The Captivity Narrative and Its Influence on Maria Kittle and Edgar Huntly

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ABSTRACT

The captivity narrative emerged as an art form in early America and is essential to the growth of what is considered “American” literature. Puritan ideology and the central role of women in captivities fueled the rise. Because captivities were so widely read, the characterization of Indians became racial stereotypes. These stereotypes were often used to propagate Euro-American desires and beliefs. Captivity narratives impacted all genres of American literature, from domestic and sentimental to frontier and gothic. Ann Eliza Bleecker’s The History of Maria Kittle and Charles Brockden Brown’s Edgar Huntly will be used as examples of how the captivity narrative influenced these works.

Introduction

The calmness of the morning is shattered by indistinguishable yells, doors crashing down, the smell of smoke, and the sight of dead men on the ground with their heads scalped bare…

On a cover of a book stands a muscular Indian warrior caressing the arms of a young blonde woman filled with fear and longing…

The Indian princess Pocahontas protects the body of Captain John Smith from an axe…

These are some of the conflicting images that have been associated with Indian captivity since Indians and Euro-Americans first made contact. The disparity in these images is due to the Euro-Americans’ wavering reaction to the Native Americans. They could be barbaric killers, noble savages, or friends and saviors. These images were so extensively and repeatedly portrayed that they created stereotypes still present today. The Euro-Americans were so obsessed with tales of Indian captivity that
those who were captured and ransomed became local celebrities. They were encouraged to write down their experiences in hopes that others could learn from their story and to fulfill the public’s fascination with Indians. Captivity narratives were such best-sellers that some "historical" accounts were made up in order to take advantage of the money-making genre. Captivities also appeared in many other art forms and genres of American literature.

In this essay, I will briefly explore some of the historical background and the role of women in captivities before analyzing the influence of the captivity narrative on Ann Eliza Bleecker’s *The History of Maria Kittle* and Charles Brockden Brown’s *Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker*.

**Historical Background and Puritan Ideology**

What exactly is a captivity narrative? Alden T. Vaughan has defined captivity narratives in the most basic sense as those works which “presumably record with some degree of verisimilitude the experiences of non-Indians who were captured by American Indians […] printed separately in book or pamphlet form” (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 9). Captivity narratives were indeed very popular until the 20th century. A bibliography being compiled at the Edward Ayer Collection of the Newberry Library, the largest single repository of captivity texts, has over 2,000 items and is not yet complete (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 8).

As for the popularity of captivity narratives, Mary Rowlandson’s *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) appeared in thirty editions and John Williams’ *Redeemed Captive, Returning to Zion* (1707) sold over one hundred thousand copies and was still being published as late as 1918 (Namias 9). Captivity narratives also appeared in many other forms. The image of the Indian capturing innocent Euro-Americans, especially women and children, appeared in poetry, drama, adult fiction, newspapers, trial records, local histories, personal letters, paintings, etchings, cartoons, and woodblocks (Namias 9).

The number of captivity narratives implies that there were many captives. How many were really captured? One study names 750 New Englanders who were captured during the French and Indian War alone, and concludes that many more captives are probably unknown (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 2). Another study by Vaughan and Richter estimates that 1,641 Euro-Americans were captured between 1675 and 1763 (Namias 7). Additionally, one tribe of the Comanches had over 900 to 1,000 Mexican and Anglo captive adoptees in 1850 (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 2). For that to be possible, thousands more must have been captured for this number to still be living with the Comanches; and since
they are a Western tribe, their contact with Euro-Americans was limited compared to Eastern tribes. Hence, the numbers of captives among Eastern tribes must have been quite considerable.

