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# Captive Women, Cunning Texts: Confederate Daughters and the "Trick-Tongue" of Captivity

Rebecca L. Harrison

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Captive Women, Cunning Texts:  
Confederate Daughters and the “Trick-Tongue” of Captivity

by

Rebecca L. Harrison

Under the Direction of Thomas L. McHaney

ABSTRACT

Combining the critical lenses of early American scholarship and that of the modern South, “Captive Women, Cunning Texts” investigates the uses and transformations of tropes of captivity drawn from the American Indian captivity narrative by women writers of the Southern Renaissance (circa 1910-45). Specifically, this study examines how captivity narratives, the first American literary form dominated by white women’s experiences as writers and readers, provided the female authors of the Southern Renaissance with a genre ideal for critiquing the roles of women in the South, and the official constructions of southern history. This work interrogates the multifaceted ways in which the captivity genre enabled these female authors to reject typical male modes of expression and interpretation, as well as male images portraying women in mythical terms that conflicted with the real experiences and boundaries of their lives.

Through critical case studies of Evelyn Scott, Beatrice Witte Ravenel, and Caroline Gordon, this study demonstrates that many women writers of this period self-consciously returned to the literary past of American captivity narratives for models and, in so doing, discovered modes of discourse and tropes of confinement that aided them in their struggle to redefine their place and that of the racial and cultural Other in southern

society, literature, and history. Their strategic re-employment of the captivity tradition literally and metaphorically provided liminal sites of exchange that both reveal and inspire agency and change in their unmasking of tradition, veneer, and the deeply imbedded cultural exchange of the white female body.

INDEX WORDS: Southern Women Writers, Modernist Writers, Captivity Narratives, Southern Women's History, Captivity Scholarship, American Women.

CAPTIVE WOMEN, CUNNING TEXTS:  
CONFEDERATE DAUGHTERS AND THE “TRICK-TONGUE” OF CAPTIVITY

by

Rebecca L. Harrison

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in the College of Arts and Sciences,  
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2007

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Captive Women, Cunning Texts:  
Confederate Daughters and the “Trick-Tongue” of Captivity

by

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## Chapter One

### **Indian Captivity and White Womanhood: Early American Tropes & Modern Southern Authors**

“You really are an Indian, not only in this book, but occasionally outside. Poor Cassie, she was a white woman to the end.” – Sally Wood to Caroline Gordon about *Green Centuries*

“. . . I have a weakness for historical novels especially when they harbor plenty of Indians.” –Ellen Glasgow to Daniel Longwell

“I run the gauntlet like a savage captive,  
Torn into ravellings  
Not by the spears of men but by the gold pins of the women!”  
—from Beatrice Ravenel’s “The Selfish Woman”

From the antebellum romance and plantation novels epitomized by William Gilmore Simms and John Pendleton Kennedy to the post-bellum, Lost Cause works of writers such as Thomas Nelson Page, the white, confederate woman in southern letters embodied the Edenic, virgin landscape of the South and its aristocratic, patriarchal, and racial values “by which southerners have defined the region’s character” throughout various periods of political turmoil (Jones 8). Personifying physical and racial purity, virtue, beauty, grace, and fragility with an underlying vein of steel, the image of southern womanhood became embedded in the cultural, communal landscape and within the region’s identity. The stronghold of this myth only intensified with the South’s charge into the Civil War, its defeat, and the aftermath of reconstruction. As W.J. Cash states,

She was the South’s Palladium, this Southern woman—the shield-bearing Athena gleaming whitely in the clouds, the standard for its rallying, the mystic symbol of its nationality in face of the foe. She was the lily-pure maid of Astolat and . . . the pitiful Mother of God. Merely to mention her

was to send strong men into tears—or shouts. . . . At last, I verily believe,  
the ranks of the Confederacy went rolling into battle in the misty  
conviction that it was wholly for her that they fought. (86)

As the confederate woman was literally identified with the cause and banner of the South, any violation of southern womanhood was, according to John C. Ruoff in *Southern Womanhood*, an assault on the South itself (133). She, or rather the ideal she personified, must be protected and preserved at all costs.<sup>1</sup> Despite its proliferation and lasting impact, however, this image of southern womanhood rarely represented the daily lives and experiences of the women who helped found, settle, and cultivate this region. In fact, the women of the South were bound and held hostage to this sacrificial, constantly serving, moral exemplar they were to embrace. Denied autonomy, selfhood, and the recognition of real experience, they stood crowned in “Dixie’s diadem” in justification of the nostalgic and constructed past that sought to perpetuate the supremacy of the white male sex of the middle and upper classes (Anne Firor Scott 222).

Despite political and economic conflicts brought about by World War I, regional agricultural depression, and the South’s confrontation with suffrage, civil rights, modernity, and philosophical developments coming out of Europe, this myth of womanhood continued its grip well into the twentieth century. Furthering the white patriarchal hegemony of the region during this period, southern male authors, critics, and

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<sup>1</sup> There is a fundamental race component to this notion of “protection” as the white, southern woman represented the legitimate, superior line. This factor further binds the confederate woman sexually as she must be kept from intimate contact with the racial Other and from sexual pleasure with her husband. As Lillian Smith describes in *Killers of the Dream*, “The more trails the white man made to back-yard cabins, the higher he raised his white wife on her pedestal. . . . The higher the pedestal, the less he enjoyed her whom he put there, for statues after all are only nice things to look at” (121). The sexual tainting of white women through captivity is a persistent and political thread of the genre of captivity narratives that will be addressed in this study, especially in the context of Evelyn Scott’s *Escapade*. This theme not only justifies the control of the racial Other, but serves “to disguise white, male control of women’s bodies” (Castiglia 123).

thinkers of the Agrarian movement, such as John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, and Allen Tate, persistently focused on a nostalgic view of history and on stereotypical, male-created images of the South in their quest to come to terms with a problematic past while seeking to define their literary culture against the North. By popularizing the New Criticism, the Agrarians masterfully inscribed their literary ideals onto the cultural landscape of the region where, as Michael Kreyling notes, “it is not so much that southern literature changes in collision with history but history that is subtly changed in collision with southern literature” (x). This Fugitive, Agrarian, New Critic quest, over the course of the century, began a trajectory of canonization and criticism from scholars such as Richard Weaver, Cleanth Brooks, and Walter Sullivan, that relegated women writers, their resistant voices, and their non-patriarchal literary traditions to the margins of southern letters. In fact, most writing by women during the literary period later labeled the Southern Renaissance, especially those works that did not lament the past or resist change, was neither received well nor considered in the category of “high literature” by many of the white male literati. The New Critics, for the most part, dismissed women as practitioners of local color and sentimental fiction, or, as Susan Donaldson notes, because their “subjects were regarded as insufficiently monumental or historical to meet Agrarian standards” (“Gender” 504). This line of thought continues well into the latter half of the century with, for example, Richard King’s 1980 publication, *A Southern Renaissance: The Cultural Awakening of the American South, 1930-1955*. In this text, King excludes most women because, according to him, they lack “historical consciousness” and decline to concern themselves with the problematic, larger, political themes of the South. This critical paradigm politely moves the women

writers of the Southern Renaissance to the sidelines as King argues they neglect to place the “true” concerns of the region “at the center of their imaginative visions” (236).

The recovery scholarship of the last two decades counters this critical trend by unearthing many dismissed female artists of the time and bringing critical vision and insight to those few anthologized in the latter half of the century. Critics such as Anne Goodwyn Jones, Susan Donaldson, Michael Kreyling, Lucinda MacKethan, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Patricia Yaeger argue for new approaches to viewing the women writers of the period that reveal their real experiences of the past, the southern landscape, and their own struggle with the complexities of history and embracing modernity as women of the South. Though they have varying research interests and agendas in their investigations of the distinct traditions of female authors of the period, these scholars agree that the women of the Southern Renaissance placed particular emphasis on taking control of telling their own stories and challenging the construction of knowledge, history, and regional propaganda. In fact, they counter Richard King’s claim that these authors lacked historical consciousness and contend that southern women were astutely conscious of the region’s complex history where questions concerning larger racial, political, and cultural themes precisely drive their writing (Yaeger, *Beyond* 288).

Yet, despite the prolific and influential recovery scholarship of this generation of scholars, what remains missing from southern criticism is a study that looks at the historical consciousness of these women as literary inheritors of a specific and highly politicized white female writing and publishing tradition: the early American Indian captivity narrative. This genre expressly explores the dynamics of essentializing discourses that present identity and social hierarchies of race and gender as fixed and

unchanging. I contend it served as the ideal form for the women writers of the South to strategically adapt in order to demystify and revise their region's very scripts of identity. Just as this genre was historically used to create and defend national borders, I argue its modern adaptation contained the power to destabilize the images of *the South* and *Southern Literature* as facts or entities that "remain intact. . . and impervious to literary representation" (Kreyling xi).

Critic Elizabeth Harrison acknowledges the relevance of the Indian captivity theme in *Female Pastoral* as "an important subplot" in the southern pastoral tradition, which was often used, particularly by male authors, to underscore female helplessness (35). She suggests, however, that many female writers, such as Ellen Glasgow and Elizabeth Madox Roberts, instead use this plot to further develop a female western hero, to emphasize the denial of female sexuality, and/or to establish a matriarchal line of bravery and self-sufficiency that stands as a counter-narrative to the hierarchical and patriarchal models of past community found in plantation society as represented in literature.<sup>2</sup> Though I agree with much of Elizabeth Harrison's assessment, my investigation goes beyond looking at captivity as a "subplot" of southern literature, one that often highlights literal abduction by Indians. Instead, my work examines captivity as a transformed genre and metaphor that underscores the subversive actions of women, their strength and survival skills, and their plot within a *community* of captives in the roles allotted them in the southern region. As Christopher Castiglia argues in his groundbreaking text *Bound and Determined*,

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<sup>2</sup> Captivity narratives are not the focus of Elizabeth Harrison's text and comprise only four pages of the book. Drawing from Kolodny's work on westward pioneer movements, Harrison's astute study primarily looks at literary landscapes in order to identify an alternative pastoral impulse in the southern women writers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



As it evolved from a religious document of the seventeenth to a feminist plot of the twentieth century, the captivity narrative allowed women authors to create a symbolic economy through which to express dissatisfaction with the roles traditionally offered white women in America, and to reimagine those roles and the narratives that normalize them, giving rise ultimately to a new female subject and to the female audience on which she relies. (4)

In this theoretical framework, captivity makes issues of economic dependence, confinement within the private sphere and heterosexuality, racial politics, and official constructions of history concrete. In essence, as Castiglia notes, these narratives offer connections between the plight of the literal captive and the less tangible forms of victimization and restriction experienced by white female readers (4). The readers literally enter a community of captives with whom, on some level, they can identify based on their own experiences and the degrees of their confinement within the public and private spheres.

Though my study is indebted to Castiglia's work that specifically looks at the cultural forces employed and the issues of social dissent in tales of white female captivity, his examination skips a critical juncture in the development of captivity narratives in America literature. Castiglia's text, which begins in the seventeenth century and moves through to the late twentieth century, does not address the women writers of the Southern Renaissance. In fact, for the most part, he skips the first half of the twentieth century. My study, "Captive Women, Cunning Texts: Confederate Daughters and the 'Trick Tongue' of Captivity," fills in this gap in captivity scholarship and

southern criticism through an investigation of the influences of the female tradition of captivity narratives on the women writers of the Southern Renaissance. My project interrogates the ways in which this genre enabled them to reject typical male modes of expression and interpretation and male images portraying women in mythical terms that conflicted with the real experiences and boundaries of their lives. My work proves that many of these women writers self-consciously returned to the literary past of American captivity narratives for models and, in so doing, discovered modes of discourse and tropes of confinement that aided them in their struggle to redefine their place, and that of the Other, in southern society, literature, and history. Specifically, this analysis links the scholarship of early American captivity with that concerning the female voice in the Southern Renaissance to ascertain the uses and transformations of tropes of captivity, as drawn from the American Indian captivity narrative, by the women writers of the period. I assert that many authors, such as Evelyn Scott, Beatrice Witte Ravenel, and Caroline Gordon, strategically employ the genre of captivity narratives, literally and metaphorically, in order to critique the region, its politics, the roles of women, and the constructions of official history.

When assessing a possible merger of these two distinct periods of American literature and culture, it is important to note that captivity narratives, from the beginning, were essentially the result of New World colonization that projected stereotypes on native peoples and women in support of the political aims of colonizers. However, over time, as settlements became permanent institutions, these narratives took on a theological dimension as settlers sought justification for the trials they faced and the actions they needed to take in order to acquire resources. By the eighteenth century, these narratives

appear with more secular characteristics and start a fictive trajectory as they develop and mutate alongside the sentimental and historical novel. Typically referred to as *fictive* narratives in the field of early American literature, these narratives move into more literary and popular forms by the nineteenth century and soon thereafter give rise to a genre of popular, purely fictional tales. In addition to this trajectory from factive to fictive, the genre of captivity and other stories of native contact, we can now discern, have always flourished in moments of racial and gender crisis in America and were not limited to the period before the Civil War as is often assumed. In fact, captivity narratives were popular throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century—the time period in which the women writers of the Southern Renaissance were growing up and emerging as authors—and the genre remained visible throughout the mid-late twentieth century, where it often takes the form of alien abduction tales.

As Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier document in *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*, contact and conflict with Native American tribes existed as substantial news headlines throughout the late nineteenth century, as did the continued publication of captivities. Among numerous new publications and subsequent editions of older volumes appeared Francis Parkman's 1867 *The Jesuits in North America* and Fanny Kelly's *Narrative* of 1871. Headlines of the later half of the century included the 1876 Sioux Indians defeat of General Custer at the Battle of Little Big Horn followed by the 1879/80 Ute War in Colorado. In 1886, the same year James T. DeShield's *Cynthia Ann Parker: The Story of Her Capture* is released, Chief Geronimo (Apache) surrendered in Arizona. This was followed shortly thereafter by the 1890 assassination of the Sioux Chief Sitting Bull and the Massacre at Wounded Knee. In addition, it is not

until 1893 that the Cherokee strip of land in Oklahoma is opened to European-American settlement. There are literal captivities that appear in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century such as *The Founding of Harmon's Station* (1910), even as a series of Wild West shows displaying Native Americans traveled the East coast. From the past, in both the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, captivity narratives were being incorporated into regional and military histories, children's literature, dime novels, and folkloristic tall tale traditions such as those of Davy Crocket and Daniel Boone. They even inspired the work of such artists as Thomas Cole (1801-48) and Horatio Greenough (1805-52) and non-fictional literary works like Washington Irving's *Astoria* (1836) and George Bancroft's *History of the United States* (1873).<sup>3</sup> In sum, the captivity tradition remained popular and prolifically exploited by both its literal participants and imaginative adapters. In time, it fully saturated our nation's cultural landscape and deeply colored our sense of a distinct frontier history. Americans "simply could not read enough about Indian captivity" (Derounian-Stodola and Lvernier 14).<sup>4</sup>

Given the influence and cultural saturation of early American captivity narratives, the women writers of the modern South had many sources for thinking about captivity as both literary material and social criticism. In fact, it is precisely through drawing on this female writing and publishing tradition regarding captivity that women such as Evelyn Scott, Beatrice Witte Ravenel, and Caroline Gordon found what they needed to

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<sup>3</sup> It is of interest that Greenough's famous sculpture "Rescue Group" stood for more than a century in front of the U.S. Capitol. This piece depicts a frontier mother and child standing by an Indian warrior and a white woodsman intent on rescuing them. The female/child figure is small compared to the Indian warrior, but his figure is diminutive next to that of the white, male rescuer.

<sup>4</sup> Frank Mott, one of the foremost historians of popular American literature, lists the narratives of Rowlandson and Jemison among the great best-sellers of American publishing, and observes that Elizabeth Hanson's 1728 narrative was printed in at least nineteen editions in the nineteenth century alone. In fact, these narratives were so popular that, as Richard VanDerBeets observes, "first editions are rare today because they were quite literally read to pieces" (xi).

deconstruct and challenge Anglo-America's assertion that "racial and gendered identities are innate, unified, and unchanging" (Castiglia 6).

As the literary heritage of white women, tales of captivity were one of the first acceptable forms of published writing for women. As Stodola states, captivity narratives were "the first American literary form dominated by women's experiences as captives, storytellers, writers, and readers" (*Women's* xi). Despite serving as an acceptable and effective mode of discourse for women, however, these narratives, as with slave narratives, often were literally and rhetorically captured and constrained by male editors. Imposed on them were political agendas that sought to contain their veiled displays of female agency and transgression.<sup>5</sup> Try as they may to contain the fragmenting power of these narratives, however, editors and other male authorities could not see that the unstable nature of the genre and the unsettling elements of cultural crossing that appear in these texts specifically appealed to American women who questioned identity and cultural borders policed by white patriarchal agendas. Thus, as Stodola argues, the white female domination of these narratives continues well into the nineteenth century, where the female literary landscape "reveals a particular preoccupation with captors, captives, and the rhetoric of captivity as women explored potential identities and roles in the century" ("Literary Imagination" 105).<sup>6</sup> Taking the next logical step, my study

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<sup>5</sup> The concept of the captive text in early America parallels publishing issues in the Southern Renaissance. As my study highlights, all three major figures experienced textual containment. Evelyn Scott's *Escapade*, for example, had large sections removed in the printing phase as the publisher feared lawsuits because of its supposed immoral nature and explicit description of the physical experience of birth and breastfeeding. Beatrice Ravenel had to contain her rebellious poetic voice in unpublished manuscripts for she depended on the male publishing world in order to support her daughter. Caroline Gordon, despite her marriage to the influential Allen Tate, faced reframing issues with her story "The Captive," because her male editor felt the protagonist was "beyond the borders of reality and . . . fiction" for a woman (Baum 451).

<sup>6</sup> Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* also discusses the use of tropes of the free and unfree in American literature in the context of race. She warns against 20<sup>th</sup> century conservative and literal criticism that would deny the complexities of such readings.

investigates the women of the modern South, and their focus on and revision of paradigms of captivity as they faced life and questioned their place in the modern world of the twentieth century. In this respect, my work moves captivity scholarship to the next level by examining overt and covert adaptations of this genre by the women writers of the Southern Renaissance who explore captivity as a dynamic cultural trope and critical paradigm in which official gendered, racial, and historical borders are simultaneously constructed and transgressed.

Southern women were clearly no strangers to tropes of captivity and their connection to issues of gender, race, community, and constructions of history. Historically, as Anne Firor Scott has noted, they were essentially confined in a tenaciously held myth of womanhood within a patriarchal family structure where “any tendency on the part of any of the members of the system to assert themselves against the master threatened the whole” (16). It has been well documented that during the Civil War, women, out of necessity, took on greater public roles. Many ran farms and plantations and worked in munitions factories, or as nurses, and seamstresses as they struggled to feed and cloth their families. Defeat in the Civil War shook the South profoundly and left the region physically and ideologically shattered and occupied by a northern militia. The aftermath of this defeat, combined with industrialization and slave emancipation, gave birth to “a set of narratives [that] portrayed the white South as a society under siege, pressed by the imperative of protecting white women from black rapists” (Jones, “Haunted Bodies” 1). It was left to the women, and what they embodied, to create a space of stability for their defeated men and to (re)create and preserve the class, social, and racial values of an antebellum southern culture where the woman was,

once again, bound to earlier codes and beliefs. Thus, it was her literal captivity to “Dixie’s diadem” that would keep her society intact.<sup>7</sup> However, “Dixie” eventually looked beyond this crown, and, as Anne Goodwyn Jones argues, through the southern woman’s authorial voice “the silent symbol spoke, and what it said, whether disguised in convention or plain and direct, was rarely fragile and good, and usually relevant to actual experience” (357).

This project demonstrates that many of the women writers of the Southern Renaissance recognized the parallels between the captivity tradition and their own regional history and social, cultural predicaments as second-class citizens and second-class writers of the South. Much like the Agrarians, they too turned to the past for answers, but the past they scrutinized was real and concrete, not a mythic agrarian or happy plantation past. My study investigates how they looked to the literary traditions of their *captive* foremothers to find ways of transgressing traditional views of women, race, community, and history. Specifically, my work contributes to the field of southern scholarship in its exploration of the following questions: Why did captivity narratives appeal to southern women writers of the modern era? What are the common traits and threads of traditional captivity that these texts share? How do the women of the Southern Renaissance transform the genre of captivity narratives and for what purposes? How do modern captivity tales address boundaries of the civilized/uncivilized in the modern

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<sup>7</sup> I do not mean to imply that the women of the South were unaffected by the equality and social reform movements of the late nineteenth century, but rather their place within them was rather complicated and conflicted given the aftermath of the war and reconstruction. In fact, beginning just after the Civil War, the suffrage movement had a paradoxical effect on the women of the South. Some saw it as an opportunity to overcome inequality, while others viewed the movement as another threat to life as they knew it. By 1890, a significant number of southern women had joined the movement, but it was “tempered by their commitment to the grand myth of the South, which depended heavily on the perpetuation of the ideal southern woman as delicate, self-sacrificial, and committed to domesticity” (Perry 234). However, by the start of the Renaissance, many writers were fighting ardently to revise southern womanhood, gentility, and repression of female sexuality even as many states were still refusing to ratify the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment.

South and real/mythical histories? How does viewing the work of several women authors through this lens contribute to the scholarship of the period?

Tracing the impulse of the captivity tradition in the female southern authorial voice, this project clearly establishes that the women of the Southern Renaissance read captivity narratives, were aware of the captivity tradition and established cultural sentiments toward Native Americans in the literary and popular imagination, and wrote directly using paradigms that these experiences evoked. In an interview concerning her work, Caroline Gordon not only admits to reading captivities, but she states that she based her story “The Captive” (1932) on the historical account of the captivity of Mrs. Jennie Wiley.<sup>8</sup> Gordon’s experience sparked a broader interest in the exploits of pioneer women and their contact with Native Americans, and she later writes a full-length novel, *Green Centuries* (1941), set in the pioneer period that required extensive research on the Cherokee. In a letter to fellow writer Katherine Anne Porter, Gordon states, “the exploits of some of those pioneer women are things that usually occur on battlefields” (qtd. in Boyle 81). Evelyn Scott refers to Native American populations extensively in her *Background in Tennessee*, and she describes a literary tradition that has “tricked” images of the Indian population into “false, strutting behaviour” for the arts (9). She also refers at length to the strength and bravery of pioneer women, often ignored in mainstream histories. This text even documents Scott’s attendance as a young girl of Wild West shows that impressed images of the “red men” into the heads of the young. Instead of seeing a captive “savage,” Scott identifies with the racial Other’s plight and uses the

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<sup>8</sup> *The Founding of Harman’s Station with an Account of the Indian Captivity of Mrs. Jennie Wiley and the Exploration and Settlement of the Big Sandy Valley in the Virginias and Kentucky* (1910) was a book by historian William Esley Connelley as told to him by Mrs. Wiley’s son. Caroline Gordon came across this book in the Vanderbilt library and describes the text as leading her “by the heels” (Baum 448). This piece is discussed at length in chapter four.



image as a way to point out the artifice of *civilized* male society. In addition, Scott addresses the paradox of this childhood image of native contact and the confinement and eventual cultural eradication of these people. She notes that despite her search of pueblos and reservations of the Southwest as an adult, she could find no survivors like those in the Wild West show of her youth.<sup>9</sup>

Poignant examples of women in fiction who become brave and cunning through captivity also permeate the literature of the Southern Renaissance as examples of what Elizabeth Harrison calls the “heroic foremothers.” Many of them, like Ellen Glasgow’s Ada Fincastle, are in search of models that will help them acquire the strength and skills necessary to survive the present and move into the future by looking to the past. In *Vein of Iron*, Ada Fincastle describes her ancestor, Mrs. Morecock, as a hardened but laudable figure. She was a woman who had “seen the brains of her baby spatter her skirts; she had been famished for food as a captive; she had eaten roots; when she reached water, she had knelt down and lapped it up like an animal” (248). Ada goes on to add that “Though she was a walking skeleton when she reached Ironside, she had the spirit . . . to begin life again. . . How could they drop the past so easily, those pioneers, and plunge into the moment before them? They were hard, it was true, but it was the hardness of character” (248).<sup>10</sup> Such examples even appear in Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* (1936) as Grandma Fontaine recalls the encoding of bravery on frontier women when she tells

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<sup>9</sup> Instead, Scott talks of finding a starved and indifferent people that were “universally” clothed and made to resemble white society. Essentially, she contends they were stripped of the very beauty and glory, that of difference, that made them like Mercury or Phaethon, “the lovely brown colour of whose body was the scar left after a challenge to the Sun!” (*Background* 29).

<sup>10</sup> Ada also talks about her great-great-grandmother who had an acculturated life with the Shawnees for several years before returning to white society. According to Ada, her ancestor never fully adapted to white life and its mores again. She says she suffered from “spells of listening, a sort of wildness, which would steal upon her” that would cause her to “leap up at the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox and disappear into the forest” (Glasgow 42).

Scarlett of her own experience in an Indian attack. These are but a few examples of this tradition that use the retellings of women's captivity stories to challenge myth and attempt to change the "substructure [of such tales] from a defense of an oligarchic order" to an indictment of regional codes that continually kept women, and the female authorial voice, on the margins of social power structures (Harrison 44).

My study examines the act of genre revision and mutation by exploring the ways these female authors use the act of looking back at the captivity narrative with modern eyes and perceive in its elements tropes that express a means for present survival and evoking change. As Eudora Welty has said in *One Writer's Beginnings*, "our inward journey leads us through time—forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling. . . As we discover, we remember; remembering, we discover; and most intensely do we experience this when our separate journeys converge" (102). Thus, the women writers of the Southern Renaissance, I argue, "converge" with their literary heritage and adapt modes of discourse that contain the very elements of resistance and transgression—strength, endurance, and agency—where captive voices can be employed to challenge the idea that racial, gendered, and official social or political constructs are innate and unchanging. In essence, the writers whom I have chosen to study adapt the captivity tradition of early America to question the essentializing white discourses on which colonization and imperialism rest.

In addition, a close examination of the common elements and paradigms of captivity narratives enlightens this project as it discerns how these authors use the female body to construct and deconstruct the borders of America, the white Anglo nation, and the regional concerns of community. My analysis reveals how captive bodies in these

narratives are often constructed to stand for their culture's values and superiority, but ultimately appear to subvert their function as symbols of national/regional stability. The unstable and volatile nature of the captivity narrative and the political power of sympathy in this tradition became, in the hands of an astute female author, a way to mark and mask agency and to serve as a powerful tool of identification between author and reader. The subsequent chapters each address the critical questions and lines of investigation outlined in this introduction through focused analysis on a writer and/or fictional work that serves as a primary example for the study.

Chapter two makes a case for reading Evelyn Scott's thinly veiled autobiography *Escapade* as an actual captivity narrative. Specifically, I examine the captivity narrative as an ideal outlet for the internal exploration of the white female self and its relationship to land, community, motherhood, race, and the nation through the genre of autobiography. This chapter argues that Evelyn Scott's *Escapade* transforms paradigms of captivity, as drawn from the American Indian captivity narrative, in conjunction with politicized tropes of motherhood. This strategy allows Scott to re-center and give voice to the moving, gendered maternal bodies of women as empowered to oppose the social constructs and politics of men in the patriarchal southern nation.

Chapter two underscores how, at its core, the genre of female captivity fractures the traditional family unit, forcing the national mother into contact zones that require reliance on individual strength, wit, and the ability to transgress in order to survive. This literal and metaphorical movement of the supposed *pure* symbols of the southern nation highlights the tension between the social expectation of the maternal body and the individual search for meaningful survival, selfhood, and independence. I contend that

Evelyn Scott employs traditional elements of the captivity narrative in her autobiography, such as concepts of the remove, the descent into extreme poverty, the perception of the liminal spaces of contact with the unfamiliar Other, and the semiotics of food/hunger, emphasizing the struggle for survival and redemption. However, unlike traditional tales of captivity, the captor in this text is the nation itself. *Escapade* documents a pregnant Scott's flight to Brazil with her married lover to avoid social condemnation and his prosecution under the Mann Act. In sum, this text deploys the moving body of a captive mother to show the tension between reproducing and subverting the dominant national/cultural narrative. By appealing to what Michelle Burnham calls the "power of sympathy," Scott lures the female reader into identification with the protagonists through the physical experience of motherhood where the trope of captivity serves to disavow, rather than imitate, standard regional and national concepts of womanhood.<sup>11</sup> Evelyn Scott herself revealed in a letter to a friend that *Escapade* was not meant as another tale of the "mentality" of motherhood in America, the "great Mother worshiping land" that denies women the power of the concrete and whole experience of the maternal body (qtd. in Scura 312). Instead, her text makes perceptible the physical, silenced, and spiritual side of this gendered experience. In this space of the raw and universal experience of corporeal motherhood, the reader slowly forgets the narrator's transgression and instead offers sympathy and empathy for the captive. It is precisely through this type of identification that the trope of captivity transforms into a critique of the nation and the myth of a coherent/imagined community where the American South and southern womanhood are happily wedded.

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<sup>11</sup> For more on the seductive power of sympathy, see Michelle Burnham's study *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*.

Chapter three, devoted to the recovery of Beatrice Witte Ravenel's work, explores the use of captivity as revisionary historiography in the guise of poetry to redefine the borders of nation, to deconstruct identity, and to re-center marginalized voices. Beatrice Witte Ravenel, poet, short story writer, and editorialist from Charleston, South Carolina, has received little attention in the scholarship on the Southern Renaissance, despite Dr. Louis D. Rubin, Jr.'s attempt to resurrect her work in the 1969 edition of her poetry collection *The Yemassee Lands* where he hails Ravenel as "worthy of lasting attention" (5). In fact, her poetry and short fiction have gone virtually untouched in the field with only two critical articles published on Ravenel's creative work and only short references to her in larger collections, usually in the context of The Poetry Society of South Carolina.

Indian captivity narratives, the first American literary form dominated by white women's experiences as writers and readers, provide Ravenel with a genre ideal for critiquing her region, roles of women, and constructions of official history. In this context, Ravenel's "Trick-tongue" poetic voice evokes in her work a double effect of captivity that confines, while it destabilizes, her "home cultures' ontological fixity" (Castiglia 12). Specifically, I argue that Ravenel uses paradigms of this genre to give voice to the Others of southern history—women, American Indians, Octoroons—and to show that official renderings and myths of identity are mutable constructs that serve and further regional, cultural, and national agendas. As Susan Donaldson points out, Ravenel's unpublished papers include several poems that specifically seek to destabilize cultural and regional boundaries and that "contemplate the confinement of women and their self-created inner worlds" ("Songs" 181).

Chapter four investigates paradigms of captivity and their transmutation in the short fiction of the period through Caroline Gordon's "The Captive." Unlike the text by Scott and the poetry of Ravenel, Gordon's piece, written directly in response to the captivity narrative of Jennie Wiley set down by historian William Esley Connelley, figuratively frees Jennie from motherhood in typical early American style by dispensing with the children in the initial Indian attack and remove. Though tragic and sorrowful, the death of her role as mother, as Margaret Homans notes, "fortunately makes possible the construction of language and of culture" (2). In other words, in Gordon's hands, the captivity narrative serves to emancipate the protagonist from both her maternal confinement in her culture and the literary silence imposed upon her in the *historical* tale recounted by Mrs. Wiley's son and used by a male historian to justify the occupation of Indian lands in Kentucky. Gordon's fictive Wiley, free from conquest propaganda, motherhood, and white-male society, is able to experience the wilderness, the racial Other, and explore her heroic potential where survival depends on voice and independent action.

Chapter five, concluding this study, synthesizes the cumulative effects of captivity and narrative descent in these southern women authors. Fundamentally, it reveals how captivity and liberty are not the binary opposites they appear to be, particularly in the female literary tradition of the Southern Renaissance. Rather, southern women writers of this era, through their resistant voices, demonstrate that such states of being depend upon normalizing discourses based on cultural values to define them as opposites. Liberty, therefore, is shown to be the purview of white men, and captivity to varying degrees remains the fate for women and the racial Other. In other words, in the modern South,

freedom for those outside of the patriarchy is an illusion rather than an attainable state of being. Recognizing the paradoxical state of liberty, these authors turn to genre revision where captive bodies are strategically employed to create counter narratives that deconstruct the historical identity formations of the southern region. As Castiglia states, “if they can never be free of identity, particularly gender identity, white women, in their passages between captivities, create and circulate a vocabulary that allows them to criticize and revise their constrictions” (11). The women of the Southern Renaissance whom I investigate show that though they continued to be confined within their cultural landscape, this captivity can be strategically transformed through their authorial voices to bring about a state of consciousness that reveals and recenters the experiences of those marginalized by the region, by its essentializing language, by its myths, and by its values.

## Chapter Two

### **“God Dawmn the filthy pureminded swine to hell:”<sup>12</sup> Evelyn Scott and the Ontological Dilemma of Captivity**

My wife, enclosed in a crystal cage of introspection, could not see outside of it the beauty that intoxicated me. –Cyril Kay-Scott

And I owe it to the South that I never did and do not now see virtue in any proposal to make other people “good” by force. The frail Puritan in me has died, and I hope will never be reborn. –from Evelyn Scott’s *Background in Tennessee*

Locating connections between gender, race, sexuality, and the past has occupied much of the groundbreaking work in southern studies throughout the last two decades. Gender and its “historical centrality to southern ideology and experience” is now not only an acceptable “analytic category,” but it is also a significant and respected academic specialty in fields of literature and history (Goodwyn-Jones 4). Emerging from much cross-disciplinary work, the study of southern women has produced numerous critical paradigms that allow for a more in-depth understanding of southern women’s voices in largely neglected works. These innovative ways of looking at female discourse analyze both what is written and the act of writing itself, the space where individual and social agency intersect within and through the text. Patricia Yaeger argues in *Honey-Mad Women* that as scholars “[w]e need to allow our critical practices to foreground the woman writer’s ability to redefine her own marginality—to revise her banishment to the borders of culture” (7). To accomplish this task, readers and students of Southern women writers must pursue the past and recover the female subjectivity that informs the present.

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<sup>12</sup> This quote is from a letter Scott sent to Theodore Dreiser dated 12 July 1923 concerning the censorship of *Escapade*. Scott makes a number of spelling and punctuation errors in her correspondence. In all instances, I have left the original intact. Note the misspelling of *damnn* in this quotation.



Women writers of the modernist period in particular developed an astute awareness of the traditions and dilemmas characterizing their own work and the work of their precursors. Analyzing the autobiographical novel *Escapade* by Evelyn Scott, this chapter specifically demonstrates how female authors tapped the narrative structures, tropes, and images deployed by their precursors and reinvented them as sites of modern agency. Such an investigation typically requires crossing disciplines; in the case of white, southern women, it also requires the reader to cross traditional literary periods in the search for earlier languages and genres that facilitated transgressive and experimental writing through the historical collective power of women's voices in later periods. The use of collective discourse as a catalyst for self-inventiveness then has the capacity to dislodge female mythology historically used and contained by men through modernist experimental modes that allow the internal to take center stage in the narrative. To borrow from Hélène Cixous, I contend that Evelyn Scott found the potential in the past to "explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of it" (Cixous 257). What I want to suggest is a theory of emancipation that arises from paradigms of captivity where the archetypal captive, wielded by the female author, breaks not only restrictive cultural codes for women but also addresses the anxiety of *female* authorship.

By taking female literary forms from the past and repackaging them in a modernist voice, women like Evelyn Scott deconstruct seemingly stable categories of literary periods through a convergence of historical voice. Specifically in *Escapade*, her first autobiographical text, Scott finds common ground between the voices of early

America and high Modernism, as the genre of the American captivity narrative provides a historical resource to draw from and reinvent. This transmutation of the captivity narrative—the first publicly acceptable form of autobiographical writing for women and the only sanctioned mode that allowed them to reflect on their personal life—empowers Scott’s authorial voice and her criticism of southern society through its application of past forms to contemporary issues. This site of contact between the past and the present demonstrates social ideology while destabilizing it by revealing the concrete possibilities of alternatives. Always focusing on women pushed beyond their physical and psychological limits, the captivity genre allowed early American women writers as well as Scott’s narrative self to inscribe an external critique of social and cultural norms, while laying bare deep-seated ontological dramas. In *Escapade*, Scott followed the captivity genre to narrativize social and psychological dilemmas that had haunted her since childhood.

Born in Clarksville, Tennessee, on January 17, 1893, Elsie Dunn (Scott’s birth name) was the only child of Maude and Seely Dunn. Elsie’s mother, Maude Thomas, was from a formerly prominent family whose money came from the tobacco industry (White 9). Despite the family’s loss of their antebellum fortune, the Thomases retained ownership of a Greek revival mansion and held on to the social privilege attained by Elsie’s grandfather Edwin Thomas. Elsie’s father, Seely Dunn, did not enjoy social privilege or acceptance, given his northern roots in Toledo, Ohio. In fact, Seely Dunn’s roots were a source of embarrassment for the Thomas family. A superintendent for the L&N Railroad, Seely earned various promotions during the course of his career; however, he lacked good business acumen and never enjoyed financial success.

As a child, Elsie spent many days in the Thomas family's Greek-revival mansion on Madison street in Clarksville, a middle-Tennessee town. Though Scott was often found at the mansion which "colored her upbringing with a romantic glow," she and her parents lived in a modest neighborhood in a small cottage on Commerce street (White 9). Despite their moderate earnings, her mother quickly initiated her daughter into southern womanhood, a role in which she seemed ideal. Known as "Gold Elsie" to family and friends, she embodied the role of southern belle with her long, blonde hair, grey eyes, and her mother's heritage. She was educated mostly by private tutors, and developed an early, keen love of learning. Though Elsie's mother remained connected to Clarksville through familial ties, Seely Dunn's search for more financial stability prompted a series of moves that took the family to Russellville, Kentucky, when Elsie was three. This relocation was later followed by moves to Evansville, Indiana, St. Louis, Missouri, and finally New Orleans, Louisiana, where they would settle in order to be near her paternal grandparents (White 15).

From a very early age, Elsie understood the role expected of her and the artifice and self-sacrifice involved in playing that role. As the author Evelyn Scott, the name Elsie took in 1913, she speaks of reacting with "blind impressionableness to demands made by southern custom upon the vanity of womanhood" (*Background* 263), "[f]or I . . . already understood that women got what they wanted only by graciously, melting, affecting to abdicate" (*Background* 35). Despite the rebellious tendencies that she describes as always being present in her mind, she continued to play the role of southern belle throughout her teens and even admits to having had a desire "to shine, like all my

little maidenly compatriots, as the professional southern belle” (*Background* 260). Once in New Orleans, however, Elsie began to have other aspirations.

After attending Newcomb preparatory school, Elsie became the youngest student enrolled at Sophie Newcomb College, an all-female branch of Tulane University. Here, Elsie embraced her rebellious spirit after heartache had driven her into a two-year mode of introspection allowing her to see “a new way of living” (*Background* 261). This new mindset, which was one of emancipation, led to her radical and public rebellion. She joined the Louisiana Woman’s Suffrage Party, published an editorial advocating the legalization of prostitution, and explored modern philosophy and literature (White 16-17).

In 1913, the most profound event of her young life occurred. Elsie met and fell in love with an associate of her father, Frederick Creighton Wellman, who was married to his second wife and was over twenty years Elsie’s senior. As the Dean of the School of Tropical and Preventative Medicine, Dr. Wellman was well known and highly regarded in the community. His wife also enjoyed a high public position as a respected concert pianist. When Elsie and Frederick absconded in December of 1913, their affair caused quite a public stir, especially given his age, position, marital status, and the fact that Elsie, twenty at the time, was still considered a minor by law. To hide their identities and whereabouts for as long as possible, both Frederick and Elsie took on new names after arriving in New York in preparation for sailing abroad. From that point forward, the couple became known as Evelyn Scott and Cyril Kay Scott (later Kay-Scott). In order to avoid prosecution under the Mann Act—legislation that forbade the transportation of minors across interstate lines for immoral purposes—the Scotts first sailed for England

where Cyril hoped to contract work with the British Museum. Given that authorities were looking for them in England as well, Cyril made arrangements with the museum to collect tropical specimens. The couple then sailed for Brazil, where they spent five years living in varying degrees of poverty and entrapment. Evelyn Scott's only child, Creighton Seely Scott (Jig), was born there. Though this period of her life was difficult, it led to Scott's emergence as a modernist thinker and writer. She even managed to publish some poetry during her Brazilian isolation.

In 1919, the Scotts returned to the United States, and Evelyn's first collection of poetry, *Precipitations* (1920), was published. Scott's poetry was well-received by the literary world, and the 1921 publication of her first novel, *The Narrow House*, cemented her reputation. This book, a literary sensation, was soon followed by *Narcissus* (1922), *Escapade* (1923), and *The Golden Door* (1925). During these years, the Scotts moved around the globe, living in Greenwich Village, Bermuda, France, Algeria, New Mexico, England, and eventually New York City again. For most of this time, Evelyn was still with Cyril, though she had numerous lovers including the poet William Carlos Williams, the novelist Waldo Frank, and the watercolorist Owen Merton. Cyril and Evelyn separated several times, which culminated in Cyril suing her for divorce in 1928. Scott continued to try to involve herself in Cyril's life, despite his attempt at distancing himself, and she made great strides in finishing her second trilogy. *Migrations* was published in 1927 with *The Wave* following in 1929. Evelyn reconnected with the British writer John Metcalfe during this time, and the two married in March of 1930.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> The last book of the trilogy, *A Calendar of Sin*, was published in 1931.

