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“The *Indians* gaping before us”: Anxieties of Consumption in Mary White Rowlandson’s
Sovereignty and Goodness of God

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Abstract

This paper traces the theme of consumption throughout Mary White Rowlandson's captivity narrative *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. From Rowlandson's fear of actual cannibalism at the outset of the work, her obsession with recording the strange foods she consumes, her status as a consumer of Algonquin culture, and lastly, the consumption of the novel by both contemporary and modern readers alike, consumption becomes the leitmotif of the text. A closer analysis elucidates that the fear of consumption truly belies a fear of colonialism and the cultural exchanges taking place at the frontier.

I. Introduction

On a cold February morning, the English colonists in the frontier town of Lancaster, Massachusetts awoke to the sound of gunshots. Upon looking out their windows, they saw some houses within their settlement already ablaze. They witnessed a man gunned down, and as he fell wounded, he was “knock’d” on the head, stripped, and had his bowels split open (12). Some of the attacking Indians then climbed the roof of a barn, whereby they “had the advantage to shoot down” at the colonists fleeing their burning homes (12).

Mary White Rowlandson was garrisoned with some members of her family in a fortified house, set back on a hill. She describes the Tenth of February, 1675 as “the dolefullest day that mine eyes ever saw” (12). The Indians surrounded the hill and began shooting “so that the Bullets seemed to fly like Hail” (12). Next, they lit the house on fire with hemp from the barn. Rowlandson recounts, “Some in our House were fighting for their Lives, others wallowing in their Blood; the House on fire over our Heads, and the bloody Heathen ready to knock us on the Head if we stirred out” (13). Trapped in her burning home, Rowlandson puts her trust in God and acknowledges the direness of her situation: “But out we must go, the Fire increasing, and coming along behind us roaring, and the *Indians* gaping before us with their Guns, Spears, and Hatchets, to *devour* us” (13; italics mine).

With no choice, Rowlandson leaves the burning house with her children in tow. Outside, she stands stunned as her brother-in-law takes a bullet to the throat. She watches as a bullet “went thorow the Bowels and Hand of [her] dear child in [her] arms” (13). Her nephew William is then “knock’d on the head” and her crying sister is also shot dead (13). In all, Rowlandson reports, “There were twelve killed, some shot, some stabb’d with their Spears, some knock’d down with their Hatchets” (14). She describes the “dreadful Sights” of seeing her “dear Friends

and Relations bleeding out their Heart-blood upon the Ground” (14). Upon leaving her home, the Indians grabbed Rowlandson and her remaining children. She recounts the promise the Indians made, that if she was willing to go with them, “*they would not hurt me*” (14). While Rowlandson mentions that she always said she “should chuse rather to be killed by them, than taken alive,” she notes, “but when it came to my trial my mind changed: their glittering Weapons so daunted my Spirit, that I chose rather to go along with those (as they may say) ravenous Bears, than that moment to end my daies” (14).

The image Rowlandson presents of the “gaping” Indians ready to “devour” her links the danger posed by the Indians to their presumed cannibalism. The underlying threat of cannibalism is sustained throughout the narrative’s opening as the Indians are described as “murtherous wretches [who] went on, burning and destroying before them”; they are likened to “a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranting and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out”; and their blood thirst is equated with that of “ravenous Bears” (12; 14). Cannibalism is tacitly implied in Rowlandson’s comparison of the dead bodies that litter the ground around her, as she relates the bodies were, “lying in their blood, like a company of Sheep torn by Wolves” (14). She depicts the violence her town sustained in terms of a slaughter: “Thus were we *butchered* by those merciless Heathen, standing amazed, with the Blood running down to our Heels” (13; italics mine). Hence, the fear of cannibalism, or consumption by the “Savage” Indians, sets the dire tone for the narrative’s opening.

The word “consume” has multiple meanings attributed to it. In the *Oxford English Dictionary* consume means both “to burn with fire; be reduced to ashes” and “to swallow up in destruction” as well as “to eat or drink; to ingest” (“consume”). The word can also mean “to purchase or use; to be a consumer of” (“consume”). The theme of consumption is paramount

within Rowlandson's narrative and it is interesting to note all the work "consume"—with all its various definitions—performs. At the opening, Rowlandson fears literal consumption – being “devoured” by the Indians (13). She spends much of her time in captivity anxious as to where her next meal will come from and which sorts of “mean” foods she will be forced to consume in the Indian wilderness to survive (33). Alternatively, living eleven weeks and five days among the Indians, Rowlandson becomes a consumer of their culture – albeit unwillingly – and as an active participant within their economy she trades her sewing and knitting for food stuffs and Indian goods. Lastly, Rowlandson's narrative was consumed at an alarming rate by readers on both sides of the Atlantic, becoming the first best-seller of the colonies (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 392). Bookended with a “Preface” by Increase Mather, and a sermon written by her husband, the Reverend John Rowlandson, her narrative was distributed among the clergy of Puritan New England. Rowlandson's tale was consumed as both a didactic tale of moral instruction and as a sign of further proof of God's Providence. Now, her text is consumed by modern readers as an explication of the tensions existent within early Puritan New England. Consumption becomes the leitmotif of Rowlandson's text. A further analysis of the work consumption performs will shed light on the anxieties concerning a developing English-American identity emerging in the colonies of New England.

II. The Fear of Cannibalism in the New World

References to cannibalism are a mainstay in early American travelogues. At its very core, this fear can be analyzed as a fear of the “Other” or the unknown, posed by the changing landscape and the unfamiliar native people. Most often, the threat of cannibalism in early travelogues and the texts of early America expose a growing fear of losing one’s European identity in the presumed chaos of the New World.

