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Women's Narratives of Confinement: Domestic Chores as Threads of Resistance and Healing

Jacqueline Marie Smith
University of South Florida, jgaspar1@aol.com

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Women's Narratives of Confinement: Domestic Chores as
Threads of Resistance and Healing

by

Jacqueline M. Smith

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

Major Professor: Phillip Sipiora, Ph.D.
Pat Rogers, Ph.D.
John Lennon, Ph.D.
Joseph Moxley, Ph.D.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Kyra Lance, for always being my inspiration and motivation to succeed. You have always been my sunshine.

I am humbled by the support and understanding of my family and friends, many of whom have been with me from the beginning as I began to flesh out my ideas for this project, using their patient ears as a soundboard. My parents, Edward and Pamela Smith, have offered unwavering support, and for that, I will always be grateful. Alden Mosher has helped me through every deadline, easing the burdens in the other areas of my life to facilitate my writing efforts. My dear friend, Jenny Draeger, has been a continued source of support and friendship. To each of you, thank you for believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

The term “narratives of confinement” redefines the parameters by which first-person, fictive and non-fictive, accounts of female captivity are classified, broadening the genre beyond Indian captivity narratives and slave narratives to include other works in which female narrators describe physical and/or psychological confinement due to tangible or non-tangible forces. Often these narratives exhibit the transformation of the drudgery of housewifery into powerful symbols of resistance and subversion, especially in reaction to traumatic events related to confinement. Needlework and food, including its preparation and distribution, frequently emerge as metaphors that express the ways in which disempowered women seek to regain control in their lives: sewing often represents an effort by women to seize power, blending the creative act with economic achievement; food preparation also relates to creativity and economic achievement and often represents love and nurturing. In this study, I examine three representative narratives of confinement, using close reading and scholarly evidence as support: Mary Rowlandson’s 1682 Indian captivity narrative, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*; Harriet Jacobs’ 1861 slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, and Toni Morrison’s 1987 fictional neo-slave narrative, *Beloved*. My examination begins the dialogue regarding the connection between domestic metaphors and narratives of confinement, broadening scholarship to allow more consideration for the subtle, feminized language of domesticity.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The lives of women, both fictional and historical, have been dominated, and often subjugated, under the burden of domestic tasks. However, some women writers have been able to transform the drudgery of housewifery into powerful symbols of resistance and subversion, especially in narratives in which female protagonists experience physical and/or psychological confinement. For centuries, and continuing into the twenty-first century, housework and the domestic arts largely remain in the domain of women, occupying an often- unappreciated, unobserved space in the American home. As such, “the business of housewifery, only the purposeful aspects – those concerned with producing and maintaining order and cleanliness and preparing food – are visible: everything else is tacit” (Rabuzzi 94). However, women have been able to achieve significant gains by practicing the skills of housewifery, despite the fact that their efforts often have been rendered invisible, as well as historically undervalued and devalued, by patriarchal society. Domestic tasks have allowed women to gain economic independence, commune with other women, and achieve feelings of mastery, especially in regards to domestic activities that result in a tangible product (sewing, quilting, cooking, etc.). Because domestic tasks are often unremarkable to society, they emerge in literature as an apt metaphor of resistance.

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* examines the psychological hold the past has over escaped slave, Sethe, and needlework helps convey how Sethe tries to appropriate an identity for herself as a young slave woman. One of the "rememories" (Morrison 43) that Sethe describes in *Beloved* is her marriage to Halle when she was a fourteen-year old slave. The young woman painstakingly creates a wedding dress from scraps of discarded fabric and netting found around her mistress's home in an attempt to make the day ceremonious in some tangible way, despite the fact that her marriage carried no legal weight. Sethe completes "the worst-looking gown you could imagine" (Morrison 71), later disassembling it so the pieces "wouldn't be missed" (70). In this incident, Sethe uses the domestic skills that she has honed as a young house slave to appropriate an essential human experience for herself, a marriage ceremony, which usually was denied to slaves in the antebellum South. In addition, she steals materials that will be overlooked, much as her efforts are largely unnoticed as she creates something that is considered to be without worth by her white mistress and master. In this instance, her sewing skills emerge as tools of resistance as Sethe subverts slave laws and local customs in her construction of a wedding gown, and the master's home, Sweet Home, becomes a site of quiet rebellion.

I contend that women writers, through the point of view of women narrators, often use images of domesticity to convey more to the readers than the simple accomplishment of a household task. Instead, these tasks become loaded images that express a myriad of ideas, such as resistance, creativity, and empowerment; when Sethe decides to fashion a wedding dress from discarded materials, she gains control of her future by utilizing creativity to subtly resist the slave system that denied her the

privilege of marrying. Some tasks, like sewing and quilting, are highly creative and skilled acts, and careful instruction has been conveyed to women in a matrilineal tradition. Not surprisingly, sewing often represents an effort by women to seize power in women's narratives, blending the act of creating a tangible product out of fabric and thread with economic achievement, in which these products are sold or bartered for personal gain. Food preparation, likewise, produces a tangible result and also relates to creativity and economic achievement since women are often able to sell or barter their cooking and baked goods for personal gain; however, food preparation in literature often represents love and nurturing as well. Conversely, food itself is often used in narratives as a symbol of subverting power, especially when the disempowered steals food. Due to the historical relevance of sewing and food to women readers, they are more likely to recognize the subtle metaphors of resistance in stories of female confinement.

Rationale for Narratives of Confinement

"Confinement" has been used since the eighteenth-century to describe "being in childbed; child-birth, delivery, accouchement" ("Confinement," def. 4). The term persisted into the late twentieth-century, used in medical journals to describe the stationary site of childbearing. In 1960, Dugald Baird published "Mothers' Preference in Confinement" in the *British Medical Journal* to explain a recent survey in which new mothers offered a preference regarding a home birth versus one in a hospital.

"Confinement" is used throughout this article as a term to describe the mothers' physical location during the birth procedure, encompassing labor, delivery, and recovery. Since

confinement simultaneously describes a literal loss of freedom as well as the uniquely female experience of losing physical freedom due to the biological mandates of childbirth, it serves as an accurate and inclusive term to describe narratives in which women have lost freedom, whether it has been lost due to forceful or subtle coercion. Throughout this study, confinement will be an over-arching term to encompass narratives in which women have lost freedom, including captivity narratives and slave narratives written by women. Narratives of confinement also exist as fictional accounts of female entrapment, exhibited in novels and short stories.

The term “confinement” is used in this context to describe a situation in which a woman loses her freedom due to voluntary or involuntary forces. The literary genres of the Early American captivity narrative and the American slave narrative exhibit distinct characteristics based on the narrators’ relationship to their captors and the cultural forces that shape their memoirs. Both genres examine women in captivity, but they also examine the male captivity experience, which is notably different in many ways; thus, neither genre accurately encapsulates the experience of female entrapment. Also, these genres only focus on involuntary captivity (at least initially), when in fact, some female narratives explore the complex experience of psychological and physical entrapment women sometimes recount being wives and mothers, as well as being subjects in a patriarchal society in which their efforts are ignored, suppressed, or punished. Due to these complexities, I affirm that a new term, “confinement,” needs to be used to accurately conceptualize the narrative describing the plight of the trapped woman.

Narratives of female confinement have fascinated audiences for centuries, from the 1682 publication of the Indian captivity narrative *A Narrative of the Captivity and*

Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson to late twentieth-century films like *Silence of the Lambs* and *Girl, Interrupted*, as well as twenty-first century TV series that focus on incarcerated women, like *Orange is the New Black*. Although images of entrapped women have always seemed to pervade American popular culture, their stories of captivity emerge in the literary canon in the form of first-person autobiographical accounts of slavery, like Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, involuntary domestic confinement, such as Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*; or perceived entrapment within patriarchal society, such as Sylvia Plath's confessional novel, *The Bell Jar*. Regarding the canon, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert in *The Madwoman in the Attic* that "[d]ramatizations of imprisonments and escape are so all-pervasive in nineteenth-century literature by women that we believe they represent a uniquely female tradition in this period" (85), an observation that could apply to other American literary works, such as the Indian captivity narrative that became popularized in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For instance, some of the more sensational narratives, often of dubious authenticity, showcase feminine captivity at the hands of "savages." These stories of female confinement, regardless of the time period or the genre, offer insight into varied positions of powerlessness that women have found themselves, frequently at the hands of the men who were trusted by the women themselves. Gilbert and Gubar observe one of the ways in which this powerlessness and domesticity emerge in nineteenth-century women's narratives: "Inevitably, then, since they were trapped in so many ways in the architecture – both the houses and the institutions – of patriarchy, women expressed their anxiety of authorship by comparing their 'presumptuous' literary ambitions with the domestic

accomplishments that had been prescribed to them” (85). This pattern is not isolated only to women’s narratives in the nineteenth-century as Gilbert and Gubar suggest; in fact, Rowlandson addresses her literary “presumption” as early as 1682.

Narratives of female confinement share some common conventions and patterns, raising the possibility that these works exist as a genre independent, yet interrelated, to other genres that are characterized by entrapment, such as the Indian captivity narrative and the slave narrative, of which there are many accounts of female captivity that have the potential to be classified as narratives of confinement. Furthermore, fictional accounts of captivity, such as the neo-slave narrative, also exhibit potential similarities that might allow them to be classified as narratives of confinement. The most obvious characteristic of the narrative of confinement, whether it be fictive or not, is that the first-person narrator is an adult female, often a mother. Furthermore, the narrator describes a captivity experience that has the following predictable pattern: she becomes forcibly separated from her home and/or children; she suffers physical confinement; she seeks a new identity while confined; she achieves freedom due to her efforts (i.e. freedom is not granted but earned); she becomes reunited with children and/or family; and she struggles with the psychological aftermath of the trauma of captivity. Narratives of confinement are not stories of despair and submissiveness, although these qualities appear, but rather stories of female survival and empowerment.

The key characteristic of these narratives is the transformative power of the captivity experience, urging the confined women to seek alternate identities that foster physical and psychological strength and often subvert the idealized contemporary feminine identity at the time the narrative was published. Often, the new identity is

honed by the strategic use of domestic skills to subvert the power structure holding the captives, a power structure that is often simultaneously cultural and personal, as well as simultaneously physical and psychological. For instance, in the case of slavery, the cultural institution and individual masters worked together to perpetuate slavery in the American South, physically and psychologically stunting slaves' abilities to function at their full potential. In the slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, narrator Linda Brent uses domesticity, especially needlework and cooking, to show how she and other slaves worked to undermine the immediate authority, their masters, as well as the wider authority, the slave economy of the American South. However, the use of domestic skills also serves as a catalyst for change; Brent uses needlework and cooking in her narrative to express subversive ideas, such as the power and influence of slave families and a femininity that relies on manipulation and cleverness, not submission or pliability.

Beneath the plot of captivity and horror described in many women's narratives of confinement are threads of resistance as female captives seek ways to gain power in their efforts to survive, and, often, thrive. Frequently, these forms of resistance are veiled, possibly even to the writers themselves, as the trapped women simultaneously struggle with physical confinement as well as feelings of social confinement as they justify their chastity, devotion to children, or adherence to other social norms. Domestic metaphors perfectly suit this conflict since readers, especially male readers, usually ignore most images of domesticity. A female writer, struggling with her own story of trauma and the pressure to maintain society's ideal of perfect womanhood, uses

domestic metaphors to convey her desire for power, independence, and creativity while advocating traditional feminine roles.

Narratives of confinement continue to be pertinent in the twenty-first century, while the slave narrative and Indian captivity narrative have lost some of their relevance; after all, the possibility of slavery or Indian captivity no longer haunt the consciousness of most Americans. In *The Nature of Narrative*, Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg assert that “[i]ndividual literary works do not always die off, though their forms may cease to be viable” (11). While this holds true for most slave narratives and Indian captivity narratives, narratives of confinement, on the other hand, continue to resonate with readers and allow for modern contributions since they can encompass fictional accounts of confinement and are not restricted by exigencies of time or place.

Domesticity in the American Home

Since household chores are often associated with the mundane and ordinary, their importance to women’s narratives remain a largely unexplored critical area, probably partially due to the fact that scholars also view these chores as drudgery and associated with the historical subjugation of women. Luce Irigaray notes how housework and domestic chores have limited, and continue to limit, the social progress of women:

What we have here are the structures of a socially constructed division of labor that continues to operate in the guise of apparently pure economism.

Women shall perform reproductive and unpaid domestic labor, men paid

productive work – these categories are still at work and what is taken to be self-evident or at least partial social progress. (119-20)

However, domestic tasks also have the ability to illuminate the deeper thoughts and motivation of women who refer to them in their narratives. Jane Tompkins suggests in *Sensational Designs* that critics should expand their study to non-canonical literature “not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment” (xi). I contend that this logic should be extended to apply to images of domesticity in women’s literature since these references often serve as a common, and easily recognizable, language between women writers and their female readers, while showing societal values towards housework and femininity.

Settlers arriving to the American colonies from northern Europe brought their gender roles and divisions of labor with them. Although New England Puritans “believed women to be naturally subordinate to men,” women enjoyed greater freedom and equality in the New World, partially due to the shortage of women in the colonies and the resulting “great need for labor” (Bremer 115). However, in marriage, women still bore the responsibility of homemaking while their husbands took care of legal and economic matters. In Puritan Massachusetts, as well as in England, “a married woman could hold no property of her own. When she became a wife, she gave up everything to her husband and devoted herself exclusively to managing his household” (Morgan 42). Because so many Puritan families were farmers, “[w]omen who were not tied down by young children probably spent their time outdoors working in gardens or with their men

in the fields” (Main 53). Puritan women who cared for children spent most of their time indoors, attending to household duties that centered primarily around a large fireplace, where “the family performed its numerous indoor activities: cooking, baking, brewing, eating, spinning, knitting, sewing, making candles, praying, reading, and conversing” (Bremer 116-117). The women of the Puritan home were responsible for “two of the necessities of life – food and clothing” (Crane 102), which would require them to spend a large portion of their day working near the fireplace preparing food and engaging in needlework to meet the needs of their families.

The division of labor for household tasks did not change much in the subsequent centuries, and women still toiled around the fireplace preparing food and creating garments and bedding for the family in eighteenth and nineteenth-century America. Women from wealthy households often hired servants or used slaves to help with domestic chores, freeing their time to work on more ornamental sewing projects, such as embroidery (Osaki 226). Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds often worked as servants or in “the needle trades” (Crane 107) to earn money, often competing against men who sought the same work with less training. However, the pay was poor for these women; “[t]he account books indicate that although slaves were hired at rates lower than those of white males, they were still paid more than white adult females” (107). For slave women, “Semiskilled, and especially skilled, jobs were less available to women, 80% of whom labored in the fields. Most of the women not employed in fieldwork were servants, seamstresses, or nurses” (Steckel 45). Female house slaves “did most of the sewing and weaving on the largest plantations,” not simply assisting their mistresses in these activities as once thought (Cash 31); however,

female slaves were left with the most labor-intensive chores of a household, working long hours and often suffering abuse by their masters and mistresses.

Various forms of needlework dominated the lives of American women for centuries and often served as an indicator of a woman's femininity and desirability, despite race and socio-economic status. Seventeenth-century English boarding schools prepared young women in "the social graces which it was thought would enable women both to attract husbands and to occupy their leisure hours once they were married" (Stone 230). Among the skills taught were "embroidery and needlework," which held precedence over other subjects such as "reading, writing, music, dancing and the French language" (230). In *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*, Rozsika Parker notes that "[w]omen's education became tolerated only when it was sufficiently differentiated from men's by the addition of music, dancing, and *embroidery*. Praise for a woman's learning was invariably accompanied by words of admiration for her skill with a needle" (74). Sarah Wilson, advertising for a Philadelphia boarding school in the eighteenth-century, indicates that at her school female students would "be taught all sorts of fine needlework, viz., working on catgut or flowering muslim, sattin stitch [sic], quince stitch, tent stitch, cross-stitch, open work, tambour, embroidering curtains or chairs, writing and cyphering" (Hechtlinger 53). Clearly, "writing and cyphering" were a less crucial part of a young eighteenth-century woman's education than needlework, which remained the focus of the advertisement. In fact, femininity and desirability were so dependent on sewing skills that men in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries "looked at a woman's sewing skills as well as her cooking talents, wealth, and social status when seeking a bride" (Osaki 225).

Despite the significance of sewing skills to the early American household, the kinds of needlework practiced by women varied according to their socio-economic status. Parker observes, “By the eighteenth century embroidery was beginning to signify a leisured, aristocratic life style – not working was becoming the hallmark of femininity” (11). In a study of the Eleuthère Irénée du Pont household in the 1830s, Amy Boyce Osaki notes that a sewing hierarchy existed in this wealthy household:

[T]he hierarchy of sewing was determined by skill and status. For plain work – sheets, towels, and items needed for the powder yards – Eleuthera [du Pont’s daughter] usually relied on the domestic staff... Formal gowns for weddings were normally done at home with help from Mrs. Waterman, the family seamstress... Eleuthera reserved fancy work – embroidered collars, cuffs, caps, and dresses for everyday and Sunday attire – for herself. (230)

This hierarchy summarily explains the various levels of sewing skills American women might have possessed in the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries, from the more practical and less ornamental work done by servants and slaves to the highly skilled and decorative work done by wealthier women, including professional seamstresses who were skilled enough to be paid for their needlework. In the slave economy, needlework, especially quilting, provided female slaves with supportive social networks that “sustained hope and provided survival strategies” since women often worked together in their domestic textile labors, ushering in the later tradition of African-American quilting bees (Cash 31). Sewing and skilled needlework were an experiential

commonality in American women's lives, crossing divisions of race and socio-economic conditions.

Because sewing dominated so much of women's waking hours in the centuries following American colonization, it is not surprising that it emerges in women's literature as a recurrent metaphor. In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar identify sewing as one of the common motifs that "are associated with key themes in female lives (hence in female writing)," along with blood and enclosure (37). In his 1988 *College English* article, Ozzie J. Mayers notes that the "conventionality of sewing, however, masks its subversive power," especially the symbolic effort to survive "that is as American as the hunt or the subjugation of the frontier" (667). However, sewing emerges in literature as more than a metaphor for simple physical survival; sewing, as a creative and feminine act, also represents women's desire to psychologically survive and thrive in situations in which freedom and will have been forcibly reduced and/or removed. In her introduction to *The Subversive Stitch*, Parker identifies the subversive nature of embroidery: "Historically, through the centuries, it has provided both a weapon of resistance for women and functioned as a source of constraint. It has promoted submission to the norms of feminine obedience and offered both psychological and practical means of independence" (xix). When faced with the trauma of confinement, women writers often use sewing as a metaphor for creating space in which women might gain power, even if the gain is as minor as bartering sewing skills for food, as in the case of Mary Rowlandson.

Food preparation was another domestic activity that was practiced irrespective of race and socio-economic status by women in the centuries following early European

colonization in North America. Similar to sewing, food preparation was a regular, necessary task for survival and was relegated to females in rural households initially due to their smaller physical size, along with other light domestic chores; “gender-based assignments of many farm chores centered on objective differences in body height and strength rather on what was deemed culturally appropriate to one sex or the other” (Main 55). These gender roles became cemented into societal expectations, forcing eighteenth-century women to remain “in or around the home,” while men and boys often left home to fulfill their domestic obligations (56). Food preparation and oversight, like sewing, was a responsibility of women in upper-class households as well as less affluent women. Unlike cleaning and many aspects of childcare, sewing and food preparation remained a measure of desirable femininity, and women from wealthy households continued to practice both, even with servants or slaves that could complete these tasks for them. For example, in the du Pont household, which was the focus of Osaki’s study about sewing in the nineteenth-century, the “daughters’ household routine included supervising the servants, preparing food, housekeeping, reading, writing, drawing, playing the piano, and sewing” (226). Most of the activities that occupied their free time were recreational, with the exception of a few household tasks, including sewing and food preparation.

Food preparation also could take several forms, such as fire-tending, boiling, roasting and baking, as well as the creation of dairy products and beer. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich studies women’s lives in New England from 1650 to 1750 in *Good Wives*, including a close examination of women’s chores. Regardless of the kind of food being prepared, Ulrich notes that the “most basic of the housewife’s skills was building and

regulating fires” in order to provide a heat source upon which to cook (20). Because “cooking and baking were year-round tasks,” the fire needed to be tended all year (20-21). Just as needlework was dependent on the types of materials available, food preparation was also dependent on ingredient availability, partially due to seasonal crops and hunting and a household’s ability to procure luxuries like sugar and coffee. However, baking remained the most challenging cooking task prior to the twentieth-century, especially since “bread-making was based on a self-perpetuating chain, an organic sequence which if once interrupted was difficult to begin again” (21). According to Hechtlinger, baking “never became the most common method of cooking” in the colonies due to the time-consuming process it required (90). Instead, cooking in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries in America consisted mainly of “hashes, ragouts, and the traditional boiled dinner” due to relative simplicity of these dishes since they could be cooked over the fire unattended for a number of hours while other chores were attended (90).

Food preparation consumed many hours of women’s time, as historical records and accounts suggest, and it emerges in literature as an important metaphor in narratives of confinement. Food preparation relates to survival and nurturing, while the theft of food itself often represents a subversion of power. Life ceases without the consumption of the nutrients found in food, so its link to survival in literature is not surprising. However, obtaining and preparing food, as a metaphor, often reflects pleasure and love, even eroticism, in women’s literature. Food preparation, unlike sewing, more often refers to the body and its need for physical sustenance and pleasure, as well as the cook’s desire for emotional sustenance and pleasure. Food

preparation, like sewing, represents hope in the future and the desire to achieve some modicum of control over situations of confinement and repression.

In addition, the theft of food itself is frequently used in narratives of confinement to illustrate a deliberate and careful subversion of power, whether the pilfered food has already been prepared or exists as unmodified food items. In *Weapons of the Weak*, James C. Scott observes that “forms of stubborn resistance are especially well documented in the vast literature on American slavery, where open defiance was normally foolhardy” (33). However, Scott notes that the “slaves themselves appear to have realized that in most circumstances their resistance could succeed only to the extent that it hid behind a mask of public compliance” (34). One of these “forms of stubborn resistance” exhibited in slave narratives, such as the one written by Harriet Jacobs, is the pilfering of food, occurring even when slaves knew that the consequences could be dire, or even fatal. This kind of resistance also emerges in other narratives of confinement when food is stolen to bolster survival as well as to disrupt the balance of power, even if the disruption is barely perceptible to outsiders.

Reconstruction of the Traumatic Event

Current trauma theory – more particularly the work of Judith Lewis Herman, Cathy Caruth, Michelle Balaev, and Susannah Radstone – is invaluable in a consideration of the traumatic experiences of abduction, confinement, and in understanding attempts to narrate such traumatic experiences. Undoubtedly, understanding psychological and literary studies that address trauma theory can help explain how trauma emerges in the captivity and slave narratives, and other narratives

of confinement, as well as how its presence may have encouraged, or even inhibited, the retelling of the account. Herman asserts that patients must record their traumas by following a prescribed format, a necessity that has been followed by autobiographers for centuries prior to Herman's recommendation. This suggested format raises the question of whether Herman's pattern is established because of these early narratives or whether this pattern is natural to the storytelling of the chronically traumatized. Although the definitive reasons for the emergence of this pattern remain unresolved in these narratives, it is quite possible that the pattern developed in response to the interaction of a variety of external variables, such as the narrators' attitudes toward both society and family life, as well as the inherent human quest to make sense of a traumatic experience. Regardless of the reasons for the pattern, it is indisputable that it exists in many Indian captivity narratives, slave narratives, and other narratives of confinement.

Survivors of captivity often attempt to integrate the trauma of events such as abduction and confinement into their life stories in an effort to understand why the experience happened to them, whether they were born into captivity or kidnapped. In her chapter "Remembrance and Mourning," Herman establishes that recounting the trauma is a crucial step in the recovery process for a survivor. Herman describes a psychological pattern of remembrance that closely follows the structure of the Indian captivity narrative and slave narrative, despite the age, gender, or nationality of the narrator, as well as the possible influence of editors or amanuenses. The therapeutic steps in reconstructing the traumatic event generally follow this pattern: a review of life prior to the trauma as well as the details of the traumatic event; the presentation of facts regarding the traumatic event; traumatic and sensory imagery; and a sincere effort at

trying to find meaning in the traumatic event (176-78). Although Herman is advocating that modern psychotherapists urge their patients to reconstruct their traumatic events in writing, her process closely mirrors that of narrators of Indian captivity narratives and slave narratives, who apparently sensed the therapeutic effects of describing the trauma of abduction and captivity, sometimes decades after the fact. In fact, James Olney describes a conventional structure for the slave narrative that roughly follows Herman's therapeutic pattern in "'I Was Born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature." Olney identifies 12 distinct conventions for slave narratives, which follow and expand on Herman's pattern of reconstructing a traumatic event, including: accounts of early life and slavery, a "description of a cruel master, mistress, or overseer," account(s) of the slave auction and the separation of families, escape attempt(s), and final "reflections on slavery" (152-153). Olney writes about how memory functions in autobiography: "It is in the interplay of past and present, of present memory reflecting over past experience on its way to becoming present being, that events are lifted out of time to be re-situated not in mere chronological sequence but in patterned sequence" (149). This natural process of memory accounts for some of the similarities in narratives of traumatic confinement, allowing the survivors to contextualize and express the trauma in writing months, or years, after their release.

Much of recent literary trauma theory focuses on fictional works; yet these studies help explain the role trauma may have played in captivity and slave narratives. The work of critics such as Caruth, Balaev, and Radstone helps contextualize how narrators might have incorporated trauma into their texts. The retelling of the experience of entrapment clearly fits Caruth's definition of a "story of trauma," which is a "narrative

of a belated experience... far from telling of an escape from reality – the escape from a death, or from its referential force – [the narrative] rather attests to its endless impact on a life” (7). Indeed, captivity and slave narratives emerge more as stories of survival and acclimation than of violence and terror. These narratives, as Caruth suggests, reverberate with life, not death; yet indisputably, trauma marks the texts, as it inevitably had marked the narrators. Caruth explains:

The crisis at the core of many traumatic narratives – as I show concretely in my readings of Freud, Duras, and Lacan – often emerges, indeed, as an urgent question: Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival. (7)

For Caruth, these stories reflect a “wound that cries out,” and the wound takes the form of the narration itself as it strives to recreate the trauma and its aftermath (4). In “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory,” Balaev offers a concise definition of trauma as it emerges in literature: “Trauma, in my analysis, refers to a person’s emotional response to an overwhelming event that disrupts previous ideas of an individual’s sense of self and the standards by which one evaluates society.” Narrators of trauma have already endured and survived the abduction and/or captivity and likely have already synthesized the experience in a way that fits their worldview. Identifying the discord between a person’s “sense of self,” both before and after the traumatic event, is problematic in a first-person narrative that omits a detailed profile of the narrator’s psychological well being prior to

the event, such as in captivity and slave narratives. In contrast, Radstone believes that offering a concise definition of trauma is impossible since “subjectivity is implicit within trauma theory,” a problem that she sees as pervasive in published works on the theory, including that of Caruth (13). In “Trauma Theory: Contexts, Politics, Ethics,” Radstone writes, “To date there has been little discussion or debate concerning either the model of subjectivity implied by trauma theory, or the theoretical difficulties negotiated by that model” (13). Citing Ruth Leys’ theories on trauma, Radstone explains that critics must understand both a “mimetic and an anti-mimetic theory of trauma” (14). Of mimetic trauma, Radstone asserts, “The notion of subjects absent from themselves and involuntarily mimicking a past traumatic experience threatened to de-stabilize the sovereignty of those subjects. In the mimetic theory of trauma, that is, traumatized subjects are neither fully in control of nor in charge of themselves” (14). On the other hand, but no less unflattering to the victim, is an anti-mimetic theory of trauma in which the traumatic event happens to a passive subject, in which “the production of memories is no longer understood to be linked to the unconscious, unbidable, processes of the inner world” but exists as “the unmediated, though unassimilated records of traumatic events” (14). Trauma theory continues to evolve, and the study of it will help scholars reveal how survivors, and narrators, of trauma incorporate their experiences into their self-image and broader worldview.

For those who have endured and survived trauma, the integration of the experience into their life story can become obfuscated, a result that modern psychologists and psychiatrists, such as Herman, seek to remedy by having the traumatized recount their stories, either verbally or in writing. Caruth asserts that trauma

is a “wound that cries out” to be heard (4), which Radstone problematizes in her discussion of mimetic and anti-mimetic theories of trauma, asserting that the memories of trauma are unreliable. For some of the Anglo-American survivors and narrators of Indian captivity and the African-American slaves freed or escaped from bondage, trauma seems to function as a motivation to record the experience; however, the reader cannot be sure of the accuracy of the memories, not only due to elapsed time but because of the “instability” of the narrators’ recollection of events. Perhaps it is in the space between the initial trauma of abduction and the process of integrating the event into the captives’ self-image that acculturation becomes assimilation as the captives struggle to recontextualize their ideas of self with their newly altered worldview.

Chapter Organization

In the next chapters, I will examine three first-person narratives of female confinement in American literature; two of the narratives are considered true accounts related directly by the traumatized women, while the third is a fictionalized account of a woman who suffers confinement and abuse as a slave in the American South. The narrators of these accounts came from varying backgrounds and from different geographical locations, yet their accounts share similarities. These narrators use a common feminized language of domestic chores, especially sewing and food preparation, to give a voice to the “wound that cries out” (Caruth 4), using a structure that Herman identifies in survivor accounts of trauma, centuries after some of early narratives of confinement were written and published.

Since Chapter One provides background on the concepts of confinement and a brief historical context of women's relationship with housework, Chapter Two will establish the scholarly conversations regarding the three narratives of confinement that will be examined in my dissertation, generally focusing on scholarship that addresses housework, subversive metaphors of resistance, and trauma. First, I will discuss the scholarship of the American Indian captivity narrative, focusing on Mary Rowlandson's narrative, since it began receiving consistent critical attention in the 1940s, and I will proceed through scholarship published in the twenty-first century. In Chapter Two, I will examine critical trends regarding the American slave narrative, with a focus on Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents*, especially since the 1980s when scholarly attention began focusing on the role of gender in slave narratives. Lastly, Chapter Two will discuss critical trends regarding Toni Morrison's *Beloved* since the publication of the novel in the late 1980s. Although the novel has received significant critical attention, my focus primarily will be on scholarship that specifically relates to domesticity and dominant metaphors of the novel.

Chapter Three will analyze the narrative of confinement written by Mary Rowlandson, in which she describes her months of captivity with an Indian tribe that abducted her from her home during a skirmish in Metacom's War (King Philip's War). This chapter will begin with an examination of family life in Puritan New England, especially the role and legal standing of women in the colonies. In addition, the role of women and female captives in the New England tribes will be compared in order to contextualize Rowlandson's role in each society that she inhabits. Furthermore, I will demonstrate how Rowlandson's narrative exhibits Scott's subtle and "stubborn forms of

resistance” (33), especially related to her entrepreneurial sewing with the Indians as well as her complicated depiction of food, food preparation, and hunger. I will contend that Rowlandson deliberately shields these forms of resistance from male Puritan readers by “hiding them in plain sight” in metaphors and references to domesticity.

Chapter Four will examine the narrative of confinement written by Harriet Jacobs, who was born into slavery yet was able to escape to New York as an adult after years of hiding from her master and his continual threat of sexual abuse. This chapter will also describe the typical American slave family structure and living conditions, as well as the unique challenges facing female slaves in order to explain Jacobs’ motivation for concealment and eventual escape. In addition, female domesticity and housework will be explored in nineteenth-century America, in relation to both free women and slave women. This will contextualize the references to domesticity and chores that Jacobs includes in her narrative, in order to understand how she and her readers would perceive these metaphors. As with Rowlandson’s narrative, needlework (such as sewing) and food and its preparation will be examined, especially when they serve as metaphors of resistance.