Over the next two decades, Scott published a number of works including *Eva Gay* (1933), *Background in Tennessee* (1937), and *The Shadow of the Hawk* (1941). These years were difficult professionally and personally, and Scott's health and reputation steadily declined. After spending some time in the States, Canada, and war-torn England, Evelyn and John returned to New York in the hope of re-establishing their literary careers. Occupying one room in a cheap hotel, where Evelyn continued to write, she finished the initial draft of *Escape into Living*, despite the after-effects of a stroke. She made some progress on various works during her recovery, but a combination of lung cancer and a heart condition finally led to her death on August 3, 1963 in the Benjamin Franklin Hotel.

Evelyn Scott enjoyed critical acclaim and figured prominently in the literary world during the 1920s and early 30s. Fellow authors such as Sinclair Lewis, Lillian Smith, and Julia Peterkin lauded her achievements. Scott was prolific, publishing twelve works of long prose, a play, four books for children, poetry, novellas, and a host of short stories, reviews, and essays. In addition to her published work, her literary estate contains much material that was never published, including three novels. Her work was hailed for its modernist viewpoint, its dealing with history, and its experimentation with imagism, expressionism, and the individual consciousness. William Faulkner even praised her work in his oft-quoted comment concerning women novelists; "Evelyn Scott is pretty good . . . for a woman" (Brennan 49).<sup>14</sup> Her reputation reached its peak with the 1929 publication of the Civil War novel *The Wave*. By the mid-thirties, however, her publications and reputation tapered off. Scott's adult life was plagued with physical,

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<sup>14</sup> Evelyn Scott wrote a number of highly regarded and astute critical essays. Her analysis of Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* helped firmly establish Faulkner as a serious writer, in addition to revealing her keen critical abilities.

financial, and emotional problems that led to clashes with her publishers—relations that were already strained by her unrelenting personal beliefs concerning her work and its conformity (or rather resistance) to traditional conventions.

With her death, Scott's work was forgotten for the most part until the late 1970s and 80s, when scholars such as Elizabeth Hardwick, Robert Welker, Peggy Bach, and Dorothy Scura rediscovered her work. Since the reissuing of Scott's texts, scholarly interest in her has increased; however, Scott's work continues to remain largely under-evaluated and undervalued, particularly in its contribution to American literature through its innovation using American genres such as the early female captivity narrative. My study of Scott examines her re-casting of the female body through captivity in her autobiographical work *Escapade*. Before commencing my reading of *Escapade* as a modernized captivity narrative, it is first necessary to delineate Evelyn Scott's self-professed historical project, its preoccupation with the American frontier and Native Americans, and the connections between autobiography and captivity.

In *Background in Tennessee* (1937), her second autobiographical work, Scott articulates her thoughts on history, specifically the female subject in history and its reverberation throughout time and place. Though published fourteen years after *Escapade* (1923), this text critically lays out the influences on Scott of American pioneer history and its literary representation. *Background in Tennessee* demonstrates her early fascination and alignment with native tribes as common marginalized figures persecuted for their refusal to acquiesce to the demands of white male culture—an annihilation that Scott links to the plight of self and individuality among the women of the modern South. *Background in Tennessee* also documents her long-held view of history as a force that

impacts the modern individual through an engrained regional psyche: “Our knowledge of that early period—a knowledge gained before its day—is really ultimate; is never superseded” (*Background* 301). Thus, Scott articulates a recognition of the intersections of the history of region and the history of self, and her text foregrounds the gendered nature of that convergence that became the focus of her experimentation with genre throughout her career.

In the very first sentence of *Background*, Scott wonders what she could offer that “had not been anticipated by scores of historians” (1). She speculates, rather ironically, that her research could not uncover material that would “reillumine well-thumbed archives” (*Background* 1). What she ends up demonstrating is that she has herself to offer—herself as an example of a southern woman in time—one of and from the culture, and one with distance and artistic vision to reflect on its values, shape, and fiber. Scott’s philosophy becomes one of “individual experience,” but it is an individualism that comes from and reverberates within a multiplicity of discourses from the past, where the individual truth “reveal[s] aspects that are typical [of the whole] and have a catholic significance” (*Background* 2). Therefore, Scott has a different project in mind. Hers is not a standard history of the region nor a telling of a life of success through conforming lenses. Rather, Scott’s autobiographical work transgresses accepted historical borders in order to broaden and deepen levels of understanding: “And so I dare recall a Tennessee which is neither represented in textbooks, nor wholly indicated in old records; and not actually visible to the most alert eye of a traveller sojourning for a while among southerners on his way to somewhere else” (*Background* 3). Scott wants to get past what she labels “two-dimensional histories” that try to force life into orthodox patterns



and predigested concepts that shape and determine experience. Such concepts represent controlling agents of culture, predominately white men and their agendas, and Scott seeks to fill in the gaps and raise awareness concerning alternate histories that remain to be written. Accordingly, her female autobiographical vision and voice focuses on the power of the internal landscape that exists on a level beyond control by the patriarchy. For Scott, anything in the realm of personal vision escapes these orthodox laws of perspective and their control.

It is no accident that she connects her identity as a southern woman immediately to another marginalized group—Native Americans. After explaining her concept of history and collective experience, Scott marvels why, after a mere introduction, people exclaim she must be from *the* South. This regional classification leads to her contemplation of what people are recognizing in her, and what connection they must be seeing to her first recollection of a human figure—an Indian:

I wonder, for instance, which, if any, of the signs they are reading can be attributed to my rather startling first recollection of a human figure—that of a dark-skinned man, entirely naked except for the white cloth nicely snaring his middle! An Indian, in fact—a spectacle so bizarre, intruding as it did on the “ramshackle Victoria” . . . represented by a small southern town, it might easily be mistaken for a vision of prenatal origin.

(*Background* 4)

Scott’s evoked, or rather conjured up, Indian serves as a symbol of her “imaginative inheritance” that can be traced backward (and forward) through a genealogical and regional continuum, where the red man was both seen and “never actually seen” but

rather encountered somewhere in time (*Background* 5). Detailed accounts of the tribes, customs, and treaties of early Tennessee permeate the first chapter of this text as do her reflections on the life of her pioneering relatives. Scott's treatment of the history of the local tribes highlights the white man's manipulation, mistreatment, and ultimate annihilation of Indian culture. In fact, for Scott, the conflicts described in *Background* serve as a rhetorical space of affinity between the red man and the white woman as both suffer and experience annihilation of the self to varying degrees.<sup>15</sup> In addition to rhetorically foregrounding marginalized figures and highlighting an affinity with the racial Other, the Indian serves as a clear and direct link for Scott to early America. In other words, she is "searching for the roots of her own pioneering spirit" (Cook 62).

For Scott, the Indians embody marginalized individuals who refuse to step aside for patriarchal white culture—a refusal she embodies as a marginalized woman. For her, they are noble because of their avid and furtive defense of their land. Scott also describes how Indians entered regional culture through an aestheticization in art. She mentions that the parlors of her family's Clarksville mansion contained numerous paintings by early Americans that she often studied. Though these images evoked death to some degree, they, more importantly, highlighted defiance and courage in the face of individual dignity and honor:

There was never a scene, of those depicted, in which, by some great river like a bluer Mississippi, on some palisade more grandly towering than any above the real Hudson, there did not appear a solitary redskin, tiny in the

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<sup>15</sup> Scott's references to specific tribes, treaties, and skirmishes with the pioneers throughout chapter one, and the rest of the text for that matter, are too numerous to cite. Thus, I have selected representative quotes that highlight her engagement with Native Americans that influence her views of history and identity as a Southern woman.

foreground of the picture, but indomitably erect with the dignity he invoked to withstand encroachments from the magnificent austerity of the wilderness surrounding him. These Indians were always on the watch, as if, in their view of the world, the threat of death were never absent; they were ready to face it and defy it in the same instant . . . . (*Background* 8)

Scott aligns herself and her cultural rebellion with this spirit of defiance and survival. She locates her contemporary mindset in those early American paintings that are so much a part of the world she grew up in. Much like Beatrice Witte Ravenel, the focus of the next chapter, Scott wants to identify with and locate the heart of the true American Indians—with all their nobility and savage courage—when they are not limited and “tricked into false, strutting behaviour for literature and the theatre” (*Background* 9). Later, she also parallels this kind of criticism to constraints faced by women writers, wherein editors sought to censor the female authorial voice when it failed to conform to acceptable codes for American women.

After contextualizing her position, chapter one moves more specifically into the pioneering heritage of her great-grandfather and great-grandmother, which provides Scott the opportunity to compare her experiences in her own generation with those of the women on the original Tennessee frontier. Specifically, she likens her Brazilian experience to that of the American frontier, particularly the toil and tribulation faced by pioneering women left to fend for the family in the face of isolation, the wilderness, and the Indian threat. She says that her time in Brazil led her to “know a little of the heartaches that go with it [pioneering]” (*Background* 16). This connection to the land also serves to show her knowledge acquired through this early, collective, female

experience of captivity and poverty: “In Brazil, I spent a year and a half where my feet were on earth whether I was under a roof or in the open. I hope it has helped me to understand” (*Background* 17). Her writing empathizes and identifies with the cost of pioneering, exploring, and breaking ground, which affected women profoundly. Scott recovers the daily lives of pioneer women and foregrounds the domestic sphere and the litany of round the clock chores necessary for the literal survival of the family in the wilderness. It is a world where miscarriage, childbirth, and stillbirth had to be survived without medical help. She emphasizes and reveals strength and the “savage” courage of women in the alien environment of the New World wilderness. It also highlights their acculturation to and affinity with the forest that fosters a survival instinct highlighted so profoundly by early American narratives.

Among other incidents in chapter one, she describes a typical Indian attack/escape scenario where the lone survivor is a white woman inevitably left behind to fend for herself in the woods. This woman, Widow Jones, must then walk twenty miles to Eaton’s Station through the wilderness to survive.<sup>16</sup> Scott imagines Jones’s concrete experience: Each moment in the wilderness, each sound and each shape could at any moment take “recognizable” form—clearly a reference to the racial Other. Noises of animals even start to sound half human to her. It puts a fear in her that makes her ask God, why “am I allowed to live—I, who was not the worst sinner?” (*Background* 24). Despite her fear, such an experience leads to an inner strength and affinity with her fate that allows her to push on and survive “with a resoluteness which was a conquest of her flinching and terrified flesh!” (*Background* 24).

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<sup>16</sup> The *Adventure* brought Moses Renfroe and his followers to America in order to establish their own religious colony.

Scott's historical continuum then advances to her own Grandmother and her experiences with Native Americans—real experiences and taught experiences. Scott details how generationally the women were taught to be suspicious of the remaining tribe who came bearing crafts for trade. Racial fear and the historical threat of abduction abound in suspicion of these now-broken natives who with one “guttural Indian voice” could still send young girls into the state of “an animal beset by horrors provoked by the familiar-unfamiliar odour of blood. . . . And your virgin mind braced itself to endure the last outrage of real comprehension—!” (*Background* 24, 25). Despite these internalized concepts of the threat of the racial Other, Scott's personal experience of Native Americans is quite different. In fact, she deploys her actualized encounter with the red man to underscore beauty, recover lost traditions, and further align her with this marginalized group.

After having discussed Indians as part of her historical project of “imaginative inheritance,” Scott takes the reader to the actual encounter she had with one in her youth. Scott's “revelation” occurred in 1896 at the age of three when a Wild West show came through Clarksville. Her nurse, Ella Ray, took her to the show, and they spent some time at the Indian exhibit. She states that the Indians were “like the etchings by Frederic Remington in the folio my father had!” (*Background* 27). In the context of the show, the Indians and their culture have taken on the role of the captive and become the objects of the white gaze—the southern, female gaze:

It was at this precise moment he presented himself, looking just as he might have in some village near Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga . . . .

Like Dragging Canoe! Like Oconostota! Like Hiawatha! Passing before

us from one tepee to another, his bronze body, with its liquid muscles, moving with a gliding strength and sureness not even Zane Grey could convey! Though there was the loincloth, this was my first electrifying glimpse of human nudity, and I was smitten as by revelation. (*Background* 28)

Embarrassed at his plight and without his war paint and feathers, her Indian ducks into a tepee in order to avoid the female gaze upon the *captive* savage who, through spectacle and show, is domesticated and used by white-male culture. However, revelation of his nobility and his bondage serves to unite Scott with the racial Other as she herself feels domesticated and constantly observed by the patriarchy. Thus, her experience of this Indian is profound and takes on aesthetic significance. Rather than experiencing fear, repulsion, or base curiosity, she describes an awakening of religious and ideological significance that serves as a catalyst for a type of conversion:

It was an annunciation—as if the Angel Gabriel, radiant as a comet, had descended from heaven before me! From that moment forward, gentlemen in hard derbies and choker collars; gentlemen in little morning coats with spats and lavender gloves, never completely deceived me as to what constituted beauty! I was faithful. (*Background* 28)

Thus, her female voice reveals a conversion of mindset and an affinity with native Americans that, as the author states, will not allow white male culture to fool her again. She sees the difference between the natural state and artifice. She recognizes the wielding of power that attempts to breed civilized culture at the expense of the Other.

This type of generational trajectory established in chapter one serves to connect with her detailed examination of the plight of women in southern society in chapter two—a plight that teaches women how to be self-sacrificing martyrs who should regard themselves “as little princesses defrauded of their heritage” (*Background* 14). This chapter, which also focuses on women’s experiences on the American frontier, delves into the isolation and hardship of the experience where women were left alone to grapple with the actual living on the land for the majority of the time. This impact of the wilderness on the female, physically and mentally, is described as a force that both “conquers and annihilates” (*Background* 37). However, this annihilation leads to a founding and embracing of inner strength necessary for survival.<sup>17</sup> This capacity of women to survive and to adapt in the face of adversity gives them ultimate value in the wilderness, which was recognized by Native Americans. It was the main reason Native Americans selected women for captivity—for ransom or adoption.<sup>18</sup> Although women were more easily taken in the initial attack, as captives they also adapted more smoothly to native culture and typically did what was necessary to survive. Furthermore, they were more valuable given their numbers compared to the number of men on the frontier. Scott

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<sup>17</sup> In chapter four, Scott focuses on the American character and American politics. She exposes the government’s turning a blind eye on the violation of Indian lands and rights by white settlers. The government responded with pretended shock and trinkets. She points out how those who rebelled were slain. The Indians become the captives: “Women, children, and the poor, lean domesticated stock from the Indian country, were herded and driven before the white men—the animals, probably, no worse off than before” (*Background* 88). Scott then reveals the “savagery” of the white man who destroyed everything of value to the Indian without any compassion; “The founders of a new state were missing no chances—not an Indian was spared, except where, for some special reason, he could be an asset in white strategy” (*Background* 89). To further root her philosophy in early America, she even mentions Cotton Mather at one point in the first section of the text.

<sup>18</sup> Men and children were usually killed in the initial attack. Those men taken prisoner were much more likely to experience torture and, ultimately, death in tribal ritual. Children taken captive were typically separated from their parents. Women, if not ransomed, were usually adopted by the tribe to replace lost members. As Derounian-Stodola notes, most tribes “did not possess the same constructs of racial purity as Europeans and found it perfectly acceptable to replace tribal members lost . . . with people of other races” (“Introduction” xvii).

sees something in this that relates and grounds her specifically in the pioneer days of Tennessee and binds her “[e]ven to shadowy female figures upon pillions, and to soundless men in moccasins, who trod the Indian traces through the Blue Ridge and Great Smoky gorges around 1784, when women in the wilderness had extra value as a rarity” (*Background* 295).

*Background in Tennessee* cleverly applies the experience of pioneer women to modern women of the South. The trope of bondage is carried forward to Scott’s own suffering under the social codes that bind the behavior of young women in her day. Even as a child, she describes herself as a captive desperately in search of freedom. She depicts a scene when she was living in Russellville with her parents. Her mother returns home from proper “afternoon calling,” the picture of a southern matron, and Evelyn is found “squatting in the grass, digging violently and laboriously with a large spoon” (*Background* 118). She recounts, “[l]ike a convict frenziedly employing a pocketknife as he seeks for freedom through ten yards of solid masonry with a guarded continent beyond! I wanted to get out, and be able to arrive somewhere else—on the other side of the strange taboos and inscrutable injunctions which hedged and hemmed me in” (*Background* 119). And yet, despite this kind of containment already felt as a threatening force by a young girl, women remained strong, embracing the region and its lost heritage—a heritage that sought to deny them voice. Scott seeks to restore their strength through her discourse. She writes that though

one may rail against the standards responsible for the cultivated [southern woman]. . . women are the backbone of the South; and it is they who have kept the South alive, and even lively, through dark days threatening it with



cultural extinction. . . . women whose practical courage, veiled by self-obliterating tact, was the one rock to be relied upon, where everything else tottered. (*Background* 274)

Thus, Scott reveals the fundamental tension between the embodiment of culture and the individual desire to rebel against it and the strength of women who were to embody fragility and acquiesce to men whom they fundamentally upheld. Thus, the collective voices of women do both: they uphold and decenter patriarchal concepts. By connecting to the early American past, Scott is able to put forth what she calls a realistic evaluation of what has and still exists. Fundamentally, it is a recognition of the importance of gender in the southern mindset that is contrary to an Agrarian view focused on the glorious past, a past with few *worthy* contributions by women. As Scott describes, the Agrarian view distorted and hid elements necessary for regional accord:

their imaginations, it seems . . . are overmuch employed with fable. They are spiritual isolationists, who bring to their proposed tradition of aggressive Dixieism, not only things anachronistic-not only attitudes sprung from ignoring many implacable actualities which must be dealt with before the South can be unified on a realistic basis-but views and assumed 'facts' which are sheer literary romancing. (*Background* 104)

Scott rejects any project that distorts or romanticizes the past, any project or industry that erases and dresses up the experiences and contributions of women. Rather, she uses her authorial voice and her literal, corporeal body and individual experience to both bridge a connection to the past in order to reclaim voice and move forward with contemporary change.

*Background in Tennessee*, though written after *Escapade*, clearly articulates Scott's viewpoint and interest in history, Native Americans, and the critical connections between the two through the intersection of multiple discourses of women from the past through the present.<sup>19</sup> This critical framing informs my reading of her literary aesthetic in the autobiographic text *Escapade*. Published in 1923, this factive account details her self-imposed exile, annihilation, and ultimate rebirth through a thinly veiled autobiographical impulse that conforms to all the principles of early American captivity narratives by women.<sup>20</sup> Scott's choice of reinventing this genre is appropriate as the early narratives were filled with autobiographical tendencies that reveal the inner lives of women who otherwise mostly exist in legal documents and in the letters and diaries of men. These early captivities are powerful precursors, as they not only allowed women to publish the accounts of their lives, but they also allowed them to publish the transgressions of their lives—the lines where they crossed accepted modes of behavior. It is those junctures in the texts that give them such power.

*Escapade* clearly breaks with more traditional and contemporary modes of autobiographical form, particularly those defined by men. As Estelle Jelinek asserts in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, women's autobiographies are not the typical male stories of success and public life that emphasize the author's connectiveness to a particular historical era. This western tradition of female voice that is both disruptive and transgressive of the traditional genre of autobiography emerges with the captivity narrative of white women who typically concentrate on the domestic sphere and on a

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<sup>19</sup> *Background* does not represent a sudden epiphany that only applies to her thinking later in life, but it specifically reflects her accumulated knowledge and interpretation of her personal and literary ancestors.

<sup>20</sup> *Escapade* is the true account of a section of Evelyn Scott's time in Brazil. She gives the text a fictional tone where characters' names and even relational status are changed to protect those represented in the text (i.e. Cyril Kay-Scott becomes John, Creighton [Jig] becomes Jackie, etc).

need to explain and understand the internal and ontological dilemmas. Thus, the fragmentation of experience typically found in these narratives parallels the “multidimensionality of women’s socially conditioned roles” that establishes patterns of diffusion (*Women’s Autobiographies* 17).

Many critics, including Scura, Welker, Edwards, and White, note *Escapade*’s similarity to the travel narrative, escapist fiction, domestic novel, narrative prose poem, and social commentary. All focus on a merging of these genres and attribute the book’s irregularities to the experimental tendencies in modernist form that seek to deconstruct borders of autobiography. Though the book does bear some similarity to these forms and it is clearly a modernist experiment, such readings mislead the reader and ignore clear and profound evidence that this text actually grounds itself in *one* particular mode of discourse from a past era. In sum, *Escapade* is not a blend of genres, but rather a text that deliberately reinvents the semiotic context of the early American captivity narrative. A close analysis of the form of Scott’s *Escapade* through the lens of the early American captivity narrative clearly locates its genesis in this genre. In fact, Scott’s text passes virtually every litmus test for being categorized as such.

*Escapade* is not the complete story of Scott’s life from her elopement forward, nor is it a documented history of her time in Brazil. It covers a very limited time span focusing only on the first three years of her life there, though the couple remained for over two more years during which time they enjoyed more financial security and comforts (Scura 293). It is perhaps more significant that Scott makes only passing references to the global context in which her experiences unfold—especially World War II (Scura 288). The self is written out of larger history in favor of individual significance.

Such overarching structure is typical in early captivity narratives. They cover the time span beginning with the initial attack and ending with the captive's liberation. They focus little on larger social issues and relay the subjective events experienced and the change to identity that occurs in zones of contact with the racial Other.

In his dissertation, Timothy Edwards focuses on the "autonomous self" as the prime question of Scott's major prose. Specifically, he asks if an autonomous self is possible for the female subject? Part of this argument is that the narrator remains virtually unnamed throughout the text—not named at all until page 208, where drunken natives refer to her as "Senhora Dona Evelina." For Edwards, this suggests effacing of the narrator's identity despite her search for individual significance. I would like to make an alternative case. First, though the narrator is virtually unnamed in the text, she is the only character whose name is not changed. Scott's husband, son and mother, Cyril, Jig, and Maude, are all transformed into characters named John, Jackie, and Nannette. Thus, this remains the true account of Evelina/Evelyn.<sup>21</sup> Also, true to early captivities, the author's name is never deliberately highlighted in the textual apparatus because the experience of captivity, as in Mary Rowlandson's case, was not about her edification as much as God's dealing with her and the subjective experience's effect on the internal—the I.<sup>22</sup> What was important was that they were the authors of the experience; thus, their names almost always appear in the title or on the title page of the work, which was a

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<sup>21</sup> Encountering her name through the language of the natives once again highlights the genre of captivity.

<sup>22</sup> Comparisons to Mary Rowlandson's text will be made throughout this study of *Escapade*. There are numerous 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century captivity narratives by white women that could be drawn upon as examples. For the sake of clarity, I have chosen Rowlandson's text because it remains the defining archetype of this genre. It was one of the first books published in America by a woman, and it was the first captivity narrative written in English. Also, sections of Scott's work bear an uncanny resemblance to passages from Mary Rowlandson's narrative. A close study of Scott's prolific correspondence to determine what specific narratives she might have read would add to this study.

significant achievement in a time period where such public acknowledgment for women was scorned.<sup>23</sup>

Scott's text is no exception. After all, it is the story of the birth of Evelyn Scott, of how Elsie Dunn was reborn through captivity. The text becomes the writing of the self independent from whom the person, or more appropriately whom the reader, thinks they know. Captivities, including *Escapade*, refuse to foreground the self as a stagnant being; the self for them is mutable through the experience of trials and what remains is the self that is reborn through the agency established in the struggle for survival. *Escapade* is not a struggle for the marginalized female subject; it is *the* story of how Evelyn Scott came into being through Elsie Dunn's escape from the South.<sup>24</sup>

Captivities begin with the attack and the killing of the former selves; they emphasize sundered families that leave captive women in isolation with only their abilities to help them survive. Structurally, they are told through geographical removes from one location to the other as the tribes flee authorities, and these are typically sequenced chronologically, covering the initial attack and ending with the ultimate release or outcome of that release. Such is the structural arrangement of Scott's text. Unless one looks through the lens of this early genre, one could easily classify *Escapade* as travel literature, as many critics have suggested. However, Scott's body is described as literally moved, carried, and often, as the book progresses, dragged across geographical and cultural boundaries. Therefore, the overarching structure is closer to captivity removes.

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<sup>23</sup> Examples include, *A Genuine and Correct Account of the Captivity, Sufferings and Deliverance of Mrs. Jemima Howe* (1792), *A True Narrative of the Life of Mary Kinnan* (1795), *God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty, Exemplified in the Captivity and Redemption of Elizabeth Hanson* (1728).

<sup>24</sup> It is no accident that Scott's title for this work, *Escapade*, contains the word escape within it.

Specifically, the first six parts of *Escapade* are arranged chronologically in a pattern of geographical moves or removes as the captivity genre labels such. It begins not with an Indian attack that takes her into the wilderness, but rather with a self-imposed captivity where the actual severing of family ties, in this sense her southern ties, becomes a necessity for her to live life as an active participant through her will. We must give her credit for her part in this remove. However, she was also quite young, under the influence of a much older man, and still a self-professed virgin at the time. Cyril plans their escape, and she is carried along, literally killing her former self through the adoption of a new name, Evelyn Scott. Thus, the book starts with her remove from the States, which is followed by “almost incessant mobility”—a feature critics have described as a unifying thread of the early American captivity narrative (Burnham 15).

Before the book begins, there is a preface of sorts that depicts the image of a fleeting city as the boat pulls out. Rather than feeling elated at what is ahead, the narrator feels “pressed between the high buildings” and “like a grape in the wine press” (*Escapade* np). Through the horizon we see “A dwarfed Liberty has ceased to threaten” (*Escapade* np). This image grounds the story in their removal from New York, literally moving away from the ultimate symbol of liberty (a white lady herself). However, it also functions as a remove into captivity, and it foreshadows the symbolic death that accompanies those taken: “In the deck chairs are rows of sickly quiescent faces. Soon the stony sunshine and the symmetrical palm trees will mark rows of identical graves—the graves of those who masqueraded in differentness” (*Escapade* np). This self-imposed exile quickly disintegrates after they arrive in Brazil, where her body becomes an object literally moved and objectified by others. In other words, her self-imposed exile quickly

becomes a state outside of her control, and she is captive in a country where she cannot speak the language and she cannot leave because she lacks a passport.<sup>25</sup>

The subsequent parts of *Escapade* typically begin with the arrival and end with the departure of the narrator and John (Cyril) in a particular locale. The book opens in a hotel in Rio de Janeiro, a large modern city, and, over the course of subsequent parts, the narrator is taken to hotels of lessening quality. These episodes reveal John's control of her body as she is transported, along with their meager belongings, to varying towns for his work. The couple eventually rent a small house in Natal, spend time at a mission in Pernambuco, reside for a short time in Salvador, take up residence on a makeshift ranch in Cercadinho in the Mountains of Bahia, and eventually experience release. These various removes are more matter of fact in the first half of the text, and they provide a way for Scott to talk about her foreign surroundings and the racial Others. As the book progresses, however, the moves become increasingly torturous, particularly after the birth of her son Jackie (Jig). The narration emphasizes her often bare and broken body. When going to the mission in Pernambuco for medical treatment, Scott writes,

I was carried on board the dirty little steamer in a chair. As we passed people turned and stared with dim curious interest. . . . I felt unpleasantly my distinction from the rest. . . . I wished I had had a veil over my face and I tried not to see any of these individuals clearly. The sense of shame is a physical impression. My body was bare and hot. My clothes couldn't

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<sup>25</sup> Also, up until this voyage, Scott claims she was still a virgin. It is on the transatlantic liner that she loses her virginity and becomes pregnant, most likely in January or February of 1914 (White 23). Thus, on another level, she is starting the book with the literal trespassing of her body with the actual mark of conception. A reader knowledgeable of early American studies cannot help but be reminded of this transatlantic narrative convention at work (clearly in reverse here) in such works as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794).

cover me. I wanted to get away from myself—the self that was at the mercy of everyone else. (*Escapade* 100)

This remove takes on a political function as it translates into what it means to be subject to another; “It is only when the distinction is one of power or superiority that it is agreeable to find yourself different from the group” (*Escapade* 100). Scott is no longer one of the ruling elite. She is the objectified Other and literally is powerless to even board the steamer herself. She is as distant from the South as possible. As Burnham notes, the remove enhances “the sense that with each successive departure the captive becomes increasingly distant from her own culture . . .” (22). In addition to culture being lost through the remove in captivity narratives, time is commonly lost. Right away we are told that her watch is broken, and, despite WWI, the only date mentioned in the book is that of the final leg of their move to the “ranch” that will lead to their ultimate demise, failure, transculturation, and liberation—Thursday, August 31, 1916 (*Escapade* 177).

Removes also commonly detail moments of assimilation to native culture on the part of the prisoner. To this point in the text, the reader sees Scott assimilate in minor ways. She is picking up the language and often speaks of herself as speaking broken Portuguese. She learns to cook the little food they have in traditional ways and even makes clothes for her baby in the traditional Brazilian style (queira). However, by the journey into the mountains to start a makeshift ranch, they become almost indistinguishable from the natives. Thus, her entry on horseback into this region actually suggests death: “The mountains enclose our death, gently, so gently, in a vast embrace which no one can deny, from which there is no escape. But I do not wish to escape. I



want to stay here forever and ever behind the wall that enfolds our peace” (*Escapade* 188). In this chapter, Evelyn and John try to make the ranch successful and even build a homemade mill. They have daily interactions, meals, and Evelyn even teaches a few surrounding natives, and they behave and follow local customs. The intimate image of their examining each other’s bodies further underscores this assimilation to native culture: “At night, . . . we strip off all our clothes, and, holding the tin lamp so close to our bodies that its heat almost scorches our flesh, we pick the ticks off on another. Hundreds there are. . . . We also bathe ourselves continually in a solution of kerosene and tobacco juice” (*Escapade* 197). This moment is ironically the most physically intimate scene in the book between John and Evelyn. The couple not only act like natives, they are mistaken for them by other “white” men.<sup>26</sup>

After a horrible storm, their mud hut collapses, and they lose all their livestock to a strange illness. The family is on the brink of starvation and sees no way out. It is clearly their lowest point in the book. At this point, they hear and see white men on horses in the distance speaking in English. However, the Scotts are ignored. They are mistaken for natives by the white mining group. Evelyn contemplates what is going on: “Then I began to regard myself, Nannette, John, and my surroundings with the vision of the people who had ridden by . . . [who] had mistaken us for poor natives who were nearly white” (*Escapade* 251). Not only are they mistaken for natives, but it satisfies them. They do not have the desire to be noticed anymore.

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<sup>26</sup> Not being recognized by your own people is one of the key moments of many captivity narratives. See Cabeza de Vaca’s *Relacion*. This takes on particular cultural cachet when the white, female captive chooses to remain with her captives when the opportunity for release presents itself. See Seaver’s account of Mary Jemison’s life.

In a last-ditch effort to save the family, John decides to attempt to get a job with the mining company. He borrows clothes and walks for days to get to the company's office and relies on his logic skills to land the job. Once he has secured the position, he returns for his family who will have to stay in hiding until they can save up the money for decent clothes for all of them. Technically, this is the last remove, the actual release from captivity. They sell off or leave their last possessions at the ranch and then make their way to a train that carries them away. However, the final image is not one of true liberation. It is that of an iron door that "opens, rolls back from one world's end to another . . ." (*Escapade* 259). Thus ends the story of their captivity; however, the book still has one section left. Part seven may not seem to fit this mold of the remove as it consists of what Scott later referred to as her "Shadow Play." In fact, many critics see it as a sharp break from the rest of the text. I see it otherwise, but I would like to postpone this discussion fittingly to the end of this chapter.

Much in the vein of captivity narratives, *Escapade* details a life of isolation and linguistic difference. Though she is with John, she spends weeks alone as he must go away often to earn money, and she must survive in this foreign culture though she does not know the language. After diverting authorities to England, Cyril chooses Brazil because he speaks fluent Portuguese. Evelyn did not. From the very start of the book, this linguistic isolation serves to highlight the awareness of helplessness of the captive in the actual state of bondage, which on some level goes beyond the physical because it is utter isolation. All of life must be translated for the captive. It is in this linguistic context that Scott first fully recognizes her predicament: "In the interchange of unintelligible noises I felt my exclusion from the life about me, my helplessness." (*Escapade* 1)

Because of this, she is truly isolated and left to her thoughts and reflection; and it is through this immediate experience of self reflection that the book is written (much like the contemplative manner of Rowlandson). She states, “I sat there in the room with nothing at all to occupy me—nothing but my thoughts” (*Escapade* 2). Like Rowlandson who clings to a Bible given to her, Scott has two volumes of poetry and *War and Peace* with her that serve as her connection to her former culture. Her language is all that can be infused with meaning for her now, so she desperately hangs on to it; “We write on anything—torn scraps of paper, wrapping paper, for paper is hard to get. . . . It is like saying one’s last words” (*Escapade* 221). However, once she can manage some Portuguese, it relieves anxiety because she can detach herself from it: “I would like to cling to Portuguese which has no relation to me, in which it is never necessary to infuse a meaning. It is a language behind which I can retreat” (*Escapade* 251).

In addition to the experience of isolation and difference in language, physical and emotional deprivation and suffering are archetypal experiences of the captivity narrative. In traditional narratives of the seventeenth century, these horrors of the endured experience served as tests or markers of punishment “by God, as opportunity for redemptive suffering, and as evidence of divine Providence” (VanDerBeets 9). This morally instructive quality in these early propagandistic texts served for the moral edification of the reader and to elicit anti-Indian sentiment. Scott’s *Escapade* also uses these elements, which highlight difference across gender and culture. But, closer to the fictionalized tales of subsequent centuries, Scott uses these aspects of captivity to evoke pity and empathy for the captive. The tests she must endure deal with the semiotics of eating, inappropriate clothing, fatigue, physical torture, fear, and the racial Other.

Much like Rowlandson's aversion to her first encounters with Indian food, Scott cannot adjust to the texture, smell, and experience of eating the poor Brazilian fare. Though she has no desire to eat it, she is hungry and "obsessed" by the idea of it despite her aversion: "I was obsessed by the idea of food. . . . coarse fish reeking . . . bread made without yeast, and tinned butter which suggested underdone cheese" (*Escapade* 2). The food is often prepared in an unsanitary fashion; Scott observes, "There is frequently a fly in the stew, and sometimes even a roach" (*Escapade* 10). As in Rowlandson's text, hunger causes the narrator to eat and be satisfied with what she can acquire. Scott illustrates this juxtaposition during her stay at the Pensao Allemao. She watches as a servant drains her coffee "through a greasy rag on which she [an Indian servant] afterward wipes her hands. And the rag is never washed. All the same it is a delicious drink" (*Escapade* 39). These images of food and drink permeate the text and, over the course of their fall into absolute poverty, they are reduced to constant and unvarying meals consisting of boiled red beans and mandioc mush. The few bits of meat that they are able to manage from their disease stricken goats is described as "maggot-laden," but none-the-less it is all she has to help sustain her family (*Escapade* 207). She notes, "I used to throw away the portions on which the flies had laid, but now I scrape the eggs and maggots away as best I can and we have that, too" (*Escapade* 229, 230).

This kind of experience is also played out in their dress and living conditions. Scott does not have the correct clothing for the time of year nor any clothing fit for a pregnancy. By the end of the book, she cannot even come out in public before John can secure the funds to give them enough clothing to appear respectable—otherwise it might crack the illusion that landed him the job that procures their release. In numerous hotels,

Scott sleeps in her coat because the sheets are so soiled she cannot take her clothes off (37). Also, she often has trouble sleeping as “I was roused more than once by cockroaches running over my face” (*Escapade* 101).

Though this text is ultimately a captivity that fundamentally comments on the American South, it is also a text about zones of contact with the racial Other—another mark of the precursive genre. This contact serves both to hide resistance and to evoke sympathy. It also highlights how “The day-to-day struggle with an alien culture is the mainspring of the experience and the driving force of the captive’s attempt to understand the change he has undergone” (Vaughan 11). Scott’s text portrays just such an experience.

*Escapade* details the people and places Scott encounters in a crisp and meticulous fashion: men, women, prostitutes, vegetation, and wildlife. Of Parahyba, Scott writes:

On these sterile oases fisher-folk had built huts of mud-daub and wattle with only three walls, across which dry palm branches were sparingly laid to keep out the rain when it should come. One could see that these people had no possessions other than the ragged clothes they wore, an earthen pot or two, and perhaps a net which was laid out to dry on the wall or the roof. Naked yellow children with emaciated arms and legs and huge inflated bellies turned, as the train passed, and stared after it with a long stupid gaze of astonishment. (*Escapade* 28)

Though coming from a society of rigid social conventions, Scott sees even more rigid definitions of social roles for men and women in Brazil where the women face constant infidelity and often beatings. Much as in other captivity narratives, there are times when

Scott's voice reveals itself as becoming expressive of the culture from which she comes. In the text, Scott describes an incident in which her son is very ill and must be taken to the hospital. Cyril is out of town, and so she must take the child herself. She goes to a charity clinic, which is filled with "old women and children, mothers with babies . . . waiting humbly and patiently in attitudes of dejection" (*Escapade* 154). Interns come and go, but the women and children continue to wait regardless of condition. There is even a baby with a bandaged head who does not get addressed. Reaching a point of frustration, she code switches back to the southern white woman of privilege in order to place herself above the native women and get immediate treatment:

I got up, walked brazenly out of the waiting room, and wandered along the corridors until I found an interne. Then I told him in broken Portuguese that his hospital was disgraceful, that I was a person accustomed to receiving courtesy, that I had been waiting there more than an hour, and that I must have attention at once. If consideration had to be bought I would pay for it. And I held out to him twenty milreis which was for the time being all of the money I had in the world. I was gratifyingly aware that I talked very loudly and that I stamped my foot. (*Escapade* 155)

The intern is alarmed by her whiteness and air of superiority and finds a doctor to help her son immediately. Scott is frightened at the realization that she had to command respect in this manner and that she is only able to do so because she once had a particular social position. Interestingly, she goes on to recognize that her ability to do this will slip away as she falls more into poverty and more into her assimilation to the alien culture.

The body, its movement, its treatment, and how it is seen becomes a transgressive and disruptive force in the text. It is both entrapment and ultimate freedom. Part of Scott's writing the female body is literally about realistically writing it. She desires to take away the romanticizing, the shame, and the secrecy of female sexuality. Women's early captivities always address the question of the female body and its sanctity. In the state of captivity, social roles of white culture do not apply, and they certainly cannot help the prisoner survive or be redeemed. The body, in this context, serves as a liminal space that "unsettles the paternal and symbolic order" (Jacobus 149). The pregnant body takes on even more significance. For Scott, her pregnancy intensifies her sense of alienation from society, while forcing her into intimate contact with her own sensuality through the corporeal experience of pregnancy, birth, and lactation. The pregnancy empowers her voice and the choice of captivity allows the story to be told, and rather graphically, because in captivity transgressive behavior is allowed to be written, and this is precisely why Scott chooses this form.

Despite the positive experiences of the maternal body, meaning is profoundly inscribed on her body by her status as a commodity of men. As Burnham writes of early narratives, captive bodies "served as tools of economic negotiation and as figures of political and religious significance as they circulated" (11). The body is thus empowered to tell a history of the markers of and rebellion against articulated cultural signs. Scott herself marks her exiled body as a condition of gaining knowledge (much like the biblical Eve); "I am convinced with my whole self, as though my flesh had informed me. Now I *know*. Knowledge is the condition of my *being*" (*Escapade* 9). Thus, being a captive outcast of southern culture allows her a sense of realization and moral worth because

value is placed on awareness, ability, and honesty, rather than artifice. She writes, “Yes, I want to be an outcast in order to fully realize what human beings are capable of. Now I know that fear and cruelty underlie all of society’s protestations in favor of honesty and moral worth” (*Escapade* 9). The act of throwing away reputation through radical action may entrap her physically, but spiritually it frees her from boundaries of restrictive social codes. As she states, to be “helpless permits one an escape from the limitations of material existence” (*Escapade* 182).

Her pregnant body is objectified both by the cultural Other and the white man on a number of levels. She cannot even go out in public without men gazing at her white, foreign body: “I can not bear to expose myself to the naked gaze of the men I see. It is almost as if they had touched me, and this uninvited contact is more than I can endure” (*Escapade* 38). In another section, desperate for adequate clothing, Scott goes to an atelier to have a pattern cut to make a maternity dress. Scott describes the tailor as a “small yellow person with moist uncertain eyes and a waxed mustache. While he was measuring me he talked volubly and passed his hand carelessly and caressingly over my hips and breasts. I felt like an animal for sale who was being examined for good points, and I hated myself because I didn’t find it possible to say anything” (*Escapade* 19). This experience makes her conscious of her flesh and its subjugation at the hands of men. She has no cachet in this culture as a woman, and an unmarried, pregnant one at that. In fact, she is only shown respect in relation to John: “Men show me respect only as they respect the physical belongings of another. They don’t really respect me, but John’s property” (*Escapade* 39).