There were four main reasons for capturing Euro-American settlers: revenge, money, adoption, and slavery (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 5). Revenge was the principal motive for taking captives. Indians were angry at the Euro-Americans who trespassed onto their lands and killed them in conflicts over land ownership and use. Angry over the death of family members, the Indians may have killed adult males in ritual ceremonies of death (such as torture). But they treated women and children differently, despite popular Euro-Americans myth. One issue never directly addressed in the captivity narratives is the threat of rape. Most female captives either report they were not molested or are silent. Research has shown that female captives indeed were not usually raped for many Indians practiced sexual abstinence during war. In many cases, captives were adopted and the captive could very well become a member of the offender's family. There is evidence, however, that Western tribes did rape their captives, perhaps in response to Euro-American sexual abuse of Indian women (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 4). The second principal reason for capture was that captives brought in money for the struggling Indians. Mary Rowlandson was exchanged for 20 pounds, the equivalent of a middle class worker's annual income. Towns and cities established trusts for ransoming captives and during the French and Indian War, the French in Canada offered money for captives, creating a market and consequently driving up the price of captives (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 5). Thirdly, the Indians needed to replace their diminishing population and adoption was the quickest way to accomplish it. Young children were the most likely to be adopted because they were easily adaptable. Many young children found the Indian culture preferable and stayed even after they could have left. Over 54% of girls and 30% of boys between the ages of 7 and 15 refused to return (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 6). If a captive was not adopted, she usually became a slave to the Indian who had captured her. Becoming a slave did not mean that they remained so for life; they were usually adopted or ransomed later (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 8). The reasons for capture and the sheer number does not explain, however, why the captivity narrative was so popular (Lewis 14).

Looking at captivity narratives from a postcolonial perspective, we perceive Euro-Americans setting up the Indians as a racial Other. Although captivity narratives were supposedly based on fact, many were exaggerated in order to conform to the structure of a captivity narrative. The Indians are usually portrayed as barbarians who scalp defenseless men, kill babies, and capture innocent white women. Euro-American authors of captivity
narratives may have hated Indians because of culture shock. Torn from their families, living without shelter, moving quickly through the forests which to them seemed un-navigable, and eating strange new foods traumatized many Euro-Americans. Many of the captivity narratives may be “a response, deflection, or attempt to deny that whites have been captured” (Sewell 40). That is, when the Indians captured Euro-American settlers, they turned the hierarchy upside down. No longer was the captive the one with power, language, and civilization, but one who was subservient to barbarian Indians (Sewall 43).

Puritan ideology was also largely responsible for the rise of captivity narratives. Recent research into the Puritan obsession with captivity themes has confirmed that such themes obsessed the Puritans before they immigrated to America. As James Lewis argues, the Puritans could not have invented a new imaginative form (the captivity narrative) without basing it on earlier forms already established (15). The Bible is certainly filled with abundant images and themes of bondage and captivity, but John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Michael Wigglesworth's *Day of Doom*, two very popular Puritan classics, are also about captivity. Most Puritans viewed "the whole of Human existence" as a form of "imprisonment" from which only God could rescue them (Lewis 15). The structure of the captivity narrative (capture, bondage, and ransom) also followed the three stages of conversion (contrition, despair, and salvation). The Puritans then, viewed narratives of Indian captivity as allegories and used them to understand their experiences in the new world (Ramsey 57). Ministers during the later 1600s and into the 1700s regularly preached that the many catastrophes which befell the Euro-American settlers were the result of their sin. As Tara Fitzpatrick summarizes, the ministers often were directly saying, "Repent [...] or you too may find your family seized and torn asunder by savages" (4). It is no marvel, then, that leading Puritan ministers such as Increase and Cotton Mather recorded and advocated the publication of captivity narratives. Because of their beliefs – viewing captivity as a test of faith and redemption – many Puritans believed Indians to be Satan's allies and as such did not hesitate in driving the Indians off their land and killing them in wars (Lewis 16). These views did not end with the Puritans but became so widespread that the stereotypes "became matter of fact assumptions in the vocabulary of all the New English who wrote about Indian culture" (Ramsey 56).

Euro-American Puritans could not only convert the Indians to a racial Other and therefore justify their actions, but they could easily extend their biased view to other groups – even Caucasians who practiced a different religion. The Catholics, most of whom were Irish immigrants, were portrayed as being so physically different that many Euro-Americans could distinguish an Irishman at a glance (Lewis 21). Cotton Mather
plainly saw the Indian captivity as a step towards Catholicism, for many captives were taken to Canada where the French Catholics lived. "If they become Captives, they fall into the hands of the Papists. The Papists will use more than ordinary Pains to debauch them," warns Mather (Fitzpatrick 8). It is peculiar how anti-Indian propaganda can be so easily transferred to whomever the Euro-Americans are in conflict with at the moment. As mentioned, during the French and Indian War, the French were only a step above the Indians but during the American Revolutionary War, the British were the captors, and the Euro-Americans the captives. The British were the ones who "massacred" Boston (Ramsey 59). Although many of the Puritan captivity narratives were written before the Revolutionary War when many wars between the colonists and the Indians took place, even after America became more "civilized" and real encounters with Indians declined, the captivity narratives and the way they constructed the image of the Indian continued (Woodward 115). The propagandist nature of the captivity narratives had set up stereotypical examples that would be used to stimulate Euro-American animosity towards Indians and other groups of marginalized people as Euro-Americans moved across the continent and across time (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 54).