Chapter Five will consider the neo-slave narrative *Beloved* (1987) by Toni Morrison which fictionalizes the historical account of escaped slave, Margaret Garner, who attempts to murder all of her children rather than having them returned to slavery. This chapter will continue the discussion of slave family dynamics and living conditions, as well as provide an examination of the lives of freed slaves in Reconstruction Ohio and other northern states. As with Chapters Three and Four, this chapter will define the role domesticity and housework played in the lives of nineteenth-century women,

particularly African American women. Needlework (especially quilting) will be discussed as well as food and its preparation, particularly when they serve as metaphors of resistance and rebellion.

In an effort to establish the immense diversity in the experiences of those female narrators who survived confinement, the Conclusion will focus briefly upon two additional and very different confinement experiences, Kate Chopin's fictional account of voluntary confinement in marriage and motherhood, *The Awakening* (1899), and the autobiographical fictional account of Sylvia Plath's mental breakdown and subsequent institutionalization, *The Bell Jar*, published in 1961. The inclusion of these examples of American fiction emphasizes the universality of the subversive use of domesticity in narratives of confinement, applying to narrators who are confined by intangible forces, such as the institution of marriage and mental illness, respectively.

CHAPTER TWO: SURVEY OF CRITICISM

Early scholarship regarding the Indian captivity narrative primarily discusses the legitimacy of the genre's emergence in Early American literature, giving preference to the Puritan narratives, such as Rowlandson's account of capture and confinement. Rowlandson's account of Indian capture was published in 1682 and is structured as a series of twenty "removes" that describe her geographical and spiritual journey through the New England wilderness. Her narrative includes metaphors and references to domesticity, especially to needlework and food preparation, which Rowlandson uses to convey her personal struggle for identity after she is removed from her natal Puritan culture and to show resistance against forces that she perceives are confining her. Despite the genre's popularity, it did not receive much scholarly interest until the mid-twentieth century, when critics began to acknowledge the literary and anthropological merits of the works. Interest in the Indian captivity narrative steadily grew over succeeding decades, usually reflecting the trends of scholarly theory of the time periods. It is only since the 1990s that Rowlandson scholars have begun examining the significance of domesticity, such as sewing and food preparation, to her narrative.

Critical trends in the study of the slave narrative mirrors the trends of the Indian captivity narrative, particularly the fact that narratives by women do not begin to attract significant scholarly attention until the 1980s. The slave narrative as a genre did not

begin receiving consistent critical attention until the late 1960s (Davis and Gates xiv, W. Morgan 73), with a spate of articles and books being published in the 1980s. Since then, the slave narrative has gained popularity with academic readers and the general public. As with the Indian captivity narrative, it is only since the 1990s that images of domesticity (such as sewing and quilting, motherhood, and food) have emerged as a focus in the scholarly examination of the slave narrative. Harriet Jacobs' narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, recounts her experiences of slavery and escape through the autobiographical narrator, Linda Brent. Brent uses references to needlework and food preparation to convey her subtle resistance to the nineteenth-century slave economy of the antebellum South.

Toni Morrison's fictionalized account of Margaret Garner's slavery experience, *Beloved* (1987), received immediate attention from both the public and literary critics, producing "a staggering amount of research" (Bast 1069), particularly in the 1990s. Although studies have examined Morrison's use of domestic activities and locales (such as the kitchen), the connection between the representation of hearthside activities, such as sewing and food preparation, with trauma and resistance have been largely ignored. Instead, much of *Beloved's* critical attention has focused on gender, slavery and race, as well as maternity. Some studies have examined Morrison's use of symbolism to advance the novel's main thematic threads, yet these studies have largely overlooked domestic symbols, such as needlework and food preparation.

Surprisingly, the critical attention paid to domestic references and metaphors in each of the works of this study has been sparse, and no single study has synthesized the commonalities between narratives in which American female writers systematically

and widely incorporate these domestic tropes into their texts as subversive elements reflecting passive resistance to the current patriarchal system in which the narrators reside. Due to this critical omission, the following survey of criticism casts a wide net to show the chronological critical trends for each of these works, as well as their related genres.

Mary Rowlandson's Early Captivity Narrative

One of the earliest scholars to take an interest in the Indian captivity narrative was Phillips Carleton. In a 1943 article in *American Literature*, Carleton suggests that the Indian captivity narrative should be considered a literary work, not simply an anthropological record. He admits that the genre's popularity and existence as a "salable" tract have undermined its literary reputation through the years but argues that the narrative's factual basis and formulaic capture-escape structure, and simple, indigenous American prose represent "the virtues of true literature" (170). Presumably addressing a readership unfamiliar with the genre, Carleton declares that this "very sizable body of literature (very nearly a thousand different titles) . . . covers all phases of the growth of America and all the regions within it from the Canadian border to Florida, and from tidewater to the Pacific coast" (176). He believes that the accounts are invaluable for understanding the increasing resourcefulness of Americans who were learning from the natives about "their strategy of fighting" and how to survive in the wilderness (175-76).

Three years later, Roy Harvey Pearce published an article on "The Significance of the Captivity Narrative," also in *American Literature*. Pearce's article examines the

evolution of the captivity narrative from those written by the early Puritans – to help define a religious experience – to those written in the eighteenth-century to elicit shock and hatred (toward, for example, the French or the natives) from the reader. He admits that before his article the captivity narrative served more as a historical document than as an independent literary genre worthy of examination and analysis. In addition, Pearce disagrees with the way in which the captivity narrative has been considered a “single genre” (1) when in fact multiple genres emerge based on the intended responses to be extracted from contemporary readers; “The significances of the captivity narrative vary from that of the religious confessional to that of the noisomely [sic] visceral thriller” (1). Pearce suggests that the Puritan narratives are most worthy of study, given their religious intensity and identifies the accounts of John Williams, Jonathan Dickenson, and Mary Rowlandson as “first, and greatest, of the captivity narratives” (2). He explains that later sensational and sentimental Indian captivity narratives, by comparison, “are not concerned with working up accurate records . . . but with the salability of penny dreadful” (8). Although Pearce states that the “cultural need” of the captivity narrative is “almost gone” (20), he considers the genre “interesting and valuable” not because it relates information about the natives and the frontier, but because it has enabled Americans “to see more deeply and more clearly into popular American culture, popular American issues, and popular American tastes. As religious confessional, as propaganda, and as pulp thriller, the captivity narrative gives us sharp insight into various segments of popular American culture” (20).

Anglo-American-native relations must be kept in mind in discussions of captivity, and Alden Vaughan’s 1965 study, *The New England Frontier*, is not focused upon the

Indian captivity narrative as such, but upon information that illustrates the ways in which the Puritans and New England natives interacted. Vaughan points out, for example, that although there are “private diaries, journals, and notebooks” as well as “official records” that “offer abundant evidence on the attitudes and actions of the Puritan toward the American Indian” (lxviii), there is a total absence of Indian sources. The natives of New England had no written language, “nor even a partial substitute for one” (lxix). Thus, even though five North American natives were captured and shipped to England on the *Archangel* in 1605 (3-4), well before any Anglo-Americans were taken captive by natives, there are no written accounts of native captivity. In addition, the first-hand accounts in captivity narratives are those of the captive colonist, not that of the native captor. Vaughan also reminds readers that the decisions, behavior, and attitudes of the Puritan captives would be seriously affected by their belief that natives were barbarians in need of England’s civilizing influence, an influence that required assimilation (xv) and “stringent laws” that “forbade English settlers” from joining Indian tribes (xvii). Vaughan believes the fact that some English Puritans “voluntarily forsook Puritan society to live among the Indians” and suggests that these “renegades” discovered “that Indian society had virtues of its own and that Puritan antipathy to it reflected self-doubt as well as cultural myopia” (xix-xx). While Rowlandson’s narrative is not overtly “pro-Indian,” her account offers a veiled approval of some aspects of Indian society as compared to English or Puritan society.

The accuracy of historical facts, in conjunction with an examination of the motivation behind the composition of the Indian captivity narrative, must be analyzed in order to better understand the development of the genre. In his 1971 *Research Studies*

article, "A Surfeit of Style: The Indian Captivity Narrative as Penny Dreadful," Richard VanDerBeets echoes many of Pearce's sentiments, acknowledging Pearce's contribution to the field. In contrast to Pearce, however, VanDerBeets focuses less on the motivation behind the composition of the Indian captivity narrative and more on the accuracy of historical facts. To him, the captivity narrative's metamorphosis from fervent religious expression to journalistic propaganda necessarily diminished the reliability of the document, leaving modern readers to wonder how much of the narrative is based on fact. In another article in *Research Studies*, his 1972 "'A Thirst for Empire': The Indian Captivity Narrative as Propaganda," VanDerBeets, like Pearce, views many of the early writers of the captivity narrative as deliberate manipulators of contemporary readers. However, VanDerBeets asserts that the manipulation is not created simply to elicit hatred towards a foreign culture, such as the natives of North America or the French (especially the Jesuits), but as a political weapon. This propagandizing continued well into the nineteenth century, "largely in the context of Manifest Destiny" (2).

A significant effect on the study of the Indian captivity narrative was the focus on the pattern of the archetypal journey and native rituals. In 1972, *American Literature* published "The Indian Captivity Narrative as Ritual," in which VanDerBeets, unlike Pearce, emphasizes the similarities among captivity narratives:

The discrete historical and cultural significances of the Indian captivity narrative, however illuminating they may be in their religious, propagandistic, and visceral applications, are subordinate to the fundamental informing and unifying principle in the narrative collectively; the core of ritual acts and patterns from which the narratives derive their

essential integrity. The variable cultural impulses of the narratives of Indian captivity are then but a part of their total effect, and the narratives are more than the simple sum of their parts. The result is a true synthesis. The shared ritual features of the captivity narratives, manifested in both act and configuration, provide that synthesis. (549)

VanDerBeets defines the journey of “the archetypal initiate” as proceeding from “Separation (abduction)” to “Transformation (ordeal, accommodation, and adoption), and Return (escape, release, or redemption)” (562). This “most fundamental of all archetypal patterns” is, in VanDerBeets’ reading, the “essential structuring device” of the captivity narratives (562). VanDerBeets further asserts that the native rituals that recur in the Indian captivity narrative – such as cannibalism, scalping, and the gauntlet – bind the work together as the initiate undertakes “the archetypal journey” (553). He concludes that only the narratives of captives who return willingly to their families, such as Mary Rowlandson, reflect this archetypal pattern; for those who experience significant acculturation or assimilation, this pattern is absent.

Scholars of the Indian captivity narrative received a significant contribution from VanDerBeets in 1973 with the publication of his *Held Captive By Indians: Selected Narratives 1642-1836*. This compilation emerges as “a representative and chronological sampling of captivities” of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, with settings ranging from “the Eastern woodlands to the Southeast, the Plains, and the Southwest,” reflecting such Indian-Anglo-American conflicts as King Philip’s War, King Williams’s War, the French and Indian War, the Revolution, the Western Wars, and nineteenth-century Plains warfare (“Preface” iv). “The only modern scholarly collection

of uncut and unaltered narratives" ("Preface" xv), the volume can be said to have begun what has become the nationwide study of the captivity narrative in survey courses of American literature.

Mary Rowlandson's Indian captivity narrative, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, began receiving more critical attention based on its significant literary merits in the 1970s. David L. Minter focuses his study primarily on this one narrative and establishes his position within the historical context defined by both Pearce and VanDerBeets in "By Dens of Lions: Notes on Stylization in Early Puritan Captivity Narratives," an article appearing in *American Literature* in 1973. As VanDerBeets does, Minter acknowledges the basic structure of the early captivity narrative: attack and/or capture, detention (or sale or trade), and escape or ransom. However, Minter identifies two distinct traditions within this basic structure of the captivity narrative, both of which are clearly exhibited in Rowlandson's narrative: "a providential theory of history that interpreted the design and action of God as ruling even 'the most unruly;' and a doctrine of afflictions that welcomed suffering and adversity by defining them as corrective, instructive, profitable" (337). For Rowlandson and many of her readers, her captivity and release became a paradigm of the historical situation facing New England at that time and aptly represented God's "providential activity on a large historical stage" (343). Minter asserts that "what we observe in the early narratives is the work not simply of an individual but of a radically socialized individual, an individual who feels a deep need to conform experience to socially sanctioned patterns and no longer feels any deep resistance to such restriction" (347). To Minter, the early captivity narrative's importance, as exemplified by Rowlandson's

narrative, lies in this very public application, not in the personal experience of the individual captive.

A major publication in 1973 (reprinted in 2000), Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* focuses on defining and identifying myths of American consciousness, but includes a section on the captivity narrative. Slotkin observes that the myths of the New World often seemed to be consciously crafted and reflective of the purported collective values of the time, for example the conscious constructs of early prominent settlers like the Mathers, who were attempting to justify their actions in the New World. Further, the heroes that people these myths are violent figures who "tore violently a nation from the implacable and opulent wilderness" (4). The "Americanness" of these myths troubles Slotkin, since he acknowledges that many of those who established myths in colonial America were European-born and consciously or unconsciously infused their own European and Christian paradigms into the American myths, often ignoring the indigenous cultures of the New World (5-6). In Chapter Four, "Israel in Babylon: The Archetype of the Captivity Narratives (1682-1700)," Slotkin identifies the early Indian captivity narrative as "the first coherent myth-literature developed in America for American audiences" (95), recognizing Rowlandson's narrative as the archetype, that is, "the primary model of which all subsequent captivities are diminished copies, or types" (102). Slotkin's assessment regarding the influence of Rowlandson's narrative on American literature continues to persist.

A major collection suggesting new directions for study of the captivity narrative appeared in the 1980s. In 1981, Alden Vaughan and Edward Clark published *Puritans*

Among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724, an anthology of eight influential Indian captivity narratives written in the early colonial period, starting with *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. In their introduction, Vaughan and Clark suggest that the Puritans responded “enthusiastically” to the genre “not only because it fused the prominent features of spiritual autobiography, lay sermon, and jeremiad with those of the secular adventure story,” but also because “its depictions of the forced rending of Puritan families ...unintentionally added an element of pathos that appealed profoundly to a society which placed unusual emphasis on family ties and responsibilities” (10). To Vaughan and Clark, the writers of captivity narratives fall into roughly four categories: those who resisted the impulse to assimilate or “go savage,” those who were empathetic to the Indians, those who had difficulty adjusting to colonial life after reassimilation, and those whose voices cannot be heard because their total acculturation included losing the ability to write or speak English.

The underrepresented female voice and experience in Early American literature began receiving critical attention in the 1980s, a significant shift in scholarship that ushered in many studies of Rowlandson’s narrative of confinement. The purpose of Annette Kolodny’s *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860* is to describe how differently women writers portrayed the frontier experience, compared to male writers, who viewed the move west as a complex melding of symbolic sexual conquest and economic success (xii-xiii). She acknowledges that the surviving women’s writings provide a skewed perspective of frontier life since a “written record” would be that of “relatively privileged, if not always wealthy, middle-class women” (xiii). In her first chapter, “Captives in Paradise,” which

addresses the Indian captivity narrative, Kolodny cites *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* as the narrative that “begins the public record of American women’s encounter with the wilderness places of the New World landscape” (17). She notes the three-phrase pattern of “capture and suffering followed by redemption” (2) and the religious symbolism in which the harsh depiction of the Indian justifies “the genocidal tendencies of the Puritans” and the wilderness becomes “the antithesis of the Paradise” of the Puritan towns and congregations (28). Kolodny also suggests that the genre was especially popular with women because of a tendency to identify their own domestic captivity on the frontier (forced by their husbands) with the mandatory captivity of the women narrators, forced into submission by Indians (33). Women’s frontier encounters typically were not marked by the adventure and prosperity their husbands experienced; “[t]he dream of a domestic Eden had become a nightmare of domestic captivity” (9). Instead, frontier women experienced conditions similar to those of the captive who has been forcibly removed from her home: wrenching isolation, anger, and physical hardships.

Critics also began applying a psychoanalytic approach to understanding Rowlandson’s captivity narrative in the 1980s, especially regarding her reaction to trauma. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian examines the Indian captivity narrative from a psychological perspective in “Puritan Orthodoxy and the 'Survivor Syndrome' in Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative,” positing that Mary Rowlandson exhibits the classic signs of “survivor syndrome,” established by psychoanalyst William Niederland: depression, anxiety, insomnia, hypermnesia, amnesia, death, guilt and personality change” (91). However, to Derounian, Rowlandson couched her psychological distress

in terms familiar to her readers when “she tried to minimize the symptoms to conform to the Puritan doctrine of providential affliction” (82-83). What makes the Rowlandson narrative so unique, Derounian asserts, is the tension between the psychological and religious experiences, which is lacking in later captivity narratives (83). Derounian also suggests that because Puritan ideology strongly encouraged followers to publicize personal traumas for the spiritual betterment of the subject and society, Rowlandson most likely avoided the final symptoms of survivor syndrome – “psychosomatic illness and inability to verbalize the experience” – as she penned her captivity narrative (91).

Trauma also undergirds critical studies in the 1990s as focus continued on how Rowlandson coped with the profound and complete loss of the familiar. Mitchell Robert Breitwieser concentrates his book-length study on Rowlandson’s captivity narrative in 1991, especially on her “concern for remembering the dead” (4), including loved ones who were killed during the Indian raid on her Lancaster, Massachusetts, home. As Slotkin did in his 1973 *Regeneration Through Violence*, Breitwieser grapples with Increase Mather’s ostensible influence on the narrative, yet Breitwieser concludes that even Mather’s deft manipulation allows Rowlandson’s interpretation, often at odds with contemporary Puritan theology, to emerge. Because of the rather muddy authorial attribution of Rowlandson’s narrative, Breitwieser explains:

Rowlandson’s work is a realistic work, not because it faithfully reports real events, but because it is an account of experience that breaks through or outdistances her own and her culture’s dominant means of representation, and because it is itself a continuation of that breakthrough rather than a fully composed and tranquilized recollection. (10)

In the chapter, "The Strangers," Breitwieser contends that Rowlandson's desire to survive, at all costs, exceeds all other desires, a fact that she tries to conceal beneath a veneer of Puritan ideology: "But the degree to which she insists on attributing survival to faith rather than to desire, again, suggests what Freud calls *denegation*, a protesting-too-much that betrays the repellant vitality of what it seeks to deny, the degree to which she desired to live and mourn, to maintain her life as its own purpose" (141). This is one of the many ways in which Rowlandson's narrative exhibits subtle subversion against patriarchal Puritan society.

During the 1990s a number of books and articles were published on captivity narratives, many having to do with gender. In 1991, Tara Fitzpatrick's "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative" regards Rowlandson's narrative, as well as other narratives written by women and introduced by the Puritan clergy, as offering a "quiet rebellion" (5) to contemporary religious hegemony. Similar to earlier critics, Fitzpatrick is attracted to the dichotomy between the language of the ministers' prefaces and the often-contradictory female accounts of being "alone in the wilderness braving the savage 'other'" (2). Fitzgerald asserts that Rowlandson's narrative offers insight into a woman who is forced from everything that she knows: "Isolation from her community had forced Rowlandson to achieve a self-sufficiency answerable only to God. At its center, her pious narrative demonstrated the deliverance of an individual who, through no choice of her own, had transcended the bounds of Puritan society and found transcendence redeeming" (11). Although Fitzgerald's article discusses other captivity narratives, Rowlandson's account becomes crucial to

Fitzgerald's argument, partially due to the fact that it pre-dates most Indian captivity narratives by women and was introduced anonymously by Increase Mather.

Rowlandson's role as a Puritan goodwife affected, and restricted, the structure and content of her narrative. In "Mary White Rowlandson's Self-Fashioning as Puritan Goodwife," Margaret H. Davis explores how Rowlandson's narrative exhibits both subservience to "male authority figures, including God the Father" (50), yet offers subtle rebellion in the simple act of existing as a narrative written by a woman, making "Rowlandson an anomaly in a culture that valued conformity" (50). However, Davis notes that "the traditional feminine skills " that she had been trained to perform as a Puritan wife and mother serves as a way for Rowlandson to barter for "food and favors," which were crucial to her survival (55). Furthermore, Davis observes that Rowlandson's apron pocket becomes somewhat of a "veritable cupboard" to store "everything she must save for survival," such as food, her Bible, and knitting and sewing tools (56). Davis regards Rowlandson's domestic skills to be an art that kept her in "a position that fit the patriarchal terms of identity" (56), while providing her with a way to express herself.

The examination of Indian captivity narratives broadened in the 1990s to include the historically marginalized perspective of the natives themselves and as well as the female captives. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier published *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* in 1993 and offer historical and critical background on a broad sampling of Indian captivity narratives. Among their goals was to counter "negative stereotypes of Native Americans that regrettably remain in the popular imagination and culture even today" (xi) by referring to "as many of the

thousands of texts” as possible, clarifying that European Americans were not the “main characters” of many of the works (for example, African-Americans and Mexicans were also taken captive), and extending the period usually examined to include sixteenth-century and late-eighteenth-century works. Similar to Pearce, Derounian-Stodola and Levernier note that the narratives often “projected stereotypes that conveniently supported the political aims of the European country that published them” (17); the accounts were “filtered through the perspective of explorers, missionaries, traders, trappers, and captives who wrote about their experiences with Indians” (52). Images of women fall into five categories, all “reinforced by the controlling theme of family dislocation: (1) victims and virgins, (2) victors and vanquishers, (3) mothers, daughters, and sisters, (4) traumatized women, and (5) transculturated women” (115). Derounian-Stodola and Levernier point out that the woman as captive represented the fractured family unit, an important concept that emerges in Rowlandson’s narrative, as well as the narratives of other female Indian captives.

The examination of gender archetypes in captivity narratives offers insight regarding the ways early American settlers regarded themselves and the natives inhabiting Early America. June Namias’ expands on Derounian-Stodola and Levernier’s examination of gender archetypes, focusing upon “varied accounts and representations” to provide “an entrée into how Euro-Americans thought about gender and sexuality when confronted by a foreign enemy of another color and culture” (9). In *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity of the American Frontier*, Namias describes the importance of captivity materials for creating mythic literature, representing “more than archetypal justifications for the Anglo-American domination of Indians,” providing

ethnographic data through Euro-American eyes, and defining a “mentality ... shaped by anxieties based on fear of potential Indian violence and family loss” as well as “fears of personal and social transformation in gender roles and other culturally prescribed behavior” (272). One of the most compelling chapters of Namias’ study, “White Women Held Captive,” seeks to establish distinct female archetypes in the Indian captivity narrative, given the large percentage of female captives: “Except for young children, married women between the ages of twenty and forty-five predominated ... Most were mothers of young children and, in the cases of the older women, were parents to both young and adolescent children” (24). Namias identifies three female archetypes that emerge between 1675 and 1870: the Survivor, like Mary Rowlandson, who adapts, survives, makes sense of, and bears “witness without undue victimization, personal aggrandizement, or genocidal aggression” (25); the Amazon, like Hannah Dustan, who aggressively fights for survival (30); and the Frail Flower, like Jemima Howe and Mary Kinnan in the late eighteenth-century and fictional heroines of the nineteenth-century, whose narratives are characterized by “brutality, sadomasochistic and titillating elements, strong racist language, pleas for sympathy and commiseration with the author’s suffering, special appeals to her sad lot as a distressed mother, and occasional invectives against dirt and sex among Indians” (37). Although Namias organizes the primary female archetypes of Indian captivity narratives into three distinct categories, it seems likely that further study would reveal subtle gradations within these archetypes, perhaps fracturing them into more precise categories.

Due to the fact that Indian captivity was a common enough experience in the early history of the American colonies, the fear of abduction and the fascination with the

“white Indian” attracted readers to captivity narratives for many decades. Gary L. Ebersole examines the evolution of the captivity narrative, including its reception by both the general reading public and twentieth-century scholars in *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Postmodern Images of Indian Captivity*. After reading more than 300 captivity narratives (275), Ebersole states, “*Captured by Texts* is, then, a history of storytelling, a study of the narrative, representational, and reading practices used in making sense of captivity. It is also a historical inquiry into the making and remaking of meaning” (13). Further, Ebersole contends that both contemporary and modern readers can relate to the idea that “captives are human beings in extremis, that is, in situations of grave danger and heightened vulnerability” (6). Ebersole examines the first Indian captivity narrative in the light of various “reading communities” (15) that have read the text and influenced readers, establishing Rowlandson’s text as a “larger covenantal account or metanarrative of God’s intervention in New England history” (23). Rowlandson’s suffering attests to the seventeenth-century New England belief that suffering was sometimes “a sign of election, of divine concern for one’s spiritual condition. If properly borne (and interpreted), suffering could be an agency of spiritual improvement” (27). Ebersole explains that Rowlandson’s account consciously places her in the expected cultural and religious discourse of the time. However, further examination needs to be done regarding the ways in which Rowlandson’s narrative subtly subverted the cultural norms of seventeenth-century New England, particularly related to established gender roles.

In the 1990s, critics began acknowledging the subversive elements present in Rowlandson’s account, finally discounting the conventional interpretation of her

narrative as representative Puritan discourse. Michelle Burnham explains that her 1997 study, *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861*, focuses upon “moments and texts in early American cultural and literary history in which the figures of captive women have elicited [an] ambivalent sentimental response” (2). She criticizes early scholars who, relying upon typology, have placed Mary Rowlandson’s captivity narrative “within an orthodox Puritan literary and theological tradition” (16) without acknowledging the subversive elements of the narrative, such as Rowlandson’s apparent respect and admiration for King Philip. Living in a culture that “if not matriarchal, certainly [is] far less patriarchal than Puritan New England” (30), Rowlandson becomes “producer-exchanger” (26) with her sewing and trading rather than “passive commodity” (28) to be traded among men for ransom. Her transculturation or “exchange of language, material goods, modes of behavior, and theological orientations” (17-18) is characteristic of the captivity experience. It entails “substitution of experience for knowledge and of the Algonquin cultural practices she encounters for her Puritan assumptions and beliefs about the Indians,” thus involving a “negotiation that resists the closure that typology would impose on it” (17). Burnham’s interpretation of Rowlandson’s narrative posits that she had a more active and deliberate role shaping both her captivity experience and narrative than many previous scholars have allowed.

However, other critics assert that the captivity narratives of women reflect the “social construction” in which the women viewed themselves. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola argues in *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives* (1998), “The social construction of men saw them as active subjects, with public as well as private roles and the ability to make choices” (xx). Women, on the other hand, “were socially

constructed as passive objects, with a predominantly domestic and private role, and the inability, often, to choose for themselves” (xx). Thus, “the narratives with female subjects . . . targeted women’s physical frailty and emotional nature” (xx-xxi).

Derounian-Stodola’s *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives* represents “chronological range, spiritual and secular diversity, and geographical variety as the American frontier pushed farther south and west” (xx) in a compilation of ten narratives from 1682 to 1892.

The Indian captivity narrative, including Rowlandson’s narrative, began receiving more interdisciplinary attention towards the end of the twentieth-century. Pauline Turner Strong explains that her study, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives*, fuses three distinct but interdisciplinary fields: “ethnohistory, women’s studies, and American cultural studies” (3). She stresses the reciprocal nature of captivity, with the taking of captives a common practice of both Europeans, who were furthering colonial expansion or securing slaves, and Indians, pursuing tribal gains. Captivity, Strong explains, was “a complex practice in which various indigenous and European traditions of mediation, redemption and revitalization converged” (3). In discussing Rowlandson’s narrative, Strong emphasizes the colonists’ general lack of understanding of the cultural and political practices of New England tribes. According to Strong, “Puritan hermeneutics provided a totalizing poetics within which the unfamiliar complexity of her captors’ actions and motivations could be reduced to an instrumentality in which they lacked rationality, morality, or agency” (99). This prevented smooth relations between settlers and Indians and suggests that Puritan theology further complicated relations, as evidenced by Rowlandson’s considering her

captivity experience and any kindnesses displayed by the Indians to be acts of Providence (98).

Rowlandson's depiction of hunger and her consumption of substandard trail fare, such as raw organs and horse hooves, exhibits a latent sexuality according to Jordan Alexander Stein in 2009. Stein theorizes that the physical sensation of hunger is the only way that the narrative connects Rowlandson to her body: "More specifically, Rowlandson's text subordinates the undeniable materiality of the human body generally, and of her female body in particular, to the not quite material yet nonetheless phenomenal experience of hunger" (470). Stein observes that hunger is a non-gendered response to a physical stimulus, which results in Rowlandson creating a non-gendered body in her narrative, which might have freed herself of the constraints of gendered sexuality. However, Stein notes that much of Rowlandson's "hunger" seems to originate less from a place of "need" rather than a place of "desire," which sexualizes her hunger account. This coupling of hunger to desire is used when Rowlandson describes her pleasure while consuming substandard foods, such as horse hoof, raw horse liver, and deer fetus. Stein asserts, "If, even in war times, unsavory food can be judged on how it tastes, then Rowlandson's interest in making such a judgment gives the impression that eating may be doing more than just satisfying her hunger" (475). Like previous Rowlandson scholars, Stein regards the narrative as "mov[ing] against didactic conventions within Puritan rhetoric" (481), particularly Rowlandson's illustration of her satisfied hunger. Throughout "Mary Rowlandson's Hunger and the Historiography of Sexuality," Stein uses Foucault's work, especially *The History of Sexuality*, as a basis to examine the link between Rowlandson's purported hunger and her sexual body.

Rowlandson strives throughout her narrative to recreate her lost home, using metaphors related to the home as a way of trying to achieve this desired restoration. To Bridget Bennett, “home” is defined as “an abstract noun that encompasses material ideas, represented by dwelling places and physical structures, and also ideas of belonging and community usually shaped by factors such as religion, culture, language, and ethnicity” (334). In her 2014 article, “The Crisis of Restoration: Mary Rowlandson’s Lost Home,” Bennett observes that Rowlandson’s narrative is marked by tremendous loss, including the loss of her home, both the physical structure and the family and community it represented, after it was burned to the ground during the Indian attack on Lancaster (327). Furthermore, Bennett notes that Rowlandson’s efforts at creating a post-captivity home parallels the efforts of contemporary colonists as they struggle to establish homes on the American colonial frontier:

Her text is an example of a body of writing that tells of the movements and experiences of early modern subjects transplanted from their natal homes, first by journeys undertaken within the contexts of larger imperial or colonial projects and then by being taken captive against their will by people whose own lives were profoundly affected by the experience of contact. (332)

On a more personal level, Rowlandson’s loss of her structural home resulted in a confusion of identity; in her narrative, Rowlandson seeks to re-affirm her identity by engaging “with modes of exchange and work acceptable to her gender and status (such as sewing and knitting)” (344). Puritan women largely based their ideas of femininity on their ability to manage their homes.

Slave Narratives and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

The slave narrative, like the Indian captivity narrative, received critical attention due to its position in the autobiographical tradition. James Olney explains the characteristics of autobiography, using their “sameness” (148) as a defining trait. In one of the most cited studies regarding the structure of the slave narrative, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature,” Olney contends that autobiographical writing depends on the narrative shaping that occurs as writers recollect past events and rely on flawed memories: “Exercising memory, in order that he may recollect and narrate, the autobiographer is not a neutral and passive recorder but rather a creative and active shaper” (149). However, the autobiographer’s inherent reliance on subjective memories is at odds with the purpose of the slave narrative, to strictly record events of slave life in order to illuminate the living conditions to which slaves were subjected. Olney posits:

As a result, the slave narrative is most often a non-memorial description fitted to a pre-formed mold, a mold with regular depressions here and equally regular prominences there – virtually obligatory figures, scenes, turns of phrase, observances, and authentications – that carry over from narrative to narrative and give to them as a group the species character that we designate by the phrase ‘slave narrative.’ (151)

This “mold” results in the formulaic structure of many slave narratives, becoming predictable conventions that Olney outlines in detail and labels the “Master Plan for Slave Narratives” (152-153). Although Olney does not discuss how the conventions operate in Jacobs’ *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, he applies

them to other well-known slave narratives, such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, as well as narratives by John Brown, Charles Ball, and Henry Bibb.