Maggie Kilgour’s foundational study, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation*, takes a psychoanalytic approach to exploring the binaries of outside/inside and self/other. Kilgour focuses on the theme of incorporation and communion: “The root of the word *incorporation* is in the body; it is a process concerned with embodiment and the bringing of bodies together” (5-6). The cultural significance of food is foremost in Kilgour’s understanding: “The need for food exposes the vulnerability of individual identity, enacted at a wider social level in the need for exchanges, communion, and commerce with others, through which the individual is absorbed into a larger corporate body” (6). Or, more simply put, “As ‘you are what you eat,’ eating is a means of asserting and controlling individual and also cultural identity” (6). If what we eat becomes a signifier of cultural identity, the construction of the word cannibal becomes an antithesis: “the division between the desired norm and feared deviant was formulated in terms of how and what the different groups ate” (148). Thus, Kilgour extrapolates the function of the cannibal in literature is to create an “Other” that signifies difference: “The cannibal is an individual’s ‘alien,’ against which he constructs his identity, and whose threat to that identity is represented as literal consumption” (147).

Mario Klarer’s “Cannibalism and Carnavalesque: Incorporation as Utopia in the Early Image of America” builds on the themes of community and incorporation outlined earlier in

Kilgour's book. Klarer traces the fascination with cannibals in travelogues and captivity narratives of the New World back to their roots in the classical texts of Plato's Atlantis myth and Homer's episode with the man-eating Cyclops. Focusing on the texts of Columbus and Vespucci, Klarer posits that "The majority of early modern accounts of discovery and travel narratives about America reflect a peculiar fusion of a utopian and paradise-like idyll of the new continent with cruel cannibalistic practices of the native" (389). The image of America portrayed in these early travelogues is highly paradoxical. He explicates a passage from Vespucci's second voyage where a young sailor is lured by a band of native women. The women surround to admire the sailor, and when he is unsuspecting, one clubs him on the head. His body is then dismembered, roasted, and fed upon. Klarer notes that this anecdote is typical of descriptions of the early Americas portrayed in travel narratives that were sent home to Europe: "A benevolent, feminine setting as familiar from the alma mater tradition suddenly turns into a cannibalistic monster" (392). The reliance on descriptions of cannibalism is a result of classical knowledge, as the "concept of pre-agrarian, precivilization cannibalism is intricately interwoven with ancient theories of cultural evolution" (393).

Most useful within the article, Klarer provides the etymology of the word cannibal. He attributes the word to a "semantic shortcoming" of Columbus' translation: "Christopher Columbus, who interpreted the name of the tribe of the 'Canibe'—due to the first syllable 'can'—as subjects of the Great Khan or man-eaters with dog-like snouts (from the Latin *canis*—dog), provided the basis for subsequent treatments of these 'cannibals' in the texts of the sixteenth century" (391). Because of the bastardization of Caribe into Canibe, the earliest depictions of natives center on descriptions and embellishments of bestial qualities, marking them as uncivilized. As Klarer relates, "Columbus and his successors project a number of ancient

and medieval topoi of anthropophagy onto the newly-discovered continent” and the exotic theme of man-eaters became a common trope of travelogues (393). Hence, “As early as the sixteenth century, the term ‘cannibal’ replaced the older ‘androphage’ or ‘anthropophage’” to describe the act of consuming human flesh (393). From this legacy, the development of the new word cannibal became synonymous with savagery and barbarity.

In *Insatiable Appetites: Imperial Encounters with Cannibals in the North Atlantic World* Kelly Watson takes a historiographical approach in order to look at the way imperialist discourses shaped notions of savagery and cannibalism. Watson argues that the Europeans accused the Native Americans of cannibalism as an attempt to solidify their own superiority and to legitimize their roles as conquerors and colonizers in the New World (2-3). Watson explains that “[t]he body itself was a fundamental site on which imperial power was negotiated and enforced” and “the functions of the body had to be controlled and regulated in order for civilization to prosper” (7). Hence, cannibalism signified bodies outside the control of Western Christianity, and the fear of cannibalism was ultimately “a fear of alternative notions of embodiment” (7). Mentions of cannibalism in English captivity narratives demonstrate developing ideas concerning the emerging English-American identity. Moreover, painting the natives as cannibals solidified English superiority: “The ability to endure the threat of cannibalism and other trials at the hands of the Indians allowed the English to justify their presence in the Americas and assert their power over the lands and its people” (22). The fear of cannibalism, then, served as a “key metaphor for the threat of incorporation into savagery” (170).

The legacy of cannibalism in early travelogues and captivity narratives aids in the understanding of identity politics within the English colonies. It delineates the “Other” versus “Self” dichotomy and allows the colonizer to assume a place of cultural superiority. The threat or

fear of cannibalism, thus, is really a placeholder for the fear of losing one's own identity. This line of thinking can be traced throughout *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. Exploring the theme of consumption within the narrative can shed new understanding on Rowlandson's evolving identity.

III. Food, Consumption, and Cannibalism: Hybridity

The fear of the Indian's cannibalism – their savagery – is sustained within the first remove Rowlandson suffers through. She recounts that she must “go with those Barbarous Creatures,” though her and the other captives' bodies are “wounded and bleeding” (14). Her first night with them is described as “the dolefullest night that ever [her] eyes saw” (14). She recalls the “roaring, and singing, and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell” (14). Invoking the Indians' “savageness and brutishness,” her last entry of the first remove is a memory of seven Puritans killed the previous summer that “were slain and mangled in a barbarous manner” (15). Rowlandson, thus, maintains that the Indians were both “inhuman creatures” and “the wild Beasts of the Forest” (15; 20).

Rowlandson's anxiety of incorporation through cannibalism, her fear that the Indians are ready to “devour” her, truly signifies her dread of losing both her English identity and culture at the hands of the Indians (13). Ultimately, cannibalism becomes the vehicle that expresses her anxiety of communion, or community, with the Indians. Jeff Berglund points out the irony inherent in this line of thought, for, on the one hand “[d]efining the Other as a barbaric cannibal, one who may extinguish your life, clearly distinguishes the boundary between good and evil, between you and me”; and, on the other hand, “[c]onsumption by another collapses identity boundaries...It erases the *difference* through the collapse of boundaries” (8-9). Berglund

correctly underscores that “This fear of losing one’s self to another alien culture is also the force responsible for projecting cannibalistic behavior onto others”; he refers to this process as “Othering” (9). Thus, Rowlandson’s concerns regarding cannibalism, in fact, reveal a deep-seeded fear of losing her own Englishness.

