vents and subsisting on scant food stores. Ripley convinces Newt to trust her, breaking Newt’s acculturation and therefore her former means of survival. However, Ripley succeeds time and time again to protect the girl from the alien menace, even so far as to fight the xenomorph Queen robotic arm-to-claw. Ripley’s climactic yell, “Get away from her, you bitch,” cements Ripley’s possession over Newt in contrast to the Queen’s destructive possession (1986). The grounds for survival in the film do not allow the sentimental audience to wonder if the xenomorph’s possession would ensure salvation. Though Newt’s acculturation of the xenomorph ways granted her survival in the wilderness, the literal possession destroys the host to continue the xenomorph’s species. Ripley put both their lives at risk through tying survival to possessing Newt, but since Ripley stands as an expert of gender performance, she breaks the feminine gender mold as a vanquisher to ensure their survival. While wholly fictitious, Ripley serves as a successful model of both substitute motherhood and vanquisher.

Though Ripley’s success as a substitute mother presents a possible outcome of national possession, responsibility remains the defining factor when valuing its institutional worth: a lack of which shown through Emeline’s failure. Taking up the helm of substitute motherhood comes easily, but the wilderness requires the responsibility of the enactor to provide salvation for the possessed. Both tales presented a feasible option for survival through acculturation and both victim-heroes chose to fight against it. In both cases, possession by the Other presented great risks to their safety, but the imaginative wilderness molded by their cultural perceptions of the Other veiled the inherent value the Other could offer. While literal possession by the xenomorphs proved deadly, Newt’s initial acculturation showed a rational means to survive. Emeline’s fear of possession severed a possible option for survival, leading her to accept...
the cannibalism of those she meant to protect in order to lengthen her own lifespan. The sentimental audience respects victim-heroes’ protective possession of the nation’s children, but salvation defines whether the institution of substitute motherhood deems valuable.

VICTIMS
Victims play the role of sentimental tokens of commodification between cultures within what Gregory Waller terms our “interchangeable exercises in dehumanizing ultraviolence,” i.e. the victim-hero tales (Gelder 260). While the fear of death looms as a possible reality when surviving the wilderness, the destruction of victims serves to dehumanize the Other as savages unworthy of cultural exchange. When depictions of the Other spend the victim’s lives needlessly, the audience views them as having an “adversarial relation to […] culture and society” (288). Not all victim-hero stories present such strong binaries, for most retain acculturation as a valuable means to survive due to adaptable gender performances. Even the most gruesome tales of victimization redeem the Other’s cultures as a “degraded but impressive creativity […] a kind of hideous aesthetic beauty,” implying their worth despite their inhumane spending habits (322). However, displaying the Other’s worth through the destruction of innocent lives designates the national borderline which the audience cannot morally cross. For the name victim-hero to apply, the Other must suffer defeat, if only through the victim-hero’s survival. In the following two narratives, Mary Smith and Sally Hardesty act the part of victim-heroes, but the sensational victimization surrounding them set their stories apart as “ultraviolent” victim tales (260).

An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Sufferings [of] Mrs. Mary Smith brandishes its fictional victimizations as sensational spectacles meant to sever the Native American’s representational ties to humanity (Scott). Leading with Mary Smith’s rescue, the plot structure highlights her victimization’s priority over the chronological order. During her captivity, the Native Americans kill Mary’s husband by stringing him up through his wrists and ankles to small trees where they then hurl tomahawks at a strip of bark near his head, eventually hitting their target. Upon reaching the Native American village, the captors dispute over the ownership of their possessions, settled by the chieftain council’s decision to kill the captives beginning with Mary’s daughters. The villagers come together to erect a ritual pit, then drag the “ill-fated females […] shrieking from the embraces of their helpless mother,” strip the girls,
and tie them to pruned saplings, arms over their heads (10). “With upwards of six hundred of the sharpened splinters” dipped in turpentine, the Native Americans puncture the girls from knees to shoulders then set the splinters on fire (10-11). After three hours of screams “echoed and re-echoed through the wilderness,” the “helpless virgins” sink into death (11). Mary Smith cannot handle the grief of losing her family and plunges “head long into the flames,” only for the Native Americans to drag her out in her delirium (12). Mary Smith survives her captivity, proving herself a victim-hero, but the imaginative atrocities and vivid descriptions of the Native Americans mar all cultural connections the investigative audience may seek to attain. The next portrayal of victimization lays claim to “the longest solid scream track ever to shake out darkened American movie houses,” a testament to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre’s* worth as a victim tale (Gelder 273, Hooper 1974).

*The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* masquerades as a true story, painting a family of retired butchers as improbable victimizers residing in the American South (Hooper 1974). Sally and her brother travel with friends to her grandfather’s grave site to ensure his corpse remains uncorrupted since grave robbers had fashioned grotesque sculptures using the nearby bodies. Though his body rests intact, the group later encounters the perpetrators, who make up an isolated family of retired butchers recently displaced from the local slaughterhouse. The audience cannot hold sympathy for the family, however, as the butchers continue their trade by killing off travelers to decorate their home with grotesque bone sculptures. On the way to visit the grandfather’s old house, the group picks up Hitchhiker, who entertains the teens by enacting bizarre parlor tricks, including slicing his hand open and taking a picture only to burn it in the van. After they dispel the crazed man, the teens arrive at the ruined house and explore a neighboring house to find Leatherface, a mute psychopath wearing a mask of leathered flesh. Leatherface destroys the teens one by one except Sally, who runs off to the local gas station to learn that the attendant rules as the family’s patriarch. The attendant anesthetizes Sally and takes her to the butcher household, tying her to a chair at the end of their dinner table. The father orders his boys to bring Grandpa, an old man held hostage by life within his dying body. The family decides to let Grandpa enact the family trade by killing Sally, with Hitchhiker yelling “Hey Grandpa! We gonna let you have this one!” Sally screams through frame after frame depicting her sickened face, projecting her visceral horror onto the audience (1974).
The ghastly men fumble to put a mallet in Grandpa’s arthritic hand, and Sally breaks her bondage to escape to the nearby road where a pickup truck driver rescues her. The morning sun rises on Leatherface dancing furiously with his chainsaw and the blood-smeared victim hero laughs through her sobs on the way to safety. The literal commodification of the victims’ bodies serves as a symbolic payment for the family’s continued work. Though artistic in nature, the sentimental audience cannot accept the family’s worth as craftsmen since they value their products over human life.

The commodification of victims devalues the cultural exchange between the Other and society when one representational authority spends the other’s tokens needlessly. Victim-hero tales utilize the market of cultural exchange to ensure survival by valuing a culture’s worth based on their adaptations to the wilderness. Both cultures must prioritize survival in the wilderness, though the Other often holds more agency over their survival as they constantly face the wilderness they inhabit. The butcher family in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* faces an uncertain future, marked as wilderness, but they survive through continuing their brutal trade in their homestead, a horrific reprisal of the slaughterhouse (1974). Native Americans have adapted wholly to an environment the national audience believes to be wild, but the Native Americans’ own fear of the white settlers’ encroachment provokes them to fight back. The one-sided victim tales align the national sentiment against the Other, devaluing the Other’s means of survival. The destruction of the victim equates to the destruction of the Other in the cultural market, valuing death of the Other over survival. Thus, only vanquishers may reap the rewards of this binary cultural exchange, which brings us to our next category.

**VANQUISHERS**

Vanquishers offer an institution of “brutal simplicity” when confronting the Other: victimizers must pay in full (Clover 116). The two-part definition of victim-heroes show the need for a hero after victimization occurs. Vanquishers accomplish just that, taking vengeance on the set Other. However, the wilderness that transforms the victim to a hero acts differently in the case of vanquishers. Victim-heroes must survive while vanquishers seek wild decimation to ensure the victimizers cannot cause further harm. Acculturating via gender performance remains an almost necessary key to survival, but vanquishers take the role of re-enacting similar victimization upon the Other utilizing their hyperbolic
acculturation. The term “femme castratrice” defines the vanquisher’s role as female castrators, women who take up the phallic weapons of their oppressors to subvert their presumed masculine agency (Gelder 51). The sentimental audience both fear and respect these women as they break gender norms to enact deadly masculine vengeance through feminine “physical, intellectual, and spiritual means” (Stodola 133). The audience’s fear of these women dwell in the hardened binaries set against the Other, flipped for the women’s re-utilization. When the Other screams for mercy, the audience remembers the national victim’s screams not a few lines previously. With the victim-hero holding the knife, the audience must justify her as their sentimental arbiter, not the Other repossessed in her body. Hannah Dustan and Jennifer represent the national victim-hero in their inverted roles of vanquisher.

Hannah Dustan needs no introduction as the name of her narrative bares her vanquisher role in its translation: *A Notable Exploit; wherein, Dux Faemina Facti,* or “a woman leader in the deed” (*Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives* 343). Hannah Dustan falls into the possession of “formidable savages” during her recovery from childbirth (58). Along with her nurse, Mary Neff, Hannah travels in captivity with Mary carrying her infant child. The sentimental destruction of her child by the Native Americans separates her from her motherly coils, and a family of Catholic Native Americans takes in the two prisoners. Their master sympathizes with their sufferings, telling them “What need you trouble yourself? If your God will have you delivered, you shall be so!” (59). The prisoners take his statement to heart, and their fear of running the gauntlet upon their arrival at the Native American settlement bolsters their priority of escape. Dustan then resolves to “intimate the action of Jael upon Sisera” to destroy her captors in their sleep (60). Before daybreak, Dustan convinces Neff to wield hatchets with her, in which they kill all but an escaping woman and child. The Native American family consisted of two men, three women, and seven children, so the wanton execution of the family brings destruction to more than just “formidable savages” (58). The similarities to the Other do not end here, as the vanquishers then scalp the family to sell their dehumanized tokens to the government. Dustan’s transformation in the wilderness far exceeds common gender performances; she flips the binaries entirely, directly mimicking the narrative’s Other. She recalled later that her captivity “twas the comfortablest time that I ever had” (56). Despite “comfortablest” meaning moral and spiritual strengthening, the death
of her infant and her fear of the gauntlet do not equate to her barbarity (56). Her actions label her as “femme castratrice” to the sentimental audience, in that she overreached the victim-hero’s goal of survival (Gelder 51). *I Spit On Your Grave* features a gauntlet of its own, enacted to tear down the victim-hero to the brink of death: death she decrees upon her victimizers as per her role of vanquisher (Zarchi 1978).

*I Spit On Your Grave* presents the brutal rape of its victim-hero, setting a rift between her role as victim and acculturated vanquisher (1978). The story opens with Jennifer renting out a lake house for the summer to finish her romance novel. Here, Jennifer’s sentimental femininity catches the attention of a group of country men, all frustrated with their stagnate lives. The men brutally rape her, depicting a ritualistic mob mentality fueled by the wild impulses of breaking femininity into submission. After Matthew, the handicapped member of the group, fails to commit her murder, Jennifer’s solemn vendetta drives her to violently murder the rapists. Each individual man begs forgiveness, citing that the mob mentality that provoked the rape no longer holds them and that their individual normalcy deserves consideration. Jennifer uncovers their wild sexual impulses for the audience to judge by seducing the men to their fate using her femininity as bait. To summarize: Matthew’s death follows his submission to lay with her, Johnny’s death concludes his castration after having sex with her, Andy gets axed with his own phallic weapon, and Stanley gets eviscerated by his own prized motor boat. Jennifer’s investigative audience watches her re-utilize each man’s masculine pride against them, therefore equating their destruction with the men’s destructive potential. However, only when Jennifer wields their wild masculinity do they bring destruction. The frustration felt by the men sentimentalizes their plight, showing that while their mob mentality brought them to rape, the men portrayed normalcy. Although Jennifer deserves her justice, the simplicity of equating rape to death flips the binary of victim and victimizer. Jennifer yells “suck it, bitch” before dispatching Stanley and ending the film, a proper thesis of the over-exaggerated sense of justice sought for both her and her craving audience (1974). Jennifer’s wit paired with her Othered vengeance defines her as a literal castrator—a vanquisher.

The equity of justice sensationalized in vanquisher texts focuses solely on the Other’s destructive power, leaving them dehumanized. The vanquishers’ adamant vengeance sets the Other as an adversary to the women, whose audience must interpret which side of the binary
deserves their sentiment. While acculturation transformed the women, they only utilize the Other’s culture for destructive means to devalue the whole of the original source. Vanquishers do not necessarily misinterpret the Other’s values, but reinterpret them through an imaginative filter of wilderness. Since a vulnerability to fear defines the wilderness, the women hyperbolize the Other’s potential to preclude death, leading them to flip the binaries and enact their self-made prophecies on their victimizers. Hannah foretells her own death in the gauntlet and thus she kills her captors before they put her through it. Jennifer believes her dehumanizing rape borders her imminent murder, so she fulfills the Other’s act upon them without confirmation of her theory. The audience may recognize the vanquisher’s acculturation as augmented by wilderness, but the justice received from their victim-hero’s bloodletting tastes all the sweeter. Though they fear the “femme castratrice” as a perverse acculturation of their women, the national audience cannot help but applaud the final revenue received from the cultural exchange (Gelder 51). The victim-hero lives at the end and the victimizers lie unburied, the very epitome of success audiences plead for when reading other victim-hero tales. Problems arise when considering ethics, but the vanquisher still holds the title of victor.

Each of our categories critiques American institutional values we hold as definite within our culture. Motherhood defines our faith in eternal citizenship no matter the trials blurring the institution. Substitute motherhood defines the ongoing pursuit to retain our national possessions despite the present dangers. Victims define the border between nation and wilderness, enriching our nation’s value while devaluing the Other’s. Vanquishers define the grim actions we must take to protect our nation from our enemies. Thus, the victim-hero archetype tests national institutions we take for granted. Without depicting the national institutions’ vulnerability through the lens of wilderness, the nation’s experience with victimization limits to reality. Fantasy allows the audience to have a subjective experience of victimization through the frame of improbability rather than the limited experiences within reality. Victim-heroes represent the audience as much as the audience represents them, growing the national awareness to victimization.