Jacobs' *Incidents* closely adheres to the conventional structure outlined by Olney yet offers a unique feminine perspective of slavery in the antebellum South. Jean Fagan Yellin examines Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents*, taking note of the qualities that make Jacobs' narrative unique from other slave narratives. Yellin approaches the narrative from a feminist perspective, focusing on Jacobs' unusual first-person account, recounted by her autobiographical narrator Linda Brent, that simultaneously describes the discrete perils of slavery to women and addresses Jacobs' professed female white audience. Yellin contends that Jacobs' narrative "is at once the plea of an erring American female, the heroic recital of a valiant black slave mother, and a woman's vindication of her life" (263). The first part of Yellin's examination explores Jacobs' correspondence and relationships with influential white female abolitionists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Lydia Maria Child, and Quaker Amy Post. Yellin uses Jacobs' correspondence with these women to plot the genesis of the narrative and to corroborate Jacobs' experiences while a slave. Also, these letters accurately attribute her writing style, which had received criticism for imitating nineteenth-century sentimental fiction. Yellin observes that "the discovery of Jacobs' correspondence shows that the style of *Incidents* is completely consistent with her private letters" (268). For the remainder of the essay, Yellin focuses on the "confessional quality" (269) of Jacobs' narrative, especially her consensual sexual relationship with the white attorney that fathered both

of her children; to Jacobs, slave women should be afforded a separate set of sexual mores due to their complicated role in the Southern household. Yellin explains:

Because its subject is the sexual oppression of women in slavery, *Incidents* presents a double critique of the nineteenth-century American ideas and institutions. It inevitably challenges the institution of chattel slavery and its supporting ideology of white racism; just as in evidently, it challenges traditional patriarchal institutions and ideas. (270)

Because of the narrative's challenge to these traditional, repressive institutions, nineteenth-century white freeborn women could identify, at least partially, with Jacobs' lack of rights and struggle to be free:

For example, while the account of Jacobs' narrator describing her battle to liberate her children from the power of their master-father is unique, it has parallels in other narratives; and because (in contrast to statutes regulating slaves) laws governing free Americans denied the authority of the female parent and entrusted children to their fathers, it also has parallels in the writings of freeborn women. (275)

Yellin asserts that *Incidents* "represents an attempt to establish an American sisterhood and activate that sisterhood in the public arena" (276); due to the wide appeal of Jacobs' narrative to her contemporary readers, Yellin views it as a cohesive force in American women's literature.

The elements of the sentimental novel would be recognizable to Jacobs' readers of primarily free Northern women and would allow them to emotionally connect to her story. Thomas Doherty takes a different approach from critics like Yellin; although

Doherty considers the role sex and gender play in *Incidents*, his primary focus remains fixed on the rhetorical strategies Jacobs utilizes as she tries to advance the abolitionist cause by addressing her “target group” (82) of “Northern women, largely from leisured middle-class households, [who] were among the abolitionist movement’s most dedicated participants” (81). One of the ways that Jacobs would appeal to her female audience was to address “the reader as a sexual equal; always, she plays on values and emotions having a special force and immediacy for female readers... Foremost among these mortifications is the sexual subservience sanctified by law” (82). Also, some conventions of sentimental fiction emerge in Jacobs’ narrative, a “promiscuous cross-pollination of influences” that Doherty notes in Jacobs’ *Incidents* and other mid-eighteenth century slave narratives (83). However, Jacobs must have been aware that these conventions, as well as pervasive cultural expectations, would force her to “first faithfully discharge her maternal responsibilities” before explaining her escape, responsibilities that Doherty notes male slaves were not burdened with before their escape to the North (89). Jacobs “earns her maternal credentials” by recounting the conditions of her grueling voluntary imprisonment in her grandmother’s attic crawlspace for seven years before finally escaping to the North. Doherty asserts that this serves “[a]s an indictment of slavery and an expression of the lengths its victims will go to escape it, the ordeal speaks for itself, but the episode serves at least two additional, narrative functions. First, it is a ready metaphor not only for the prison of slavery but for the restrictions of domestic life... The episode has a second, more certain narrative purpose: it verifies and accentuates Linda’s maternal commitment” (89-90). Jacobs continues to accentuate Brent’s “maternal commitment” by later describing the

hardships she endured to try to ensure the safety and health of her children, even after her escape to the North. Brent's "maternal commitment" is expressed frequently in the narrative by the employment of domestic metaphors, especially needlework.

Besides the challenges of maternity, Jacobs' narrative examines other sufferings and abuses experienced only by female slaves. Andrea Starr Alonzo builds on the studies of Yellin and Olney in her 1989 article about Harriet Jacobs and Mary Prince's slave narratives. Although Olney did not directly address women's slave narratives in "I Was Born": Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," Alonzo applies Olney's "formula" (119) of conventions exhibited in slave narratives to the narratives of Jacobs and Prince. Furthermore, Alonzo notes the unique challenges female slaves endured; "Rape, concubinage, and the wrath of jealous mistresses were only a few of the indignities female slaves suffered just because they were women" (120-121). Due to these gender-specific hardships, Alonzo asserts, "The women's slave narratives also illustrate the importance of female bonding... Significantly, sisterhood crosses the color line, even in slavery, when despicable men are involved" (121). The narratives of Jacobs and Prince urge their female readership to unite against the abuses of women.

One of the problems that black female writers, such as Jacobs, faced was that definitions of "womanhood" in the nineteenth-century were centered on several extreme examples: the white ideal, often based on domesticity and physical beauty, and the figure of the tragic mulatta. Beth Maclay Doriani bases much of her 1991 *American Quarterly* article on the work of other noted "autobiographical critics" (200), including Yellin and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., as she explores the role of "selfhood" (200) in Jacobs'

Incidents and Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig: or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859). Like previous critics, Doriani notes that nineteenth-century African-American

women like Jacobs and Wilson had to develop a literary selfhood based on the established conventions of the "popular female genres – the seduction novel and the domestic novel – as well as an Afro-American genre, the slave narrative" (200).

However, Doriani posits that these genres were too confining for Jacobs and Wilson, forcing them to establish their own independent literary identities that could better reflect the lives of contemporary black women (203). Jacobs and Wilson:

[s]how that the world of the black woman – as a person inextricably bound up with others yet responsible for her own survival, emotionally, economically, and politically – demands a revised definition of true womanhood, a revision of the nineteenth-century white woman's social and literary stereotype as well as that of the black woman, the "tragic mulatta." (207)

Doriani notes the various subversive elements present in the narrative as Jacobs strives to dismantle the traditional views of womanhood to allow a new definition of womanhood to emerge, one that incorporates "the qualities of intelligence, will, resourcefulness, and courage which allow women to overcome their hardships" (211).

Although sexual mores and preconceptions of beauty are often the ideals that critics examine in Jacobs' narrative, Doriani expands this discussion:

Yet Jacob goes beyond the conception of freedom found in white woman's fiction, broadening the definition of woman as homemaker and mother to include economic and political dimensions... Economic independence, not

marital dependence, is what she strives for as well as a home and the company of her children. For her, true freedom entails economic freedom. Unlike the heroine of the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity, Jacobs does not shun the public sphere of the marketplace, which many women saw as corruptive. (211-212)

Doriana contends that Jacobs' narrative shatters existing stereotypes regarding black women and creates a new identity in which women use intelligence, resourcefulness, and courage to survive and find personal freedom and independence. This resourcefulness is depicted in Jacobs' narrative by the inclusion of domestic metaphors that subvert the patriarchal slave economy.

Studies in which Jacobs' narrative is compared to male slave narratives also illuminate important distinctions between first-hand accounts of slavery penned by men and women, revealing critical trends in nineteenth-century thinking about race and gender. Using Doriana's article as a critical springboard, Winifred Morgan compares the male slave narrative to that of a female slave, using Douglass and Jacobs as representative examples of each, primarily due to their popularity. Morgan cites Doriana's examination of how Jacobs reworked the conventions of the male slave narrative to better illustrate the experience of the female slave in her 1994 article, "Gender-Related Differences in the Slave Narratives of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass." Morgan asserts that female slaves, such as Jacobs, tend to recount the "network of relationships on which she depends and to which she contributes; her most important relationships devolve from bonds of love" (84). In Jacobs' narrative, Brent often connects domestic metaphors to beloved family members, particularly her

grandmother, mother, and children. On the other hand, achieving literacy remains the main focus of many slave narratives by men, including Douglass.

Few literary critics have published studies on the significance of needlework in Jacobs' narrative, forcing an interdisciplinary approach to researching this topic. Floris Barnett Cash explores the role quilting plays in African-American traditions and cultures, beginning with slavery and continuing through the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. While Cash does not directly address Jacobs' slave narrative (or slave narratives in general), she addresses the quilting traditions of slave women, asserting that slave women did "most of the sewing and weaving on the largest plantations" (31), despite previous reports that indicated that slaves simply assisted their mistresses with these domestic activities. Also, Cash examines how the act of quilting allowed African-American women to create a "kinship network" (31) of support, while also allowing them to earn money for their creations.

Jacobs creates three distinct metaphorical "spaces" in *Incidents*, which protect her and her children in times of crisis. In her 1999 *African American Review* article, Gloria T. Randle identifies that Jacobs' narrator, Brent, utilizes these spaces at crucial times of her narrative in which she experiences extreme psychological stress and/or physical danger: "While these spaces are inevitably flawed and often grossly inadequate, they serve the immediate purpose of providing critical nurturing, of protecting 'Brent' and her children from present danger, of allowing her to function in relative mental health while imprisoned in a culture that constantly threatens her sanity" (43). The three "creative constructions" that Randle examines are: Brent's creation of mother-figures in reaction to the absence of her biological mother; "the negotiation of

her own sexual prerogatives – her compromise between enforced immortality and a personal code of virtue;” and her voluntary imprisonment in her grandmother’s garret that allows her to straddle life and death for seven years (43). Randle asserts that “[Brent] conjures up avenues of impossible possibility time and again” (55); the creation of these spaces serves as a way for Brent to survive the slave system that she was born into, as well as the unbearable, contradictory moral, ethical and psychological demands made on slave women. Although Randle’s examination of Brent does not address domesticity directly, the article expands on Brent’s intelligence and determination to survive.

Unlike other critics who focus on Jacobs’ narrative in relation to “male slave narratives or the domestic novel” (6), Virginia Cope positions her 2004 examination primarily as an analysis of the text’s exhibition of the economic principles of nineteenth-century America. Throughout the *African American Review* article, Cope closely examines Jacobs’ narrative, using key passages to show how Jacobs denounces paternalism, and the subsequent precapitalism, in the South in favor of an idealized vision of the free North:

Drawing on nineteenth-century notions of contract that idealized voluntary market exchanges as the embodiment of human liberty, Linda rejects the paternalistic ethos of the precapitalist South in favor of a Northern, capitalist world view. With these narrative moments in mind, a rethinking of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* finds that, for Linda Brent, the journey from South to North is a journey into capitalism. (5)

Cope establishes that precapitalism is inextricably tied to “paternalism,” a term that she defines as being dependent on the “reciprocal relations in which some are born to rule, others to obey. It proved to be an ideal model for defending slavery, for it allowed masters to construe themselves as benevolent caretakers for unavoidably inferior slaves, who as part of an extended household would labor in exchange for protection and guidance” (6). Cope closely examines Jacobs’ narrative, using key passages to show how Jacobs denounces paternalism, and the subsequent precapitalism, in the South in favor of an idealized vision of the free North. However, Cope shows that Jacobs’ depiction of her escape to Philadelphia becomes shadowed with disillusionment as she realizes that the North, although not dependent of paternalism or precapitalism, offers its own form of bondage due to widespread racism: “Freedom to Linda Brent is figured in the possibilities for social mobility within an economy that rewards efforts and intelligence with monetary gain; accordingly, she indicts racism for thwarting open and equitable market exchanges” (16). Cope notes that Jacobs’ freedom is finally achieved not by her escape to the North but by one final economic exchange: her employers’ purchase of her freedom (17). Cope establishes the subversive nature of Jacobs’ narrative, although she does not address domestic references, such as needlework and food preparation.

Harriet Jacobs uses traditional feminine qualities, in this instance “motherhood,” as a subversive element to undermine the tenets of slavery to her white, female audience. In her 2006 article in *Legacy*, Stephanie Li writes: “Jacobs’ reliance upon the trope of motherhood capitalizes on the political import of prevailing beliefs in the sanctity and power of the mother and suggests that a woman’s sexuality offers a vital means of

resistance against patriarchal oppression” (15). While earlier critics, such as Yellin and Doherty, regarded Jacobs’ depiction of motherhood as a way to appeal to her readers’ own reverence for maternity, Li contends that Jacobs manipulates these feelings to undermine the readers’ prevailing beliefs about slavery. Jacobs often entwines motherhood with domestic references, including needlework and food.

A critical area that has been largely ignored regarding *Incidents* is Jacobs’ pervasive use of themes and images pertaining to death. In “Playing Dead: Harriet Jacobs’ Survival Strategy in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*,” Georgia Kreiger explains: “The subject of death infuses the narrative, appearing repeatedly in descriptions of actual deaths, in numerous death wishes spoken by Jacobs’ persona Linda Brent and others, and in the narrator’s consideration of whether or not death is preferable to a life without liberty” (607). In fact, Kreiger notes that at least 28 deaths are described in *Incidents*, including Jacobs’ own metaphorical entombment in her grandmother’s attic garret; Kreiger likens Jacobs’ voluntary entombment to:

[t]hanatomimeses, acts such as those of wounded soldiers who feign death on the battlefield in order to survive, or those of victims of animal attacks who played dead in order to thwart the animal’s further aggression. In cases such as these, victims avoid further physical endangerment by turning themselves, temporarily, into corpses. (607)

Building on Randle’s 1999 study regarding Brent’s use of “mediating spaces” in *Incidents*, Kreiger compares the attic crawlspace to a tomb. Not only does the confinement in the attic serve to shield Jacobs from Dr. Flint’s sexual advances, but it also represents the theme of “Christian death and resurrection” (609), allowing Brent to

emerge from her self-imposed tomb cleansed and ready to achieve freedom by escaping north. While this article does not address the role of domesticity in Jacobs' narrative, it helps to further establish the complex metaphorical nature of the account.

Jacobs uses images of domesticity and home to urge her target audience to reconceptualize their definition of "womanhood." Laura Smith examines how domesticity functions in three nineteenth-century fictional works in her 2012 article, "'Don't Be Too Careful of Your Silks and Rags': Domesticity and Race in Nineteenth-Century American Literature." Although her professed focus is on fictional works, Smith begins her article with an analysis of the final paragraph of Jacobs' *Incidents*, honing in on Jacobs' professed desire for a home of her own. Smith writes, "But Jacobs' autobiography makes a key intervention into the largely white middle-class discourse of domesticity by demonstrating her domestic faculty, mother love, and home sentiment" (344). To do this, Jacobs "measur[es] her behavior against a white discourse of domesticity and arguing for a more expansive notion of womanhood to accommodate the unique and terrible challenges facing black women: the struggle for self-possession, the lack of access to marriage and goods, the inability to protect and nurture one's own children" (344). However, Smith expands her analysis beyond *Incidents*, to include "'Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* (1859), Fanny Fern's *Ruth Hall* (1855), and Harper's 'Fancy Etchings' (1873), all exhibiting autobiographical elements within fictional narratives, [and] provide rich ground for considering 'real-life' material culture as manipulated in fictional discourse" (344). Much like Doriani asserts in her 1991 article, Smith argues that Jacobs' *Incidents* pushes the boundaries of contemporary definitions of "womanhood," using images of

domesticity, especially sewing, to propel black women into a more inclusive conception of femininity.

Neo-Slave Narratives and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

In the foreword to *Beloved*, Toni Morrison explains that the novel is based on a newspaper clipping that outlined the crime committed by Margaret Garner, the escaped slave mother whose act of infanticide inspired the character of Sethe (xviii). In the 1991 article, "Margaret Garner': A Cincinnati Story," Cynthia Wolff incorporates primary historical documents into her article to recreate the events surrounding the infanticide and Garner's trial, as well as illustrate the parallels between Garner's story and *Beloved*: "So much in this novel resurrects the 'Margaret Garner' who fled across the Ohio River in 1856 that it matters very little how many historical details have been altered. The essential elements remain..." (435). Wolff establishes the lack of legal protection facing white and black mothers in the nineteenth-century, prompting the creation of "the possibility for 'community' among black and white women" (420). Despite the popularity of the "Cult of True Womanhood" in the United States at that time, white women were unable to make any legal claims to their offspring or have a deciding voice in the "meaningful decision[s] in their lives" (419). Certainly, slave women suffered a worse situation since neither they nor the children's fathers, whether freed or white, had any legal rights regarding their offspring; "a slave woman and her children all 'BELONGED' to her white owner" (420). Margaret Garner's 1856 murder of her young daughter, and attempted murder of her remaining three children, brought the condition of slave mothers to public attention, after her escape from Kentucky to free Cincinnati.

The idea of “home” occupies a crucial thematic position in *Beloved*, much as it does in Jacobs’ *Incidents*. Lori Askeland examines the similarities between Morrison’s novel and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, particularly how the image of the “home” functions in both novels. She begins by establishing the influence the “Cult of Domesticity” held over nineteenth-century homes, as well as the resulting disempowerment women, white or black, experienced in these homes (785), primarily due to the fact that their “employments were usually uncompensated and whose domains were always conceived, designed, and owned by males” (786). However, Morrison’s twentieth-century novel seeks to subvert the “Cult of Domesticity” by setting “itself up as a remodeling of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that examines this ideology and revises it in a way that avoids reification of the patriarchal power structure” (787). At the center of Morrison’s “remodeling” sits “an exemplary Victorian model home, Sweet Home, as a critique of a system covered with the ‘bignonias’ of the domestic ideal but built of the ‘rough logs’ of slavery” (791). This central metaphor operates in conjunction with the Ohio home of Baby Suggs (and later Sethe and her family), 124 Bluestone. To Askeland, 124 Bluestone represents the remodeled version of the domestic ideal, as envisioned by freed slave Baby Suggs, especially in home’s establishment of “a life-giving kitchen at its heart [that] creates a communal domain” (796), while Sweet Home represents the false image of a domestic ideal built on the horrors of slavery.

Morrison uses the complementary structures of conventional genres to achieve her storytelling objectives in *Beloved*. Similar to Askeland, Cynthia S. Hamilton also sets *Beloved* against a nineteenth-century canonical novel, *The Scarlet Letter* in this case, yet compares *Beloved* to the conventions of both the slave narrative and the gothic

novel in her article. To Hamilton, “The basic problem of the novel concerns the need to transform facts of unspeakable horror into a life-giving story, for the individual, for the black community, and for the nation” (429). To address the problem, Hamilton theorizes that Morrison uses the basic slave narrative structure, citing Olney’s “master plan,” to establish the foundation of her story. However, Hamilton notes that this structure has limitations for Morrison; “it is a story of a single individual and is told from a single point of view, that of the escaped slave; we are given only a small amount of information about others who are important to that individual, or whose stories add to the graphic depiction of the horrors of slavery” (436). Due to these inherent limitations of the classic slave narrative structure (436), Morrison supplements the novel with conventions of the gothic: “What a gothic framework allows, therefore, is coverage of the same general area as that of the slave narrative, but in a manner which highlights the significance of aspects of experience slighted by the slave narrative: the psychology of violation, victimization and scapegoating” (441). Using the works of Faulkner and Hawthorne as points of comparison, Hamilton demonstrates how this “gothic framework” influenced Morrison’s storytelling in *Beloved*, including her use of irony and allegory, literary devices that work in conjunction with metaphor in the novel.

Symbolism in *Beloved* has received significant scholarly attention. Michèle Bonnet examines Morrison’s symbolic use of trees in her 1997 article in the *African American Review*, “‘To take the sin out of slicing trees...’: The Law of the Tree in *Beloved*.” Bonnet establishes the importance of trees in her article and links trees and “sacred groves” to African religions in which “they are considered as intermediaries between God and man...” (42), a fact Bonnet believes Morrison was aware. However,

much of Bonnet's focus remains on the cutting of trees, beginning with an early observation by the narrator about a sawyer who planted roses "to take the sin out of slicing trees for a living" (Morrison 57). According to Bonnet, trees embody sacred life in the novel:

It follows that even if no explicit judgment is passed on Sethe's deed, even if we are given a number of unquestionably good reasons that partly legitimate her decision, she is nevertheless shown to commit a major transgression in deciding to cut her daughter's throat since she infringes upon a principle whose sacredness is postulated by the narrator's remark on the sawyer's sin and demonstrated by the nourishing quality of the tree.

(Bonnet 44-45)

Bonnet contends that this illustrates the "law of life" in the novel, and she identifies several instances, in addition to the above example, in which trees define and elaborate on this law. Furthermore, she identifies other "laws" that operate in the novel, connecting these laws to Morrison's use of trees. These laws include: "the transgression of the tree's sacred law" (44) and "the law of growth" (46). Although this article does not offer commentary on domestic metaphors, Bonnet's close examination of trees in *Beloved* establishes that patterns of symbolism are used extensively in the novel.

Despite the allusion to domesticity in the title, "Knitting and Knotting the Narrative Thread – *Beloved* as Postmodern Novel," Rafael Pérez-Torres's essay examines *Beloved* as a postmodern work, referring to knitting only as a metaphor to how Morrison combines premodernist and postmodernist elements in her novel:

The 'not' signified by blackness becomes for Morrison a means by which to weave her tale. A process of interpretation and reinterpretation in *Beloved* serves to form an 'is' out of the 'nots,' helps untie the tangled threads by which Morrison knits together her novel. *Beloved* challenges us to rethink the relationship between the postmodern and the marginal, to bind together seemingly separate cultural realms. The novel forces us to retrace the distinct threads of the historically marginal that color the weave of postmodern culture. (93)

Pérez-Torres offers some discussion on "commodity and exchange" in the novel (95), and like many critics, keeps his focus on the obvious commodification of the slaves themselves.

Motherhood emerges as a form of resistance against slavery in *Beloved*, much as it does in Jacobs' *Incidents*. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu examines the motivation behind contemporary African American women writers who create neo-slave narratives, as well as the greater implications to popular culture in her book-length study, *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*. Although she mentions *Beloved* only briefly in Chapter 6, "Children of Those Who Chose to Survive': Neo-Slave Narrative Authors Create Women of Resistance," much of her discussion centers on the connection between resistance and motherhood in the neo-slave narrative, which certainly has application to the novel: "The very attempt to mother under the conditions of slavery, when the demand was merely to produce children to augment the master's labor force and when the awareness that those children could be

sold at the master's whim was an everyday reality, was a heroic act" (153). In addition, she identifies other sites of resistance for enslaved mothers, including:

[b]y learning to read and sometimes tutoring their children, by instilling in their children a sense of self-worth that served to contradict their enslaved condition, by trying to keep their families together, by serving as othermothers to slave children separated from their own mothers, by developing extended kin networks to provide and receive support, encouragement and everyday assistance, and even sometimes by engaging in violence, as in the case of Margaret Garner. (153-154)

Beaulieu concludes this chapter with the assertion that these literary representations of resistance will influence contemporary readers to create resistance in their own lives.

Critics have examined slavery's effect on Morrison's characters, especially their fractured sense of identity that has been undermined by pervasive racism and the resulting dehumanization of slavery. In "Postcolonial Experience in a Domestic Context: Commodified Subjectivity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Mary Jane Suero Elliott explains, "The imposed perception of themselves as commodified beings, when internalized, results in their continued struggle to develop an empowered, agentive sense of self" (181). Although not mentioned in Elliott's study, domestic metaphors in *Beloved* often represent the main characters' struggle to attain an individual identity, separate from the identity bequeathed on them during slavery. However, this struggle does not end in futility for *Beloved*'s Sethe, since she benefits from the communal voice that supports her at the novel's conclusion and represents her larger community: "What succeeds in breaking through the cycle imprisoning Sethe and Beloved in its redundant sterility is

the sound of the community's voice. The use of a communal voice to negate the effects of an oppressive discourse on Sethe's life serves to link her once again to the community and to the potential to develop her subjectivity" (195). In addition, Elliott comments on Morrison's "historical revisioning, which calls for collective rememory" that illustrates the United States as a predatory "colonist nation" instead of the benevolent nation that has been popularly depicted (183). Elliott explains that "just as [Sethe] needs to confront unresolved issues in her past, the nation, in an act of collective decolonization, also must confront the colonialist past in order to change the neocolonialist present" (183). Thus, the U.S. and Sethe follow similar paths.

The role of trauma in *Beloved* has attracted critical attention. J. Brooks Bouson's essay on trauma and shame in Morrison's fiction was included in *Toni Morrison* in 2005, published as part of Harold Bloom's Modern Critical Views series. Most of Bouson's focus stems from "corrosive racist stereotypes and discursive repertoires in the construction of African-American identities as racially inferior and stigmatized" present in Morrison's work (125). This essay specifically focuses on the pervasive psychological incorporation of shame and reaction to trauma in Morrison's works, including *Beloved*, citing the works of theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and Sigmund Freud.

In nineteenth-century America, as well as *Beloved*, the kitchen was the "heart" of the home and the center of most domestic activities. Betty J. Chroninger based her 2005 dissertation on the depiction of the kitchen in Toni Morrison's novels, including *Beloved*. Chroninger asserts that the kitchen represents a space in which the African American woman could find empowerment, despite the fact that the kitchen historically had been a place of toil where African American women worked to provide sustenance

for their white employers or enslavers. For instance, she cites Denver's employment by the Bodwins at the end of the novel as an example of opportunity, rather than subjugation: "[t]he difference here from any other novel is that Denver's job has the possibility of leading her to greater freedom, independence, and a better life because Miss Bodwin sees Denver's potential and wants to educate her" (131). Chroninger does not limit her examination of kitchens to *Beloved* but expands her study to include other novels by Morrison, such as *Sula*, *Song of Solomon* and *Paradise*.

Despite Morrison's extensive use of color in *Beloved*, color symbolism has received surprisingly scant critical attention. However, Florian Bast uses literary trauma theory as the basis for his examination of how the color red operates as a dominant trope in the novel, a color that represents the characters' efforts to cope with the traumatic effects of surviving slavery. In his 2011 *Callaloo* article, "Reading Red: The Troping of Trauma in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*," Bast contends that the study of color in the novel has been largely overlooked by critics, despite the recurrence of vivid colors that permeate the work, including ribbons, clothes, Baby Suggs's patchwork quilt, and flowers (1069). Instead of looking at every instance of color in *Beloved*, Bast focuses only on red due to its close connection to character trauma (1069): "It is in the use of the color red that the issues of voicelessness, trauma, and troping are linked. As the novel narrates the characters' dealings with the psychological wounds inflicted on them, moving from shock and voicelessness to repression and finally to storytelling, it continuously utilizes color symbolism" (1071). While Bast's study does not specifically address domesticity, his examination of color does relate to domestic materials, such as fabric.

In the next chapter, I analyze *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, in which Rowlandson describes her captivity with the Indian tribe that abducted her and her daughter from their home in Lancaster, Massachusetts, during a skirmish in King Philip's War. This chapter includes an examination of family life in seventeenth century Europe and Puritan New England, especially regarding the role and legal standing of women in both societies. In addition, the role of women and female captives in the New England Indian tribes are examined in order to contextualize Rowlandson's role in each society that she inhabits as well as the resulting trauma and loss of identity that she experienced after being forcibly removed from her Puritan home. Furthermore, I include a close reading of Rowlandson's narrative of confinement to demonstrate how her references to domesticity exhibit Scott's "stubborn forms of resistance" (33), especially related to her tactical sewing with the Indians as well as her complex depiction of hunger, food, and food preparation.

CHAPTER THREE: MARY ROWLANDSON

Introduction

From the time that *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* was published in 1682, critics and readers have used Mary Rowlandson's Indian captivity narrative of abduction, survival, and release as a template by which subsequent narratives were interpreted and judged. The narrative is structured as a series of twenty removes, with each remove representing Rowlandson's geographical and spiritual journey into the New England wilderness and away from home and family. In "Mary Rowlandson's Captivity and the 'Place' of the Woman Subject," Lisa Logan views the essential structure of the narrative as the first of many metaphors that emerge:

With each day of travel, Rowlandson grows more 'removed'; not only from the tiny frontier village of Lancaster, Massachusetts, but from her whole way of life and her certainty of its significance... Rowlandson is lost 'in the midst' of another people and another worldview, a place without recognizable markers, boundaries, or rules. (257)

In addition to the narrative's structure, the issue of authorship has received attention. Many scholars attribute the composition of Rowlandson's narrative to her alone, despite

the probable influence of her minister husband and Puritan minister Increase Mather, the likely author of the account's preface:

[I]t seems naïve to assume that at least her husband or her senior spiritual advisor, Mather, would not have had some input, which might well have included editorial additions and revisions; indeed several aspects of Rowlandson's story recall sermon stylistics and ministerial retellings of other captivities. (Derounian-Stodola, Intro. to *Rowlandson* 5)

Despite the male influence in Rowlandson's narrative of confinement, the text includes metaphors and references to housewifery, especially to sewing and food preparation, that add a uniquely female imprint to the text, which Rowlandson uses to convey her identity struggle within a new culture and to show resistance against forces that she perceives are confining her.

Rowlandson's narrative structure anticipates the conventions of later Indian captivity narratives. The universal archetypal pattern of Rowlandson's narrative of confinement – “capture-initiation-return” – became one expected in subsequent captivity narratives. Richard VanDerBeets describes the “journey of the archetypal initiate,” who “proceeds from Separation (abduction), Transformation (ordeal, accommodation, and adoption), and Return (escape, release or redemption)” (562). In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin explains that this common narrative archetype expresses not only the captive's personal growth, but the fears and struggles of the early colonists as they sought independence and survival (95-98). Given the nature of Rowlandson's transcultural experience, Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark note that anthropologists have identified this structure as an “initiation process by which a person

moves from one set of perceptions to another” (11). Like many later captivity narratives, Rowlandson’s also begins *in medias res*, as the Indians attack her home in Lancaster, Massachusetts, during King Philip’s War, in which of the “thirty-seven Persons, who were in this one House, none escaped either present Death or a bitter Captivity, save onely [sic] one” (Rowlandson 14). The depiction of the attack spans only several pages, concluding as Rowlandson surveys the violent scene at her home.

Although features of Rowlandson’s narrative became conventions in later captivity narratives, her account is unique in its structure of 20 sections, called “removes,” that clearly define the progression of the geographical, psychological, and spiritual stages that she experiences as an Indian captive. This structuring device allows Rowlandson to express her feelings of loss and suffering as well as her adaptation to Indian culture as she learns how to negotiate and thrive in the tribe. In the final stage of the narrative, at the twentieth remove, Rowlandson describes the process by which she was finally ransomed and reunited with her husband and surviving children.

While earlier scholars regarded *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* as a foundational and even typical Puritan narrative, today Rowlandson is presented to students not as the “famous victim” of a 1989 anthology (Baym 141), but as a strong and resourceful woman who not only survived her captivity but had a complex and dynamic relationship with her Indian captors, thriving as an entrepreneur among them. Gordon Sayre notes that “[d]ue to its presence in many anthologies, in recent years Rowlandson’s narrative has probably been the most-read text of colonial Anglo-American literature” (130). In his 2000 introduction to Rowlandson’s narrative, Sayre offers a wide range of criticism that indicates that twenty-

first century scholars regard her work as complex and controversial, citing, for example, the debate about the authorship of her narrative and especially her shifting “ethnocentric outlook” (130). Sayre concludes, “The text continues to challenge new readers and inspire competing interpretations, for it is dense with meaning on many levels, from religious to ethnographic to psychological to sentimental” (130). Sayre points to the text’s richness and complexity, without determining that it is the “best” example of an Indian captivity narrative.