While the threat of cannibalism is foremost in Rowlandson’s opening, this threat will later become transposed as the narrative devolves into a depiction of her growing consumption of native foods. Rowlandson details the gradual transformation of her tastes:

The first week of my being among them, I hardly ate any thing; the second week I found my stomach grow very faint for want of something; and yet ‘twas very hard to get down their filthy trash: but the third week (though I could think how formerly my stomach would turn against this or that, and I could starve and die before I could eat such things, yet) they were pleasant and savoury to my taste.
(21-22)

Moved from starving as a means to avoid eating what she considers “their filthy trash,” by her third week in captivity, Rowlandson becomes forced to eat the Indians’ food as a means of survival. As Kilgour explains, “Eating is the most basic of all needs...and in most cultures it is regulated by strict social practices that determine what can and cannot be eaten”; Rowlandson’s need for food, then, truly belies the “vulnerability of individual identity” as she must rely on the Indians for sustenance (6). The transformation of her tastes from considering their Indian food “filthy trash” to finding it both “pleasant and savoury” highlights the social and cultural exchange Rowlandson takes part in. Thus, in beginning to blur the distinctions between what the Indians and the English ate by incorporating Indian foods into her diet, Rowlandson’s identity begins to shift. Her changing tastes signify a turning point in the narrative where she begins to

acculturate to her new Indian surroundings. From here, her text will develop into a catalogue of her transforming tastes and her shifting identity as Rowlandson herself begins to mirror the likeness of the savage cannibal she so fears at the narrative's outset.

Observing the foods Rowlandson consumes as markings of spiritual transformation, Heidi Oberholtzer Lee in "The Hungry Soul" reads early American captivity narratives as pseudo-pilgrimage texts. Throughout the texts she examines, she underlines what she views as a "gustatory theology," which she describes as "a system of belief that articulates religious truths and understandings of the divine and spiritual world through gastronomical language" (64). She reads captivity narratives as pilgrimage texts, connecting them because "pilgrimage narratives link the spirit and the physical body" (65). In her analysis, Lee explains that the writers of captivity narratives "proudly record their bodily transformations, most often in terms of tongue or stomach, and offer these gustatory or gastronomical changes as proofs to their readers that their intertwining physical and spiritual journeys have matured them in the faith" (67). In her argument, Rowlandson's body becomes a site of conversion and of renewed spirituality and faith. Through this religious lens, Rowlandson is able to rewrite her experiences in Indian captivity as testaments to her faith. Thus, her text becomes proof of a "spiritual conversion of the appetite" (Lee 75).

Lee emphasizes that "American captives...most frequently return to the 'bitter complaints' of Job" for "the suffering of Job deeply resonates with their own suffering in captivity...legitimat[ing] and sanctify[ing] the captives' own experiences in finding native American foods increasingly pleasing" (69). She argues that by alluding to Job and explaining that it is God's grace which turns bitter, disgusting foods to sweet and savory foods, Rowlandson applies a religious focus to her suffering. In this view, Rowlandson's many descriptions of the

“mean” Indian foods she consumes are a narrative technique used to echo the strengthening of her faith. Lee wages that in presenting the savage foods she was eating as a means of spiritual conversion, Rowlandson shows her Puritan audience that “Her tastes have become more godly, not more savage” (80).

While Lee makes a convincing argument for the predominance of food within the narrative, in many ways it overcomplicates Rowlandson’s cultural relationship with the food she consumes. Moreover, Lee’s reading erroneously views Rowlandson’s Puritan English identity as fixed and static within the narrative. Though Rowlandson will use an allusion to the Book of Job or a quotation of scripture to bless the foods she consumes in the opening removes, as early as the Eighth Remove the tone of the narrative shifts and she loses this artifice. Rowlandson relies less on praising God with every action and moves instead to emphasizing her changing tastes as part of her new identity. Her narrative also breaks with presenting the Indians as savage beasts as she spends more time with them. Thus, her tales of consumption begin to mirror her gradually changing identity, as she is further removed from her Puritan English identity and begins to acculturate to her new position as Indian-Captive.

Rowlandson’s Englishness, and her civility, is tested when she proves she can stomach the Indians’ foods. An Indian male has a basket of horse-liver, and Rowlandson recounts: “I asked him to give me a piece: what (sayes he) can you eat Horse-Liver? I told him, I would try” (23). She lays the horse liver on the coals to roast, when those around her steal part of it, causing her to scoop it off the coals while it was only “half-ready” (23). She describes eating the undercooked, horse-liver “with the blood about my mouth, and yet a savoury bit it was to me” (23). Proving she can eat the Indian foods through her own agency, Rowlandson surprises even the Indian who offered it to her. Most interesting, the image of Rowlandson eating raw meat with

blood dripping down her face recalls the earlier cannibalistic imagery used to describe the Indians' behavior established at the narrative's opening. Her fear of cannibalism thus becomes inverted, where it is she and not the Indians with blood dripping from the face. Her actions blur the distinctions between the civilized and the savage, for in this depiction it is Rowlandson who appears the cannibal.