Thus, the legacy of the victim-hero archetype bridges the terms Final Girl and Republican Mother as dual arbiters of American institutional values (Jancovich 79, Kerber). America relies on these archetypal women to argue for their respective audience’s values when their institutions
come under pressure. Not all values represented through the women equate to the entirety of America. Contemporary America cannot contain the grand cornucopia of ideas and people within the Final Girl, for she speaks for herself and hopes the audience can relate. Early American Puritanism preached their morals into tidy lines, defining the fledgling nation by its Republican Mothers insistence on staying the course while treading past the border. So, early America definitely held a more defined vulnerability to the wilderness, but the sheer breadth of unknown knowledge held within the interconnected world provides ample sustenance for contemporary America to fear. We rely on our old habits to calm our fears and define our values as needed in the tremendously open world. The nationalistic tales of victimization serve as second-hand experiences in the wilderness past the audience’s subjective lives, arguing for moral codes defining America. Though the victimization may critique the audience’s long-held beliefs, their disillusion only redefines, not destroys, their American values. In the immortal words of Rod Serling, “science fiction [is] the improbable made possible, [and] fantasy [is] the impossible made probable” (Serling 1962). Both horror and Indian captivity genres grant their audience access to the unknown, familiar concepts in foreign forms. Only the American audience can decide whether to believe or disbelieve, to define or re-define.

Works Cited


IV. Crossing the Borders of Captivity
Capturing Dorinda Oakley

Dorinda Purser

In the opening scene of Ellen Glasgow’s 1925 novel *Barren Ground*, Dorinda Oakley stands as if poised in flight gazing out the window of Pedlar’s store where she works. She metaphorically sustains a similar posture of captivity throughout the novel. Glasgow describes her as “running toward life” (Glasgow 3), yet she confines Dorinda behind the window as the last train of the evening passes without stopping at the station in Pedlar’s Mill, Virginia. The train leaves the buildings of the town and nearby farmlands in a state of snowy isolation. Dorinda inherits gendered captivity from her Protestant Scotch-Irish mother and great-aunts, who in their time were “duped into domesticity by men” who “wield the powerful tools of romance and religion” (Castiglia 115). The Abernethy great-aunts and the women in Pedlar’s Mill, descendants of pioneering women, willingly fall victim to the romance plot in patriarchal discourse. Glasgow represents the land as both captive and captor left infertile by tenant farming after post-civil war reconstruction circa 1890 to 1920. In the summer, broomsedge takes over the unfruitful fields which are symbolic of the female body. This image of a captive land is repeated in the winter when broomsedge frossts over with ice in the snow. Metaphorical linking of land as female body by critics and male writers of traditional Southern romance sexualizes male dominance in the public sphere and brands such dominance as necessary for agrarian and female fruitfulness. In sentimental fiction, highly charged images of female confinement parallel male dominance of the public sphere. The “tender violence” (Wexler 6) of domestic male dominance in sentimental narratives require “that women beg for money and for love” (Campbell 153) often leaving the unfruitful female body in spinsterhood. Though Glasgow presents her protagonist from the beginning as if enclosed in a Victorian Christmas snow globe, conversely, she adapts the captivity narrative in order to resist sentimental fiction.

*Barren Ground* stands between the romantic tradition of southern writing and modern fiction. It is “the first real novel, as opposed to
romances, the South had brought forth; certainly the first wholly genuine picture of the people who make up…the body of the south” (Cash 374-375). The novel shares components of realism with modernism and regional literature with national mythology. Glasgow’s letters to critic Allen Tate reveal her conflict with and her allegiance to the Southern Agrarian and Fugitive writers, while her relationship with Stark Young “allowed her to see her own past in ways that she had not before, while linking her to the future” (Goodman 195). Her correspondence with writers and critics of her time sharpens her writer’s craft and subnects her work for greater influence. Glasgow sees *Barren Ground* as a juncture in her writing skill and agency that gives her greater confidence concerning her future as an author. In the preface to the second edition of the novel, Glasgow positions her character, Dorinda Oakley, as a universal character. Her vision expands beyond Virginia and the South to “the conventions of the world we call civilized,” she writes to Tate (qtd. in Goodman 194). Glasgow emphasizes the literary conventions of modernism as a supplement to the regional pioneer code of Virginia. She additionally writes, “As a young girl I had resolved that I would write of the South, not sentimentally, as a conquered province, but dispassionately, as a part of a the larger world. I had resolved that I would write, not of Southern characteristics, but of human nature” (qtd. in Caldwell 211). Whether or not Dorinda is universal as Glasgow insists, the novel characterizes the captivity mythology that permeates American literature.

Two opposing types of captivity confine Dorinda Oakley throughout *Barren Ground*. Initially, Dorinda falls for the trappings of the sentimental romance plot that she inherits from her female forebears. However, she rejects the role of wife according to the standards of Pedlar’s Mill. The idea of romance with Jason Greylock captivates Dorinda, and they plan to marry. With no knowledge that she is pregnant, Jason marries Geneva Ellgood in a betrayal of his betrothal to Dorinda. After a remove to New York, the loss of her baby, and a return to Old Farm, Dorinda enters into a self-imposed captivity where she rejects physical and emotional love. From her self-inflicted captivity, she is able to conquer the land and make it fruitful. Glasgow proposes the romance plot as a captivity that conceals the real and traumatizes the spirits of those who live out the illusion of romantic love. In doing so, she seeks to “overturn the expectations of the Southern literary tradition – particularly its restrictions on the fate of the ‘ruined’ woman” (Hollibaugh 32). Ultimately,
Dorinda Oakley gains freedom from the trappings of the sentimental romance plot by rejecting the role of mother and wife.

Before Dorinda acquiesces to the sentimental romance plot, she rejects the role of wife by scorning Nathan Pedlar while he is married to her friend and former teacher, Rose Emily. Their marriage conforms to the social standards of Pedlar’s Mill, and he is an exceptional husband. However, Dorinda “had often wondered how Rose Emily could have married him” (Glasgow 16). Physically he resembles a clown with a mashed nose, and he appears a buffoon to the rest of the town because of his farming techniques. Dorinda looks for “something different” (Glasgow 10) in a marriage. Young Doctor Jason Greylock arrives from New York returning to Queen Elizabeth County to attend his dying father. Old Doctor Greylock owns Five Oaks farm near Old Farm, the home of the Oakley family. As suggested by the first image of the novel, at twenty years old Dorinda feels confined in Pedlar’s Mill. When she meets Jason, ‘something different’ becomes the idea of romance centering on a person; nevertheless, behind her need for something different, Dorinda is already rebelling against male agrarian propertied tradition and the kind of marriage that confines women in a “household economy” (Kennedy 45), where women carry the burden of private household labor and reproduction, while men have the privilege of public social reproduction.

Unwittingly, Dorinda commits herself to the imaginary stranger of her daydreams who sweeps her away on the train to something different in the future. She sublimates the impulse to rebel from male dominated conventions under accommodation to socially inherited norms of femininity. She sees herself living at Five Oakes, remaking it into a feminine space, but without Old Greylock’s mulatto mistress, Idabella, and her racially mixed children. She convinces herself that romance is real, and she finds it “not in imagination, not in the pallid fiction crushed among the great tomes in her great-grandfather’s library, but driving on one of the muddy roads through the broomsedge” (11). Jason grows up in in Pedlar’s Mill; therefore, she is not projecting the same imaginary on him that she might if he were a stranger. Evidently, everyone is pushing them together. Rose Emily Pedlar and old Matthew Fairlamb make comments that propose a possible amatory relationship between Dorinda and Jason. She feels that “everybody wanted to marry off everybody else” (20). The Presbyterian community tends to pair people for marriage within the social constructs that protect standards of virtue. Michelle Burnham
suggests that after the American Revolution, “the virtue practiced by citizens became aligned with social institutions outside the realm of the state, such as the church, the school, and the family” (82). Virtue confined in marriage becomes a social configuration related to the political model of representation. The citizen transfers his or her active power to another agent; therefore, the virtue of the individual is diminished. The danger with this model for marriage is that it can be abandoned by the agent to whom it has been surrendered. In the political model, virtue can be renewed or recovered by the institutionalization of periodic elections. While the political process allows for flexibility of virtue, the same cannot be said of the static social institutions of church, family, and marriage. If the social representative of the early twentieth century abandons the virtue surrendered, it cannot be recovered. Such is the situation with Dorinda and Jason. Because Dorinda accepts the role of wife and mother, Jason's abandonment leaves her without a social representative and a loss of public virtue.

The death of Rose Emily Pedlar parallels the dead child imagery in the novel. She is infantilized in bed while knitting baby clothes with pink wool in a room with gay colors. Her daughter, Minnie May, who is a mothering figure in the novel, acts out a scene with paper dolls in which a mother finds her child dead. Additionally, Glasgow manipulates the transgressive element of female mobility often found in sentimental fiction. The paper doll mother finds her dead child in the road, and Rose Emily “refuses to admit that she will soon leave her children motherless” (Hollibaugh 35). She insists that she will get up tomorrow, in the morning, or by evening. Heartache accompanies the loss of children. Dorinda confronts this type of loss when she loses Rose Emily, her own unborn child, and almost loses Mrs. Faraday’s child in New York.

The many instances of dead child imagery in the novel foregrounds the inconsistencies of the male dominated social system. Dorinda stumbles “passively into pregnancy and is almost ruined by motherhood” (Hollibaugh 34). Aside from the emotional stress of loss, Dorinda lives under a system where men control the meaning of a woman’s pregnancy and motherhood. Furthermore, the loss of her child adds to Dorinda’s loss of public virtue. Like husbands, children are the representatives of their mothers “because conduct and manners were transmitted through their mothers…the virtue of the republic was…in the hands of its mothers, just as it was presumed to lie in the hands of its voters” (Burnham 83). In the early twentieth century, Eudora and Dorinda Oakley are not
subject to the laws of coverture as their predecessors were, but through the institution of church and marriage, a husband still represents his wife politically and socially, if not in legal exchange of property. Women gain the right to vote in 1920. Thus while Mrs. Oakley is left in a state of “passive dependence” (83) with her husband and children representing her, Dorinda Oakley has, technically, more autonomy than her mother. Yet, Dorinda’s autonomy is in danger because “deception can so easily mask corruption as virtue” (Burnham 84). Dorinda is unable to believe that Jason can deceive and abandon her to public ridicule, and she does not examine the consequences of Jason’s professional callousness regarding the loss of Rose Emily.

Dorinda ignores the clues and hints of weakness in Jason’s character and his love for her, until at church he comments on her blue dress that he does not remember asking her to wear. She seeks her mother’s advice. She is still dependent upon her “inherited sense of self” (Lesser 8), though she repels the thought when old Matthew Fairlamb reminds her of her gendered social captivity:

He’s a spry young chap, and would make a good match for you, Dorinda,” he concluded, in merciless accents.

Dorinda’s head was turned away, but her voice sounded smothered. “You needn’t worry about that.” (Why did old age make people so hateful?) “I haven’t seen him but once since he came home.”

“Well, he’ll look long befo’ he finds a likelier gal than you. I ain’t seen him more than a few times myself, but in these parts, what young men are as skeerse as wild turkeys, he won’t have to go beggin’. Geneva Ellgood would take him in a minute, I reckon, an’ her Pa is rich enough to buy her a beau in the city, if she wants one, hee-hee!” His malicious cackle choked him. “They do say that young Jason was sweet on her in New York last summer,” he concluded when he had recovered.

For the first time Dorinda turned her head and looked in his face. “If everybody believed your gossip, Mr. Fairlamb, nobody at Pedlar’s Mill would be speaking to anybody else.”
Old Matthew’s mouth closed like a nut-cracker; but she saw from the twinkle in his bleared eyes that he had construed her reprimand into a compliment. “Thar’s some of ‘em that wouldn’t lose much by that,” he returned, after a pause. “But to come back to young Jason, he’s got a job ahead of him if he’s goin’ to try farmin’ at Five Oaks, an’ he’ll need either a pile of money or a hard-workin’ wife.” (Glasgow 13)

In her illusions of marriage and motherhood with Jason, she believes she will be able to merge self with the agrarian model of socially gendered captivity. Matthew’s teasing does not prompt her to examine her willingness to accept Jason. She misses his intentions. Rather, later she takes his comments as commending Jason. In sum, she only accepts advice that is dependent upon the inherited sentimental romance plot, specifically, her mother’s capitulation to gendered captivity. Republican “mothers practiced an indirect and mediated form of power…subtly transferred values and ideas…through the medium of education or suggestion” (Burnham 83). Consequently, Dorinda receives indirect impressions of self from her mother’s experience and from family history, despite the facts of Eudora Oakley’s own experience with socially inherited captivity.

Eudora’s romance with Gordon Kane forty years ago involved old Matthew personally, since he worked as a carpenter at Old Farm during that time. Like Jason in Dorinda’s romance, Gordon Kane in Eudora’s represents a familiar otherness. Though both in their time grow up in Pedlar’s Mill, they carry the ambience of cultural hybridity, “the surplus left over after the event of cultural exchange” (Burnham 21) outside the world of Queen Elizabeth County. As the last man in Pedlar’s Mill to see “her mother’s missionary lover” (Glasgow 14), old Matthew breaks the news to Eudora Abernethy when Kane dies of fever in the Congo. Therefore, her mother does not marry the man she loves, the man who can fulfill her ambition to follow him as a missionary in Africa. Eudora’s unfulfilled ambition means that she cannot escape the gendered captivity of wife and mother in the agrarian economy.