The first section of this chapter will address the evolution and structure of European families and communities from the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, using the studies of well-known historians like Philippe Ariès, Lawrence Stone, and Stephen Ozment, in order to establish the foundation of familial and gender roles that influenced family life in Puritan New England, such as what Rowlandson likely experienced as a Puritan wife and mother. This section also will examine family life among northeastern native tribes during the same period to clarify the conditions Rowlandson might have experienced as a female captive and how these conditions influenced her interpretation of traumatic events, including her use of household chores as metaphors of resistance. Furthermore, the comparison of these two societies will help illustrate her identity struggle as she was forcibly removed from her natal culture to the tribal culture of the “savage” other, an “other” feared by Puritan New Englanders. Finally, a close examination of Rowlandson’s use of specific domestic chores will be offered to show how these activities served as a way for her to express her reaction to trauma and her resistance to Puritan society.

Evolution and Structure of European Families and Communities

The term “family” has been used differently over the centuries to reflect societal ideas and needs. From 1500 to 1800 in England, Stone defines this fluid term as loosely encompassing genetically related people who live together (28). A household, on the other hand, could consist of many people “unrelated by blood or marriage” (28). A “household” could include “non-kin inmates, sojourners, boarders or lodgers, occupying rooms vacated by children or kin, as well as indentured apprentices and resident servants, employed either for domestic work about the house or as an additional resident labor force for the fields or the shop” (28). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, these diverse “households” were sometimes referred to as “families.”

Designation of the structure of the family, however, has become a controversial subject due to disagreement regarding the typical organization of the household prior to the nineteenth century. In 1962, Ariès argued that complex, extended households became more nuclear and exclusive in the eighteenth century: “The progress of the concept of the family followed the progress of private life, of domesticity. For a long time the conditions of everyday life did not allow the essential withdrawal by the household from the outside world” (375). While idealizing the socialization of the earlier extended households, Ariès also explains that closer emotional bonds among all family members and frequent interaction between parents and children developed as families became more nuclear and exclusive. In a similar vein (although Stone emphasizes the advantages of the nuclear family, Ariès of the extended household), Stone describes the “open lineage family” (103), households with several generations of kin, open to the

community and distant relatives, with “no sense of domestic privacy, and inter-personal relations” from the 1450s through the 1500s (408). He suggests a modification of the household structure, in the later part of the 1500s and early 1600s, toward a restricted patriarchal nuclear family (409-11), with an orderly “household responsible for, and the symbol of, the whole social structure” (409). By 1700, Stone argues that “a new family type” had emerged, a closed domesticated nuclear family (411-14), with “greater stress on internal bonding within the family” (409), that is, “[a]ffective individualism” (411-12), and a diminishment of emotional involvement with the community. Ozment appears to frown upon Stone’s “happy argument and even happier prose” that imposes the “negative features of English family life onto the earlier centuries (the open lineage family), while shoving the positive ones into the later (the closed domesticated nuclear family)”; he says that Stone turns Ariès’s “somber, tentative thesis into an unambiguous account” (20). Whatever the family structure, members of both “family” and “household” units were considered morally and legally subordinate to the husband and father, that is, the head of the unit.

The family established the model for the power relationships of life (religious, political, communal). In addition to establishing such order, the husband’s duties included the welfare and protection of his family and could include responsibilities, even military, within his community. His citizenship gave him protection and privileges; a propertied man could also participate fully in “politics and government” (Ozment 26). Although both husband and wife could “command servants,” the husband also had the legal right to “physically discipline” his wife, “much as he might do a servant or a child” (Ozment 26). A man’s role of father was closely related to his role as husband since the

majority of legal issues related to parenthood rested with fathers, while most of the daily parenting, especially of young children, was not the responsibility of the father.

However, as boys reached the age of six or seven, their fathers began to actively direct their moral and practical education, with special regard to their vocation and even marriage (Ozment 73). Although Ariès and Stone question the role of loving parents in earlier periods, scholarship today suggests that caring fathers date back to the beginnings of human documents and images. In addition, Ozment notes that although the father “increasingly controlled vocational destiny and parental attention” once a son was six or seven, “mothers remained involved in the rearing of their sons” (73), just as fathers were engaged in the care of their daughters into their later years.

The position of women in these patriarchal households remains unclear in some areas. Many scholars of the 1960s and 1970s believe that women had more independence and more opportunities from about 1200 to 1500 when they could pursue “careers in industry and commerce outside the home” (Ozment 23). This was the golden age of women’s freedom until the twentieth century. In these early patriarchal households the wife “remained under her husband’s authority (*Munt*) at home, [but] in practice, she played the matriarch to his patriarch, ‘wearing the pants’ in the household, as both, together and independently, planned and directed their shared household and business obligations” (Ozment 25). These scholars believe that as nuclear families emerged, with affective relationships developing between both husbands and wives and parents and children, women became increasingly homebound, taking a greater role in housework and childcare, reducing the need for servants in some families and isolating wives and children from community and kin as the household became more and more

exclusive. With this reading, the period from 1500 to 1800 became “a low point in the history of European women” (Ozment 23) as their lives became more constricted. Ironically, women’s activities were reduced by the structure of the nuclear family at the very time when medical advances made childbirth a less “dangerous experience” (Stone 64) that would not curtail their business opportunities.

Information about the situation of the child in the family or household is also contradictory. However, the view that most people hold is that of Ariès and Stone: that children attained a special place in the nuclear family. In *Centuries of Childhood*, Ariès observes that one of the most obvious differences between families of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries was the increase in emotional intimacy between parents and children (375). He writes that the ways in which childhood was viewed by Europeans began changing in the 1200s, becoming markedly different by the 1600s: “No doubt the discovery of childhood began in the thirteenth century, and its progress can be traced in the history of art in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But the evidence of its development became more plentiful and significant from the end of the sixteenth century and throughout the seventeenth” (47). Ozment believes that “ancient Roman marriage practices, to seventeenth-century funeral sermons, to advice literature” point to the “modern sentimental family,” including the loved child, existing from antiquity (104). Long-neglected family archives “compellingly document the folly and hubris of assigning quintessential spousal and parental love only to modern or recent times” (109). Ozment answers Ariès’ question about whether parents in the past treated their children with care and love – “they emphatically did” (110) – as is clear from diaries, letters, images, family chronicles, account books, wills.

Puritan Family and Community Structure

Puritans brought not only their religious beliefs but also their distinctly English culture to the New World during their migration in the early seventeenth century. In their 1938 study of the Puritans and their writings, Perry Miller and Thomas Johnson point out that “about ninety per cent of the intellectual life, scientific knowledge, morality, manners and customs, notions and prejudices, was that of all Englishmen” (7) and suggest that these beliefs have remained pervasive and persistent. English culture and Puritan religious beliefs infused the government of the newly formed New England colonies and every facet of Puritan society. Miller and Johnson explain, “The New England ‘theocracy’ was simply a Protestant version of the European social ideal, and except for its Protestantism was thoroughly medieval in character” (17). This “medieval character” operated on many levels in Puritan society, especially in the familial structure that closely followed their religious tenets. It was complimented by a humanism that recognized humans as “rational and responsible” beings (24).

The Puritans brought their families with them in the hope of establishing a fully functioning society in New England, unlike many of the first French or Spanish emigrants to the New World, and the family structure of the early colonies closely followed the traditional patriarchal structure of England. In *The Puritan Family*, Edmund Morgan establishes the close relationship between the church and Puritan societal and familial values. He writes that early colonial society heavily relied on the idea of hierarchy, as did contemporary English society: “The essence of the social order lay in the superiority of husband over wife, parents over children, and master over servants in the family, ministers and elders over congregation in the church, rulers over subjects in

the state” (19). The family structure imitated the patriarchal line of primogeniture that formed the foundation of English royal society. In *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England*, Ann M. Little explains:

Early modern English and colonial Anglo-American households were ideally ordered according to the ‘great chain of being’ that articulated humankind’s role in society at large as well as its relationship to the divine. Puritan New England was especially committed to this vision, and its colonies were built around a hierarchy based on sex, age, rank, and status. (94)

Morgan clarifies the reasoning: “Since God had created the world with some beings subordinate to others, he naturally proceeded upon the same principle in constructing human society. Subordination was indeed the very soul of order, and the Almighty as a God of order formed his earthly kingdom in a pattern of subordination” (17). Although this structure had begun to decline gradually in England (as Ariès, Stone, and Ozment attest), the early colonists embraced it as one of the crucial tenets of their government and religious beliefs. Helena M. Wall regards this colonial period with ambivalence. In *Fierce Communion: Family and Community in Early America*, she notes the inherent flaw in the Puritan mimicry of English culture: “One of the many ironies of early American society is that the European colonists sought to reproduce, even to freeze in time, patterns of family and community life that were already beginning to erode in Europe” (1). With European trends of “population growth, geographic mobility, economic changes,” and medical advances that lowered child mortality rates, Wall argues with Ariès and Stone that more affective family structures were forming and contends that

the colonists adhered to traditional family structure as well as to the traditional physical layout of the New England villages in order to provide the comforting familiarity of their “communal values” in a new and strange world (2).

In Puritan society, the family unit served as a powerful, multi-faceted institution that functioned on a variety of levels, such as offering medical care, vocational training, religious instruction, and social services (Little 95). Little elaborates on the role the “great chain of being” played in the formation of Puritan family structure: “Since God had delegated his authority on earth to Adam, men were to rule over women, children, servants, and slaves. This ordering of households was not a private matter but one of crucial importance to the functioning of society as a whole: family order was the basis of all order” (94). Morgan explains that Puritan theology mandated that a woman occupy a position of subservience to her husband:

The proper conduct of a wife was submission to her husband’s instructions and commands. He was her superior, the head of the family, and she owed him an obedience founded on reverence. He stood before her in the place of God: he exercised the authority of God over her, and he furnished her with the fruits of the earth that God had provided. (44-45)

With other historians, Little argues that “the hierarchical nature of the colonial family did not serve all of the interests of each family member equally, and that they were therefore prone to disorder and breakdown even in relatively stable New England” (95). However, a detailed study needs to be done from colony to colony: it would be misleading to assert that the cultures of, for example, Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, and New Haven did not differ greatly. Puritanism varied widely in the New England

colonies – despite the monolithic view often presented. In “Notes on Life in Plymouth Colony,” John Demos uses demographic techniques to offer one of the most complete and detailed studies of a single colony. Because his study primarily focuses on Plymouth, it cannot be assumed to exactly translate to the neighboring colonies, although similarities certainly were shared. Not surprisingly, the core of the Puritan family in Plymouth was the relationship between the husband and wife, and marriage was encouraged.

Although women were valued contributors to the “community of work” (Demos, *Past* 28) in the early American colonies, their legal and economic fate was determined by the established patriarchal forces in their lives: their fathers, brothers or husbands, and religion and community. Puritans expected each member of the family to contribute to the successful running of the household by participating in chores, and women typically cared for the gardens, orchards, and the home, while men worked in the “‘great fields,’ plowing and planting” (10). Although Puritan families seemed to evenly distribute household chores, women lacked power in many areas of colonial life, such as voting or being “otherwise active in public affairs” (11). Even in childrearing, women seemed to have a limited role. Demos points out that most childrearing publications written prior to the nineteenth-century, and the subsequent decline of the agrarian lifestyle, were typically addressed to the father, since “women were considered too irrational and unsteady to take the lead here” (10). Further, Puritan childrearing was marked by the “doctrinal imperatives of evangelical religion,” especially the concept of “original sin” (14). Furthermore, Puritan “advice-literature urged the “‘breaking’ and ‘beating down’ of will – those were the favorite verbs – from the earliest possible age” (14), even

regarding the care of infants. Patriarchal power structures dominated Puritan childrearing practices.

Predictably, marriages in Puritan New England often resulted in a number of children, most surviving into adulthood. In seventeenth-century Plymouth, Demos believes that “there was an average of seven to eight children who actually grew to adulthood (“Notes” 63). However, Demos contends that it was likely that birth rates were much higher, “although how much higher we cannot be sure because no trace exists today of many who died in infancy and early childhood” (63). In *Children in the New England Mind in Death and in Life*, Peter Slater explains that research has established that “in the healthiest communities, such as Andover and Ipswich in the mid-seventeenth century, one in every ten infants died . . . In less favored places during the seventeenth century, like the towns of Salem and Boston, as many as three infants of every ten expired” (16). Thus, the parental fear of losing at least one child was not unfounded.

Each pregnancy and subsequent childbirth also carried its own inherent risks. Colonial women could not enjoy the long life expectancy of their male counterparts due to the medical hazards related to childbirth. Demos estimates that a colonial woman’s life expectancy in Plymouth during the seventeenth century was a full seven years shorter than a man’s, with death rates for women peaking from ages 20 to 50 (“Notes” 66). Philip Greven’s statistics regarding the second-generation death rates among Andover residents in the seventeenth century show that women also had a shorter life expectancy than men, but the difference was not as dramatic as in Plymouth, with figures ranging from just one year to about four years (84). However, due to relatively

small sampling of residents, Greven notes that the findings may not be entirely reliable (“Family” 84). Despite the possible unreliability of the available statistics, consistent accounts and data underscore the fact that women could expect a shortened life expectancy due to the physical risks of pregnancy and childbirth.

For young Puritans, childhood was not a discretely marked time period as it is in modern society; instead, children developed naturally and assumed adult roles and duties when these were deemed appropriate by their parents. Because most children did not attend school regularly, they “joined their elders in the work of fields and farm, in the pleasures of the hearth, in the social round of village and neighborhood, in the devotions of the local church” (Greven, “Family” 76). In his examination of the Puritan family, Morgan notes that most daughters began their early training shortly after turning five or six years of age, learning the requisite skills necessary to fulfill their future role as “housewife, whether as daughter, wife, or mother” (67). Often young girls would leave the home to work as apprentices, learning the skills that would make them exemplary housewives in the future (76). Although most Puritan families believed that early childhood should be marked by periods of leisure and play, children often began contributing to the family chores before the age of seven when they were deemed physically and emotionally ready for proper instruction and responsibility.

Native Family and Community Structure

While colonial family life tended to be marked by a patriarchal structure, many of the Northeast Indian tribes – such as the Iroquois, the Huron, the Wampanoag, and the Seneca – followed a matrilineal structure that offered powerful roles to both adult males

and females (J. Miller 141, Bell 307). In “Kinship, Family Kindreds, and Community,” Jay Miller notes the cultural contrast as it must have appeared to French settlers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries:

Settling among the farming towns of the Northeast, Frenchmen came face to face with elaborate “mother right” matrilineal systems. Again and again, across North America, curious observers would discover yet another tribe or nation with what came to be technically called matrilineal descent, because it challenged or contrasted so strongly with their own naturalized “father right” of kinship traced through men. (141)

In his study of the Seneca Nation of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, anthropologist Anthony F. C. Wallace notes the Seneca matrilineal social structure and the Seneca nation’s reliance on women to provide most of the tribe’s sustenance. As one of the five tribes of the Five Nations, or Iroquois League, the Seneca social structure was closely related to the other four tribes of the League: the Oneidas, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Mohawks (Dowd 57). The matrilineal structure of the early Seneca, inhabiting what is now New York, could be most clearly observed in the social hierarchy exhibited by those inhabiting the “traditional Iroquois dwelling unit,” the longhouse (159). Wallace describes the longhouse as “a dark, noisy, smoke-filled family barracks; a rectangular, gable-roofed structure anywhere from fifty to seventy-five feet in length, constructed of sheets of elm bark lashed on stout poles, housing up to fifty or sixty people” (159). Those inhabiting a single longhouse were biologically related, and since it was a “residence of maternal lineage” (159), an elderly woman presided over

each longhouse, while her daughters, along with their husbands and families, resided there with her (159).

Regardless of whether a tribe was matrilineal or not, the primary role of men in Indian society remained consistent as hunters and warriors. Hunting allowed the tribe to obtain meat, but it also served a spiritual purpose, as native myths illustrate. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Slotkin describes a Delaware myth of creation “typical of that held by many North American tribes” (46). In this myth, the people of the tribe live under a lake, consumed by hunger as they subsist only on roots and vegetables. Their luck changes when “a tribal hero discovers a deer and pursues it as a hunter” (46). The chase leads the hero “to a hole permitting escape from the underworld,” and once freed from the underworld, the hunter kills the deer and consumes some of the meat (46). The hero then returns to his tribe with the remaining meat, and all “partake of it, are awakened, and follow the hunter out into the world to populate, enjoy, and worship the maternal spirit of the woods” (46). This myth illustrates the power of the hunter as provider of meat – engaged in both a practical and spiritual effort. Likewise, the role of the warrior was regarded as being both practical and spiritual, and war ceremonies contributed to the “group identity” (Holm 162). In “American Indian Warfare,” Tom Holm asserts, “The warrior is praised, not necessarily for going to war, but for participating in a tribe’s unique ceremonies and thus preserving its power and relationship with the spirit world” (162). Holm notes that there exists “some evidence to demonstrate that Native American groups essentially waged ritual warfare in order to assure young males of their positive roles in society and to provide an outlet for youthful aggression, while at the same time insuring that not too many of them would be killed in the process” (163).

The reasons for going to war varied in a tribe, such as defending territory against encroachment (including the protection of farmland) or retaliating against another group.

Like the Puritans, most Indian tribes had fairly rigid gender roles; however, women often fulfilled an invaluable economic role within the tribe. For instance, Seneca women were almost entirely responsible for breeding livestock as well as farming. According to Wallace, the Iroquois “were a cornfed people” (160), and the Seneca Indians farmed approximately “a million bushels of corn each year” (160). The women, who would work communally, conducted the extensive farming efforts; individual plots of land were not considered necessary or favorable to the community. Little suggests a political importance in the Iroquois women’s role in the production of food: “Because their work provided upwards of 75 percent of the calories consumed by their families, ethnohistorians have argued that Native women’s economic importance translated into greater political influence (if not formal political roles) than that of European and Euro-American women in colonial America” (99). Although Seneca women spent much of their time engaged in the backbreaking labor of farming, James Axtell contends that theirs could not have been a “life of unremitting drudgery” (85) or few captured women and girls would have remained with native tribes. Axtell observes that Indian captive Mary Jemison describes female labor with the Seneca as being no less onerous than what white women endured (85).

Because the men were often away from the village for extended periods of time hunting or pursuing diplomatic relations with neighboring tribes or colonies, women who remained in the village to farm wielded significant influence in tribal matters. Wallace explains:

[T]he women stayed at home. Thus, an Iroquois village might be regarded as a collection of strings, hundreds of years old, of successive generations of women, always domiciled in their longhouses near the cornfields in a clearing while their sons and husbands traveled in the forest on supportive errands of hunting and trapping, of trade, of war, and of diplomacy. (164)

Little observes that native women enjoyed only slightly more control over their lives than their white counterparts; yet she notes that their influence in family matters was far greater than that of Euro-American women: “There is good evidence that both Algonquian and Iroquois women were central not just as producers and caregivers but as decision makers in their families as well” (100). Wallace identifies three distinct domains in the Iroquois tribe in which women exercised the most political power: nominating successors to certain chiefs, lobbying for tribal matters during a “kind of town meeting,” and advocating for a particular fate for tribal captives, either to avenge the death of, or to replace, a lost tribal member (164).

In the matrilineal tribes of the Northeast, women often initiated the search for captives to replace or avenge the death of lost tribal members and then helped determine the captives’ fates once they had been secured by the tribe. In “Captivity, Adoption, and Slavery Reconsidered,” Pauline Turner Strong explains that the usual captivity process among the Iroquois typically starting with “a bereaved clan matron whose grief (or that of a clan member) remained unassuaged after a series of condolence rituals. She would then persuade her brothers’ sons (or other young male members of the matrilineage) to obtain one or more captives” (343). After the captives were abducted by the tribe, their fate remained uncertain, depending on a variety of

factors, including age and gender. Little elaborates on both Algonquian and Iroquoian women's roles in the adoption of captives, indicating that they often served as the primary deciders on whether a captive would live or die and by what means (101). Like Strong, Little notes that the older women often were instigators of the captivity and were the ones to greet the captives upon first arrival. These women would decide which captives were worthy of adoption, including which families the captives would reside with and what their roles in the new family would be (101). It is possible that Mary Rowlandson encountered these decision-making women during her captivity without understanding their importance to her fate.

Rowlandson's Struggle for Identity and Metaphors of Resistance

Mary Rowlandson was removed forcibly from her Puritan home, at the threat of immediate death, by attacking Indians, and, not surprisingly, she suffered a crisis of identity throughout the months of her captivity. During her first remove, Rowlandson describes the loss of the familiar:

All was gone, my husband gone (at least separated from me, he being in the Bay; and to add to my grief, the Indians told me they would kill him as he came homeward) my children gone, my relations and friends gone, our house and home and all our comforts within doors, and without, all was gone (except my life) and I knew not but the next moment that might go too. (140)

In her list of losses, Rowlandson does not identify her own loss of identity as a Puritan goodwife, but this absence is implied by the inclusion of the loss of her family and home.

Bridget Bennett comments on Rowlandson's crisis of identity after she experienced the physical ruin of her home: "Home was a powerful identificatory site for Puritan women, especially wives...The destruction of Rowlandson's Lancaster house, therefore, creates a predicament for her. How could she maintain the most valorized qualities of Puritan femininity?" (343). However, in the early part of Rowlandson's narrative, her six-year old daughter, Sarah, who had suffered a mortal wound during the raid, remains with her, and while Sarah lives, Rowlandson clings to her previous identity as a Puritan wife and mother. Once Sarah dies in the third remove, Rowlandson is finally stripped entirely of her previous identities, and she struggles to redefine who she is. Simply, the death of Sarah serves as a powerful catalyst to the creation of Rowlandson's new identity, an identity that she creates and defends by using carefully constructed metaphors of resistance, particularly those related to domestic chores. Bennett notes the dichotomous role that domestic chores serve in Rowlandson's narrative:

Finally, her engagement with modes of exchange and work acceptable to her gender and status (such as sewing and knitting) confirms her upholding of contemporary ideals of Puritan femininity. Yet at the same time her domestic skills allow her to operate with some dexterity within a subsistence economy in which her abilities have a value that she quickly recognizes and exploits like a canny housewife. (344)

However, Rowlandson's references to domestic chores serve a greater purpose than being a pragmatic way to shape a new identity; in fact, her references to domesticity, especially to needlework and food, exhibit subtle elements of subversion, especially to the seventeenth-century English preconceptions regarding race and gender.

The second remove recounts how Rowlandson was plunged into “the vast and desolate wilderness” (140) as the raiding party retreats to the woods and their camps. Many critics have examined Rowlandson’s use of the wilderness in her narrative, especially “her painfully literal combat with the wilderness” (Henwood 169) as well as her struggle with the metaphorical spiritual wilderness that pervades her narrative. Slotkin examines the spiritual wilderness in captivity narratives, including Rowlandson’s, in *Regeneration Through Violence*. To Slotkin, “Indian captivity victimization by the wilderness was the hardest and most costly (and therefore the noblest) way of discovering the will of God in respect to one’s soul, one’s election or damnation” (101). In *Captured by Texts*, Gary Ebersole explains, “It is enough to recall that in Puritan discourse the wilderness was never merely topological space but rather functioned within a larger symbolic complex of wilderness-civilization that carried a spiritual significance” (56). Furthermore, Lisa Logan regards the wilderness as a physical and symbolic presence that “destabilizes Rowlandson’s categories of home, embodied in her Bible and Lancaster, Massachusetts, and disturbs the security of the Puritan view” (257). Certainly the wilderness serves as a symbol of spiritual desolation and struggle in Rowlandson’s narrative of confinement, yet it also operates as a symbol of her profound loss of identity, not simply isolated to just her spirituality.

In the third remove, Rowlandson’s journey into the “wilderness” becomes more complete when her daughter, Sarah, dies after “nine days from the first wounding, in this miserable condition, without any freshing of one nature or another, except a little cold water” (Rowlandson 142-43). In the lines immediately following Rowlandson’s account of the Indians burying Sarah in an unmarked grave in the wilderness without

her knowledge, Rowlandson writes, “God having taken away this dear child, I went to see my daughter Mary, who was at this same Indian town, at a wigwam not very far off, though we had little liberty or opportunity to see one another” (143). Mary, who was approximately ten years old at the time of the raid, had been captured at the same time as Rowlandson, along with Joseph, Rowlandson’s son. With one child dead and buried in the wilderness, Rowlandson seems to be trying to recapture at least one of her identities, that of mother, by seeking out her surviving captive children.

Throughout the remaining removes, Rowlandson’s captured children seem to serve as a motivation for her survival as she credits them for allowing her to resist suicide, while also reinforcing her pre-captivity identity. In the ninth remove, Rowlandson’s “master” leads her to where Joseph was being held captive in a nearby village. Upon her return to her village, Rowlandson recounts her misery:

When I was returned, I found myself unsatisfied as I was before. I went up and down mourning and lamenting: and my spirit was ready to sink, with the thoughts of my poor children: my son was ill, and I could not think of his mournful looks, and no Christian friend was near him, to do any office of love for him, either for soul or body. And my poor girl, I knew not where she was, nor whether she was sick, or well, or alive, or dead. (152)

Rowlandson describes her assimilation to the tribe as well as her industrious sewing that allows her to forge relationships with the Indians and barter favors prior to this description in the ninth remove. It seems that her surviving children serve as a sort of bridge between her two “worlds” and corresponding identities: her natal Puritan patriarchal culture (and her corresponding role of citizen, wife and mother) and her

adopted Indian matrilineal culture (and her corresponding role of entrepreneur and negotiator). Throughout Rowlandson's confinement narrative, references to her children are frequently accompanied by descriptions of her feelings of misery. These feelings can be attributed to her separation from the children as well as her fears regarding their health and safety; however, since these accounts of misery are often placed within descriptions of Rowlandson's entrepreneurial success, it can be inferred that her former identity, as represented by the children, caused Rowlandson discontent. This maternal discontent would not have been acceptable to her Puritan readers, but Rowlandson seems reticent to disavow her success within the Indian tribe, including her entrepreneurial sewing and apparently close relationship to King Philip (Metacom); due to this, Rowlandson disguises her successes in metaphors of mundane domestic chores that likely would have been overlooked by the Puritan elders.

The fourth and fifth removes are pivotal since they show Rowlandson's shift of identity from Puritan wife and mother to a new identity marked by independence and, ironically, a sense of freedom. In the fourth remove, Rowlandson was forced to leave her daughter, Mary, and "four little cousins and neighbors ...the Lord only knows the end of them" (145) since the Indians Rowlandson traveled with were headed deeper into the wilderness. Rowlandson's tone is mournful as she recounts her state of mind when they stopped at "a desolate place in the wilderness" (145):

Heart-aching thoughts here I had about my poor children, who were scattered up and down among the wild beasts of the forest: my head was light and dizzy (either through hunger or hard lodging, or trouble or all

together) my knees feeble, my body raw by sitting double night and day,
that I cannot express to man the affliction that lay upon my spirit.... (146)

She decides to read from her Bible to assuage her grief, weeping for the condition of her children and herself.

In stark contrast to the grief and self-pity reflected in the fourth remove, the fifth remove describes the Indians crossing the Baquag River, exhibiting Rowlandson as more confident in her survival abilities and offering grudging respect for the Indians, while criticizing the English army who was in pursuit of them. Rowlandson explains how the Indians, who were so numerous that Rowlandson writes that she was unable to count them all (146), were able to cross the river in less than 24 hours, including “old and young, some sick, and some lame, many had papooses at their backs, the greatest number at this time with us, were squaws, and they travelled with all they had, bag and baggage” (147). Rowlandson herself “did not wet her foot” (146) due to ingenuity of the Indians in creating a raft for her, a favor that she curiously does not explore. After the Indians and Rowlandson had crossed, they saw the smoke of the English army’s fires, as the soldiers made camp before crossing the river to pursue the Indians. However, Rowlandson recounts, “...yet this river put a stop to them” (147). Although she couches her criticism in the language of Puritan faith, her harsh judgment of the English army is palpable:

God did not give them courage or activity to go after us; we were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance; if we had been, God would have found out a way for the English to have passed this river,

as well as for the Indians with their squaws and children, and all their luggage. (emphasis added, 147)

This passage also offers another indication of her shifting identity: her use of “us” and “we” simultaneously refers to “her and the Indians” and “her and the English,” respectively.

In addition, this remove also establishes two domestic metaphors that pervade the remainder of the narrative and serve to undermine Puritan values and mores. Rowlandson first mentions her “knitting work” (146) as she recounts what she had to carry during her crossing of the Baquag River; “I carried only my knitting work and two quarts of parched meal...” (146). Rowlandson is carrying a fairly large quantity of food, which seems anomalous since she repeatedly mentions the near-starvation conditions experienced by herself and the Indians. Rowlandson recounts, “The first week of my being among them, I hardly ate anything; the second week, I found my stomach grow very faint for want of something; and yet it was very hard to get down their filthy trash...” (147). In this remove, she establishes her struggles with hunger and eating typical Indian fare.

Although she does not comment on the ownership of the parched meal, it seems likely that the meal is part of her personal rations, possibly bartered as a result of her work as a seamstress, work that she describes in frequent detail throughout the remaining removes. During their encampment after the river crossing, Rowlandson describes a squabble she has with her mistress regarding her needlework:

I was at this time knitting a pair of white cotton stockings for my mistress; and had not yet wrought upon a Sabbath day; when the Sabbath came

they bade me go to work; I told them it was the Sabbath day, and desired them to let me rest, and told them I would do as much more tomorrow; to which they answered me, they would break my face. (147)

Rowlandson does not comment about how the situation was resolved, but her silence on the matter seems to indicate that she abided by her mistress's wishes and worked on the Sabbath. However, the passage is remarkable in its depiction of Rowlandson's attitude, in stark contrast to her identity of the "victim" in previous removes. Rowlandson begins to make demands and advocate for herself in this remove, apparently powered by a confidence that originated in the intrinsic value she gained from the tribe due to her needlework. In this passage, Rowlandson's needlework serves a twofold purpose: to justify why she worked on the Sabbath against Puritan doctrine and to serve as a metaphor for her gain in confidence and power within her role of Indian captive, a benefit that likely was missed by Puritan (male) readers due to its connection to undervalued domestic chores. Ozzie J. Mayers examines the symbolic role of sewing in women's American literature in "The Power of the Pin: Sewing as an Act of Rootedness in American Literature," noting that "sewing can be understood as a symbolic act of survival, expressed through an urge not to flee but to pin oneself down in order to discover the unconscious, unarticulated, and private modes of expression buried within" (667). In fact, Rowlandson's references to sewing throughout her narrative of confinement consistently reflect an internal "awakening of self" that allows her to develop confidence in her own abilities, including being able to creatively contextualize and survive the trauma of Indian captivity.

The seventh remove illustrates Rowlandson's changing perspective regarding food and hunger, something she touches upon in earlier removes, as well as her own acculturation to Indian life. The tribe that Rowlandson traveled with carried minimal food stores, relying instead on hunting and scavenging for sustenance. James Axtell describes the scarcity of food experienced by New England Indian captives in "The White Indians of Colonial America":

The lack of substantial food supplies forced the captives to accommodate their stomachs as best they could to Indian trail fare, which ranged from nuts, berries, roots, and parched corn to beaver guts, horseflank, and semi-raw venison and moose, eaten without the customary English accompaniments of bread or salt. (66)

The result for Rowlandson often was an acute hunger that changed her perspective on what was suitable for consumption and what was not. Jordan Stein examines the critical debate regarding Rowlandson's hunger in "Mary Rowlandson's Hunger and the Historiography of Sexuality," and asserts that "[t]here remains some room to debate whether Rowlandson's hunger is finally a spiritual hunger as the preface's author would have it, or bodily hunger, as more recent critics might" (483). To Stein, Rowlandson's hunger represents a latent sexuality: "...what makes hunger appear to bear on sexuality, is that as much as her narrative registers hunger as a basic impulse or drive, the (inevitably partial) satisfaction of hunger in the narrative nonetheless appears deinstrumentalized, a matter of taste and not just need" (474). Although Rowlandson's hunger might hint at sexual pleasure, it seems more likely that hunger, and

Rowlandson's description of food, offers insight into her changing self-identity as she begins to enjoy food that she would have rejected prior to captivity.