Rowlandson's developing tastes for Indian foods allow her to consume "Indian Corn," "Ground Nuts," "Pease," broth made of horse hooves, and even the "Ruffle or Riddling" –the small intestines of a horse (23; 25; 35-36). In addition to eating their foods, her tastes become remarkably more "savage" by her own description. One evening, an Indian gives her a piece of bear flesh. Without an opportunity to cook it, and fearing it will be stolen from her, Rowlandson stores it all day and night in what she refers to as her "stinking pocket" (27). The next evening, she is able to boil it after it sat spoiling; as she consumes the rotting meat, she remarks, "and I cannot but think how pleasant it was to me" (27). Rowlandson takes time to draw attention to her shifting appetites, for remembering her time in Massachusetts, she recounts "I have seen Bear baked very handsomely amongst the English, and some liked it, but the thoughts that it was Bear made me tremble" (27). She draws a distinction between the civilized cooking styles of the English and the Indians' ability to consume raw, undercooked meat. While she remembers a time that she would not touch bear, even if it was "handsomely" baked in the English style, she remarks on her changing tastes: "but now that was savoury to me that one would think was enough to turn the stomach of a bruit-Creature" (27). By her own account, the once civilized Rowlandson is now likened with the savage, "bruit-Creature".

Another example of Rowlandson's developing tastes for Indian foods occurs when the Indians kill a deer; she recounts "they gave me a piece of the Fawn, and it was so young and

tender, that one might eat the bones as well as the flesh, and yet I thought it was very good” (33-34). Rowlandson’s ability to eat even the bones of the deer fetus recalls cannibalistic imagery. Moreover, this passage reveals that not only can she stomach savage foods but she begins to savor them, as she comments she found it “very good” (34). While finding the deer fetus tasty, Rowlandson still attempts to maintain some distinction between her more civilized tastes and those of the Indians, as she explains, “In the morning they took the blood of the *Deer*, and put it into the Paunch, and so boiled it I could eat nothing of that, though they ate it sweetly” (34). Though Rowlandson’s tastes change so that she can eat their foods for survival, there are still boundaries she will not cross. Her tastes therefore become not easily identifiable as either English or Indian.

For example, Rowlandson at one point observes her “Wolvish appetite,” explaining, “for many times when they gave me that which was hot, I was so greedy, that I should burn my mouth, that it would trouble me for hours after, and yet I should do the same again” (34). Making note of Rowlandson’s shifting tastes, Rachel B. Herrmann observes that the narrative “emphasizes that Rowlandson’s depictions map a change in foodways”; she defines “foodways” as “anything related to the production, distribution, or consumption of food” (56-57). Thus, in addition to Rowlandson’s tastes becoming more savage, her actions do as well, for as Herrmann points out, “Increasingly in the narrative, she ate her food raw, quickly, and ruthlessly” (57).

Perhaps the most savage thing Rowlandson does occurs in the Eighteenth Remove. Hungry, she begs for food in another Indian’s wigwam. Given only a small piece of food, she remains unsatisfied. She then steals food from an English child in a rather disturbing account:

The Squaw was boiling horses feet, then she cut me off a little piece, and gave one of the English Children a piece also. Being very hungry, I had quickly eat up

mine: but the Child could not bite it, it was so tough and sinewy, but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing, and slobbering it in the Mouth and Hand, then I took it of the Child, and eat it my self; and savoury it was to my taste. (36)

After giving this lengthy narrative detail, Rowlandson devotes very little to defending her egregious action. Though she has literally stolen food out of the mouth of a child not yet old enough to chew, the only explanation Rowlandson provides is one of hunger: “Thus the Lord made that pleasant and refreshing, which another time would have been an Abomination” (36). In this account, the Lord has sanctioned her actions, and Rowlandson’s text moves on without much reflection on this episode. While she is happy to forget, what is interesting to note is that after she steals the food and returns “home” to her Mistress’ Wigwam, Rowlandson is reprimanded for her actions: “and they told me I disgraced My Master with begging” (36). However, she does not seem to make the connection that she is, in part, being chastised for stealing the food from the mouth of a child. It seems, though, that her improper actions do not go unnoticed by the Indians. Christopher Castiglia notes that, “As Rowlandson begins to seem less ‘white’ by her own definition, the Indians becomes less alien, and the racial oppositions structuring her earlier notions of identity momentarily collapse” (50). Rowlandson’s behavior is becoming more and more uncivilized. Her actions here again collapse the boundaries of savage/civilized established at the outset of the narrative.

Rowlandson’s ability to consume Indian foods is ultimately a sign of her changing identity. As she acculturates more to their way of life, Rowlandson’s Puritanism and her Englishness begin to fall to the wayside, and a hybrid identity begins to emerge. Neither wholly Algonquin, nor able to live the way she had among the English, Rowlandson’s identity is also unable to be pinned down or fixed. Rather, she occupies a liminal place between the two

dissimilar cultures. Anthropologist Victor Turner describes the Rites of Passage within a culture as having “three distinct phases of separation, limen (Latin for ‘threshold’), and aggregation” (95). Turner explains, “The attributes of liminality or of liminal *personae* (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (95). Turner’s example of liminality applies aptly to Rowlandson’s position among the Indians. Removed from her English colonial life, and not fully incorporated into Algonquin society, Rowlandson occupies a liminal position, “betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremony” (Turner 95). As such, Rowlandson’s behavior is not easily identifiable as she occupies a place between two contrasting cultures in a space carved out by colonialism.

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha borrows from Turner the notion of liminality, providing that in these liminal places cultural values become negotiated. In the existence of liminal spaces arise “the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (2). A liminal space becomes, an “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” and “opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (4). Rowlandson’s experience of captivity among the Indians, then, becomes a liminal space where she is able to negotiate the conflicting views of her Puritan culture that sees the Indians as inferior and savage and her own experience and knowledge of the tribe.

Rowlandson must learn to live among the Indians, and in doing so she must leave some of her Puritan beliefs behind. As she was working on knitting a pair of stockings for her master’s

wife, she refused to knit on the Sabbath, claiming religious exemption: “When the Sabbath came they bad me go to work; I told them it was the Sabbath-day, and desired them to let me rest, and told them I would do as much more to morrow: to which they answered me, they would break my face” (22). Rowlandson’s refusal here, due to religious reasons, is mirrored at another point in the text where she is idly reading her Bible as the Indians are packing up for another remove. Her mistress “snatched it hastily out of [her] hand, and threw it out of doors” (28). While they were packing up their loads to go, Rowlandson complains hers was too heavy, “whereupon she gave me a slap in the face, and bade me go” (28). Once Rowlandson learns to accept their rules, and puts behind her notion of religious exemption from work on the Sabbath, hunger becomes less of an issue. She begins to understand that she must earn her keep and work for her food. Rowlandson realizes her agency and the focus of the narrative shifts from God’s blessing over her food and becomes more a recounting of what she has eaten.