**Women and the Captivity Narrative**

Captivity narratives were instrumental because for the first time, Euro-American women were writing about their experiences. Euro-American women were extremely interested in Indian warfare because it represented a threat to their safety. Indians, they felt, were murderers of husbands and protectors, massacred of innocent children, and an impediment to the civilization being built in America, which Euro-American women wished to embody (Baym 15). Indeed, the female victim at the center of the genre contributed to the popularity (Ellison 451). Captivities gratified Euro-Americans in their conception of a female victim who symbolizes a civilization and land in need of being rescued by Euro-American men from savage and undeserving Indians. Also, women during this period were the driving force behind the press and a large and growing readership. They probably enjoyed captivity narratives because they underlined the importance of women.

Earlier critics at first believed that Euro-American women were much more sympathetic to Indians than Euro-American men had been. This argument is unconvincing when one considers the racist language of Bleecker and Rowlandson. In the words of one critic, "disobedient women writers imported domestic conventions into [James Fenimore] Cooper's wilderness in order to confront and revise ethnocentric histories and the prejudices of white men's fiction" and consequently, they were "more
daring in its [their] depiction of the forbidden domain of miscegenation [...] and more respectful of native American cultures and of cultural relativity” (Tawil 100). While this may be true in some cases, white women were just as influential and active in constructing the racist stereotypes. Since Columbus' voyage during the Renaissance, America had been represented in Europe not as a “pious Puritan,” “a white husbandman,” or even a “dashing explorer” as many Americans may think, but as a "naked, voluptuous American Indian woman” (Smith-Rosenberg 482). Many Euro-American women, then, were consciously setting themselves up as the new "American Eve" (Tawil 100). In doing so, they often tried to represent that "naked, voluptuous American Indian woman" as Other. Gayatri Spivak, using Jane Eyre as an example, points out that white women often refused to acknowledge women of color and while they differed with the men on some issues, were in total agreement in support of Europe's imperialism (Smith-Rosenberg 486). Bleecker, for instance, portrays the Indian women in Maria Kittle as more savage than their male counterparts.

Women returning from captivity were often celebrated. Perhaps because more women stayed with the Indians than men and it was felt that being a female captive was a harder disposition than being a male captive, women were a greater concern. Also in the Christian faith, it was very widely believed that women had fallen souls. They were easily tempted and became temptresses themselves, had intuitions and often-supernatural powers (i.e. witches), and were supposedly closer to nature. In a sense, women were more similar than men to the heathen Indians (Woodard 122). Becoming a captive then, represented to many Puritans a supreme test of faith. Easily tempted women stayed and those who made it through their ordeals were symbols of virtue and revered as models.

Since the female captive was made an example to follow or to avoid, she soon became entwined in the domestic and sentimental genres. I will explore one of the earliest fictional accounts of the captivity narrative immersed within the language and conventions of the domestic and sentimental novel.

**Domestic + Captivity Narrative = Maria Kittle**

Ann Eliza Bleecker begins The History of Maria Kittle with this warning: "However fond of novels and romances you may be, the unfortunate adventures of one of my neighbours, who died yesterday, will make you despise that fiction, in which, knowing the subject to be fabulous, we can never be so truly interested" (Bleecker 3). It is fairly obvious that Bleecker intended Maria Kittle to follow in the tradition of the captivity narrative by trying to lead her audience away from the sentimental novels
and towards the more “historical” captivity narratives. However, Bleecker's *Maria Kittle*, published in 1797, is fiction and one of the many examples of how the captivity narrative was easily adapted into the other genres – especially the sentimental or domestic novel. In light of this view, the captivity narrative can be re-examined and it can just as well be said that the sentimental or domestic novel was easily adapted into captivity narratives (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 388).