The objectification of her body becomes even more potent as she needs medical care for the birth of her son. John secures the services of a local doctor, Doctor Januario, and Scott details his examination of her naked body. Dr. Januario treats her like a commodity and erases her as an individual with rights and feelings:

Doctor Januario has small waxed mustache, [and] large cold brown eyes with heavy lids . . . . He took my clothes off, felt me all over, and said I was very healthy, in very good condition. . . . I felt his cold eyes all over me, ignoring me. I wanted to get away from my body that he had touched—to leave it to him. To have one's individuality completely ignored is like being pushed quite out of life. Like being blown out as one blows out a light. I began to believe myself invisible. (*Escapade* 51)

In addition to feeling separated from the body he touched, she feels like she has lost something from having him examine her though she cannot name it. She recognizes that it gives him a stronger sense of power to look upon women, particularly foreign women, in such an intimate way. *Escapade* employs sensationalism here in the racial Other's exploration and objectification of the white female body. Such concerns are always addressed in captivity narratives. Rowlandson, for example, avidly denies any inappropriate use of her body. Scott twists the genre's thematic concern for the potential of rape in captivity and actually describes the exploration of her own white body in the text. The reader, particularly the southern reader, would be both drawn in and repulsed given the regions' concern with miscegenation. White women represented the ability to keep the race pure, and so much of the construction of southern womanhood is built upon this notion of protecting female sexuality. These moments when racial boundaries

“become unexpectedly porous” place the reader in the position of sympathetic witness (Yaeger *Dirt* 89). Scott may have been an adulterer and an unwed mother, but does she deserve to suffer the racial Other’s hands upon her naked and pregnant body in the most intimate way?<sup>27</sup> By revealing her inability to act in this situation, Scott becomes an unwilling participant and the audience, the reader, would undoubtedly feel empathy for the captive white body.<sup>28</sup> Scott recognized sympathy’s seductive force and its ability to draw attention away from her transgression. By putting the reader in this position of witness who is powerless to stop the act, the reader “experiences the suffering as deeply as the victim” (Fisher 108).

Also, in colonial narratives there was a direct correlation between the integrity of the female body and cultural coherence. Burnham notes that “As these captive women defend their virtue by arguing for the sustained integrity of their bodies, they argue also for the coherence of the cultural and national categories their bodies represent” (171). *Escapade* reinvents this function of the captivity narrative by completely obliterating the body in the text. Scott’s physical body is impregnated, violated by the racial Other, cut open and sewn up by mission doctors, and left to starve in the wilderness of Brazil. Her textual body, therefore, intentionally destroys the physical body specifically to symbolize the desired fracture and obliteration of the restrictive southern codes for women that mark her regional body.

There is a narrative trick at this point in the text. The racial Other is not the only one shown guilty of objectifying her body. The horror she experiences at the hands of the native doctor during the birth of her son is clearly paralleled to the eradication of the

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<sup>27</sup> When describing her labor, Scott mentions that Doctor Januario not only looked at her body, but “touched [her] . . . intimately” (*Escapade* 53).

<sup>28</sup> This suggests that Scott manipulates racial prejudice for her advantage.

white female body and inner self at the hands of white, Christian men at the mission. The delivery of her son, botched by Dr. Januario, has left her in pain and in need of corrective surgery. John finds a mission that is equipped to help her and gets the lead doctor to take the case. Scott endures a hard and painful journey there, and her experience at the hands of Christian mission doctors is horrible and not what one might imagine. Though we are not specifically told that Dr. Beach is from the South, it is certainly implied in the text. Scott writes that Mrs. Beach told her “immediately that she is a Southerner and, I can see, means me to infer that she is an aristocrat” (*Escapade* 105). Thus, the representative figure of authority in southern society, the white, Christian man sets out to try and rectify the damage done by the inadequacy of the racial Other. Dr. Beach and his son are relatively pleasant to her at first, but, once in the position of doctor/patient, they treat her body as a commodity. Relating the moment of being placed on the examination table, she states,

I was very conscious of being looked at by men—not doctors, and I knew they were conscious of it too although they were trying to pretend otherwise. . . . Taking off one’s clothes strips one of so much mental covering. . . . Whenever I gazed at young Dr. Beach he turned his head away and coughed slightly. I see where hatred of the flesh comes from. It is through the flesh that you are at everyone’s mercy. (*Escapade* 107)

Dr. Beach lacks the necessary equipment to perform a full operation, so he does a temporary one that should help her until she can return to the States. Given the anatomical area and natural moisture, her stitches have to be redone twice. This problem annoys Dr. Beach, as does her slower than expected recovery and request for morphine

for the severe pain. He calls her a nuisance; she reports that Dr. Beach said, “I was an hysterical woman and had no excuse for being disturbed by such an insignificant experience” (*Escapade* 113). When the stitches have to be repaired a third time, he has her drink as little as possible and asks her to restrain from going to the bathroom. Her body is literally reduced to the control of fluids. When she still does not recover quickly, he becomes angry, disgusted, and even more degrading. For the reader, this horrific treatment of the narrator during such a delicate operation in the most intimate place almost erases any blame she may bear for her situation, and, instead, turns the reader against the cultural representative in the text. In addition, by turning the narrative discourse on Dr. Beach, Scott cleverly transfers sympathetic identification away from the representative of white, Christian culture onto her own body. It is a subtle shift, but a pertinent one as it is symbolic of a larger needed change for women.

The focus on contact zones with the cultural Other emphasized in captivity narratives functions on two levels in this text. Scott first employs the traditional captivity narrative construct of describing the exposed and helpless captive body in the gaze of the racial Other. Second, she parallels that experience to her own collision with dominant culture. By manipulating this aspect of the genre, Scott reveals a space of inter-cultural contact that, to borrow from Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of colonial encounters, distinctly involves “coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6).

*Escapade* clearly politicizes the maternal body as a site of cultural exchange. Yet, the text also reveals the duality of maternity where the corporeal experience is not only restored but embraced. This inscription of meaning on the female captive serves to connect her to a female readership faced with the same ontological dilemma brought on

by the anxiety of motherhood: “I wonder who I am. Who is this being I am alone with every day, who is already a part of the child she never beheld, the child who knows her more intimately than any other creature can, though it has never seen her with its eyes” (*Escapade* 41). Scott’s astute and vivid description of this inner transition and the realization of the actual experience marginalizes her social infractions that are recounted at the beginning of the text and rhetorically centers an intrinsic sentiment shared by women as a historical community of captives. She essentially articulates maternity as both creation and self-annihilation, and thus takes on captive language: “I had a sharp painful pleasure in my fright, in my sense of bondage to my child. I would always belong to him. I would always think of him first. My abandon to him was humiliating and sweet . . . I thought, It is my body I give to him. And I was surprised in recognizing this. I had imagined maternity as something thin and ideal” (*Escapade* 60). The absorption with the maternal condition, this state of being, is a source of beauty and struggle for Scott throughout the text. It represents a part of her consciousness out of the realm of her control, and it is something she cannot rebel against. She is captive to it on an instinctual level that requires total surrender. Though she embraces the physical experience of it, including breast feeding, she also paradoxically resents her total surrender to something weak and helpless. She even compares her love for her child to a fatal condition:

And my love for Jackie, like all maternal love I imagine, resembles a fatal disease. . . . I feel as if I were being consumed by my child’s remorseless weakness and, without being able to behave otherwise, I realize the morbid completeness with which I abandon myself to his most trivial

desires. Maternity provides an irresponsible condition. The mother, the individual, has no longer to decide what is best for her in life. Instinct indisputably arranges her existence. (*Escapade* 158)

The crux is that despite the erasure of the individual, she cannot help desiring the cycle: “Yet I long for another child more than for anything on earth. I can’t understand myself. It is like longing for annihilation. And it is not the ideal conception of a child which appeals to me but the sensual experience, the feel of weak hands upon me, of eager lips at my breast” (*Escapade* 158). The concrete description of feeling tied to the physical reality of the experience reveals the complexity of the bond between mother and child. This revelation profoundly serves as a way to invite empathy and identification from a female audience who understand Scott’s conception of the plight of the mother that goes beyond language precisely because it is rooted in the primal experience. The captivity narrative’s traditional emphasis on the exposed female body allows Scott to violate, to a large degree, taboos that prohibit the physical description of the material maternal body, which is empowering for women. The hands, the milk, and the breast become unsuppressable in *Escapade*, despite her editor’s attempt at censoring parts of the work, and the linguistic experience returns a “sensuous” wholeness to the female body (Scura 312).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Another comparison to early captivity narratives exists in her description of the racial Other’s treatment of a child. Petronilla, one of her various servants, has a baby, but she curses at it and strikes it when Scott is not in the room with it. It is frail, weak, and, given the lack of proper care, dies. However, like Mary Rowlandson who feels no remorse when her Indian master’s papoose dies or when an abandoned papoose is left half alive in the cold, Scott does not bemoan the infant’s death except to focus on the individual significance of the episode. She comments that “There is no reasonableness in blaming Petronilla. What one needs to blame is the stupidity of Nature. But in spite of all my attempts at detachment I am indignant. Theresa says the child is starving to death and I can easily believe it. If I don’t keep after Petronilla she never feeds it, and she is deliberately careless in her preparation of the milk. . . . I have heard her call the baby “o diabo,” and I am almost certain that she strikes it, small though it is. Why shouldn’t she! For her it represents an added burden to her penury. And of course the maternal instinct, even when it is strongest,

Focus on the discourse of the body can be liberating, but on some level it is no longer even discourse. Captivity narratives allow women to cut through the linguistic and cultural baggage of motherhood to the reality of the shared experiences of women. There are no complex metaphors, polite readings, or anything else that sublimate the real—that is, physical—experience. By describing the bondage of maternity, Scott is actually redeeming and liberating the real experience from language—from historical discursive practices. Scott certainly recognized the power of this rhetoric. She says as much concerning literature: “I wondered why the birth of a child appealed so little to the imagination of the artist. Why were all the great realistic novels of the world concerned with only one aspect of sex? This surely was the last—the very last—thing one needed to know before one came to conclusions about life” (*Escapade* 58).

The captivity narrative is the only genre that has focused so thoroughly on the mobility of the woman’s body, not just geographically but internally, and that is precisely why it is the most appropriate discursive tradition for Scott to draw from for her cultural suppression in the South and the price of her liberation in an alien society. Thus, captivity becomes a “contradistinctive” force for Scott that allows her room to stand against the discourse of both male literary practices and “the formal historian” (*Background* 301). Part of this “contradistinction” in Scott’s collective framework lies in the desire to make visible the agency found not only in rebellion against restrictive social codes but in the transformative ownership of one’s own actions. This gets at the crux of self-responsibility as self-realization takes us full circle in the journey of the white female captive’s quest for both survival and redemption. In early captivities like Mary

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only modifies the individual without altering her predilections in the least. Just the same I hate Petronilla for her stupidity, her unkindness, her lack of imagination” (*Escapade* 93).

Rowlandson's, the narrative discourse itself, written after the events, becomes an individual journey and test of the self—a self constantly in flux between the cultural definitions it came from and the forced change necessary for survival in zones of contact with the Other. As Burnham notes, “[Rowlandson's] captivity seems to her a type of spiritual pilgrimage during which her sanctity and election were tested” (24). Scott's transmutation of this genre must also deal with this fundamental aspect of the genre, but clearly does so from a revolutionary presumption about religion and sexual politics.

Scott's text, delivered from the body of her autobiographical self, reveals her identity both as a product of the cultural constructs of southern womanhood and as a rebellious spirit seeking true individuality in the context of women's culturally and biologically imposed and distinct roles. That is, she does not enter alien cultures like an objective genderless anthropologist; she is transported into these cultures where she is subject to the most basic aspects of women's traditional experiences. Two impulses are in constant conflict as her physical and spiritual states are tested through the trials of captivity. Accordingly, the narrative body is tortured and destroyed by both its historical cultural markers and public acts of transgression. However, what is tested through the experience is not Scott's belief in God or previously imposed cultural codes of conduct, but Scott's belief in the easy emancipation of the gendered self. She discovers that radical behavior may lead to other forms of bondage, whether physical, psychological, or economic.

Scott speaks of the southern patriarchal concept of women as the perpetuator of a society ruled by men where women were not only relegated to the domestic sphere, but expected to uphold the illusion of a lost genteel past. This burden becomes symbolized



through their chastity, which ultimately must be protected at all costs by male domination. Scott's understanding of her father, detailed in *Escapade* through the character Uncle Alec, reveals that his paternal duties, and his sense of her happiness were not to nurture her growth, but rather "related only to my virginity" (*Escapade* 77). The mere suggestion of a self outside of male societal needs results in "distance," "sympathetic jest[ing] of my ideas," and the patronizing gesture of a "patted" head to put the utterance in place (*Escapade* 77). In other words, he seeks to reproduce the martyred, southern female body through conformity. The politicizing of her body to the orthodoxy of southern cultural values results in an individual death that goes unmourned and unnoticed: "One can die inwardly without any of [those who rear you] being aware of it" (*Escapade* 77). Her attack is directed specifically at the familial unit that constantly reproduces the inscribing of the past on the present, but also it is aimed at the individual women who permit it to continue through blind conformity. The self-sacrificing and holy southern matron on a pedestal is cleverly knocked down to cowardess: "I have seen . . . too much of what self-sacrifice implies. People who profess to live only for others evade the responsibility for their cowardice and give their self-gratification a subtler form through a trick which allows them moral superiority" (*Escapade* 4). Scott would rather exist in a state of captivity allowing her independence and responsibility because that ultimately lets her develop greater moral worth. Thus, captivity becomes a conscious choice; she can merely exist carrying the regional markers of womanhood, or she can rebel and *live* with the consequences. Though absolute freedom may never be attainable, one can at least struggle to become one's own master.

Scott returns time-and-time-again to the thematic need to own the self. Early on in *Escapade*, the reader learns that John's wife Louise is trying to locate them and seek retribution. Described as having the law on her side, she makes a public scandal of Evelyn and Cyril's elopement and threatens prosecution under the Mann Act. Despite Louise's tirade, which Scott hears about through correspondence with her mother (her aunt Nannette in the text), Scott does not dismiss or disparage Louise's reactions. Quite the opposite, she states that Louise is "justified" in treating them like "enemies" (*Escapade* 17). This rhetorical play is strategic on Scott's part, because she is actually guilty of running away with another woman's husband. Rather than trying to justify this action, she owns it and shifts her discussion to a mild attack on society, the conveyors of restrictive cultural constructs who are "almost as unkind to the innocent participant . . . as to the sinful originators of the debacle" (*Escapade* 16). Scott writes, "But I am in rebellion against all those people who make the laws, who edit the newspapers, who, without once inquiring into the personal elements which distinguish every situation, condemn in advance all those who fail in a conformity which has no individual significance" (*Escapade* 17).

This persecution from afar, which she regards as more cultural than personal, becomes a driving force in her commitment to her own moral code, which values the condition of the individual as self-determined. Particularly, through the act of writing, the narrative body seeks ownership of her self-selected captivity. She does not want to be *written* out of the scandal as a victim, so she will not allow societal discourse to have power over her. "What I resent most deeply," she writes, "is the attempt to deprive *me* of responsibility for my own acts. To have John sent to prison as though *I* had not equally

selected the condition to which we have been brought!” (*Escapade* 17). Later Scott echoes this sentiment; “As it is, I was ‘seduced.’ . . . I am not to be allowed any decent self-responsibility for my acts” (*Escapade* 79). Thus, through the act of writing *Escapade*, Scott regains individual control and agency, claiming her actions as her own.

As in early captivity narratives, the captive’s authorship exerts some control over the representation of her plight. As author, Scott herself is master of her destiny, because she gets to tell the tale and account for herself in the experience. In sum, as Mary White states, *Escapade* “involves a constant negotiation between the woman her southern society expected her to be and the woman she sought to be in rebelling against such expectations” (77). There is no conclusive outcome to this tension, and Scott is often ambivalent about her situation, particularly as her health is affected. However, the emphasis on choice and the need to allow for individual difference never waivers. This is another effective strategy, as she emphasizes to the reader serving as witness that she does not expect or desire conformity to her views, but mere tolerance: “I have no wish to force myself on the world, but I want at least a tolerance which will allow me to exist” (*Escapade* 187). The reader need not convert but simply acknowledge room for alternative paths for women’s lives. Certainly, most readers at the time would not have conceded readily that adultery is an acceptable alternative, but the mere suggestion that it is fractures the strong hold of dominant mythologies of gender.

By describing and publishing the actual experience of captivity, the captive body reverses the power relations imposed in the narrative, as the authors not only define but interpret their confinement. In other words, they become the master through the medium of writing. This is important for Scott, who wishes to show that she becomes neither

savage nor whore through her transgression. She is a wife, mother, and citizen in all the flawed definitions of such socially determined roles; she is whole. Despite her physical suffering, she wins a “linguistic victory” for the former captive self through the control of the actual storytelling (Sewell 42).

The more Scott slips into poverty and faces the abject nature of the experience, the more she needs to control, to become captor so to speak, of her physical and linguistic environment. No better example exists in this text than her treatment of animals. Over the course of her narrative, Scott collects a menagerie of pets that directly correlates to her level of poverty and bondage in Brazil. In fact, by the time they are situated on the site of the failed ranch, the reader cannot remember all the creatures subject to her. Scott the writer, distant from the immediacy of the related events, recognizes this and uses her accounts of their animals strikingly in the text to underscore the experience of confinement.

At first, the reader notices an occasional addition of a captive animal—a present from John, a wounded creature she rescues. However, as her situation becomes more desperate and her captivity more crushing, the images of her pets become more cruel, and Scott herself often inflicts the captivity, even maiming them so that they cannot escape. For example, she has a toucan that “drags about with a chain on its leg or sits in a huddled plaintive heap at my feet” (*Escapade* 152). There is a caged finch that she cannot part with and attempts to bring to the ranch with her. It dies a terrible death in transit with its claws contracted in his cage, “gripping the emptiness” (*Escapade* 167). Once they arrive at the mud hut John has constructed, the more desperate their situation becomes, and the more desperate her need to put herself in the role of master. For

example, she finds an owl's nest in a felled tree and clips the bird's wing in order to keep it from flying away. However, the odd thing is that after she has done this—maimed the bird, taken away its will and liberty—*she* dreams of it flying free. She writes, “I imagine him free; a gray cloud of feathered quiet drifting, his low cry, and his claws clinging to a young bird—clinging, clinging like an unlifting shadow” (*Escapade* 206). Though she imagines him free, a predator on the hunt, the reality is that he is her captive who must obey her for food, which the owl does in a helpless manner. “He is resigned . . . utterly,” she writes (*Escapade* 207). In this way, she becomes a part of the owl's world through domination, herself a powerful predator. On a larger scale, the owl is the symbol of the individual who will never experience freedom because he is not willing to die for it. He obeys and exists for others, much like the southern women Scott has determined not to be.

This image of the owl is immediately juxtaposed in the next paragraph with a description of another captive predator, a hawk. The hawk, also wounded for the sake of capture, does not resign himself to Scott as master. He is no feeble and grateful captive. She writes, “It is different with the hawk. . . . when I attempt to feed him his terrible eyes select unerringly my moving finger. More than once he has dragged at it with his beak and torn my flesh” (*Escapade* 207). Despite his capture and a wound that no longer permits him flight, the hawk still seeks liberty even though it will most likely result in his death. The hawk, therefore, represents the person who struggles to establish power and accepts the cost of rebellion. Scott writes, “He sees us too plainly. His vision has placed us outside him forever. He recognizes our antithesis. He also reminds me of a child. He is another death” (*Escapade* 207). By connecting hawk and child, Scott brings the

metaphor of captivity full circle. She unpacks her own imagery toward the end of part six; “I realize the cruel element in this passion for pets. I love them because they are subject to me, because I cannot be hurt by them, and it flatters me to give to them without anticipating a response. Perhaps that is really my attitude among human beings. At any rate I much prefer the society of these creatures to the society of the people I have known in the past” (*Escapade* 244).

The dedication of *Escapade* reads,

To Adam, the monkey; Dinah, the tan and white bitch; the armadillo, a small unrelenting secret; the owl; the hawk; the deer; the mangy little chicken who lived in a cotton nest after its leg was hurt. To the delicious goats and all the little birds with sunken breasts and rigid claws—my friends who are dead, who loved me for no more than the food I gave them. (np)

This dedication, which seems odd when first read, is the reader’s initial hint of how the self is constructed. However, after reading the text, one is brought full circle back to the dedication in a different light. Just as capturing these creatures was a way to control some aspect of Scott’s life as it started to spin out of control in her self-imposed captivity, the dedication serves as the initial marker of linguistic control of her life—the birth of Evelyn Scott from the death of Elsie Dunn. She aligns herself not just with other captives, but with those bound by her. Scott linguistically becomes both captor and captive, which poignantly “illustrates how difficult . . . [the] struggle becomes for the marginalized female subject” (Edwards 21).

This helps us see how American captivity narratives functioned as a way of giving birth to the female authorial voice; they allowed women the public space to do an improper thing—to have an unconventional experience and then write, tell their own stories, and invite public recognition. In colonial times, an accepted public male voice denoted value and extraordinary merit, and captivity narratives gave this privilege to women too. Yes, these early tales served patriarchal and religious agendas, and they were often incorporated into male religious texts and some were even ghost-written by men (proving, perhaps, just how significant they are). More often than not, men sought to control these narratives through their own textual manipulation because the female voice had found ways to fracture “strictly delimited boundaries between the gendered spheres of public and private” (Carroll i). Thus, by guiding the reader’s interpretation, male editors sought to contain the narrative meaning of these accounts, and, therefore, to deny the female experience and voice to protect social hierarchies of gender.

There is no better example than the initial 1682 publication of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative, which contains a preface by the influential minister Increase Mather and a sermon by her husband printed immediately following her text. Rowlandson’s narrative—her voice and her history—is literally sandwiched between the interpretations of these two male ministers. Increase Mather and Joseph Rowlandson most likely had some significant editorial control over the content and framing of her tale, the extent of which we can only speculate. However, despite this attempt at containment, Rowlandson’s voice and subjective experience still significantly “transcends the historical and cultural circumstances that produced it . . .” (Derounian Stodola, “The Indian” 5). No amount of typological framing can erase the revelation of

her transgressive actions while she is with her Algonquin captors, nor can it white-wash her subjective telling of a story that embodies a different role for a Puritan woman.

This ability of captivity narratives to center and make public the female voice and to legitimize transgression within captivity certainly appealed to Scott. In this vein, by marshalling authentic experience into social commentary, her authorship advances ideological views by refocusing historical modes of female discourse. Her strategic employment and subtle twists of the genre forge her cultural, gendered transgressions into sympathetic moments of identification with the reader that fracture accepted modes of discourse. Yet even Scott's experience, though written over 200 years after Rowlandson's, could not escape the containment of men—in this case, the publishing world. The frankness concerning the physical body disturbed the sense of etiquette of her publisher, Thomas Seltzer, so much that he had the book censored in page proofs. No original copy text exists; asterisks mark deleted sections.<sup>30</sup> To Theodore Dreiser, Scott wrote,

When my account of Brazil was in page proof a lawyer was called in who said it was a "borderline" book, and would be considered, in its original form, a menace to American institutions. . . . I was requested to cut out all statements that I was proud of my relation to Cyril, all statements of my emotional rebellion when I felt I'd rather die than marry to please people who were my moral inferiors. I also was requested to take out all physical statements about pregnancy because I was an unmarried mother, all remarks about giving milk or other indecencies. (qtd. in Scura 312)

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<sup>30</sup> The asterisks mark twelve instances of deleted text. However, the extent of the excised text is unknown, particularly since rewriting may have been done to avoid obvious textual gaps. For a more detailed discussion of the excisions, see Scura's afterword (313, 314).



Scott was outraged and bitter about the censoring of her text. However, she needed the money and could not pull out of the contract (White 75). The excised passages concerning maternity particularly incensed her because she viewed it as the most concrete and defining experience for women that needed de-romanticizing. She wanted to restore its fullness and authenticity through the textual body. Interestingly, in addition to echoing the attempt at containment of Rowlandson's text by white, patriarchal authority, this censorship of Scott represents another twist on captivity.

Traditional captivity narratives usually release the female captive from motherhood by killing the children or separating mother and child. Critically, such a fracture of a woman's defining role as mother is what allows many moments of agency in the text. In *Escapade*, this structure is reversed. Scott seeks to restore the maternal voice and the reality of the experience in captivity, through its honest and forthright telling. Granted, the extent of the emphasis on maternity was undoubtedly diminished and somewhat contained through the publisher's cuts.<sup>31</sup> However, the maternal relation and all its complications remains unmistakably in the text as both a fracturing force and a source of identification with the female reader.

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<sup>31</sup> Scott's text also suffered a later attack with the publication of Cyril Kay-Scott's autobiography *Life is Too Short*. In this text, he devotes a section to their time in Brazil. However, the male version is one of adventure, spiritual searching, and the quest to free himself from a life that bored him. His choice of Scott as a companion is devoid of emotion, and she is reduced to her willingness to go; "... at the end of a few months, the only really important thing that turned the scale was, ... that Miss Dunn was the only woman I knew at the time who would consent to go to the tropics with me. I was glad it was to be someone who wouldn't bore me" (168). His version of this time period is full of excitement, travel, and accomplishment. References to Scott occupy very little of the text, and, when he does mention her, it is typically condescending and patronizing to Scott, her pain, and her abilities. He will defy the reader to feel any sympathy for her: "And lest the reader feel gratuitously sorry for my new wife I will say at once that neither she nor our child ever lacked a meal or a place to sleep while we were in Brazil" (179). Her physical problems are also of no consequence to him: "Civilized women are biologically incompetent" (193). In fact, he even goes as far to suggest that he could have done the operation and delivery himself and avoided all the problems had he had the right equipment (194). A detailed analysis of the difference in their versions of this experience would contribute much to the understanding of the gendered nature of the autobiographical impulse.

Such focus on the biological and emotional make-up of women and their experiences give captivities their power as historical markers of change. As Derounian-Stodola writes, they “allowed the captive . . . to set the record straight by furnishing insider information” (“Introduction” xviii). These women, through the telling of their stories, simultaneously upheld the sanctity of their sexual bodies in captivity, defended the publication of their experiences against possible objections, and often revealed intimate details that defend their Indian captors and indict the white colonizers (whether intentional or not). Moreover, they make the resilience and courage of the *weaker* sex a matter of public record. As such, these narratives allow the victim to turn public discourse around on the dominant culture, where they have the potential to alter preconceived concepts of both civility and barbarity. These narratives lay a trap, so to speak, through their sensationalism. After all, they are about bondage, sexual intrigue and the racial Other, and, ultimately, freedom—concepts typically taboo in white culture. Thus, their immense popularity contained the power to register with permanence the female reader’s often suppressed interests and even her domestic experience. Richard VanDerBeets has written,

The most compelling pattern in the captivity narratives, however, is that of the Archetypal Hero who engages in an archetypal journey of initiation, a variation of the fundamental Death-Rebirth archetype. This archetype is manifested in the captivity pattern of Separation (isolation from one’s culture and symbolic death), Transformation (a series of excruciating ordeals in passing from ignorance to knowledge and maturity,

accompanied by ritualized adoption into a new culture), and Return (symbolic rebirth with a sense of moral or spiritual gain). (x)

*Escapade* meets all these criteria, and Scott, as the heroine, certainly fulfills the death-rebirth archetype.

In concluding this study of Scott's *Escapade*, a further consideration of part seven of her text, "Shadow Play," is warranted. Evelyn Scott's twenty-six page play, which closes *Escapade*, is expressionistic and contains elements of fable and biblical illusions. More significantly, it shocks the reader in its divergence of form and theme (seemingly) from the rest of the book. For Scott, the play, however, was the only way to end *Escapade*. Scott writes in a letter to her friend Lola Ridge, it "can be used at last and in just the way it ought for it absolutely represents my absolute at that period having been written then" (to Lola Ridge). As critic Dorothy Scura observes, "It is a condensed, symbolic, and distorted map of the narrator's mind . . ." during her escapade in Brazil (Scura 297).

At the end of part VI, Scott is released from the world of the ranch, a place where she passes as being native. The last image of her is on the train moving away from this ultimate state of savagery: "The train begins to descend. A river is pink-brown in the timid light. Stooping figures of washerwomen. One has her skirts rolled to her waist and even her fat buttocks immersed in the stream. A heavy iron door opens, rolls back from one world's end to another, and lets me out" (*Escapade* 259). This image appears to be one of release for the narrator. The prison-like doors signifying her captivity finally allow her to leave; but, what does it textually let her out to? Perhaps if the book ended

here, readers could interpret her escape from the failed ranch and savagery as liberation. Yet, there is something on the other side of this iron door—the shadow play.

This fable-like piece opens with the tale of Dina, who betrays her lover, Aaron, with Monsieur Renard, a beast-like man with “furry pointed ears and . . . a bushy tail . . . uncomfortably depending through a slit in his clothes” (*Escapade* 260). A confrontation quickly ensues between Aaron and Renard, during which creditors storm the dwelling and threaten them. Renard and Dina manage to escape, while Aaron is left to deal with the creditors and his disgruntled servants demanding their wages. Aaron, taking on prophet-like qualities in his defense, abolishes law in favor of inspiration and starts his own church in which he serves as God-head. Shortly thereafter, Aaron’s seduction at the hands of a sprite leads to the crumbling of his church with “the impression of the last day, or of Pompeii during the eruption” (*Escapade* 279).

The play then abruptly removes to the jungle, where Aaron finds himself alone circled by the seven daughters of the wind.<sup>32</sup> In this setting, Aaron must accept that he is not a divine prophet and is ill-prepared for survival in the harsh environment. Animals mock him and deny him a place in their community. This act concludes with Aaron’s dream visions, including those of the Virgin Mary and Dina who becomes a figure of death. Ultimately, Aaron faces ghosts that are really his doubles, who surround and mock him. Reduced to a childlike state, he is put into a crib by a maid and sung to sleep.<sup>33</sup> The song she sings him is of tigers pursuing young lambs, with religious

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<sup>32</sup> Of her few possessions, Scott had two volumes of poetry with her in Brazil. One contained a large selection of the Romantics, for she mentions Keats and Shelley in *Escapade*. The seven daughters is most likely a reference to William Wordsworth’s “The Seven Sisters; Or, The Solitude of Binnorie.” His poem evokes the mythology of the Pleiades star cluster, which were the seven daughters of Titan Atlas and the sea-nymph Pleione.

<sup>33</sup> For a full summary of this section, see Mary Papke’s “Players in the Dark” (181-182).

undertones of a glorified baby that can soothe wounds. The play ends in darkness, as it began, but also in silence. It is, in fact, described as “Silence and darkness, as it was in the beginning” (*Escapade* 286).

In her fine and comprehensive afterward to *Escapade*, Scura suggests that section seven, with its modernist flavor of questioning form and genre, might remind the reader of *Cane* by Jean Toomer, the Circe episode in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, or of Carson McCuller’s *Ballad of the Sad Café* (297). Though these works all do highlight the challenging nature of modernist fiction, I believe that Mary E. Papke makes a keen connection between Scott’s “Shadow Play” and the shadow play found in Plato’s *Republic* (185). Plato’s “Allegory of the Cave,” which is also book seven of the larger work, is often considered the first captivity tale. Though it is clearly not a tale of captive women involving the racial Other and the frontier, it is an allegory that highlights bondage, manipulation, agency (or lack thereof), and the borders of cultural experience.

In “The Allegory of the Cave,” men are described as having been chained by the leg and neck in a cave since childhood. They cannot turn around, and thus can see only what is in front of them. What they see are the shadows on the wall of the cave facing them, which are being projected by the firelight of their captors, “artificial objects, including figures of men and animals in wood or stone or other materials, which project above the Parapet” (Plato 228). For these captives, the shadows of those artificial objects are the only reality that they know. They, as Papke notes, “are passive, unquestioning spectators without agency or will” (185). During the course of the allegory, it is imagined that one captive is set free and forced to face the knowledge that his experience has been manipulated all this time. In fact, he is forcibly taken up out of the cave into the

sunlight where he finally realizes his state of being in the cave. Knowledgeable and happy, he returns to the cave to enlighten and, thus, set free his fellow prisoners. Clearly, he expects that they also would desire this change, this understanding of what actually is the *truth*.

At this point in the allegory, the narrator asks Glaucon, concerning the prisoner, “‘Would he not feel like Homer’s Achilles, that he would far sooner ‘be on earth as a hired servant in the house of a landless man’ or endure anything rather than go back to his old beliefs and live in the old way?’” (Plato 230). The answer is definite: “Yes, he would prefer any fate to such a life” (Plato 230). However, in this tale, the other captives are not described as being open to the idea of change, to the idea that reality may in fact be different than what they are accustomed to. Instead, they are described as “laughing” at him and trying to kill him: “If they could lay hands on the man who was trying to set them free and lead them up, they would kill him. [Glaucon then responds] Yes, they would” (Plato 231). Simplistically, in the context of the *Republic*, this allegory serves as a comment on government and the role of the philosopher in society who must, like the captives, go down into the cave to free the minds of the deceived.

There are a number of readings of the meaning of this allegory as a captivity, and certainly an in-depth comparison of it with Scott’s play is warranted for future study. However, given the scope of this chapter, what I simply suggest is that the ending of *Escapade* is a clear allusion to Plato’s shadow play and thus another means by which to connect *Escapade* to the genre of captivity. Plato, as D.A. Callard documents, dominated Cyril Kay-Scott’s thoughts in the Brazilian year *following* their release from the failed ranch in Cercadinho (29). Cyril Kay-Scott himself documents his thinking about Plato,

specifically citing the *Republic*, in his autobiography *Life is Too Short*. Kay-Scott notes that while in Central Africa, he had taken along two books that he read over several times, one of which was Plato, whose dialogues “delighted” him (252). His immersion in philosophy comes full circle during his time in Brazil. Kay-Scott writes,

As in Africa, many a time in Brazil (for I had another copy now) have I sat in camp or lounged, perhaps leaning against an ore pile, reading Plato, my spirit (almost to use his own words) mounting to stand upon the dome of heaven, seeing the sights within its globed interior, on to the heaven above the highest heaven to scan the essence that is knowing, and roam the infinite above all knowing. (253)

Despite his delight in and appreciation for Plato’s work, Kay-Scott dislikes the *Republic*, so much so that he mentions this twice in two consecutive paragraphs. He provides no explanation in this section about why he believes the *Republic* inferior to the rest of Plato’s work. He simply says that he finds it “paling in comparison” to Plato’s dialogues and that he “cared for [it] less” (253, 252). This reference demonstrates his concern with philosophy, and we can recall his remark about Evelyn Scott and her philosophical acumen: “In Elsie Dunn [Evelyn Scott] I found one of the few women I had known . . . with whom I could discuss philosophy” (168). Thus, it is not a stretch to imagine Evelyn Scott evoking both Plato’s allegory of the captives in the cave, deluded by shadow play, and perhaps the larger message of Plato’s *Republic*—that society should be rigidly hierarchical and the “Republic” should be wary of artists.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A more detailed analysis is needed of Plato, Cyril’s dislike of the *Republic*, and Scott’s intentional evocation of a book Kay-Scott finds inferior.

Just as *Escapade* begins with a dedication to captive animals and a preface that details the initial remove away from the marker of liberty, the book comes full circle and firmly roots its ending in the tradition of captivity, where the release leads to knowledge, though the knowledge requires the ultimate cost—death and the annihilation of the self. Scott seeks liberation from her cave of southern tradition and true womanhood that would have her lead a far less authentic experience as a self-realized woman. However, despite her pursuit of real experience, she remains chained to southern regional ideologies and beliefs. They certainly cause her strife in the text, and they literally cause her torment as she suffers mentally and physically in a foreign environment, landless and alone in an effort of radical rebellion.<sup>35</sup> As Papke writes,

The self painfully, torturously, turns to the light even as she remains fettered by the contingencies of history and the material limitations of the flesh. That she breaks out of one nightmare world only to enter yet another shadow play is the modernist drama par excellence, that drama continually reenacted in a world of shifting and conflicting perspectives . . . . (185)

*Escapade* itself is its own shadow play, where larger forces—southern society from afar and Cyril through his physical movement and isolation of the young Evelyn—manipulate the central figure's reality. While she is freed from the shackles of southern womanhood, her release is not ultimate emancipation. Rather, she finds that her escape leads her into another form of captivity—a captivity that ultimately also is a nearly annihilating force. Thus, the shadow play of section seven serves as a reenactment of this movement to and

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<sup>35</sup> Though Cyril was technically with her, he was absent for long periods of time, sometimes as long as six to eight weeks, when traveling through the villages in his position as auditor for a sewing company. *Escapade* emphasizes this isolation.



from captivity that represents the circularity of the female politicized body from its precursor, the early American captivity narratives, to modes of discourse in the modernist period. Manipulated and reenacted, this employment of the captivity narrative “generate[s] emergent feminist revisions of dominant ideologies” (Burnham 170), providing an apt context for the escapades of Elsie Dunn and her new persona, Evelyn Scott.

**Chapter Three**  
**Beatrice Witte Ravenel:**  
**Breaking the “Little Stick” of Zarathustra**

Eyes in the breathless leaves!  
 Eyes saturated with the proved distrust of generations.  
 Bird of passage Indians  
 Have swept this way,  
 And squaws have fanned their lightwood fires by stealth,  
 Never at ease. —from Ravenel’s “Papoose Eyes”

“Did you ever feel that it put a barrier between God and you—if you are a woman—by calling him *He*—as though he were a man? . . . God ought to be called God, quite simply, or Else one ought to have made a special pronoun. If only the writers of the Bible had thought of that—but then they were all men.”—from Witte’s [Ravenel] “Madonna Mia”

Beatrice Witte Ravenel’s life long home, Charleston, South Carolina, produced a number of notable southern artists and literati over the years and remains a city distinct for its grace, charm, and aristocratic feel. Originally founded as Charles Towne in 1670 on the west bank of the Ashley river, Charleston moved to its present location in 1680, and it quickly developed a powerful market economy through the rice, indigo, cotton, and slave trade. The draw of enormous wealth through imports/exports brought well-educated merchants and planters to the area who in turn developed for themselves a cultured way of life. By the end of the colonial period, this city was known for its artistic venues and, as James Hutchisson notes, “was the undisputed theatrical center in the colonies” (138). The city’s artistic growth continued throughout the antebellum era, and Charleston became lauded as one of the literary capitals of the South from which magazines such as the *Southern Review*, *Russell’s*, and the *Southern Quarterly* earned a national audience. However, the crisis of the Civil War soon halted the city’s steady cultural and literary progress. Though strategically prominent in the war, this once

flourishing city significantly dwindled and lay virtually dormant during Reconstruction. The turn of the century finally saw a revival of the arts take root where intellect, imagination, and a new sense of self came forth in the novels, stories, poems, and essays being produced there.<sup>36</sup> Charleston would become by the 1920s a chief center of southern poetry of national significance thanks in large part to the efforts and influence of the Poetry Society of South Carolina. Founded in 1920/21 primarily by Charlestonians John Bennett, Hervey Allen, and DuBose Heyward, this society instituted reading groups and lecture programs that brought poets of international repute to the community, supported artists through numerous annual writing awards, and nurtured several key local writers such as Beatrice Witte Ravenel, the focus of this chapter.

Though Beatrice Witte Ravenel made a strong, early impression on critics, readers, and nationally renowned poets such as Amy Lowell, her work all but disappeared from the literary scene until Louis D. Rubin, Jr., attempted to resurrect her poetry in his 1969 edition titled *The Yemassee Lands*. This volume of Ravenel's work includes some previously published poems, as well as a selection of her unpublished poetry that Rubin felt exemplified her expertise. Despite his efforts, this edition did not capture much critical interest in Ravenel, the bulk of whose verse continues to remain in relative obscurity. As the daughter of one of the most influential families in Charleston and as a member of the Poetry Society, she does receive brief mention in various historical and literary sources. However, "there has not yet been a study that adequately examines her poetry to show why she deserves more attention and praise for the richness of her verse" (Worthington 76). In fact, since Rubin's edition, the field of southern

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<sup>36</sup> See *The Companion to Southern Literature*, eds. Flora and MacKethan, Louisiana State UP, 2002.

letters has seen only two article-length publications devoted entirely to this important figure.