Rowlandson’s shifting identity is also evident in her inconsistent use of pronouns throughout the narrative. At the opening, she often uses “I” to refer to herself. It marks her as an individual separate from the Indians: “I had often before this said, that if the *Indians* should come, I should chuse rather to be killed by them...” (14). Yet as the narrative progresses, she begins to refer to herself among the Indians using pronouns like “us” and “we”. These pronoun slippages begin to disintegrate the “us versus them” mentality so clearly established at the text’s opening. For instance, in the Fourth Remove, Rowlandson writes, “We came about the middle of the afternoon to this place; cold, and wet, and snowy, and hungry, and weary, and no refreshing (for man) but the cold ground to sit on and *our* poor Indian cheer” (20). Here, her use of the collective “we” and even reference to “*our* poor Indian cheer” shows that in this passage, she counts herself with the Indians. In the Seventh Remove, she notes “we had a wearisome time of

it the next day” (22-23). Rowlandson’s identity, however, is not fixed within the narrative, and often wavers between her emerging Indian identity, and her former Puritan English identity. This shift is evidenced when Rowlandson recounts, “In this travel up the River, about noon the Company made a stop, and sate down; some to eat and others to rest them. As I sate amongst them...” (23). Here she marks herself as separate. Her fluctuations reveal that her identity is neither fully English nor fully Indian, but rather a hybridization of the two.

Particularly interesting is when Rowlandson’s text oscillates back and forth between her identities within the same passage. For instance, after gleaning food with the Indians from a destroyed English field, herself receiving two ears of corn, she thinks, “A solemn sight methought it was, to see whole fields of wheat, and Indian Corn, forsaken and spoiled: and the remanders of them to be food for *our merciless Enemies*. That night *we* had a mess of Wheat for our supper” (23; italics mine). This passage is interesting because within it she both laments her enemies and their desecration of English lands while herself partaking in the plunder. Thus, she counts herself among the English’s “merciless Enemies” with the usage of “we” in describing her supper. Her pronoun usage often falters, marking that her identity is no longer fixed as either English or a member of the Algonquin Indians. The narrative fluctuates, mirroring her liminal position between the two disparate identities. Another example is when she admits to feeling so at home with the Indians that she forgets her place and her position as captive: “And here I cannot but remember how many times sitting in their Wigwams, and musing at things past, I should suddenly leap up and run out, as if I had been at home, forgetting where I was” (29-30). Rowlandson admits her feelings of comfort and home while she was with the Indians, but quickly regains her position and chastises herself within the text: “But when I was without and

saw nothing but Wilderness, and Woods, and a company of barbarous Heathen; my mind quickly returned to me” (30).

At the outset of the narrative, Rowlandson reads her capture in line with the experiences of Job, “*And I onely am escaped alone to tell the news?*” (14). She believes her capture and her afflictions are a trial, a sign that God is testing her faith: “I then rembred how careless I had been of Gods holy time: how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent, and how evilly I had walked in Gods sight; which lay so close upon my Spirit, that it was easie for me to see how righteous it was with God to cut off the threed of my life” (16). She notes God’s providence in her captivity for “as he wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other” (16). Thus, at the beginning of the narrative she attributes all of her good fortune to God’s grace. For instance, in the Third Remove, when the Indians cross a river by raft and she manages to not wet her foot, she believes it to be Divine Providence. She reads her dry foot symbolically, “I did not wet my foot, (when many of themselves at the other end were mid-leg-deep) which cannot but be acknowledged as a favour of God to my weakened body” (21). However, later in the narrative, her tone shifts and she takes a more secular approach. An example of this occurs when she receives a piece of wild pork; she does not acknowledge God’s grace, but rather attributes it to “common mercies” (40). The shift from God’s grace to “common mercies” reveals that her time living among the Indians disrupts her Puritan world view. Thus, the longer she spends with the Indians, the greater her inability to read her experiences in line with scripture.

Rowlandson’s existing assumptions of English superiority are continually brought into question. Believing the English to be dominant, Rowlandson is astonished by the sheer number of the Indians she sees lining the riverbank. She remarks, “When I was in the cannoo, I could not but be amazed at the numerous crew of the Pagans,” and to count the whole company of them

she notes is “beyond my skill” (24; 21). She begins to question her assumed English superiority when the Indians are able to cross a particularly arduous river that the English Army is unable to cross:

And here I cannot but take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the Heathen: They were many hundreds, old and young, some sick and some lame, many had Papooses [babies] at their backs, the greatest number were Squaws [women]: and they travelled with all they had, bag and baggage, and yet they got over this River aforesaid... (22).

Here, the tribe of Indians, with their sick and their old, women carrying children on their back as well as all their possessions, are able to make the daunting cross that “put a stop” to the English (22). This “strange providence of God” Rowlandson flounders to make sense of, adding that of the English, “God did not give them courage or activity to go over after us: we were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance” (22). Her reasoning betrays her growing doubt regarding notions of English superiority.

The more time she spends with the Indians, the less she is able to reduce them to the “Heathens” and barbarous savages that she describes them as at the narrative’s opening. She even notes their kindness as when one night, while she was weeping, the Indians told her “none will hurt you” and provided her with two spoonfuls of meal and a pint of pease, which Rowlandson notes was given “to comfort [her]” (24). She provides that, “though I was gone from home, and met with all sorts of *Indians*, and those I had no knowledge of, and there being no *Christian Soul* near me, yet not one of them offered the least imaginable miscarriage to me” (26). One evening a squaw even gave her some groundnuts and provided a warm place for her to sleep for the night; remarking on this generosity, Rowlandson adds “and yet these were Strangers

to me that I never knew before” (27). She even notices the kindnesses showed by her master, such as showing her the route so she can visit her son and providing water for her to bathe, calling him “the best Friend that I had of an *Indian*” (28). Though Rowlandson’s praise here is qualified, she is still able to think of her Indian master in terms of friendship, a relationship inconceivable to her at the narrative’s opening.