The loss of Gordon Kane devastates Eudora’s emotions and ambitions, and his death possibly endangers her virtue as well. Glasgow does not explain how soon after the loss of Kane Eudora “fell a victim of one of those natural instincts which Presbyterian theology has damned but never wholly exterminated, and married a member of the ‘poor white’ class, who had nothing more to recommend him than the eyes of a
dumb poet and the head of a youthful John the Baptist” (Glasgow 7). Eudora marries Joshua Oakley because she is pregnant, but the question remains as to whether or not she is pregnant when Kane dies. Scholar Lisa Hollibaugh agrees that the narrative “subtly allows for the possibility that Eudora, too, has suffered the loss of a child” (37). All three of her children, Josiah, Dorinda, and Rufus belong to Eudora’s husband, but they are the three who, as the reader learns, “survived” (8). Glasgow’s insinuations go further than indicated by Hollibaugh. When Dorinda asks, “Ma, whatever made you marry Pa?” (Glasgow 78) Mrs. Oakley is too stunned to answer. She prevaricates and eventually settles on the distraction of religion: “There ain’t but one way to stand things…There ain’t but one thing that keeps you going and keeps a farm going, and that is religion” (80). Dorinda counters that for her religion does not replace happiness, and for a moment Dorinda is distracted. Concerning her great-grandfather’s religion, she observes: “But he must have had something else first…People always seem to have had something else first, or they wouldn’t have found out how worthless it is. You must have been in love once, even if you have forgotten it” (80). Then Dorinda asks her again why she married Joshua. Nevertheless, Mrs. Oakley’s involuntary paroxysm, “the muscles in Mrs. Oakley’s face and throat worked convulsively…a voice that was half strangled” (80), does not allow her to reveal the truth to Dorinda. Instead, Mrs. Oakley tells her that “those feelings have always gone hard in our family.” She continues to explain, “passing with obvious relief from her personal history” (80). Great-aunt Dorinda Abernethy tries to drown herself in the water at the mill “when she couldn’t get the man she’d set her heart on,” and Great-aunt Abigail “went deranged about some man she hadn’t seen but a few times” (80). Instead of giving specific reasons for their actions, Eudora obscures the truth by wrapping it in societal codes of perception—speculative, distancing, and judgmental—labeling women based on public displays of inward romantic crisis. When she tells Dorinda that her other great-aunts, Rebekah and Priscilla, “were sensible enough when they had stopped running after men,” (82) Dorinda’s horrified reaction gives her the resolve to avoid Jason in the future, because she sees the danger of losing self by indulging in sentimental romance. Nevertheless, Dorinda rejects Jason before she accepts him in a pattern of “engagement and withdrawal with respect to the issue of marriage” that is preserved to the end of the novel (Lesser 16). She brings the same engagement and withdrawal to relationships with the social community of Pedlar’s
Mill and with men, such as Richard Burch in New York, and Nathan Pedlar and Bob Ellgood of Pedlar’s Mill. Her capitulation sets the scene for Dorinda’s entrapment.

Physical intimacy with Jason closes the trap of their romantic relationship, and they plan to marry. Though the fields represent Dorinda’s sexual awakening, “the blasted oak and the burned cabin” (Glasgow 120) symbolize the sexual union between Dorinda and Jason. These landmarks locate at the bend in the road where Dorinda watches for Jason’s return and becomes aware of the depth of his betrayal. Dorinda discovers that she is pregnant from Aunt Mehitable Green, the “coloured midwife” (15). Her daughter works at Five Oaks, and from her Dorinda learns about “the old man’s drunken frenzies, and the way his mulatto brood ran shrieking about the place when he turned on them with a horse-whip” (49). The mother of Jason’s father’s brood is “a handsome, slatternly yellow woman, with a figure that had grown heavy and shapeless, and a smouldering resentful gaze?” (49). Jason’s family history reiterates lost feminine virtue, but this time the children survive infancy and also suffer loss of virtue through illegitimacy. Ann Kennedy proposes that the “female subject’s illegitimate reproduction threatens the integrity of property, since the illegitimate child is already dispossessed of that form of inheritance upon which the culture depends” (Kennedy 51). Jason’s marriage to Geneva Ellgood leaves Dorinda in illegitimate motherhood because he has cut off any possibility of marriage with Dorinda. If she remains in Pedlar’s Mill under gendered codes for propertied society, loss of virtue in both mother and child can force Dorinda into the position of the sentimental character who has to “beg for money” (Campbell 153) to survive. Before sexual union with Jason, she concedes “that the colour of the broomsedge was overrunning the desolate hidden field of her life” (Glasgow 50). When Dorinda seeks her mother’s counsel, she believes that “marriage had been too strong for her, and had conquered her” (Glasgow 79). However, as Dorinda’s sexual entrapment approaches, broomsedge imagery gathers more power to conquer Dorinda: “the broomsedge, subdued by twilight, became impenetrable” (71); “What the broomsedge caught, it never relinquished” (95). Dorinda finds that the broomsedge that covers the fields of her sexual awakening sweeps her off her feet and “engulfs” (107) her as she faints in front of Aunt Mehitable’s home revealing her pregnancy to the old woman. The trap of the romance plot closes around her. Subsequently, Dorinda escapes to New York on the train.
New York represents the wilderness of earlier captivity narratives taking Dorinda away from the sentimental romance plot and squarely into the captivity plot. Her flight from the Southern landscape parallels removes within the captivity genre, similar to that of Mary Rowlandson when the Indians take her “into and through the wilderness” (Burnham 51). Instead of a forest remove, this is a cityscape remove. Though she is forced to leave the Southern landscape to avoid the stigma of unwed motherhood, she does not gain freedom from captivity because her pregnancy links her to Jason no matter her physical location. While her brother, Rufus, and Jason “envision cities, Richmond and New York, as sites of opportunity where they might escape the hungry grasp of broomsedge and create new lives” (Miller 85), Dorinda escapes the inherited gendered codes for propertied society. The captivity plot “circumvents the dilemma of authority” (Castiglia 114) allowing Dorinda to transgress mobility codes for women within the narrative as Glasgow manipulates the “extra-vagance” (Castiglia 114) of her female character within the captivity plot. Dorinda was looking for something different to escape imprisonment within the domesticity of her mother’s home and the sameness of life there, and now she is forced to strike out on the venture that Rufus and Jason somehow fail to accomplish. For Dorinda, New York as a wilderness space becomes a “cultural no man’s land” (Castiglia 115). In the Faraday home, Dorinda spends her time with the children, and becomes friends with Mrs. Faraday. She works as a receptionist at Dr. Faraday’s office, and the only other man she sees, other than patients, is a young doctor named Richard Burch who is “cautious, deliberate, methodical, he was in no danger, she felt, of plunging precipitately into marriage” (Glasgow 180). Most of all, in New York, she is able to recover her virtue as she recovers from her loss. Dr. Faraday keeps her miscarriage within the private realm of doctor and patient confidentiality. His estate and medical practice does not depend on male defined codes of female virtue. At home in Virginia, an illegitimate pregnancy is given meaning by men. But in New York, though she is pregnant when she first arrives, she no longer has to live by the criteria set by male tradition for women as mothers and wives.

While she is in the Southern landscape, Dorinda sublimes awareness of her own body according to the Western pattern of female body as citadel. The sublimation and “alienation of mind from body” (Miller 84) pervades “courtship in regions of the American South dominated by the teachings of the puritan Protestants” (Raper 80). However, in New
York she connects mind and body through morning sickness and the other pains of carrying a child. She feels like she has turned into stone, and her feet hurt. On her way to a job interview, Dorinda loses the baby in a street accident when she steps off the curb, dizzy from morning sickness, and a cab hits her. This event frees her from the captivity of the sentimental romance plot. The loss of the baby is a “release” from the romance captivity because it breaks the link with Jason, and it frees her from the stigma of unwed motherhood in Virginia society. It frees her from male imposed constraints of harlot or coquet. However, “this tragic loss marks the hardening of Dorinda’s inner being” (Bunch 19). She feels no emotion except irony. She loses all interest in life. In this loss, like “Mary Rowlandson and Anne Jamison” (Derounian-Stodola 153-154), Dorinda is a traumatized victim. Victims of emotional battering pay a great price which is not often reported in earlier captivity narratives other than in vague terms in the sentimental text. This painful and personal account of captivity is given prominence in Glasgow’s text of Southern realism. Dorinda gives up on any relationship with Jason before she leaves home. She realizes his weak character as she stands before him with a gun prepared to shoot. Though she no longer wants him, she does not give up on love for the child she carries until it is taken from her in the accident: “One idea had possessed her so completely that now, when it had been torn out from the roots like a dying nerve, there was no substitute for happiness that she could put in its place. ‘I’ve finished with love,’ she repeated over and over” (Glasgow 176). She is speaking of the child, but she conflates the ideas as illusory romance, determined that she will no longer expect or desire to be a mother or a wife.

The severing of child from mother allows Dorinda to become acculturated to the ‘wilderness’ or Othered environment. Though New York is not the wilderness of earlier captivity narratives, it serves as one of Dorinda’s “liminal sites of liberty” (Harrison 137). Before the loss of her child in the accident and on her way to the job interview, Dorinda sees the way women are dressed and feels “old-fashioned and provincial” (Glasgow 162) because the young women who pass her are in the newest style of dress with different material, gloves, and hats worn in a different manner. Their hair is also different. She feels the pain of blistered feet. Then she sees a “gaily dressed girl” come out of “a hotel of grey stone, as gloomy as a prison”. The girl “flitted out into a hansom cab which was waiting in front of the door” and she thought “How happy she must be … dressed like that, and with everything on earth that she wants!”
Homi Bhabha explains that identity begins with an appealing image, then “an identification with the displaced location from which that image appears as appealing ... the liminal position of cultural and national indeterminacy” (Burnham 47). After the loss of her child and dismissal from the hospital, as Dorinda establishes a new community of friends while working for Dr. and Mrs. Faraday, she experiences the next phase of identification within the liminal space of New York. She identifies with the first impressionable image by “identifying with the latter” (47). She is able to experience the love of the Faraday children from “the locus or perspective of transgressive liminality” (47). Her mothering experience is both vicarious as she sees Mrs. Faraday go through a pregnancy and nursing a child, and she has the real mothering experience and responsibility of nursing a dying child while still maintaining an unmarried position in her new culture. If she allows sentimentality to interfere, she can lose the freedom gained by lininality, because “sympathy is a movement that insistently denies its own activity, a border crossing that conceals its own transgressiveness” (Burnham 48). In the hospital, Dorinda realizes that she has lost the baby and has a short conversation with a nurse who advises:

“Don’t remember,” replied the nurse with authority. She hesitated an instant, and stared down into the empty cup. Then, after reflection, she continued clearly and firmly, “It won’t hurt you to know that you have been very ill, now that you are getting well again?”

Dorinda’s features, except for her appealing eyes, were without expression. Yes, she remembered now; she knew what she had wished to ask, “Oh, no, it won’t hurt me,” she answered.

“Well, I thought you’d take it sensibly.” After waiting a moment to watch the effect of her words, the nurse turned away and walked briskly out of the ward. (Glasgow168-169)

Though Dorinda is traumatized by her loss, she does not allow sentimentality to fill in and conceal the gap. The result leaves her with “double identification” (48). She is able to see herself as a mother and as a carefree and unencumbered young woman. New York allows Dorinda to make plans for a future free of restraints, but she is also free to establish
Dorinda Purser

restraints. In her new liminal space, she gains freedom from the captivity of the romance plot by rejecting physical and emotional love.

Dorinda eventually accepts an invitation from Richard Burch to attend a concert. Through evocative music, which reminds her of the landscape of home, Dorinda’s emotions are awakened. “This was not music, she thought in surprise, but the sound of a storm coming up through the tall pines at Old Farm. She had heard this singing melody a thousand times, on autumn afternoons, in the woods” (Glasgow 184). The emotional awakening gives Dorinda another opportunity to change her life. She experiences alteration of identity resulting from her previous experiences of the landscape surrounding Old Farm, a pleasant memory. She identifies with the impressionable image from home by identifying with the emotions induced by the music. She is ready to approach the world from a different locus of self. The identity gap gives Dorinda willful alternatives. The psychological ‘gap’ of Homi Babha’s model of identity becomes the liminal wilderness space now. Home becomes the Othered along with New York. With the awakening of her feelings comes mobility. Her mental return from captivity begins in New York when she decides to become educated to resist the traditional male dominated social hierarchy of home. Classical music spurs her to come up with different ideas and to reject traditional farming. Dorinda studies new techniques in agriculture. Her return does not include a rescue by men. She insists that she is “finished with all that” (Glasgow 194; 367; 409). Dorinda tells Dr. Burch that she feels drawn back home. Afterward, she receives a letter from her mother telling her that her father is dying. She refuses to marry Richard Burch, and she goes home with neither a husband nor a baby.

Dorinda Oakley makes a choice of self-imposed captivity to preserve her new identity from which she tames the land. With the locus of self within, not in the community of Pedlar’s Mill, or in the inherited version of femininity, she sees the land with a different eye. She sees it from the perspective of the Othered liminal space within. After reaching out to her community in New York, gaining an agricultural education, and a new locus of self, Dorinda chooses to withdraw from the community once again in Pedlar’s Mill to preserve her secret self. She refuses to accept local fatalism and male supremacy with its traditional views of marriage and motherhood. She becomes a female pioneer. Besides rejecting physical and emotional love and tradition, she places herself into a captivity to work in a trans-gendering fashion in overalls. She becomes a man
in her work ethic and dress to conquer the land, to make it bear fruit, to do what the local men cannot. After her parents are both gone, she makes her chosen wilderness fruitful and succeeds in making Old Farm into a thriving dairy agribusiness. Nevertheless, she still refuses to marry. When Nathan Pedlar proposes, she refuses at first. When she decides to accept his proposal, she stipulates the terms of their marriage still refusing to be wife and mother. The marriage seals their friendship and economic relationship as they accumulate land. Together they buy Five Oakes when Jason has to sell the farm. And after Nathan dies, Dorinda takes care of Jason whose health has been destroyed by the effects of alcoholism. Jason loses Geneva through suicide, he loses his farm, and he loses himself until Dorinda takes him from the poor house and into her own home which she has made from her own choices that helped her and her land to prosper.