In the seventh remove, she recounts an incident in which an Indian passes her carrying a "basket of horse liver" (148). Being hungry, she asks him for a piece and then begins roasting it over a fire. Before it was finished cooking, "they [the Indians] got half of it away from me, so that I was fain to take the rest and eat it as it was, with blood in my mouth, and yet a savory bit it was to me" (148). Rowlandson's experimentation, and enjoyment, of indigenous food reflects her own assimilation into the tribe and her burgeoning independence, not simply a sexual awakening (although that certainly could have been a factor). Not only does Rowlandson assert herself and ask for a piece of the liver, but she physically fights for possession of it in order to survive. Rowlandson emerges from this scene as a victor, not a victim, and seems to relish the spoils of her fight without guilt or shame.

An earlier incident in the seventh remove also establishes Rowlandson's use of food as a metaphor of resistance. Before Indians grabbed her cooking piece of horse liver from the fire, Rowlandson had an ear of Indian corn stolen from her after she found two ears in "deserted English fields" (148). While she admits she was upset by the theft, she does not indicate that she did anything to recoup her loss. However, shortly thereafter, she asks an Indian for the horse liver and then fights to recover it during the before-mentioned theft. Her behavior while obtaining food mirrors her attitude towards gaining independence during the early removes of her narrative: initially she is upset by her loss of food (independence) but only complains about it, taking no action to remedy her situation; later, she asks for food (independence) and receives it, even though it is

not what she is accustomed to eating; and then finally, she takes what she believes to be hers. Throughout the remaining removes, Rowlandson seems to be no longer content to simply ask for food (independence) but instead actively seeks it through theft or employment.

In the pivotal eighth remove, Rowlandson meets with King Philip several times and describes a friendly relationship with the Wampanoag leader, which seemingly stems from King Philip's desire that Rowlandson sew a shirt, and later a cap, for his nine-year old son. While Rowlandson's description of her first interaction with King Philip is fragmented and obfuscated by various unrelated anecdotes, it is clear that Rowlandson respects him and was treated fairly by him in their brief exchanges. Once the Indian party arrives at King Philip's camp in Connecticut, Rowlandson meets with him, although she does not clarify whether he called her or whether she went on her own account. Of this visit, she simply writes, "Then I went to see King Philip, he bade me come in and sit down, and asked me whether I would smoke (a usual compliment nowadays amongst saints and sinners) but this no way suited me" (150). Strangely, Rowlandson makes no further comment about the visit with him, leaving her readers without a clear sense of the meeting's purpose or content.

However, later in the eighth remove, Rowlandson describes her growing familiarity with King Philip, apparently resulting from the notoriety of her sewing skills in the tribe. Rowlandson's needlework skills are apparently well-known at this point since King Philip requests her services to craft English-styled clothes on behalf of his only son (Lepore 150) on at least several occasions. Rowlandson writes, "During my abode in this place, Philip spake to me to make a shirt for his boy, which I did, for which he gave

me a shilling: I offered the money to my master, but he bade me keep it: and with it I bought a piece of horse flesh” (150). She follows this reference to King Philip with another reference to him, in which he again solicits her sewing skills: “Afterwards he asked me to make a cap for his boy, for which he invited me to dinner. I went, and he gave me a pancake, about as big as two fingers; it was made of parched wheat, beaten, and fried in bear’s grease, but I thought I never tasted pleasanter meat in my life” (150). This indicates that Rowlandson had at least three encounters with King Philip shortly after her arrival to camp, although it is possible that her contact with the leader was much greater than she suggests. Another telling sign of their growing familiarity is the fact that she no longer refers to him as “King Philip” as she had earlier in the remove, but “Philip,” his shortened moniker.

Rowlandson’s familiarity with King Philip remains a curious inclusion in her narrative, especially considering the Puritans’ vilification of the leader who had instigated many of the attacks on English settlements in New England, including the attack on Lancaster. David Minter explains that “the early captivity narratives embody one of the primary tensions in Puritan life – tension between the urge toward unification and interdependence and the urge toward separation and independence” (345). While Minter is referring to the broader cultural and religious challenges of Puritan society, this observation can easily be applied to Rowlandson’s own personal struggle in the wilderness as she seeks to remain faithful to her natal culture, and the restrictions inherent in it, while reveling in her newfound independence after her forcible separation from the Puritans. Rowlandson’s progressively familiar relationship with King Philip reflects this struggle on a smaller scale as she uses her sewing skills to attain some

degree of resolution between these opposing imperatives that dominate her narrative; needlework provides the perfect vehicle to maintain her Puritan ideal of femininity while allowing her to gain favors and independence, including those from King Philip.

King Philip compensates Rowlandson for her needlework, a clear indication that Rowlandson's role in the tribe was not that simply of a slave but as a valued participant in her own right. He first compensates her as a skilled worker, offering her English currency for her efforts, which she attempts to give to her own master, "Narragansett leader" Quinnapin (Lepore 135). This strategic move could have been an attempt to seek her master's favor, or it could indicate that Rowlandson continues to misread her own status within the tribe, believing herself to be less valuable to the tribe than she is. Regardless of the reason that she tries to give away her shilling, Rowlandson's needlework emerges in the eighth remove as a powerful bartering tool that she uses to gain favor with the males who wield power over her in captivity as well as a means to gain tangible rewards, such as money to buy food.

Furthermore, due to the economic structure of Puritan New England, it is probable that the shilling that Rowlandson earned from sewing for King Philip may have been the only money she had ever earned and managed on her own as an adult. In her article, "Gender, Work, and Wages in Colonial New England," Gloria Main examines the "patriarchal authority over the household" in Puritan New England and observes the rigid "distinctive social roles" that existed between men and women (39). Although wage information in the early colonies is sparse, Main cites a seventeenth-century account by John Pynchon regarding wages in the early colonies:

Only a few women appear anywhere in John Pynchon's Connecticut Valley accounts. Of the four women he mentioned in the 1640s, one received pay for chickens and eggs, one for weeding, one for making hay, and the fourth for domestic service...The first reference to spinning appears in 1663, to knitting in 1668, and to sewing in 1669. (53)

Granted, Pynchon's account pre-dates Rowlandson's narrative, yet it seems reasonable to assume that wage conditions for women in 1640s Connecticut were similar to wage conditions for women in 1670s Massachusetts. In addition, since Rowlandson was a minister's wife (Derounian-Stodola, *Women's* 3), she would have occupied a higher social position than farmers' wives, thus eliminating the need for her to earn wages to support the family by hiring herself out as a domestic laborer.

In the second instance, as noted, King Philip compensates Rowlandson's needlework with an invitation to dinner. As previously mentioned, Rowlandson eats a "pancake...made of parched wheat, beaten, and fried in bear's grease" (150) during her meal with the Indian leader. Considering the fact that this meal had been cooked over a fire, it is not surprising that Rowlandson would evaluate it as superior to the raw horse liver that she had eaten in the seventh remove; yet her gushing assessment of this meal seems odd, considering that she had probably eaten many substantial meals with her Puritan family that she had prepared herself. However, when put in the context of her previous references to food, this positive assessment of King Philip's pancake is consistent; as Rowlandson moves further into the "wilderness," she continues to shed her previous identity in favor of a new identity of independence. This independence is inextricably tied to her needlework, which allows her to receive favors, including food.

Thus, to Rowlandson, King Philip's pancake tastes better to her than food she had prepared as a Puritan wife, mother, and daughter due to the fact that she earned the pancake with her own needlework skills. Furthermore, food serves as an indication of Rowlandson's level of assimilation to the tribe; as she acclimates to the near-starvation conditions of the Indians, substandard fare becomes "savory." In turn, as she acculturates to tribal life, Rowlandson does not describe King Philip as a reviled Indian leader responsible for the deaths of many English colonists, as most Puritans believed, but as a friendly ally during her captivity.

The ninth remove continues to establish Rowlandson's reputation as a skilled seamstress as well as provide further proof of her continued assimilation to the tribe. In this incident, Rowlandson explains how a "sorry Indian" asked her to make shirts for him and an unborn "papoose" (151). At the delivery of the baby's shirt, the Indian pays her by giving her a knife. She writes, "I carried the knife in, and my master asked me to give it him, and I was not a little glad that I had anything that they would accept of, and be pleased with" (151). Again, Rowlandson is solicited to use her needlework skills in exchange for favors, in this case, a knife. She offers the knife as a goodwill gift to her master, Quinnapin, a man she describes in the twelfth remove as "the best friend that I had of an Indian, both in cold and hunger, and quickly so it proved" (154). Furthermore, by this remove, it seems likely that Rowlandson was becoming quickly assimilated into tribal life, as evidenced by her use of an Indian word, "papoose," even though she recounts this experience many years later.

The women of the tribe also solicited Rowlandson's needlework skills, suggesting that the native women lacked some of the essential domestic skills of femininity that

were valued by European culture. Rowlandson's "mistress," Weetamoo, was one of the women who asked Rowlandson to sew on her behalf, a woman for whom Rowlandson exhibits great contempt throughout the narrative, later describing her as "a severe and proud dame she was" (163). In the thirteenth remove, "Philip's maid came in with the child in her arms," asking Rowlandson to give up a portion of her apron to "make a flap for it" (156). Rowlandson refuses, and Weetamoo tries to force Rowlandson's cooperation:

[T]hen my mistress bade me give it, but still I said no: the maid told me if I would not give her a piece, she would tear a piece off it: I told her I would tear her coat then, with that my mistress rises up, and takes up a stick big enough to have killed me, and struck at me with it, but I stepped out, and she struck the stick into the mat of the wigwam. (156)

This incident offers important insight into the difficulties Rowlandson experienced as her identity changes during her captivity. As previously established, her needlework skills enables her to gain favors and respect from the tribe, benefits that seem to please Rowlandson, especially if those soliciting her skills are male. As a woman born in a patriarchal society, Rowlandson seems comfortable being asked to work at the request of men and apparently seeks to gain their approval. However, Rowlandson seems to resent orders from Weetamoo, not recognizing, or not caring about, the power she holds in the tribe as "a powerful Pocasset leader and sister-in-law to Metacom" (Sayre 129). Rowlandson's resentment surfaces as outright rebellion as she dodges the blow of the "powerful 'squaw sachem'" (Derounian-Stodola, Introduction 4), an act of blatant disrespect that must have surprised and infuriated Weetamoo. While the incident

exhibits Rowlandson's continual development of personal confidence, due in part to the power she gains by using her sewing skills, it also exhibits how stagnant her ideas regarding gender roles remain, despite her own enjoyment of the more fluid gender roles in the Indians' matrilineal culture. It seems quite likely that Rowlandson's resentment of Weetamoo stems not only from a misunderstanding of the power the sachem has, but also from a contempt that Weetamoo, and King Philip's maid, could not perform one of the most valuable domestic skills Puritan women could possess: the ability to sew.

The eighteenth remove includes one of the most puzzling examples of Rowlandson's behavior while she remained with the Indians; she describes how she steals food from an English child. After a day of walking, she and the Indians traveled to an "Indian town" where they "stayed all night" (162). Rowlandson recounts, "In this town there were four English children, captives; and one of them my own sister's" (162). After visiting with her niece, Rowlandson enters several wigwams, apparently looking for food. She writes:

Then I went to another wigwam, where there were two of the English children; the squaw was boiling horse's feet, then she cut me off a little piece, and gave one of the English children a piece also. Being very hungry I had quickly eaten mine, but the child could not bite it, it was so tough and sinewy, but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing and slobbering of it in the mouth and hand, then I took it of the child, and ate it myself, and savory it was to my taste. (162)

Although Rowlandson does not prepare the food in this passage, the hoof becomes a central metaphor that simultaneously explains Rowlandson's desire to survive at all costs and her progress of assimilating to Indian customs. Not only does she apparently enjoy the experience of eating a slobbery horse hoof, but she seems to have no remorse about stealing it from an English child captive – one who is traveling with her blood relative. Furthermore, since her own son is an English child captive with another tribe, it seems surprising that she would take food from a child in a similar condition to her son.

However, when this incident is put in the context of her actions in earlier removes, especially regarding food and sewing, it becomes a predictable part of Rowlandson's behavior pattern. As Rowlandson gains confidence in her own abilities, mainly through her entrepreneurial success with sewing, she gradually sheds some of the Puritan notions that she arrived with, such as not eating substandard food (such as scraps from a horse carcass) and accepting King Philip as an ally. In addition, she had experienced food theft on more than one occasion while with the Indians, a habit that she apparently integrated into her own behavior as she became more acculturated to tribal ways. This is underscored by the fact that Rowlandson included this incident in her narrative at all, without remorse or shame; to her, even after years of residing with the Puritans again, it was perfectly acceptable to steal food from an English child in her own self-interest. In "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," Tara Fitzpatrick notes that Rowlandson's depictions that "relate the alternatively daring and degrading concessions she made to survive," including stealing food from a child, reflect that she is "[n]either submissive nor despondent in dealings with her captors, [and] she

presents herself as defiant and calculating, resilient and self-reliant” (12). While Rowlandson exhibits great changes in her self-image throughout the prior removes, often using references to sewing and food to elaborate on these changes, the eighteenth remove includes one of the most telling indicators of her shifting self-identity and uses food as a metaphor for change.

The last remove is also the longest and describes the negotiations leading up to Rowlandson’s release as well as the ambivalence she exhibits as she returns to Puritan society and her surviving family. In stark contrast to the victimized and bewildered Rowlandson that appears in the early removes, Rowlandson directly negotiates her release with King Philip in this final remove, describing herself as a savvy and confident participant rather than chattel to be sold:

Then Philip smelling the business called me to him, and asked me what I would give him, to tell me some good news, and speak a good word for me. I told him, I could not tell what to give him, I would [give] anything I had, and asked him what he would have? He said, two coats and twenty shillings in money, and half a bushel of seed corn, and some tobacco. I thanked him for his love: but I knew the good news as well as the crafty fox. (168)

Despite Rowlandson’s skepticism regarding the terms of her release, she begins her journey towards Lancaster days later, leaving the people she had lived with for “eleven weeks and five days” (171). Rowlandson describes her departure with ambivalence: “So I took my leave of them, and in coming along my heart melted into tears, more than all the while I was with them, and I was almost swallowed up with the thoughts that ever I

should go home again” (172). Rowlandson’s tears results ostensibly from the fruition of her constant desire to return to her home and family; however, it seems curious that she would cry more tears at her departure from the Indians than when her daughter died shortly after the raid on Lancaster.

This description and other details from her homecoming point to the ambivalence Rowlandson experienced at returning to Puritan society, which probably stemmed from her sorrow at relinquishing her hard-won identity as an entrepreneur within the tribe as well as her attempt to contextualize the trauma she experienced. One of the most puzzling parts of the twentieth remove is her numbered listing of “remarkable passages of providence” in which she “took special notice of in [her] afflicted time” (169). These examples of Divine Providence would have been interpreted by contemporary Puritans as God’s favor of the English; however, these examples simultaneously exhibit a clear, albeit grudging, respect for the Indians. In the third of the “remarkable passages of providence,” Rowlandson explains:

Which also I have hinted before, when the English army with new supplies were sent forth to pursue after the enemy, and they understanding it, fled before them till they came to Baquag River, where they forthwith went over safely: that the river should be impassable to the English. I can but admire to see the wonderful providence of God in preserving the heathen for further affliction to our poor country. They could go in great numbers over, but the English must stop: God had an overruling hand in all those things. (170)

To Rowlandson, the Indians emerge as a means to test the faith of the English and herself; yet, on the other hand, her criticism of the English is implicit in this passage as she points to the English soldiers' inability to face the same adversity as the Indians. This line of thinking continues in the fourth "remarkable passage of providence" when she writes:

Strangely did the Lord provide for them; that I did not see (all the time I was among them) one man, woman, or child, die with hunger...I can but stand in admiration to see the wonderful power of God, in providing for such a vast number of our enemies in the wilderness, where there was nothing to be seen, but from hand to mouth. (170)

Again, Rowlandson indicates that God provided for the Indians as a test to the English: "But now our perverse and evil carriages in the sight of the Lord, have so offended Him, that instead of turning His hand against them, the Lord feeds and nourishes them up to be a scourge to the whole land" (170). Rowlandson clearly exhibits profound ambivalence regarding her view of the Indians, vacillating between admiration and the desire to couch her experience in conventional Puritan belief, which seems to have been shaken by her experience in the wilderness. Derounian comments on this duality: "Counteracting the religious commentary in Rowlandson's work, however, is the psychological commentary of a deeply troubled person" ("Puritan Orthodoxy" 86), noting that "[p]erhaps the most convincing evidence that Rowlandson underwent severe trauma during her captivity is that she changed as a result of the experience" (90). Certainly, Rowlandson exhibits profound changes in the narrative that describes almost four months of captivity.

Rowlandson initially describes herself as a frightened, grief-stricken mother in the earlier removes and then later describes herself as a self-sufficient, confident woman who survives in an alien culture by successfully forging relationships and becoming invaluable to the tribe due to her sewing skills. While Derounian posits that Rowlandson's changes are attributed to trauma, it would be facile to assume that her personality changes were entirely involuntary reactions to trauma. The act of recording her experience in writing served to give voice to "the wound that cries out" (Caruth 4), yet her narrative of confinement also exhibits a subtle thread of pride as Rowlandson recounts her survival, an element she was not willing to renounce to adhere to Puritan precepts. Instead, she embeds this pride in her descriptions of entrepreneurial sewing and how she obtained food while living as a captive, references to ordinary domesticity that would not have threatened the beliefs of the Puritan elders. These "threads" of domesticity bind the narrative into a coherent whole, offering consistent metaphors of resistance as Rowlandson seeks to simultaneously give voice to a profoundly painful experience in terms acceptable to Puritan culture, without renouncing the personal accomplishments that she fought so hard to achieve.

In the next chapter, I will examine Harriet Jacobs' slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*, focusing on the way in which Jacobs subtly integrated metaphors of domesticity into her own account of confinement to offer resistance to the power structures that thwarted her efforts at obtaining freedom. In order to contextualize these power structures, the first part of the chapter will discuss the slave economy as well as the roles women, both freed and enslaved, occupied in nineteenth-century America. Specifically, domesticity and housework will be examined

in order to explain how Jacobs used references to sewing and food preparation as metaphors of resistance.

CHAPTER FOUR: HARRIET JACOBS

Introduction

Harriet Jacobs appropriates an identity for herself much as Mary Rowlandson does in her narrative of confinement; however, Jacobs' struggle to gain a new identity seems to stem from the experience of being born into the slave system of the American South, a struggle that she recounts in her narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. In the preface, Jacobs explains: "I was born and reared in Slavery; and I remained in a Slave State twenty-seven years" (335). The ostensible purpose of her narrative seems to be to convey a didactic abolitionist account of the horrors of slavery, even in the absence of profound physical mistreatment. Thomas Doherty notes that the narrative serves "[a]s an indictment of slavery and an expression of the lengths its victims will go to escape it, the ordeal speaks for itself" (89). However, other thematic threads emerge in the narrative, including Jacobs' desire to create a loving home for herself and her children, a basic human desire at odds with the mandates of slavery. Laura Smith, in "Don't Be Too Careful of Your Silks and Rags': Domesticity and Race in Nineteenth-Century American Literature," comments on the significance of Jacobs' narrative and the role of domesticity:

But Jacobs' autobiography makes a key intervention into the largely white middle-class discourse of domesticity by demonstrating her domestic

faculty, mother love, and home sentiment... Throughout the narrative, Jacobs pleads her case for black womanhood, measuring her behavior against a white discourse of domesticity and arguing for a more expansive notion of womanhood to accommodate the unique and terrible challenges facing black women: the struggle for self-possession, the lack of access to marriage and goods, the inability to protect and nurture one's own children. (344)

Winifred Morgan also notes the recurring theme of home and domesticity in slave narratives written by women: "Women narrators are more apt than men to stress, as Jacobs does, a desire for home of one's own. Yet to maintain their own homes, women need a degree of economic power... Even in freedom, most fugitive slave women still worked as domestics, cooks, laundresses, and seamstresses" (91). At the end of her narrative, after achieving legal freedom for herself and her son and daughter, Jacobs writes, "The dream of my life is not yet realized. I do not sit with my children in a home of my own. I still long for a hearthstone of my own, however humble" (513). Despite the fact that she was able to achieve legal freedom, a home remained out of reach for Jacobs as she continued to struggle to obtain economic freedom at the time that she composed her narrative.

Jacobs uses the experiences of her autobiographical narrator, Linda Brent, to recount the difficulties of being a slave woman in the South, explaining her desire to adhere to the conventional roles and behavior of respectable femininity (as exhibited by free white women), which was at odds with the expectations of her master who desired to have an adulterous sexual relationship with her. Doherty notes that "what lends this

narrative unique and immediate appeal is, of course, sex – the sex of the narrator, of the audience, and in the story” (81). Jacobs’ narrator, Brent, keenly understands the sexual perils a slave woman faced and knows that consummating a sexual relationship with her master would force her into motherhood; she observes, “My master was, to my knowledge, the father of eleven slaves” (Jacobs 367). The children of this union would be put into the precarious position of being a painful reminder to her mistress of her husband’s philandering behavior, a situation that often forced the sale of young slave children. To avoid this outcome, Brent seeks the attention of another free white man, prominent local attorney Mr. Sands, to father her children, hoping his status and kindness will give them the best chance at a free life. Unfortunately, Brent did not seem to anticipate the social consequences of her actions, which put her actions at odds with accepted nineteenth-century notions of femininity, leaving her grandmother and local community outraged at her imprudent sexual choices. Eventually, her master, Dr. Flint, uses her children to try to manipulate Brent’s behavior, and force her obedience, by planning to bring them to his son’s plantation to train to become field hands. However, Brent defies traditional adherence to nineteenth-century ideals of womanhood and motherhood and leaves her children by escaping Flint’s power, eventually seeking refuge in the storeroom attic in her grandmother’s house in the same community in which Dr. Flint resides. For seven years, Brent remains hidden in the attic until it is deemed safe for her to escape to the North, where she becomes employed as a domestic worker and later becomes reunited with her children. She finally achieves freedom when a concerned friend buys her freedom from Flint’s surviving family after his death.

Throughout her narrative of confinement, Jacobs incorporates references to domesticity, especially food and sewing, which serve as subtle acts of rebellion and resistance to the slave system. Jacobs' narrative broadens the accepted notion of femininity by proposing "that an accurate definition of womanhood for her time includes not only domesticity, relationships with her children and others, and the qualities of resourcefulness and personal strength, but also the ability to survive on her own—emotionally, economically, and politically" (Dorani 212). Jacobs' apparent intended audience was free white Northern women, a group that would be receptive to her abolitionist message: "Northern women, largely from leisured middle-class households, were among the abolitionist movement's most dedicated participants" (Doherty 81). In addition, these targeted readers would have been attuned to domestic metaphors, allowing her multiple messages to resonate. However, unlike Rowlandson's use of domestic metaphors of personal resistance, Jacobs often links her domestic metaphors to expressions of familial love and the slaves' desire to seek freedom, for themselves and others. The American slave system encouraged the instability of slave families; thus, slaves forming close familial attachments and risking life and personal safety for others undermined the entire economic system on which slavery relied.

The first section of this chapter addresses the structure of slave families and communities in nineteenth-century antebellum America, using the studies of historians such as John Blassingame, Peter Kolchin, and Wilma King to establish the typical familial and gender roles that influenced slave life, such as what Jacobs might have experienced during her first 27 years. This section also examines the work experience of female slaves during the nineteenth-century in order to conceptualize the conditions

that Jacobs might have experienced as a female slave and how these conditions influenced her interpretation of traumatic events, including her use of household chores as metaphors of resistance. Finally, a close examination of Jacobs' use of specific domestic chores will be offered to show how these activities served as a way for her to express her reaction to trauma, to claim an identity, and to resist slavery and racism in American society.

Evolution and Structure of Slave Families and Communities

Chapter Three examined the family and community structures in European, colonial, and native societies through the nineteenth-century in America, especially noting how women participated in both European-based patriarchal societies and the matrilineal structures of some of the tribes inhabiting what is now the northeastern United States. However, this examination omitted a significant demographic group populating America through the nineteenth-century: the millions of slaves working for, and alongside, free Americans. By 1860, it is estimated that four million slaves lived in the United States, a number that had been steadily growing for decades after the early import of “only 600,000 to 650,000 Africans, some 6 percent of all the slaves brought from Africa to the New World” (Kolchin 22). Due to the “self-reproducing nature of the slave population in the United States,” the initial import of African slaves developed into “by far the largest slave population in the Western Hemisphere” (22). In some states of the Deep South, such as Mississippi and South Carolina, more than half of the reported population to the Census Bureau in 1860 consisted of slaves (242). In the United States, more than 12% of the overall population in 1860 consisted of slaves (242). Clearly,

slaves, many of whom were descendants from Africans, emerged in the nineteenth-century as a significant component of American society, profoundly influencing communities and American culture.

Statistics suggest that most of the slaves living in the nineteenth-century United States were not born in Africa, yet modern scholars debate whether African traditions and structures regarding family and gender roles persisted in slave culture. One area that scholars dispute is whether the slave societies that descended from African tribes were matriarchal, matrilineal, or matrifocal. In *American Slavery: 1619-1877*, Peter Kolchin asserts that it is a misconception that American slaves experienced a matriarchal society, “Recent research has dispelled the once common stereotype of the prevalent slave ‘matriarchy,’ predicated on weak ties of affection between slave men and their families. Still, for at least two reasons, slave families were less male-dominated than free families typically were in the nineteenth-century” (140). Kolchin believes that slave families were less patriarchal than nineteenth-century white families due in part to the fact that men were often sold away from their families; he adds that “slave men lacked the legal authority over their wives that free men possessed” (140), allowing slave wives and husbands to share fairly equal status in the family. According to historian Wilma King, “many women in Africa reared children with little help from the fathers in line with an accepted pattern of matrilineal or matrifocal families” (147), a pattern that pervaded slave culture due to the regularity with which male slaves were sold away from their families and the frequency by which slave children were born to white masters. Mothers occupied the central role in most slave families, bearing most of the responsibility regarding childrearing:

All too often, these responsibilities fell disproportionately upon slave mothers, who provided the initial nurturing and were the basic anchors for the young children. Mothers played major roles in helping their children adjust to work, understand plantation authority, and meet the tragedies and traumas of slavery. (147)

Claire Robertson also comments on the debate regarding matriarchy in African and slave cultures: “The fact remains that we have no historical record anywhere of a matriarchal society in a sense equivalent to patriarchal, that is, where women held most positions of power and authority and dominated the society’s economic and ideological structure” (11). As for the matrifocal family, Robertson asserts that it is defined as one in “which the mother plays a substantial role in providing substance and making decisions,” whether the father is present or not (12). Many African and slave families certainly were characterized by this definition since the mother provided most of the “subsistence needs” for the family (12). However, Robertson notes that this is not enough to warrant the label of “matrifocal,” especially since the mothers in these families did not make the majority of the family decisions. Robertson contends, “It is very difficult, then, to make an argument supporting matriarchy, or even matrifocality, as dominant in most African societies. Rather, patriarchal authority dominated most facets of life even if women often had substantial economic responsibilities and autonomy” (12). While scholars have disputed the degree of involvement mothers and fathers had in the typical slave family structure, and the appropriate terms to invoke for these families, discussions have consistently centered on the increased level of maternal involvement in slave families as compared to European-American families, which were rigidly patriarchal. It

seems that most of the fluidity regarding slave gender roles, as compared to European-American culture, was due to the repressive nature of slavery and the resulting instability of family and social structures, not primarily due to the persistence of African traditions.

Although marriage became a predictable stage of life for most nineteenth-century Americans, slave marriages were fraught with challenges and hardships and lacked the legal authority that marked the marriages of free Americans. Historian John Blassingame examines slave marriages in *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*, noting the reticence many slaves exhibited regarding marrying another slave:

Many slaves vowed early in life never to marry and face separation from loved ones. If they had to marry, the slave men were practically unanimous in their desire to marry women from another plantation. They did not want to marry a woman from their own and be forced to watch as she was beaten, insulted, raped, overworked, or starved without being able to protect her. (164)

However, slaveowners often discouraged, or prohibited, their slaves from marrying outside the plantation mainly because they wanted to keep “all of the slave’s interests under the control of the master and gave the slave fewer excuses to leave the estate” (165). If slave marriages did occur, often they transpired without fanfare or ceremony, and “in most cases consisted of the slaves simply getting the master’s permission and moving into a cabin together” (165). The most profound challenge facing slave marriages was the lack of control the slaves had over their own lives and that of their

spouse and children. Blassingame describes the inherent difficulty a slave husband faced:

After marriage, the slave faced almost insurmountable odds in his efforts to build a strong stable family. First, and most important of all, his authority was restricted by his master. Any decision of his regarding his family could be countermanded by the master.... The master, and not the slave, furnished the cabin, clothes, and the minimal food for his wife and children.

Under such a regime slave fathers often had little or no authority. (172)

Although Blassingame only contextualizes the situation of slave fathers, mothers also “had little or no authority” over their own lives or the lives of their children, having to rely on the whims and decisions of the masters. Kolchin describes the painful dichotomy many slave families experienced: “Slaves struggled valiantly to lead normal lives, and in doing so they relied most heavily on their families, but their lack of power vis-à-vis their masters rendered those families extremely vulnerable” (142). Vulnerable marriages that lacked legal authority often produced vulnerable offspring whose well-being was determined solely by the slaveowners, not the biological parents.

One of the greatest fears held by slaves was that their family unit would be fractured when one or more of the family members were sold away by the master. Blassingame explains:

By all odds, the most brutal aspect of slavery was the separation of families. This was a haunting fear which made all of the slaves’ days miserable. In spite of the fact that probably a majority of the planters tried to prevent family separations in order to maintain plantation discipline,

practically all of the black autobiographers were touched by the tragedy.

(173)

Slaveowners sold slaves for a variety of financial reasons, including to repay debts and to settle an estate after death. For instance, Georgia plantation owner, Pierce Butler, owned hundreds of acres of productive cotton and rice fields in the Sea Islands, yet in 1859, “four hundred of its slaves went under the hammer to pay the owner’s debts” (J. Scott xlvi). In her study of African American slave families in the Appalachian region, Wilma Dunaway describes the common practice of selling slaves to satisfy debts and asserts that Thomas Jefferson repeatedly sold his slaves to remain fiscally sound:

To remain solvent, he rented out his lands, but he exported twenty slaves.

Four years later, he marketed another forty slaves. Jefferson used the strategy repeatedly as his fiscal safety net. In fact, he sold 161 slaves between 1784 and 1794. Between 1787 and 1793, Jefferson sold slaves once every eight months. (45)

When Jefferson died, “the families of 130 slaves were permanently separated” (59), which was a fairly common practice of settling the estate of a deceased slaveholder. In fact, Dunaway comments that “[f]ewer than 10 percent of Upper South slaveholders maintained and protected slave family ties in their wills. Instead, white inheritance practices structured barriers to the survival of slave families” (59). The fear of the disintegration of the family unit became a reality for many slaves in nineteenth-century America.

Slaves often created full lives away from the probing eyes of their masters, despite the inherent uncertainty and powerlessness that slaves experienced within the

slave economy. Kolchin observes that “[s]laves at work were closely regulated, but away from work, they lived and loved, played and prayed, in a world largely unknown to the masters” (133). The slave quarters provided slaves with the privacy necessary to lead “lives partially free from white supervision” (149). Typically, the slave quarters on plantations were “[c]omposed of cabins grouped together to form a slave ‘village,’ the quarters was typically set at a considerable distance from the master’s ‘big house,’ to shield planter families from the intrusive presence of a large slave population” (149). The quality of the quarters varied from plantation to plantation. Frances Kemble describes the slave quarters on her husband’s Georgia plantation, noting that “[t]wo families (sometimes eight and ten in number) reside in one of these huts, which are mere wooden frames pinned, as it were, to the earth by a brick chimney outside...” (67). Claude Nolan observes that “[i]n the city masters and slaves usually lived close together on relatively small lots. The slaves’ house was likely to be in the backyard and, designed to emphasize bondage, was a long and narrow, facing the back, without windows opening on the street, and with living quarters above the bottom floor of stables and storerooms” (8). The conditions of the slave quarters in towns and cities, such as those that Harriet Jacobs might have experienced, were often better due to the scrutiny of neighbors.