While the text purports to be spiritual, there are many instances where Rowlandson’s inscribed Puritan world view falters. While her previously held world order is clearly brought into question during her time with the Indians in the wilderness, her increasing failure to providing scripture for each thing she is blessed with could be a sign of her growing doubt in her faith or the inability of her faith to provide meaning for her new experiences. Michelle Burnham explains that typology, or the ability to read events or one’s own experiences in line with scripture as a foretelling of God’s favor, “ideally operates through a structure of equivalence” (16). However, this equivalence is not sustainable in Rowlandson’s narrative: “The simple substitution of experience for knowledge and of Algonquin cultural practices she encounters for her Puritan assumptions and beliefs about the Indians becomes suspended in a moment of negotiation that resists the closure that typology would impose on it” (16-17). For Burnham, this is due to the cultural exchange Rowlandson participates in as she negotiates her Puritan world view and her lived experiences of the Indians. Typology, then, fails to provide a coherent reading of the narrative and, instead, Rowlandson’s inclination towards it produces narrative tension. The incongruity of Rowlandson’s text, where she can describe the kindness of the Indians toward her or their goodwill and then universally claim their savagery, produces what Burnham refers to as “moments of inequivalence” (17). Castiglia also makes note of the incongruities within the narrative, stating that it “challenges several central assumptions of her home culture” and that

“Rowlandson develops, in contrast to her monovocal theological frame, a more complex perspective that allows her to see the Indians as more than stock characters in the drama of her religious salvation” (46).

IV. Consumer of Culture

As a captive, Rowlandson inhabits a unique place in the colonial economy. Burnham explains that Rowlandson’s captive body becomes a symbol of economic exchange, since “Captives served as tools of economic negotiation and as figures of political and religious significance as they circulated between the New England tribes and the New England colonists” (11). Rowlandson is aware of the economic value her bounty will provide, as she makes note when another squaw offers a new place for her to stay, commenting, “I understood that *Wettimore* thought, that if she should let me go and serve with the old Squaw, she would be in danger to lose not only my service but the redemption-pay also” (37). As Rowlandson becomes a symbol of exchange crossing the boundaries of the colonial world and the Indian world of New England, Rowlandson is herself also changed. Burnham elaborates that “As commodities change hands, the commodity itself changes, becomes inscribed by the friction of exchange” (20). The “friction of exchange” is visible in the signs of Rowlandson’s evolving identity. Burnham continues, “When the commodity exchanged is a human subject, such inscription can not only alter the subject itself but can disturb or confuse the discourse and culture that finally incorporate it” (20). Aside from herself being a symbol denoting worth, Rowlandson also partakes in the Indian economy through her sewing and knitting skills and reintroduces her payment back into the economy through trade or barter. By participating in the Indian economy and becoming an active consumer, Rowlandson takes part in Algonquin culture, and is herself changed as well.

As the narrative progresses, Rowlandson's agency grows from that of a passive object, waiting to be rescued, to an active agent in her new world, capable of working and bartering for her food. Castiglia notes that, "In entering the Indian economy, Rowlandson transforms herself from an object of exchange in a trade conducted between men (the Indians and the British haggle over Rowlandson's worth in terms of tobacco and firearms) to an agent of exchange" (47). Rowlandson will eventually set her own ransom price and will sell the tobacco her husband gives her for "nine shillings in Money" (41).

Rowlandson is able to trade her Englishness – in forms of the sewing and knitting of English style clothes – for Indian foods and goods. Chief Metacom, who the English refer to as King Phillip, asks her to make a shirt for his son and pays her a shilling, which she exchanges to buy a piece of "Horse-flesh" to eat (25). Next, she makes his son a cap and is rewarded with an invitation to dine with him. At dinner, she receives "a Pancake, about as big as two fingers; it was made of parched Wheat, beaten and fried in Bears-grease" (25). Remarking on her newly acquired taste for bear, she continues, "but, I thought I had never tasted pleasanter meat in my life" (25). Through the cultural exchanges Rowlandson participates in, such as by trading her knitting and sewing skills either for shillings that she then reintroduces into the Indian economy or goods and foodstuffs she receives, Rowlandson becomes both a consumer and a participant, an active agent, within the Indian economy. She also becomes a consumer of the Algonquin culture. As such, she is better able to acculturate to their way of life. She sometimes receives tobacco for the housewifery she provides, and barter with it for more food: "Sometimes one of them would give me a Pipe, another a little Tobacco, another a little Salt: which I would change for a little Victuals" (34). She makes a shirt in exchange for bear-meat, knits stockings in an exchange for pease, and sews a shirt for a "mess of Broth, which was thickened with meal made

of the Bark of a Tree” (25; 28). She knits three pairs of stockings for a hat and silk handkerchief, and makes a shift in exchange for an apron (37).

Rowlandson is even able to exchange her knitting for freedom: a chance to leave the wigwam. An Indian asks her to knit him stockings; she explains, “I shewed my self willing, and bid him to ask my Mistress, if I might go along with him a little way” (32). Her mistress obliges, and Rowlandson remarks, “but I was not a little refreshed? with that news, that I had my liberty again” (32). In the Ninth Remove, Rowlandson speaks of a “sorry Indian” who declined to pay her after she made him a shirt (26). Her agency grows, as she repeatedly reminds him of the debt owed: “But he living by the River side, where I often went to fetch water, I would often be putting him in mind, and calling for my pay” (26). Eventually, after demanding repayment, he gives her a knife, which her master asks if he can keep. She is pleased to contribute to her household, noting, she “was not a little glad that I had anything they would accept of, and be pleased with” (26). She is proud to be able to contribute to her Indian family’s household.