Notes

1. This article incorporates Glasgow’s spelling of broom sedge.

2. “Commercial relations of exchange” (Burnham 83) also endanger virtue because virtue depends on stability as well as autonomy, and stability can be undermined by unpredictability in the market and the dependence fostered by debt.

Works Cited


Unknowable and Thereby Unconquerable: Examining Ada McGrath’s Resistance in *The Piano*

Brett Hill

*Then the wind took her hand and said, “Come with me.” But she refused.*
—Ada McGrath from *The Piano*

Jane Campion’s film *The Piano* portrays a silent figure, Ada McGrath, who accompanied by her daughter, Flora, embarks on a new life in New Zealand during the Victorian Period of colonization. Ada’s new husband Alisdair Stewart, a white Indian George Baines, the native Maori tribe, and various other European colonists simultaneously reveal Ada’s captivity in the foreign land. Ada’s silence commands attention toward her restriction and resistance to her confinement, ultimately allowing the viewer to identify with the underlying theme of captivity and give insight to her means of escaping these restrictive boundaries.

While the film does employ characteristics from the captivity genre, Campion’s work differs from traditional women’s Indian captivity narratives. Unlike Early American captivity stories, *The Piano* centers Ada’s subjective, personal experience, highlighting Ada’s own characterization as an individual woman caught in restrictive domestic constructs rather than as a character who stands in for or represents nationalistic and/or religious agendas. By highlighting Ada’s personal characterization, the film concentrates upon the mental experience of captivity rather than the physical hardships such notable captives as Mary Rowlandson and Hannah Dustan endured. Furthermore, the film portrays Ada as given into a captive domesticity—where she is exchanged by and to white male culture—rather than the traditional captive’s removal from family by a “savage” group of native outsiders. Ada’s captivity, one that takes the genre out of the traditional context, reveals Ada’s own forms of resistance to traditional captivity, calling into question the specific captivating force of the patriarchal language that she adamantly rejects throughout the film.

In describing the function of patriarchal discourse, language is seen as a primary mode of communication which expresses thoughts of desires,
needs, objections, and understanding. Within the film, the insertion of the patriarch narrows communication and indicates that language is a one sided construct that defines subjects through the perspective of male desires. Ania Loomba states in *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* that “language is seen to construct the subject” (36) exemplified within the film as the patriarchal figures define the subject, Ada, portraying “[patriarchal] language as a tool of domination and as a means of constructing [her] identity” (Loomba 40). As the patriarchal language constructs Ada in the film, her female identity is given meaning by the male, resulting in male dominance and female submissiveness in which the she must forego her individual identity, needs, and desires.

The portrayal of Ada and the patriarchal figures is elaborated within *Breaking the Patriarchal Code* as Louise Goueffic’s states that “[t]he assumption is that male includes ‘woman,’ therefore, ‘she’ need not be named as a separate, active, distinct and autonomous participant, […], an individual, in the civilizing process” (4). Goueffic claims that patriarchal language creates a complex construct that both creates and instills dependence toward man, a “dis-identification” (7) of the female self that greatly hinders true agency or a unique identity. According to Goueffic, this language claims that “maleness is the cause of both femininity and masculinity” (8), stating that since the female identity is a results of male definition, the female as an independent self is non-existent, labeling the female as an object rather than “a subject who names herself” (8). This reverberates throughout *The Piano*, claiming that Ada, as a woman, “does not exist, or if [she] does that [she] does not exist as [herself], or that there is something wrong with [her] femininity when it is not identified with or said to be caused by [the] exterior maleness” (8) of the dominating men within the film. Goueffic’s assertions reveal the instilled and created patriarchal belief that Ada can only exist under the supervision of the controlling male figures within the text.

Inevitably, as Ada exists under male control, she becomes property, specifically in the contract of marriage portrayed in the film by Ada, her father, and Alisdair Stewart that shows domestic captivity. In “Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty,” A. James Hammerton calls the contract “patriarchal marriage” – “[s]anctioned by law, [to] signify the undisputed power of husbands and fathers over wives and children” (270). As Alisdair Stewart and Ada’s father contain the legal right of unquestionable authority, there is an inevitable disregard of Ada’s individuality, undoubtedly making her property of the two male
figures. As the male’s property, Ada becomes an object, void of agency, seen as intellectually inferior, and stripped of her own needs and desires through the view of patriarchal dominance.

In response to her domestic captivity, Ada deconstructs the power of the patriarchal language that attempts to contain her. Although her options seem limited, Ada resists the dominant language through self-imposed silence, using alternate and unconventional forms of expression such as her female gaze, body, and music to express her identity and individual desires. As these unconventional forms of communication exist outside the bounds of common patriarchal discourse in the text, they allow Ada to resist patriarchal control and protection by the dominating male figures. As Ada acts in silence through resistant forms of expression, she transcends her captivity - a physical female body viewed as merely object and property - by being unknowable and thereby unconquerable by the dominating patriarchal discourse in the film.

The film’s opening shot establishes a viewpoint of the world through Ada’s fingers, capturing a perspective that both hides as well as hinders the individual’s view. Her fingers mimic the outlook of being behind bars, trapped or imprisoned, giving the sense of the onlooker’s restriction. Eventually, the shot is reversed, showing that the limited view is Ada’s own, foreshadowing her own captivity within the film in traditional constructs of domesticity and patriarchal language. Ada’s captivity begins with her father, an invisible patriarchal figure who initiates the written contract of marriage between her and the unknown Alisdair Stewart prior to Ada’s journey to New Zealand. Importantly, the dominance of the patriarchal language begins with the grounded view of male superiority, initiating from a central male source just as Ada’s restrictions begin with her literal father. Ada states from her mind’s voice—rather than her “actual speaking voice,”—“today [father] married me to a man I have not yet met, he said my daughter and I shall join him in his own country” (The Piano). Through Ada’s mind’s dialogue, the first instance of patriarchal language is expressed, revealing itself as a controlling language of “he said,” between two men, Ada’s father and Alisdair Stewart, that calls for Ada’s submission through the denial and inevitable removal of her own female agency. As the decision is structured by the father, Ada’s agency is denied by patriarchal discourse between the two men that restricts her from choosing both her partner and location.

As Ada lacks the power of her own free will due to the cults of womanhood, the audience sees control located with her father and her future
husband, who willfully decides that he should marry her; she claims “[m]y husband said my muteness does not bother him, he writes, and hark this, God loves dumb creatures so why not he?” (The Piano). Since the power of the decision rests purely in the hands of the patriarchal figures, Stewart’s remarks further reveal the patriarchal attitude that deems the female character intellectually inferior, claiming that her silence or avoidance of the patriarchal language as a result of being “dumb” (The Piano). Stewart’s view of Ada is reflective of Attwood’s statement that “the power of the … Patriarch over women… demands the erection of a regime of representations which approve only what he says and sees, allowing him to define them, secure them in their place, while relegating… to a chaotic realm of unintelligibility” (86). Stewart not only believes that Ada is “dumb” because she is silent, but defines her as so from the power granted to him by the patriarchal constructs that she is excluded from. Stewart’s agreement to marry Ada also reflects the patriarchal attitude of Goueffic’s “dis-identification” that views the female as incomplete without the male counterpart, believing that he, as the male, assumes the power to account for her agency and thereby give her identity which she lacks as an outcast from the patriarchal language—a power codified by legal rights of husbands to subsume their wives as property at the time.

After the marriage, Ada and Flora arrive on the New Zealand coast, where they wait for Stewart to lead them to their new home. As they wait, Ada begins playing her piano while simultaneous shots of the restrictive ocean’s waves visually enclose Ada and Flora upon the foreign land, eventually making their way on shore and crashing into the enclosed piano. Shortly after this image of restriction, we are introduced to Alisdair Stewart leading George Baines, a white Indian, and the native Maori tribe through the wilderness towards Ada and Flora. Stewart is dressed in traditional European attire and continuously brushes his hair only to cover it with his aristocratic top hat. His dress, as well as his stern expression, signifies seriousness, and more specifically, the business of conquest additionally alluded to by his English presence in the colonization period of New Zealand. The colonized land is “his own country” (The Piano), as Ada states in the beginning of the film. As Stewart has married Ada via written patriarchal discourse, his sudden stop to remove a small picture frame from his pocket, revealing a picture of Ada inside, acts as a reminder that Ada is now his own property. The imagery of Ada’s photograph confined within Stewart’s frame symbolizes her captivity to him, an object that he as a man of conquest must
attain and control. The desire to control her becomes representative of the patriarchal language that states Ada, as a female, has no identity outside of male control. Stewart seeks to control Ada, assuming her as nothing more than his property, and, as Stewart uses the glass covering the picture of Ada to meticulously fix his hair, he undoubtedly sees himself reflected in Ada’s own entrapment as her captor.

The portrayal of Stewart’s patriarchal view of Ada as merely an object, or his property, is further shown during his and Ada’s attempted wedding photograph. The camera used for the wedding picture presents a dynamic that further portrays the binary of the male subject and the female object, working like the written contract of marriage as a medium that grants power to one individual, the male figure, while placing Ada under his authority as a spectacle. As Ada sits in front of the camera, Stewart’s eye looks through the lens at her, revealing his male gaze. As Attwood states, this is “an attempted act of possession and ownership in which women give meaning, held in place and turned into an object of desire” (88). In viewing her, Stewart captures the female body, granting agency to his male mind to conjure his own ideas, desires, and needs while simultaneously denying Ada’s. In this moment of male spectating, Stewart marks Ada as completely his own property and under his control, whereas the prior events of patriarchal discourse that decided the marriage and viewed her from a photograph saw Ada as something to be conquered and controlled.

As Stewart views Ada as his property through his patriarchal lens, his eventual attempt to rape her presents an action that concretely highlights his view of her as property. Set in the wilderness, the visual of Stewart’s predator like demeanor reveals a further binary of Stewart as the hunter and Ada as the hunted. Looking back at the stalking Stewart, Ada becomes aware of his male gaze upon her, while simultaneously understanding his dominating desires and intentions in the moment as they have clearly surfaced previously in their relationship. Here, these desires go further than merely viewing Ada as his property; he attempts to physically take hold of her through the action of rape. Importantly, Ada’s immediate response of fleeing Stewart’s gaze and eventual physical grasp on her signifies a lack of consent, which Stewart ignores. In disregarding her will, the attempted assault shows that Ada is an agentless object to Stewart, a mere physical female body that the male patriarchal figure has the right to take full advantage of. The controlling patriarchal view is further detailed as Stewart clutches Ada in his grasp, forcefully
holding her to the ground in an attempt to remove her clothing to literally reveal her as flesh only. As Ada’s expression shows her unwillingness and displeasure, Stewart abruptly stops as he hears Flora’s voice crying “mother” (The Piano) in the distance. Only in this moment can Stewart recognize Ada as more than his property, which draws his attention to the fact that Ada was also defined as a subject, a “mother,” prior to his patriarchal captivation of her.

Although Stewart briefly displays recognition of Ada as an individual being, his actions and attitude throughout the film overwhelming draw back to his dominating control of her as his property. Without dismissing the horrid portrayal of attempted rape, Stewart’s trading of Ada’s piano signifies his most dominate action of patriarchal authority by assuming it as his property and neglecting Ada’s attachment to it. Shortly after the wedding photograph that reveals the marriage is concrete, George Baines asks Stewart to trade Ada’s piano for “land across the stream” (The Piano), to which Stewart unhesitatingly agrees. By agreeing, the transaction alludes back to Stewart as a man of conquest in his gain of property as well as his complete neglect of Ada’s affection for the piano, an integral means of her individual communication and expression. As Stewart does not seek permission from Ada, the transaction shows that Ada’s piano has become Stewart’s rightful property, an event after the marriage photograph that signifies Stewart’s conquest. Stewart’s neglect of Ada’s affection towards the piano is revealed when he tells Ada and Flora about the trade, showing no sign of remorse for her expressed anger towards his actions, but rather states, “we’re a family now, we all make sacrifices and so will you” (The Piano), reflecting Hammerton’s assertions about the “undisputed power” of the “patriarchal marriage” (270). From this unquestionable authority between Stewart and Ada, his words become final in response to the transaction, literally revealing the patriarchal language as a powerful tool in justifying Stewart’s actions that cause Ada to submit an integral part of herself to him for the further gain of his needs and desires shown here as the further attainment of property. Importantly, his action to trade the piano for land sets the course for the remainder of the film by evoking Ada’s resistant expression and integrating the contrasting male figure George Baines.

Overall, Stewart’s actions highlight the ways in which his patriarchal attitude views Ada as property, a female body that only gains significance or meaning with his presence. As a result of this dominant patriarchal view, Stewart sees Ada as intellectually inferior and thus demands her
to submit her agency to him, giving him full control of her as property and demanding Ada as Attwood states, to “trad[e] [her] desires for [his] protection” (86). As Stewart works to limit Ada through patriarchal control, he not only views her as inferiorly secondary, but further attempts to make “what he wants… out to be what she wants” (86), revealing a neglect of Ada’s needs and desires substituted by his own. As Ada’s expression as an individual is dismissed, her resistance to the patriarchal structure heightens, elaborating on her use of silence, the female gaze, her body, and musical expression as well as showing a contrast in how she acts in the presence of the dominating male figure, Stewart, and the male figure, George Baines.