Sentimental novels such as *Charlotte Temple* (available in America in 1792) and *The Coquette* (1797), although seemingly different from captivity narratives, are essentially the same. A young heroine must confront a dark, foreign, and dangerous villain who exposes her to an unprotected world (Woodward 116). The heroine is torn from her family and friends into the world of the villain and left to survive on her own as many captivity narratives portray. Other novels were not only concerned about the Indian wars or hostilities but how to conduct a courtship or find a mate in these conditions. James Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826) is better known today, but *Hobomok* (1824) by Lydia Maria Child and *Hope Leslie* (1827) by Catharine Maria Sedgwick were equally concerned with finding a mate in times of Indian hostilities (Tawil 99). Not surprisingly, Bleecker's *Maria Kittle* reads like a true captivity narrative although it is fiction and revolves around Maria's search for her husband.

Maria Kittle is a characterization in a long line of captive women. June Namias has identified the three major types of captive women: Survivor, Amazon, and Frail Flower. The Survivor is someone who adapts, makes sense of and accepts her situation (Namias 29). Mary Jemison would be an example of a Survivor. Captured by Shawnee Indians when she was fifteen and later adopted by Senecans, Jemison chose to stay with her adopted family for many years. Later when Euro-Americans moved westward towards her land, she was a link between the two cultures. The Amazon captive was a woman who usually resisted captivity in violent ways. Hannah Dustan was captured in 1697 but during the night was able to scalp ten of her twelve captors and return home. The portrayals of the Amazon captive were excessively bloodthirsty and racist, but they filled the new role in America of the fierce and defending mother/warrior figure that would be especially needed during the Revolutionary period (Namias 36). The last figure of female captivity is the Frail Flower. She is usually helpless, distraught, and miserable throughout her captivity and has trouble afterwards dealing with some of the results of captivity.

Bleecker begins not with the attack that usually starts a captivity, but with the depiction of the domestic serenity that is destroyed by the Indians’ assault. While most sentimental novels depicted the adventures or consequences of being too forward or sexually easy, Bleecker portrays her protagonist as a paradigm of virtue. Obeying her parents, she marries a
"relation of her's [...] although not handsome [...] his learning and moral virtues more particularly recommended him to her esteem" (5). They retire to Mr. Kittle's farm where she is blessed with two children and lives in "tranquil enjoyment" (6). This picturesque setting is interrupted by the arrival of the French and Indian War and the "horrid depredations" being committed by Indians on innocent families such as the Kittles. In what Ellison has called the "rape of the pastoral" Bleecker describes how the Indians burn Maria's house and fields and then all the grain fields they pass (458). The attack on innocent people and nature leads to an almost apocalyptic end for the Indians. While Maria is in captivity, Bleecker writes of an earthquake and fiery meteors which frighten the Indians. Believing that God is finally punishing the Indians, she runs as "Lot did from Sodom" (41). The contrast between the introduction and the arrival of the Indians makes apparent the threat that Bleecker and many Euro-American women believed Indians were to the domestic sphere (Ellison 451). It is the Indians who are the catalyst for Maria's loss of her domestic happiness: her children, her husband, and her home.

Maria's loss is based on Bleecker's own experiences. Bleecker was never a captive, although she did have some near encounters. In 1777, while her husband was away trying to find another place to live because of the fear of British attacks, Bleecker was forced to flee with her two young daughters when she received news that Indians were attacking two miles from her village. The roads were filled with other colonists escaping and Bleecker begged for assistance, but none was given. She reunited with her husband, but lost her elder daughter, Abella. Four years later, Bleecker’s husband would be captured while he was out harvesting. Her husband was rescued after only a week in captivity, but the trauma was too much for Bleecker and she delivered a stillborn child shortly after his return (Ellison 452-453).

The loss of her two children from these events would cause Bleecker to portray Indians as threatening the venerated state of motherhood. In Maria Kittle, Bleecker describes over five children being killed by Indians. One of the most graphic is the mutilation of Maria's pregnant sister-in-law Comelia. "His [the Indian warrior's] sanguinary soul was not yet satisfied with blood; he deformed her lovely body with deep gashes; and, tearing her unborn babe away, dashed it to pieces against the stone wall [...]" (19-20). The baby killings are always narrated by the mother (or Maria) and filled with undisguised hatred for the Indian. This clever tactic of having the mother narrate the killing of her own child, of course, directs all sympathy towards the Euro-American mother and fosters hatred of the Indian. As Bleecker writes after Maria's son has been smashed against the stones of the house, "O hell! are not thy flames impatient to cleave the center and engulf these wretches in thy ever
burning waves? are there no thunders in Heaven – no avenging Angel – no God to take notice of such Heaven defying cruelties?" (22).