Most slave families prepared and consumed their meals in the slave quarters; some families were even allotted a small plot of land to grow their own vegetables. Nolan explains, “Families regularly cooked their food in fireplaces, using a long handled iron skillet with three legs and a tight fitting lid, and pots hanging from a crane over the fire” (12). The quality and quantity of a family’s food rations would vary depending on

the generosity and means of the slaveholder. In most cases, a greater share of rations was given to slaves who worked in order to provide them the necessary energy to complete their tasks, thus leaving young children and the elderly with the least amount of sustenance. In Steckel's study about slave health, he asserts:

Yet it is clear from the discussions of slaveowners among themselves about the care and feeding of slaves that they focused on working slaves.... Planters usually stated allowances of meat, corn, and other foods in terms of working or laboring hands. If children were mentioned at all, they usually received 'proportionately less,' presumably in relation to work effort. (51)

Frances Kemble makes a similar assertion when describing the hungry children begging for food on her husband's plantation, "Animal food is only allowed to certain of the harder working men, hedgers and ditchers, and to them only occasionally, and in very moderate rations" (169). Due in part to insufficient food rations, some accounts note that slaves would steal food to supplement their diets or to subvert the slave economy, albeit in negligible ways. Kolchin describes these acts of resistance, "Slaves joined together to pilfer their masters' larders, as well as, less often, to burn their barns and poison their food" (161). Furthermore, some masters capitalized on slave malnourishment and used the promise of more rations to encourage good behavior, "Some masters and overseers used food to control the slaves, awarding an extra pound of meat weekly to slaves who had done their work and caused no trouble, or passing out extra rice to those who had picked a given amount of cotton" (Schneider and Schneider 84). While some families were offered a small plot of land to grow their own food, many of these gardens never

reached fruition due to the slaves' lack of time and/or knowledge about gardening.

Kemble notes that the slaves on her husband's plantation were offered gardening space, "Attached to each hovel is a small scrap of ground for a garden, which, however, is for the most part untended and uncultivated" (68). Due to long work hours, especially during times of harvest, slaves often had little time and energy to meet their immediate physical needs, including growing and preparing food. In his slave narrative, Solomon Northrup describes the slaves' return to the quarters, "Finally, at a late hour, they reach the quarters, sleepy and overcome with the long day's toil. Then a fire must be kindled in the cabin, the corn ground in the small hand-mill, and supper, and dinner for the next day in the field, prepared" (110). While the quarters provided slaves with some privacy to spend time with their families and foster relationships, their time there was often constricted and insufficient to tend to their needs.

First-person accounts and scholarship regarding slavery describe the important, yet tenuous, role families played in the lives of slaves, offering them solace and minimal protection in an economy in which they existed as chattel to improve the lot of their masters. While much of their private lives centered on spending time with their families in the slave quarters, often the development of other relationships was stunted due to the demands placed on their time and energy by their masters. Kolchin observes:

Of course, antebellum Southern slaves, like people everywhere, felt diverse, overlapping attachments: to self, family, friends, locality, class, and ethnicity. But evidence suggests that they usually identified most strongly at the two extremes, as individual and family members on one

side and the slaves – or even blacks – on the other, with relatively weak and immediate ties to local ‘communities.’ (165)

It is not surprising that community relationships suffered since the daily lives of most slaves were dominated by physical toil from early childhood into old age.

A Life of Toil: “Women’s Work” and Slavery

Slaves’ lives predictably were marked by unremitting physical toil and hardships, often not significantly relieved by childhood, pregnancy, birth, illness, or old age. In his article about women slaves and work, Steckel notes, “The frequency and the detail of reports about slave labor from narratives and observers confirm the general high level of toil” (46). This level and intensity of labor would necessarily affect all areas of slave life, from maintaining family relationships to personal health. While all slaves could expect heavy workloads throughout their lives, slave women experienced sexual and reproductive challenges that exacerbated the already severe psychological and physical toll slavery exacted on them. Harriet Jacobs, through narrator Linda Brent, describes the condition of female slaves after the birth of her daughter, “When they told me my new-born babe was a girl, my heart was heavier than it had ever been before. Slavery is terrible for men; but it is far more terrible for women. Superadded to the burden common to all, *they* have wrongs, and sufferings, and mortifications peculiarly their own” (405). Furthermore, slaves, male and female alike, often harbored the justified fear that their “common burden” could become more intense and laborious due to changes in their role on the plantation or farm, such as being moved from the house into the fields or due to being sold or rented to another slaveholder.

Slave children were not exempt from the toil and hardships that were experienced by their parents in the slave economy. Children, as young as seven-years old, increasingly gained awareness of the “common burden” of slavery, entering the workforce on some plantations and farms after years of experiencing malnourishment and neglect. One of the factors affecting slave children was that “[t]he legal status of slave mothers determined the condition of their children. Slave mothers were forced to relegate their children to a life of bondage, since slavery in the United States was an inherited condition. Children belonged to slaveowners for life, even if their mothers became free after giving birth” (King 149). Because of this, even children borne to the union of a female slave and a slaveholder would be subject to a life of captivity and marked for an existence of toil. Using diverse sources, such as “slave manifests, plantation records, slave narratives, probate records, and the census,” Steckel tries to reconstruct the working conditions of antebellum slaves, including children, in his study, “Women, Work, and Health Under Plantation Slavery in the United States.” Steckel observes, “The slave narratives indicate that few slaves escaped work in childhood: 48% of those who discuss the subject began working before age 7, 84% before age eleven, and only 7% reported that no work occurred before age fourteen” (44). Clearly, work was a pervasive part of life for young slaves and was intended to prepare them for a life of service and labor. Steckel notes the range of tasks children completed to prepare for their later roles as adult slaves:

Young slaves picked cotton, carried drinking water to the fields, picked up trash, helped in the kitchen, fed chickens and livestock, minded young children, pulled weeds, and gathered wood chips for fuel. Although it is

difficult to establish the intensity, duration, and physical demands of these jobs, it seems clear that the tasks were part of a real work experience that prepared the way for regular adult labor. (44)

The division of labor often differed for young slaves according to gender. Young female slaves generally started working at an earlier age than males because their early tasks usually consisted of housework and other less laborious tasks. However, as Steckel notes, many female slaves left the house at some point to labor in the fields, which was often a difficult transition:

Girls not only began work earlier but were more productive than boys at certain tasks, such as picking cotton.... The typical girl began her working life entirely or partially in the house but ended up in the fields, while the typical male spent his working life as a field hand. Adaptation to labor in the fields after working in the surroundings of the big house was an additional challenge posed for females by adolescence. (44)

Kolchin makes a similar observation about slave children in *American Slavery: 1619-1877*, noting that “masters interfered extensively in their lives, bringing some to the ‘big house’ to serve as domestics and assigning others ‘light’ chores that became increasingly onerous until they were put to regular field work, usually between the ages of eight and twelve” (140). Due to the masters’ presence in their lives, slave children often experienced confusion when they “found themselves in a tug-of-war between plantation authority and parental influence” (King 153). Blassingame also comments on this inherent contradiction, which was often emphasized by the parents themselves, “Recognizing the overwhelming power of the whites, parents taught children obedience

as a means of avoiding pain, suffering, and death. At the same time, they did not teach unconditional submission” (188).

Slave women faced additional challenges due to the physical demands of pregnancy, childbirth, and recovery. Certainly, these reproductive challenges were lessened for the slaves who worked at domestic chores; however, as Steckel notes, this was not the situation for most female slaves: “Semiskilled, and especially skilled, jobs were less available to women, 80% of whom labored in the fields. Most of the women not employed in fieldwork were servants, seamstresses, or nurses” (45). Contradictory accounts discuss the likelihood that pregnant slaves would have experienced a reduction in work in order to ensure the health of both mother and baby. Steckel observes that “[p]lantation manuals, daily work records, and other sources show that women's work was arduous and that pregnant women had little or no reduction in workloads before the fifth month” (55). On the other hand, Blassingame writes, “Masters, not the black men, determined how much care and attention slave women received when they were pregnant and the treatment that infants received. During her pregnancy a slave wife usually continued her back-breaking labor until a few weeks before her child was born” (179). King notes that women continued to work heavily throughout their pregnancies and, like Blassingame, places the blame with the slaveholders “who extracted physical labor from the pregnant and nonpregnant alike” (148). Frances Kemble catalogues the numerous atrocities that female slaves experienced regarding reproduction on her husband’s plantation, including their “complaints of overwork” while pregnant (114) as well as the short confinement period allotted – fewer than three weeks – to women who had delivered babies (214). In addition, Kemble describes the

individual circumstances of the female slaves she encountered, listing their names, how many children they had borne, and their recurring physical maladies, which Kemble singularly attributes to hard work during and after pregnancy. She writes: “Another of my visitors had a still more dismal story to tell; her name was Die; she had had sixteen children, fourteen of whom were dead; she had had four miscarriages: one had been caused with falling down with a very heavy burden on her head, and one from having her arms strained up to be lashed” (240). While it is impossible to assert that all female slaves experienced the atrocious conditions that Die did on the Kemble plantation, scholarship and contemporary accounts point to many slaveholders valuing labor over healthy pregnancies and deliveries.

Most slaves spent the majority of their lives, from cradle to grave, working to improve the situation of their masters, receiving little to no compensation for their labors or the toll taken on their bodies and minds. Female slaves suffered additional challenges and hardships due to the reproductive mandates of their bodies, sometimes having more than a dozen pregnancies with little reduction in their workloads. Some slaves, such as Harriet Jacobs, suffered the additional burden of trying to elude the sexual advances of their masters.

Jacobs’ Struggle for Identity and Metaphors of Resistance

Needlework

References to the act of sewing dominate much of Rowlandson’s narrative of confinement, yet Jacobs’ sewing references are less numerous and often dovetail into

the discussion of finished sewing products, such as tablecloths, draperies, and clothing. Amy Boyce Osaki comments on the role of sewing in "A 'Truly Feminine Employment': Sewing and the Early Nineteenth-Century Woman": "The home in the nineteenth century was a woman's proper place.... Within the home, sewing was a woman's activity: a 'truly feminine employment' taught by mothers to their daughters" (225). However, slave women, such as Jacobs, were denied a stable home of their own; "[a]n aspect of subjection Jacobs feels keenly is her domestic dependence, her work within another's home" (L. Smith 343). As a young girl, Jacobs was fortunate to be trained in this "feminine employment" that was the basis of judging a woman's value in the community, oblivious to the fact that she was a slave. She fondly remembers the times that she spent with her first mistress: "I would sit by her side for hours, sewing diligently, with a heart as free from care as that of any free-born white child" (343). In addition, Jacobs was also taught to read and write by her mistress, a distinction that later sets her apart from other slaves. However, the gift of education serves as more of a torment to Jacobs than a boon, echoing the sentiments of Frederick Douglass when he recounts how he felt after learning to read as a slave boy: "As I writhed under it, I would at times feel that learning to read had been a curse rather than a blessing. It had given me a view of my wretched condition, without the remedy" (279). Similarly, Jacobs describes the burden of expectations that her family had for her, in part due to her upbringing and education: "But why, thought I, did my relatives ever cherish hopes for me? What was there to save me from the usual fate of slave girls? Many more beautiful and more intelligent than I had experienced a similar fate, or a far worse one. How could they hope that I should escape?" (390). Although Jacobs was able to obtain some education,

including that in the “feminine employment” of sewing, she was unable to adhere to the same standards of femininity as white women, a point she makes throughout her narrative, especially regarding the sexual demands made on slave women by their masters, “Still, in looking back, calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standard as others” (386). Despite Jacobs’ repeated plea that she be judged by different standards than her free contemporaries, she closely aligns domestic skills, especially needlework and its products, with desirable femininity and refinement.

Needlework skills also were valuable to slave women since they often allowed for physically less demanding work in the master’s home instead of back-breaking labor in the fields. In the preface to her narrative, Jacobs acknowledges that most slaves in the South suffered “far worse” (335) than she did physically, which her narrative partially attributes to her domestic skills as well as the influence of her grandmother, a free black woman who was respected by local slaveholders for her intelligence, high moral character, and cooking skills. At one point, narrator Brent recounts how her master, Dr. Flint, attempts to bribe her with easy labor in his home in exchange for concubinage and the permanent severing of ties with her children’s father:

If you agree to what I am about to propose, you and they shall be free. There must be no communication of any kind between you and their father. I will procure a cottage, where you and the children can live together. Your labor shall be light, such as sewing for my family. Think of what is offered to you Linda – a home and freedom! Let the past be forgotten. (410)

Light domestic housework, specifically sewing, is advanced by Flint as a reward to Brent for her acquiescence to him, along with the attainment of her own home. When Brent refuses Flint's offer, he reverses the strategy and threatens to send her and her children to his son's plantation, implying that they eventually would work suffer strenuous fieldwork: "... and your children shall fare like the rest of the Negro children" (411). Although Brent's domestic skills offer her more choices than many female slaves, she decides that she would rather risk the labor of the plantation, for herself and her children, than submit to the sexual advances of Flint. However, once Brent and her two young children arrive at the plantation, she finds herself once again engaged in housework rather than toiling in the fields as the household begins preparing for the arrival of young Flint's new bride: "My task was to fit up the house for the reception of the bride. In the midst of sheets, tablecloths, towels, drapery, and carpeting, my head was as busy planning, as were my fingers with the needle. At noon I was allowed to go to Ellen. She had sobbed herself to sleep" (413). Although Ellen was too young to begin working in the fields, she was relegated to being apart from her mother, without adult supervision, while she worked. Ellen's despair forces Brent into returning her children to her grandmother, without the permission of her master. Eventually, Brent discovers that Flint plans on returning her children to the plantation to be "broke in" (420), forcing Brent's escape.

Brent couples references to sewing to idealized feminine morality, a standard that she struggled to adhere to as a slave. Brent's narrative is riddled with descriptions of her resistance to Dr. Flint's repeated sexual advances, culminating with her eventual escape. However, as a young adolescent, Brent decides to thwart his advances by

willingly engaging in a sexual relationship with Sands, a local attorney, an obvious act of subversion: “Converting her body and reproductive abilities from sites of exploitation to vehicles of resistance, Linda undermines the authority of the slave master and works to liberate her children” (Li 15). Brent discovers that she is pregnant with her first child with Sands and reveals this to Flint to sexually repel him, at least temporarily. Because of her confession to Flint, Brent knows that her grandmother will soon learn of her liaison with a white man, and she decides to tell her before she hears of it from Flint. However, Brent dreads disappointing her grandmother, knowing that she will judge her for succumbing to sexual pressure outside of marriage: “I went to my grandmother. My lips moved to make confession, but the words stuck in my throat. I sat down in the shade of a tree at her door and began to sew” (387). Brent cannot speak the words that she dreads to her grandmother, but instead, she seems to try to express herself through the act of sewing, which also serves as a touchstone of idealized feminine morality, a luxury that Brent does not believe she has. Thus, this passage demonstrates the internal struggle Brent is experiencing. On one hand, she wants to be able to make her own choices, especially since she feels that she has so few as the property of Dr. Flint; however, she also struggles to adhere to the social expectations of femininity, as modeled by her grandmother and her deceased mother, slave women who had more opportunities for monogamous sexual relationships due to the kindness of their masters and mistresses. Gloria Randle observes the dichotomous relationship Brent had with her grandmother: “The grandmother is at once Brent’s ideal and her nemesis – on the one hand, an exemplary model whom she can never hope to emulate; on the other, an unrealistic, disempowering model from whom she wants to break free” (46). Brent’s

grandmother discovers her secret and becomes enraged at Brent for her sexual indiscretion. Brent recounts, "She tore from my fingers my mother's wedding ring and her silver thimble. 'Go away!' she exclaimed, 'and never come to my house, again.' Her reproaches fell so hot and heavy, that they left me no chance to answer" (387). The ring and thimble are the few possessions that Brent has from her mother, and these two items further serve to symbolize her personal struggle: to try to adhere to traditional feminine acts of marriage and domesticity, respectively, while her efforts are stymied by Dr. Flint, the man who legally owns her. Furthermore, these two possessions symbolize love in the narrative; the wedding ring universally represents marital love and fidelity, while the silver thimble represents maternal love and domestic duty.

Brent uses her sewing skills to express love for her children during her confinement in the garret of her grandmother's storehouse, despite the fact that much of the narrative laments her ability to provide a proper home for her children. Once Brent escapes from the Flint plantation, she eventually seeks refuge in her grandmother's house, hidden from Flint "in plain sight" in the tiny attic above the storehouse on her grandmother's property, where she remains hidden for seven years. Even Brent's children, who live with her grandmother, are unaware of her presence. During her early confinement in the garret, Brent finds a discarded gimlet; she uses the tool to provide minimal light and air in the attic: "I bored three rows of holes, one above another; then I bored out the interstices between. I thus succeeded in making one hole about an inch long and an inch broad" (439). Using this light, Brent was able to see well enough to stay occupied: "My eyes had become accustomed to the dim light, and by holding my book or work in a certain position near the aperture I contrived to read and sew" (440).

Both reading and sewing had been taught to Brent by her first mistress, which had provided the foundation for her desire to attain the idealized femininity of free American women. However, lacking freedom, Brent continues to strive towards her ideal, as well as to provide love to her children with the limited resources available. Although she was hidden from them, she works tirelessly in the garret to create Christmas gifts for them:

Christmas was approaching. Grandmother brought me materials, and I busied myself making some new garments and little playthings for my children.... I heard Benny ask a little playmate whether Santa Claus brought him any thing. "Yes," replied the boy; "but Santa Claus it ain't a real man. It's the children's mothers that put things into the stockings." "No, that can't be," replied Benny, "for Santa Claus brought Ellen and me these new clothes, and my mother has been gone this long time." (441)

While it seems likely that Brent no longer has possession of her mother's silver thimble, a symbol to Brent of idealized maternal love and domesticity, she continues to try to provide both to her children, even faced with the dire circumstances of extreme and protracted confinement, by using the needlework skills taught to her by her first mistress. In this instance, sewing offers insight into Brent's personal resistance to the slave system, even though it is visible to no one but herself and the reader. As Brent hides from her master in the attic, she ostensibly defies the slave economy; however, when she sews for her children in this attic, she defies slavery on a deeper level as she asserts her mother-love for children for whom she has no legal claim. Sewing allows her to use the tools that had been provided to her as a young slave girl against the slave system itself; while sewing demonstrated proper nineteenth-century femininity to society,

it also becomes a “weapon of the weak” as Brent continues to erode slavery’s hold on her life.

The actual products of needlework emerge in Jacobs’ narrative as representations of domestic refinement and the trappings of a respectable home, both of which are subversive to the slave economy when African Americans possess them. Brent often uses her grandmother’s home as the benchmark of the idealized home, crediting her for creating a safe refuge with her own domestic skills, especially that of sewing and cooking. As a young slave, Brent relied on her grandmother to provide her with additional sustenance and clothing since the Flints’ contributions were nominal. Brent establishes this point in Chapter II: “I was indebted to *her* for all my comforts, spiritual or temporal. It was *her* labor that supplied my scanty wardrobe. I have a vivid recollection of the linsey-woolsey dress given me every winter by Mrs. Flint. How I hated it! It was one of the badges of slavery” (346). As with many of the references to clothing and linens in the narrative, the quality of the products reflect the amount of love and nurturing that went into their creation. In effect, these products help establish the identity and subsequent self-worth of the possessor. When Brent wears the clothing issued to her by Mrs. Flint, she feels like a slave; however, when she wears the clothing provided to her by her grandmother, she seems to experience a surge of self-worth due to the love and affection of her family.

Brent finds herself in a similar position as her grandmother in Chapter XXXIII, when she is required to pay for the upkeep of her daughter, Ellen, despite the fact that Ellen had been retained for service by the Hobbs family. At this point, Brent has

escaped to the North after her confinement in the garret and is working for the Bruce family in New York, caring for their infant. After a visit with her daughter, Brent recounts:

I was far from feeling satisfied with Ellen's situation. She was not well cared for. She sometimes came to New York to visit me; but she generally brought a request from Mrs. Hobbs that I would buy her a pair of shoes, or some article of clothing.... Thus many dollars of my earnings were expended to keep my child comfortably clothed. (485)

Brent's economic status allows her to purchase clothing for her daughter instead of having to create her wardrobe with her own needle. Despite the fact that she does not create the clothing, her labor and subsequent wages supply the means to purchase the required items. However, Brent's description of how she provided for her daughter lacks the emotional connection that the earlier references to sewing convey, especially the anecdote about how she sewed Christmas gifts for her children when she was confined to the garret. Apparently, it is not simply labor that represents love in this narrative of confinement, but instead the act of sewing emerges as a type of private communication that conveys love and nurturing.

Brent equates the products of domestic needlework, especially linens and tablecloths, with respectability and the basic human desire for a safe home. In Chapter XII, Brent the discusses the repercussions of Nat Turner's rebellion on the local slaves, including the pervasive presence of the patrol, mainly poor whites seeking power in the slave economy that had excluded them. Most of the members of the patrol "had no Negroes of their own to scourge. They exalted in such a chance to exercise a little brief authority, and show their subserviency to the slaveholders; not reflecting that the power

which trampled on the colored people also kept themselves in poverty, ignorance, and moral degradation” (393). Curiously, Brent carefully arranges the finery in her grandmother’s house in expectation of the eventual raid by the patrol, knowing that the display would anger them: “I knew nothing annoyed them so much as to see colored people living in comfort and respectability; so I made arrangements for them with especial care. I arranged everything in my grandmother’s house as neatly as possible. I put white quilts on the beds, and decorated some of the rooms with flowers” (393). Although Brent accurately anticipates the anger and indignation of the patrol, she does not seem to consider hiding the goods that would be envied by the poor whites; instead, she uses these “arrangements” to point out the inequalities of the slave economy and flaunt the superior lifestyle enjoyed by her grandmother, a free black woman, to the debased position of white non-slaveholders in the South.

Brent clearly understands the danger of her act since she asks a respected white man to witness the patrol’s search in order to protect their belongings from being pilfered. In fact, Brent explains the repercussions of not having a protector: “The dwellings of the colored people, unless they happened to be protected by some influential white person, who was nigh at hand, were robbed of clothing and every thing else the marauders thought worth carrying away” (393). Clothing, like linens, were tangible products of needlework and often were closely associated with the wearers’ identity. Furthermore, many slaves and impoverished free blacks owned little more than their clothes, making these possessions valuable and personal. However, the patrol searching Brent’s home was not attracted to their clothing but a “large trunk of bedding and table cloths” (394), products that represented civility and luxury, which the poor

whites did not have, but wanted. Brent reconstructs the reaction of one of the patrollers: “‘Look here, mammy,’ said a grim-looking fellow without any coat, ‘You seem to feel mighty gran’ ‘cause you got all them ‘ere fixens. White folks oughter have ‘em all’” (394). To Brent, his reaction is predictable based on his economic status, which she represents by the lack of a coat, a basic necessity in warding off cold North Carolina winters. In addition, his reaction is predictable as a white man in the American South; because his economic status will not allow him to afford slaves, yet he is white like the majority of slaveowners, he strives to exert racial pressure on Brent and her family, asserting that only whites deserve domestic finery. Brent uses the patroller to voice the racism and hypocrisy that resulted from the economic inequalities inherent in the “peculiar institution” of slavery.

Food

Food references pervade much of Jacobs’ narrative and serve a similar purpose as sewing: they represent love and nurturing, which in turn undermines the slave system that depended on the free trade of slaves irrespective of their familial affections and forbid legal marriage among slaves. The narrator, Linda Brent, attributes her grandmother’s freedom and successful homemaking to her cooking and simultaneously equates her cooking with love for family and friends. The kitchen and storehouse, in which valuable food was prepared and kept, emerge as symbolic spaces of love and safety, and Jacobs seeks refuge in both in her narrative of confinement. On the other hand, incidents that describe the lack of food illustrate the corruption of the slave system in which the basic human need for nutrition is denied to increase profits or to

discipline slaves. Jacobs incorporates references to pilfering food early in her narrative to show how hungry slaves would subtly subvert power from their masters to fuel their own bodies and feelings of self-worth. In a curious omission, Jacobs does not attribute food preparation to her narrator, Linda Brent, at any point in the narrative; this absence indicates Brent's own belief that she is unable to create a home or properly love her children in the same way that her grandmother did.

Brent's idealized version of nineteenth-century femininity seems to originate with her grandmother, more than the general view of white femininity or any other particular figure. In addition, the domestic ideal associated with Brent's grandmother would have been recognized by Brent's intended white female readership: "In every scene in which she appears, Aunt Marthy upholds the morals and values associated with true womanhood, giving voice to the ideals of Jacobs' white female readers" (Kreiger 611). Aunt Marthy, as her grandmother was called, became indispensable to her master's household when she was a young slave, "officiating in all capacities, from cook and wet nurse to seamstress" (Jacobs 342), and later became renowned locally for her cooking. Brent writes that "[s]he was much praised for her cooking; and her nice crackers became so famous in the neighborhood that many people were desirous of obtaining them" (342). The demand for her crackers increased enough for her to sell them in the neighborhood, with her mistress's permission: "[u]pon these terms, after working hard all day for her mistress, she began her midnight baking, assisted by her two oldest children. The business proved profitable; and each year she laid by a little, which was saved for a fund to purchase her children" (342). While she was not able to save enough money to buy all of her children and grandchildren out of slavery, she was able

to provide Brent with sustenance to supplement the meager contributions of the Flints after Brent was willed to them: "I was frequently threatened with punishment if I stopped there; and my grandmother, to avoid detaining me, often stood at the gate with something for my breakfast or dinner" (346). These passages clearly equate grandmother's cooking with love: her cracker business became a vehicle to buy her children's freedom, and Aunt Marthy ensured that her granddaughter had enough to eat in the frugal Flint household. At the time Brent composed her narrative, she knew that her grandmother's efforts at freeing all of her children and granddaughter had been fruitless, yet the results of her efforts were insignificant to Brent; instead, her grandmother's unwavering love was demonstrated by these acts.

Brent does not indicate that her grandmother had to hide her entrepreneurial endeavors from the local white community. Instead, it seems as though the white community welcomed her cooking and ignored the possibility that the cracker business subverted the slave economy by attempting to free enslaved family members and offering them a glimpse of what life as a free American might look like. However, this image was not lost on Brent: "By perseverance and unwearied industry, she was now mistress of a snug little home, surrounded with necessaries of life... There was a grand big oven there, too, that baked bread and nice things for the town, and we knew there was always a choice bit in store for us" (351-52). For Brent, the kitchen is inextricably linked to her grandmother's love and nurturing, providing Brent with what she had been denied by slavery: a mother, a home, sufficient nutritious food, and love. While Brent viewed her grandmother's home as a tangible symbol for everything that slavery denied her, it is likely that the white community, especially the male slaveholders, would have

seen her grandmother's modest home and household comforts as insignificant since these material manifestations of domestic labor occupied the disregarded realm associated with "women's work."

Aunt Marthy's domestic endeavors eventually allowed her to purchase the freedom of one son, Phillip, after son Benjamin's failed escape attempt to the North. Brent describes Benjamin as becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the "hard lot" of slavery, despite "the charms of the old oven" in her grandmother's home (352). Perhaps, it was *because* of "the charms of the old oven" and the life of secure, domestic comforts that it represented that compelled Benjamin to rue his condition as a slave and attempt a dangerous escape after getting into a physical altercation with his master, "one of the richest men in town" (354). After Benjamin "was pursued, captured, and carried back to his master," he was jailed for his escape and experienced harsh conditions while incarcerated (355). However, his mother tried to ease his suffering with outpourings of love, especially by bringing him food: "As his food was of the coarsest kind, we carried him as often as possible a warm supper, accompanied with some little luxury the jailer" (357). As with the previous anecdotes connecting food with love, Aunt Marthy provides her loved one with the only sustenance available to her: food. Furthermore, she brings a bribe for the jailer, a "luxury" that seems likely to have consisted of food and subverts the established system of punishment devised for an escaped slave. As a final subversive blow to the local slave system, Aunt Marthy purchases the freedom of son, Phillip, after Benjamin finally makes a successful escape after being sold: "The brave old woman still toiled on, hoping to rescue some of her other children. After a while she succeeded in buying Phillip. She paid eight hundred dollars, and came home with the

precious document that secured his freedom” (360). Aunt Marthy uses the money earned by selling her crackers to the local white community to buy her son out of slavery. Although Aunt Marthy is a revered and beloved member of the community, she subtly undermines the slave system by degrees: first, setting an example of a comfortable free life; next, providing food and love to her enslaved children and grandchildren as they faced abuse and neglect; and finally using money funded by white patrons to buy the freedom of her son.

Aunt Marthy’s demonstration of love through food is not confined to only her family members but extends to neighbors and her former master’s family. Brent describes the careful preparations her grandmother makes before the visit of Miss Fanny, Mr. Flint’s great-aunt and the woman who bought Aunt Marthy’s freedom years prior: “My grandmother loved this old lady, whom we all called Miss Fanny. She often came to take tea with us. On such occasions the table was spread with a snow-white cloth, and the china cups and silver spoons were taken from the old-fashioned buffet. There were hot muffins, tea rusks, and delicious sweetmeats” (415). The food provided to Miss Fanny by Brent’s grandmother was sweet, luxurious fare that included pastries and candies; the table setting was also evocative of luxury and civility, including silver, china, and white linens. Brent describes Miss Fanny’s departure: “When Miss Fanny bade us good by, her bag was filled with grandmother’s best cakes, and she was urged to come again soon” (415). Clearly, Aunt Marthy wants to convey her feelings of respect and love to the woman who offered her the gift of her freedom, and she uses food and hospitality as expressions of affection. The rich and decadent foods served were not intended to provide physical nourishment to Miss Fanny, being laden with sugars and

fats, but instead to offer comfort and pleasure to the white woman who could provide her own nourishing foods. Brent also describes the hospitality that her grandmother had once extended to Mrs. Flint, the woman she helped raise from girlhood: “There had been a time when Dr. Flint’s wife came to take tea with us, and when her children were also sent to have a feast of ‘Aunt Marthy’s’ nice cooking. But after I became an object of her jealousy and spite, she was angry with grandmother for giving a shelter to me and my children” (415). As with Miss Fanny, Brent’s grandmother extended her hospitality to those that she cared about; however, in the case of Mrs. Flint, the hospitality, and representational love, was rejected to convey Mrs. Flint’s disapproval of Brent, who she suspected, rightfully, of being the object of her husband’s affection.

Food often represents emotions, especially love, as characters such as Brent’s grandmother use the preparation and offering of food as a tangible way to communicate love and affection. However, as historical study reveals, the slave system of the antebellum South did not facilitate love among slaves, partially due to the common practice of selling slaves for financial gain to bolster the masters’ financial stability, such as in the earlier example of Thomas Jefferson. Loving another slave was inevitably fraught with risk in several ways: first, it exposed the slave to emotional vulnerability should the beloved be sold, and secondly, it could provide the master with leverage if he realized that the slave could be more easily controlled by threatening the beloved’s absence (or conversely, bribing with the beloved’s presence). It would seem likely that slaves would have tried to alleviate the risks of loving by hiding their feelings from their masters. The preparation and proffering of food might have been a simple way to subtly and privately convey strong emotions, such as love. Even as a free woman, Brent’s

grandmother continues to use food to demonstrate her affections for family, friends, and neighbors.