Through this resistance of the patriarchal language, Ada undoubtedly becomes the film’s heroine, a conqueror that deconstructs the patriarchal power that surrounds her. Although Attwood expresses a warning about the heroine figure, stating the “tradition [often] works to position women as embodiments of sex and death” by making “women a silence into which men speak” (87), she further claims that “silence… offer[s] proof that the heroine is above corruption” (87), a claim that shows the ability for the female figure to transcend inferiority as an individual entity. Although her silence gives the patriarch a view that sees her as “dumb” and controllable, her silence ultimately works to grant her an overwhelming power by being unknowable. This is seen in relation to Stewart and how his language towards Ada is a trap used as a means of making sense and understanding her. As Ada willingly refuses to speak back and participate in Stewart’s patriarchal language, both her agency becomes identified as an individual who chooses to be silent and thereby allows her to be a mystery by not participating in the language of patriarchal dominancy. Adrienne Rich elaborates Ada’s silence in *Blood, Bread, and Poetry*, stating that “silence, the empty spaces, the language itself, the excision of the female, the methods of discourse tell us as much as the context, once we learn to watch for what is left out, for the unspoken” (45). As Ada refuses participation in the patriarchal language, she eliminates the ability of patriarchal discourse to define and, therefore, confine her as the discourse disregards other desires and needs, showing them to be “what is left out,” revealing the patriarchal view as limited, or one dimensional in understanding. Importantly, as she is unknowable by refusing to participate in the dominate discourse of control, she becomes unconquerable and transcends the identity created by the patriarch that views her as merely a desirable object, a body.
void of meaning. Furthermore, as Rich elaborates, silence becomes a language itself, ultimately allowing her to communicate by different forms of expression that reveal a greater insight to her identity than the “context” of the patriarchal environment allows. Through silence, Stewart is further distanced from the female characters, becoming “partial, hard of hearing, short sighted, and incapable of pleasure” (Attwood 87), a vast contrast to the freedom of expression found while around Baines. However, through Stewart’s “incapability” of understanding Ada’s feminine language, the potential for alternate ways of understanding and expressing are created, allowing Ada’s silence to contrast and resist the patriarchal language that confines her, showing power through her female gaze, body, and music.

In “The (Un)Speakable FEMININITY in Mainstream Movies: Jane Campion’s “The Piano,” Jaime Bihlmeyer writes that “the female gaze signifies a break from the Law of the Father…, it denotes the deconstruction of phallogocentrism” (69) allowing for a transcendence of the female in the “Symbolic order” (69). Within Campion’s film, Ada’s gaze becomes a mechanism of combat toward Stewart’s gaze (spectating her through the camera lens and through his intended rape) that attempts to turn Ada into “an object of desire” (88). Ada’s own gaze reflects the male gaze back onto Stewart, “deconstructing” the intention of his capturing her and labeling her with his own desires. In this way, Ada remains free of patriarchal definition that claims her as inferior, but rather pushes the male’s quest for power back onto himself to feel his own failure in confining her. The gaze empowers Ada throughout the film as she uses the gaze at other characters as well including George Baines and Flora; however, these exchanges “open up possibilities, create pleasures, negotiate bargains, [and] admit differences” (Attwood 91), rather than resisting control. Similarly to Ada’s silence, the gaze becomes primarily frustrating for Stewart as his only form of communication is the patriarchal language which Ada’s female gaze deconstructs, making his effort to contain her futile while simultaneously reflecting the patriarchal dominance back onto himself. By effectively combating the male gaze that seeks to confine the female body as an object of patriarchal desire, Ada allows herself to communicate willfully with her own body, directing the audience’s attention to the relationship between Ada and Baines.

Through the initial trade of the piano and land between Stewart and Baines, the film sets the tone of contrast between the two men, showing the ways in which Ada resists the colonizing Stewart while being able
to fulfill her desires with the acculturated white Indian, Baines. Upon first impression, Baines’s manipulation of both Stewart and Ada portray him as equally vile and controlling as the patriarchal language itself. The idea to trade land for Ada’s piano to give him a sexual advantage over her initially presents Baines as a savage character who is able to manipulate everyone around him, seemingly mirroring the savageness of Stewart’s attempt at rape. This portrayal of Baines as a savage manipulator continues as he makes a deal with Ada to gain her piano back, saying that she must allow him to “watch her, listen to her, [and] touch her” (Attwood 92) for every key on the piano. In response, Ada negotiates a lesser number of keys, but, more importantly consents to the idea, leaving her resistance to the patriarchal dominance questionable by portraying her as “a whore” (*The Piano*) in giving into a man that she barely knows. Specifically, her consent underscores the importance of her expression through the piano and subverts the notion that Baines is representative of white patriarchal systems, but rather exemplifies what *Sentimental Men* calls a “man of feeling” working to deconstruct the binaries of “masculinity and sentimentality… placed in irreconcilable… opposition.” He does not assume her “dumb” and a commodity, but rather allows her to gain the piano back, acknowledging her agency in the matter as well as labeling the piano as her property rather than Stewart’s. As Baines gives Ada the choice to negotiate, the agreement contrasts Stewart’s attempted rape that portrays Ada’s lack of agency and assumption that she is his voiceless property. Here, Baines becomes a sentimental rather than savage figure, and he steps outside the bounds of conquest which consumes the identity of Stewart, showing a vast contrast between the two male figures within the text and how Ada decides to interact with each.

From the onset of Baines’ introduction, we learn that he is illiterate; he cannot read or write the patriarchal language, but rather is a European descendant who embraces the Maori language and identity. Baines’ acculturation is visually portrayed by his native Maori facial tattoos as well as the Maori’s trust in him as they speak to each other in the native Maori tongue by the river. Here, the native’s acceptance of Baines differs from their perception of Stewart, whom they derogatorily refer to as “old dry balls” in their native tongue, a response that critiques his overly serious demeanor of conquest. Furthermore, as Baines and the Maori’s converse, they speak about Baines’s wife who he nonchalantly mentions “has a life of her own” (*The Piano*) and has decided to remain in England. As a married man, Baines’ reference toward his wife reveals
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his own resistance of legal restrictive codes of womanhood and domesticity, disassociating him from patriarchal control that confines women to remain within the controlling view and space of the man. A commonality between Ada and Baines shows as Ada, too, does not speak the patriarchal language that creates restrictions, necessitating the use of an alternate form of expression to communicate with one another through the enactment of their agreement.

The alternate communication reveals itself in Ada’s willingness to engage with Baines in sexual affection, willfully sharing her body as a symbolic act of their affection towards one another. As the agreement between Ada and Baines continues, Baines decides to give the piano back before the negation is fulfilled claiming their bargain “is making [Ada] a whore and me wretched” (*The Piano*). As Baines gives the piano back to Ada, the film shows that he desires true affection from and toward Ada rather than a property based agreement that reflects the photographic and written marital contracts between Stewart and Ada. In Baines’ decision, Ada’s agency and desires become expressible. As this agency allows her to express her individual needs and desires, Ada uses her body to resist her strict and unwanted marital agreements to Stewart, eventually returning back to Baines, sexually and willfully sharing her body with him by true affection outside the bounds of property ties and contractual agreements.

Furthermore, it is Baines who recognizes Ada’s affection for her piano, removing it from the beach and eventually giving it back to her after their affection towards one another has been established. Ada tells of the piano’s importance to her in the beginning of the film as she states, “I don’t think myself silent, that is, because of my piano” (*The Piano*). Here, Ada informs that the piano is an instrument that gives her an identity in which she effectively communicates through, covering her silence that results from patriarchal restriction. As Ada’s music undoubtedly comes from herself, her own emotion and desire, rather than a reduction “to a matter of statements and demands, questions and answers” (Attwood 92), the film continuously directs attention towards the comfort of herself and her daughter as she plays. As the “notion of voice as music… envisions communication as a process which is infinitely changeable” (Attwood 89), Ada is allowed to express herself without limitations. Without the strict adherence to form and imposed control, music contrasts restriction, claiming itself as unknowable and thereby uncontrollable as the expression of silence, further revealing
the limitations of the patriarchal language. The music works to remove Ada from the patriarchal restrictions that mold and enforce proper form, allowing her to understand her own inward emotion and desires that the patriarch intends to secure. It is through these unlimited emotions and desires that give Ada stability and clarity, a knowledge that never misses a key, but rather expresses effectively and directly. As an “infinite” form of expression, music becomes reflective of her spirit, her inward being, which allows for unlimited communication as the idea of the indestructible spirit suggests. As music expression is an inward emotion, the idea of captivating the outward objectified female body is further hindered, proving the incapability of restricting the intangible and limitless and therefore incapable of being captivated.

After Stewart’s suspicions and jealousies are confirmed regarding the relationship between Ada and Baines, Attwood’s attention to the heroine’s downfall “as embodiments of sex and death” become tragically close to manifesting. In response to the relationship, Stewart attempts to captivate Ada within the home by boarding the doors and windows; eventually, he removes the barriers and simply states, “I’ve decided to trust you to stay here. You won’t see Baines? Good” (The Piano). Ada’s succeeding decision marks the superficial sincerity in Stewart’s “trust” as a truly subtle threat. After Stewart leaves the premises, Ada remains in the home, but decides to send a message to Baines that she has written on one of the piano keys. The message is given to Flora who reluctantly accepts it, only to place the message in the hands of Stewart who reads the engraved words—Dear George you have my heart Ada McGrath (The Piano). As Stewart makes his way to the house, ax in hand, the depiction of his rage draws attention to Attwood’s sentiment of Ada’s death. Dragging Ada to the chopping block, Stewart gives one last attempt of patriarchal authority by viscously disembodying Ada’s finger with the visually phallic structured ax, further disrupting her ability to physically play the piano and leaving a mark that brands her as his property. As Stewart eventually realizes that his ability to contain Ada has failed, he visits Baines, giving his final attempt at patriarchal control by stating to Baines that “I wish her gone. I wish you gone. I want to wake up and find that this was all a dream. That’s what I want” (The Piano).

As Ada, Flora, and Baines leave the visual space of confinement, the film presents a sense of relief and contentment by the visual sunshine and calm ocean waters that contrasts the environments previous cold, gray, and surging characteristics. As the environment reflects the removal
from domestic captivity, Ada’s simultaneous suicide attempt presents an odd dynamic to the relief of her escape. As the decision is made to throw her piano overboard at Ada’s request, as Flora relates that “she doesn’t want it…it is spoiled” (The Piano), the film reveals Ada’s intentional effort to situate her foot between the ropes as to be dragged behind the piano into the depths of the ocean. The explanation of her attempted suicide reveals a shock of her newly found freedom away from the grasp of patriarchal control. As Ada has only expressed herself in relation to patriarchal control, the idea of expression from an individual desire becomes overwhelming, resulting in her decision to be essentially controlled by the weight of the piano as a substitute. It is after the attempt of literal death that Ada reveals her lullaby, stating:

At night I think of my piano in its ocean grave, and sometimes of myself floating above it. Down here, everything is so still and silent that it lulls me to sleep. It is a weird lullaby, and so it is, it is mine. There is a silence, where have been no sound. There is a silence, where no sound may be, in the cold grave under the deep deep sea. (The Piano)

The “weird lullaby” presents a dual nature of eeriness and tranquility within the film, reflective of the sentiment in Ada’s captivation, her resistance, and eventual escape. The lullaby gives space between Ada’s old self in the midst of patriarchal control and her new self in relation with Baines. Between these two selves, there is recognition of her prior characterization of mystery that allowed her to resist control and the new sense of vulnerability. Within the depths of the “ocean grave,” Ada can escape her new vulnerability in the relationship with the male figure, using the lullaby as a comforting guard to become incapable of interrogation and thereby continually unknowable. However, in escaping vulnerability, Ada partially neglects her new freedom, seeing herself as visually bound and hovering above the piano in complete silence, granting power to the lingering effect of the patriarchal language, affecting her even after she escapes patriarchal confines and finds genuine male affection. However, as the old piano used for resistance is dead, in its “grave,” the lullaby calls attention to the burial of Ada’s resistance as well, reminding the viewer of the image of Ada removing the shoe that is bound by the rope, escaping the piano’s downward pull. As Ada “sometimes” sees herself “floating above [the piano],” the figurative death
greatly draws attention to her desire to survive, ultimately revealing a complete transcendence to the water’s surface, a shift from her old life to new possibilities that reflects her transcendence over the influence of patriarchal captivity and its lingering effect.

The aftermath of Ada’s resistance to patriarchal captivity shows in the end of the film revealing her as disfigured, claiming herself as “quite the town freak” (*The Piano*), a title which she states “satisfies” (*The Piano*) as she taps the key of her new piano with her newly fashioned metal finger. The disembodied finger serves as a scar that reveals her as survivor, a reminder that she is an individual who endured control but was never conquered. Her escape is reliant upon her own forms of resistance, the female gaze, her body, and music that result from her silent voice in the midst of patriarchal discourse. Furthermore, her resistance leads her to Baines, showing that not only did she transcend captivity, but her resistance does not leave her outside the bounds of finding love, allowing her to remain within the agreement of male affection without being controlled or viewed as a physical female body that is merely object and property.