Bleecker also attacks Indian women, as if to suggest that not only are Indian men subhuman, but Indian women are also without any humanity. Before entering the Indian village, Maria expresses her longing for female companionship, "I shall [find] some of my own sex, to whom simple Nature, no doubt, has taught humanity; this is the first precept she inculcates in the female mind, and this they generally retain thro' life, in spite of every evil propensity" (43). Bleecker has Maria defend the Indian women in order to contrast her innocence with the "truth." Immediately after Maria's proclamation, she is assailed by "an old deformed squaw" with a pine-knot aimed at her head (43). The Indian savage who has been her keeper must rescue Maria from the old Indian woman. Bleecker shows that there is no civilization in the Indian culture because the women who are the keepers of order are even more savage than the men. Domestic harmony is achieved only when Maria reaches Canada and is surrounded by Euro-American women. Even then, her domestic circle is not complete for there are no men. Only with the return of her husband can Maria attain that domestic tranquility that she had before the Indian attack.

For all Bleecker's disparagement of Indians, she like many captives could occasionally portray Indians in an amicable way even when her main objective was to portray Indians as savages massacring innocent women and children. For instance, when Maria objects to the Indians' preparation of food, they immediately send out a young Indian to hunt for some wood-pigeons (35). The Indians also rest for over two days before traveling because of Maria's swollen feet (43). However, Maria does not see that the Indians have treated her more humanly than most Euro-Americans were treating their captives. She complains incessantly of the heat, fatigue, and the savage Indians. Bleecker is committing the same offense that many captivity writers did; Euro-Americans could not realize that the "Indians possessed a culture essentially different from their own but with an integrity of its own that the captive was, at the manifest level, usually incapable of seeing or appreciating" (Derounian-Stodola and Levernier 85).

Bleecker is able to depict humanity in others when they are of the same race as she. When Maria reaches Montreal, "an English woman" reaches out a hand to help her and Maria immediately notices her "humanity" in the act (46). Bleecker is even able to see the allies of the Indians, Frenchmen, on a humane level while denying humanity to the Indians. "From my infancy have I been taught that the French were a cruel perfidious enemy, but have found them quite the reverse," claims one of Maria's companions in Montreal (56). As revealed in this line, Euro-Americans were racist not only towards the Indians, but towards any particular group that they were fighting with at the time. However, Euro-
Americans could see the French and British as humans while the Indians remained sub-humane. Bleecker is among her contemporaries for she implores, "Would to Heaven! That the brutal nations were extinct, for never – never can the united humanity of France and Britain compensate for the horrid cruelties of their savage allies" (63). It is ironic that Bleecker could see that both the French and British had Indian allies but still only blame Indians for the casualties that she felt Euro-Americans were suffering at their hands.

In examining the Indian attacks of Maria Kittle, it is easily seen that Bleecker borrowed heavily from the many stereotypes of Indian captivity narratives. The way the Indians attacked, the smashing of the child into the brick wall, the burning of the fields and Maria’s subsequent release in Canada, could have been procured from any captivity narrative. In reviewing Bleecker's Maria Kittle, we can conclude that Bleecker was very prejudiced against Indians. However, her hatred of Indians stems from her powerlessness about her situation – for which she blames the Indians. Bleecker not only blames the Indians, but she also holds Euro-American men partly responsible. Mr. Kittle leaves Maria alone even after she pleads with him to stay, indicating that it was the fault of Euro-American men for not protecting their families as they should and getting themselves into wars with the Indians or Britain or France in the first place. It is around the same time that images of the gun-toting mother appear in popular magazines and artwork (Namias 34). If women wanted protection, then they were going to have to do it themselves. The only weakness of Bleecker is that she chooses to remain within the ideology and structure of the captivity narrative. She cannot acknowledge that the conflicts between Indians and Euro-Americans are oftentimes the result of Euro-American conflicts with France or Great Britain. The next example by Charles Brockden Brown, however, is more critical of the Euro-Americans’ role in captivity narratives.