Jacobs' narrative offers examples of slaves stealing food from their masters as a way to undermine and resist the slave system. However, the pilfering of food does not simply represent fiscal theft from the master; instead, the pilfering of food serves as way for slaves to appropriate basic human needs and desires, including nurturing and comfort, that had been denied by the slave system in the antebellum South. As indicated earlier, historical records suggest that the deprivation of food was a common practice by slaveholders to control slaves and limit their costs of maintenance. Brent touches on this practice in her narrative several times, including the conditions she and her daughter endured as slaves. In addition, her description of the new mistress on Mr. Flint's plantation serves to illustrate how Brent equates the young woman's allocation of food to the slaves as a benchmark for her inhumanity:

The young mistress came out to see how things were done on her plantation, and she soon gave a specimen of her character. Among those in waiting for their allowance was a very old slave, who had faithfully served the Flint family through three generations. When he hobbled up to get his bit of meat, the mistress said he was too old to have any allowance; that when niggers were too old to work, they ought to be fed on grass. Poor old man! He suffered much before he found rest in the grave.

(419)

Brent's inclusion of this incident simultaneously points to the fidelity of the old slave and the callousness of the young mistress who denies him basic human comforts in old age:

respect and proper nutrition and care. While no evidence exists in the text to indicate whether the old slave later pilfered food from the Flints to survive, accounts of slaveholder cruelty such as this one exist alongside several accounts of stealing. Earlier in the narrative, Brent describes how slaves on a neighboring plantation stole food from their brutal, exacting master, Mr. Litch:

A freshet once bore his wine cellar and meat house miles away from the plantation. Some slaves followed, and secured bits of meat and bottles of wine. Two were detected; a ham and some liquor been found in their huts. They were summoned by their master. No words were used, but a club felled them to the ground. A rough box was their coffin, and their interment was a dog's burial. Nothing was said. (377)

According to Brent, Litch owned more than 600 slaves and punished them without regards for the local laws due to his wealth, which “effectively screened” him from serious crimes against his slaves, even murder (377). Although Brent does not comment on Litch’s practice of providing food to his slaves, her accounts of his cruelty and torture suggest that withholding proper sustenance as a punishment or means of control would have been within the bounds of his typical treatment of slaves. This suggests that the pilfering slaves were subverting the slave system on the Litch plantation in several ways: on one hand, the pilfering suggests outright rebellion against the fiscal holdings of a hard and wealthy man; in addition, their theft of luxury goods, ham and liquor, suggest that the slaves were seeking to assert their humanity by stealing products that give pleasure, not just a means to sustain life. This is seen in another example that Brent includes, in which she provides an excerpt from a local

black preacher's sermon, elucidating the sins of the congregation of slaves: "You men steal away to every grog shop to sell your master's corn, that you may buy rum to drink" (398). Incidents such as these operate in opposition to the way in which Brent's grandmother regards food: to her, the preparation and delivery of food represents a subtle yet powerful way of expressing love and affection; to the pilfering slaves, the stealing of food and liquor seems to serve as a way to fill gaping voids left in their lives by the exigencies of slavery, especially the basic human desire to have pleasurable sustenance and comfort.

Once Brent decides to escape from Flint's plantation in order to protect her children from being "broke in" as field hands (420), she seeks refuge with the help of friends and family in various homes in the community, often finding safety in places in which food is prepared or stored: kitchens and storehouses. Brent is hidden "in plain sight" in the domain of women, in which food, a metaphor of love and resistance in her narrative, is stored, prepared, and served. At one point, an unnamed prominent white woman offers to hide Brent in her home, without the knowledge of her family or slaves, except for her most trusted slave: the cook identified as Betty in the narrative. Brent recounts the conversation between the white woman and Brent's grandmother:

Aunt Martha, I pity you both. If you think there's any chance of Linda's getting to the Free States, I will conceal her for a time. But first you must solemnly promise that my name shall never be mentioned. If such a thing should become known, it would ruin me and my family. No one in my house must know if it, except the cook. She is so faithful that I would trust my own life with her, and I know she likes Linda. (424)

After the being hidden in the white woman's home, she and Betty suspect that a house slave had discovered Brent's hiding space in the main house; to protect her, they moved her to a hidden crawlspace beneath the kitchen in which "a buffalo skin and a bit of carpet were spread" for her (428). Throughout the day, Brent could hear Betty speaking to herself and others in a way to convey information to her: "When the housemaids were about, she had sly ways of drawing them out, that I might hear what they would say" (428). Although Brent did not stay in the kitchen hiding space for long, it served as the safest place for her while seeking refuge in the home of her "benefactress" (429). Betty, the trusted cook, serves as a liaison between the slaveowner and Brent, often bringing her food and kind words, whether she was hiding under the kitchen floorboards or hiding the "small room" over the white woman's "sleeping apartment" (425). Similar to Brent's grandmother, Betty equates food with love and affection, and she promises to bring Brent "some nice hot supper" (425) after a stressful day of confinement. Brent observes, "Betty's vocation led her to think eating the most important thing in life. She did not realize that my heart was too full for me to care much about supper" (425). While it is possible that Betty did not realize how heartbroken Brent was to be separated from her children during her early confinement, it is more likely that she wanted to provide Brent with a "nice hot supper" to offer her comfort *because* of her heartbreak, not in spite of it. In the days shortly after her escape from Flint, Brent describes the stress and difficulties of being secreted away in a local home, and she establishes the kitchen and the cook, Betty, as the greatest providers of comfort and safety during this part of her life.

Brent was moved to her permanent hiding space in the small garret above her grandmother's storehouse, after it was determined that Brent's presence was putting the "benefactress" at too much risk. Brent remains hidden in this garret for seven years: "The garret was only nine feet long and seven wide. The highest part was three feet high, and sloped down abruptly to the loose board floor. There was no admission for either light or air. My uncle Philip, who was a carpenter, had very skillfully made a concealed trap door, which communicated with the storeroom" (437). Brent explains that the trap door was her only link to her family and becomes the portal for food to pass through as well as where adult family members might visit with her briefly at night. As in other parts of the narrative, food represents love, and in this instance, providing Brent with food put the family at great risk of being detected for harboring a runaway slave. Nonetheless, her family provides her with food and shelter, despite the risks, proving their love and devotion to each other. Also, Brent again finds safety and refuge near food, living in the part of the house that her family was certain would be overlooked during a search.

Linda Brent ignores her own experiences preparing food in her narrative, a curious omission that seems related to her own desire to have a home of her own. Certainly, Brent's grandmother serves as the paragon of feminine love in her narrative, bequeathing affection and comfort with the foods she had prepared with her own hands, in her own kitchen. Repeatedly, Brent connects her grandmother's love and home with food. However, Betty, the cook, also prepares food and equates it with love, but this connection seems lost on Brent who finds Betty's insistence on hot meals as being unnecessary and unwanted. Perhaps the defining difference for Brent in her reception

of these women's food was that her grandmother had a home while Betty served as a slave, without a home that she could claim. Due to the fact that Brent had spent most of her life as a slave working at domestic chores, it seems unlikely that she had never prepared food, yet her narrative does not depict her working in the kitchen or preparing food for her own children, even after she escapes to the North. However, Brent was unable to obtain a home of her own in the North, a point that Virginia Cope makes in her article about Jacobs' shifting regard of capitalism: "When Linda Brent finally reaches the Free States, she discovers that racism, sexism, and her fugitive status – the goals which motivated her long and arduous passage out of slavery – severely limit her ability to earn a living and provide a home for her children" (Cope 6). Brent's careful omission of her own act of preparing food suggests her disappointment that she could not obtain a home of her own, and because of this, she remains silent about her own cooking.

Harriet Jacobs seems to use her autobiographical narrator, Linda Brent, to describe the challenges that she experienced as she sought freedom through years of slavery and confinement, as well as after her eventual escape. While Brent admits that her captivity was physically easier than that of other slaves that she knew, her narrative is rife with heartache as she recounts years in which basic human rights and connections were denied to her because she had been born into slavery. Similar to Mary Rowlandson, Brent's narrative exhibits an identity struggle; however, she tries to capitulate between the conflicting ideals of nineteenth-century womanhood, as exemplified by her grandmother, on one hand, and the definition of white femininity on the other. References to sewing and food pervade the narrative and help illustrate

Brent's conflicting desires to reconcile these ideals of womanhood with her desire for freedom and a home:

Yet Jacob goes beyond the conception of freedom found in white woman's fiction, broadening the definition of woman as homemaker and mother to include economic and political dimensions... Economic independence, not marital dependence, is what she strives for as well as a home and the company of her children. For her, true freedom entails economic freedom. (Dorians 211-12)

Sewing, and the products of needlework, emerge as metaphors of resistance since they often are used to undermine the existing power structures that confined Brent and those that she loved as well as to provide a means of independent economic support to women who were skilled with the needle. Food, and the preparation of it, also represents idealized femininity as well as love and nurturing. In some instances, Brent offers examples of slaves pilfering food as they strived to undermine the power of their masters and to appropriate the basic human desire for comfort and nurturing that were being denied to them. In her narrative, Brent justifies slaves' efforts at subverting the economic system that held them in thrall: "Who can blame slaves for being cunning? They're constantly compelled to resort to it. It is the only weapon of the weak and oppressed against the strength of their tyrants" (426).

In the next chapter, I examine Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, a fictionalized account of escaped slave Margaret Garner who attempted to kill each of her four children rather than allow them to be returned to slavery in the antebellum South. As with the previous narratives of confinement, I focus on the way in which Morrison

integrates metaphors of domesticity, especially sewing and food; in *Beloved*, these domestic skills help to illustrate how female slaves, and eventually former slaves, tried to subvert the power structures that held them and worked to redefine their identities, especially after they had finally achieved “freedom” at the end of the Civil War. In order to contextualize African Americans’ lives in Reconstruction America, the chapter also will discuss the social and cultural changes former slaves experienced in black communities in nineteenth-century America.

CHAPTER FIVE:

BELOVED

Introduction

Chapter Four examined the family and community structures of slaves in the antebellum South, particularly in the nineteenth-century, to help establish the cultural context in which Harriet Jacobs, and her intended audience, might have regarded her autobiographical narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. As with the previous chapter, Chapter Four also examined the additional hurdles women faced during this period, including the gender-based division of labor as well as sexual and reproductive challenges. Chapter Three primarily focused on the cultural conditions of freeborn women of both European and Native American descent, while Chapter Four kept the examination limited to enslaved African American women. However, as the American Civil War concluded in 1865, a new populace emerged in America's towns, cities, and rural farmlands: recently emancipated slaves. Many of these former slaves found themselves redefining their identities as "free" citizens, as Toni Morrison depicts through her protagonist, Sethe, in *BeLoved*. While former slaves held high expectations about their lives after their legal emancipation from slavery, historical accounts demonstrate that freed slaves continued to experience persistent hardships along with only modest gains in their quality of life. Not surprisingly, former slave women faced unique challenges as "free" citizens in both the South and North due to the burdens of

maternity as well as discrimination and violence stemming from misogyny and racism. These challenges are narrated in *Beloved* by a cloaked language that uses domestic metaphors to subtly subvert the dominant power structures that seek to restrain former slave women as well as their freeborn daughters.

Evolution and Structure of Former Slave Families and Communities

Slavery in the United States legally came to an end in December 1865 with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution (Kolchin 207), yet many former slaves failed to realize the benefits of freedom that they had anticipated due to a variety of factors, including repressive laws aimed at curtailing black rights and property ownership, poverty, white racism and violence, and the fracturing of the slave community. Kolchin notes the dichotomy between the hopes and reality of freed slaves:

The post-emancipation world brought significant changes to the lives of the freedpeople [sic] – as well as to society at large – but it also brought continued hardship, exploitation, and depression. As a result, within a generation, hope largely gave way to disappointment, and enthusiasm yielded to sullen resentment and sometimes to despair. Was this really the freedom for which they had longed? (201)

One of the main roadblocks to the economic success of freed slaves was the lack of profitable employment opportunities and their inability to purchase land of their own. Many freed slaves remained in agricultural roles, sometimes even working for the masters that had enslaved them. However, most former slaves working in agriculture found themselves in sharecropping or cottage tenancy arrangements that often

mimicked the slave economy by which many had been exploited, often leaving them too impoverished to afford their own land (Dunaway 234). Kolchin describes the inherent difficulties of post-war sharecropping: “Sharecroppers lacked the independence of farmers. In the post-Reconstruction years, with the changed balance of political power, they often became financially (and at times physically) dependent on merchants and planters who supplied them with credit at usurious rates” (219). However, as Kolchin notes, sharecropping did provide freed slaves with more autonomy and control than other arrangements, such as wage labor (219), and occasionally resulted in enough saved money for sharecropping families to buy land (220). Kolchin observes that “[t]he great majority of these black farm-owning families eked out a relatively modest existence on small holdings, but the sense of accomplishment and independence that landownership gave to former slaves was immeasurable” (218). Many sharecropping families supplemented their earnings with “household or home-based production” (White 182) in which the family would grow additional crops, “[take] in laundry, [raise] chickens, and [produce] baskets, shoes, hats, and clothing for use or sale” (182). Sharecropping, like other aspects of former slaves’ new lives, included hardships and inequity, yet often provided more autonomy and financial reward than slavery had afforded.

Some former slaves pursued non-agricultural employment, often leaving the countryside to settle in urban areas which they believed offered more employment opportunities and protection from violence. Wilma Dunaway examines the non-agricultural work performed by former slaves from 1865 to 1870 in *The African-American Family in Slavery and Emancipation*, noting that most of the jobs “were low

paying and short term” such as “employment for porters, day laborers, hotel and restaurant workers, street cleaners, and artisans. Most female heads of household listed their occupations as washwoman, laundress, or servant” (239). In *Ar'n't I a Woman?*, Deborah Gray White describes how former slave women regarded employment after emancipation, including their unwillingness to accept poor working conditions, such as “washing white women’s menstrual rags, and especially arduous work like ditch digging and repair in knee-deep mud” (172). Furthermore, non-agricultural female workers resisted practices that they had endured while slaves, such as leaving their children in the care of other women, or leaving them entirely unattended; “[b]y taking their children with them and caring for them during the workday, household workers avoided the slavelike conditions that kept them separated from their children for long hours” (172). The unintended consequence of this employment demand was that some employers would refuse to hire “women who headed households” (Dunaway 223) because they “resent[ed] the attention young children demanded from their mothers” (White 181). However, both agricultural and non-agricultural work, while often low-paying, offered some benefits to former slaves, including the ability to negotiate the terms of employment and provide enough free time for home-based contract work. In some cases, former slaves experienced better working and living conditions while free compared to their circumstances when they worked for a master.

Many former slaves migrated to urban centers to find safety in numbers as well as to procure employment. After the Civil War, many white people were left destitute and homeless, resulting in “bands of thieves” that traveled in rural parts of the South

“stealing cotton and livestock” (Dunaway 243) as well as vigilante groups that targeted free blacks (243-44). Dunaway notes that the areas of the South with “the smallest black populations” often had a greater “danger of racial violence” than more populated regions (244): “Ex-slaves in rural areas experienced the greatest incidence of violence even though they were scattered in small pockets” (245). The violence of the rural South motivated some former slave families to migrate to larger towns or to the North, where they believed that they would be safer from vigilante hostility. The dramatic rise in violence against former slaves in the South has been partially attributed to white racism as well as the deterioration of the patriarchal slave economy that relied on the goodwill of the masters to safeguard their charges. White explains that “[h]istorian Catherine Clinton has argued that such violence escalated in the postwar era because emancipation removed the landowners’ economic motivation to keep their workers alive and healthy” (174). Without the incentive to keep their workers healthy and safe, many employers used fear and violence to control former slaves, knowing that the current laws favored landowners over the testimony of the abused. White observes that “black women, like black men, could expect no justice in a court of law, nor could they look to authorities for protection” (175), regardless of the severity of the crimes committed by white perpetrators.

Former slaves also migrated to urban centers and other parts of the country in an effort to locate lost family members who had been sold during slavery. While some loved ones were unable to be located after emancipation, some were reunited with families and spouses who had been lost to them for many years. In her study about slavery in the Appalachian region of the United States, Dunaway notes that “only about

12 percent of separated spouses rebuilt their families at war's end" (257), while "[o]ver all [sic], three-quarters of those black Appalachians who were forcibly removed lost contact with their families forever" (258). Not all of these rare reunions were happy, though, especially when spouses remarried while under the assumption that they would never find the lost husbands and wives who had been sold away. White explains, "The odds were against reuniting, but once together again former slaves faced a curious dilemma: which marriage should take precedence?" (178). Due to the fact that marriages initiated during slavery lacked legal authority, former slaves were required to determine which marriage would persist and whether or not to "legalize their marital relationship" (177). For women, the decision to legally marry involved consideration of both their emotional attachment to their partners as well as the more pragmatic considerations of economic and physical protection.

Laws were enacted during Reconstruction that further imposed a patriarchal structure to the families of freed slaves. For instance, "[t]he Freedman's Bureau designated the husband as head of the black household and insisted that he sign contracts for the labor of the entire family" (180). This mandate reduced the amount of control that married black women had over their lives since they no longer were able to negotiate the terms of their employment. However, as mentioned earlier, employers were more likely to hire married women, even if they were mothers, than single mothers. Marriage, for former slave women, served as a double-edged sword in which some personal freedoms were eliminated as part of the patriarchal family structure, yet the benefits included increased physical safety and protection from outside abuse and a more favorable employment outlook. However, despite some of the benefits of marriage,

census records from 1870 indicate that many black households had a female head of household. In the Appalachian region, “[m]ore than two-fifths of all black Appalachian family units were headed by one parent, in a majority of instances the mother” (Dunaway 259). The households of former slaves were often characterized by a “complex combination of kin and nonkin [sic], the children from several marriages, women who merged their own offspring with orphans and elderly, sometimes even multiple spouses” (260). While the government encouraged patriarchal households, many former slaves defied this expectation and formed households that accommodated several families, providing economic and social support, as well as personal safety.

Many former slaves experienced few changes in their overall quality of life after slavery was abolished legally in the United States in 1865. After their emancipation, many former slaves still lived in poverty, worked for white employers, and suffered discrimination and abuse. However, some were able to reconnect with loved ones and earn enough wages to support their families and buy property. Most slaves, regardless of their economic standing, used their newfound freedom to re-conceptualize their lives and reject conditions that mimicked slavery; “[t]he unifying feature of the freedpeople’s behavior during the postwar years was their determination to get as far as possible from slave dependence, to demonstrate to themselves and others that they were really free” (Kolchin 217). Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* demonstrates this personal desire for independence in her characterization of former slaves Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs, and Stamp Paid. These characters, particularly the protagonist Sethe, struggle throughout the novel to reinvent their identities and their families in the shadow of slavery in Reconstruction Ohio.

Former Slaves' Struggle for Identity using Metaphors of Resistance

The characters in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* seek new identities in nearly the same way that Harriet Jacobs' narrator, Linda Brent, does in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Many of the female characters in *Beloved*, like Brent, struggle to reconfigure their identity as women, mothers, and American citizens after the trials of confinement and abuse. Unlike Brent, however, the characters in *Beloved* struggle not only to gain identities after enduring the traumas of slavery and its violent aftermath, but they also must survive the traumatic "rememories" of captivity that literally and metaphorically haunt their new lives in Ohio. Sethe describes her conception of "rememory" as she attempts to explain the horrors of slavery to her freeborn daughter, Denver:

I was talking about time. It's so hard for me to believe in it. Some things go. Pass on. Some things just stay. I used to think it was my rememory. You know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do. But it's not. Places, places are still there.... What I remember is a picture floating around out there outside my head. I mean, even if I don't think it, even if I die, the picture of what I did, or knew, or saw is still out there. Right in the place where it happened. (Morrison 43)

Time's progression is not linear to Sethe, and the past, with its attendant horrors and traumas, will always exist and be experienced by generations to come.

Many of the persistent rememories that the characters experience in the novel are ostensibly connected to the trauma and abuse of captivity, and these trauma events affect the characters' lives years after they were able to obtain freedom. J. Brooks

Bousoon discusses how rememories in *Beloved* function to remind the characters about the violence of their past:

Morrison represents the speechless terror of trauma in recurring scenes of dissociated violence – vivid and highly visual scenes in which her characters experience violence from a detached perspective. And she also conveys the haunting and driven quality of traumatic and humiliated memory as she depicts the “rememories” – that is, spontaneous recurrences of the past – that plague her characters. (124)

Once the characters survive an act of violence, they must spend the rest of their lives trying to survive the rememories of that violent act, rendering the past trauma into a viable, painful recurring event. Florian Bast examines the pervasive presence of trauma in the novel and notes that most scholars “have focused or at least touched on the text’s portrayal of physical and emotional trauma and the characters’ struggles to survive it” (1069). As with the confinement narratives written by Rowlandson and Jacobs, *Beloved* depicts women experiencing profound trauma, including captivity and physical abuse, while demonstrating their indomitable will to survive the trauma and its subsequent rememories; in the aftermath of trauma, Morrison’s characters create identities of their own, often expressing their struggles with explicitly feminine symbols of the home, such as needlework, fabrics, and food.

Morrison’s narrative of confinement also signifies that traumatic events are not the only rememories “floating around” (Morrison 43) that are expressed by a language of domesticity; love also exists as a rememory that can be experienced by future generations and is often depicted by references to needlework and the preparation and

serving of food. However, the love that the characters experience in *Beloved* is often painful and subversive, representative of the danger of loving something or someone that can be taken away without notice or reason. Former slave Paul D reflects on Sethe's love for her children:

Risky, thought Paul D, very risky. For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit; everything, just a little bit, so when they broke its back, or shoved it in a croaker sack, well, maybe you'd have a little love left over for the next one.
(54)

Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu echoes Paul D's sentiment in her article, "Children of Those Who Chose to Survive': Neo-Slave Narrative Authors Create Women of Resistance"; however, she regards the slave mother's love for her children as an act of heroism and subversion instead of dangerous foolishness:

Resistance has long been the key to survival for marginalized peoples. In the African American community, this is best exemplified by the enslaved mother... The very attempt to mother under the conditions of slavery, when the demand was merely to produce children to augment the master's labor force and when the awareness that those children could be sold at the master's whim was an everyday reality, was a heroic act. (153)

Throughout the novel, love is consistently portrayed as dangerous to both the lover and the beloved, and characters that make the choice to love without boundaries commit an act of daring subversion to the former slave economy and white society that is marked

by racial discrimination. However, the ramifications of loving, especially if the love is “too thick” (Morrison 193), remain for generations as a rememory, as exemplified by the physical reincarnation of the daughter that Sethe had loved too much. The sermons about love that Baby Suggs, Sethe’s mother-in-law, delivers in the woods exist as another rememory in the novel, haunting Sethe for more than a decade after Baby Suggs died. Baby Suggs preaches to the local community of former slaves, urging them to subvert the social and economic power structure of Restoration Ohio by loving themselves:

Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. They don't love your eyes; they'd just as soon pick em out. No more do they love the skin on your back. Yonder they flay it. And O my people they do not love your hands. Those they only use, tie, bind, chop off and leave empty. Love your hands! Love them. Raise them up and kiss them. Touch others with them, pat them together, stroke them on your face 'cause they don't love that either. You got to love it, you! And no, they ain't in love with your mouth. Yonder, out there, they will see it broken and break it again. What you say out of it they will not heed. What you scream from it they do not hear. What you put into it to nourish your body they will snatch away and give you leavins instead. No, they don't love your mouth. You got to love it.

(103-104)

Baby Suggs believes that making the decision to love is conscious and necessary for the community as they begin to assert their independence and establish their new identities, not as former slaves but as individuals with finite bodies and boundless love.

The simple act of loving themselves undermines the complex power structures that sought to suppress and control them in slavery and afterwards.

The central act of subversive love in the novel is Sethe's decision to kill her children to keep them from being returned to the plantation, Sweet Home, 28 days after Sethe's escape to Ohio, and this act is consistently connected to food and milk. Morrison models Sethe's violent act of love on the historical account of escaped slave Margaret Garner, who attempted to kill her children in 1856 rather than have them returned to slavery. Lori Askeland notes the connection between the supernatural presence of Beloved, the mysterious African American girl who arrives at 124 unannounced, and the ghost, or rememory, of slavery that persists throughout the novel: "Moreover, despite its northern locale, 124 Bluestone is haunted as much by the 'patriarchal institution' of slavery as by the ghost named Beloved, who is seemingly Sethe's murdered baby" (792). Although Sethe had tried to kill each of her four children, she only succeeded with one of them, the "crawling-already" (180) toddler, whose throat she cut with a handsaw. Sethe justifies her decision as an act of profound love that was necessary to keep her children safe from the torture and degradation of slavery under the new master, Schoolteacher. To Paul D, she describes her love: "Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to. You know what I mean?" (190-91). Paul D recognizes the danger of such intense love and tells her, "Your love is too thick" (193). Sethe's act of love, in the form of murder, also becomes a rememory that

cannot be escaped, prompting the occurrence of numerous supernatural events at 124 Bluestone Road after the murder.

The ramifications of “too thick” love on the past and present lives of the characters of *Beloved* are explored in the novel, often expressed by metaphors of domesticity, especially food and milk as well as needlework and fabrics. As with other narratives of confinement, the female narrators and characters engage in domestic tasks to not only complete the chores but to express latent emotions and ideas, including those subversive to the existing patriarchal power structures. In *Beloved*, the act of sewing often serves as a metaphor for the establishment of a new identity as well as a way of showing love and nurturing. In a more pragmatic sense, sewing also offers female protagonists a way to gain economic independence by bartering their needlework skills for food, favors, or money; for instance, Sethe explains to Paul D how she is able to support herself and her daughter without the help of husband: “And I sew a little on the sly” (12). The act of a character preparing and delivering food to another predictably anticipates a loving relationship, albeit one that could be dangerous or subversive to society, as in the case of Sethe’s intense love for her children, despite her master’s legal claim on each of them upon their birth. In addition, “too thick” love becomes symbolic in Morrison’s depiction of mothers’ breast milk; Sethe regards breast milk as synonymous with love, and her parts of the narration recount her desire to deliver milk to her children after their escape to the North, especially to the “crawling-already” baby who relied on it, even at the threat of capture or death. Cooking serves a similar purpose in the narrative of confinement, and Sethe often prepares meals with the professed intention of showing love to her family or Paul D. However, like sewing,

cooking serves a pragmatic function since Sethe is employed at Sawyer's Restaurant as a cook, a job that allows her to support herself and her family. However, Morrison depicts Sethe pilfering food and other materials from her employer, much as slaves pilfered food from their masters in slave narratives, such as Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The act of pilfering subverts the dominant social structure in the novel and simultaneously inverts the conventional meaning of providing food: the act of offering food represents an offering of love and affection. At Sawyer's Restaurant, Sethe removes food, instead of offering it, from her employer to offer it to those she loves: her family.

Needlework and Fabrics

References to sewing in *BeLoved* seem to serve a dual purpose: to convey feelings of attachment between characters and to exhibit characters' desire to assume a new, individualized identity, independent of the slave system into which they had been forced. Fabrics, such as simple calico and rich velvet, emerge as related metaphors that convey the characters' desire to create a new identity and subvert the current economic and social systems holding them in thrall. Although *BeLoved* is peopled with numerous characters of both genders, sewing and fabric references are used exclusively to describe the identities and relationships between female characters, primarily the matriarchal figures of Sethe and Baby Suggs. Floris Barnett Cash observes in "Kinship and Quilting: An Examination of an African-American Tradition" that "[t]he voices of black women are stitched within their quilts" (30), and it seems reasonable to assume that these voices were also stitched into other needlework projects by African American

women, such as dresses and clothing for their babies. Although former slaves increasingly engaged in communal sewing during Reconstruction, the needlework activities in the novel are primarily solitary.

One of the most significant and extended needlework metaphors in the novel emerges in Sethe's description of how she created her wedding dress when she "married" Halle at Sweet Home. Sethe tells Beloved and Denver about it after Beloved asks about her "diamonds," crystal earrings given to her as a wedding present by her mistress, Mrs. Garner (70). Sethe admits that she learned of wedding customs from Mrs. Garner, not having any experience with them before: "I never saw a wedding, but I saw Mrs. Garner's wedding gown in the press, and heard her go on about what it was like. Two pounds of currants in the cake, she said, and four whole sheep. The people were still eating the next day. That's what I wanted" (70). This passage incorporates both needlework and food into the description of Sethe's idealized wedding, but the majority of the wedding description focuses on her creation of her makeshift wedding gown, a dress cobbled together with discarded household scraps. Sethe recounts, "Well, I made up my mind to have at the least a dress that wasn't the sacking I worked in" (70). Due to her condition as a slave, Sethe was unable to buy any of the materials for her dress, and she owned nothing other than the clothes issued to her for work. In order to create a wedding dress, Sethe had to pilfer materials from the Garner household, especially pieces "that wouldn't be missed right away" (70) until she could return them after their ceremony:

The top was from two pillow cases in her mending basket. The front of the skirt was a dresser scarf a candle fell on and burnt a hole in, and one of

her old sashes we used to test the flatiron on.... Finally I took the mosquito netting from a nail out the barn. We used it to strain jelly through. I washed it and soaked it best I could and tacked it on for the back of the skirt. And there I was, in the worst-looking gown you could imagine. Only my wool shawl kept me from looking like a haint peddling. I wasn't but fourteen years old, so I reckon that's why I was so proud of myself. (70-71)

Each stolen piece, with the exception of the burned scarf, was used in daily domestic chores, just as Sethe was, and effectively represents her condition on the plantation as a forced laborer stolen from her mother and, by extension, her homeland of Africa.

While white American nineteenth-century culture encouraged matrimony and formal ceremonies to mark the legal and spiritual union of two individuals, slavery in the United States made both of these events unattainable in the lives of most slaves. The Garners allowed Sethe and Halle to “marry,” yet the union held no legal weight, and the wedding ceremony consisted of a spectral mimicry of nineteenth-century marital customs, leaving Sethe feeling akin to a shadow of a bride in her makeshift gown. However, Sethe’s creation of this dress subtly subverts the slave culture in which she and Halle inhabit; the presence of the dress, albeit temporary, allow the couple to claim their identities as “man and wife,” despite the legal barriers forbidding it.

Baby Suggs creates a dress for Sethe after her escape from Sweet Home, which helps solidify their familial affection and conveys support for the harbored fugitive slave. After Mr. Garner died, the management of Sweet Home was left to Mrs. Garner’s brother-in-law, a cruel disciplinarian called Schoolteacher. Pregnant Sethe and Halle decide to escape to Ohio with their three children to protect their family from

Schoolteacher's abuse, an ill-fated journey to Baby Suggs' house that almost killed Sethe and her unborn child and left Halle behind in Kentucky, never to be heard from again. Sethe arrives at Baby Suggs' home at 124 Bluestone severely beaten and sick after delivering her baby in a partially submerged boat. While cleansing and nursing her back to health, Baby Suggs stitches a dress together for her daughter-in-law:

She led Sethe to the keeping room and, by the light of a spirit lamp, bathed her in sections, starting with her face. Then, while waiting for another pan of heated water, she sat next to her and stitched gray cotton. Sethe dozed and woke to the washing of her hands and arms. After each bathing, Baby covered her with a quilt and put another pan on in the kitchen. Tearing sheets, stitching the gray cotton, she supervised the woman in the bonnet who tended the baby and cried into her cooking.

(109)

This passage merges sewing and cooking references, connecting emotions to both chores. Baby Suggs incorporates sewing as part of her efforts to heal Sethe's mind and body after her traumatic escape from slavery. The description of "tearing sheets" and "stitching... gray cotton" alludes to the creation of bandages to place on the wounded parts of Sethe's body. It is not until later that the needlework project is revealed to be a "gray cotton dress" (110) for Sethe to wear. In a sense, this dress does serve as a bandage to cover the wounds the Sethe bears after slavery and her escape; since it covers her entire body, it offers healing to her entire body. Furthermore, this dress provides Sethe with a new identity as a free woman and beloved family member; her bloody and torn slave clothes are discarded, and she dons a clean dress created in the

North by the hands of a freed slave. The dress represents Sethe's fresh start and new identity. The final part of this passage mentions another woman who sat with Baby Suggs and whose story offers a cautionary tale to Sethe who feared that in response to her own trauma that she would "develop some permanent craziness like Baby Suggs' friend, a young woman in a bonnet whose food was full of tears" (114). The events that traumatized the young woman are not explained, only that her tears would flow unabated and drop into her cooking, incorporating her sorrow into the food that she would prepare.