As a participant in the Indian economy, Rowlandson’s bartering becomes a form of cultural exchange. Through her trading, she becomes better accustomed to the Algonquin way of life. In spending more time with her Indian captives, Rowlandson begins to see them as people and form relationships she thought implausible at the narrative’s outset. However, presented with the prospect of returning home, the Indians are once again presented as before:

O the wonderful power of God that I have seen, and the experiences that I have had! I have been in the midst of those roaring Lions, and Salvage Bears, that feared neither God, nor Man, nor the Devil, by night and day, alone and in company, sleeping all sorts together; and yet not one of them ever offered the least abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action. (46)

Rowlandson's text appears to come full circle: the Indians have devolved into fearless, roaring animals and are referenced by their supposed bestial nature. Teresa Toulouse argues, "Rowlandson's stress on this inviolate body does not simply point to her orthodox desire to credit God with her redemption; it also points to her own need to be reintegrated into the community as the same body (mentally and physically) that was wrenched from it – that went out into the wilderness but remained the same" (655-656). There is no room in English Puritan society for Rowlandson's hybrid identity; as a result, she must shed it to be reintroduced into that society and accepted back.

Though the text showcases her emerging liminal identity, in order to be reincorporated into Puritan society she must present herself and her body as unchanged by her experiences in the wilderness. Thus, the binaries of Other/Self, Civilized/Barbarian that appear at the outset are reestablished in the final part of the narrative. When Rowlandson thinks of her dead child and "how it was buried by the *Heathen* in the wilderness, from amongst all *Christians*," it weighs heavily on her conscience. While ultimately redeemed from her captivity and reunited with her family, the narrative resists a wholly, happy ending. The last image presented is haunting:

When all are fast about me, and no eye open, but his who ever waketh, my thoughts are upon things past, upon the awful dispensations of the Lord towards us: upon his wonderful power and might in carrying us through so many difficulties, in returning us in safety, and suffering none to hurt us. (50)

The "awful dispensations of the Lord" disturb her peace at returning home. Rowlandson's experience is destabilizing; she writes, "I remember in the night season, how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies and nothing but death before me" (50). It is difficult for her to fully return to her former life, and she seems to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder: "Oh

the wonderful power of God that mine eyes have seen, affording matter enough for my thoughts to run in, that when others are sleeping mine eyes are weeping” (50).

V. Narrative Consumption

The first publication of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* appeared in 1682 and sold out quickly, leading to three more issues in that same year (Vaughan and Clark 3). Selling more than a thousand copies in England and America combined, the text qualified as a contemporary best-seller (Derounian Stodola 3). Whether its popularity was due to its spiritual teachings or its dramatic and psychological portrayal of Rowlandson’s captivity is hard to pinpoint; Vaughan and Clark remark on the popularity of captivity narratives, for, “In a society without fiction and plays, and almost barren of poetry, real-life drama filled a crucial cultural void” (3).

For modern readers, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, holds the place as a “touchstone text in early American literature” and is frequently anthologized (Derounian Stodola 5). Rowlandson’s narrative provides a window into early life in colonial America and allows a chilling retelling of life in the now unimaginable New England wilderness. It also provides for an ethnographical view into the inner workings of the Algonquin tribe and the cultural exchanges that took place on the frontier.

Often first person in nature, autobiographical, or semi-autobiographical, captivity narratives were greatly indebted and stylistically similar to religious writings, including sermons and spiritual autobiographies. Relying on biblical themes and language, these narratives were often didactic and imparted moral lessons to their readers. In her overview of the genre, Kathryn Zabelle Derounian Stodola makes the point that “the Puritan narratives especially used strategies of seventeenth-century English providence tales, which showed God’s intervention and

omnipotence in every day events” (xiii). In addition to borrowing heavily from sermons and spiritual autobiographies, the contents of Puritan captivity narratives were also indebted to jeremiads; a jeremiad is a lamentation on the state of the congregation, often delivered by pastors. Aldan Vaughan and Edward Clark elucidate, observing that “Puritan clergymen...accused New England of backsliding from the high ideals and noble achievements of the founders, of God’s evident or impending wrath, and the need for immediate and thorough reformation” (7). Hence, captivity narratives were published and promoted as a sign that the Puritan community needed to amend their backsliding ways and regain the Lord’s favor and became evidence of God’s vengeance: “Captivity was God’s punishment; redemption was his mercy; and New England must heed the lesson or suffer anew” (Vaughan and Clark 1).

In her introduction to *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*, Derounian Stodola remarks that though the captivity narratives of both men and women were often “mediated” by male editors, the narratives of women were much more likely to have come under editorial review (xxv-xxvi). While the text of the narrative is often credited to Mary Rowlandson herself, as Derounian Stodola points out, “it seems naïve to assume that at least her husband or her spiritual advisor, Mather, would not have had some input, which might have included editorial additions and revisions; indeed, several aspects of Rowlandson’s story recall sermon stylistics and ministerial retellings of other captives” (5). Tara Fitzpatrick also makes note of male influence in women’s captivity narratives. Reading these narratives as “palimpsests” due to the “dual” or “dueling” voices at play, she argues “By explicating the relations between the dual, sometimes dueling textual voices of the captives and their ministerial sponsors, we find that Puritan women’s captivity sagas generally relied on two narrators: the redeemed captives themselves and the ministers who propagated the captives’ histories for didactic purposes of their own” (2).

Thus, the heavy reliance on scripture and Rowlandson's desire to read her captivity typologically points to, at the very least, some ministerial influence.

Perhaps the narrative's "normative" Puritan ending, where Rowlandson once again praises God and she returns to depicting the Indians as the "savage beasts" of the forest, is also due to the meddling of a minister or the work of a spiritual editor. There is no way to know conclusively which parts of Rowlandson's text were altered, or if they were altered at all, but an outside editor could make sense of some of the narrative inconsistencies. From the pronoun slippages to the emotional conflicts in Rowlandson's biblical justifications for her Indian-like behavior, these incongruities could be the result of manipulations by an editor intent on recuperating the text as a spiritual lesson for others. Another aim of the text could have been to highlight notions of English-Puritan superiority and to downplay the way one could become acclimated to Indian culture.