**Frontier/Idea/Gothic Novel + Captivity Narrative = Edgar Huntly**

Charles Brockden Brown’s novel Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-walker has been viewed as social and political criticism of the founding of America. Just as in Puritan narratives where an individual often symbolizes a community, Edgar’s story is America’s story (Toulouse 256). What then does Edgar’s experience tell about the Pennsylvanian settlers and specifically their relations with the Native Americans? What, if anything, does Edgar’s story say about the emerging new country called America? While most Euro-Americans were enormously proud of their ideals regarding democracy, reason, and the rational mind, and celebrated such Enlightenment figures as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson,
Brown in *Edgar Huntly* challenges the rational pursuit of knowledge (Mackenthun 22). Edgar is so determined to find the murderer of Waldegrave that he is obsessively destructive. Edgar proves that even when he is in the midst of the action, his mind cannot account for all of his behavior (Weidman 17). America was also supposedly the land of opportunity and equality. That may have been true in rhetoric, but America, like Edgar wished to bury what it did not want to acknowledge, such as the genocide that made white America possible.

The depiction of the Indians in *Edgar Huntly* is often racist, leading many to believe that Brown is racist. For example, the Indians are nameless, faceless, and voiceless. But with Brown, there must be a distinction between what Edgar is saying and what Brown is saying. The Indians have no names, but then why should they? Throughout most captivity narratives, the Indians are only referred to as “Squaw,” “Master,” or “Indian” as Rowlandson does in hers.¹ The only Indian mentioned by name in *Edgar Huntly* is Old Deb and that is obviously not her real native name. Rather it is what Euro-Americans have named her until Edgar renames her Queen Mab.

Edgar presents the Indians as physically different from the settlers. He first describes the Indians when he comes upon them sleeping in the cave. Immediately, he knows that they are Indians from their “uncouth figures” and the moccasins “adorned in a grotesque manner” (164). The Indians are not only “uncouth” but they are positioned with their “back[s] turned towards” Edgar so that they are faceless (167). Indians are “beasts” of the woods for the last Indian that Edgar kills “moved upon all fours” (191).

Edgar also insinuates that Indians have been trained to do nothing else but fight with Euro-Americans and that they cause most of the conflicts. After he has killed the fourth Indian at Old Deb’s shed, he compares how he, who has no training, defeated four of them who have been trained from birth in the “artifices and exertions of Indian warfare” (185). The Indians also never speak during the novel except through Edgar. The importance of speech is realized when Edgar knows that the group approaching him are “friends” by their “voices” which “had something in them that bespoke them to belong to friends” (187). However, when Edgar later mistakes Sarsefield for an Indian, it is because he only hears the “treading of many feet” and sees “several figures” (211). Queen Mab is silenced even as Edgar gives her a voice. She can only speak through Edgar and it will be he who ultimately decides what she will say. For example, Edgar states that Queen Mab was angry because of the many

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¹ Rowlandson’s mistress was called Weetamoo but it is not until the 19th Remove that Rowlandson mentions it once.
injustices that had been committed by her neighbors, but these injustices were “groundless and absurd” according to Edgar (270). Edgar’s rhetoric here should not be mistaken for Brown’s. Brown is always presenting at least two views. Since Brown has already established Edgar as an unreliable narrator in regard to the events in the story, Queen Mab’s claims are probably genuine.

If as Smith-Rosenberg claims, Euro-Americans were trying to displace that “naked, voluptuous American Indian woman” in order to supplant her with their own motifs of America, Queen Mab is the Indian woman who refuses to go away. Described as “one female” whose “birth, talents, and age, gave her much consideration and authority,” she decides to stay even after the whole village leaves (198). Although she has aged since then, Queen Mab continues to be a reminder that what Edgar and his neighbors are living on is hers. She demands only that they clothe and feed her and yet is consistently pushed further and further westward until she finally sets her Indian countrymen, her “brothers and sons,” upon the people who have displaced her (200). Queen Mab may have had reason to be angry. She had been living in Norwalk until two years previously when, according to Edgar, “some suspicion or disgust induced her to forsake her ancient habitation, and to seek a new one” (200). What exactly caused Queen Mab to move, Edgar never lets the reader know. Edgar likes to portray Queen Mab rather fancifully or comically but the Indians do more than serve as mere backdrop for his story. Queen Mab is the cause and the leader of the rebellion and not the “fancy” or “subject of mirth and good humour” Edgar likes to think she is (199-200).