By and large the scholarship of southern letters, particularly through the first half of the twentieth century, has tended to focus on the white male writers of the Southern Renaissance, such as Allen Tate, Robert Penn Warren, and William Faulkner, who brought attention to the literatures of the South during the modernist period through their focus on history, loss, southern memory, and regional boundaries and definitions. Southern daughters were seen, as Louise Westling notes, as the “creations and inheritors of a culture which in part defined and perpetuated itself by their silence” (5). Their work was viewed by the cultural powers-that-be as insufficiently historical in nature, not focused on larger regional concerns, and not necessarily at one with the South’s sense of communal unity—an important aspect of the Agrarian sensibility. Allen Tate specifically states in a letter to Donald Davidson, “all great, or really good writers, must have a simply homogeneous sense of values which incidentally are the kind of values we wish to restore” (Fain 246). He goes on to refer to Ellen Glasgow as a “bad” and dangerous novelist precisely because he viewed her as mixing the old South with progress, which in his view set up too “many contradictory values” (Fain 245). Tate and his fellow influential Agrarian John Crowe Ransom particularly criticized the women writers of Charleston from the 1920s as mere practitioners of local color, a derogatory categorization used to dismiss their art as less than serious. By labeling them as practitioners of this genre, such criticism implies that their concerns are localized—their work devoted to capturing the nuances and distinguishing characteristics of a region by focusing on dress, speech, mannerisms, and anecdotes, rather than dealing with larger

modernist concerns. Yet despite this label, Ransom, in a contradictory turn of logic, goes on to declare “that writers like Josephine Pinckney, Beatrice Ravenel, and Julia Peterkin were not at one with their community” (Donaldson, “Tate’s Profession” 505). In fact, in an article for the *Virginia Quarterly Review*, he argues that they “are not [even] Charleston in spirit, but may be construed somewhat indirectly as witnesses to Charleston’s decay” (qtd. in “Tate’s Profession” 505). The Agrarians could not fit the writing by these women into their definition of southern literature and culture, and, as such, it had to be seen as local and, ironically, foreign at the same time. In sum, for the conservative Agrarians, any liberal sentiments displayed by these women writers were tantamount to an attack on the southern spirit and a result of alien influences that needed to be dismissed. This compartmentalizing of their work as local color continues relatively late into the 20<sup>th</sup> century by scholars of southern letters primarily as an exercise of exclusion and boundary-making that aims to protect and consolidate a serious literary canon dominated by the concerns and voices of white southern men.<sup>37</sup>

The last two decades have seen significant and heightened critical interest in redefining southern writing, southern voice, and southern foci, and it is in the context of a more universal approach to the boundaries of this literature that we can truly understand and appreciate the power of Beatrice Witte Ravenel’s work, which does not fit the typical mold. Though some of her poetry deals with southern locales and themes, for the most part, it resists conformity to typical categories of southern writing. Her verse, published

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<sup>37</sup> Many of the influential female authors of the modernist period recognized and discussed openly this elitist, male approach to what was considered noteworthy literature and female exclusion from this canon. Caroline Gordon, Allen Tate’s wife, more than once in her correspondence refers to the Fugitive-Agrarian circle as “the boys” and the “Nashville brethren.” See *The Southern Mandarins*, ed. Sally Wood. In a letter to Katherine Anne Porter complaining about John Crowe Ransom, Gordon writes, “He can’t bear for women to be serious about their art” (qtd. in Waldron 199).

and unpublished, does not lament the loss of the old South or of southern traditions. She is not tormented or torn by regional sins, decay, or a love/hate relationship with her father. She is not preoccupied with perpetuating a hierarchical social or cultural order or with the making of a central southern literary tradition or southern community by Agrarian standards. Her poetic voice is simply not consumed by what Lewis Simpson labeled the “southern aesthetic of memory” that organized each male author’s perception in this period (10). Instead, hers is a more radical voice of difference that turns to those on the margins of history and established boundaries and uses their images, voices, and traditions to question and offer different readings of the past. In other words, she is just as concerned with the magnitude of history as her male counterparts, but her perspective seeks to problematize, fill in gaps, and broaden our perception of the world—a world she recognizes as being more than just about the South. Her voice is not *southern* by traditional categories. It has a universal and cosmopolitan flair by virtue of which her employment of traditions of the genre of captivity narratives powerfully serves to politicize and draw attention to the essentializing racial and gendered subtexts of narrative records that justify and reinforce supposed cohesive cultural values, sensibilities, and communal unity.

Captivity, as a genre characterized by movement, cultural conflict, and survival, allows her to bring to the forefront the fundamental questions of identity, communal coherence, and historical representation. These tropes provide a radical mode for women like Ravenel who are confined in the modern southern literary tradition, allowing her to go beyond the boundaries of what constituted *southern* literature and culture. Perhaps Homi Bhabha best describes the possibilities of interstitiality in narratives of colonial

contest that “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular and communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (1-2). Simply put, as Ravenel recognized, the cultural crossing emphasized through the captivity tradition exposes both reader and writer to alternative cultural paradigms that “generate forms of critical and subversive agency, both within and outside the text” (Burnham 3). For Ravenel, resistant agency is enacted and shown possible precisely because of captivity, not in spite of it.

Before delving into Ravenel’s employment of this literary tradition, it is important to get a sense of this writer’s life. Beatrice Witte, born in 1870 to Charles Otto and Charlotte Witte, grew up in Charleston society. As the daughter of a German merchant banker, she was well off and enjoyed numerous intellectual and artistic pursuits. Though her five sisters followed the more typical path of finishing school and marrying well, Ravenel, after attending the Charleston Female Seminary, pursued courses at the Harvard Annex in Cambridge, later Radcliffe, where she studied widely for five years in literature, history, French, and German philosophy. During her Cambridge years, Ravenel seriously invested herself in her writing, publishing in such journals as the *Harvard Monthly*, *Scribner’s Magazine*, and the *Harvard Advocate*. Quickly becoming part of elite literary circles, Beatrice Witte impressed such young intellectuals as Norman and Hutchins Hapgood and William Vaughn Moody who were attracted to her precisely because she was strong-minded and seemed to lack “the soft sentimentality which the superior young Harvard man disliked” (Hapgood 81). Her poetry during this time, though it has many

notable qualities, often conforms to the idealistic and sentimental popular publishing tradition of the time.

Despite her success and stimulating intellectual life in Cambridge, Beatrice Witte returned to Charleston society in 1900 where she married Francis Gualdo Ravenel with whom she had a daughter, Beatrice St. Julien, in 1904 (Rubin 11). The three took up residence in the Charleston low country at Ocean Plantation, which would later inspire several of her better known poems. With her new domestic role, Ravenel published little until the mid to late 1910s when her poems began appearing in various journals and her fiction earned an essential part of the family's income. Though charming, handsome, witty, and of the elite Charlestonian class, Frank (Francis) Ravenel was relatively poor and lacked keen business sense (Rubin 11). By 1920, like many other literary women, Beatrice Ravenel found it financially necessary to publish her work after her husband lost her sizeable inheritance (\$250,000) and passed away at a young age (Rubin 11). Left to provide for her daughter, Ravenel turned out fiction at an astonishing rate in magazines such as *Ainslee's* and *Harper's*, and she wrote editorials for the *Columbia State* newspaper edited by her brother-in-law, William Watts Ball. Though her manuscripts suggest a rebellious poetic voice, given the financial necessity driving her, it is not astonishing, as Susan Donaldson notes, that her "articles in the *Columbia State* expressed opinions compatible with the audience of a white South Carolina newspaper of the period" ("Songs" 182).

After the Poetry Society's establishment, Ravenel quickly became a respected member who received several prestigious prizes and actively engaged with visiting artists, such as Amy Lowell, with whom she corresponded regularly. The Society not



only inspired and helped develop Ravenel's writing through its modernist and imagist influences, but it also played a key role in helping her disseminate her work beyond Charleston.

Writing actively until about 1926, Ravenel married Samuel Prioleau Ravenel, a financially successful lawyer and distant relative of her late husband. Freed from financial worry, she published little after this time, with the exception of her West Indies series.<sup>38</sup> Instead, she traveled widely and continued to live a comfortable life in Charleston until her death in 1956.

Ravenel's experiences in Charleston and at Radcliffe instilled an ardent sense of historical consciousness in her writing and sparked an interest in colonial history and narrative distortion, especially through tropes of captivity as personified by the Indian-White conflicts that mark the period of Early American literature. Ravenel's manuscripts reveal a keen creative engagement with and employment of these tropes from colonial history. What is clear from archival research is that Ravenel read captivity narratives, was astutely aware of the captivity tradition and of popular sentiments on literary and social levels toward Native Americans, and wrote directly about paradigms these experiences evoked.<sup>39</sup> For instance, her notes for an unpublished poem centering on a Yemassee chief cite various historical and literary sources on Indian legend from such writers as Williams Gilmore Simms, James Rivers, and Edward McCrady.<sup>40</sup> In a draft of

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<sup>38</sup> This series was inspired by her travels with her second husband. The poems highlight the struggles of black Creoles in a confining white world. Some focus on the insubstantial protection of a white veneer, while others erase the boundaries between the two races and eschew social propriety (Donaldson, "Songs" 188).

<sup>39</sup> A fellowship from the Southern Historical Collection allowed me to spend a week in residence at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill where the bulk of Ravenel's papers are held. Also, the Houghton Library of Harvard College provided me with copies of letters Ravenel wrote to Amy Lowell from their collection of Lowell's correspondence. I am grateful to both institutions for their generosity.

<sup>40</sup> "Sanute the Chief" by Ravenel is discussed at length later in the chapter.

the article “Some Old Charleston Writers,” she refers to numerous early narratives and correspondence about the settling of the area and Native American contacts in Charleston. Her scrapbook reveals clippings of her editorial pieces for the *Columbia State* wherein her thoughts on Indian farming techniques, their hard work, and their literary representations throughout history are evident. She even criticizes Voltaire and Chateaubriand for being “enamored” with the idea of savagery with no real knowledge of the Indian. Ravenel’s unpublished papers also include several poems specifically dealing with captivity such as “Sanute the Chief,” “The Captive,” “Bondswomen,” “Song of the Maid of Saragossa,” and “To the Body.” Her papers also include references, notes, and even chapter copies of her mother-in-law Harriot Horry Ravenel’s historical writings, which include a biography of *Eliza Pinckney* (1896) that was part of a Colonial book series on women in America as well as *Charleston, the Place and the People* (1906) a social history of the area. The poet Amy Lowell in her letters to Ravenel often recommends writers, including those writing about early America such as the novelist Charles Brockden Brown (Folder 7, letter dated March 25, 1923). In sum, Ravenel was quite knowledgeable about Native American tribes—their history, their traditions, their representation, their importance in regional issues—and, they certainly became a dominant theme in some of her most notable published works such as “The Arrow of Lightning,” “The Alligator,” and “The Yemassee Lands.”

As Susan Donaldson and Curtis Worthington argue, in these published poems Ravenel’s poetic voice, embodied by the mockingbird, the totem of the Yemassee, “becomes a daring and resourceful thief, a ‘Trick-tongue’ that steals the music of others

and deceives its listeners” (Donaldson, “Songs” 184). Ravenel writes in “The Arrow of Lightning,”

You are no dryad,  
No young squaw of trees;  
You are a conjurer.  
You sing the songs of all birds with a difference,  
Bringing the drop of blood, the touch of dead man’s fingers,  
That makes the alchemy. (22)

She uses this voice—a voice capable of transmutation as the word *alchemy* implies—to challenge the official historical narratives by moving the voices of the cultural Other to the center in order to capture the echoes of their history and “To tell of the passing of nations, / Of the exquisite ruin of coasts, of the silvery change and / the flux of existence” (*The Arrow* 24). She frees them from captivity in the official record that uses them to justify westward expansion. The release of the tribal memory is personified in “The Alligator,” as the medicine man teaches the Bull Alligator the war cry of the Yemassee’s shared experience to protect their heritage. The poem describes the fall of the Native American sacred lands where “In the hills of our dead, in the powdering flesh that con- / ceived us, / shall the white man plant corn” (*The Arrow* 28). Ravenel’s medicine man predicts not only the eradication of the tribe, but the total erasure of its memory. Thus, he entrusts the creature of the swamp with the secret names and words of the tribe who will guard their legend and speak for the Indians after their disappearance at the hands of the white colonizers:

In the new days,

The days when our voice shall be silent,  
 Speak for the Yemassee!  
 Nanneb-Chunchaba, you, little Fish-like-a-Mountain,  
 Shout through the forest the terrible war-cry of Yemassee!

*“Sangarraah! . . . Sangarraah-me! . . . Sangarraah-me!*

Shout! I shall hear you!

*Sangarraah! . . .”* (Ravenel, *The Arrow* 28-29)

The alligator’s bellow, and by extension Ravenel’s poetic voice, evokes and remembers the lost native voices in a “Cry of the mud made flesh, made particular, personal,” (*The Arrow* 25). Thematically, her concern with the consequences of colonizing locates itself not only in the reemployment of tribal voice, but more specifically through the direct employment of captivity tropes originating in the narratives of early American texts.

Drawing from this tradition of the early captivity narrative, Ravenel disrupts and subverts innate constructs of the southern region through a disorientation that resists the establishment of a unitary voice. Rather, she questions the history imposed on the region by the mythologies of those in power. In addition, Ravenel’s work exists on a universal level that does occasionally deal with southern issues, but more often finds itself within a global context where problematized issues exist beyond the geographic borders of the South. In much of her unpublished writing, she deploys historical and mythological figures to demonstrate how nation building, religion, and roles of individuals are gendered constructs wielded by the agendas of dominant groups.

Weaving these figures within tropes of captivity from that distinctively early American genre is an ideal choice on her part precisely because there is nothing distinctly *southern* about early American captivities from the region other than geography. Most captivity narratives by which the genre is characterized were written or at least took place before there was a *South* in the social/cultural context we think of today.<sup>41</sup> As a group, these narratives are more secular and sentimental in tone than 17<sup>th</sup> century northern narratives as they were recorded in the post-revolutionary era of the 18<sup>th</sup> century where many were appropriated by male authors and publishers in a propagandistic way “favoring westward expansion and portraying Native American tribes as an impediment to this” (Weyler 30). Furthermore, these narratives were commonly used by historians, novelists, and folklorists in a nationalistic impulse to define America’s historical roots and illustrate true American character. In this context, the pioneer experience of captivity that exemplified individual heroism and fortitude characterized and foreshadowed the continuing greatness and future success of the American nation.<sup>42</sup> Ravenel inverts this historical use of captivity to question, not perpetuate, exceptionalist constructions of American identity and heritage. In fact, as I will demonstrate, she strategically employs subversive elements of captivity within her published and unpublished poetry.

In the poem “The Jesuit Missionaries,” which appeared in her volume *The Arrow of Lightning*, Ravenel evokes history, images, and language from the 70-odd volumes of the *Jesuit Relations*, which were popularized for an American audience by Francis

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<sup>41</sup> The most well known southern captivities are those of Mary Kinnan, Jennie Wiley, Mary Moore, and Frances Scott, and, of course, those narratives retold by John Frost in his popular text *Daring and Heroic Deeds of American Women* (Arno Press, 1869), which emphasizes tales of women captured in Tennessee, western Virginia, and Kentucky.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of this concept in nineteenth-century historiography, see David Levin’s *History as Romantic Art*, Stanford UP, 1959.

Parkman's 1867 *The Jesuits in North America*. The Jesuit Order, or Society of Jesus, was founded by Ignatius of Loyola during the Counter Reformation in order to win souls back to the Catholic church. The Jesuits sent missionaries to Catholic colonies globally, including the French territories in North America. The individuals Ravenel mentions—Brebeuf, Daniel, Raymbault, and Jogues—were ordained priests and missionaries to the Hurons who were captured and savagely tortured by the Mohawks. Even though they had the opportunity for a quick death, the missionaries continued to try to save “red” souls while captive. This resulted in a long and very brutal series of torture episodes as the white men were taken village to village where they were publicly beaten and burned. However awful the experience, this increased and continuous torture made their sacrifice for God that much greater as they endured Christ-like suffering, and they were eventually made saints in the Catholic church.<sup>43</sup> On the surface, Ravenel's poem captures the essence of their mission and captivity:

Like soldiers they took their orders,  
 Marching to certain glory.  
 And like soldiers they wrote  
 From the Front back to Headquarters;  
 No compromise to flatter a difficult public,  
 But cogent reports to their General,  
 Stark awful reality.

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<sup>43</sup> For background on the Jesuit missionaries, particularly the representation of their suffering, see Allan Greer's “Colonial Saints: Gender, Race, and Hagiography in New France” in the *The William and Mary Quarterly* 57:2 (2000): 323-348.

Scourged, bitten with fire,  
 Battling with beasts, with fever, with a novel and strange  
     demonology;  
 In the face of long and fastidious torture,  
 They saved, like feathery, Spring-leaved brands plucked  
     from the burning,  
 The souls of red children. (*The Arrow* 68)

At this point, her poem turns a critical eye on the missionaries' suffering and historical representation by moving from their brutal captivity at the hands of the racial Other to the confinement experienced by the wives and children of those who settled the land that continually remain ignored by the makers of the historical record:

They were no wise concerned whether the climate  
 Might pamper a wife, what education  
 Might nourish her offspring.  
 Traveling light, going alone and farthest,  
 They followed the Spirit.  
 Others have followed them—  
 Makers of books and of records  
 Turning to the splendid names  
 Brebeuf, Daniel, Raymbault,  
 Jogues, first light to the Mohawk.  
 There is the fruitful witness—  
 "Relations." Relations." "Jesuit Relations." (Ravenel, *The Arrow* 68)

By portraying the “Makers of books and records” as the followers of the Jesuits, Ravenel turns an ironic eye on the *official* renderings of a glorious past where, as she hints through her exaggerated praise, the makers of the records are more concerned with a type of hagiography than true historiography. Ravenel then ends the poem with a call for change: “The foot-notes rise up, call them blessed— / Fathers of American History!” (*The Arrows* 68). In this piece, Ravenel uses the cultural crossing of captivity to transgress the boundaries of a historical record viewed as innate, unified, and unchanging. In effect, she highlights the marginalized voices, possibilities of multiple discourses, and calls them, the foot-notes, to the center. Ravenel recognizes such dominant historical discourses as a universal problem existing beyond the boundaries of the South. This poem is not about a particular “southern” theme; it does not take place in a southern locale, nor does it employ southern images. In essence, she deploys the historical account to deconstruct more universal gendered and politicized constructs of nation building. I would add that it is very possible that she, in fact, is directly responding to their specific use at the hands of historians such as Francis Parkman, with whose work she was familiar.

Francis Parkman, a Harvard-educated historian, uses the captivity of the Jesuits in his 1867 *The Jesuits in North America* to justify England’s cultural dominance over both the Indians and the French. Though I believe Ravenel would strongly take issue with Parkman’s prejudice against the Indians and his support of their extermination for white progress, I believe she echoes and displaces his criticism of the futility of the efforts of these French missionaries by shifting it to those constructing the historical record. Parkman writes that the exploits of these Jesuits “attest to the earnestness of their faith



and the intensity of their zeal; but it was a zeal bridled, curbed, and ruled by . . . equivocal morality . . . [based on] superstition, bigotry, and corruption” (98, 187). For Parkman, the Jesuit’s enthusiasm, which supposedly came from the inspiration of God, was, in reality, “fostered by all the prestige of royalty and all the patronage of power” (244-45). Thus, the captivities of the Jesuit martyrs offer Parkman the “opportunity to dramatize what he perceived as the cruelty of the Indians and the stupidity of the French” in order to support the concept of British cultural superiority (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 175). Parkman attempts to rewrite Jesuit historiography through his own anti-Catholic and Protestant Anglo-Saxon view of the history of North America. Ravenel, recognizing the metaphoric function of the Jesuit narratives in historical texts such as Parkman’s, imbues them with a literary effect through poetry in order to question the essentializing and exclusive philosophy used in *historical* works that she believes, to use Parkman’s language, is corrupt, bigoted, and about power. In other words, in her poem “The Jesuit Missionaries,” these captivity episodes, through a direct link to the “Makers of books and of records” followed by a rising up of the “foot-notes,” reinforce the need to question and examine the exclusive tendencies of this discipline that more often contains rather than explores its cultural consciousness as “only one among other [equally valuable] cultures and languages” (Bakhtin 370).

“Sanute the Chief,” an unpublished, undated poem illustrates Ravenel’s revision of both the captivity paradigm and American exceptionalism. In this poem, Ravenel reflects on the story of Sanute, a Yemassee chief, who warns a local settler, John Fraser (Frasier), of an imminent attack in which he and his family will be taken captive and

killed.<sup>44</sup> According to the historical record, the Yemassee, unhappy with the English settlers, joined with other tribes in accepting an offer from the Spanish, who supplied guns, ammunition, and other necessities for attacking South Carolina (Gallay 327). Out of friendship, Sanute warns Fraser of the threat of war and promises that he will kill the Fraser family quickly in order to save them from torture by fire if they refuse to flee. On his wife's pleading, Fraser heeds his warning, and the family successfully escapes.

William Gilmore Simms, the dominant southern novelist of the nineteenth-century, employs this story in his novel *The Yemassee* as part of a larger political message that justifies the annihilation of the Indians to facilitate the white settling of South Carolina. Beatrice Ravenel was familiar with Simms's canon and challenges his account of the silencing of the Yemassee in her poem "The Yemassee Lands."<sup>45</sup> In a draft of a presentation called "Some Old Charleston Writers," Ravenel ironically writes that "when Gilmore Simms, pouring out novel after novel, of very varying importance, achieved 'The Yemassee,' he gave us something that deserves to be remembered. There is no need to speak of the orators or historians. They have their own secure and honored places" (Papers). What "deserves to be remembered" for Ravenel is not the founding of the area by English settlers or their justifications for expansion, but rather the native tribes and their history, culture, beauty, and, more importantly, what they suffered as "savages" at the hands of the "civilized." In Ravenel's hands, Sanute's legend is

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<sup>44</sup> William Gilmore Simms's novel *The Yemassee: A Romance of Carolina* (1835) uses this story of Sanute's warning of the settlers as part of its plot. See page ninety-nine in the University of Arkansas Press edition, 1994. The historical reference for Sanute's warning of the settlers most likely arises out of Alexander Hewitt's *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia* (1779) (Gallay 327). See volume one, pages 192-194. Ravenel for the most part uses the spelling *Fraser*, but sometime it appears as *Frazer*. *Frasier* is a common spelling in historical documents.

<sup>45</sup> For a fuller discussion of her transformation of Simms's imagery, see Donaldson's "Songs" pages 184-185.

(re)appropriated from Simms and embellished with the threat of captivity that empowers it to debunk several national myths including that of the civilized white man and the savage Indian and the sexual threat of the racial Other. Given the significance of this text to the topic at hand and the fact that it was never published, I am quoting it in its entirety as it appears in her papers at the Southern Historical Collection:<sup>46</sup>

Sanute the Chief

1715

There came this hour in every mortal day  
In Fisher's Tavern by the waterfront.

Reverberations of the tides slapped in;  
Reflections of the dazzling crests of waves  
Made half the dusky walls a looking-glass 5  
To dance in, heaving green and watery gold,  
Until the humming taproom floated strange  
As undersea, and men cast queasy glances  
At strangers' faces, too like mariners  
New-drowned, ghost-drifting through tobacco smoke. 10

Just after sunset, just as though the sun

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<sup>46</sup> Two drafts of this poem along with textual notes appear in the Ravenel manuscript collection at the Southern Historical Collection (box 3 folder 18). I have opted to use draft two as it clearly incorporates her line edits from draft one. In Ravenel's papers, draft two is typed and contains some further line edits and strikethroughs. I transcribed only what appears to be her final intent in my transcription. Spelling mistakes and textual emphasis are Ravenel's. For example, see "horsely" and "seperateness" (150, 169). The line numbers are mine and are there for the reader's reference.

Had left behind a Red-man's choking curse.

But some days, from the snug red-curtained parlour

Where rum out-trailed a labyrinth of smells,

A deeper boom dispersed these grisly thoughts 15

And brought a homeliness about the air.

Mine host would smile, as at a seasoned cause

For humor. "Mr. James Adair, the trader

Among the Indians, rode this early morning

Along the south plantations into Charles Town." 20

The answering humorous twinkle never failed him:

Your deep-sea captains, planters, gentlemen

Of the Assembly, all would smile and twist

A knowing eyebrow; none the less, might linger

Till half the night was gone, when James Adair, 25

(Enough imbibed but not a drop too much)

Would pay his own score thriftily, but pour

A vintage from his memory without measure

As long as one would drink.

He had lived so long 30

Among the tribes, had paced their villages,

Savannahs, Tuscaroras, Yemmassees,

That he had caught their way of watchfulness  
 Disguised as all-sufficient proud detachment.  
 The high-hooked nose, the sun-tanned coppery cheek-bones 35  
 Had all their quality; the sweeping gesture  
 Magnificent but sparse; yes, everything—  
 Except their silence.

“Well, I mind Sanute.

Some folks will tell you red men have no souls, 40  
 Are barely human. These same folks will speak  
 Of Moses and the patriarchs and the prophets  
 As elegant and court-bred gentlemen.

They fancy David some Lord Charles, some governor  
 Fresh come from London, quizzing-glass and ruffles, 45  
 And sentiments to match from yon Spectator  
 Or French philosophers. I read their doings  
 And see a good deal of the Indian in them.

You know my mind. Laugh, gentlemen, yes, laugh.  
 Some day I'll write a book and laughter'll cease. 50

I swear I know if I know anything  
 These red men are descended from the tribes  
 That Israel lost! I prove it by their language,  
 Their feasts, their ritual garments, even the name,  
 The secret name they give their Manitou. 55

I've seen what I have seen. They know their value,  
 A chosen and a loved peculiar people.  
 They call their tribes by names that Israel used  
 To call their cherub-standards. And the times  
 For kindling new-born fire are the same. 60  
 I've marked upon their chief sanhedria  
 (One well may name them so), in poplar wood  
 White painted, eagles, and upon their stands  
 A panther carved, the nearest beast they know  
 To Judah's lion. And their prophets wear 65  
 Such trappings Aaron's sons might recognize.  
 I've seen it all. When I remember Samuel  
 A-hacking Agag, sir, before the Lord,  
 I see him in a crest of sacred swan-plume,  
 A conch-shell breastplate and a red-lined mantle, 70  
 His tomohawk face turned devil in the gleam  
 Of bonfires lit for torture. On their mound  
 They've sacrificed to God a thousand years  
 At Pocoataligo. I've known some Indians  
 A deal more cleanly and fastidious 75  
 Than those same ancients. Take you now King David  
 And fair Bathsheba, and her man Uriah.  
 It's then I ponder on Sanute the savage

And Fraser's fair-haired wife. You hear the story

And tell me who's the better gentleman. 80

A bold man, Fraser, taking up his land

So far from Charles Town, in those early times.

Far in backcountry, on the skirts of danger.

Too near the Yemassee. We called them friendly;

We might have guessed the belts and messages 85

That went and came from Spaniards to the southward.

Fine, clean-limbed men, the Yemmassee. Their clothing

Was splendid: pliant leather, hung with beadwork;

Hair-feathers torn from cardinals. They lived

With ceremony. Fine canoemen, hunters. 90

Sanute, their chieftain, saw the stranger woman,

And he protected her.

Her hair was pale

As tassels of the corn-stalks; she was lovely.

White women must have proved a sheer amazement 95

To Indians. Like a spirit, like a night-sun,

Their name for moon. He swung about the clearing

And watched her. Fish he brought and doves and deermeat,

And took the cakes and bannock from her hand

With deep dark glances, thanking not at all. 100

Whole nights a play of shadow in the shadows,

Whole days, he watched her ply her homely tasks.  
 And when she placed upon her good man's head  
 A bowl, to trim his hair, belike he pondered  
 How neat a line the tomohawk would find 105  
 To guide its circled sweep. Meanwhile John Frazer  
 Broke ground, felled saplings, drove his stubborn plow,  
 And thought that tales of peril from the red man  
 Were mightily overdrawn.

One summer morning, 110

Sanute, come home again from journeying  
 To distant tribes upon a fearful errand,  
 Was drawn, as sun draws leaflings to the eastward,  
 To fair Bathsheba's cabin. In the doorway  
 She sat, the woman. She was singing, low, 115  
 Most gently, like a groundswell under broomgrass,  
 A feathery sound. She held across her knees  
 A white papoose, with softer floss than hers,  
 And in the chief's huge palm she laid the child's  
 And patted it as vine-leaves bend from branches 120  
 To pat one's skin, and said, "Now you are friends,  
 You two great chiefs."

Sanute the Yemassee

Fled to the forest. There were devils then



In wildernesses; conjurers disarmed them 125

With arrow-offerings and scarlet feathers.

All day he grappled with them. He, a chief,

What makes a king, I ask you? Hardly gold

Or pompous trappings. Power over humans—

That's all that counts. It's being bold to say, 130

“Yon man's between my glory and the sunlight,

So blot him out”; or, “yon enticing female

Could make me free of trouble and harassment

Of life one hour. To my tent with her.”

(For that's the use of woman; she's escape, 135

Illusion of release). That's why Barbarians

Clad mostly in fantastic nakedness,

Of painted stripes, fawn-trotters, leather fringes,

Assume the carriage of your emperor,

Having dominion's one essential—power. 140

God knows what held his hand, Sanute, a chief,—

His fighting-tail was clear five hundred men—

He knew besides how soon a captive squaw

Forgot her people and her husband's wigwam,

And set her smiles to please her new-found lord. 145

Who taught him this strange woman would be different?

We know how David acted.

Listen then.

That night he came once more, with sundry herbs  
 Grasped in his fist. He uttered horsely, "Water." 150  
 She gave him always what he asked for thus,  
 Because he was a chief, he had supposed.  
 But catching now the smile in her blue eyes  
 He knew she found him a demanding child  
 One humors. Even then he bowed his spirit 155  
 To ask her good man's leave. He then cast the herbs  
 Upon the surface of the earthen bowl,  
 And, gently as a cowering mist that brushes  
 The vine-leaves on a trellis, over and over,  
 And touching, barely touches, thus he bathed 160  
 With that charmed water both her moon-white hands,  
 Her countenance, the column of her throat;  
 Then, rising from his knees, in his own speech  
 He said, "You are my sister. I must guard you,  
 Even from myself." 165

And thus he set apart

The woman, made of her a fountain sealed.

(Holy, beloved, are one word in their language.)

He joined her to him by a seperateness

As close as marriage, which he might not cross. 170

He made her holy and forbidden to him,

Forever.

Not so many moons went by

Before he came again and bade them flee

From fearful wrath to come. John Fraser laughed. 175

What, leave his crop, all ready to be gathered,

His fruit trees and his porkers? Then Sanute

Cried out the lightning spitting from the cloud:

“The war-belts come. The bloody stick goes forth

When that red sun falls down into the water. 180

My people take the war-path. Cherokees,

And Creeks all take the war-path. Every white man

Will die. This only can I promise you.

Before the young men bind you to the stake,

And thrust the lightwood splinter in your eyeballs, 185

Sanute will kill you swiftly—only this!”

Then, by the woman’s terror for her child

Compelled, John Fraser took the chief’s canoe;

And so they brought to Charles Town first of all

The warning of that deadliest war that tore 190

The province, wiping out the settlements  
 Within ten miles of loopholed tabby walls.  
 That held the town. You know that ghastly tale  
 Of how we broke the Yemassee. No need  
 To jog your memories yet. They're raw with it. 195

He never saw the woman's face again, —  
 Sanute. He never heard, most like,  
                     He might have taken her to him  
 As David took Bathsheba. How I know  
 The tale is true? Because he spoke, once only, 200  
 Of this to me. He knew not where she walked,  
 Beside what streams, but knew she was not dead.  
 He said, 'The hunter makes his path by stars;  
 And every night some stars have climbed the hill  
 Of clouds.' (They talk this poetry way, the chiefs, 205  
 As naturally as we talk blasphemy).

'If she had died all stars would stop, as I  
 Would stand, as quiet as a hard-held breath,  
 To see her pass across the Bridge of Stars.'  
  
 "I didn't tell him she was gone, years gone— 210  
 In childbirth of her second young one. No.

Your gentleman has gifts in being hurt  
 That thick-skinned folk like we can scarce conceive—  
 Genius in suffering.

And certainly

215

He was a gentleman, this chief Sanute.” (Papers)

It is far from inconsequential that Ravenel selects Mr. James Adair to narrate the story of Sanute in her poem. Adair was a historical figure, a white Indian trader, who lived among the southern Amerindians for numerous years (Gallay 351). He was skilled in Native American affairs and diplomacy, respected their customs and integrity, and wrote a *History of the American Indians* (1775), in which he attempted to prove the North American Indians were descended from the ten lost tribes of Israel.<sup>47</sup> Ravenel was clearly familiar with Adair’s book, as she references it directly in the poem and borrows words and allusions from his list of arguments in lines 53-74. What is perhaps most significant about her choice of a narrator is, once again, how it positions her poetic voice as a revisionist historian. By selecting a man who wrote a treatise about the natives as descendents of Israel, she (re)affirms the Indians’ common heritage with the *civil* white man and highlights a common humanity and spirituality. Also, by ventriloquizing his voice, the poet radically aligns herself more with the racial Other than the white man, as Adair is described as almost Indian himself. He lived with the tribes so long that he not only “had caught their ways of watchfulness,” but his physical appearance and mannerism even “had all their quality” (3, 6). Thus, through Adair, she frames her

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<sup>47</sup> For more on Adair’s argumentation see *History of the American Indians* (1775), ed. Samuel Cole Williams (New York: Promontory, 1930).

(his)story to dismantle the dominating, patriarchal voice of Simms who uses the conflict with the tribes to justify the settling of South Carolina by white Europeans.

Accordingly, in “Sanute the Chief,” Adair begins his narration of Sanute’s story by emphasizing that most settlers see Native Americans as barely human without souls.<sup>48</sup> Instead, the people prefer to speak

Of Moses and the patriarchs and the prophets  
As elegant and court-bred gentlemen.  
They fancy David some Lord Charles, some governor  
Fresh come from London, quizzing-glass and ruffles,  
And sentiments to match . . . . (42-46)

However, the speaker who has “read their doings” notes that he sees precisely what the populace perceives as Indian traits in these patriarchs and prophets. To illustrate this point, the speaker strategically contrasts Sanute’s contemplation of captivity to that of a worshiped biblical King in order to invert concepts of the civil and the savage. Ravenel writes,

. . . Take you now King David  
And fair Bathsheba, and her man Uriah.  
It’s then I ponder on Sanute the savage  
And Fraser’s fair-haired wife. You hear the story  
And tell me who’s the better gentleman. (76-80)

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<sup>48</sup> In colonial times, the theory that the American Indians were descendents of the ten lost tribes of Israel was originally developed as a counter argument to those Europeans who propagated that the Indians were without souls, possessed by demons, and the result of a separate creation. It was most often used by missionaries or religious groups such as the Quakers who strove for more peaceful relationships with native populations or who, like the Millennialists, wanted to convert them. Despite its many permutations sect to sect, in sum, it was a tradition used to enoble native Americans and create a common link with European spirituality.

Adair goes on to describe Sanute's desire for Fraser's wife, who with her blonde hair, pale skin, and delicate features ". . . must have proved a sheer amazement / To Indians . . . / Their name for moon . . ." (95-97). Sanute brings her gifts and clandestinely watches her perform her domestic tasks during the day and at night. In addition, even though Sanute and John Fraser are at peace, Sanute's desire for Fraser's wife causes him to fantasize about scalping him:

And when she placed upon her good man's head  
A bowl, to trim his hair, belike he [Sanute] pondered  
How neat a line the tomohawk would find  
To guide its circled sweep. . . . (103-106)

At this point, the poem takes a remarkable turn and disrupts the typical trope of the early American captivity tradition in order to subvert dominant myths.

Sanute is drawn back to her in the summer ". . . as sun draws leaflings to the easterward" (113), and Mrs. Fraser, rhetorically compared to Bathsheba, is alone with her small child and clearly could easily be taken captive. Once Sanute approaches her, she places her child's hand in Sanute's and declares them now friends and fellow chiefs. This stark reminder of friendship and of his role as a leader places Sanute into a crisis of conscience that results in his fleeing to the woods to grapple with his desires for this white woman. Ravenel does something unique here; to date, I have found no other tales or poems where the Native American figure contemplates the moral and ethical questions surrounding the act of captivity and the use of power as Sanute does.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Additional study of this sub-genre of captivity and its critical function would contribute significantly to the field.

At first, Sanute rationalizes taking Frazier's wife captive for his pleasure. Sanute notes that he is a chief and has the power and dominion to do it. In addition, his experience tells him, as does Ravenel's as a reader of the early American genre, that young women like Mrs. Fraser would eventually acculturate: "He knew besides how soon a captive squaw / Forgot her people and her husband's wigwam, / And set her smiles to please her new-found Lord" (143-145). However, at this point, the poem highlights Sanute's refusal to act on these impulses. Instead, the poem contemplates the philosophical questions concerning what truly makes a king:

What makes a king, I ask you? Hardly gold  
 Or pompous trappings. Power over humans—  
 That's all that counts. It's being bold to say,  
 "Yon man's between my glory and the sunlight,  
 So blot him out"; or, "yon enticing female  
 Could make me free of trouble and harassment  
 Of life one hour. To my tent with her."  
 (For that's the use of woman; she's escape,  
 Illusion of release). That's why Barbarians  
 Clad mostly in fantastic nakedness,  
 Of painted stripes, fawn-trotters, leather fringes,  
 Assume the carriage of your emperor,  
 Having dominion's one essential—power. (128-140)

Ravenel, alluding to the biblical David, ironically concludes this section by stating wryly: "We know how David acted" (147). David, of course, took Bathsheba for himself and



upon learning of her resulting pregnancy has her husband killed. This historical parallel is not lost on the reader as Ravenel's Sanute takes a very different and noble path. Resisting the certainly easy capture of Fraser's wife, he, instead, makes her holy and chaste to him through an Indian water ritual that in a number of ways resembles the Christian ordinance of baptism. Now cleansed, declared his sister, and even made sacred, she is safe from captivity:

He joined her to him by a seperateness

As close as marriage, which he might not cross.

He made her holy and forbidden to him.

Forever. (169-172)

Therefore, instead of taking her captive, he the "savage" Indian, in contrast to the "civil" David, ensures her freedom and her chastity. Accordingly, the poem concludes, "And certainly / He was a gentleman, this chief Sanute" (215-216).

Once again, in this poem, Ravenel strategically employs the cultural crossing of captivity in order to critique the borders of a southern past policed by white, patriarchal agendas that demonize the racial Other and mention women only in passing. By employing the actual contemplation of captivity, Ravenel gives depth, complexity, and moral character to this Yemassee chief who shows more philosophical thought and reason than the biblical David. Furthermore, the cultural crossing that takes place in the poem bridges the gap between the white woman and the racial Other, effectively debunking the sexual threat of the man of color used in southern culture to encourage

white women to trust in and seek the protection of white men.<sup>50</sup> Of course, these white protectors often crossed the color line sexually with their female slaves. Thus, Sanute's union with Ms. Fraser is more spiritual on some level than marriage because he has pledged never to violate her. Sanute not only resists taking her for himself, but he goes as far as making her holy to him. The brilliant contrast to David's actions further emphasizes the need for white, patriarchal society to look with a critical eye within its own culture where captivities abound as men wield power over women and minorities.

Ravenel's critical engagement with and direct employment of the captivity tradition permeates her other poetry dealing specifically with larger national gender issues and the confinement that southern women continued to face under the legacy of true womanhood. In these pieces, the external captivity trope highlights an internal captivity that ultimately results in death of the self. Though southern womanhood existed on a regional level, Ravenel recognized that this type of confinement for women through established codes of womanhood was a systemic problem nationally. By turning to early American history, Ravenel locates an identification with the paradoxical nature of repression and passion in American Puritan character that for her personifies the interaction of what she deems the "force of life" with a narrow minded community. In a letter to Imagist poet Amy Lowell dated July 29, 1925, Beatrice Ravenel reflects on the passion of the early Puritan character, which she directly correlates to the modern female poetic voice through a comparison to Lowell and then to Emily Dickson. Ravenel writes:

When I was at college I remember Professor Barrett Wendell  
speaking of the apparent coldness and the real passion of the New England

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<sup>50</sup> For a full discussion of the southern rape complex and its use as a mode of sexual and racial suppression, see Jacquelyn Down Hall in *Powers of Desire*, Ed. Snitlow, et al.

Puritan character—a passion which, at the beginning, was expressed in its religious experiences, evidently because no other outlet was allowed it.

When I read your poems I thought of his insistence on the subject. That was what you meant, wasn't it—to show the force of life breaking through repression, and commonplace conditions, and the thwarting of the natural emotions that a narrow and hide-bound community exacts? [ . . . ]

Emily Dickinson, I suppose, is an example of the same repressed passion and thirst for life. There was a time in my life when one of her poems used to haunt me: –

“The soul asks pleasure first,  
And then relief from pain,  
And then the little Anodynes  
That deaden suffering.”<sup>51</sup>

And so on, until it humbly craves “the liberty to die.” She could say more, compressedly, than anyone except, perhaps, William Blake. . . . This whole thing is very macabre, and possibly too near the ridiculous, but Emily never balked taking chances, so she might have meant something of the kind. (“Dear Amy,” emphasis in the original)

This letter evidences Ravenel's interest in early American history as well as proves her actual study of the subject. Ravenel's reference to a “narrow and hide-bound community” certainly translates to the one she, as a modern poet living in the elite circles of Charleston, must maneuver between in order to make a living from her writing and yet

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<sup>51</sup> Ravenel misremembered four words in the section of the poem she quotes that do not significantly change the meaning from the original. The poem is #536 from Johnson's edition of Dickinson's work and begins “The Heart asks Pleasure – first – .”

release her radical poetic sensibilities. As the *OED* notes, “hidebound” implies individuals who are confined, constricted, and restricted in view or scope to the point of bigotry. This meaning can easily be applied to Ravenel’s experience and view of the southern cultural environment. In addition, the Dickinson poem Ravenel cites (and says she is haunted by) metaphorically implies that death is a welcome freedom to the captive soul. When viewing the poem in its entirety, the reader discovers that the heart asks the “privilege,” or as Ravenel adequately rephrases, the liberty, to die specifically from “The will of its Inquisitor” (Dickinson 262). In fact, Ravenel will come back to this sentiment in her own poem dedicated to Dickinson discussed later in this chapter.