**Notes**

1. Ada McGrath is silent throughout the film.
2. Early American Indian Captivity narratives often portray the female as a representative to instill religious and/or nationalistic expansion. Greg Sieminski states in “The Puritan Captivity Narrative and the Politics of the American Revolution” that “Puritan narratives represent a crucial development in the emergence of a national culture” (36).
3. Mary Rowlandson and Hannah Dustan are two iconic figures of Early American Indian Captivity genre.
4. As a silent figure, Ada’s dialogue throughout the film is expressed through internal dialogue, her “mind’s voice” (*The Piano*).
5. Barbara Welter states within “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” that “[t]he attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself, and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” (152).
6. A legal ideology and practice of A. James Hammerton’s illustration of the “patriarchal marriage” (270).
Works Cited

“Bonds of Land and Blood”: Communal Captivity and Subversive Femininity in Woodrell’s Winter’s Bone

Jason Cole

Long ago, when I would read about women mired in poverty, one of the things these women frequently had in common was that they’d had to become household bosses at young ages. Quit school, care for siblings, and so on. The meth world requires this…

—Daniel Woodrell

Published in 2006, Daniel Woodrell’s Winter’s Bone narrates the journey of Ree Dolly, an adolescent native of the Missouri Ozarks and member of the novel’s infamous Dolly clan, as she seeks out her missing father in the Ozark wilderness. The novel follows Ree as she negotiates a hostile land and oppressive criminal culture. Read through the lens of female captivity, certain tropes begin to emerge, including a communal captivity by the land, a gender captivity that oppresses women, the formation of a subversive community of captives, and the freedom from captivity promised by hybrid formations. The communal captivity of the Ozarks of Winter’s Bone is layered: while the difficult terrain generates complementary gender roles that captivate both men and women, men further oppress women in order to perpetuate masculine culture. As Ree crosses cultural borders that separate the feminine domestic space from the masculine culture of vice, she encounters contact zones defined by cultural exchange between Ree and the Ozark male community. As a result of these cultural exchanges, Ree forms a hybrid identity defined by the appropriation of characteristics of Ozark masculinity as she reconstitutes herself against this other culture. Though her hybrid identity is eventually punished because it compromises male cultural hegemony, her punishment also functions as a ritual of initiation that cements this hybridity as it redefines Ree as a member of the male community. The duality of the male culture’s reaction to Ree’s hybridity initiates a complementary series of events; the punishment she endures
for her hybridity inscribes on her body a visible narrative of captivity which, through empathetic appeal, establishes a gendered community of captives; this community of captives is then able to subvert patriarchal doctrine through the implementation of a collective dissenting voice, thereby ensuring Ree’s longevity and allowing her as cultural hybrid to create greater possibilities for feminine agency.

In her review of Winter’s Bone, Kathleen Johnson of the Philadelphia Inquirer situates the novel as a “story about the inescapable bonds of land” (qtd. in Woodrell). The novel evidences such an interpretation of the Ozark’s landscape as captor through its depictions of an oppressive nature limiting the mobility of its inhabitants. Early in the text, Woodrell’s narration observes that, in the sky over Ree’s home in Rathlin Valley, “[s]now clouds had replaced the horizon, capped the valley darkly” (Woodrell 3). The image of the “capped” valley suggests that the valley functions as a container, denying the community outward and upward movement—or geographic and socio-economic mobility, respectively. Woodrell later describes the Ozark environment as a “landscape of freeze” (48), evoking further its ability to effect stillness and stasis within its borders. Additionally, Woodrell incorporates into the text instances of the land thwarting the community’s attempts at accessing geographic mobility by rendering roads useless. As Ree returns from her first remove to Hawkfall, the narrator states that, during Ree’s visit, “[t]he scraped road had been so well iced as to be impassable” (64). Here, bad weather and freezing conditions impede progress along the only viable means of movement through and out of the Ozark landscape—the roads. The description of the road as “scraped” hints at the futility of the community’s efforts to effect such movement; though the Ozark inhabitants clear the thick snow from the roads in order to re-establish mobility, the roads are still denied them, reclaimed by the Ozark winter. Later, as Gail Lockrum—described by Woodrell as “Ree’s best friend” (31)—and Ree leave Ree’s home in Rathlin Valley for Reid’s Gap in Northern Arkansas, the narrator describes the drive out of the valley: “There were scads of shallower potholes and spring floodwaters had cut creases in the dirt hubcap-deep” (85). Gail goes on to describe it as “‘so rough to where you about can’t call it a road no more’” (85). Both descriptions indicate the environment wearing and disfiguring the road until it is both dangerous and nearly unrecognizable. As such, travel on the road becomes ill-advised and limited. Ree evidences this interpretation of the road as inhibiting movement when she advocates the deterioration
of the road as a deterrent to those who would access the valley: “We like it this way—it keeps tourists out” (85). What she does not realize is that such natural deterioration isolates the Ozark insider community as well. Taken together, these collective images of an Ozark landscape limiting the socio-economic and geographic mobility of the community within and those outside its borders suggest the isolation and resulting communal captivity of Ozarkians by their environment.

In her topological study “The Naming of the Land in the Arkansas Ozarks: A Study in Culture Processes,” E. Joan Wilson Miller supports Woodrell’s reading of the Ozark landscape as captor and elaborates further on the conditions surrounding this communal captivity. The isolation of Ozarkians within their environment, Miller contends, “was allied to a paucity of resources” (243); while the harsh terrain and “meager [natural] resources” (240) made self-sufficiency difficult, the land’s natural barriers prevented both escape and reliable trade. The lack of trade also limited access to services and service goods, notably education and educational materials (246). According to Miller, such conditions “restricted opportunities to rise out of […] a poverty-stricken environment” (240). This claim echoes Woodrell’s depiction of an Ozark community “capped” by its surroundings; historically, the isolation of Ozark inhabitants within the impoverished landscape limited their upward—or socio-economic—mobility. In Winter’s Bone, Woodrell implies a continuation of this lack of economic autonomy among the Ozark community by including moments where poverty eliminates choice. Early in the novel, Woodrell relates Ree’s concern as she considers the negative effects limited resources could have on the lives of her two brothers: “Sometimes when Ree fed Sonny and Harold oatmeal suppers they would cry, sit there spooning down oatmeal but crying for meat, eating all there was while crying for all there could be, become wailing little cyclones of want and need, and she would fear for them” (8). Though Ree understands her brothers’ desire for the possibilities and choice signified by the meat—and desires both for herself in order to ensure favorable outcomes for them—survival dictates that she utilize her limited resources efficiently, effectively removing such possibilities and, with them, economic autonomy. Woodrell also intimates the ability of limited means to remove economic autonomy when Ree and Gail later visit the Bawbee Store to buy food for the household. When Gail asks if Ree is going to buy parmesan cheese to go with the spaghetti she plans to make, Ree states, “‘Nope […] It’s too expensive. It costs even
more’n meat does” (123). Like the meat, the cheese is eliminated as a possibility by an economic efficiency necessitated by a limited income. Consequently, the impoverished condition of the captive Ozark community denies Ree agency.

Such elimination of possibilities through communal captivity by the Ozark landscape prompts the creation and dissemination of the gendered codes of behavior within the Ozark community of Winter’s Bone. Offered few legal avenues by which to re-assert economic autonomy and re-establish choice, the text’s male Ozarkians have turned to vice. At one point, Ree, via Woodrell’s narrative voice, considers her “olden Dolly kin,” describing the men as “mostly idle between nights of running wild or time in the pen, cooking moon and gathering around the spout” (28). With little education and no outside investment in the region, the men of the novel have no prospects for work in the traditionally male-dominated public sphere. Woodrell evidences this by having Ree imagine her male ancestors “cooking,” a conventionally domestic labor. In response to such limitations, the men create and maintain a gendered drug culture to increase the profitability of “cooking”—their only occupation—and generate possibility. However, this criminality soon becomes a gender prescription that captivates male Ozarkians through the removal of the male subject. The masculine model seen in Ree’s reflections persists in the cultural present of Woodrell’s Ozarks; where Ozark men once cooked illegal alcohol called “shine,” all of Ree’s male contemporaries cook methamphetamine—another illegal, more sinister drug. During Ree’s first remove to Hawkfall, she describes her father to another young woman, Megan, saying, “he cooks crank” (51). Megan, in response, tells her, “Honey, [the men] all do now. You don’t even need to say it out loud” (51). Megan’s reaction suggests the hegemonic nature of the drug trade: the manufacture of illegal substances has become a gender prescription where men are expected—even assumed—to “cook crank.” Like previous generations of Dolly men “gathered around the spout,” the community of men forms around and is defined by drugs and drug production. Also, the bodies of Ozark men continue to be marked by this production and related activities through dismemberment and disfigurement. Ree envisions her male ancestors as having their “ears chewed, fingers chopped, arms shot away” (28). These grotesque markings that Ree associates with the historical body of the Dolly male serve as signifiers of the gendered prescription of illegal drug manufacture, trafficking, and violence that made them. Such signs of
captivity are mirrored in Woodrell's description of Teardrop, Ree's uncle and a representative of male culture early in *Winter's Bone*. Woodrell writes, “Uncle Teardrop […] had a lab go wrong and it had eaten the left ear off his head and burned a savage melted scar down his neck to the middle of his back” (23). The image of Teardrop’s “eaten” left ear mirrors that of his ancestors’ “chewed” ears; in both cases, Woodrell uses the language of consumption to suggest the masculine drug culture’s devouring of the men it ensnares. Woodrell continues by describing Teardrop’s tattoos: “Three blue teardrops done in jailhouse ink fell in a row from the corner of the eye on his scarred side” (24). Even the tattoos—the “teardrops” from which Teardrop’s name and, consequently, identity are derived—signify violence done while imprisoned as a result of his involvement in the illegal activities of his culture. The persistence of similar signs across generations proves a consistency that must be attributed to a long-standing and culturally-defined gender prescription. These male bodies bear a recognizable brand that marks them as part of an Ozark masculinity and denies them self-definition and autonomy.

This masculine role that captivates the male community creates a complementary role for Ozark women. Immediately following the description of her male ancestors (28), Ree considers historical Ozark maternity, picturing the women as having “lonely eyes and homely yellow teeth, mouths clamped against smiles, working in the hot fields from can to can’t, hands tattered rough as dry cobs, lips cracked all winter […] Ree nodded yup. Yup” (28-29). Ree casts the Ozark matriarch as a selfless provider, sustaining the family to the detriment of the self. Woodrell evidences this reading by having Ree imagine previous generations of Ozark women toiling to the point of despondency on poor farmland while their hands and lips dry up from neglect. Also, Woodrell’s portrayal of the women having “mouths clamped against smiles” implies a sacrifice of expression or subjectivity—another form of selflessness. Male absence from the home forces this role upon Ozark women, effectively removing female agency; with no male to help in the maintenance of the household, women must deny self and assume the mantle of help/less domesticity in the service of family. Ree’s nod evidences the continued relevance in her cultural moment of the traditional female role. Its applicability is further proved as Woodrell writes Ree struggling to accept the role in the wake of her father’s disappearance. Sporadically, Woodrell imparts that Ree dreams of leaving her family—two small brothers and “sick” mother—to join the Army; however, after Jessup, Ree’s father, signs over the family
home to cover his bond and subsequently disappears, the dream begins to falter as finding him and, with him, someone to take up the mantle of caregiver in her absence becomes less feasible. Immediately following the news of her father’s disappearance, Woodrell narrates Ree’s interior monologue, writing, “She’d never get away from her family as planned, off to the U.S. Army [...] She’d never have only her own concerns to tote. She’d never have her own concerns” (15). Faced with the possibility of losing both her father and her home, Ree contemplates a future defined by domesticity and motherhood where she must sacrifice the freedom signified by joining the Army and a subjective experience defined by “her own concerns.” Later, after Teardrop refuses both information and aid in Ree’s search for Jessup, Woodrell’s narrative voice once again describes her reaction: “Ree felt bogged and forlorn, doomed to the spreading swamp of hateful obligations. There would be no ready fix or answer or help” (25, emphasis mine). Here, as in the previous passage, Ree realizes that the help/less situation of Ozark maternity in conjunction with the probable loss of the paternal Jessup and the house prescribes for her a limited experience where she must marginalize her subjectivity and privilege those “hateful obligations” of family. Read in tandem, these scenes project Ree’s experience to mirror that of her ancestors. Like her female forbears, Ree is forced into this role by the absent male figure; she is by necessity becoming part of a recognizable femininity characterized by maintaining the household and left intact for generations as a result of the persisting male role it complements. Once again, because the role is effected and not chosen, Woodrell highlights the removal of feminine agency and self-determination where women—represented here by Ree—become captive to domesticity and motherhood.

The women who subscribe to this gender role do not have the benefit of equal potency with the Ozark masculine community. A power dynamic that serves the male culture exists between genders and captivates Ozark women. The women of the novel are literally confined; the men deny them personal vehicles, the only viable means of transportation through the harsh wilderness of the Ozarks. This restricts women’s mobility to a greater extent than the land alone can achieve, creating a gender specific confinement that characterizes a male-dominated feminine captivity. In the novel, masculine figures like Teardrop, Blond Milton, and the bartender at “Ronnie Vaughn’s place” (167)—presumably Vaughn himself—own and/or operate vehicles: Teardrop has a recognizable green truck (113), Blond Milton uses his truck to take Ree to a
house incinerated by a drug-related explosion (73), and Teardrop buries an ax in the front windshield of the bartender’s sedan (169). However, no vehicles are attributed to the text’s women. This is the result of a cultural prescription, not choice. At one point, Teardrop asks Ree if she could drive while he pushed, should his truck get stuck in the snow, to which Ree replies, “I’ve never had a car, man” (172). Though regaining traction would only require her to hold the truck steady while operating the accelerator, she does not feel knowledgeable enough to make an attempt. Such a lack of experience and learning suggests a distance between women and vehicles. Ree’s first conversation with Gail also evidences this distance. When Ree asks Gail if Gail would use her husband’s truck to take Ree to Reid’s Gap in northern Arkansas, Gail replies, “I got to ask him. He keeps the keys” (35). When she returns to Ree, Gail tells her, “He won’t let me drive” (35). Gail’s lack of a personal vehicle or autonomy in the use of her husband’s further proves the immobility of women within the community. In this passage, however, it becomes evident that this immobility is maintained by the masculine hegemony represented by Gail’s husband, Floyd. By “keep[ing] the keys” and exercising the ability to deny Gail access to them, Floyd polices mobility, reserving for himself the right to determine when Gail may come and go from home. This prescription, once again, works to preserve male culture. By binding the women to home through forced immobility, the men are able to come and go as they please, secure in the knowledge that their children and home are being maintained. Such denial of autonomy concerning movement is a confinement indicative of a feminine captivity policed by an oppressive and dominant patriarchy.