Edgar often portrays the Indians as the antagonists whom he is reluctantly forced to kill. In many ways, it is through his killing of the Indians and his rescue of the captive girl that Edgar becomes a hero and an adult (Weidman 17). However, the act of killing the Indians may be Edgar’s way of killing the “savage sinful” part of himself (Toulouse 253). Edgar is continually bathed in the blood of the Indians that he kills. He is also mistaken for an Indian and nearly killed by his mentor Sarsefield and the Euro-American settlers who are searching for Indians. Perhaps Edgar needs to kill the Indians to let out the frustration and rage that he feels. Immediately before Edgar wakes up in the cave, not knowing where and how he got there, Edgar learns that his fiancée, whom he had depended on for future financial security, is penniless. The fortune left to her upon her brother Waldegrave’s death is really Weymouth’s. In his letter to his fiancée Mary, he is almost too calm and accepting. “Repine not [. . .] regrets are only aggravations of calamity [. . .] and it is our duty to shake them off,” he counsels (149). In spite of these elevating words, his bitterness is apparent when he reprimands Mary for her “love of independence and ease, and impatience of drudgery” which are “carried to
an erroneous extreme” (148). However, one wonders if Edgar is not again projecting his own misdeeds onto Mary as he does with the Indians. He claims that it is she who has longed for the freedom from “daily labour” so that she could “indulge [her] love of knowledge and [...] social and beneficent affections,” yet it is he who has also longed for these freedoms (148).

Edgar is not the only one who wishes to destroy that “savage sinful” part of him. The Euro-American search party shares many similarities with the Indian warriors. Edgar describes the Indians as committing the “most horrid and irreparable devastation” (167). They seem to have no purpose in starting the attacks and yet Brown portrays the Euro-Americans in no less disparaging terms. Sarsefield narrates how they came upon the Indians by a brook and killed seven while they were “wholly unconscious of the danger which hung over them” (242). It is ironic that while Edgar has been picturing the typical Indian raid – early in the morning without warning, killing the inhabitants as they sleep, burning his uncle’s house – it is his uncle who has been doing the surprise killing. Edgar’s uncle, Mr. Huntly, is also extremely eager about going on the hunt. Unlike Mr. Inglefield with his “pacific sentiments,” Mr. Huntly is more than ready for the “arduous and sanguinary enterprise” of killing Indians (241). Mr. Huntly’s farm is on the site of the old Delaware village, and he has had many years of “experience in their [the Indian] wars” that makes him an “intrepid leader” when it comes to tracking Indians (243). Perhaps like Edgar, he is anxious to erase the Indians for he considers them a threat to his land. No matter what the emotion, the Indians had a way of representing what many Euro-Americans feared in themselves (Ramsey 63).