Concerning her thoughts on women and their status in southern society, Beatrice Witte Ravenel does not focus on the stereotypical feminine preoccupations in the southern way of life centered on the home, family, inherited values, and the aesthetic of memory as outlined by Lucinda Mackethan in *Daughters of Time* (10). Rather she understands that women are starting at a point of subjective knowledge that has been molded by those in power and who have created a heritage of subservience. Thus, her quest becomes to create a poetic voice that holds the potential to construct knowledge in a way that exposes this practice of cultural phallocentrism with the power to wear away its authority. In other words, Ravenel refuses to write the southern lady and instead strategically wields tropes of captivity to disavow, rather than imitate, standard regional concepts.

In “The Selfish Woman,” Ravenel once again returns to the language of early American captivity when contemplating the spirit of a woman bound to the public body of the *lady* in the modern South.

Love me or leave me alone.  
 You shall no longer cling about my lap,  
 Your love that will not love!  
 Your separateness that will not go away!  
 If you were gone  
 I could be all creation in myself.  
 But not with you to lead me and frustrate me—  
 Your hesitations, your half-tones, your cowardice.  
 I run the gauntlet like a savage captive,  
 Torn into ravellings  
 Not by the spears of men but by the gold pins of the women!  
 (*The Yemassee* 90)

This poem might be easily misunderstood if it were not for her employment of a captivity rite in the end. The gauntlet, according to Zabelle Derounian-Stodola, most often served as an initiation rite where white captives were forced to run, possibly naked, through a line of villagers throwing stones or sticks at them. Here, however, Ravenel's speaker is not suffering through a brutal initiation by Indians. She is struck, "torn into ravellings," by the initiation into southern womanhood. Ravenel clearly addresses the lasting proliferation of the myth of southern womanhood that held women hostage as sacrificial, constantly-serving, moral exemplars in the South. Drawing from the traditions of captivity allows her to fracture myths of southern womanhood through the revelation of the internal captivity such a system placed on women. For the speaker, the artifice, the veneer, becomes a torment that she longs to shed. Ravenel makes visible the

separateness experienced so deeply that, as Anne Goodwyn Jones argues, it cost women their identities—their individual sense of self (4).

These sentiments are continually echoed in Ravenel's published work. In the poem "Duty," she further highlights the artifice required of a lady, which binds the individual through regional responsibility, as the title suggests:

Tread lightly.  
 Speak like the soft texture of magnolia  
 That bruises at one light graze to brown silence.  
 Be lovely, be invitation and calling to the touch,  
 Melt like the dance, swelling to graciousness. [. . . ]  
 .....  
 But men do not love her.  
 The angels may love her  
 But surely they do not visit her. (*The Yemassee* 87)

The irony revealed in the poem concerns the reward for such "Duty." Men, presumably white men, can no longer love her. The artifice imposed on her through societal roles may elevate her to a regional symbol on a pedestal, but it does so by entombing her in a form of marital sexual subservience resulting in a loss of marital fidelity. Social standards held that "only men and depraved women were sexual creatures and that pure women were incapable of erotic feeling" (Firor-Scott 54). The white southern veneer transforms the belle into a chaste matron lacking sovereignty over her own sexuality, which denies her enjoyment of and authentic engagement in the sexual act. This distance between the act and the woman results in a void between woman and man—one that

ultimately contributes to domestic discontent and supports a double standard.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, the “magnolia” through her “Duty” can only be loved by angels. Ravenel returns to this subject, directly discussing sexualized women and male control, in her unpublished poem “Bondwomen” transcribed on pages 119-121.

Thoughts concerning the trapped inner-life of women and the language of confinement persist throughout Ravenel’s unpublished work as well. In “To the Body,” she writes, “Only in dreams can I escape your tyranny. / . . . Only when I leave you behind, drug you with weariness, can I escape from you / . . . Each morning like a petulant child you reestablish your implacable claim. / Why must I go?” (Papers). In this context, these poems offer connections between the plight of the literal captive and less tangible forms of victimization and restriction experienced by the white, female readers of the narratives (Castiglia 4). In other words, by strategically employing the language and traditions of captivity, literally and metaphorically, the narratives highlight the movement of the female and/or racial body through levels and divergent forms of social and political captivity that may never lead to true release. Therefore, the recognition of captivity, in this sense, becomes a state of consciousness that necessitates change. She contrasts this with an appreciation for women such as Emily Dickinson who chose to control their confinement and retreat inward in a type of self-imposed captivity where “a rich inner life and the dazzling possibilities of language [can be] wielded as weapon and shield” (Donaldson, “Songs” 187). In Ravenel’s poem “Emily Dickinson: (1830-1886),” she writes:<sup>53</sup>

You shut your doors on small intrusions.

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<sup>52</sup> For a full discussion of this double standard see chapter three of Firor-Scott.

<sup>53</sup> A comparison of Ravenel’s poem to Dickinson’s “The Soul selects her own Society” would further elucidate these concepts.

You chose your cage: a garden and the sweep  
 Of seaward-flung horizons free of bounds;  
 Intensive secrets of your winter greenhouse;  
 And words – the cutting wizardry of words,                 5  
 Sword-dance of dictionaries, patterning  
 With more and more distinctness, finer pointed grace,  
 The rhythms flung between yourself and life.

Bird in the dark, your wine-gold venturous eyes  
 Pierced with a fiery needle; you must sing                 10  
 To night's vast world suffused with unseen stars;  
 Beauty without topography or limit,  
 Sufficient beauty, waiting for the sun  
 No longer, all the promises of night  
 fulfilled in radiant darknesses of song. (16)

In the last stanza of this poem, Ravenel refers to Dickinson as a “bird in the dark” with “venturous” and piercing eyes that sing to the world of night, “Beauty without topography or limit” that waits for the sun no longer (lines 9,12). Once again, she emphasizes her concern for looking beyond bordered representations of the region or the mind. It is also no accident that she picks a figure who distanced herself from the bonds of marriage, motherhood, and society.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> This consciousness-raising use of captivity is furthered in her West Indies poems that are largely written in the voices of black Creoles. In this series, Ravenel deals with the inner-life struggles of mixed race figures that, as Donaldson points out, the white world seeks to contain and domesticate (“Songs” 188). In



Ravenel's interest in figures who separate themselves from standard social roles takes on added significance in an unpublished piece titled "Bondwomen." This poem, one of her most powerful and strikingly direct, concerns a more universal consequence of females captive(ated) by men in a condition that ultimately leads to their cultural demise, their removal from history. In "Bondwomen," Ravenel comments on the historical, religious, and mythological captivity and appropriation of female legends. These stories must be tamed by the men controlling their narrative production in order to perpetuate a patriarchal social order over the course of centuries. Accordingly, remarkable legendary women must be shown as participants, to varying extents, in their fall from power. As a modernist thinker, Ravenel was astutely aware that the act of remembering or writing history is a selective, often manipulated, process; therefore, her revision of cultural memory seeks to evoke change in the present. In effect, she anticipates what Michael Kreyling later argues in *Inventing Southern Literature* when he states that myth and history are used to selectively "feed one another; [and] together they make consciousness a process, and we are in it, body and mind" (xviii). Thus, in order to reveal the subjective female representations in this tradition, Ravenel turns to myth, opera, religion, and philosophy to dismantle male cultural ownership in which women are silenced and persuaded to yield their power to men—a power that often takes the form of sexual realization. In other words, Ravenel wishes to focus on the silenced voices of the women whose stories were used and shaped by men and in so doing reveal where "men have actively shaped their [women's] experience of self and world . . ." (Christ 4).

Ravenel was aware of what Lewis Simpson labeled the "omnipresent subject of modern

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these poems, such as "Jeune Fille Octoroon," the veneer of whiteness and propriety become the individual's cage. More study of Ravenel's thoughts and investigation of race issues in her work is needed.

letters: man's idea of himself as a creature of his own conception of history, and his resistance to this idea" (212). Accordingly, in "Bondwomen" she utilizes cultural memory as a resistance to subjective historicism and as a secret message to women and their understanding of their own heritage of powerlessness. In order to facilitate my discussion of this unpublished piece, it is quoted at length.<sup>55</sup>

### **Bondwomen**

Let no man read these verses.

They should be read by women and their daughters

Who must be pondering school-books. They are tabu.

There lived a queen long since by the Euphrates

Who vintaged loves as men pluck grapes in handfulls, 5

(For her own joy, as men take toll of women);

Saying, "I am free. I will. Naught is forbidden.

My self-respect's intact. All is permitted."

Yet always ere the new love's cluster ripened

Death poured the last one's silence. Never, never 10

In this same world should two men lean to murmur

"Semiramis?" with confidential eyelid.

There lived one Thaïs, sought by several cities.

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<sup>55</sup> Found in Ravenel's papers at the Southern Historical Collection, this poem is handwritten and dated 1917 (folder 14). Ravenel's line edits have been faithfully incorporated; spelling mistakes and textual emphasis are the author's own. See, for example, the spelling "Zarathrustra" in line 30. The line numbers are mine for the reader's reference.

She left her doorsill, channeled by feet and tribute,  
 Her live male-rubies, won Phaenecian mirrors 15  
 That woke like dawn when Thaïs glamored past them;  
 Young, wicked gods, and drugs, and intricate perfumes  
 Subtler than sin; and honourable verses  
 Made by great poets. Saint she died and martyr,  
 Out in the desert, a thin-haired unwashed martyr, 20  
 Because of one dull monk's obscure opinion.

There lived a maid, Hyppolita, a warrior.  
 For one man's love who kept no faith with women  
 Nor much with men, she cast away her people.  
 Her arrogant tall girls, farouche and splendid. 25  
 They, lacking her, dropped wounded by the wayside  
 In that long, lamentable homeward battle,  
 While sleek she purred upon a husband's hearthstone.

All things have women done for men's opinion,  
 Kissing the little stick of Zarathrustra. 30  
 Their seacoast is a smiling fierce republic,  
 Their hinterland a man-ruled suzerainty.  
 Who would not mourn for women? I am fearful  
 That men should know this truth concerning women.

Therefore let no man dare to read these verses. (Papers)

The title “Bondwomen,” which literally means female slaves, sets an interesting tone for a poem that centers around three powerful female figures; it also squarely places these figures into the literary language of bondage. Opening with the warning, “Let no man read these verses. / They should be read by women and their daughters / who must be pondering school-books. They are tabu” (1-3), Ravenel instantly and unmistakably genders the political nature of the poem’s subtext to prevent readers from ignoring this slant in its interpretation. Perhaps there also exists a tongue-in-check slant to the opening warning to men who, by poem’s end, are “dare[d]” to read the poem—a Pandora’s box of sorts that once opened refuses containment (35).

Fitting women into critical paradigms that negate a gendered reading by appearing to transcend it has frequently been used by scholars as a line of resistance to addressing gender issues that challenge homogeneous male values and sentiments. In many such critical economies, the label *artist* whitewashes “divisions of human sexuality” that then “do not entail allocations of power, only divisions of biological function” (Kreyling 104). “Bondwomen” leaves no room in its opening for such transcendence; it is a poem concerning women that highlights the spinning of history and myth as sexed subjects where males have shaped the possibilities of women’s lives. By focusing on those generations of women “pondering school books” in the first stanza, this poem directly connects women’s experiences with that of learning through cultural documents used by established male institutions.

Ravenel herself was astutely aware of the power of semantic manipulation and how experience can be and is expressed in literature where gender becomes a politicized analytic category. In her private correspondence, Ravenel often comments on the bravery required of the disenfranchised in order to be oneself and pursue individuality. She writes to Amy Lowell in a letter most likely from July 1922,

As for your power over people, I have seen how you can play with an audience, and individuals must be even easier material. If you can pardon perfect frankness, I find you quite unforgettable, and find so much more in your poems for having heard you read them in your beautiful voice—a voice with such a hinterland to it, such an effect of reserve power and opulent imagination. You reminded me, if you know what I am trying to say, of the very most significant women of the Elizabethan plays, women who were courageously and impulsively themselves, because there was enough to them to justify their originality, instead of being the mosaics of second—hand ideas and emotions that most human creatures are, —and women who could express themselves with all the richness of language—and with the irresistible edge of irony. Now if you consider this impertinent, I apologize. But you brought it on yourself.

(“My Dear Miss Lowell”; emphasis in original)

Ravenel admired the women of the Elizabethan plays because they pursued individuality and their own desires rather than being pieced together as “the mosaics of second –hand ideas and emotions” (Letter 6). She also recognizes the correlation of this freedom of creative and ironic ability to a time when there were enough such women so that their

community could translate to liberty or, to use her term, “originality”—a theme she takes up in “Bondwomen.” Given these concerns, the poem’s initial warning promises a frankness to its intended audience and serves as a way to establish a more sympathetic identification between the writer and her imagined readers as a community of female captives in society that has devalued them and their heritage from the past. By setting up the intrigue of what is deemed now “tabu” for women—words, language, and therefore knowledge—the poem ultimately calls for the recognition and realization within the captive community of their compliance in this patriarchal dominance and the need for change, which must come from within a united group. Much like Mary Wollstonecraft, Ravenel treats women as “rational creatures” in an attempt to

persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength . . . and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love, which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt. (9)

Captivity in this poem, therefore, provides inter-textual sites for emancipation by underscoring the need for united action. Such identification was often used in sentimental and abolitionist writing by women authors to inspire “in its readers, that response, . . . ideally translated into political action” (Burnham 163).

After firmly establishing the sexed, political nature of the piece, Ravenel writes a sequence of three stanzas devoted to powerful historical and mythical women. However, the women chosen for discussion, Semiramis, Thaïs, and Hippolyte, are not “pure”—that

is, not moral exemplars according to acceptable gender norms dictated by male society. They are powerful, aggressive, sexually charged, non-conformist women who dominate men and who are ultimately punished for their sexual power, particularly by those editing their legends in cultural documents. In other words, their bodies become objects of institutional discipline where they serve as warnings, not models, “instruments of sexual . . . suppression” for those “who challenge the established order” (Yaegar 298).

Ravenel, in stanza two, begins with Semiramis, the mysterious Assyrian queen of Babylonian birth who lived and reigned around 800 B.C. Not much is known about her historical life other than she was strikingly beautiful, strong, and a very capable ruler who reigned after her husband’s death until her son became of age.<sup>56</sup> During this time, she assumed responsibility for building up her city from an artistic and military perspective and became a respected ruler popular with her people. Relatively quickly over the course of a few centuries, varying mythic accounts of Babylon transform her legend into that of an evil seductress who secures the throne through sexual manipulation, refuses to remarry so that she can continue her rule without a male master, and resists abdicating her throne to her son when the time comes. This negative legend of Semiramis takes on significant cultural cachet in the arts after Voltaire publishes his popular play *Semiramis: A Tragedy*, written in 1784. This in turn directly inspired Gioachino Rossini’s 1822 opera *Semiramide*, and these representations influence numerous accounts of her legend in sculpture and painting, including a work by American artist William Wetmore Story. It is clear from Ravenel’s scrapbook, in which she collected her contributions to the

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<sup>56</sup> Reliable sources on Semiramis as a historical figure are almost non-existent. The information presented here is pieced together from a variety of sources that all draw from the work of male Greek historians. For further information, see Jean Bottero’s *Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (2001) published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

Columbia, S.C., *State* newspaper, that she read and studied Voltaire's work, and though she does not mention Rossini directly, she was clearly well-versed in opera and attended many performances in Charleston. She may have indeed seen Rossini's opera. In both Voltaire's and Rossini's versions of the story of her ascendance to power, Semiramis is transformed into a lust-filled ruler who in collusion with her lover Assur is responsible for the death of the king, Ninus, and who—in Oedipal fashion—almost marries her own son, who was taken from her as a child.<sup>57</sup>

As "Bondwomen" describes, Ravenel's Semiramis could resemble any number of male rulers throughout history and myth known and often admired for their sexual exploits. She writes: Semiramis "vintaged loves as men pluck grapes in handfulls, / (For her own joy, as men take toll of women)" (5-6). For Semiramis, taking and enjoying such pleasure is her right, her will, and as the sovereign queen the rules are her own. She, in effect, has seemingly achieved ultimate freedom from society's mores: "I am free. I will. Naught is forbidden. / My self-respect's intact. All is permitted'" (7-8). However, such a female figure cannot be permitted to exist. Thus, in the popular legend created by Voltaire and followed by Rossini, Semiramis must be tamed. Though she has vowed to never share her throne, Voltaire paints her as inevitably caught between two men. One is her accomplice in her husband's death, a former lover, who insists they marry so that he can secure the throne. The other is her son whose identity is finally revealed to her before the wedding. Despite her history of independence and power, she cannot, or rather will not, shed her guilt of assuming power at the cost of the role of wife, nor can she ignore and shed her role as mother once acknowledging it. Therefore, the men

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<sup>57</sup> See Voltaire, *Semiramis: A Tragedy*.



recasting her legend into popular and influential art remove, or rather taint, her power as a sexual being, because such a woman cannot be allowed to go beyond the boundaries of society if the established dominant order is to be maintained. This type of woman—who does not cater to husband, son, or lover—would be too dangerous and, accordingly, must be punished for not following the path dictated by social roles. Her actions, albeit fictional, cannot be romanticized, excused, or ignored, but rather she must be crucified to discourage such pursuits of political and sexual freedom by a woman. Consequently, she is portrayed as giving in to the role of mother out of guilt and duty and, in an ironic twist, is killed by the hand of her own son, appropriately in her dead husband's tomb.

Ravenel's stanza on this figure ends rather obscurely, “. . . Never, never / In this same world should two men lean to murmur / ‘Semiramis?’ with confidential eyelid” (10-12). Perhaps Ravenel is referring to Semiramis's betrayal by her lover Assur and her son Arsace that results in her death. In Ravenel's revisionist reading, Semiramis earns blame because, after years of following her own path, she gives into the opinions and social constructs of male society rather than actively controlling her own destiny. Another possibility is that Ravenel is directly referring to the two male writers, Voltaire and Rossini, and their appropriation of this legend that they popularize and revise to become the story of an evil seductress whose demise is inevitable. In this reading, what is murdered, or rather what “death poured” silent, are the accomplishments and power of the actual historical figure whose true story is lost, becoming a myth used to cordon off undesired social change.

William Faulkner often addresses the rhetorical power of narrative even when divorced from fact. In “Dry September” when asked if the rape of a woman really

happened, the head lyncher McLendon responds, “‘Happen? What the hell difference does it make? Are you going to let the black sons get away with it until one really does it?’” (Faulkner 172). Though Faulkner is concerned with racial scapegoating, the same suggestion of the power of narrative to impact social construction applies to gender. Consequently, I find it no coincidence that on the cover of the most popular edition of Voltaire’s piece, the translation Ravenel would most likely have read, is a rather haunting quote from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “Murder, though it has no tongue, will speak with most miraculous organs” (Voltaire i).<sup>58</sup> For Hamlet, murder cannot be kept silent or hidden, as it always finds a voice that gives the perpetrator away; the act, in other words, generates its own signifiers. In her poem, Ravenel inverts this connection between speech and action, where language obfuscates the reality of patriarchal oppression. The conspiring narratives for Ravenel actually commit murder in “confidential” fashion by falsifying the cultural record of the positive aspects of Semiramis’s rule and a story that potentially holds the ability to challenge established gender hierarchies.<sup>59</sup>

Stanza three concerns Thaïs, an Egyptian courtesan who becomes a Saint in the Catholic church. Versions of her story are common among historic religious texts, and she was taken up by many pursuing artistic representations. For instance, Anatole France based a novel, *Thaïs*, around the story, and Jules Massenet, inspired by France, wrote a noted opera by the same name. As a serious student of French and French literature, Ravenel likely was familiar with France’s text, which popularized the legend of Thaïs.<sup>60</sup> According to religious accounts, Thaïs was a wealthy, smart, and strikingly beautiful

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<sup>58</sup> From *Hamlet* Act ii, scene 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ravenel describes a connection between language and its social efficacy that has been articulated by speech act theorists such as John Austin and Shoshana Felman.

<sup>60</sup> As a modernist, France was also influential on other Southern writers such as James Branch Cabell.

woman who could captivate any lover; she is even rumored to have controlled all of Alexandria with her sexual charms.<sup>61</sup> Paphnutius, a monk, hears of her exploits and decides that her conversion would be a great victory for the church. Disguised in secular clothing, he visits her and warns her about God's final judgment, when her soul must account for her sins. Swayed by his passionate speech, Thaïs burns her worldly goods and vows to follow the monk into the desert where she is taken to a convent and sealed into a cell from which she has no outlet. Held in this state of captivity, she is told to pray repeatedly, "You who made me, have mercy upon me" (Ward 76). Three years later, convinced of her forgiveness by God, Paphnutius returns and unseals her cell.<sup>62</sup> Thaïs does not welcome the release and wishes to remain in her cell as a captive before God, but the monk insists upon her release and return to society. She dies fifteen days later a martyr in the desert.

As she does with Semiramis, Ravenel paints Thaïs in the beginning of this stanza as a celebrated and confident woman of import and power. She is "sought by several cities," and followed by "tribute," "live male-rubies," and "... honourable verses / made by great poets" (13, 15, 18-19). This rather favorable description of her sexual power and prowess is immediately juxtaposed with her fate as an object of religious conversion—a conversion brought on not by a great man or the holy spirit, but by "one dull monk's obscure opinion" (21). As legend has it, Paphnutius decides she needs saving because her actions caused so many *men* to lose their souls through fornication, reducing themselves to poverty, and their participation in bloody quarrels over her. Thus, by referring to Paphnutius's "obscure opinion," Ravenel highlights how in such documents

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<sup>61</sup> For scribal accounts of Thaïs, see Benedicta Ward.

<sup>62</sup> The specific name of the monk varies depending on the version of the tale. I have used the name found in the most often related historical account from the text *Thaïs, the Harlot* (see Ward).

Thaïs is not just responsible for herself, but her legend must also take on responsibility, and spiritual responsibility at that, for the decisions of men. What is incomprehensible or vague for Ravenel is why the men are not responsible for their own actions. In addition, Paphnutius knows that saving the soul of the great seductress of Alexandria glorifies him personally, though he describes it as glorifying the church.

Recognizing the many layers to this myth, Ravenel does not portray this conversion in any holy or grace-filled light. She does not even speak of Thaïs's immortal or rescued soul or of any gratitude for deliverance from sin. Ravenel's tone is much more sardonic. Acknowledging that Thaïs died both as saint and martyr, Ravenel rather emphasizes the poverty and degradation of this experience where she perishes "out in the desert, a thin-haired unwashed martyr" (20). Sealed away in the literal confinement of her cell, Thaïs has her self-determination, individuality, and quest for material success taken from her. She is reduced to pleading for mercy before a male God. In this stanza of "Bondwomen," Ravenel underscores the paradoxical use of guilt and praise, particularly through religious discourse, to domesticate the dangerous aspects of Thaïs's legend—her power as a woman when left unrestrained by a hierarchical gendered social order. Yes, she is on a religious pedestal in the end, but as a thin and unwashed corpse who lacks any resemblance to the powerful woman initially described in the poem who was venerated by "honourable verses / made by great poets" (18-19). Ravenel emphasizes how cultural texts treat the confidence and individuality of these women who exist beyond patriarchal borders. Accordingly, Thaïs and Semiramis are portrayed by persuasive men as unable to trust in their own ideas and reactions as independent women. As a result, they place themselves in the hands of men who are supposedly revealing the

*truth* to them in an effort to set them free from their *burdens*. Of course, as Ravenel stresses, that freedom in both examples is ultimately a non-heroic death.

In stanza four, the poem turns to the Greek myth of Hippolyte and takes on a different tone concerning the described figure.<sup>63</sup> It is no accident that Ravenel ends her examples of powerful women by dealing with perhaps the most potent female figure in western literature—the great mythic Amazon Queen. Daughter of Ares and Otrera and the object of Heracles' ninth labor, she was the supreme leader of a tribe of strong and independent warrior women—a tribe that chose to live without the company of men except for mating purposes. Taken as a captive bride by Theseus, she adapts to her role as wife to the Athenian and bears a son Hippolytus.<sup>64</sup> Her acceptance of this domestic role is not portrayed kindly by Ravenel, who refuses to give her the same ennobling introduction as the other two figures. Rather, she simply introduces her as a maid and warrior who “For one man’s love who kept no faith with women / Nor much with men, she cast away her people” (23-24). Ravenel has no sympathy for this mythic figure whose legend is perhaps the greatest betrayal to women in that it leads to the downfall of Amazonian society—the only female stronghold against patriarchal social orders. Ravenel’s poetic voice sympathizes with the lost female warrior figures who, despite the betrayal, seek Hippolyte’s release. To her, they are the ones who are “farouche and splendid” and who deserve remembering (25). In other words, for Ravenel, what is most compelling, and why she chooses to end with the example of Hippolyte, are the

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<sup>63</sup> Though Ravenel uses the spelling Hyppolita, for discussion purposes, I have chosen to use Hippolyte, which is the most common in classical mythology.

<sup>64</sup> Some mythic accounts have Theseus abducting Antiope, Hippolyte’s sister, thus confusing the two names. Other accounts have Hippolyte willingly agreeing to the marriage in the fourth year of war to bring about a peace with Athens. For more on Hippolyte see Robert Bell’s *Women of Classical Mythology* (CA: ABC-CLIO, 1991.). Ravenel was most likely familiar with her from such literary references as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, which highlight her acclamation to life as an Athenian.

consequences of her actions. Hippolyte's acculturation and acquiescence to the role of wife and mother requires her concession of pure, unadulterated female power over a solely female society. This not only leads to her personal demise—as with Semiramis and Thaïs—but it has much larger consequences.<sup>65</sup> The Amazons are completely defeated without her leadership and left “wounded by the wayside” as a disenfranchised group that will no longer have the glory, independence, and respect they once enjoyed (26). This line referencing their fall is ironically followed in the poem by “While sleek she purred upon a husband's hearthstone,” which ends the stanza (28). Thus, while one woman enjoys the protection of a man advocated by the cultural norm, her sisters fall without her. Such focus on self-preservation, on the individual rather than the community, renders the larger battle lost and once again reveals the participation of the individual woman involved in acquiescing to established social orders that disempower women. Ending with this example that highlights female complicity in perpetuating male social hierarchies allows Ravenel the ideal transition to directly address the imagined community of female captives that should be inspired to political action as a group by the “tabu” truth revealed.

Shifting back to the universal lesson of her poem, she writes in stanza five, “All things have women done for men's opinion, / Kissing the little stick of Zarathrustra” (29-30). Line 29 goes well beyond the literal meaning of what women will do for men by speaking of how women and their official, albeit subjective, representations have served male artistic and cultural goals, including those of Voltaire, Rossini, Massenet, France, and Shakespeare. The use of their female bodies by male representation culminates in

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<sup>65</sup> Theseus eventually repudiates her and takes up with another woman.

line 30 with a direct and an ironic reference to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his work *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None* in which the prophet Zarathustra, founder of Zoroastrianism, descends from a cave after years of meditation. This brief reference is a subtle and powerful part of the poem that puts the previously mentioned women and their plights into critical perspective. Ravenel's phrasing "Kissing the little stick" is certainly an ironic, comical, and emasculating reference to Nietzsche's documented sexism in his text, particularly obvious in the chapter titled "On Little Old and Young Women."<sup>66</sup> However emasculating Ravenel's association of "little" to his "stick" is, by having women kiss it, Ravenel also reveals that they are on some level paying homage to Nietzsche's philosophy, a male-centered philosophy of dominance.<sup>67</sup>

For Nietzsche's Zarathustra, life is the will to power and the ultimate goal of the individual is to become an *Übermensch*. This *superman* understands that his fate rests in his own hands. He seeks to make himself and his future at the cost of others; he obeys no laws except the ones he gives himself; and he accepts the premise that *not* all men are created equal. According to this Zarathustra, one supreme God does not exist, and those who teach and enforce Christian values, such as piety and meekness, and worship a supreme deity are actually seeking to force people into giving up their will to power and to submit to those who prosper from such conventional religious instruction. Those who refuse the struggle for individuality and personal desire turn to mass doctrines such as religion, nationalism (and by proxy, regionalism), or democracy as a means to escape and

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<sup>66</sup> In this chapter, Zarathustra explains that women exist to bear children; otherwise, they are bad, dangerous, and their happiness is to be found only in "he wills" as a "woman must obey and find a depth for her surface" (Nietzsche 67). The chapter ends with the often quoted, "You are going to women? Do not forget the whip!" (Nietzsche 67).

<sup>67</sup> Though Nietzsche does highlight and map out some of the principles of ancient Zoroastrian texts, for the most part, the values expressed in his book are his own and not those of the religious prophet.

to maintain peace. They, in fact, become social slaves. He goes on to argue that God is a creation of the great mythmakers, and “Zarathustra’s mission is to lead people [i.e. men] away from myths toward an assertion of the will” (Collinson 1376). Since Nietzsche’s philosophy specifically rejects divine providence, Ravenel highlights the point that the domination of men over women is not part of a grand religious scheme, but rather a scheme created and used to enforce a patriarchy that serves the will of the male individual and the ambitions of men.

Stanza five culminates in Ravenel’s addressing Nietzsche’s doctrine of eternal recurrence. This doctrine preaches that all events in history, big and small, will repeat themselves indefinitely.<sup>68</sup> Ravenel suggests that as long as women seek to please men, follow mass doctrines of society, and embrace peace at all costs, the history of their dominance, subservience, and loss of sexual power will continue to be repeated throughout time. After all, she writes, “Their seacoast is a smiling fierce republic, / Their hinterland a man-ruled suzerainty” (31-32). Thus, the women’s seacoast is described as a “fierce republic” or as a place where the people’s will prevails. However, “their hinterland” or the district behind them is “a man-ruled suzerainty,” a place where supreme power is wielded by feudal overlords to dominate and hold their state captive. The women, in other words, let the dominance continue as they remain a smiling but furious mass who constantly give up their will to power, to use Nietzsche’s words.

What then is the poet’s fear and truth that men might learn of women? Ravenel writes, “Who would not mourn for women? I am fearful / That men should know this truth concerning women. / Therefore let no man dare to read these verses” (33-35). Is

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<sup>68</sup> The theory that history repeats itself in cycles was derived by the Greek philosopher Plato who was influenced by Babylonian astronomers. Also, as I discuss in the previous chapter, Plato’s parable of the cave is a prototypical captivity allegory.



“this truth” that women have no desire or propensity to be dominated, ruled, and disciplined as Nietzsche suggests?<sup>69</sup> Or that they are too easily manipulated into following mass doctrine through the expectations of the roles of wife, mother, and religious models? Is she revealing that society and man’s opinion matters more to most females than their freedom to be active subjects? Or the opposite, a truth obscured by men’s rewriting of heroic, powerful women’s stories? Whatever the specific intended message may be, Ravenel underscores in “Bondwomen” that female complacency is the biggest threat to women who will remain captives to male society and male representations in cultural texts as long as they allow themselves to be. However, Ravenel suggests that all is not hopeless. As long as men do not truly recognize that their power over women is not based on male authority but on women’s participation in their own subjugation (thus the repetition of the warning at the end), women still stand a chance of social change as long as they maintain a “fierce republic” of captives seeking liberty—and perhaps once they recognize and embrace their power as sexual creatures.

In closing this discussion of Beatrice Witte Ravenel, I would like to turn to the second epigraph of this chapter, which further serves to illustrate Ravenel’s concern and awareness of the gendered subtext of historical narratives. In fact, she expands her criticism to the entire Judeo-Christian tradition. This epigraph comes from one of Ravenel’s many pieces of short fiction that have yet to be published in a collection.<sup>70</sup> In

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<sup>69</sup> Such a reading of Nietzsche’s philosophy concerning women in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is common among critics of his work.

<sup>70</sup> Ravenel’s fiction has received no critical attention whatsoever in the field. Perhaps this is because of an impression that her themes are too domestic, but the list of periodicals where some of her stories appeared is impressive and more of this work deserves new attention. There are some notable stories that explore issues of gender as well as southern identity and culture. For example, “Madonna Mia” was written and published before Ravenel was a wife and mother, and well before she had to be concerned with making money through her work. Therefore, her narrative voice in this early story is closer to the radical poetic voice revealed in her manuscripts.

“Madonna Mia,” which appeared in the *Harvard Monthly* in April 1892, a young girl about to enter her novitiate at an unnamed convent in New Orleans befriends an artist. After opening up to him about her life, she requests that he draw her a picture of the Madonna as a girl before the Annunciation. She is seeking the image of the woman Mary, the one a female can relate to on a spiritual level, not the annunciated “Madonna” who was impregnated without her knowledge or consent and thus bound by her role as virgin Mother to a male Christ.<sup>71</sup> The young girl, Jeanne, cannot, or rather will not, accept this Madonna who is always portrayed and painted by males. The pre-annunciated image of Mary, which celebrates her in her own right, is the one in which women of any age can see themselves, their own heritage, and thus confide in: “That is what makes it so easy to tell Our Lady all one’s troubles—she is like your mother, and yet a girl like yourself at the same time” (Ravenel, “Madonna” 70). Ravenel’s choice of Jeanne seeking the true image of Mary from an artist is significant in that Ravenel is on some level undermining traditions of Western art, which typically portray Mary in three roles—all emphasizing her as mother to a male savior rather than celebrating her as the female creator, and all distancing her from women.<sup>72</sup> Jeanne then asks the artist, “Did you ever feel that it put a barrier between God and you—if you are a woman—by calling him *He*—as though he were a man? . . . God ought to be called God, quite simply, or Else one ought to have made a special pronoun. If only the writers of the Bible had thought of that—but then they were all men” (Ravenel, “Madonna” 71). In rather bold

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<sup>71</sup> In this story the young girl, Jeanne, who will ironically become Soeur Marie Angelique after her novitiate, is very specific about when she uses the term “Madonna” or Mary. In addition, for Jeanne, Mary is only “Our Lady” before the Annunciation.

<sup>72</sup> Typical portrayals of the Madonna fall into three categories: receiving the annunciation, holding the baby Jesus, and the grieving Mary (the Pieta). All emphasize Mary receiving validation through her role in Christ’s incarnation.

fashion, Ravenel allows the young girl, who is about to become a representative of the official church, to question the distance placed between women and their own spirituality by coding religion in masculine terms. Furthermore, Ravenel directly makes the connection to the writers of religious historiography whom she blames for this separation of what is Godly from the female. The story ends with the young girl giving the artist specific details about what the image of the girl Mary should look like, and she expresses great joy at the outcome. Jeanne finally calls this Mary “blessed” and states that now “she is such a charming confidante” (Ravenel, “Madonna Mia” 71).<sup>73</sup> Accordingly, in “Madonna Mia,” the young girl wants the image of Mary before both Mary’s body and her visual aesthetic are appropriated and taken captive through male representations.<sup>74</sup>

Such sentiments concerning the captivity of Mary and her importance as a type of female Goddess are also seen throughout Ravenel’s poetry, even as late as 1939 when she was no longer publishing actively. In these pieces, Ravenel investigates how female spirituality was monopolized and taken captive by men, particularly in the American Puritan tradition. For Ravenel, the Puritan emphasis on a vengeful male God contained and oppressed women by negating their religious experiences and stealing their religious heritage. In this dominant early American religion, women are held captive to a God that they are intentionally kept separate from and who must be translated to them through men. There is a need for further and broader study of her complex thoughts on American religion; however, a brief overview of these pieces reveals a preoccupation with paradigms drawn from captivity traditions, as women are shown as having an affinity to

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<sup>73</sup> I find it interesting that in this issue of the *Harvard Monthly*, the first article is “Some Neglected Characteristics of the New England Puritans” by Barrett Wendell. As Ravenel’s correspondence attests, she studied early Puritanism with Professor Wendell whose work clearly served as a thematic source.

<sup>74</sup> In addition, Ravenel particularly indicts American Puritan doctrine for stealing Mary from women—a concept I will address in discussing her poem “Motherhood.”

the forest that serves as a source of power, solitude, and secret independence. Ravenel uses this connection to nature in order to highlight women's sexuality and power.

In early captivity traditions, many white women who experienced prolonged stays with their captors were described after their release as suffering from listless spells, staring into the woods, and having a type of wildness in the eye.<sup>75</sup> This tradition follows its way into fiction, often to underscore female helplessness, particularly in the southern pastoral tradition (Harrison 35). However, some female authors take this tradition and give it a different spin. For example, Ellen Glasgow writes of Martha Tod, Ada Fincastle's grandmother in *Vein of Iron*, who, after living with the Shawnees for seven years, could not get the taste of the wilderness completely out of her blood. Even after marrying a church elder, during the season of Indian summer, "she would leap up at the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox and disappear into the forest" (Glasgow 41-42). Then, on her deathbed, "her youth, with the old listening look had flashed back into her face, and she had tried to turn toward the forest" (Glasgow 42). At this point in the novel, Glasgow highlights an affinity between women and the forest and between women and Native Americans. Martha Tod is called to the forest; her youth is associated with it; and she longs to return to it in death. It is a place of interspaciality that allows women to cross out of patriarchal white society into liminal sites of liberty. Even Ada herself has the same hint of wildness stemming from an association with the woods and does on many levels identify with the Indians. She engages freely in adult passion on the Indian trail on Thunder Mountain, and this encounter is presented by Glasgow in more explicit

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<sup>75</sup> It was not uncommon for the captive female experiencing prolonged captivity to desire to remain with her Indian family. They were more often than not forced to return to white society where in addition to experiencing acclimation difficulties, they suffered scrutiny for their acculturation into Native American society.



But secretly the woman makes her choice

Of Gods. New moons go flickering through her feasts. 10

One day her soul goes hunting through the wild

And, grown blood-kin with flowers and birds and beasts,

Forgives Him everything with lifted voice—

Giver of life, the Father of her child! (Ravenel Papers)

In the context of Puritanism invoked through Ravenel's original title, the "flaming holy hill" immediately reminds the reader of the shining city on a hill the Puritans attempted to build in the new world. Ravenel's tone toward this Puritan utopia and its representative male figure is less than positive as she plays on the duty, denial, and hell-fire and brimstone aspects of this tradition. The Puritan God is one who imposes his will upon his followers "All for observance, nothing for delight" (4). He is a God "of battle, swift to smite" who is "Adored with all the terrors of the night" (5,8). Ravenel's sardonic poetic voice rather derogatorily refers to him as "The Old Man of the Tribe, supremest Ill" (7). In addition to this thematic concern, the reader soon learns that Ravenel's point in this first stanza goes beyond the obvious reference and critique of Puritan doctrine, for under the poem in her manuscript appears a typed note: "After reading 'Moses and Monotheism,' by Freud" (Papers).<sup>78</sup>

This book was Freud's last major work, which was highly controversial given its investigation of Jewish religious heritage in a period of German anti-Semitism. Though I in no way can attempt to summarize all the psychological and developmental analysis of

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<sup>78</sup> Ravenel most likely read the original German publication, and her papers indeed reveal that she had a working knowledge of German. For example, a note to Ravenel from a Mr. G. Halle found in folder 1, is written in German; he uses the familiar, informal second person singular "Du" with Ravenel.

his complex text, a brief understanding of its principles is necessary given Ravenel's direct acknowledgement. In sum, according to Freud, Moses was not a Hebrew, but rather an Egyptian nobleman who wanted to save the monotheist religion from extinction after the pharaoh's death. He strategically places himself at the head of the oppressed Semitic tribe, frees them, and creates a new nation where he further spiritualizes this faith. The former slaves eventually grow tired of the demands of the faith and kill Moses in a revolt. However, the memory of the murder of their leader is communally repressed and does not resurface even when Moses's legend reasserts itself in religious tradition fused with that of a Midianite priest by the same name. Freud argues that the repression is necessary and intentional at the hands of those constructing culture and framing social order. In his discussion of this biblical legend, he emphasizes the distortion of historical reality and its political use in the hands of the biblical scribes. For Freud, the example of Moses reveals that the historian must become a "(psychoanalytic) detective" charged with "the task of . . . discover[ing] those traces . . . that have not been completely obliterated" (Bernstein 15). Therefore, Freud's text problematizes central cultural records in its concern with what has been distorted, concealed, altered, and for what purpose. Specifically, he locates its axis squarely in "the problem of tradition, not merely its origins, but above all its dynamics" (qtd. in Bernstein 29). The introduction to the 1934 manuscript further elucidates his views on historical *fidelity*. Freud, specifically addressing the concept of historical *truth*, writes:

As the sexual union of horse and donkey produces two different hybrids, the mule [Maulthier] and the hinny [Maulesel], so the mixture of historical writing and fiction gives rise to different products which . . . sometimes

want to be appreciated as history, sometimes as novel. For some of them deal with people and events that are historically familiar and whose characteristics they aim to reproduce faithfully. They derive their interest, in fact, from history, but their intent is that of the novel; they want to affect the emotions. Others among these literary creations function in quite the opposite way. They do not hesitate to invent persons and even events in order to describe the special character of a period, but first and foremost they aspire to historical truth despite the admitted fiction. Others even manage to a large extent in reconciling the demands of artistic creation with those of historical fidelity. How much fiction, contrary to the intentions of the historian, still creeps into his presentation, requires little further comment. (qtd. in Bernstein 65)<sup>79</sup>

Neither a historian nor a novelist, Freud links these genres through psychoanalytic theory in order to fracture concepts of central cultural tradition by highlighting *intentionality* in the act of creation, whether subconscious or conscious, and its political employment of *fact*. In *Moses and Monotheism*, he concerned himself with the altering of the legend of Moses in order to question what specifically accounted for the distinctive character of the Jewish people and their ability to survive. Furthermore, through his discussion, he revealed that the historical evidence presented in material documents was anything but trustworthy because of the potential for the distortion of sources, fixed in writing in later

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<sup>79</sup> Ravenel, who read German, would have been aware that Freud's original title for the book was *Der Mann Moses, Ein historischer Roman* (*The Man Moses: An Historical Novel*).



periods, and all closely interwoven with national and regional concerns. Thus, for Freud and by her own admission Ravenel, the concept of historical *truth* is a misnomer.<sup>80</sup>

Given this insight and her acknowledgement of Freud's text, Ravenel's first stanza in "Primitive God" takes on even more significance as the reader is directed to interpret the central figure as Moses. She reveals not only how Moses has been wielded as a patriarchal figure in the Judeo-Christian tradition, but simultaneously how figures of male power are being replicated in religious systems that are removed from natural connections between man and God, such as Puritan New England. In some ways, Ravenel wants to mislead the reader upon the first read by directing attention to Puritan New England. Then, the textual note, which relates the reader to Freud, gives pause for a second reading through the legend of Moses that once again brings us back in circular fashion to the idea of the doctrine of eternal recurrence where history repeats itself. Ultimately, Ravenel wants the reader to recognize that, on one level, American Puritan culture repeats the type of manipulation the figure of Moses experienced as detailed by Freud. Also, this stanza presents the reader with another figure reminiscent of Nietzsche's Zarathustra, referenced in Ravenel's "Bondwomen," where man creates a superman to wield power and dominate society through the pursuit of the power of the individual. In this sense, religion is once again revealed as a force of distortion to serve dominant power groups.