This feminine captivity is also defined by enforced silence. Woodrell makes evident the prescription of silence among women concerning their subjective experience when Sonya, Ree’s neighbor, brings Ree and her family some food following a visit to Ree’s home by a law enforcement official. When Sonya asks Ree if she had any information to offer the officer, Ree states, “[I] Wouldn’t never tell if I did” (18). To this pledge of silence, Sonya replies, “Oh, we know that” (18). Sonya’s response indicates an expectation of Ree’s silence concerning Jessup’s whereabouts—a matter, as we later find out, tied to the masculine drug culture—even when speaking might ensure the well-being of her family. Later when Ree visits Teardrop, Victoria, Teardrop’s wife, supports Ree as she tries to spur Teardrop into action. After he rebukes Ree for considering asking people in the cultural center of Hawkfall for help finding her father,
Victoria entreats him to go and ask on her behalf as part of that masculine culture. Though Teardrop fires back a short “Shut up” (25), Victoria is not deterred. She continues by qualifying her request, saying, “I just mean, none of them’s goin’ to be in a great big hurry to tangle with you, neither. If Jessup’s over there, Ree needs to see him. Bad” (25). This time, Teardrop warns her, “I said shut up once already, with my mouth” (25). Teardrop, as a hegemonic figure at this point in the text, reinforces the expectation of silence with the threat of violence. In both Ree’s conversation with Sonya and Teardrop’s threat to Victoria, Woodrell, highlights the expectation of a stifled female voice within cultural discourse and the violent consequences of transgression, elucidating a gendered prescription enforced by patriarchal oppression in manifest forms. The Ozark masculine culture’s hegemonic limiting of female speech characterizes a feminine captivity whereby the agency to choose what to say or speak as subject are removed in favor of preserving the patriarchal drug culture. Taken together, the policed boundaries of mobility and speech create a female captivity defined by stillness and silence.

Over the course of the text, Ree negotiates gendered “contact zones” defined by interactions with men and indoctrinated women. During such moments of contact, Ree is exposed to the contrasting epistemology of Ozark masculinity that privileges the male community of vice over the family. Ree’s memories of her father—one zone of contact—communicate his ability to come and go from home at will. Through Woodrell’s narration, Ree remembers, “Jessup was […] given to uttering quick pleading promises that made it easier for him to walk out the door and be gone, or come back inside and be forgiven” (4). Here, Jessup retains a level of mobility with relation to home. Unlike Ozark women, the men, represented by Jessup, are not confined to the domestic space; men are allowed to “walk out” and “come back inside” fluidly with minimal resistance from women, never confined as women are within the domestic space. This retained measure of mobility hints at an underlying difference across gender borders concerning the importance of family. To elaborate, where ideal Ozark femininity emphasizes the importance of family and dictates its survival to the detriment of the female self, Ozark masculinity advocates the neglect of family to sustain culture. This difference is articulated in Ree’s visit to Teardrop’s home. When Ree asks Teardrop if she should ask residents of Hawkfall about what might have happened to her father, Teardrop forbids her, stating, “That’s a real good way to end up et [sic] by hogs, or wishin’ you was”
(25). When Ree appeals to the common blood existing between their family and the Dolly families of Hawkfall, Teardrop replies simply, “Our relations get watered kinda thin between this valley here and Hawkfall. It’s better’n bein’ a foreigner or town people, but it ain’t nowhere near the same as bein’ from Hawkfall” (25). Teardrop, as part and parcel of the masculine criminal culture, understands that the bond of family is devalued among the indoctrinated male community—represented here by Hawkfall, its cultural center—when it compromises culture. When Ree, ignoring Teardrop’s warning, finally makes it to Hawkfall, her encounter with Merab reaffirms Teardrop’s reading of the fragility of family within Ozark male culture. When Ree asks for an audience with Thump, Merab initially turns her away outright. Ree then appeals to their shared blood and explains the circumstance necessitating her search for her father, spurring Merab temporarily into action. After presumably announcing Ree’s presence to Thump, Merab denies Ree again, saying, “Talkin’ just causes witnesses, and he don’t want for any of those.” When Merab leaves Ree outside, Ree squats under a tree, hoping to “make that man [Thump] weary of [her…] waiting” (61). Finally, Merab returns with a cup of soup, lets Ree drink it, then sends her home one last time, telling Ree, “He knows what you want to ask and he don’t want to hear it” (63). As Merab returns to the house, Ree exclaims, “‘You mean he ain’t goin’ to come out’n say one word to me? Nothin’? […] So […] blood don’t truly mean shit to him […] Blood don’t truly count for diddly to the big man?’” (63). When confronted with Thump’s indifference in her time of need, Ree is made to understand the gap between the gendered ideologies as they relate to family: the blood relations that she values so highly “don’t truly count for diddly” among the masculine community represented here by “the big man”—a signifier emphasizing Thump’s status as figurehead of a masculine culture. Though family, Ree is a possible “witness”; as such, she poses a threat to the illegal male culture—an entity privileged over family within that culture—and cannot be allowed to compromise it by meeting with Thump.

As Ree continues to negotiate these contact zones and expose herself to masculine ideology, she begins to reconstitute herself. This creates a hybrid identity 9 that, in turn, suggests possibilities for women. 10 Ree’s adoption of traits identified with Ozark masculinity—specifically, mobility—while retaining her feminine identity marks her transition into hybridity. Over the course of the text, Ree becomes progressively mobile;
though she lacks a vehicle, Woodrell depicts Ree constantly walking—to the home of her Uncle Teardrop; to Gail and Floyd’s home; part of the way to Hawkfall and around it once there; to the cave in which she spent the night after her first journey into Hawkfall; presumably home again after the night in the cave; and back to Hawkfall for her second visit to Thump Milton’s home. Woodrell’s devotion of so much of his text to scenes of Ree walking relates her ability to effect her own movement across historically rough terrain. As shown previously, men normally monopolize such mobility. Ree’s employment of a male cultural practice for the sake of family and its continued survival suggests her cultural hybridity. This hybrid formation focused on mobility presents a possibility for feminine subversive agency. Christopher Castiglia’s interpretation of images of walking captives provides language for the semiotics of walking in female captivity narratives; in the conclusion to his *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst*, he writes, “to walk is to […] refuse passivity […] ‘To walk’ is to be acquitted, freed from the charges for which one has been imprisoned […] [To walk] is to be released from one’s bondage, and to escape the patriarchal charge that a woman is ‘guilty’ by virtue of her gender” (189-190). Read through this lens, the walking female captive becomes subversive of female captivity: to “refuse passivity” and walk is to claim agency—to claim freedom. This would serve to thwart the prescriptions that bind women to home and men. As evidenced by Castiglia, the subversive agency made possible by Ree’s hybrid mobility threatens to destabilize patriarchal culture; as a result, measures are taken by acculturated women to restore her to the feminine captivity of stillness and silence. When Ree—moving herself once again—arrives in Hawkfall for the second time, Merab attacks her outright with her sisters backing her. Near the end of the scene of the beating, Woodrell’s narration states, “[Ree] was sunk to a moaning place, kicked into silence” (130). The immediate effect of her beating at the hands of cultural figures is Ree’s silence; she loses consciousness and, with it, the ability to speak. This signals her forced return to a prescribed, gendered silence. Also, the beating renders her unable to move herself any longer. After Teardrop arrives and Thump grants him permission to take Ree home, Woodrell suggests this inability to move by having Thump charge the others, “Put the girl in Haslam’s truck. Carry her if you got to” (137). And, they have to; Woodrell writes, “Megan and Spider Milton put Ree between them and shouldered her from the barn.
Her feet dragged up dust” (138). Merab and her sisters have rendered Ree still once more. Her dragging feet mark Ree’s loss of mobility; she can no longer effect as agent the movement of her body; she must rely on others or remain immobile. This is further indicated when Ree arrives back home where Gail is waiting for her. After being helped from the truck, Ree begs Gail, “Help me wash […] Please. Help me wash” (142). Ree’s inability to wash herself signals her loss of command of her body. Her beating by cultural representatives has restored her to a state of gendered captivity where even the small measure of autonomy signified by bathing oneself is denied her. She is completely motionless. By rendering Ree both silent and still, this punishment for compromising the Ozark patriarchal superstructure succeeds in confining her once again to the home and restoring her to the feminine captivity created by the gendered power dynamic.

However, the beating serves a separate, contrasting function when read as a ritual of initiation. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Arthur Levernier in the second chapter of *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1500-1900*, “The Mythology of the Captivity Narrative,” situate the rituals of initiation into other cultures present in captivity narratives as “constitut[ing] boundaries that, once crossed, also define the initiate in terms of ‘the other’” (41). In other words, those who experience such rites of passage are re-defined as members of the new culture. In Ree’s case, she becomes part and parcel of the masculine culture through her punishment. When Thump comes into the barn where she is being kept after Merab’s attack, he gives her a moment to speak. His statement, “You got somethin’ you need to say, child, you best say it now” (133) suggests a test of worthiness; she will live or die by what follows from her mouth. She understands this, and, once again forced into a cultural contact zone, reconstitutes herself. She states,

I got two little brothers who can’t feed theirselves…yet. My mom is sick, and she is always…goin’ to be sick. Pretty soon the laws’re takin’ our house away n’trowin’ us out…to live in the fields…like dogs. Like fuckin’ dogs. The only hope I got to keep our house is…is, I gotta prove…Dad’s dead. Whoever killed him, I don’t need…to know…that. I don’t never need to know that. If Dad did wrong, Dad has paid. But I can’t forever carry both…them boys’n Mom…not…without that house to help. (Woodrell 134)
Here, Ree’s identification with Ozark feminine ideology is still apparent; she still sees herself as provider and maintainer of her household. What may be her last statement before death is an appeal to let her access her father in order to ensure her family’s survival. However, by choosing to ignore her father’s murder and murderer, she casts herself as investing equally into the masculine ideology of culture before family. She understands that learning the identity of her father’s killer would compromise the masculine culture; knowing the killer’s identity would force her to act, as it later does Teardrop. Consequently, she forfeits the information, placing the interests of culture before her father—her family. This masculine sensibility, as evidenced in the earlier examination of the contact zones Ree negotiates in the novel, is the central difference between the psychology of the male and female roles. By appropriating it, Ree develops another facet of hybridity. When Teardrop arrives and intercedes on her behalf (135-137), she is allowed to live, evidencing her passage into the male community and cementing this hybridity.

The duality of the punishment/ritual evidenced by its function as both a return to captivity and initiation into the “Other” culture catalyzes a series of complementary outcomes. First, the process of returning Ree to captivity—the beating—marks her body with bruises. As the physical manifestation of Ree’s captive experience, her bruises become a visible captivity narrative by which she relates this experience. As Ree’s body is viewed among the community of women, their shared experience of captivity finds symbolic representation in Ree’s narrative and creates a community of captives around the empathy it generates. Castiglia provides a precedent for such a formation, writing,

Captivity […] gives symbolic form to the culturally unnameable: confinement within the home, enforced economic dependence, rape, compulsory heterosexuality, [and] prescribed plots […] allow[ing] women authors to create a symbolic economy through which to express dissatisfaction with the roles traditionally offered […] women […] and to reimagine those roles […] giving rise ultimately to a new female subject and to the female audience on which she relies. (Castiglia 4)

Castiglia proposes that those factors which define female captivity by an oppressive patriarchy find expression in the captivity narrative, creating what Rebecca Harrison in the conclusion to “Captive Women, Cunning
Texts: Confederate Daughters and the “Trick-Tongue’ of Captivity” calls a “shared self identity based in confinement” (214). While Gail bathes Ree immediately following Ree’s return home post-punishment, Woodrell writes, “The women of Rathlin Valley began crossing the creek to view her even as she lay in the tub. Sonya led [the women] into the bathroom and closed the door on the paled waiting boys with their stricken faces […] The women stood in a cluster looking down at the colored bruises on milk skin, the lumped eye, the broken mouth. Their lips were tight and they shook their heads” (145). Woodrell’s picture of the group of valley women gathering around Ree’s body is a visual representation of the mechanism described by Castiglia. Coming together around the tub, the women form a community focused on Ree’s visible narrative. By “clos[ing] the door” on the men, the women also separate themselves, highlighting both the gendered nature of the community as well as the confinement that catalyzes its formation. Also, as they read and interpret Ree’s corporeal narrative, Woodrell emphasizes the empathy of the female audience for the textual subject by calling attention to the audience’s shaking heads. Woodrell further evidences such empathy during Ree’s encounter with Jean Dolly, Ree’s distant relative and a resident of Bawbee. As Jean and Kitty Thurtell, another member of the community, study Ree’s brutalized face through the window of Teardrop’s truck, Jean finds a commonality between herself and Ree by reading the signs of captivity inscribed on Ree’s body. Jean states, “I once had my own ugly-fuckin’ dustup with them lard-assed bitches. They ganged me the same shitty yellow-bellied way as they done her” (166). Jean draws a connection from Ree’s experience to her own, divining a shared identity as oppressed captive and entering into community with Ree. Moreover, Jean’s allusion to her endurance of a similar beating reveals empathy present between the female authorial subject and her gendered audience. Together, these scenes of women forming bonds of empathy with Ree around her body and the captivity narrative evident in the bruises that mark it parallel the process outlined by Castiglia for the formation of a community of captives.