By portraying the Indians as the enemy and himself as the hero, Edgar may be one of the first in a long line of American heroes. American heroes are consistently portrayed as innocent, peaceful, and virtuous heroes who only respond when the enemy has committed some heinous crime. For instance, Sylvester Stallone describes his character John Rambo as "a reluctant warrior. [...] When he does get into a combative situation it is never against the enemy directly. It's always trying to rescue somebody and he's trying to fight his way out, not in” (Lewis 14). Stallone could have been describing Edgar Huntly as well for no matter how many people Edgar or Rambo kill and how much they destroy, there is always the myth of righteous violence on their side. They were only reacting to the enemy (Lewis 14). In Edgar Huntly, before Brown has Edgar kill the first Indian, we are given the story of Edgar's parents as well as a young infant sibling being murdered in their beds by Indians. For this reason Edgar cannot look upon a "savage without shuddering” (166). As if this were not reason enough, the Indians have captured a young girl whom no reader would
forgive Edgar for not rescuing. Although Edgar may on the surface seem like the typical hero, Brown wants us to see what is wrong with this image. Brown purposely uses the captivity narrative in his novel to expose the hypocrisy that was present in them. How does Edgar kill his first Indian? He does so with an Indian hatchet, implying that Edgar is just as barbaric as he accuses the Indians of being (172). Edgar's second weapon, Sarsefield's rifle which is obtained when an English officer dies in Bengal, links Edgar to the imperialistic English officer in India who is killing "Indians" (Smith-Rosenberg 493). The rifle has gone from one site of British colonialism, India, to America. In fact, the countries featured in Edgar Huntly besides America are Ireland, England, and India (Smith-Rosenberg 493). These three countries are well known for the way the British have oppressed and exploited the native peoples. As Edgar tells us, the rifle was "constructed for the purposes not of sport but of war" (179). Also immediately after Brown narrates the murder of Edgar's parents, he comments on a fact rarely acknowledged by Euro-American characters: "I knew that, at this time, some hostilities had been committed on the frontier; that a long course of injuries and encroachments had lately exasperated the Indian tribes; that an implacable and exterminating war was generally expected" (166). Brown is supporting Queen Mab's claims of injustices although he does not neatly put all together, but rather leaves little clues here and there. Because the captivity narrative is written from a first person point of view of someone who is longing to return home, it is easily forgotten that the very person writing the captivity narrative is often the intruder (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 394). Edgar Huntly was published in 1799 (although the action of the story takes place in 1787), and thirty years before, or around 1769 to 1771, the population of Pennsylvania doubled from Euro-Americans moving west onto Indian land (Smith-Rosenberg 483). Brown correctly presents Old Deb's view of the Euro-American settlers as "aliens and sojourners, who occupied the land merely by her connivance and permission" (199). Rowlandson, in her captivity, often writes as if the Indians were encroaching onto English land: "the Indians quickly spread themselves over the deserted English fields, gleaning what they could find" and there was a house "deserted by the English" in which she wanted to sleep (Armstrong and Tennenhouse 394-395).

The importance of the person who is telling the story is unquestionable. Edgar often writes as if he was the victim central to the genres of captivities and gothic novels, but Edgar is no victim (Mackenthun 22). Although he may keep mentioning that he has no experience in such a “contest and scene like this,” he admits to having a “spirit vengeful, unrelenting, and ferocious” (184). His attacks on the Indians become more vicious and offensive until finally he bludgeons the last Indian to death.
Then in a “freak of fancy” as Edgar names it, he sticks the dead Indian’s musket upright into the ground in a show of victory and triumph (194). Edgar has claimed from the beginning that he has only been defending himself or rescuing the captive girl, but it is evident from his action here that he is (like his uncle) an eager killer.

History is written by the conquerors; *Edgar Huntly* proves how critical the person narrating the story is. Waldegrave, Edgar, and Mrs. Lorimer all felt the need to write down their story or argument so that they could present their side of the story. Each felt the need to express his or her beliefs or prove that they are right even when it is obvious that they are wrong. The captives who came back to write their stories were in many ways like Edgar who came back from his traumatic experience but what they wrote is about as reliable as Edgar’s narrative.

**Conclusion**

Captivity narratives are often viewed as an anomaly in American Literature and Rowlandson’s is the only narrative routinely considered in classrooms. Captivity narratives should be valued as documentation of early American history as well as broader cultural heritage for they were so widely read that many of the themes and images became stereotypes and symbols of America. Their influence is felt in all genres of American literature, from domestic and sentimental to gothic novels. Authors like Bleecker used captivity narratives to structure a story about the powerlessness of women in a society that often left them unprotected from the very real threat of Indians. Women like Maria Kittle were frequently left in situations due to conflicts that were oftentimes beyond their control. Other authors, such as Brown, used captivity narratives to challenge a nation’s rhetoric about equality for all citizens. Captivity narratives served many purposes but they answered for many the question of American identity. Captivities propagated Euro-American desired beliefs and stereotypes and made a division in who belongs and who does not. The decline since the 20th century in captivity narratives could be a sign that the racism present in them is no longer needed and wanted, or the disinterest in captivity narratives could be a sign that we are ignoring what is better left forgotten. If only we, like Edgar, could misplace the manuscripts, we could hide the fact that we were once enticed by what shames us now. However, captivity narratives are significant documents of America’s racial complexity.
The Captivity Narrative and Its Influence on Maria Kittle and Edgar Huntly

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