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<sup>80</sup> Freud in this text associates textual manipulation with murder. He states that "In its implications the distortion of a text resembles a murder: the difficulty is not in perpetrating the deed, but in getting rid of its traces" (qtd. in Bernstein 15). Given Ravenel's admitted familiarity with Freud's text, I believe this further supports my reading of "Bondwomen" concerning the figure of Semiramis, where I argue that perhaps what is killed, what death renders silent, are the actual accomplishments and historical (i.e. factual) elements of the figure. The positive elements, murdered by those employing her legend, are eliminated to make way for the distorted elements necessitated by patriarchal agendas.

To combat this force of distortion, Ravenel moves in the second stanza to more natural ties to spirituality where women are organically meshed with nature, the wild, and the divine. It is a connection that empowers them and allows choice. The language of this stanza that speaks of moons, hunting in the wild, and increasing blood-kin with beasts ties women to the land in language similar to that used to speak of Native Americans. The quite perplexing end surprisingly emphasizes forgiveness. But what and who is being forgiven? Yes, she forgives “Him,” the masculine God, who has fathered her child. However, the tone and wording emphasize something more heretical: “Giver of life, the Father of her child!” (14). Ravenel’s phrasing and word order suggest that what is truly important and who is really the giver of life is the woman—the descendant of Mary. It is “her child” with an exclamation. And what is being forgiven? I would argue that it is the manipulation and distancing of female spirituality—a spirituality tied to creation, fertility, and the land—in favor of the imperialist masculine tradition of dominance. Women, in this sense, are for Ravenel closer to God specifically because of their ability to give life, not in spite of it.

This sentiment brings us full circle to the captive image of Mary that Ravenel first mentioned in her early story “Madonna Mia” and repeated in the poem “Motherhood.” In this unpublished piece, she writes that God, the masculine Puritan God, stands apart from women in his arrogance. The female speaker, however, finds spiritual affinity in the Mother of God. She states,

Should I vex with women’s weaving

The Ancient of Days?

Should I make Golgotha trivial

With my anxious household ways?  
 Should a God be mindful of me  
 In his arrogance apart?  
 But Mary, but Mary,  
 She knew me in her heart. (Papers)

The narrator of the poem then traces a heritage and experience of pure female spirituality through a matriarchal line of creation back from Mary, to Demeter, to Isis where “There was still the woman goddess / For a woman’s need” (15-16). Yet, this female Godhead is denied modern women. The poem describes the Goddess Mary as “stole” and “hid where I may not find” for the purpose of allowing men to frame female spirituality according to their masculine image and agenda. In this structure, women become aligned with “the beast.”<sup>81</sup> The speaker states,

They have shaped us as the beast is  
 With little space between,  
 They have taken from me Mary,  
 My Mother and my Queen.

In “Motherhood,” Ravenel blatantly rejects an established Christianity that focuses solely on the male Christ figure rather than his creator who, for Ravenel, is Mary. Motherhood is, therefore, ultimately a power that cannot be stripped from women. It is a power of creativity that directly links the female to the divine—a power so frightening to men that it has to be stolen and concealed.<sup>82</sup> However, Mary’s captivity cannot be sustained as she

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<sup>81</sup> In the book of Revelation there are two women: one, the whore of Babylon, is associated with the beast, and the other is the holy virgin who flees from the beast into the wilderness.

<sup>82</sup> This sentiment is also echoed in her published writing. In the poem “Missing” from *Arrows*, her voice takes on the persona of a mother whose son has been lost in war. She directly questions God on how her

experiences rebirth with the arrival of each new child. Ravenel ends this piece rather powerfully and directly:

But who takes from me, a woman,  
                                     The creative choice?  
 Who can hold my World from dawning  
                                     When it hears my voice?  
 In the hour the child is living  
                                     She shall live anew:  
 I shall crawl back to Mary  
                                     As the lamb to the ewe. (Ravenel Papers)

Here Ravenel employs Mary's captivity and her release sought by the speaker of the poem to reconstruct a female religious trajectory, one she traces back from Isis, that empowers and includes women. By ending with this series of questions, she implies that no one can truly take away the origin of creativity from women and that women merely need to find or get back to the roots of where they come from—their hinterland that ultimately equates them with the divine.

As I have demonstrated, Beatrice Witte Ravenel both literally and metaphorically employs captivity as revisionist historiography in her poetry to redefine the borders of nation, deconstruct identity, and re-center marginalized voices. By recognizing the parallels between the captivity tradition and her own regional history and social, cultural status, she scrutinizes and transgresses traditional views of women, race, community, and official constructs of history. In sum, her work draws attention to (and simultaneously

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son could be dead. She imposes upon him to remember the morning he was born, and she lifted her voice to praise him "(I a creator even as Thou) —" (Ravenel 66).

subverts) how the bodies of captives are used to manufacture regional and national power and cohesion, and, therefore, demonstrates “the ideological investments in maintaining . . . [the] body as an object of cultural exchange” (Castiglia 10). This discursive crossing allowed through literary traditions of captivity provide Ravenel specifically with revisionary possibilities of recontextualizing cultural scripts by permitting the often silenced captive body to articulate for itself. In so doing, these bodies resist cultural framing by concurrently revealing and resisting the inscription process. In other words, she reveals their use as subjects by focusing on the marginalized and, therefore, allows their meaning to be renegotiated as a consciousness-raising process that is ultimately capable of etching liberty in the very regional and/or American institutions that imprison them. Similar to Foucault’s discussion of tropes of captivity in prisons and in sexuality, Ravenel displays their manipulation by and their participation in the very institutions that they seek to resist. In so doing, captivity becomes the most effective trope for liberty. Emily Dickinson—one of Ravenel’s precursors and a poet who influenced and “haunted” her work—writes:

Except Thyself may be  
Thine Enemy—  
Captivity is Consciousness—  
so’s Liberty. (#384)

Clearly, Ravenel shared this view of captivity with Dickinson where the consciousness-raising process become the cogent path for change.

Given these concerns and her employment of this early American tradition, it is strange that “so many Southern literary historians have overlooked Ravenel’s perplexing

and unsettling poetry of otherness and disrupted boundaries. For writers and students of the region have been absorbed with the task of defining the *interior* and *boundaries* of the region and its literature, not its hinterlands and shadows” (Donaldson, “Songs” 189).

Unlike many of her contemporaries, Ravenel refuses to make a case for or against the South as a coherent region. It remained her home throughout her life and was instrumental in her creativity. However, Ravenel’s South takes on a more universal characteristic in that her southern poetic voice looks at the global context of historical, racial, and gendered concepts that exist within and well beyond its borders. Rubin in his introduction to Ravenel’s work noted the depth of her concern with the discursive narrative and discipline of history. He writes, “. . . most of her best work arises out of her strong sense of place and of history. She possessed, as Morris Cox has noted, a kind of historical sensibility that went beyond the mere recital of incidents and events from the past” (Rubin 16). Though his cursory discussion of her dealings with history ends there, her poetic voice, as I have argued, offers us a different vision of the South and southern history by focusing on what has been silenced—and in this sense releases these subjects from their captivity. Perhaps Ravenel herself says it best in a poem focused on individual agency and first-hand experience. For her, following one’s desires and living today, though it may not be prudent, is important because tomorrow may bring captivity and a loss of agency:

Tomorrow may find you  
 Locked in his glassy tentacles;  
 Jellied in crystal aspic;  
 An old-fashioned paperweight,

Blooming in glass.

Everything horrible. ("Peach-Blossoms in February," Ravenel Papers)

## Chapter Four

### **“To Cumber *Land*”: Caroline Gordon and the Anagogical Nature of Captivity**

“I feel sorry about the Indians. . . I have gotten quite a feeling for them, having been worrying with them now for some time—I have a pioneer lady out in the woods living more or less happily with the Indians after having all her children brained and her house burned and so on. . . . Nancy was fussing about her food the other day and I caught myself telling her that little Indian children are never allowed to eat anything hot for fear of going soft. Really, though, people don’t appreciate the Cherokee as they ought to.”—Gordon to Léonie Adams

“Must get back to my Indians. I plan to kill off twenty six of them today but alas, I will have to stop the bloody work at four o’clock to go and pour tea at a ladies’ gathering.” —Gordon to Muriel Cowley

From its beginnings in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the early American captivity narrative revealed the struggle between the individual and the collective identity of Anglo-American settlers that resulted from their negotiation and interaction with the wilderness. For the settlers, “these captivities came to epitomize the spiritual trial posed to the colonists by the American wilderness, its savage inhabitants, and perhaps most importantly, the savagery within themselves” (Strong 1). Though the genre underwent a series of transmutations in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century in both factive and fictive accounts, what continued to hold the interest of both writer and reader was its ever-compelling focus on the development and place of American identity as it is tortured, transformed, and released.

In her investigation of early colonial narratives, Pauline Turner Strong views the captivity genre as a “convergent historical practice and . . . a discourse of domination” (7). Strong’s study examines how the Other and the “Captive Self” function through identification and resistance that results ultimately in transformative narrative acts. In her



critical framework, “[t]he Captivating Savage . . . not only defines but undermines, not only threatens but seduces, the Captive Self” (Strong 8). These narratives, she adds, ultimately comprise a hegemonic tradition that serves to put forth a version of the past in order to ratify the present.

While this is arguably true for certain narratives during certain periods, the reemployment of these narratives by women in the modern South was for anything but the ratification of modern social order. The “captivating savage” as a literary archetype appealed to certain southern women authors negotiating the place of the individual creative self struggling for existence within a collective southern identity. This collective identity continued to encode their gendered bodies as self-denying paragons of virtue who, despite modern ideology, remained relegated to the domestic sphere where they were still “expected to recognize their proper and subordinate place and to be obedient to the head of the family” (A. Scott 17). The concept of the female gendered body as the captive self represents more than a female body burdened by domesticity. It highlights an extension of the bonded female body to the captive mind that hinders and prevents creative and intellectual pursuits. Even when women found time to produce creatively, they were relegated to a status well below their male contemporaries in the literary world of southern letters where the ranks of notable authors were defined predominantly by those men schooled as Agrarians. These women faced neglect at conferences (if invited to begin with), difficulties with publishing their work, and ultimately were dismissed as second-rate authors, even by other women.

Ironically, the pervasiveness and depth of the captive selves of southern literary women is best illustrated through Caroline Gordon’s encounters with Gertrude Stein,

whom she met in Europe on a Guggenheim fellowship. A self-defined genius, Stein ultimately fashions herself as an avatar of *male* literary greatness. At Stein's weekly gatherings of influential literary and intellectual men, the *wives*, including known authors such as Gordon, were "segregated" at a separate table as "second-class citizens" and hosted by Stein's companion, Alice B. Toklas (Tate 64). Gordon wryly recounts that Stein claimed "that she was 'the flower of American literature: first there was Emerson, next there was Whitman—and now there is *ME*'" ("Afterword" 294). Stein, despite her insightful and progressive work, ultimately views herself in line with great literary men. Putting Gordon in her place at the *women's* table epitomizes the practice of relegating women's creative vision to second-rate status. Recounting another meeting with Stein on the streets of Paris, Gordon says, "Gertrude was surprised to hear that it was me and not Allen who had the Guggenheim this time. 'You?' she says 'And what can you do?' 'I'm trying to write a novel' I rejoins [*sic.*] meekly" (Wood 127).<sup>83</sup> Stein was not burdened by the domestic sphere as she completely rejected any patriarchal constructs of women. As a public lesbian and independently wealthy, she never experienced the plight of traditional wife, mother, and female artist.

Perhaps more important than the public perception of women writers by the male literary establishment courted by Stein was the lack of space and time to do the actual work. For these women, writing was a serious art, but one that had to be created, birthed, nursed, and weaned between childcare duties, caring for ailing spouses, and keeping house. Such expectations held their creative vision captive through politicized

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<sup>83</sup> In comical fashion, Gordon takes a stab at Stein in a letter to Sally Wood by finding Stein's dogs more notable than the author herself: "we were taking a turn in the gardens the other day and I saw streaking toward us an oversized white French poodle and one of those Mexican toy terriers . . . 'My God, look at that' said I, meaning the remarkable pair of dogs. Allen having an eye more for the ladies said 'Yes, its Gertrude Stein' and so it was" (Wood 126-127).

concepts of proper roles for women instituted and defined by dominant patriarchal culture that denied women, particularly wives and mothers, proper time, space, and support to do intellectual work. Seeing their own plight akin to that of the pioneer woman left to tend the garden in the new frontier, these southern authors recognized the potential of captivity narratives both to “gain perspective” and reinterpret “the mythic and cultural reworkings of the same [shared] basic story” of gendered politics in America—a culture rooted in the captive and commodified bodies of women (Derounian-Stodola “Captivity Narratives” 247).

The reinvention of such narratives by modern generations of female writers often reverses the hegemonic discourse by exploding male colonizing traditions through revelation and ambiguity. Their refashioning of their own captive bodies in the space of an intercultural encounter with the captivating savage exposes and criticizes the dominant culture, while marking and defining their own creative visions that reveal a multiplicity of voices. As I have demonstrated, such women writers as Evelyn Scott and Beatrice Witte Ravenel become their own interpreters of history, both internal and external, and its repetitive workings in successive generations. The female authorial voice reveals itself as something distinctly separate from its male counterpart precisely by its state as captive Other in its divergence from male pastoral tropes. Though ultimately revelation is not always equated with release, the act of reinvention that acknowledges the captive body marks awareness and highlights the struggle and need for change.

Caroline Gordon’s employment of the captivity narrative as a force resistant to colonizing collective identities subsists as an ideal case study, given her plight as a southern woman and artist. Gordon was arguably one of the most well-positioned literary

women from the modern South. Married to the Fugitive Agrarian author and critic Allen Tate, Gordon circled amongst her husband's highly influential literary friends such as Robert Penn Warren, Donald Davidson, and Hart Crane, and his connections brought her into contact with such well-known authors as Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ernest Hemingway. She also had her own connections through her professional and personal association with such literary figures as Ford Maddox Ford. Yet despite these connections, her desire and need to write and publish was a constant struggle in the face of her duties as wife, mother, provider, and host as defined by her southern upbringing, duties that carried into her long association with Tate. This dilemma of the female artist is best summed up in the often quoted section of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction; and that, as you will see, leaves the great problem of the true nature of woman and the true nature of fiction unsolved" (4). This internal and external struggle to reconcile her poetic vision with outward pressures and exigencies plagued Gordon during her most productive years.

Arriving on October 6<sup>th</sup>, 1895, Caroline Gordon was the second of three children born to James Maury Morris Gordon and Nancy Meriwether.<sup>84</sup> The Meriwethers were a prestigious family connected back to the pioneer days, and the family matriarch, Gordon's grandmother and namesake, held Caroline as her favorite. Gordon's first seven years were spent on the Meriwethers' tobacco farm, Merimont, where she was schooled in proper southern gentility and surrounded by stories of confederate veterans, slaves, and family lore.<sup>85</sup> Gordon was fond of Merimont, despite its traditional southern codes of conduct, and chose to remain there when her mother and father moved to teach in

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<sup>84</sup> For detailed accounts of Gordon's life, see the biographies written by Makowsky and Jonza.

<sup>85</sup> Spelled by some as Merry Mont.

Tennessee. Even after joining her family in 1902, Gordon would return to spend her summers at Merimont throughout her life.

Caroline Gordon received a rigorous home education, and when James Gordon opened a boy's preparatory school, Gordon's University School, in Clarksville, TN, Caroline was admitted as her father's only female pupil. Gordon loved to read as a child, particularly the classics and folklore, and she recalls three significant fairy tales that impacted her adult life as an author: "Beauty and the Beast," "Sleeping Beauty," and "The Robber Bridegroom" (Makowsky 27).<sup>86</sup> As she matured intellectually, she quickly became adept at history, mythology, and literature under her father's tutelage.

Experiencing a religious conversion of sorts, James Gordon joined the ministry as a Campbellite preacher around 1908, and the Gordons' moved consistently for the next few years. Despite the family's mobility, Gordon managed to complete her preparatory requirements, and she was admitted to Bethany College in West Virginia in 1912. She graduated in 1916 and taught high school in Tennessee before starting a job with the *Chattanooga News* in 1920.

Caroline Gordon's life changed radically while vacationing at her parents' Guthrie, Kentucky, home in the summer of 1924 when she met Allen Tate for the first time. The two formed an immediate connection, and Caroline followed him to New York a few months later.<sup>87</sup> At some point late that fall, the two rekindled their summer romance, which led to an unexpected pregnancy. Gordon and Tate married in May of

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<sup>86</sup> Gordon's recalling these tales as a strong influence in her writing is significant given their content. The first two are tales of captive women and the latter is of a woman who, through trickery of her own, avoids captivity and death.

<sup>87</sup> Tate was visiting Robert Penn Warren.

1925, and their only child Nancy was born on September 23 that same year.<sup>88</sup> The young couple experienced significant financial difficulties right from the start, and an appeal to Gordon's mother resulted in Caroline allowing the newborn Nancy to live with her Grandmother and namesake. Though Caroline saw her daughter several times over the next two years, Nancy remained with the Gordons until Gordon's mother was unable to care for her due to illness. Free from the burdens of new parenthood, Gordon and Tate first moved to a pre-Revolutionary farmhouse, which they shared for a while with Hart Crane, and then returned to New York where Caroline became Ford Madox Ford's secretary and befriended other female authors such as Katherine Anne Porter and Josephine Herbst.

By the fall of 1928, Nancy, age three, was once again living with Tate and Gordon, and the young family relocated to England and then France on a grant. They returned to New York in January of 1930 where they continued to struggle to make ends meet. Despite their financial trouble, Caroline Gordon finally became a published author with "Summer Dust" (November, 1929) and "The Long Day" (March, 1930) appearing in *Gyroscope*, a now forgotten "little" magazine. Both brought her recognition and critical interest, which fueled Gordon's desire to further her art and complete a novel. Seeking to stretch their dollars, the couple moved to Merimont for an extended visit. They fall in love with an antebellum home overlooking the Cumberland River on this trip, and Tate's brother Ben bought it for them. They affectionately dubbed it Benfolly.

Gordon's first novel *Penhally* appeared in 1931, despite domestic and financial concerns and a second unplanned pregnancy, which Gordon decided to end (Jonza 113).

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<sup>88</sup> They both claimed that they married on 11/3/24, well in advance of their daughter's birth (9/23/25). However, official records list the marriage occurring on May 15, 1925 (Makowsky 59).

After recovering from a string of illnesses that year, Gordon and Tate moved to France on a Guggenheim she received in 1932. Nancy did not accompany them on this sabbatical. Though torn by the separation from her child, Gordon wrote, “On the other hand I could do a hell of a lot more work” (Makowsky 110). After their return and a brief stay at Merimont, Allen took a job at Southwestern University in Memphis in 1934, the year Gordon’s *Aleck Murray, Sportsman* came out. Over the next few years, Gordon published numerous pieces, including *None Shall Look Back* (1937), *The Garden of Adonis* (1937), and *Green Centuries* (1941)—all providing her with a degree of critical acclaim despite varying sales records.

Leaving Benfoly for the last time at Summer’s end in 1937, she spent the next several years in a string of academic appointments, including stays at the Women’s College of the University of North Carolina in Greensboro, and at Princeton. Gordon was often reduced to the status of faculty wife during these years, something she resented, and this pressure combined with continuing financial difficulties and Tate’s roving eye led to significant marital strife that escalated as Nancy matured and no longer served as a buffer between the two. Despite their mounting personal issues, Gordon finished *The Women on the Porch* (1944) followed shortly thereafter by *The Forest of the South* (1945).

Gordon and Tate separated in 1945, and she moved back to New York where Tate joined her a few months later. This attempt at reconciliation did not last, and they divorced in January of 1946. Over the next fourteen years, Gordon and Tate remarried and continued a cycle of separation and reconciliation as they taught and held editorial positions in various cities including New York, Chicago, and Princeton. They separated

for a final time in 1959, and Allen moved on, romantically, taking up with the poet Isabella Gardner (Makowsky 213).

Despite her former acclaim and the appearance of *Old Red, and Other Stories* in 1963, Gordon's work started to fall into obscurity, and Gordon predominantly relied on time-consuming teaching appointments in the 1960s and 1970s. Continuing to write when her health permitted, she finally consented to moving to San Cristobal, Mexico, with her daughter and family in 1978 where they could better care for her. Just a few years after settling in Mexico, Gordon suffered a series of strokes. She died from complications resulting from a leg amputation on April 11, 1981.

In the previous chapters, I have fleshed out and established connections for the reader between Evelyn Scott and Beatrice Witte Ravenel to Native American and early American culture and tropes of captivity whose genesis I claim is located in early captivity narratives by white women. These connections served to focus new critical lenses on the female author's reinvention of this earlier form of female discourse in order to move toward a new "historical practice that turns on partiality, that is self-conscious about perspective, that releases multiple voices rather than competing orthodoxies, and that, above all, nurtures an 'internally differing but united political community'"—that of the female captive in modern society (Hall 28). Caroline Gordon similarly shared such interests in early America, Native American tribes, and captivity narratives. This tradition particularly inspired Gordon's imagination through its emphasis on history, ritual, and intercultural encounters and allowed her a creative space to express her predicament as a female author.



As a child, Gordon was fascinated by fairy tales of captive women, and she embraced pioneer and adventure stories, which she often enacted with her brothers. One of her two self-professed favorite stories was Cooper's popular and highly influential *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826). Though she loved the story, as the young, white, female of the group, "Caroline was often relegated by her brothers to what she regarded as the unexciting role of the 'elderly' Chingachgook of Cooper's novel" (Makowsky 26). This relegation symbolizes her own vision as she structures and recenters female heroic characters and their encounter with the forest and its inhabitants. In addition, her childhood was filled with early lore concerning 18<sup>th</sup> century Virginia and her distant relative Meriwether Lewis, leader of the Lewis and Clark expedition and protégé of Jefferson. This family lore would become the subject of Gordon's last, unfinished novel, *Joy of the Mountains*, which concerns Lewis's relationship to Jefferson, his explorations, and his mysterious death in a Tennessee tavern in 1809.<sup>89</sup>

Throughout her maturity as a writer, Gordon's fascination with native tribes continually resurfaced, and she did extensive research of their history and the history of their encounters with white culture in preparation for her work on a historical novel that would come to be known as *Green Centuries*. Gordon was a meticulous researcher with a keen eye for detail. Specifically, she was concerned with getting the Native American position into her work in a truthful way that was not colored by white propaganda.<sup>90</sup>

Gordon even took the time to attend "the opening of an exhibit of Native American art at the Museum of Modern Art in New York to get a few ideas for *Dragging Canoe's*

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<sup>89</sup> The Meriwethers did not believe Jefferson's published account of Lewis's death as a suicide. In her fictional account, Gordon indicts Jefferson for betraying his pupil and paints him as a family villain.

<sup>90</sup> Many critics view early western constructions of images of Native Americans, even in the form of exhibits and ethnographies, as tools of white domination. However, Gordon uses these sources to empower and to break loose from standard representations.

costume, and she read an entire volume of George Bancroft's *History of the United States* for two sentences of dialogue between Rion Outlaw and an old Cherokee trader" (Jonza 206). In addition to reading ethnographies, she also read captivity narratives and tales of those who lived peacefully among the Indians. For instance, she used the historical figure James Adair—a figure Ravenel employed in "Sanute the Chief"—as a model for a central character in *Green Centuries*, Archy Outlaw, who joins the Cherokee tribe through ritual adoption. Gordon's familiarity with and use of images, archetypes, and Native American culture is evident in her work, and her thorough research is well documented in biographies written by Nancylee Jonza, Veronica Makowsky, and Ann Waldron. The white conquest of Indian territory features as a large thematic focus in her body of work where she not only writes of Indians, but re-envisions an actual captivity narrative through the retelling of the historical abduction of a white woman, Jennie Wiley, by a mixed band of Cherokee and Shawnee.

Gordon's short story "The Captive," published in *Hound & Horn* in their final issue of 1932, remains overlooked by critics. The few who recognize the story's value and different flair from Gordon's other short pieces tend to discuss the text with a mere nod to the genre of early American captivity, rather than analyzing the allegorical and secular typological function of the captivity genre in the text. The few critics who mention the tradition and function of captivity narratives that had permeated the cultural imagination of Eastern Kentucky reference standard critics of the captivity genre such as VanDeerBeets, Slotkin, or Castiglia only in passing, quickly transitioning to their own

critical agendas.<sup>91</sup> For example, Phillip Jones quotes VanDerBeets in a one paragraph review of captivity narratives in order to move his study systematically to what he deems Gordon's concern with heroism and "extended methods of characterization" (2).

Though he indicts other critics for not showing "awareness of the literary genre from which the story was drawn," Jones commits this same offense as he focuses strictly on the source narrative, *Eastern Kentucky Papers: The Founding of Harman's Station with An Account of The Indian Captivity of Mrs. Jennie Wiley and the Exploration and Settlement of the Big Sandy Valley in the Virginias And Kentucky* published in 1910, and not on the fundamental principals and critical concerns of the genre of captivity narratives (5). Primarily focusing on the source narrative compartmentalizes Jones's study into a more-or-less comparative discussion of William Connolley's historical work and Gordon's fictive account.

Anne M. Boyle in *Strange and Lurid Bloom* argues that Gordon "felt trapped by the maternal, by what she considered her inherent need to nurture and to create, and by the fear that her nurturing of others interfered with her literary creations—creations that might turn out to be criminal or dangerous to the existing order" (68). This statement is certainly true as Gordon's letters to Sally Wood prove, and Boyle clearly recognizes the potential for maternal emancipation in captivity and its ability to free Jennie Wiley's voice silenced by the historical account.<sup>92</sup> She even begins to address directly the potential of captivity narratives to free women from societal constraints and allow them

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<sup>91</sup> Richard VanDerBeets's *The Indian Captivity Narrative: An American Genre*, Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*, and Christopher Castiglia's *Bound and Determined: Captivity, Culture-Crossing, and White Womanhood from Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst* are considered the seminal texts in the study of early American captivity narratives.

<sup>92</sup> Gordon uses the spelling "Jinny" in "The Captive." Unless specifically quoting Gordon, I have opted to employ the documented, correct spelling "Jennie" for clarity.

to experience new roles. However, her brief discussion of the genre of captivity falls short as it relies solely on a quote from Castiglia that guides Boyle's analysis into one of total liberation wherein the heroine learns to navigate the "violent terrain of the man" and free herself "from two hostile environments" (81). Such a reading of complete release through mastery of a masculine landscape ignores key symbols in the text that suggest an affinity with Native Americans and the forest and that demarcate the experience of captivity—while certainly a catalyst that evokes agency and independence—as an ever-present state from which no true release is possible.

Gordon found the idea for this story by reading William E. Connelley's historical account of the abduction of Jennie Wiley. In a 1966 interview with Catherine Baum and Floyd Watkins, Gordon attests to following the source closely.<sup>93</sup> She states,

I was in the stacks in the Vanderbilt library, and I took this book down idly. . . . and looked at it, and I got very excited about it. . . . and I read it at first just because I found it so interesting. And then the idea of finishing the story came to me. It seemed to me that the story was there. I don't think I thought about it much at the time. I just knew I had to write that story. (Baum 449)

Identifying with the absences, with what lay silent in the narrative, Gordon "got the notion" that she "could finish it" (Baum 448). Gordon specifically mentions that she did not look at Jennie's story as a historian would, but rather as an artist. It is being in the space of a writer of fiction that enables her to give Jennie voice. Gordon's comment

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<sup>93</sup> Though insightful on a number of levels, this interview has significant limitations. The scope and depth of the questions themselves is mediocre, and the interviewers ignore cues from Gordon concerning the direction and nature of her answers. In addition, Gordon did not reread "The Captive" before attending the session, and, according to her, she had not read it since shortly after its initial publication in 1932.

concerning seeing the text in “fictional terms” reveals her focus on insight, rather than pure invention. Though she does change and leave out some scenes from Connelley’s account, Gordon has no interest in significantly altering or rewriting the tale; she sees it as “almost written,” and she seeks to refashion it and charges herself with its adequate completion (Baum 448). The question then becomes, what is she drawn to? What aspects are undone for her as reader, writer, and woman?

As Gary Ebersole argues in *Captured By Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*, “the sentimental female body is morally instructive precisely insofar as it is ‘interesting’ to others” (164). Connelley’s historical Jennie, as female captive, may attract a sympathetic response from male readers in his version’s justification of westward expansion.<sup>94</sup> Yet, as a woman trying to create and survive while dealing with the demands of domesticity, Gordon locates Jennie’s experience as a captive, her inner monologue, which Gordon believes is lacking in the version by this male historian. As Gordon notes in the interview, she is really drawn to the pictures that Connelley includes in the text. These are black and white drawings of Jennie and her reactions at various stages of her captivity, which ultimately support the concept that his historical narrative is just another rendering of a cultural tale. As such, for Gordon, these images reveal “the soul of an artist” (Baum 448). Their depiction of Jennie, her struggles, her engagement with the natives and the forest, and her quest for freedom hint at the internal experience withheld from Connelley’s written narrative. Gordon seeks to restore the silenced voice of the woman who drives the narrative. Instinct, she recalls, made her realize the story was “better told that way,” where one could use “interior monologue” and get “into the

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<sup>94</sup>For Gordon, Connelley’s Jennie is not so much a “historical” figure, but a construct of a supposed factual account that becomes a story in itself rather than plain historical fact. I will use the term “historical Jennie” to distinguish between Connelley’s character and Gordon’s.

character's consciousness" (Baum 456). Without that, she adds, "I don't think I could have gotten the story across" (Baum 456). Thus, Gordon seeks to transform Jennie's own perception of her internal and external experience as captive into a "stable body-as-text," to use Ebersole's language, as a means to escape the historical narrative that denies the captive agency in her own story. Gordon will continue to use the potential of this genre of early American captivity to parallel the silenced and captive woman with her own plight, emphasizing the secular typological possibilities of the narrative.<sup>95</sup>

Gordon was well versed concerning Native Americans and admits to reading a few captivities, but this one "just sort of leaped at me and led me by the heels" (Baum 448).<sup>96</sup> Two clues in this interview with Gordon reveal a deep personal identification with Wiley and an interest in using the genre of captivity to comment on the plight of women, particularly that of the female artist. First, the act of writing the story, embodying Jennie's voice, caused her distress. Gordon says, "I suffered more writing it than any story I ever wrote" (Baum 449). She notes, "I felt as if I had been living in the wilderness for weeks from jerky. . . . And I was exhausted" (Baum 449).

Secondly, through an analogy to Dante, Gordon establishes her own critical position concerning her intent in the text and its connection to a history of bondage shared by women through successive generations. When Baum and Watkins attempt to get Gordon to talk about the concepts of theme, moral, and meaning in writing, Gordon continues to object to these categories and responds by referring to a letter that Dante

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<sup>95</sup> In Puritan ideology, typology refers to Old Testament events as foreshadowing the New Testament. By extension, some Puritan historians interpreted events in New England history as "types" of biblical precedence, too. For my argument, "secular typology" denotes the repetition of social and cultural archetypes, specifically the reproduction of female bondage in successive generations.

<sup>96</sup> Also in the interview, Gordon mentions Janet Lewis's *The Invasion* and the capture and return of Donald Davidson's great-grandmother who was taken to Canada.

wrote to his patron Can Grande della Scala. As Gordon recounts, Scala asks Dante why the public likes to read another poet's work and not Dante's. Dante replies, "In order to read my poetry, you've got to read in four different ways" (Baum 457).<sup>97</sup> Dante then describes the literal versus the allegorical level, and the tropological level versus the anagogical level. Though Gordon notes the literal and allegorical levels of "The Captive," she firmly places her story in the fourth category. Gordon states, "And on the fourth level, anagogical, well, I don't think fiction writers often hit it and only the greatest poets, like Milton and Dante, who treat of heavenly matters. Now, I think this story fits in that category" (Baum 458). "Anagogical" typically refers to the spiritual and mystical realm, especially concerning spiritual interpretation and understanding mysteries. Why would Gordon classify this story, based on a real Indian captivity narrative, as one that fits in the highest and spiritual category of understanding art? In order to begin to answer this question, we must first look at the source narrative and then Gordon's response through her version of Wiley's captivity.

In the preface to his 1910 account, Connelley introduces his topic by establishing a theory of history that roots the founding of American settlements in a notion of tragedy as universal and mobile. He writes, "The introductory chapter to the history of most of the early settlements of Kentucky is the story of a tragedy. In many instances this characteristic of their annals is repeated [and] . . . This feature does not apply to the history of one locality more than to that of another. It is the general rule and is found in the story of almost every community" (np). Such tragedies, he argues, are not only repeated over time, but are "often deepened and intensified" (np). Connelley uses this

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<sup>97</sup> These quotes are Gordon's language from her memory of the Dante letter.

idea of universal tragedy through captivity to transition to the importance of the account of Wiley's captivity in the founding of Harmon's Station in Eastern Kentucky. It also serves as a means to emphasize the need to look to tradition for unrecorded history.

Once his theory is established, he positions his account of Wiley in factual terms by emphasizing his fidelity to the source. Such posturing of the truth of the narrative in the preface was common with 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century captivity narratives, whether for religious instruction or for furthering anti-Indian or anti-French sentiments, to make them appear impervious to sentimental embellishment and hearsay. Connelley's framing of his historical narrative is pertinent because "embellishment and diffusion marked the narratives' [the captivity genre's] subsequent career" from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century on, where it became part of local folklore, inspired "penny dreadfuls," those popular accounts for the masses, and was even more subjected to heavy editorial hands that sought to heighten drama and give flare and polish to the prose (Vaughan & Clark 25). Jennie Wiley's account already permeated the imagination of the Kentucky region and inspired numerous local versions; thus, Connelley needed to establish his own theory of history while giving credence to his source material—a type of hearsay itself. He writes,

In all matters concerning Mrs. Jennie Wiley I have followed the account given me by her son, Adam P. Wiley. There are several reasons why I have adhered to his statements in that matter. I knew him intimately and long, and I never heard his reputation for truth and veracity brought into question. He was a minister of the Gospel. His mind was a storehouse of history and border story. He possessed fine oratorical and conversational powers. His memory was wonderful and it was not impaired by the great



age to which he lived. He was thirty-three when his mother died. His opportunity for exact knowledge of what did actually transpire was far superior to that of any other pioneer living into my generation. (n.p. preface)

Connelley's praise of Adam Wiley continues for several more sentences that emphasize not only his personal character, but also his familiarity with hunters and families of the region, as well as local topography. Connelley even claims that members of local tribes attest to the physical strength and abilities of the Natives in the narrative, even in what he considers their questionable crossing of the Tug and Louisa rivers in Wiley's account. Connelley notes that Adam Wiley was chiefly concerned that the account of his mother's captivity "be preserved" and, as the reader discovers later in a footnote, that it be done in a manner that upheld her character. Thus, the preface establishes a theory of history rooted in *representative* captivity that is not only tragic, but that deepens and repeats itself over the course of time. For Connelley, Jennie Wiley becomes the recorded body, or sign, of this archetypal pattern and her abduction and escape symbolic of the founding of American society.

Gordon was drawn to this concept of generational history where the female body encodes and reencodes its own subjectability in sociohistorical constructs. As Derounian-Stodola and Levernier point out in *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900*, Connelley felt the need to highlight in his preface that Jennie had another five children after her escape, and these children began family lines of their own. The inclusion and emphasis of this "intergenerational information" in Connelley's account underscores captivity as an interruptive force where life continues just as it did before (Derounian-

Stodola & Levernier 148). In Jennie's case, we have the literal and symbolic replacements of all five Wiley children killed in her abduction. Then, Jennie's narrative is recounted by a male historian from her son's perspective, which inevitably frames Jennie's experience more or less for the purpose of justifying expansion. In Connelley's hands, Jennie's body becomes the vehicle for recounting a masculine history where her *freedom* and its purpose remains "the prerogative of white males" (Castiglia 11).

Gordon identifies with and embraces this concept of generational captivity and repetitive historical paradigms, but she uses the potential of the genre to highlight its gendered nature and mark on the female body in its full-circle movement from one form of captivity to another. In Gordon's hands, Jennie's body becomes the archetype of female movement into new forms of bondage represented by her Indian captivity where she is given voice, agency, and even the space to have creative vision; however, in her release, this form of captivity is merely exchanged for the old which results not only in domestic bondage but silence. Gordon suggests such a reading in the Baum interview when she identifies with Jung, rather than Freud, precisely "because he calls your attention constantly to the . . . archetype" (Baum 453). Furthermore, Gordon defines the ending of the story as "characteristic" and understood only by putting Jennie "up on a pedestal" and "in the proper perspective" (Baum 458). Ultimately, Gordon seizes Connelley's narrative and, turning it into a first person account, gives Jennie agency in her own narrative while revealing how limited and tentative this acquisition of agency is in a society that limits and restricts not only the roles of women, but what women can

creatively produce given the burdens of domesticity—something that Gordon referred to as her *menagé*.<sup>98</sup>

Gordon's correspondence clearly reveals her plight as wife and mother, and its impact on her creative endeavors. She often feels trapped in domesticity and the endemic problem of a female author needing not only space to create, but also enough financial return to help support a family which was barely able to make ends meet and often slipped into poverty.<sup>99</sup> In a letter to Maxwell Perkins, Gordon writes, "It is, certainly, much harder for a woman to write than it is for a man. I am in a panic half the time fearing something will happen to prevent me from writing"—which it often did (qtd in Makowsky 106). Gordon also felt the pull of motherhood on her artistic creations, which caused her significant grief over the course of her daughter Nancy's young life. Though avidly concerned with her daughter's well-being, Gordon consents to her mother raising the newborn Nancy for two years until her mother's health begins to fail, and, once Nancy is with them full-time, she hires a nanny whenever finances permit it to free her to write.<sup>100</sup> Gordon is torn between the incompatibility of her roles as mother and writer, and she often feels guilty for emphasizing the latter. She writes of feeling "paralyzed" in Nancy's absence, but Nancy's presence without any help literally incapacitates her as writer. A prime example of this conflict occurs when Gordon decides not to take Nancy with her and Tate while on a year long fellowship in Europe. Instead, she opts to leave

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<sup>98</sup> Gordon used this term in reference to her care of both Tate and her daughter Nancy, but also concerning her responsibility of the household management (physical and financial), including the care of the constant flow of artistic guests who would often stay for long periods of time.

<sup>99</sup> Like Evelyn and Cyril Kay-Scott, Gordon and Tate believed in living off one's art. They supplemented their income with teaching appointments and some occasional editorial work, but they considered this an extension of their craft, albeit one that burdened them and exhausted their creativity.