In comparing the captivity narratives of French Priests and Spanish explorers with those of New England, Teresa A. Toulouse also notes that the female captives of New England often "manifested culturally valorized qualities of religious acceptance, humility, and obedience until she was 'redeemed' eventually" (1). She argues that these narratives "were eagerly supported, disseminated, prefaced, and even written by American-born New English ministerial elites" (1). Toulouse ultimately suggests that Rowlandson's and other female captivity narratives were "appropriated" by male authors for political purposes; Rowlandson's text was used to "support a providential reading of the past Indian war" as well as becoming "indirect rhetorical salvo in a cultural battle" defining the beliefs concerning English sovereignty in the New World (22).

The *Preface to A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, penned by the anonymous “Per Amicum,” Latin for “Her Friend,” goes to elaborate lengths to uphold that the author of the narrative is truly Mary Rowlandson herself:

This Narrative was Penned by this Gentlewoman her self, to be to her a Memorandum of Gods dealing with her, that she might never forget, but remember the same, and the several circumstances thereof, all the daies of her life. A pious scope, which deserves both commendation and imitation. Some Friends having obtained a sight of it, could not but be so affected with the many passages of working providence discovered therein, as to judge it worthy of publick view...[so that] others benefit by it as well as her self. (9)

“Per Amicum” is often credited as Increase Mather, a prominent Puritan minister in the New England community. In his explication of the captivity narrative that will follow, he highlights the true purpose of its publication: Rowlandson’s actions, her ability to repent her sins and stay steadfast in her faith is truly worthy of “*both commendation and imitation*” (9). He frames the spiritual purpose of the narrative is to show “the wonderfully awful, wise, holy, powerful, and gracious providence of God” in redeeming Rowlandson (8). Per Amicum’s benevolence at allowing a narrative by a woman to enter the public sphere belies the true purpose of the narrative: its utility for spiritual teaching is really a “benefit” to the entire Puritan community.

Be it “appropriation” or “mediation,” “dual” voices or “dueling voices,” male ministers had a helping hand in the writing, editing, and publication of women’s captivity narratives. In explicating a sermon of Cotton Mather’s, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, Lorraine Carroll explains that for Mather, women “*embody* the virtues he exhorts his entire congregation to practice”; and thus, he “use[s] the model of a virtuous woman for [his] political, social, and

religious interests” (17). She puts forth, that in “Writing as Ter Amicam, Increase Mather seizes on the instructional potential in the figure of the virtuous woman” (29). Rowlandson’s narrative represented “the possibilities for Puritan practice in any place, at any time, and by anyone adhering to Puritan principles of self-examination and public confession” (29).

Thus, Rowlandson’s narrative was published, promoted, and ultimately consumed as a sign that the Puritan community needed to amend their backsliding ways to regain the Lord’s favor. Her narrative, crafted at least in part by Increase Mather, became evidence of God’s vengeance and offered a path to redemption. While certainly not the first captivity narrative, Rowlandson’s text was the first to detail a woman’s captivity experience; her narrative also became the model on which other captivity narratives were based.

Just as Rowlandson’s narrative details various forms of consumption—her fear of being cannibalized, the new and strange foods she must learn to prepare and eat, becoming a consumer and active participant within the Indian economy—her text was also consumed by the Puritan community. It was advanced by the clergy as an example of moral rectitude and used to impart spiritual lessons. Heralded as an example to aspire to, Rowlandson’s captivity was evidence of a vengeful God, and her redemption was a hopeful reminder of God’s providence. Copies of the text were consumed by readers in the American colonies and abroad in England. Perhaps its popularity owes to its religious instruction, but more realistically, the narrative fascinated its readers with dramatic portrayals of the New World and life among an Indian tribe.

Though Rowlandson only lived among the Algonquin for eleven weeks before being rescued, her ethnographical descriptions of the Indians’ travails through the forest, the organization of their powwows, and the glimpses she provides into their way of life in the wilderness both fascinated and excited readers curious about the New World and life on the

frontier. Her depiction of a matrilineal society and her own ability to survive captivity and become an active agent negotiating and overseeing her ransom provides readers a rare example of a woman as an active agent over her fate in the seventeenth century. Her portrayals of the Indians and her relationships with them not only humanized the Indians but also allowed for a sense of psychological realism within the work.

Modern readers frequently turn to Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* as the archetype of early American captivity narratives in literature and history survey courses, its themes being widely applicable to understanding the concerns of early American society. The presence of religion continues to undercut our culture: the early concept of Puritan Exceptionism later evolved into American Exceptionism. While we may seem a more secular society than the Puritan colonies, just as Rowlandson attempts to reconcile her faith in God with the harrowing events she suffered through, the theme of religion and God's providence still haunts our modern sensibilities.

Consumption, ultimately, provides an interesting frame in which to read Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. Fearful of literal consumption at the text's opening, Rowlandson's anxieties concerning cannibalism really mask her fear of losing her own superior Puritan-English identity at the hands of the "savage" Indians. The anxieties of cultural exchange: fear of cultural loss and fear of cultural inferiority, aptly amplifies our own modern concerns with globalization and immigration.

Often, Rowlandson's text is explicated as an example of the anxieties existent within early American society and the developing cultural and economic exchanges on the frontier, the liminal space between two seemingly incompatible cultures. The economy carved out by colonialism oversaw the exchange of tobacco and weapons, English shillings for food and later

scalps, and eventually the exchange of captives. Derounian Stodola goes as far as to argue that “the Indian captivity narrative functions as *the* archetype of American culture, or its foundation text, in which initial contact between Europeans and Native Americans inevitable evolved into conflict and finally conquest” (xi).

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