As suggested by Jean’s response to Ree’s visible narrative, this community of captives ultimately proves subversive; their transgressive vocalization of their discontent with their captivity forces a suspension of patriarchal ideology that denies Ree access to her father. During and following the women’s viewing of Ree’s body in the bath, women’s dissenting voices permeate the text. These voices consistently criticize the
actions of Merab: Permelia, Ree’s elderly neighbor, suggests Merab’s betrayal of the female community when she says to the women gathered around the bath, “‘There’s never no call to do a girl like that […] My say is, this is wrong. It can’t ever be right to do a girl that way. Not between our own people’” (145); when Ree and Gail spy Sonya speaking to a group of local women near her home, Gail tells Ree, “‘Looks to me like Sonya’s took up for you, Sweet Pea’” (154), implying Sonya’s endorsement of Ree over Merab; and Jean, when reprimanded by Kitty for audibly criticizing Merab and her sisters, states, “‘I’ll say the truth any-damn-where I want’” (166), emphasizing further her contempt for Merab and her sisters. It is this subversive collective voice of the female community of captives that forces Ree’s last confrontation with Merab. Near the novel’s end, Merab and her sisters visit Ree one night offering to “carry [Ree] to [her] daddy’s bones” (180) in order to save Ree and her family. After Ree threatens the sisters with a gun and stalls, reluctant to leave with them, Merab finally tells her, “‘Come on! Come along, now […] We need to put a stop to all this upset talk about us we’ve been havin’ to hear” (180). When Ree replies that she has not said anything about them, Merab states, “‘We know. Everybody else has’” (180). Woodrell making visible the subversive conversations among the community of captives concerning Merab’s attack leaves no doubt that Merab is alluding to those exchanges. Her demonization by this community compels Merab to consider the possibility of ostracism. Though she is indoctrinated by the male culture, she does not have Ree’s hybridity; she and her sisters are examples of Ozark maternity. As a result, marginalization by the rest of Ozark female culture would isolate them completely. To restore herself and her sisters to the community of women, Merab decides to help Ree, effectively privileging the female ideology of sustaining the household by giving Ree her father’s hands—the means by which Ree is able to save home.

By creating conditions that allow Ree to access her father and save her home, the community of captives also gives Ree the opportunity to create more possibilities for agency within the female community. As stated previously, feminine gender prescriptions usually dictate economic dependence for women. However, Ree’s hybrid identity as an initiated member of male culture grants her and, through her, the greater female community access to economic autonomy. After Ree proves her father’s death with Jessup’s severed hands, Teardrop approaches her at home while she teaches Sonny and Harold how to fight. After asking Ree about
her mother, he tells Ree, “I guess you’ll be needin’ to get some money laid by. I could scare somethin’ up for you, girl, learn you how to earn around here” (190). Teardrop’s promise of work is a new formation; to this point, commerce and the public sphere have been dominated by Ozark male society and denied women. It is Ree’s cultural hybridity that subverts this exclusivity. Ree takes advantage of the moment, telling Teardrop, “I won’t touch crank” (190). Here, she expands on the possibility of work by acting as agent and creating a model for women defining their role within the conventionally masculine public sphere. Additionally, because of the subversion of masculine ideology by the female community, Ree receives what’s left of the money posted for Jessup’s bond after the bondsman’s fee. When asked by Sonny what she intends to buy with the money, she closes the novel with her answer: “Wheels” (193). Ree’s decision to buy a car creates arguably the most significant possibility for the captive women of Winter’s Bone: the possibility of escape. With this, even remaining becomes a choice, and complete agency is achieved. Together, these scenes prove the potency of the community of captives. Their collective dissent not only thwarts a patriarchal hegemony that oppresses them, but also creates the precedent for and, therefore, possibility of the female agent through accessing escape from communal and gendered captivities.

Woodrell’s novel, when read through the lens of female captivity, depicts a gendered community of captives subverting their patriarchal captors and, by doing so, creating what Burnham describes as “moments of critical resistance enabled by hybrid formations generated within scenarios of cultural exchange” (6). Though Woodrell’s community of Ozark women are the textual beneficiaries of this new agency, the implications of such subversion by this community are not isolated to Woodrell’s pages. Castiglia writes, “The novels based on the narratives assert the metaphorical usefulness of captivity for women readers by featuring appreciative female audiences within the texts, thereby suggesting the potential value for women of reading captivity stories as a way not only to express other forms of constraint but also to enter a community of fellow ‘captives’” (4). Castiglia extends the possibilities generated by the novel’s gendered captive community to Woodrell’s readership; as Woodrell depicts an empathetic community forming around the brutalized captive body, he ultimately appeals to an oppressed audience, giving them an effective mechanism for throwing off captivity and seizing a similar freedom through subversion and autonomy. The specificity of the
communal captivity experience in the novel and Woodrell’s history as a resident and native of the Missouri Ozarks indicates a target audience: those women captivated by meth culture in American Ozark communities. Though fictionalized, *Winter’s Bone* documents a very real captivity as evidenced in the opening quote from Woodrell. Though typical and misrepresentative at times, Woodrell’s novel seeks to restore possibility to Ozark women, those most oppressed in a community held captive.

Notes


2. I use “hegemony” and “hegemonic” to signify what Robert Dale Parker calls a “dominating influence and/or power” (194).

3. Kent Blansett in “Intertribalism in the Ozarks, 1800-1865” locates the Ozark Mountains “within the state boundaries of southern Missouri, northern Arkansas, and northeastern Oklahoma as well as the southeastern-most tip of Kansas [with] Missouri and Arkansas mak[ing] up the bulk of the Ozarks” (475). Woodrell stages the majority of the events of *Winter’s Bone* in Missouri, close to the Missouri-Arkansas border. In one exceptional scene, Ree’s visit to April Dunahew, her father’s mistress, takes her across the state line into Arkansas.

4. I do not distinguish between Woodrell and the narrator. In John C. Tibbets’s “‘Riddles Across the Sky’: Daniel Woodrell Talks About *Winter’s Bone*,” Tibbets states, “[I]n *Winter’s Bone*, there’s another authorial voice—yours—running alongside the speech of your characters” (33). In his response, Woodrell does not refute or discredit this assumption; in fact, he validates it by claiming that integrating his voice into the novel was “tricky” and had the potential to “backfire” (Tibbets 33).

5. Miller’s description of the Ozark landscape as a “deeply dissected mountain land” (243) in which “valleys […] were the only means of ingress and approach to the areas of settlement” (247) provides topographical support for the Ozarkian communal captivity and isolation suggested in Woodrell’s imagery.

6. I separate the prefix from the suffix in order to highlight both and evoke the word’s oldest meaning: “[d]estitute of help; having no assistance from others” (OED Online).

7. Mary Louise Pratt coins the term “contact zone” to signify a “space of […] encounters […] in which peoples […] historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usu-
ally involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). Pratt clarifies that the term “emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other” (7). In other words, the invocation of these zones in literary criticism is meant to highlight ideological difference between the two entities and the exchange their meeting facilitates. Where Pratt invokes contact zones to signify a physical setting where subjects collide along borders of culture, *Winter’s Bone* showcases a contact zone situated on the borders that define gender.

8. Merab, her sisters, and Megan. However, though they appear to represent Thump Milton and hinder Ree’s search, they do so as paradigms of Ozark maternity. To clarify, Thump is Merab’s husband and Megan’s grandfather; because allowing Ree access to information about her father would endanger Thump, head of the masculine criminal enterprise, the women screen and turn her away in the process of serving the family as prescribed by their feminine role.

9. Ree’s hybrid identity also extends to her sexuality. Of the “three seasons” of sexual “practice” she had with Gail, Ree through Woodrell’s narration recalls her and Gail “each being the man and the woman, each on top and bottom, pushing for it with grunts or receiving it with sighs” (87). In addition to the overt statement that both Ree and Gail were at once “the man and the woman,” the performativity of their sexual encounters imparts to the reader their ability to inhabit both gendered sexual spaces. This reciprocal relationship presents the possibility of transcending a sexual captivity effected by heteronormativity that confines women to their half of the sexual experience. It also makes possible the elimination of the male sexual threat without eliminating female sexuality—a possibility with particular significance in the case of Ree, who has been raped by Little Arthur (54-55). Though significant to my argument because of the feminine agency and possibilities it generates, I footnote this facet of Ree’s hybridity for two reasons: the origin of this hybridity may not have been the product of exposure to masculine ideology within a contact zone, and the hybrid sexuality, because it is mostly invisible and seemingly transitory, does not compromise masculine culture in a way that helps to effect the punishment/initiation examined later.

10. According to Michelle Burnham in the introduction to her *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*, crossing transcultural borders “expose[s] the captive and her readers to the alternative cultural paradigms of her captors. In col-
lision with other, more dominant paradigms,” she continues, “emergent hybrid formations can generate forms of critical and subversive agency, both within and outside the text” (3).

11. Immediately following their escape from the barn, Teardrop tells Ree in his truck on the way home, “I can’t know who killed Jessup […] I’ll show up somewhere’n see whichever fucker done it sippin’ a beer’n hootin’ at a joke and […] that’ll be that. They’ll all come for me then” (141). Here, Teardrop intimates that knowledge of his brother’s killer would force him to act. This blood feud would contradict the masculine ideology that dictates culture before family; such a compromise of cultural security would warrant retaliation. When Teardrop tells Ree “I know who now […] Jessup. I know who” (192) and walks off near the novel’s close, we are left with the sense that he will not return.

12. Castiglia’s work—published in 1996—identifies these tropes of female captivity by patriarchal culture in narratives from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries. Their re-appearance in Winter’s Bone—as evidenced in my examination of captive Ozark femininity and Ree’s hybridity—marks Woodrell’s 21st century text as a continuation of Castiglia’s canon of female captivity literature.

13. In her documentary “Women of Old-Time Music: Tradition and Change in the Missouri Ozarks,” Holly Hobbs states that “the Ozarks have been continually—conflicting—romanticized, exoticized, sensationalized, and stereotyped” (55). She condemns such representations as “harmful exploitation” and partially credits them for the scarcity of Ozark scholarship. Woodrell is often complicit in such gross typecasting; the Ozark landscape of Winter’s Bone is populated by a grotesque community of disfigured meth cooks, despondent women, and dismembered fathers. The absence of “modern[ity]” and “divers[ity]” (Hobbs 55) in Woodrell’s text as well as its pervasive drug use and primitive social structure evidence Woodrell’s culpability in such widespread misrepresentation.

Works Cited


Contributors

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**Jason Cole**, an English major and professional musician, has a wide range of academic interests that include Southern Modernism and Medieval studies. He recently read his essay, “‘A Perfect Lady is Without Price’: Evelyn Scott’s Contrast of the New Woman and the Southern Belle in ‘A Shadow Play,’” at the 2012 Southern Women Writer’s Conference at Berry College, Rome, Ga. Post-graduation, Jason plans to pursue a career as a musician, and he would like to thank his mother and fiancé for their patience and support.

**Michele Drane** is a senior at the University of West Georgia majoring in English with a concentration in Secondary Education. Within her field of study, she enjoys captivity and gender theory, early American literature, African American studies, as well as Young Adult Literature. She is also interested in how music
affects student learning and behavior. After her teaching internship in Spring 2013, she will graduate and become an English teacher in one of Georgia’s public schools. She also hopes to complete graduate work and, eventually, acquire a doctorate degree in American Literature, using it to help grow the field of American education.

Michelle Leigh Guinn, from Sharpsburg Georgia, is a full-time student of English and Secondary Education at the University of West Georgia. After college, her goal is to become a literature teacher who inspires students to be better readers and writers. A mother to a three year old boy, Michelle spends most of her time studying, reading, and playing with her son. After receiving her bachelor’s degree, Michelle plans to return to school and pursue a master’s degree in English. Although the exact subject is unknown, her long time goal is to write a novel that will help young adults as they progress in life and continue to discover their identities.

Brett Hill is a senior at the University of West Georgia whose initial desire for artistic expression came from the eclectic sounds of the popular rock group Led Zeppelin and the literature of Mark Twain. He continues to enjoy all of these artists, incorporating their influence into his own creative projects. Brett intends to join his father’s electrical business after graduation, utilizing his writing skills within and outside of the business.

Mary Catherine Lyons is a graduate of the University of West Georgia where she served as the 2012 President of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society, and was a member of Alpha Lambda Delta and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. Her academic interests focus on Renaissance Literature and the Captivity Narrative genre. After her graduation, she plans to take time off and prepare for Graduate School, where she will focus on earning her Masters in the Art of Teaching. Ms. Lyons would like to thank Drs. Harrison, Insenga, and Pearson for their support and guidance throughout her college career, as well as Professor Bonnie Adams,
whose guidance led her to the English Department. She would also like to thank her family for their continued love and support.

**Hannah Barnes Mitchell** combined her interests by majoring in English with a minor in Film Studies. While attending the university, she served as an officer for The Creative Writing Guild and became a member of Sigma Tau Delta. Her academic interests include contemporary British and American Literature, Film as Literature, and Creative Writing. Hannah enjoys writing short fiction as well as screenplays. In the future, she plans on attending law school in Atlanta. She has been married to her very supportive and loving husband for seven years and has two beautiful children, to all of whom she dedicates her academic success thus far.

**Dorinda Purser** is a Secondary English Education major at the University of West Georgia. In 1983, she received an associate’s degree in science and liberal arts from Northwest Alabama State Junior College where she was awarded a scholarship for editor of the campus newspaper, *The Viking Sail*. Upon graduation, she married her husband of twenty-nine years. They have two adult daughters, a son-in-law, a granddaughter, and a grandson. After homeschooling her children, Dorinda served in churches as a teacher and women’s missionary leader and served her community as a Brownie Girl Scout leader while moving with her family per her husband’s career. Now focused on her own pursuits, she is seeking a career as a high school teacher and writer after graduation in May 2014. In addition to teaching, she enjoys writing stories that educate and inspire her grandchildren.

**Gina Riccobono** is an English major with a concentration in Secondary Education. She loves to cook, is actively involved in an on-campus ministry, and got married this semester during this volume’s publishing. She plans to attend graduate school at UWG and possibly pursue a teaching career in the near future.
Wes Shelton enjoys critiquing American institutional values across a myriad of academic interests—skills he acquired as an English major at the University of West Georgia. A former president of Sigma Tau Delta, he bequeathed his crown graciously to Cat Lyons after leading the organization in 2011. He owes a debt of gratitude to the UWG English department and would like to ensure them that his debt will be repaid in full. Through long nights spent in *The Twilight Zone* to pristine mornings filling books with graphite monsters, Wes finds creative and critical inspiration within the small cracks that form his reality. Journeying into an unknown future, the pen in his hand will protect him from the unseen specters looming in the shadows.