<sup>100</sup> When Tate makes choices that financially prevent having a nanny, Gordon writes how she sees little chance of getting the work done and that she is "getting a bit bitter about it" (Wood 42).

Nancy with a trusted aunt. Gordon writes, “Still it is hard to put the ocean between us. On the other hand I could do a hell of a lot more work. . . . God, I’d love to get out of the cares of a menagé for a year” (Wood 114). Gordon makes the difficult choice of physically leaving her child to facilitate her work, but this freedom from maternal bonds cannot be sustained given its mental and spiritual extension. Hearing about Nancy’s illness and relapse, Gordon writes that she cannot put the ocean between them again work or no work: “Every night when I got to bed I am convinced that she will die before we get back. In the morning I’m not so sure but I feel so rotten after lying awake half the night that I don’t get much work done” (Wood 132).

In addition to her motherhood duties were the number of visitors who would stay for long periods of time and for whom Gordon, as gracious southern hostess, was primarily responsible. Essentially, Gordon took on the role of inn-keeper, which became a particular strain, one that she often resented, when they moved into their home on the Cumberland River dubbed Benfolly. Her care for Tate himself also drained time away from her writing. He seemed to suffer continually from some illness or depression, and his inability to finish his Lee biography put further financial strain on the family. Gordon wrote to a friend, “God knows when Allen will finish that damn book . . . We could do almost anything this winter if he only would” (qtd in Jonza 108). Instead, he falls into a depression over it, and the family runs up significant debt despite living as much as possible off their garden.

Gordon’s personal situation flared up around the time of her execution of “The Captive” in the fall of 1931. Gordon’s first novel *Penhally* sold poorly, which necessitated her letting go her only servant, whose presence freed Caroline from enough

domestic duties to write (Maakowsky 106). Exacerbating her feelings of domestic entrapment, Gordon desires to begin a novel during this time; however, her domestic burdens and financial worries prevent it.<sup>101</sup> It is in this space of being pulled between her family, her art, and her finances at her southern home Benfolly that she immerses herself into “The Captive,” which she is able to complete in a mere six weeks.

Her desperate need for money sparks Gordon to ask Maxwell Perkins for an immediate decision on the story. Perkins turns it down for *Scribner's*, noting that he does not think it has sufficient interest and, more importantly, he does not feel that Jennie works as a character with real depth. Getting back to the original form of early captivity narratives by women, Gordon intended to start her version of Wiley's abduction with the initial attack and remove. This choice highlights her deliberate departure from romantic, sentimental literary ideals, which her editor seeks to uphold. The frank portrayal of Jennie's consciousness—particularly her comment that her son could no longer help her after being killed—disturbed Perkins. Gordon states in the Baum interview that Perkins told her, “Caroline, where are you going to go from there? . . . If a woman looks at her fourteen-year-old son while he is being tomahawked and her chief emotion is that she can't get any more help from him, she is wound up to such a pitch that she is beyond the borders of reality and you can't handle her in fiction” (451). In the Baum-Watkins interview, which takes place over 30 years after her exchange with Perkins, Gordon states that her famous editor was correct, and thus she rewrote the beginning of the piece. However, this memory is somewhat faulty and selective, perhaps even polite. As a letter to Robert Penn Warren shows, at the time of Perkins' comments and his refusal to accept

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<sup>101</sup> Gordon to Josephine Herbst, “I have another one all ready to write but can't get at it on account of being so broke. I had to let Beatrice go—couldn't pay her” (qtd in Maakowsky 106). The novel she is referring to was *The Gardon of Adonis*, which would not be published until 1937.

the story, Gordon was more than just upset: “My rage was so great that I couldn’t use my mother tongue properly so Allen wrote for me, a deadly letter telling him what was what and asking him what the hell and so on” (qtd in Makowsky 108). Though Tate writes this letter for Gordon, she signs it as her own. Such an act illustrates her desire to be an independent woman with agency, but her conditioning as a southern woman prevents it. She acknowledges the desire through her signature of the forceful letter, a letter that clearly stated her sentiments, but it is nonetheless her voice as translated through a man’s—and a male mentor at that—who often attempts to contain her female literary aesthetic within his own Agrarian vision and standards.<sup>102</sup>

For Caroline Gordon, Jennie was the perfect archetype for the plight of women in a patriarchal southern society. She wrote that “the state of mind of this pioneer woman, her life and her experience, are at the spiritual foundations of thousands of Americans” (qtd in Jonza 111). As such, she claimed “The Captive” to be her best writing and would stake her reputation on it. Given her own personal constraints as a woman artist, Caroline Gordon clearly identified Jennie Wiley as a founding archetype of the experience of captivity, and it is in this space of the connection between a modern writer and a past pioneer through intercultural contact where this text becomes anagogically instructive. “The Captive,” as I will show, becomes “an invitation to readers” to examine and be allowed into the “human condition and, with the comparative knowledge gained,

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<sup>102</sup> Caroline Gordon often mentions getting both Tate’s and Ford’s input on her work. Though their advice clearly sharpens her skills, she frequently mentions frustrations with trying to please their aesthetic sense, particularly Tate, who at times literally redrafts sections of her work himself. Though her pieces betray a subversive undertone clearly her own, Gordon’s desire to please Tate as her mentor serves to mold much of her work, particularly her novels, into his Agrarian aesthetic. Despite the introductory rewrite requested by Perkins, “The Captive,” given the quick pace and circumstances of its completion, escapes this fate and reveals a great deal about Gordon’s voice.

to meditate on . . . the costs of civilization” and that civilization’s impact on women (Ebersole 169).

Surprisingly, scholarship on Gordon has not recognized the importance of naming in Gordon’s story title and its personal and archetypal significance. In a letter to Ford Madox Ford dated October 1931, Gordon reveals that “The Captive” was originally titled “To Cumberland”:

I am writing a long story (20,000 words) which I’m going to enter in Scribner’s long story contest, hoping not to win the prize but that they’ll buy the story . . . . It is called ‘To Cumberland.’ (You say ‘Cumber *Land*.’) I am having a great time, reading about pioneer times. Not being here you will be spared a lot. Allen has had to hear all about Jenny Wiley. . . . (Lindberg-Seyersted 19, emphasis in original).

This quote reveals Gordon’s identification with Wiley through connecting the story with her personal predicament. Writing at her southern home Benfolly, Gordon is literally situated on the Cumberland River, and she originally titles the story after that river. Therefore, this story of a captive, pioneer white woman becomes symbolic of Gordon’s own creative captivity implied in the dedicatory tone of the original title “To Cumberland.” In addition to pointing to Ford’s diction, Gordon herself plays upon this language in her letter to Ford by separating the two words “Cumber *Land*.” The land, Gordon’s domestic land, that is, literally “cumbers” her—it hinders, obstructs, burdens (O.E.D.). Thus, the renaming of the story “The Captive” takes on added significance.

On another level, regardless of publication date, in all instances of the Wiley story that I have located, Jennie’s name appears in some capacity in the title. Besides

Connelley's source narrative, typical examples include Arville Wheeler's *White Squaw: The True Story of Jennie Wiley*, John Nathan Bennett's *Jennie Wiley—Pioneer: The True Story of A Virginia Frontier Heroine (As told by her great-great-great-grandson)*, and Harry M. Caudill's *Dark Hills to Westward: The Saga of Jennie Wiley*. Such title convention follows the typical pattern of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century captivity narratives, which almost always name the captive in the title of the work. As Derounian-Stodola points out, such acknowledgment was important because it was the only space "for a female to initiate . . . public recognition" ("Introduction" xviii). It also fundamentally individualized the experience. Gordon intentionally diverges from this conventional aspect of the genre, deconstructing the title merely to "The Captive." By doing so, Gordon highlights the intensely personal and yet universal experience of captivity for women, especially those desperate to create art like herself. Identifying with the anagogical nature of the story, Gordon sought to free herself creatively, and Jennie literally, by beginning the narrative with the initial attack that removes her protagonist from traditional domestic constraints as defined by white, male culture.

As Michelle Burnham notes, "Captivity narratives nearly always begin with the moment of Indian attack, and the descriptions of these attacks incessantly focus the reader's attention on the abduction or death of infants" (50). Gordon's wielding of this genre follows standard form in her interest in "killing the mother," so to speak. However, such immediate release crosses a boundary of understanding with her male editor, Maxwell Perkins, who is put off by such a female character. With chagrin, Gordon revises her introduction to appease Perkins in order to try and secure publication for monetary reasons. She does so by adding a short section that occurs before the attack.



On the surface, this brief section serves to frame Jennie as a more conventional mother caring for her children, her home, and her livestock. This framing, intended to make Jennie more socially acceptable, refuses containment even in the reframing of the text. Instead of painting Jennie as the self-sacrificing mother or virtue-in-distress female common in many early narratives, Gordon gives Jennie a brazen undertone that goes against male knowledge and protection in order to follow her own desires.

The story begins with her husband, Tom Wiley, preparing to depart for the station where he will trade ginseng for salt. He is anxious about leaving her, but Jennie insists on his completing the task, because they have already been without salt for over three weeks. She is “bound he should make the trip, Indians or no Indians,” and she prods him along stating, “I’d as soon be scalped now and have done with it as keep on thinking about it all the time” (“The Captive” 175). Jennie later reveals sentiments of regret for having him go; however, these worries are not strong enough to sway her from following her own path. Within a few hours of his departure, Jennie’s son, Joe, brings her attention to persistent owl calls on the mountain. Jennie clearly knows that something is amiss, but she ignores the peculiar back and forth calling of the owls in favor of continuing her work on the homestead (“The Captive” 176). She reflects upon an incident that occurred when she was bear hunting, also not a typical female task, where a male hunter criticized her for being bold: “‘You’re brash, Jinny,’ he said, ‘and you always been lucky, but one of these times you going to be too brash’” (“The Captive” 177). Despite her momentary consideration that the hunter may have been correct, she once again delays addressing the potential danger in favor of finishing her work. John Borders, a neighbor who stops by and recognizes the danger in the owl calls, asks Jennie to bring her children home with

him. Jennie does consent, but will go only after fastening the stock, milking the cow, and gathering the chickens. She follows her own judgment, rather than a man's, as she believes that "Indians hardly ever come round before nightfall" ("The Captive" 178). However, rather than waiting, the Indians attack soon after Borders leaves to look for his lost sheep, and they kill four of her children and take Jennie and her infant captive. Her captors are a mix of different nations, including Mad Dog, a brash and ruthless Cherokee chief, and Crowmock, an elder and more compassionate Shawnee chief.

In departure from Connelley's source narrative, Gordon gives Jennie a degree of culpability for her capture, which symbolizes, on some level, a desired release from domesticity and motherhood.<sup>103</sup> More than once Gordon links this potential for release of the white female, albeit a violent one, with the racial Other and thus establishes an affinity between the two groups. This affinity is furthered with the white female recognition of the consequences of the male euro-American desire to subdue the wilderness. Caroline Gordon stated that the pioneer, as represented by Tice Harman, had a "hatred of the forest" for he saw it as "a great menace. . . . That's one reason they cut the trees down, looted the country. . . . they were afraid of it" (Baum 456). What they feared, according to Gordon, is a loss of their individuality. In order to preserve the borders of their culture, they dominate the land and try to remake it in their own image. This colonizing quest, however, has consequences—consequences that are marked on the suffering female body, which the genre of early American captivity highlights. This

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<sup>103</sup> Connelley's account makes no mention of Jennie insisting upon Tom going to the trade post. Connelley writes that he was merely absent for trading purposes. Also, Connelley states that it is Borders who brings Jennie's attention to the owl calls, and the historian emphasizes Jennie as making "all haste" to take her children to the Border's homestead (37).

genre also allowed a space for women to indict the colonizers, though such comments were often dismissed by the patriarchy.<sup>104</sup>

In “The Captive,” the Indians attack the Wiley homestead not out of bloodthirsty savagery, but calculated revenge. They believe it to be the home of Tice Harman, who recently killed a brave without provocation.<sup>105</sup> Despite witnessing the deaths of her children, suffering a grueling journey to the salt licks, and surviving the trials of her captivity, Jennie does not blame the Indians for her plight, but rather Tice Harman. She thinks, “it was him that brought all my trouble on me” for “shooting that Indian down when there warn’t really any use in it” (“The Captive”196). Such an affinity is repeated in Gordon’s pioneer novel *Green Centuries*.

Cassy, Rion Outlaw’s wife, is also attacked on the homestead while her husband is away. Unlike Jennie, the defenseless Cassy is not taken captive. Her brother and two of her children are tomahawked, but she is left alone despite the Indians’ acknowledgement of her presence and clearly what would be her easy capture. Instead, with an “axe in one hand” and her brother’s scalp “dangling from the other,” the Indian “saw her and looked into her eyes and smiled” (*Green Centuries* 418). The band of Indians then disappears in the ravine. Cassy recognizes his look as one of fondness and experiences guilt and depression at what she believes to be her participation in the deaths of her children. Thus, Gordon’s women appear to recognize the cost of white-male

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<sup>104</sup> Sarah Wakefield’s 1864 narrative, which asserts that her Dakota captors treated her well and had reason to rebel, is a prime example. When Wakefield returned from captivity and refused to testify against her captors, she was accused of consorting with the enemy. Her narrative, one that was not recorded or edited by a man, reveals her treatment by government officials that, as Derounian-Stodola writes, led to her lack of trust in “a patriarchal view of the world. . . . [Instead] she trusted her own conscience, guilt, and sense of justice, which empowered her to write, publish, and circulate her narrative to vindicate herself and to counteract the other accounts” (*Women’s* 239).

<sup>105</sup> Matthias (Tice) Harman was involved in numerous expeditions and violent acts against native Americans.

domination and rape of the land, and the narrator seems to portray that the Indian, as is the case with *Green Centuries*, “understands that [Cassie] is not the white man’s ally but the Indian’s” (Boyle 140).

Writing a captivity appealed to Gordon precisely because the genre erases the role of wife and mother for the female captive and thrusts her “in contexts that necessitated a revision of the discourses of knowledge and identity” (Castiglia 6). Free from established borders, the experience of captivity becomes a destabilizing agent that, ironically, allows for reflection, self-realized experience, and creative authorial voice—all things Gordon desperately desired. Accordingly, in “The Captive,” Gordon sought to shed Jennie’s role as mother and wife quickly in order to move into the creative zones of contact with the racial Other. Though she reframed the text for Perkins, four of the five children are killed in the initial attack and the baby dispensed with shortly thereafter during a failed escape attempt. These plot elements allow Gordon to draw attention away from Jennie’s role as caregiver and mother—in other words, her concern for external necessities—and focus on her internal or mental development as an individual. Therefore, it is not until her baby is killed at the end of section III that Jennie is truly able to cross into liminal space and move forward. Accordingly, at the beginning of IV, the stormy weather clears: “I turned over on my back and laid there looking up at the sky. It had cleared off during the night and the stars was shining” (“The Captive” 186). In addition, Jennie’s documented pregnancy at the moment of her capture, her labor and delivery among the Indians, and her infant’s initiation test, though all in Connelly, were omitted from Gordon’s fictive account. Gordon’s interest was in Jennie’s experience away from domesticity in captivity. Further accounts of the maternal body would have continued to focus the

reader on the role of the mother. To avoid Jennie's continual association with maternity, Gordon simply omits these historical details.

Furthermore, right from the start of her capture, Gordon's Jennie is not separated from her captors linguistically. She immediately understands enough of their language to communicate with them, and, after her infant is killed, she fully embraces their language, speaking to them in Shawnee.<sup>106</sup> Jennie discovers that she is to be adopted by the elder chief, Crowmock, who wants her to serve as a teacher to the Indian women, and they remove to a sacred area and establish camp in a rockhouse for the duration of the winter. Jennie, now accepted as a candidate for adoption, is given responsibility for the care of the camp and allowed a large degree of freedom, including wandering into the forest alone to gather wood. At first, she thinks of escaping and makes a half-hearted attempt; however, not knowing how far the settlement may be, she opts to stay with her captors: "Likely as not I'd starve to death in the woods, or freeze if the weather turned. I'd better stay with the Indians, where at least I could sleep warm and eat" ("The Captive" 189). Stay she does and, ironically, her solitary and meditative work allows her creative space to think, reflect, and even dream.

Gordon states in the Baum interview that a natural way of asserting individuality in contact zones is through memory. This raises the question, what kind of memories does the fictional Jennie have in captivity? And what version of self is revealed through these recollections? Typically, in the genre of early American captivity narratives, memories of life before captivity are given little narrative space as the captive focuses on the actual trials of the intercultural experience. When they do arise, they more often than

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<sup>106</sup> Connolley reports that the historical Jennie "did not know what the Indians were saying, and only came to know what had passed long afterwards when she understood the Shawnee language" (39).

not take the form of self-reflective analysis where the captives realize what sins have led to their need to be punished by God or what comforts they had and never appreciated in their former life.<sup>107</sup> Other narratives focus so closely on the liminal experience that references to the past are limited to whether or not a spouse is still looking for them or going forward with life. In Gordon's reinvention of the captivity narrative, significant textual space is given to memory, but the focus is untypical for the early genre. Though kept busy working for the Indians, Jennie finds that her work environment provides her with ample time to think and consider.<sup>108</sup> This reflective space of solitude and silence, one rarely achievable in her role in white society, leads to two key series of memories of her former life that primarily focus on her individuality before marriage and motherhood.

The first group of memories occurs while Jennie makes bullets for the Indians. This involved process requires days of gathering firewood and hours upon hours to smelt the lead and cool it down. Left alone and at peace with her work, Jennie notes, she would "be up on the barren from sunup to sundown" ("The Captive" 190). The second series of memories also arise out of solitary work when she is sent down to the lick for salt—a job involving long waiting periods as she must process the salty water at different temperatures. Captivity has freed Jennie from maternal burdens and wifely duties that allow Jennie space for reflection. For Gordon, this freedom of thought is symbolic of a creative space for work and one aligned with the Indians. Though afraid of her new

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<sup>107</sup> There is one section in the story where Jennie reflects upon food and her waste of it in the past. This section differs from early narratives in its discursive location, as typically such morally instructive reflections occur during the actual captivity when the captives receive little food or food unacceptable to their Anglo-American pallets. Jennie's reflection arises out of her own escape attempt, which causes her hunger. She notes that as long as she remained with the Indians, she received plenty of food.

<sup>108</sup> Some critics have suggested that Jennie is merely doing squaw work, which is akin to her duties as a white pioneer wife. Though she is performing gendered tasks, albeit ones associated with women of another culture, she is allowed to focus on her duties; they are not expected in addition to the multiplicity of roles and responsibilities assigned to southern white women in their patriarchal home culture.

landscape where the lick had “three sulphur springs . . . [and] was white with the bones of beasts,” it inspires an affinity with Jennie and the wilderness that breeds creativity through its literal connection to the beasts who came before her. Empowered with her own creative vision, she becomes an imaginative creator:

I couldn't keep my eyes off the bones. I would take them up in my hand and turn them over and over, wondering what manner of beasts they had belonged to. Once I made myself a little beast, laying all the bones out on some lacy moss, the front feet stiff like it was galloping off in the woods, the hind legs drawn up under him. A hare it might have been or a little fawn. Or maybe a beast that nobody ever heard of before. (“The Captive” 193)

Jennie symbolically creates from the land, in contradiction to male colonizing impulses to clear it. She puts the bones together, gives them shape, and imagines them free in the wilderness; this freedom she associates with herself who, given such space to *work*, has the potential to discover something original: “that nobody ever heard of before” (“The Captive” 193). This affinity between the wilderness and creation is further supported through the type of memories she describes.

Yes, on some level, as Jane Gibson Brown notes, Jennie's memory serves to “keep alive the presences of her lost family and her past” (81). At first, she mentions seeing her husband and children still alive in their house. However, her reconstruction of her family still results in *her* absence: “It was like they were all living; it was only me that was gone away” (“The Captive” 190). Gordon's protagonist reconstructs her home life through memory, but she sees herself as outside of it. In its allegorical connections,

Gordon's story does not see the "death" of woman as mother and wife; rather, it highlights the need for existence and roles outside of conventional white marriage, a theme furthered through the memories focused on Jennie's single life. In addition to highlighting Jennie's separation mentally from her former life in the domestic sphere, this memory of her family comprises only a small paragraph of the section dealing with remembrance, which quickly moves the narrative through some odd and at times humorous memory choices for a woman supposedly *suffering* in captivity.

Jennie moves from this brief vision of her family, one that she no longer sees herself in, to the remembrance of times "long before" she was "grown and married" ("The Captive" 191). These early memories comprise the bulk of this section and further distance her from her life in the domestic sphere. First, she recounts a memory about Lance Rayburn, a hunter, who appears to have attempted to rape her when she rejects his advances:

He come toward me, and before I knowed what he was up to he was on me and trying to bear me to the ground. He was a strong man but I was stout, too, and I stood up to him. We was rassling around in the bushes quite some time before he got me down, and then he had to keep both his hands on my chest. I laid there right still, looking up at him. ("The Captive" 191)

Jennie invokes her father as a protective force in an attempt to ward off the attack; yet, this has no effect on Rayburn's advances. She recognizes the impotence of white male protection and bests Rayburn by denying him any permanent rights to her body. She explains to Rayburn, "it ain't going to do you no good. I ain't going to have none of you



no matter what happens” (“The Captive” 191). When she denies him the power of restoring her honor once he violates it, Rayburn is powerless to act, and he lets her go. Thus, Jennie’s faith in her own voice and freedom to choose the outcome of her fate save her, not a reliance on white male protection or male codes of sexual virtue. Ultimately, she would rather exist as a tainted woman than as the wife of her rapist.

Historical captivity narratives often depicted captors as threats to white sexual purity, serving to justify patriarchal control of Indian lands and extermination of the racial Other. Gordon seizes this aspect of the genre and reverses the image to reveal the potential and more probable sexual tainting of the white female body by a white man rather than a *savage* captor. Rayburn hoped the rape would ultimately result in their union—a union that he envisions as a better match than that of Tom Wiley, thereby announcing that he knows what is best for Jennie and forcing her down that path. This incident stands in juxtaposition to the encounter between Jennie and the Cherokee chief. Mad Dog intends to make Jennie his wife, even against her will; however, in Gordon’s story, Mad Dog makes no sexual advances toward her, whereas Rayburn lays his hands on her not once but twice.<sup>109</sup> Gordon’s captivity trope suggests that “in the wilderness of fiction women rescue other women, bringing the heroine not from Indian captivity to the ‘freedom’ of white society but . . . [into] communities imagined through the enabling fiction of shared gender identity” (Castiglia 124). Gordon ultimately rescues Jennie from both Rayburn and the Indians, and frees her from patriarchal control by giving her voice

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<sup>109</sup> In the dream sequence, Rayburn appears again and pulls her over to him. Also, even though Mad Dog has purchased Jennie for his wife, there is no indication that he will force a sexual union against her will. Gordon was well versed in Cherokee culture and would have been aware of tribal taboos concerning rape, particularly of female captives. For discussion of these various taboos see Colin Calloway’s work on eastern tribes.

and agency. In contrast, Connelley's historical account sought to place Jennie's story into the service of patriarchal colonizing agendas.

In an ironic reversal of the opening scene where Jennie insists that her husband go and trade for salt, Jennie is sent to collect salt for the Indians. This act exposes her to the secrets of the forest and likens her to a character who comfortably crosses gendered boundaries. At the lick, Jennie remembers Vard Wiley, who was known as the biggest liar in the settlement because of his tall tales about his hunting days, tales of large beasts, and a giant salt lick; the settlers make fun of him, and the children sing a song about his supposed exploits. Jennie now realizes that he was in fact a "truth-teller" and imagines attesting to his story. This memory sequence aligns Jennie with Vard on a number of levels. Anne M. Boyle suggests that Gordon wants Jennie to be seen as complying with or in collusion with "those who create fraudulent images of self" (86). I would like to go a step further and suggest that through Jennie's memory the two characters, female and male, become symbolically one in order to highlight the mutability of identity across gendered and racial lines. Both experiences bear witness to the secrets of the forest, and both move in and out of cultural—that is, racial or gendered—codes with ease. Their symbolic alignment morphs into embodiment when Vard Wiley literally puts on Jennie's clothes—her bonnet, dress, and shawl—and he assumes her identity to dupe a schoolmaster who is swimming naked.

Dressed in Jennie's garb, Vard sits down to watch the schoolmaster bathing. Clearly a representative of white male authority, the schoolmaster shakes a fist at the female figure and calls her a "brazen hussy"—echoing the hunter's criticism of Jennie as brash in the beginning of the story. After the schoolmaster gets out of the water, Vard

chases him home. Vard never reveals to the schoolmaster that it was he impersonating Jennie. Rather, he tries to convince the schoolmaster that it was indeed Jennie Wiley herself. The thought of the incident causes Jennie to laugh, the only expression of joy in the story. She reflects, “I would laugh all by myself there in the woods. Throw back my head and laugh and then feel silly when the woods give back the echo” (“The Captive” 194).

Though masked in humor, this is another critique of the exploits of white men. Jennie’s present fate is not her own doing, nor the result of the native people’s aggression, but the consequence of Tice Harman’s attempt to conquer the wilderness. This reflection also reveals the potential threat of female sexuality to *naked* male power. If Vard Wiley is indeed a “truth teller,” as Jennie has discovered in the wilderness, what is the truth revealed by his embodiment of Jennie in the schoolmaster exploit? Perhaps on one level Gordon suggests through this episode that females have always had the capability of thwarting social codes, embodied by the schoolmaster. The representative authority of the borders of white culture stands naked with a shaking fist calling her impersonator names, and when Vard moves toward him in an act of aggression rather than away, as proper feminine behavior dictates, the schoolmaster flees. The impersonation emphasizes the veneer of appropriate, gendered conduct and reveals the possibility that underneath the surface—the bonnet, dress, and shawl—lies the outrageous, adventurous, tale-telling power attributed to males. Role-swapping by Vard and Jennie challenges standard symbolic constructs of the human body as “a bounded system.” As anthropologist Mary Douglas theorizes, the boundaries of the human body “represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious” (115). Vard and Jennie

playfully—and sometimes “brazenly”—manipulate the signifiers of *male* or *female* bodies, revealing the mutability of human identities. Recognizing the humor and power represented in the fact that the cross-dressing Vard is simultaneously her and not her, Jennie cannot contain her voice and explodes in laughter. The echo of Jennie’s laugh serves as a reflection of voice symbolic in its confirmation of her being and its power. The forest echo validates her voice and her experience—she can hear herself—and Jennie delights in this recognition. This concept of mutable identity further serves to align Jennie with Native Americans through her own crossing of borders in captivity. As Castiglia argues, such “captives recognize that the dominant narratives of their home cultures are neither natural nor universal and turn a critical eye on the ways white Anglo-America normalizes and circulates its values” (89). Following this potential of the genre, Gordon’s discursive crossing through her reemployment of this narrative challenges the enforcement of proper behavior for women.

In turning Vard into Jennie’s *doppelgänger*, Gordon moreover combines the subversive potential of the captivity narrative with the destabilizing force of the Native American trickster tradition. According to Andrew Wiget, most Native American cultures recognize “a single figure whose character incarnates the polar values of Culture Hero and Trickster” (5). Wiget explains that this “[o]ne persona, the sum of all possibilities, can encompass at least three distinct roles: the aggressive Culture Hero like Monster-Slayer, the cunning Promethean Culture Hero, and the bumbling, overreaching Trickster” (16). The Vard-Jennie constellation typifies the conflation of transformative and disorderly powers in the multivalenced persona of the culture hero/trickster. While Jennie and Vard initially represent the culture hero and trickster roles separately, Gordon

merges both in the cross-dressing scene. In the beginning of the story, Jennie already appears as the *female* culture hero through her brashness: “I knew well there wasn’t another woman in the settlements would have undertaken to stay on that place all day with nothing but a parcel of children” (“The Captive” 177). Introducing herself as the seasoned markswoman who shot better than most men and would attack a bear without backup, Jennie clearly functions as a female adaptation of the Native American ideal of the culture hero. The manifold oral traditions about the historical Jennie as well as Connelly’s reworking of the material moreover demonstrate that she was indeed venerated as a powerful, aggressive culture hero in the frontier mythology of 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The ability of Gordon’s Jennie to escape twice from the violent power of patriarchal authority—the sexual advances of two men, Lance Rayburn and later Mad Dog—also reveals her affinity to the cunning culture hero, who prevails not through strength but through trickery.

Yet Gordon apparently knew that Jennie’s status as culture hero would be incomplete without the complementary figure of the trickster. The Vard we learn about in Jennie’s flashbacks is indeed buffoonish as well as disorderly. Just as the Native American Trickster’s “behavior [was] always scandalous” (Wiget 16), Vard told tall tales, he was “laughed at” (“The Captive” 193) by the people of the settlement, and he played practical jokes. In crossing the limits of gender roles and appearances and thus challenging the school master’s authority, Vard—like the Native American trickster—“becomes a useful, institutionalized principle of disorder,” who “provides [. . .] the ‘tolerated margin of mess’ necessary to explore alternatives to the present system, to contemplate change” (20). Jennie clearly relishes this destabilizing role Vard played in

her community, for the remembrance of this story allows her to laugh out loud in the middle of the wilderness.

More importantly, though, being the “tolerated margin of mess” appears more and more as an attractive alternative to the protagonist herself. While Jennie knows that Vard is not merely the shape-shifting trickster but also the “truth-teller,” she herself explores and ultimately exploits the mutability of her appearance and identity. Immediately following the memory of the Vard incident, the reader discovers that in addition to speaking their language, Jennie has adapted to Indian ways. However, whereas Vard must don a disguise and pretend to be a woman, Jennie embraces her new identity fully. She learns to work like an Indian, and even accepts Crowmocker as “a father” (“The Captive” 194). He becomes a mentor to Jennie, showing her how to scrape and cure animal pelts, make deer thread, and even call deer out of the brush. He tells her that once she is formally adopted, he will teach her the art of native medicine by revealing ancient secrets. Jennie assumes the physical appearance of an Indian female, including face painting. She relates that the elder chief, “Fixed me up some of the red root mixed with bear’s grease, and after I’d been putting it on my face for a while you couldn’t told me from an Indian woman, except for my light eyes” (“The Captive” 194). Crowmocker then tells her that her white blood will be cleansed from her when she is formally adopted. She will then feel Indian and embrace all Indian ways. In fact, the actual adoption rite is all that stands between her and assimilation. Jennie looks Indian, speaks the language, and has gotten so comfortable that “the Indian way of doing things seemed natural to me. I thought nothing of seeing dark faces around me all the time” (“The Captive” 195). Jennie’s shape-shifting seems complete at the end of the story, when a

white woman outside the fort mistakes her for an Indian and runs “inside the fort, the children after her” (“The Captive” 208). Jennie’s role as culture hero, therefore, relies at least in part on her ability to embrace the persona of the trickster.

By aligning Jennie with a Native American culture whose origin stories are “one of creative flux, where the essential nature of things can change” (Ruppert 15), Gordon thus expands the border-crossing ability of the female captive. In embodying the dual identities of trickster and culture hero, Jennie simultaneously gains heroic stature and subversive power. Gordon ultimately wields this trickster/culture hero identity as a potent alternative to the sanctioned ideal of women defined and molded by a southern patriarchal culture: the self-sacrificing, frail paragons of virtue. Accordingly, we see Jennie successfully adapt to life with the Indians—an adaptation that ultimately frightens the protagonist, given its power to take her irrevocably beyond the borders of white culture.

It is not until she is brought face to face with the potential consequences of her full violation of the borders of white culture—possibly engaging in a sexual act with the very Indian responsible for killing her role as white mother—that Jennie backs away from acceptance of her affinity with the wilderness and the racial Other. At this point in the text, a white male captive described as around eighteen is brought into the camp. Jennie approaches him, but he does not recognize her as a white woman: “He looked straight into my eyes. It was like he didn’t know I was there” (“The Captive” 196). Later, she reflects, “There on the path he looked at me and didn’t know me for a white woman” (“The Captive” 197). Jennie actually tells the captive that she is white, but he says nothing to her. In Connolley’s historical text, Jennie is not allowed near the captive.

In fact, there is no reference that the captive even saw her, and Connolley specifically claims that she was not allowed “any conversation with him” (59). These differences are significant in Gordon’s reinvention of the captivity story. First, Gordon has Jennie mistaken for Indian by the male captive who not only sees her, but who looks directly in her eyes. The eyes, representing the internal condition, should betray her as white, yet they do *not* as Gordon has aligned her so closely with the native culture she engages with. Jennie completely passes for a squaw, even in the face of a male representative of the borders of her home culture, and this passing further underscores an affinity between the racial/cultural Other and the white woman.

Unlike the historical account, Gordon’s fictional Jennie is close enough to speak to the captive. Though a brief encounter, Jennie’s dialogue at this point vocalizes the actual root of Jennie’s individual powerlessness in the story. Gordon highlights that it is not her gender or state as literal captive of the Indians that binds her ability to act, but rather her social position in society as a southern white woman. As such, no matter how much agency she acquires as an acculturated Indian, Jennie is ultimately powerless to act. She says to the white captive, “‘I can’t do nothing,’ . . . ‘I’m a white woman, but I can’t do nothing. Christ! . . . There ain’t nothing I can do” (“The Captive” 196). Here, Gordon’s authorial voice finds affinity with Jennie through the plight of the female artist seeking space to create. No matter how many family ties are severed or how far she removes Jennie from white patriarchal borders, Gordon cannot deny the truth—that Jennie is indeed still a white woman (and will remain so) touched by the repressive values and codes of conduct of her time. In this scene, the inability to do anything that is connected to her *whiteness* is highlighted three times in four short, staccato sentences: “‘I



can't do nothing'" ("The Captive" 196). The anxious complaint is repeated almost verbatim in the subsequent dream sequence. Therefore, Jennie literally voices her own plight in society because, despite her distance from the borders of white culture and her acculturation, she has yet to be adopted by the racial Other and as a white woman she has no status in *either* society.

In the 1971 interview concerning "The Captive," Caroline Gordon articulates the disenfranchisement of the white woman in society by contrasting it with a native matriarchal example. In her longest response to any question, she discusses various points of information from her research concerning Dragging Canoe, Atta Kulla Kulla, John Sevier, and matriarchal structures in native culture. She says,

One thing that's interested me is that almost every Indian tribe had its Pocahontas, and the Cherokee Pocahontas was a woman named Nancy Ward. . . . She was what they called a ghigau. . . . It was a matriarchal organization you know. And she sat with the men in the long house and waved the swan's wing; that is, she had the power of veto. That's the only power she had. But she could veto anything when she waved the swan's wing. (Baum 455-56)<sup>110</sup>

The ability to say no and have it recognized by those in power is clearly of interest to Gordon in a society where women do not have that right or are made to feel guilty and less than women for evoking it. The example of Nancy Ward contrasts starkly to Jennie's utterance that as a white woman she cannot do "nothing." Unfortunately, not recognizing this connection between Jennie as captive and Ward as the matriarchal

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<sup>110</sup> Gordon is referring to the legend of Nanye-hi "One Who Goes About." Allowed to sit in councils, her special power was in the pardoning of captives. By mentioning Nanye-hi, whose power was one of liberation, Gordon may also be suggesting that only women themselves can truly say no to captivity.

pardoner, the interviewer interrupts Gordon to get back to traditional ways of gaining insight: “If I can switch to the subject of technique . . .” (Baum 456).

Familiar with tribal ways, Jennie realizes immediately that the captive will be tortured to death, and she appeals to Mad Dog directly by invoking her Indian status and using her future adoptive father’s Indian name: “A present for Kagaye-liske’s daughter. Give me this boy” (“The Captive” 196). Explaining that this “boy” has killed his brother, Mad Dog denies her request, but his earlier hostility towards her seems to have vanished. He laughs—the only other character to do so besides Jennie—strokes her hair, and refers to her by her white name: “‘Jinny’ he said, ‘pretty Jinny’” (“The Captive” 196). Mad Dog recognizes her resourcefulness, ability to adapt, and her brashness, which attracts his affections. This is supported by Jennie’s reaction to his touch. She does not shudder nor react with horror. She merely walks away. Mad Dog’s attraction based on her courage and brashness stands in sharp contrast to the schoolmaster who runs from her image or Lance Rayburn who is rendered powerless through her words.

Now drawn to Jennie, Mad Dog bargains with Crowmocker after killing the male captive in order to make her his wife. The realization of this union frightens Jennie, and she appeals to Crowmocker as his daughter, but the request is denied. Jennie’s panic has little to do with crossing lines of sexual purity with the racial Other, and, on a fundamental level, she has already accepted that as her fate when she says, “‘Keep me for one of the young men of your village’” (“The Captive” 198). Rather, she recognizes that there is a difference between collusion with the Other and perpetrating the severing act against her home culture. Aligning herself with the enemy of white patriarchal culture is one thing; crossing sexual borders with the one who actually murdered the embodiment

of the white mother is another. Despite his ruthlessness, textual evidence suggests that Jennie is attracted to Mad Dog. She observes him the night following her abduction and describes his physical appeal: “When he moved, you could see the muscles moving, too, in his big chest and up and down his naked legs. An Indian woman would have thought him a fine-looking man, tall and well formed in every way” (“The Captive” 181).

Notwithstanding this attraction, Jennie realizes that a sexual union with him would be the ultimate betrayal of the borders of white culture—the betrayal of both wife and mother. He is not just any Indian, but the one who spearheaded the attack on her home, killing all her children and burning down her house. Becoming his wife would be the equivalent of wielding the Tomahawk herself, and, in Gordon’s story, she is not prepared or willing to take responsibility for that radically severing action.

I have suggested that in this story Caroline Gordon is working through her own struggle to find the time and space to write without being circumscribed by the borders of domesticity. Yet she perceives, and portrays in her story, how difficult it is to abandon the role of mother and wife completely, particularly when the alternative is not freedom but sexual submission, thus revealing through Jennie the dilemma of the modern woman artist. Gordon feels that women should not have to face such choices; yet it repeats itself through successive generations, including our own. For Gordon, the dilemmas were very real, and she did frequently cross the borders of acceptable behavior in order to save herself and her work.

In Connolley’s account, Jennie is tied up and almost burned at the stake (61). She remains calm and shows great courage in the face of death as she does not want to give her captors any satisfaction. Her actions impress the Indians, and the Cherokee chief

spares her life and purchases her as a wife. Rather than have her fictional Jennie literally tied to the stake, Gordon encodes the threat of torture into the dream sequence that reveals to Jennie the path of escape. In this dream sequence, both threats to Jennie, white and Native American, blend into one in a foreshadowing of the ending and of the morally instructive nature of the plot—that a woman’s body, and by extension her mind and spirit, moves always *between* forms of captivity, not away from it.

The tortured captive comes to Jennie in a dream vision and beckons her to follow him.<sup>111</sup> He takes her down a path that leads to a clearing and her house; however, the house is now made of bone not wood. Jennie enters her home and finds that it is full of white faces, including that of Lance Rayburn, who once again lays his hands on her. A fiddle starts to play and the white male figures begin to dance.<sup>112</sup> An interesting shift in the story happens at this point on both a literal and allegorical level. Earlier, textual evidence suggests an affinity between the racial Other and the white female, particularly in their common opposition to white male colonizing impulses. Through Jennie’s dream, a morphing of sorts occurs, that allows Gordon to shift the alignment away from Indians and white women to that of their alignment with white men. In other words, Gordon uses the captivity narrative at this point in the text to displace “onto the dark and dusky figure of the Indian, a projection of the husband’s [or rather what he represents] darker side” (Kolodny 33). Jennie sees the white male figures as they dance “bowing back and forth” in her dream, but they darken and change form. They morph into figures with “fur or feathers dangling from a belt and all the faces around were dark, not like they were at first” (“The Captive” 201).

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<sup>111</sup> The dream sequence does appear in Connolley’s historical narrative.

<sup>112</sup> In the story, Jennie says that there were not “any women dancing” (“The Captive” 200).

By moving into the dream sequence, Gordon symbolically molds the two threats to Jennie, Indian and White, into one through the dance. Both cultures threaten her individuality in some way, and this is rendered in the story with the “great flames” meant for her being kindled in her own chimney and the stake, a rattlesnake tree, growing through the middle of her own house “up from the table through the roof” (“The Captive” 201). Evoking the method of executing transgressive women—or witches—in early modern Europe and America, the house and the hearth no longer provide a protective space. Jennie, recognizing there is no safety to be found, even in her own home, flees. Both white and Indian voices follow her, seeming to indict her no matter the choice she makes. Jennie continues to follow the light in her dream, and ultimately makes it to a mountaintop where she is rejoined by the male captive who points out the location of the fort in the valley.

After this dream, Jennie resolves to escape and does so while the Indians are hunting by following the path laid out for her in the dream. In the face of exhaustion and starvation, Jennie uses her newly-found affinity with the forest to her advantage, and she remains resolved to survive no matter what happens. For example, despite the fact that she knows she should not build a fire, she does so anyway in order to boil some greens, albeit doing it the Indian way to hide the smoke: “‘I’ll eat . . . ‘varmints or no varmints’” (“The Captive” 206).<sup>113</sup> Jennie knows the Indians are close, and she even finds moccasin footprints on the path.<sup>114</sup> Despite obstacles, she presses on and finally makes it to a river

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<sup>113</sup> Food imagery is important in this sequence as it is aligned with feeding the soul and, through memory, with wastefulness. Jennie remembers buttermilk given to pigs and slightly molded bread that was thrown away; both items she would do anything for at this moment. Gordon, in her correspondence, continually reflects upon wasted time in the domestic sphere when that time could be nourishing her creative work.

<sup>114</sup> According to Connolley, in the historical account, the captive’s lack of knowledge of the surrounding geography saved her. Once the Indians discovered her escape, they went the most direct route to the fort

that stands between her and the fort. Calling out to the women outside the stockade, Jennie is not immediately welcomed as she is mistaken for Indian. She does eventually convince them that she is a white captive, but, to her chagrin, Jennie discovers that the only man at the fort is elderly, feeble, and without a canoe. The current is too strong for her to swim across, so she instructs the man to make a raft, which he does. On their way back over the river, the raft starts to fall apart right as the Indians begin to appear on the bank headed out toward them. The elderly man prays and, in typical genre conventions, gives up their fate to God. Gordon, through Jennie's response, breaks starkly with conventions of the genre of captivity narratives. Resting her fate in *works* rather than God, she retorts, "Go on and pray, you old fool. . . . I'm a-going to git across this river" ("The Captive" 209). Gordon prefers to deny the agency of prayer; no divine intervention can free the gendered body of white womanhood—freedom requires a power to be found in the female self. Accordingly, Gordon portrays Jennie as the one to save herself and the white man as well.

Significantly, in Connolley's historical account, it is Henry Skaggs, the elderly man, who has the idea to build the raft and who is credited with getting Jennie across the river. Once she is on the other side of the river, the Indians yell, "honor, Jennie, honor" (Connolley 75). Connolley believes that the chief is referring to the fact that he spared her at the stake and paid for her as his wife. Thus, he reads Jennie's escape as a breach of social codes that bind her to the chief. Gordon reinvents the ending of this "historical" captivity written by the male historian and the historical Jennie's son.

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looking for her. Jennie's choices led her in a more indirect way that allowed her to elude them long enough to escape. See Connolley footnote 19, page 73.

In an effort to seem thorough in his research, Connolley details in chapter ten of the text other accounts of Jennie's story that he had collected. Connolley claims that "It is not necessary to make any comment on them," especially in light of his own account based on what he has already established as his authoritative source, Jennie's son. The first alternative account, Connolley claims, is the most "fair statement" of the narrative in its cultural permutation "related in every household in the Big Sandy Valley" (79).<sup>115</sup> This is significant for two reasons. In this alternative account, Jennie is the agent of her rescue, as she seizes "the paddle out of his [the old man's] hands, and while he prayed . . . succeeded in propelling the raft in" (Connolley 81). Instead of invoking honor, the chief yells after her in admiration for her cunning and bravery that has indeed bested him, "Whoopee, my pretty Jinnie!" (Connolley 81). Therefore, rather than morally instructive, Gordon's account re-centers Jennie's cultural legend and returns agency to Jennie, who is not only capable but does navigate the wilderness, the racial Other, and the borders back to white society. This switch from Connolley's narrative to the cultural legend emphasizes the importance of women in frontier history, their strength in adversity that repeats itself over the course of generations. By returning narrative power to Jennie, particularly in the actual moment of her release when all seems lost, Gordon highlights how society perpetually seeks to bind the female body and its liberty through gender constructs. The outcome of Jennie's escape reveals both subversion and acquiescence in cultural norms.

Gordon's abrupt and subtle ending has perplexed critics. Some, like Baum and Watkins, see it as a simple summing up or rounding off of the story. Others focus on

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<sup>115</sup> It is an account from James Hayden VanHoose, of Fayetteville, Arkansas, related to Connolley in a letter dated August 4, 1895.

Jennie's final statement that appears to attribute her escape to luck rather than her own efforts. Typically, they argue that attributing escape to luck allows her readmission to white society or that the ending simply underscores a "newfound humility and the wisdom of nature" as the last statement of the piece (Brown 84). Such readings deny textual evidence that suggest the ending as an imprisoning experience, rather than a freeing one.

"The Captive" ends with a quite powerful image: "We went through the gate. I heard the bolt shot home and I knew I was inside the fort. I fell down on the ground and the women and children come crowding. The Indians were still yelling. I sat up and the high stockade fence was all around me. 'Lord God,' I said, 'I was lucky to git away from them Indians'" (209). Clearly, there is some sense of dramatic release as Jennie crumbles to the ground after her arduous escape through the wilderness. However, the context of this supposed liberation cannot be divorced from its reading. First, Jennie is not returned to a fully staffed fort protected by the best woodsmen in the area. The men are absent; only women, children, and an elderly man are at the stockade. Secondly, she is locked into a literal jail and her captors are still outside the walls of the fort, with the freedom of the forest to protect them. Jennie is trapped inside a man-made structure with nowhere to go but back to the role of wife and mother, which will not only tie her down but provide her with no real protection from external forces. Thus, the last image we are given in the story is that of a high fence walling her in. Given this imagery and her movement back into white society where she is literally surrounded in the end by women and children, there is a certain ironic tone to her last statement: "'Lord God,' I said, "'I was lucky to git away from them Indians!'" ("The Captive" 209).



As a fictional character, Jennie is limited in her own understanding of her body-as-text and body as history in its symbolic, archetypal nature. Gordon implies this in *The House of Fiction* in her commentary on the first-person narrator: “We may agree that he is telling us what happened, but knowing him as we inevitably do, we may question the range and depth of his understanding” (626). Gordon illustrates that Jennie has not gotten away from anything; rather, she is just switching forms of captivity. In fact, the captivity she is returning to by choice will prove more of a burden in some ways as she will lose that time of reflection and creation she had in the wilderness. As unfortunate as that is for the protagonist, it is the only possible choice given the constraints of southern white, patriarchal society. Yes, Jennie desires those roles, as does Gordon, but in a manner that allows a woman the same ability and space to do creative work.

Critics such as Boyle focus on the use of luck as a masking force in her rescue: “Attributing her escape to luck rather than her brash character or self-reliance, Jinny knows she will be admitted inside the borders of the community” (Boyle 89). Though that might have been an accurate reading of a factual 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> century narrative where the captive had to be concerned with the appearance of propriety and sexual purity upon return, I do not believe that is the intent behind “luck” in Gordon’s 20<sup>th</sup> century fictional captivity. If we look back at her source narrative, which she read closely, Connelley notes that on the way to returning Jennie to her husband, the party in charge of *protecting* her was attacked by Indians several times despite the odd time of year for such persistent attacks. Connelley writes, “It often seemed as though they were lost, and Mrs. Wiley had to bear a rifle and fight . . . which she did effectively” (76).

Jennie was captured because a white man killed an Indian for no cause, and she lives in captivity for eleven months without any signs or hope of rescue from white male culture. When she does escape, no typical frontiersmen are there when she makes it to the fort. In sum, Jennie owes little to anything but her own resourcefulness. Even her dream of escape that shows her the way to the fort, despite the male captive figure, is a product of her own creative power fostered through her spiritual connection to the forest and the native culture with which she has been aligned.

Her own imagination produces the dream vision and, thus, provides her own road map for rescue. Such a road map is possible only in the wilderness where, according to Native American beliefs, spiritual power connects human beings and the natural world that surrounds them, allowing individuals to cross into different states of consciousness or being. This connection between the internal and the external was embodied in native culture through dream visions, which served an important and central part in the spiritual lives of most North American tribes. As Andrew Wiget observes, these tribes believed that dreams had the power to “reshape identity about an interior vision revealed by the unconscious [ . . . ] [T]hey were considered the source of wisdom and creativity” (38). In other words, dream visions were a spiritual source for finding strength and generating renewal necessary for survival and growth. Through Jennie’s genuine engagement with the native culture and the American landscape that results in her own dream vision, Gordon also aligns Jennie on a spiritual plane with the racial and cultural Other.

In addition, in “The Captive,” it is evident that Jennie is far from concerned with publicly crossing typical gender borders. However, female resourcefulness is something that white male culture labels as luck, because it threatens masculinity. Therefore, the

use of the word *luck* at the end of the piece sardonically comments on the first use of the word in the story. A male hunter, whom she has challenged to go into a bear's den before other men can get there to help, tells her that "'you always been lucky, but one of these time you going to be too brash'" ("The Captive" 177). Here we see that luck emphasizes nothing more than the fact that luck had nothing to do with it.

Another important detail that often gets overlooked is the white male captive in the text. He is described as capable of killing an Indian, yet he is silent in captivity, and in Gordon's narrative, and has no agency for escape.<sup>116</sup> There is even no attempt of it. Yet a white woman, after seeing her children killed, and who was approximately eight months pregnant in the historical account, manages not only to survive, but attempts escape two times and ultimately frees herself on the third. A close examination of the image of this male captive in her dream vision reveals him as a rather ominous character. Yes, he does lead her down the path of escape, but what kind of figure is he? And what is he really leading her to?

The dream, as Gordon re-imagines it, is a product of Jennie's own creative vision and spiritual ties to the forest, and it ultimately inspires her ability to escape Indian captivity. However, rather than revealing the path to ultimate release, this vision actually symbolizes her return to captivity in her own culture. As such, the dream vision reveals her totem or *badge* of identity. Though dream totems in Native American culture typically focus on natural phenomena, as Wiget argues, "At the center is an image, which functions as a mask of the soul in its interior dialogue" (39). What is particularly

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<sup>116</sup> Though Jennie describes him as a boy, Gordon put him around eighteen in the story. Connelley has him at twenty in the historical account. Regardless, even at eighteen a young pioneer man living in the wilderness settlements would be trained and skilled in shooting and other survival tactics—certainly he would be expected to be as *adept* as most pioneer women.

powerful about these dream totems is “their union of abstraction and concreteness . . . [which gives them] such a surrealistic visionary quality that they attain a universal character despite their identifications with a particular individual” (39). Jennie’s totem—the external manifestation of her essential character of her inner self—is that of the captive moving between different states of bondage. Furthermore, taking on the “universal character” of dream totems, this state is extended to all white women of the South and, for Gordon, to the female artist struggling for voice in a male literary landscape.

The interpretive challenge in understanding Jennie’s dream vision lies in how to make sense of the role of the male figure who seems to guide her back to *civilization*. He is an inauspicious character, and comes to her with a lamp “made from the bleached skull of a sheep . . . [that] was filled with buffalo fat” (“The Captive” 199). He does not speak to her until the end of the dream, but rather motions for her to follow him through the wilderness. Gordon’s Jennie at this point describes his eyes, which represent his inner character. She says that in her dream, “His eyes were the same eyes that had looked at me there on the path” (“The Captive” 199). When the male captive was first brought into camp, Jennie does not describe his eye color, but rather describes how he sees her—and he sees her like an Indian despite her assertion of white womanhood. And due to this misunderstanding, looking straight at her, he is described as not seeing her at all; Jennie says, “It was like he didn’t know I was there” (“The Captive” 196). Thus, white women and Indians are once again linked as being invisible to the male colonizer. As a result, in her dream vision, Jennie is led back under male supervision to the borders of white society where she can be re-domesticated and put in her *proper* place. The

tortured captive leads her back to her home, which is symbolic of death in its solid bone state and where the Indians and white men merge into a common threat. Then, this figure of walking death points out the fort, which cements her captivity back into white society. Therefore, the image of the captive in her dream is a symbol of the other captor, white male society, that denies her the freedom for creativity—a plight Gordon understood far too well. Furthermore, this use of the dream totem, which reveals Jennie as essentially “The Captive” as the title of the story typifies, further aligns Jennie spiritually with the racial Other. Like Jennie, and Gordon herself, their bodies will never know true release as their future is one of movement between states of bondage defined by the white patriarchy.

Gordon had come to realize that in order to write, she had to be free of domestic responsibility. When perfect freedom proved impossible, her slow production became the inevitable result of the negotiation between the difficult terrain of the domestic and public sphere.<sup>117</sup> Thus, Gordon expresses significant irritation at the interviewers’ suggestions that Jennie’s failure to escape sooner says something about moral or cultural weakness. The interviewer asks, “Is Jinny’s failure to try to escape more before the dream any kind of moral or cultural weakness on her part? Has she given up to her life with the Indians too much?” (Baum 460). Gordon’s response is clear:

Well, I think that question is sociological. . . . I will not charge you with that crime, but almost. The woman is human. She has seen all her children killed. She saw a man tortured to death. She herself was in danger

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<sup>117</sup> In her correspondence, Gordon reveals jealousy of and some derision for other women writers who are able to distance themselves completely from domestic ties. To Sally Wood, Gordon writes of Katherine Anne Porter shedding yet another husband, “She has to sever every earthly tie she has before she can do any work, go off to a hotel somewhere usually” (Wood 214).

of being tortured. I think that is brought out very plainly. . . . I would have been dead or nuts by this time, and I think most modern women. She is of heroic stature, but still she is a human being. And how can you say, how can anybody say, that she's lacking in moral fiber? I think she's got about forty times as much moral fiber as almost any woman I know. (461)

Gordon emphasizes that Jennie survives captivity not only by the Indians but also by white society. After all, Gordon describes the historical Jennie as outliving her husband by numerous years and having “a whole ‘nother breed of children” (Baum 458). She survives captivity yet again, and that is why Gordon brings up the need to “put her up on a pedestal” (Baum 458). This is where I believe we see the parallel of this story to the captivity of the female artist in society, particularly where religion and a woman's biological purpose are often used to limit her roles in society—even in modern society where work furthering the self maybe allowed as long as it is not at the expense of domestic duties.

Immediately following the “‘nother breed” of children remark, Gordon presents a revealing anecdote. She tells the interviewer of a black man named Ananias, who had a very large family. Gordon says that the family's doctor, Cousin Robin, tells Ananias that his wife should not have any more children as it would seriously risk her health. Despite this warning, Ananias gets her pregnant again and, when questioned by the doctor about going against his medical advice, he attributes it to “the Lord's will” (Baum 459). Cousin Robin responds, “‘Don't talk that way to me. The Lord never had but one child himself”” (Baum 459). This anecdote reveals Gordon's own attitude about the plight of the mother. One child complicates life enough; more than one actually risks a person's

health—even God himself can only handle one child. Yet Jennie, like most women surviving captivity, can have another breed of children, five to be exact, and live well into her nineties. One of the reasons for this anecdote here is that Gordon suffered a personal crisis immediately after writing her story—most likely during the time of revising the introduction. She was pregnant again and had to decide between repeating motherhood or carrying on her work as a writer. As critic and biographer Nancy Lee Jonza notes, “It was just one more thing gone wrong,” and “it was all she could do to balance her writing with the care of six-year-old Nancy” (113). Despite her love for her daughter and longing for another child to provide a sibling for Nancy, Gordon acknowledged that she could not handle it. Thus, for the sake of her professional development, she had an abortion early in 1932.<sup>118</sup> Her anecdote about God having only one child is also a comment on the gendered nature of pregnancy, and even more ironic than it first appears to be. God did not carry, give birth, or raise his son, yet he only has the one. Women, however, are expected to repeat the process until they are broken down. Her reference to Cousin Robin’s comment reveals that, though she deems it unfortunate, Gordon does not regret her choice. Given social constraints, it is the only one she can make.

In one lengthy response to Baum and Watkins, Gordon mentions the need to put Jennie in the proper perspective. She highlights her life as a mother of a “breed” after captivity, and she tells the Cousin Robin anecdote previously described in response to the

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<sup>118</sup> Gordon acknowledges the pregnancy in a letter to Sally Wood dated March 12, 1932. The letter was published in Wood’s *The Southern Mandarins*, but the section referencing pregnancy and abortion was edited out. Jonza references a section of the omitted material in her endnotes in *The Underground Stories* (416). Jonza places the abortion in late January/early February, while Makowsky places it in early March. Evelyn Scott, the subject of chapter one, also had an abortion (White 98). Scott was concerned about her health because of her prolapsed uterus, but she was also concerned about finances and the space to write. Though I have no evidence to suspect that Ravenel had a second pregnancy, she has only one child. Thus, all three writers—writers engaged with captivity narratives—do not repeat motherhood.

interviewer's question concerning Jennie's final statement about being lucky to get away from the Indians. Gordon is clearly and systematically connecting captivity to motherhood. Jennie is actually far from lucky given what she returns to—a cycle of captivity for women in a society that places the full domestic burden on them. However, not recognizing the nature of Gordon's response and its connection to the story, the interviewer says, "I like that" and immediately switches the subject to the mundane and seemingly pointless question of whether or not country people have better memories than city people. Gordon, displeased with the shift, utters a mere two-word response, "Of course" (Baum 459).

Towards the end of the interview, the interviewer states, "I have a hard time making my point in language you will accept, but one of the things that's striking in this story to me is the hardship of frontier life on the women. And even in the story when you see two deer together, a buck will bump the female" (461). What he apparently wants her to say is that women had a harder time on the frontier than at any other time in history. Gordon refuses such a reading of her text because the point is specifically that the spiritual, creative captivity of women—deepening through motherhood and domesticity—denies space to work for herself, as well as generations of women before her.<sup>119</sup> Thus, she wryly responds, "Bucks have been bumping females for thousands of years" (461). She goes on to state that the women of today actually have a harder time in her view, because social pressures and changes in patriarchal structure place an even heavier burden on women. She cites the lack of acceptance of the older generation still living with the young, which takes away built-in childcare. Also, with modern

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<sup>119</sup> I discuss Connelley's concept of a universal, repetitive, and mobile history of American settlements rooted in captivity and Gordon's play on this concept where the female body encodes and reencodes its own subjectability in sociohistorical constructs on page 164.



conveniences, the young mother is expected to be chauffeur, laundress, etc. Gordon cites both an anthropologist and a doctor who believe the burden on women has more than doubled. For Gordon, Jennie is a hardier breed of women because of her affinity with nature that enabled her to serve as her own protector, a characteristic purposefully denied women under the concept of male protection. Thus, as Gordon says, modern women could not bear up to Jennie's captivity because "I don't think they would know how to protect themselves at all in her circumstances. They couldn't possibly have done it" (462).

In conclusion, I concur with Thomas Landess in his discussion of *Green Centuries* that "the true action" of Gordon's work "is archetypal rather than historical in its ultimate significance" (495). In this story, through the captivity trope, Gordon systematically comments on social life for women, particularly those attempting creative, intellectual work. Her pioneer captive serves as an archetype for modern-day captives and highlights the connection between physical captivity and creative/intellectual captivity. In sum, her text does not uphold or ratify social codes of exclusion, but rather draws attention to the borders that contain or limit creative potential. While Indian captivity narratives traditionally highlighted the "restoration" of women captives as the conclusion of their captivity, Gordon asks whether such a release is truly possible. A rather post-modern gesture, the final scene of "The Captive" finds Jennie scoffing at the ineluctability of the captivity state. Gordon, in turn, faced the same incomprehension and containment of her artistic vision during the interview with Baum and Watkins as she had experienced in Maxwell Perkins' response to her story. Yet Gordon is not quite caught in a funhouse of despair. Her story gains subversive agency by revealing states of female

captivity in modern society—even if the author could ultimately not break free from this condition herself.

Gordon has been neglected by scholars looking at gender issues, even those with feminist affiliations, despite her modernist experimentation with form that engages in an exploration of issues concerning social constraints on women, the silencing of the female voice, and the plight of the woman author in a male literary world. Partially, this has to do with Gordon's devotion to Tate in spite of his verbal and physical abuse and infidelity, her close association with Tate's conservative Agrarian friends, and her struggle to find her own voice under that quite powerful male influence. Her letters reveal that she felt the constant strain of being an outsider in Tate's literary circles where her role was always as his wife. In a strategic effort to gain her own acceptance as an author, Gordon embraced her husband's literary principles and fashioned her own work as that of a "masculine" writer. This led to Gordon's public persona being one that appeared resistant to other women writers and seemed to embrace patriarchal views of history and codes of conduct, thus opposing the feminist ideologies emerging in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Boyle has pointed out, her turbulent life with Tate, her conversion to Catholicism, and her "re-assertion of male authority" and "disregard of racial issues in her later works" color Gordon scholarship. Too many critics missed the conflict between her public persona and her female artistic vision, which constantly subverts her own attempt at containment in her work (Boyle 33). In spite of her temporary acquiescence with male literary codes, she desperately tries to shed her fetters as a writer, particularly in this story of female captivity.

It is no accident that her letters reveal her sympathy with caged animals in zoos, who, like herself, long to break from the stupor of their circumscribed existence. In reporting about her visit to the Memphis zoo, she writes: “It is so sad to stand by the black panther, though, and watch his eye light as he gazes past you and sees a bird on a bough or a plump little boy” (Wood 166). Fascinated with caged predators in particular, Gordon imagines they might break through human encumbrances and rediscover their true nature. One of the zoo-keepers reports to Gordon that

[o]ne of the lions, raised on a bottle used to be such a pleasure to him he said. They led him [the lion] around on a leash and used to bring him to the pavillion every afternoon for his ice cream cone which he ate, the pavillion manager says ‘very nicely.’ But as he got older he lost his taste for ice cream and got savage so had to stop his visits to the pavillion. (176)

In both cases, Gordon empathizes with the plight of the caged animals and virtually desires the return of their savagery. Not coincidentally, the next sentence in her letter to Wood betrays her own desperate need for liberation—especially as a writer: “WILL NOW GET TO WORK” (176; emphasis in the original). For women writers like herself, it takes more than time and financial support to work; it takes a savage conviction. In her story “The Captive,” and particularly in the figure Jennie Wiley, her voice as woman, captive, and liberator finally breaks forth.

Despite following Tate’s literary aesthetics, Gordon acknowledges and criticizes the fundamental disjunction between his theories and concrete experience.

Appropriately, this break takes the form of a garden image: “He [Tate] has the strangest attitude toward the country—the same appreciation you’d have for a good set in the

theatre. I think Allen feels toward Nature as I do toward mathematics—respectful indifference. He walks about the garden hailing each tomato and melon with amazement—and never sees any connection between planting seeds and eating fruit” (Wood 30). On a number of levels for Tate, and many of his fellow Agrarians, art is based on the binary paradigm of Cartesian philosophy, following Decartes’ axiom “cogito ergo sum.” In other words, artistic vision is created and exists in separation from physical, concrete reality.<sup>120</sup> The artist, therefore, makes or fashions the world in his own image. This view of art separate from the physical process, Gordon so concretely explains, renders the male Agrarian theorists without “field technique”; as such, she writes, “Allen and John Ransom and Don Davidson would make damn poor field workers” (Wood 185). For Gordon, such a dualistic vision or separation of art from reality (separating the “tomatoes” from the “seeds”) is impossible for the female artist. Such a dualistic vision denies the inseparable connection between the personal and physical experience of the woman artist and her imaginative vision, which Gordon, in turn, underlines in her work, particularly in her adaptation of the captivity genre that not only underscores but centers the physical experience of women.

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<sup>120</sup> For a succinct discussion of Decartes, dualism, and Cartesian thought, see *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*.

## Conclusion

### Southern Women & Revolutionizing Captivity: “A Notable Exploit”<sup>121</sup>

It is the extreme situation that best reveals what we are essentially, and I believe these are times when writers are more interested in what we are essentially than in our daily lives.—from Flannery O'Connor's “On Her Own Work”

Indeed, to many late nineteenth-and early twentieth-century men, women seemed to be agents of an alien world that evoked anger and anguish, while to women in those years men appeared as aggrieved defenders of an indefensible order. Thus, both male and female writers increasingly represented women's unprecedented invasion of the public sphere as a battle of the sexes, a battle over a zone that could only be defined as a no man's land.—from Gilbert & Gubar, *No Man's Land*

The literary landscape of American modernism throughout the early- and mid-twentieth century was almost solely gendered masculine, particularly for those writing in and about the South. Male Agrarian writers and New Critics established canons of southern literature and the critical paradigms that evaluated them in ways that served to center a male modernist tradition and aesthetic while relegating writing by women to second-class status. Kept from the category of *high* literature, which in turn denied them academic recognition in subsequent decades, the tropes and concerns of southern women writers remained under-evaluated until the latter half of the twentieth century. As Bonnie K. Scott notes, “The inscriptions of mothers and women, and more broadly of sexuality and gender, were not adequately decoded, if detected at all” (2). Of particular importance in this regional framework is the female concern with the undoing of a historical and

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<sup>121</sup> This excerpt is part of the title of Hannah Dustan's captivity, which appears as “A Notable Exploit; wherein, Dux Faemina Facti” in Cotton Mather's *Magnalia Christi Americana: Or, the Ecclesiastical History of New-England* (1702). Dustan is the quintessential figure of the victorious captive who wields the tomahawk herself as her captors sleep.

cultural tradition steeped in concepts of gender that denied autonomy and selfhood to women—southern womanhood.

Content with her place in the home, a southern *lady* aspiring to the archetype had to be virtuous, pious, and fragile, deferring to white, male authority and suffering in silence. These virtuous beings, whether real or literary, stood vigil to a lost past, and they were at the core of the South's very definition of self throughout the Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Southern Renaissance. In their service to their region, the white, southern female body became, as Jacquelyn Hall states in *Revolt Against Chivalry*, "the most potent symbol of white male supremacy" among the upper and middle classes (155). What these women were supposed to live up to, however, was rarely compatible with their daily lives, where their identity always became a negotiation between the real and the imagined. As Anne Goodwyn Jones has pointed out, the true Confederate woman was really "a personification, effective only as she works in others' imaginations" (4).

Modern female thinkers and writers were not immune to the effects of southern womanhood. They not only lived it growing up, but their authorial voices were contained by it as adult women. In multifaceted responses, these female authors often wrote against the limiting and restrictive boundaries of this personification, calling for new ways of envisioning a female aesthetic and relationship to society, culture, and the American landscape. One central strategy for deconstructing the patriarchal literary landscape of the modern South was found, as my three case studies reveal, in the re-employment and transformation of the early American captivity narrative by white women. The first American writing and publishing tradition dominated by women and acceptable for

women's public voices, this genre highlights moments of cultural exchange that reveal female agency, the commodified white female body, and its service to established regional and national cultural borders. Such narratives also underscore, through the racial body, interactions that align the white female with those whom she is supposed to be *protected* from. Such an affinity established in literary discourse reveals the colonizing impulse of the white, male agenda, and its desire to marginalize the Other. By turning to the captivity genre as a model and inspiration, these female southern modernists, in effect, move beyond the personification of the southern lady back to a time when *the South* did not even exist in the cultural and geographic forms it takes today. Locating this *usable* female past not synonymous with the South in modern literary landscapes, Scott, Ravenel, and Gordon unmask notions of immutable identity and incontrovertible historical representations. They also potently give voice to the previously silenced female exemplar through captivity's focus on the real, un-romanticized experiences of women.

As an examination of this impulse, this project began with a series of questions concerning the influences of the early American captivity narrative on the women writers of the modern South. Specifically, this study asked why the captivity narratives appealed to a southern female aesthetic? Are there recognizable and common threads of traditional captivity that these texts share? Is the precursor genre re-invented and transformed by the women of the Southern Renaissance? And, to what end do these modern captivity tales address boundaries of community, civility, and history in the modern South? Though limited to the specific concerns of three representative figures—Ravenel, Scott, and Gordon—each case study elucidates the appeal of the genre of the captivity narrative, its

powerful and yet often ambiguous subversive potential, and the employment of the archetypal principles of the genre by these modern southern women writers.

Central to their agendas is a clear focus on the generational repetition of female subservience in history wielded through female archetypes. Each author is concerned with the historical re-employment and transformation of the tropes and states of female captivity that confine body, mind, and spirit. By recording female bodies that are simultaneously suffering and resilient, submissive and subversive, these authors create a master trope for an archetypal pattern of captivity in the founding and development of American society—one that takes on added significance as it is regionally appropriated to uphold dominant ideology. Ravenel and Scott in particular strive to re-center women and the racial and cultural Other in larger historical contexts that expose cultural phallocentrism, isolation, and linguistic difference. As such, the captivity genre allows them to encode and re-encode on the female body the state and history of women outside or beyond masculine narratives and historiography. As shown in Ravenel's injunction "Let no man read these verses" in her poem "Bondwomen," these authors instruct female audiences in identifying and resisting the trajectories and tools of patriarchal oppression.

Furthermore, the language of captivity allows southern women the discourse to describe how their bodies are coerced and restrained through prescribed notions of white femininity that uphold mythical regional constructs—how their bodies are used to preserve southern history and manhood. This language reveals each author's negotiation of this conflict and also "marks her distance from the culture that would claim her as its idealized representation" (Castiglia 94). By giving the conflict discursive power, these authors highlight a shared language of women—that of bondage. In a region steeped in



the white female body, radical liberation and language of total freedom distances more than unites. Recognizing this shared self identity based in confinement, these authors relate to their *community* of women by highlighting their shared state of captivity—the language of which ultimately legitimates moments of imagined cultural escape.

Scott, Ravenel, and Gordon each harness captivity narratives to explore spaces between cultures, or contact zones. In so doing, each author underscores the subversive elements of the original genre that escaped attempts at containment by both authors and male editors who used them to support religious and colonizing agendas. All three intentionally foreground transgressive acts in captivity, the civility of the racial Other—one that at times exceeds that of the white man—the threat of female sexuality to male power, and, perhaps most importantly, the mutability of identity and community. In their own creative visions, Scott, Ravenel, and Gordon each reveal to me Castiglia's critical account of early American narratives, that

[. . .] In captivity, white women generate social accounts that feature people of color in roles other than irrational and savage tormentors and white women who are not simply voiceless and frail items of exchange. In so doing, captives recognize that the dominant narratives of their home cultures are neither natural nor universal and turn a critical eye on the ways white Anglo-America normalizes and circulates its values.

Discursive “crossing,” occasioned by the experience of capture, thus enabled captives to challenge the enforcement of “proper” gender, racial, and class behavior. (Castiglia 9)

In their meditation on the human condition in times of duress, captivity narratives allow these modern southern authors space to contemplate the costs of civilization for women as the internal, personal, and real experience of the captive as a commodified body drives the narrative. Setting the record straight, these captives articulate for themselves the fact that Western civilization is almost invariably based on the colonization of the Other. References to or adaptations of early American frontier narratives, therefore, allow these writers to envision women in situations to which they have been subjected against their will. Showing the impact of colonial power on women as well as the racial Other, captivity narratives align these groups purposefully and creatively.

Early American narratives of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century were exploited for their morally instructive nature where religious redemption was located in the suffering female body. Transforming this politicized framing of these early texts, Scott, Ravenel, and Gordon *instruct*, or rather morally edify, their audience by emphasizing the culpability of women for their containment and the responsibility for subversion. Ravenel foregrounds the effects of compliance to female artifice, appropriated mythology, and deference to male authority that culminates repeatedly in a call for the hinterland—the “foot-notes”—to rise up against the “man-ruled suzerainty.” Whereas Gordon and Scott create states of captivity in order to highlight the *burdens* of motherhood while also imagining the possibilities of shedding this encumbrance. Particularly for Scott, empathy for the maternal body takes on seductive power in the face of a male nation that seeks to deny women the real experience of maternity. By highlighting their collusion with this distancing from their own body, she indicts women “with any guts” to protest against what she ironically calls the “great mother worshipping

land” (qtd. in Scura 312). These calls for change suggest that women must support each other in shared communities of resistance that problematize rather than essentialize individual and communal identity. Ravenel and Scott globalize the context of these issues for women, exploding traditional southern literary aesthetics, in their movement away from geographic and psychological borders that define the region.

In their respective adaptations of the captivity genre, the three authors create symbolic representations of the plight of the woman author. All three have to negotiate and counteract the *captivity* or containment of their creative vision and their literary work by male aesthetic standards (editors, publishers, and critics), censorship, social taboos, and economic exigencies. Ravenel separates herself from these standards through a double consciousness that infuses her public editorial voice with conservative discourse, while keeping her poetic voice aligned with social change. Gordon and Scott at times succumb to male editors in their need for monetary support, but their central figures embrace the distance that captivity provides the female author to resist containment. Therefore, despite male tampering, they remain able to criticize the patriarchy as captivity becomes a subversive deconstructive space of unlearning. Cultural codes, stereotypes, and roles are shed, which allows for a reassessment of their identification with white men.

In due course, each author reaches the conclusion that in modern southern society no true release from captivity is possible—for themselves or their fictional female subjects. However, they strive to control confinement through creative re-visionary sites of rescue. In other words, they reinvent the American captivity narrative in an effort to write a counter-narrative or establish a counter-tradition to the prevailing male

mythology in American literature that champions the fantasy of escape from personal, social, and cultural strictures. Ultimately, they highlight the exclusionary nature of the American Dream, which is not blind to race, gender, or class.

This study reveals that much more needs to be done concerning the investigation of early American tropes of captivity and southern female authors. An inclusive and collective examination of Native Americans and white womanhood in the novels of female southern modernists is of top priority as an outgrowth of the critical paradigms established in “Captive Women, Cunning Texts.” By extension, there are numerous sites for additional work centering on metaphorical captivity (mental and spiritual) within motherhood and the southern landscape. Specifically, the recovery of texts like Elizabeth Maddox Roberts’s *Time of Man* under these lenses would contribute to our shared understanding of the modern female aesthetic.

A natural outgrowth of the early American captivity tale is the spiritual autobiography, which is intimately tied to the conventions and political uses of captivity narratives. This genre impacted the religious trajectory of the predominantly Calvinist South, and it was readily adapted and transformed by the women of the Southern Renaissance, particularly concerning issues of racial enlightenment. Therefore, research focused on southern women’s autobiography, early American influences and transformations, and the color line needs further study. The intricate connections between early American captivity narratives and the impulse of early American spiritual autobiography/conversion narratives results in a convergence in modern forms that seeks

to fracture innate ideas about racial and community structures.<sup>122</sup> Though they use numerous and various metaphors and techniques to accomplish their goals, fractured bodies and fragmented inner psyches permeate these autobiographies and provide a means for exploring tolerance and understanding across color lines through a Bakhtinian notion of the body in action. As the individual female becomes politically imbued with public issues of race, the female textual body becomes the site of change through an examination of the construction of history, racial signs/signifiers, and/or memory. Specifically, such autobiographies as Lillian Smith's *Killers of the Dream* (1949) and Katherine DuPre Lumpkin's *The Making of a Southerner* (1947) use the language of religious repentance and redemption in confessional discourse, as drawn from early American conversion narratives of white women like Elizabeth Ashbridge's *Some Account of the Fore Part of the life of Elizabeth Ashbridge. . . Written by Her Own Hand Many Years Ago* (1755), in order to criticize and transform preconceived notions of race, difference, and official constructs of the southern past. The re-employment of this early American white, female tradition marks and highlights the discursive and aesthetic differences of these texts from the modern autobiographies of women of color, such as Mary Church Terrell's *A Colored Woman in a White World*.

In closing, I would like to return to the concept of the "notable exploit," which to the early American ear evokes the archetype of the victorious and vanquishing captive,

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<sup>122</sup> Fred Hobson begins his article "The Sins of the Fathers: Lillian Smith and Katherine Du Pre Lumpkin," with a brief reference to the tradition of the spiritual autobiography and the conversion narrative of early America. Classifying these literary traditions as "rather remote history," his study borrows the term "conversion" in an effort to identify a tradition in southern women's writing concerning racial transformations. I contend that this type of comparison needs to go a step further. Rather than looking at how the modern autobiographies are comparable to that past form, we need to examine if and how they are influenced by it. In other words, how intentionally were these women drawing from and re-employing the form? The South was clearly centered in Calvinist traditions where religious language, salvation, and redemption were at the core of regional identity.

Hannah Dustan.<sup>123</sup> In March of 1697, Hannah Dustan was taken captive by Abenaki Indians less than a week after giving birth. Her midwife Mary Neff was also taken, along with the infant girl who was killed immediately following the attack. An Abenaki family of twelve housed the two women along with an English boy, Samuel Leonardson, taken around eighteen months earlier. According to the account, Dustan was afraid of running the gauntlet, so she masterminded her escape by coordinating with Samuel Leonardson and Mary Neff. These two women, one recently out of childbed, and the young boy managed to murder ten of their twelve captors while they slept, and, rather than immediately fleeing, took the time to scalp them with the Indians' own weapons. Upon returning to the colonies, Dustan's husband, Thomas Dustan, successfully petitioned the government for a bounty for the Indian scalps, even though such rewards had recently been abolished. He reasoned that his wife was "disposed & assisted by Heaven to do an extraordinary action, in the just slaughter of so many of the barbarians" (qtd in Caverly 39). The influential minister Cotton Mather, captivated by Dustan's experience, praises her actions and delivers a sermon on her capture and escape. His dramatization appears in not one, but three of his published texts—perhaps precisely because he could never truly come to terms with her radically transgressive actions.

The subversive potential of Dustan's story lies in the doubling of her sleeping Indians captors—her victimizers and victims—for the white patriarchy. By overcoming her captors in their sleep and killing them by turning their own weapons, the tomahawk, against them, Dustan reveals the uncanny agency and power of women to retool the very structures—cultural, social, and literary—that hold them in place. In his account of the

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<sup>123</sup> Dustan appears as *Duston* and *Dustin* in other accounts and in some historical references. I have opted for the spelling most commonly used by early American captivity scholars.

Dustan story, Cotton Mather struggles to represent and contain Dustan's actions that, despite his religious framing and political use, radically violate codes of feminine behavior. Left struggling with justifying her "notable exploit," Mather stresses (twice) the actual absence of law in the wilderness to justify her violation of the professed and male-guarded laws of God and society:

[. . .] when the whole Crew was in a *Dead Sleep*, (Reader, see if it prove not so!) one of these Women took up a Resolution to intimate the Action of *Jael* upon *Sisera*; and being where she had not her own *Life* secured by any *Law* unto her, she thought she was not forbidden by any *Law* to take away the *Life of the Murderers*, by whom her *Child* had been Butchered. She heartened the *Nurse* and the *Youth* to assist her in this Enterprize; and all furnishing themselves with *Hatchets* for the purpose, they struck such home Blows upon the Heads of the *Sleeping Oppressors*, that e'er they could any of them struggle into any effectual resistance [. . .]. (Derounian-Stadola, *Women's* 60)

Mather *suggests* legitimizing her actions through the absence of law, but he never fully endorses her. Dustan's agency—in avenging her dead child—exists prior to and independent from the ministerial authority represented by Mather. Thus, Mather can only suggest the primacy of individual judgment ("she thought she was") for an action that eclipses the authority of divine—and, by extension, ministerial and social—judgment. In other words, even in the hands of Mather's interpretive and rhetorical skill, the *story* of the female captive resists containment, just as the captive had defied her captors.

Furthermore, Mather's evocation of the biblical Jael likens Dustan to the wife of a Kenite who deceives and murders the Canaanite general Sisera by offering him kindness and shelter.<sup>124</sup> Inviting the general into her tent—her protective domestic space—she soothes the general with an ideal public female persona: “Turn in, my lord, turn in and fear not” (Judges 4.18). Providing him with milk, a blanket, and supposed safety by guarding the door, she insures that the general sleeps, and Jael quietly drives a nail of the very tent *protecting* him into his temple and into the ground upon which he lay. Praised for her actions as “Blessed above women,” this biblical heroine, and her successor Hannah Dustan, stand as archetypal examples of improbable figures who have the capacity and opportunity to wield agency in the service of larger historical causes (Judges 5.24).

Much like these figures, Evelyn Scott, Beatrice Ravenel, and Caroline Gordon embark on their own notable exploits against the sleeping oppressor, but by turning the pen, their own powerful tomahawk, on the male literati who continually contain their work. Through their reconception of the usable past of the captivity narrative, these women criticize cultural agents that want to shape the history of a woman's story. Furthermore, they seek to evoke change and desired release from southern white patriarchal codes of womanhood by demonstrating the movement of the white female body through mediated imprisonments. Refusing to normalize their privileged upbringing, these women perceive that captivity provides distance from the supposed ontological fixity of the South and regional culture through zones of inter-textual contact. The markers of the precursive genre in their modern hands seek to create a community of

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<sup>124</sup> See Judges 4:18-22.



captives as a means to dissolve patriarchal bondage—a metaphoric distance from white, male civilization. In sum, they re-imagine womanhood, create bonds with women, and force a critical eye on the colonizing impulse of white men. Wielding their own tropes of discursive captivity, they each become a version of the *Dux Faemina Facti*, “woman leader in the deed,” in an authorial attempt to center a female aesthetic against the male literary order of modern southern letters and mythical constructs of history that marginalize women and the racial Other (Derounian-Stodola, *Women’s* 343).

By interrogating the literary manifestations of early American tropes, specifically that of the captivity narrative, “Captive Women, Cunning Texts” has sought to open the doors to a distinct sub-genre that highlights a powerful precursive writing and publishing tradition by white women and to explore its influence on and re-invention by women writing of and from the modern South. By examining the three critical case studies of Evelyn Scott, Beatrice Witte Ravenel, and Caroline Gordon, this project formulates innovative interpretive approaches through its critical hybridity that shed light on the female literary landscape of the American South.

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