A quilt with two orange squares is a recurring image in *Beloved* and represents both familial love and identity; however, the narrative does not show the production of the quilt or who created it, only the finished product that is utilized by the residents of 124. Early in the novel, the quilt is described as an integral part of the décor of the "keeping room" in 124, where Baby Suggs retreated before her death to contemplate color (46):

The walls of the room were slate-colored, the floor earth-brown, the wooden dresser the color of itself, curtains white, and the dominating feature, the quilt over an iron cot, was made up of scraps of blue serge, black, brown and gray wool – the full range of the dark and the muted that thrift and modesty allowed. In that sober field, two patches of orange looked wild – like life in the raw. (46)

The composition of the quilt is dominated by neutral colors, presumably a patchwork of scraps of discarded clothing worn by lost or forgotten relatives and friends. Cash describes the process by which quilts were created in order to utilize all available

materials, even scraps of fabric: "African-American women recycled cloth as a means of survival. They designed their quilts to accommodate the scraps and rags which were available to them. Slave women exchanged old blankets and thick cloth among themselves. They used these and anything they could get their hands on to piece quilts" (32). In the midst of the neutral colors, orange scraps enliven the quilt and offer visual interest. These vivid scraps also presumably originated from someone's discarded clothing, deliberately dyed to give pleasure to the wearer. The quilt ostensibly symbolizes family and community since the individual identities of each contributor is represented in the quilt by pieces of his/her clothing, a fabric palimpsest of sorts in which the original wearers' identities cannot be entirely erased. Furthermore, the quilt symbolizes the journey of life in which daily toil and hardships cast a gray, neutral tone over days, months, and years. However, these days are occasionally interrupted by sublime joy, experienced as births, love, and physical pleasure, and are represented by the orange patches. For instance, Sethe's life was dominated by pain, toil, and traumatic loss, yet she experienced two distinct incidents of joy: the 28 days of camaraderie at 124 before Schoolteacher arrived to return her to Sweet Home and the days with Paul D and Denver before Beloved's arrival. These two "patches of orange" in Sethe's life became sites of rememory to which she repeatedly returns in her narration.

The quilt with the orange patches becomes a source of comfort to the younger generation of women, Denver and Beloved, as it was for Baby Suggs and Sethe. When Beloved arrives at 124, she is weak and sick, infantile in her dependency on others. Denver designates herself to be Beloved's nurse and brings her into the keeping room where Baby Suggs spent the last days of her life: "Once there, she collapsed on Baby

Suggs' bed. Denver removed her hat and put the quilt with two squares of color over her feet" (64). The act of covering Beloved with the quilt represents Denver's desire to cover the young woman, who she suspects is her resurrected sister, with the love and support of herself and her family. Once lucid, Beloved notices the vivid orange patches of color covering her feet: "It took three days for Beloved to notice the orange patches in the darkness of the quilt. Denver was pleased because it kept her patient awake longer. She seemed totally taken with those faded scraps of orange, even made the effort to lean on her elbow and stroke them" (65). Beloved, like Sethe, has experienced few events that have given her joy, and her preoccupation with the orange patches could represent her desire to seize moments of pleasure and love by returning to her lost family. Once Beloved gains physical strength, she craves stories about the past and urges Sethe and Denver to share their experiences with her. Denver's favorite story to tell is about her birth when Sethe is trying to escape to Ohio after being brutally whipped at Sweet Home. During Denver's narrative, "The dark quilt with two orange patches was there with them because Beloved wanted it near her when she slept. It was smelling like grass and feeling like hands – the unrested hands of busy women: dry, warm, prickly" (92). In this description, the quilt is connected to matrilineal traditions of domesticity and nurturing, and it offers the deliberate comfort that women's busy hands provide and simultaneously alludes to Denver's birth story. Denver's birth story is dominated by the care provided by female hands; her delivery and survival is credited to an escaping white girl named Amy Denver and her "good hands" (90). Furthermore, Amy discovers Sethe "down in the grass" (39), unable to walk any further due to her injuries. Throughout the novel, the quilt's meaning subtly changes depending on the needs and

rememories of the user. Despite the fluidity of the quilt's significance to different characters, a common thread of meaning regarding the quilt pervades the narrative: the quilt offers comfort as well as communal and familial love to each user, and the vivid patches of orange signify the brief moments of joy each life experiences, even amid grief, trauma, and loss.

The recurrent story of Denver's birth during Sethe's escape from Sweet Home includes references to fabric, specifically the velvet that Amy Denver seeks in Boston. Although not legally considered a slave, Amy experienced a similar condition of captivity as an indentured servant who was required to settle her mother's debt before achieving freedom. She tells Sethe, "My mama worked for these here people to pay for her passage. But then she had me and since she died right after, well, they said I had to work for em to pay it off. I did, but now I want me some velvet" (40). Amy, a young white woman, likely experienced a lifetime of confinement and abuse as an indentured servant, and, like Sethe, was seeking freedom in the North. To Amy, velvet symbolizes rebirth: "...velvet is like the world was just born. Clean and new and so smooth" (40). Amy seems to connect the procurement of velvet to the attainment of a new life in which she will be "reborn" as a free woman who can enjoy the luxury of appreciating beauty simply for its own sake. After finding Sethe immobilized in the grass, Amy discusses velvet and hope, which forces Sethe to find the strength to crawl to shelter before nightfall: "It was the voice full of velvet and Boston and good things to eat that urged her along and made her think that maybe she wasn't, after all, just a crawling graveyard for a six-month baby's last hours" (41-42). The hope inherent in the idea of rebirth, as represented by velvet, provides motivation for Sethe to also hope for her own rebirth in

the North and for the literal birth of her unborn child. When Denver is telling Beloved about her birth story, she includes details about Amy's penchant for velvet through a curious attribution of dialogue:

We got a old nigger girl come by our place. She don't know nothing. Sews stuff for Mrs. Buddy- real fine lace but can't barely stick two words together. She don't know nothing, just like you. You don't know a thing. End up dead, that's what. Not me. I'm a get to Boston and get myself some velvet. Carmine. You don't even know about that, do you? Now you never will.
(94)

Although Denver was not present to remember the dialogue, it seems likely that she reproduced the dialogue after hearing Sethe tell the story or that she concocted it herself since both scenarios exhibit that she possessed some level of understanding about the connection between velvet, rebirth, and her own existence. However, Amy's dialogue reveals the endemic racism of the American South as she positions her own situation as preferable to Sethe's, despite their obvious similarities. Instead, Amy connects the situations of Sethe and the old seamstress, using their ignorance of velvet and their status as slaves as their defining qualities. To Amy, ignorance is as much of a death sentence as being a slave. Also, this passage reflects Amy's dismissal of domesticity as a valuable quality for a woman to possess, seemingly positing that domestic skills will not protect a woman from entrapment and death; only by forging a new identity, independent of domestic chores, can a woman find freedom and hope.

Sethe tries to justify her act of murder to Paul D, using sewing and calico to represent the love she was able to express to her children once she was free. Sethe

explains to Paul D that she had saved a scrap of calico at Sweet Home to create something for her youngest child, the daughter that she later ended up killing in Ohio. She tells of her regret at leaving the fabric behind during her escape from Kentucky:

For the longest time I been meaning to make it for her and do you know like a fool I left it behind? No more than a yard, and I kept putting it off because I was tired or didn't have the time. So when I got here, even before they let me get out of bed, I stitched her a little something from a piece of cloth Baby Suggs had. Well, all I'm saying is that's a selfish pleasure I never had before. I couldn't let all that go back to where it was, and I couldn't let her nor any of em live under schoolteacher. (191-92)

As with the creation of her wedding dress, Sethe plans on using discarded fabric to create clothing that conveys an identity that she was striving towards but continually was denied. In the instance of the calico scrap, Sethe seeks the identity of a mother, knowing that legally she had no claim to her daughter. Perhaps it was the uncertainty of her claim on her daughter's upbringing that causes Sethe to delay the creation of clothing for the baby until she believes that she was free in the North. Once in Ohio, she recounts hastily sewing a garment for the baby, and she links this needlework project to the simple pleasure of being able to love her children, a pleasure that she was unwilling to renounce when Schoolteacher arrived at 124.

Food

The presence and absence of food and nutrition dominate *Beloved* and represent the struggle for identity and basic human rights that the characters experience as free

African Americans in Restoration Ohio. As in Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, food in *Beloved* often symbolizes the characters' desire to love and be loved, regardless of the barriers and memories that often stymie the development of healthy interpersonal relationships. Food emerges in the novel as a complex and fluctuating symbol that subtly illustrates degrees of emotional intensity, such as milk representing pure mother love and confectionaries representing a decadent greedy love. Furthermore, the preparation and offering of food to friends and neighbors represents the bonds of a community, illustrated by the feast at 124 that Stamp Paid instigates with two baskets of blackberries and later by the community's food donations to the women of 124.

Food and love are repeatedly equated throughout the novel. Characters that love each other offer each other food, which often quells the hunger in the recipient, and the giver, for both love and nourishment. For instance, Sethe decides that she wants to prove her affection to Paul D shortly after Beloved's arrival, which strained their relationship due to the stress of having the strange girl living at 124:

On her mind was the supper she wanted to fix for Paul D – something difficult to do, something she would do just so – to launch her newer, stronger life with a tender man. Those litty [sic] bitty potatoes browned on all sides, heavy on the pepper; snap beans seasoned with rind; yellow squash sprinkled with vinegar and sugar. Maybe corn cut from the cob and fried with green onions and butter. Raised bread, even. (117)

Sethe's previous experience with love had taught her that love was fraught with difficulties, just as the meal that she plans to create for Paul D is complicated and time

consuming; not only does the meal represent her affection to the man, but it also mirrors her ideas about the demanding nature of love. The same logic persists in an earlier question posed to Sethe by Paul D regarding the continued presence of Beloved: “‘You just gonna feed her? From now on?’ Paul D, feeling ungenerous, and surprised by it, heard the irritability in his voice” (67). Paul D recognizes that Sethe feeding Beloved food equates to Sethe feeding the girl love, and he resents having to compete with an additional person for Sethe’s affections. The connection between love and food is not isolated to Sethe’s affections; the description of the feast at 124 after Sethe’s arrival from Kentucky pairs love and food again:

But the baby's thrilled eyes and smacking lips made them follow suit, sampling one at a time the berries that tasted like church. Finally Baby Suggs slapped the boys' hands away from the bucket and sent Stamp around to the pump to rinse himself. She had decided to do something with the fruit worthy of the man's labor and his love. (160)

This passage refers to the two baskets of blackberries that Stamp Paid had gathered earlier in the day, reaching into brambles to remove the delicate fruit, and later offered to Baby Suggs as a gift. Baby Suggs regards the man’s efforts as indicative of his love for her family, especially baby Denver, who he had helped ferry to safety during Sethe’s escape. Stamp Paid carefully places the berry in the baby’s mouth so that she can taste the sweetness of the fruit. The experience of tasting the wild blackberries, for the baby and the adults, is described as being akin to a religious experience, as a kind of Holy Communion, in which love and reverence become enmeshed in the flavor.

Stamp Paid’s two baskets of blackberries culminates in a feast due to the

cooperative efforts of the family and represents a communal celebration and show of support for the unlikely arrival of Sethe and her children after their escape from slavery. Baby Suggs decides to bake blackberry pies, making enough to share with the neighbors; Sethe and Stamp Paid also decide to contribute to the meal, and their efforts miraculously multiply as Baby Suggs' pies increase in number:

She made the pastry dough and thought she ought to tell Ella and John to stop on by because three pies, maybe four, were too much to keep for one's own. Sethe thought they might as well back it up with a couple of chickens. Stamp allowed that perch and catfish were jumping into the boat – didn't even have to drop a line. From Denver's two thrilled eyes it grew to a feast for ninety people. 124 shook with their voices far into the night.

(160-61)

The feast at 124 originates with a simple act of love and grows exponentially as Baby Suggs' love had expanded for her newly arrived family and her supportive community. However, the community seems to regard her expression of love as excessive: "Too much, they thought. Where does she get it all, Baby Suggs, holy? Why is she and hers always the center of things?" (161). To the community of former slaves and free blacks in Cincinnati, Baby Suggs' display of food, love, and kinship was offensive, even dangerous, and they recoiled from her and her family the next day, finding her bounty akin to a religious sacrilege:

Now to take two buckets of blackberries and make ten, maybe twelve, pies; to have turkey enough for the whole town pretty near, new peas in September, fresh cream but no cow, ice and sugar, batter bread, bread

pudding, raised bread, shortbread – it made them mad. Loaves and fishes were His powers – they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale, or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old whiteboy as God knows they had. (161-62)

The excess of love angered the community enough that they did not offer help to Baby Suggs and her family when the slave catchers were observed arriving to town, allowing them the opportunity to seize Sethe and her children and return them to slavery.

The ramifications of the feast are palatable the next morning to the community and the residents of 124. On the morning after the feast, the neighbors of 124 Bluestone “swallowed baking soda... to calm the stomach violence caused by the bounty, the reckless generosity on display at 124” (162), while Baby Suggs, Sethe, and Stamp Paid worked to replenish the resources lost to the feast. Baby Suggs was working in the garden and determining the health of the future crops of corn, peppers, and squash. As she stands in the garden plot, she determines that the vegetables continue to grow, despite the quantity that had been gathered for the party and presented to her friends and family:

Much as they'd picked for the party, there were still ears ripening, which she could see from where she stood. Baby Suggs leaned back into the peppers and the squash vines with her hoe. Carefully, with the blade at just the right angle, she cut through a stalk of insistent rue. Its flowers she stuck through a split in her hat; the rest she tossed aside. (162-63)

Although Baby Suggs had freely given the bounty of her home, and heart, to her family

and community, she still has an abundance of vegetables ripening, just as her heart has an abundance of love at this point in the narrative. However, despite the reassurance that her garden continues to yield food, Baby Suggs senses the community's disapproval of her display of excess and regrets the ostentatious feast. Baby Suggs cuts the rue, putting the herb's ornamental flower in her hat and discarding the edible part to illustrate her regret. In this way, Baby Suggs "rues" the indecency of her over-abundant table and heart. However, soon after Baby Suggs advertises her regret, Schoolteacher and the other three horsemen arrive at 124 to return Sethe and her four children to slavery in the silence that the community creates with their disapproval. Mary Jane Suero Elliott asserts that "[t]he people of the community tacitly withdraw their support by denying Sethe, without warning, access to a system of communication developed by and for the community" (187). In this single act of withdrawal, the community provides wordless commentary regarding the dangers of former slaves showing too much love.

The uneasy relationship between the community and the occupants of 124 continues to be connected by the proffering, and rejection, of food. The community's complicity in Schoolteacher's arrival at 124 on the day after the feast resulted in Sethe's desperate act to save her children from slavery. The community continues to withhold support from the family until Baby Suggs' funeral, about a decade after the murder. However, Sethe rejects the community's support of Baby Suggs and refuses to participate in the funeral and graveside service in the way that the community had expected. For instance, Sethe would not sing at the graveside service, "not joining in the hymns the others sang with all their hearts" (Morrison 202). Sethe's unwillingness to

conform to the community's wishes initiated further resentment from her neighbors, expressed as the rejection of her prepared dishes: "That insult spawned another by the mourners: back in the yard of 124, they ate the food they brought and did not touch Sethe's, who did not touch theirs and forbade Denver to" (202). In this instance, the consumption of food serves as a way to communicate tacit approval and disapproval among the community.

The community uses food years later to communicate with the women of 124 after Denver solicits help from her childhood teacher, Mrs. Jones. Months after Beloved's arrival, the situation at 124 had deteriorated to the point that the three women were starving due to lack of food. Paul D had left the house after he found out that Sethe had killed her oldest daughter, and Sethe had lost her job at the restaurant because she wanted to spend as much time as possible with Beloved, finally recognizing that she was her resurrected daughter. No one was providing food or money for the family, resulting in their acute hunger, which was the most severe for Sethe:

But the pain was unbearable when they ran low on food, and Denver watched her mother go without – pick-eating around the edges of the table and stove: the hominy that stuck on the bottom; the crusts and rinds and peelings of things. Once she saw her run her longest finger deep in an empty jam jar before rinsing and putting it away. (285)

Love equates to food for Sethe, and she allows her daughters, especially Beloved, to take all of the nourishment available, starving herself in order to give them all of her love. Denver realizes that she is only one capable of getting help for the family, and she

returns to the community that she had shunned for most of her life by asking Mrs. Jones to help her get a job so that she could feed her sick mother. Mrs. Jones tells Denver, “But if you all need to eat until your mother is well, all you have to do is say so” (292). After a lifetime of greedily receiving food and love from her mother, Denver seeks to repay the debt but refuses to ask for handouts from strangers. For Denver, as with her mother, love is complex and not easily accepted from strangers. However, the community offers their love to Denver, in the form of prepared dishes, as a form of restitution for abandoning their neighbors living at 124 Bluestone years before. The dishes arrive at the house, often left on the same stump on which the family found Beloved:

Two days later Denver stood on the porch and noticed something lying on the tree stump at the edge of the yard. She went to look and found a sack of white beans. Another time a plate of cold rabbit meat. One morning a basket of eggs sat there. As she lifted it, a slip of paper fluttered down. She picked it up and looked at it. (292-93)

The community’s renewed acceptance of Denver allows her to escape from her self-imposed exile as well as to seek employment and new friends while helping her mother and Beloved. Also, the community’s involvement becomes the catalyst for the exorcism at 124 that finally expunges Beloved from the premises. After nearly twenty years, “thirty women made up that company and walked slowly, slowly toward 124” (303), remembering the good times and good food that they experienced as younger women during the time that Baby Suggs lived there. Their communal love and support, as well as their audible prayers, force Beloved off the porch and into the woods, never to be

seen again. Elliott contends that “what succeeds in breaking through the cycle imprisoning Sethe and Beloved in its redundant sterility is the sound of the community’s voice. The use of a communal voice to negate the effects of an oppressive discourse on Sethe’s life serves to link her once again to the community and to the potential to develop her subjectivity” (195). Essentially, it is the love of the community, initially expressed as gifts of food, that obliterate the body and spirit of Beloved from the house. The gifts of food allow the community of women to convey their support for the women of 124, using domesticity to give voice to their allegiance to one another and to subvert the traumatic memories that inhabit the residence and their own histories.

Food often represents the pure, transformative power of love as in the community’s donations to the women of 124, while sweet foods seem to symbolize a greedy, insatiable love that often consumes and corrupts the giver and the receiver. The love that is suggested by rich, sweet foods has been corrupted by the persistent sufferings that were the result of physical confinement and abuse, indicating that psychological confinement remains due to the presence of the traumatic memories. Sethe’s daughters, Denver and Beloved, exhibit the most profound cravings for confectionaries, reflecting their acute hunger for love. Shortly after Paul D’s arrival at 124, the baby’s ghost violently shakes the kitchen furniture as Sethe, Denver, and Paul D prepare to eat dinner. In response, Paul D yells and also throws furniture, effectively banishing the spirit from the house. After Paul D and Sethe go upstairs to consummate years of unresolved yearning, Denver is left alone downstairs, excluded and lonely in the space where her dead sister’s ghost and her mother had been. In an effort to fill the emptiness of that space and the space inside of her, she eats the sweetest food that is

available:

Denver wandered through the silence to the stove. She ashed over the fire and pulled the pan of biscuits from the oven. The jelly cupboard was on its back, its contents lying in a heap in the corner of the bottom shelf. She took out a jar, and, looking around for a plate, found half of one by the door. These things she carried out to the porch steps, where she sat down... She pried the wire from the top of the jar and then the lid. Under it was cloth and under that a thin cake of wax. She removed it all and coaxed the jelly onto one half of the half a plate. She took a biscuit and pulled off its black top. Smoke curled from the soft white insides. (Morrison 22)

Not only does Denver seek out the sweetest food that is readily available at 124, but she prepares to consume all of the jelly in one sitting, indicating that she is not eating to satisfy physical hunger but rather to fill an emotional void. Denver's tendency to equate sweet food with love is not surprising since Stamp Paid introduced her to the taste of sweet blackberries when she was a baby, and he offered the berries to her as an act of love. Later in the novel, Paul D purchases tickets for the three of them to attend a local carnival, and Denver's loneliness seems appeased by the community's renewed interest in her and the presence of sweet carnival food:

Denver bought horehound, licorice, peppermint and lemonade at a table manned by a little whitegirl in ladies' high-topped shoes. Soothed by sugar, surrounded by a crowd of people who did not find her the main attraction, who, in fact, said, "Hey, Denver," every now and then, pleased her enough

to consider the possibility that Paul D wasn't all that bad. (58)

While the presence of candy seems to comfort Denver, who craves love, Sethe tries to reject the candy, and love, that Paul D offers her at the carnival: “He teased Sethe into tents she was reluctant to enter. Stuck pieces of candy she didn't want between her lips” (58). Sethe’s previous experiences with love had been complex and painful, and her hesitation about accepting the candy represents her hesitation to consider loving Paul D. Despite her reticence, Paul D forces the candy in her mouth, much as he had been forcing his love on her and Denver.

Beloved develops an acute craving for sweet foods as she recovers at 124 shortly after her arrival, indicating the shifting focus of affection in the house from Denver to Beloved. While Denver was the only child in the house, she craved attention and sweets; however, once Beloved arrives, she becomes the center of affection for Denver and Sethe, resulting in her childish need for unbounded devotion and an endless supply of sugary foods:

[S]ugar could always be counted on to please her. It was as though sweet things were what she was born for. Honey as well as the wax it came in, sugar sandwiches, the sludgy molasses gone hard and brutal in the can, lemonade, taffy and any type of dessert Sethe brought home from the restaurant. She gnawed a cane stick to flax and kept the strings in her mouth long after the syrup had been sucked away. (66)

Beloved’s desire for love, especially from Sethe, develops throughout the novel into an insatiable need, much as her appetite remains unchecked, despite the fact that she often receives the most generous portion and the sweetest foods. Both Sethe and

Denver “feed” Beloved, trying to fill the vast void in the girl for both hunger and love; Sethe uses stories from her past to show her love, while Denver uses food: “It became a way to feed her. Just as Denver discovered and relied on the delightful effect sweet things had on Beloved, Sethe learned the profound satisfaction Beloved got from storytelling” (69). Love, as expressed by careful narration, is interchangeable with sweet-tasting foods, and Beloved greedily consumes both, resulting in the near-ruination of Sethe by the end of the novel.

Beloved’s insatiable desire for sweets seems connected to the “sugar teat” (84) that served as a substitute for her mother’s milk during the children’s escape to Ohio, while Sethe remained at Sweet Home until she could safely follow later. Sethe explains the use of sugar as a milk substitute to Paul D: “Nobody was going to nurse her like me... I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn’t have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it” (19). Throughout the novel, mother’s milk clearly represents love, and Sethe establishes that only she would provide milk to her baby, offering the sustenance and love that had been denied to her as a child. Sethe’s mother had to return to working in the field only weeks after giving birth, leaving Sethe’s care to a wet nurse, Nan. Sethe explains, “Nan had to nurse whitebabies and me too because Ma'am was in the rice. The little whitebabies got it first and I got what was left. Or none. There was no nursing milk to call my own. I know what it is to be without the milk that belongs to you; to have to fight and holler for it, and to have so little left” (236). When she finally arrives at 124 after her harrowing escape and delivering her baby in a rowboat, she understands that she can love her children without bounds: “There was no

question but that she could do it. Just like the day she arrived at 124 – sure enough, she had milk enough for all” (118). Sethe clearly equates her mother’s milk with the freedom to love her children. Once she escapes from slavery and arrives at 124, she is able to nurse both of her daughters, newborn Denver and the “crawling-already” baby, who would no longer be fed the “sugar teat” as a poor substitute for her mother’s milk.

However, Sethe is unable to fully nourish and satisfy her children, even after her escape, due to slavery’s presence and the memories of its traumatic marks on her; she fails to nurture her children when she kills one daughter and then tries to nurse the surviving infant with her daughter’s blood mixing with the milk. Michèle Bonnet observes that Sethe is unable to successfully mother her children, despite her profound love for them: “The dominant theme of the book is that, because the children have been deprived of proper nurturing, they have been unable to develop into real persons – it accounts not only for Beloved’s crippled and ultimately evil character but also for Denver’s unnatural childishness and inner emptiness” (49). This explains why Beloved, the resurrected “crawling-already” baby, still craves sweetness as a comfort and substitute for love, seeking candy and sugary foods to help ease her desire for Sethe’s nurturing and attention.

Food becomes a symbol of subversion when it is stolen, and the act of pilfering food often represents characters’ desire to appropriate basic human rights denied them or a new identity in the face of confinement. A recurrent image of stolen food is when Sethe’s milk is forcibly removed by Schoolteacher’s nephews hours before she escapes from Sweet Home. She tells Paul D about the assault shortly after he arrives at 124: “... those boys came in there and took my milk. That’s what they came in there for. Held me

down and took it" (19). Paul D expresses his disgust at the beating she received after she told Mrs. Garner about the abuse, yet Sethe fixates on the theft:

"They used cowhide on you?"

"And they took my milk."

"They beat you and you was pregnant?"

"And they took my milk!" (20)

The theft of Sethe's milk, intended for her baby, represents slavery's denial of her essential human right to love and nurture her children. Just as her master can take her milk, he can take her children. Sethe keenly understands this relationship, and the assault on her maternity helps motivate her to escape from Sweet Home as she had planned, despite the severe beating she had received. While the attack on Sethe by the three boys was intended to subvert her identity as a mother, Sethe used the attack to subvert slavery itself.

The pilfering of food by slaves represents their desire to appropriate proper sustenance and to reinforce their identities as human beings, not simply as property. As with *Incidents*, most of the pilfering in *Beloved* occurs on plantations in the antebellum South in response to the draconian measures slaveowners instituted to control their slaves and reduce their financial overhead. After Mr. Garner's death, "Schoolteacher took away the guns from the Sweet Home men and, deprived of game to round out their diet of bread, beans, hominy, vegetables and a little extra at slaughter time, they began to pilfer in earnest, and it became not only their right but their obligation" (225). Sixo, one of the male slaves at Sweet Home, explains to Schoolteacher his rationale for stealing when he was caught with cooked meat: "Sixo plant rye to give the high piece a

better chance. Sixo take and feed the soil, give you more crop. Sixo take and feed Sixo give you more work” (224). Sixo cleverly uses the argument that he is “improving [Schoolteacher’s] property” (224) by stealing protein-rich foods such as pork to help fuel his labors. However, his logical explanation also demonstrates Sixo’s resistance to Schoolteacher, specifically, and slavery, in general, by showcasing his intelligence; one of the tenets of slavery posited that Africans benefitted from slavery’s patriarchal structure due to their inability to reason effectively as whites, and clearly, Sixo’s quick intellect undermines this belief.

Sethe also pilfers food and other essentials from Sawyer’s Restaurant while she works there as a cook, much as Sixo did from Schoolteacher. However, Sethe’s motivation to steal from her employer differs from Sixo’s reasons. Although Mr. Sawyer pays Sethe for her labors, she often takes inventory from the restaurant to help support her family at home:

But matches, sometimes a bit of kerosene, a little salt, butter too – these things she took also, once in a while, and felt ashamed because she could afford to buy them; she just didn't want the embarrassment of waiting out back of Phelps store with the others till every white in Ohio was served before the keeper turned to the cluster of Negro faces looking through a hole in his back door. (223-24)

While Sixo pilfers as a justification to receive proper nourishment and subvert his involuntary confinement, Sethe steals food and other essentials because she does not want to be associated with the other “Negros” that have to wait at the back door of the local store. For Sethe, stealing from Sawyer’s Restaurant allows her to reject the

identity of being a “second-class” citizen, another kind of confinement, by having to wait for the white customers to be served before she can purchase what she needs.

Furthermore, Sethe’s pilfering illustrates her defiance against the black community as she refuses to conform to their behavior and also avoids contact with them by waiting in the line. Sethe’s pilfering simultaneously undermines white society, in the form of stealing from her employer, as well as rejects black society, by refusing contact with them. Sethe’s act of stealing isolates herself and her family, while the act of stealing by slaves, as depicted by Sixo, unites them in solidarity against white culture and the slave economy.

Sethe works as a cook at Sawyer’s Restaurant and was hired to perform similar duties as those required of her as a slave at Sweet Home, where she worked in the kitchen alongside Mrs. Garner preparing food and ink. Sethe was hired by Mr. Sawyer shortly after her release from jail for killing her daughter, and her labors are paid in the form of a salary and leftover food: “Mr. Sawyer included midday dinner in the terms of the job – along with \$3.40 a week – and she made him understand from the beginning she would take her dinner home” (223). After her shift, Sethe would pack the edible leftovers to bring home to her family. Although Sethe refrained from waiting in line at Phelps’ store for butter or salt because she did not want to wait for the white patrons to be served first, she readily accepts the leftover food that the white patrons of the restaurant did not order: “But there was some passable stew. Problem was, all her pies were sold too. Only rice pudding left and half a pan of gingerbread that didn’t come out right. Had she been paying attention instead of daydreaming all morning, she wouldn’t be picking around looking for her dinner like a crab” (223). Sethe continues to receive

leftovers, just as she did as a child when she struggled to find nourishment from the wet nurse, Nan, who rarely had enough milk left for her after nursing the white children first. Furthermore, the leftovers that she rejects are offered to the dogs, putting the needs of her family slightly above the waiting strays: “The wind raced down the alley so fast it sleeked the fur of four kitchen dogs waiting for scraps.... Finally the back door opened and Sethe stepped through holding a scrap pan in the crook of her arm” (149). Sethe and her family, like the dogs, have to settle for food scraps and are marginalized by society, accepting other scraps that are doled out to them in life, such as love, freedom from confinement, and a protected home.

Morrison’s neo-slave narrative *Beloved* is set in Reconstruction Ohio in the 1870s, and the African American characters remain confined by profound racial inequities as well as the haunting memories of slavery that inhibit the possibility of happiness and satisfying interpersonal relationships. Maternal relationships are highlighted, and Sethe emerges as the central figure, occupying the spaces of daughter, daughter-in-law, and mother. Maternity and images of domesticity often work in conjunction in the novel to symbolize the degrees of love experienced by the women in the novel, especially between mothers and daughters. As with Jacobs’ *Incidents*, domestic metaphors, especially those of needlework and food, help convey the complex emotional interaction between characters as well as to offer insight into the influence the traumatic memories of slavery have on the characters, creating other forms of voluntary and involuntary confinement. While Morrison examines the physical and psychological effects of violence and trauma on the characters in the novel, “[she] never focuses on the act of victimization for very long; instead, she quickly shifts her attention

to the way characters deal with – and even more importantly – help one another to deal with the pain, anger, and sense of shame brought about by victimization” (Hamilton 438). This novel, like other narratives of confinement, celebrates survival in the face of trauma and adversity and uses images of domesticity to communicate the ways in which the characters cope and endure.

In the final chapter, I will examine other narratives that describe the experiences of female narrators who survived confinement. The Conclusion will focus briefly upon two additional confinement experiences, Kate Chopin’s fictional account of voluntary confinement in marriage and motherhood, *The Awakening* (1899), and the autobiographical fictional account of Sylvia Plath’s mental breakdown and subsequent institutionalization, *The Bell Jar*, published in 1961. These examples of American fiction emphasize the universality of the subversive use of domesticity in narratives of confinement, applying to narrators who are confined by intangible forces, such as the institution of marriage and mental illness, respectively. This chapter will consider the broader implications of further study of domesticity in the area of confinement narratives and will seek to redefine the female captivity experience as a confinement experience of voluntary or involuntary origin.

CHAPTER SIX:

CONCLUSION

I always have been fascinated by accounts of captivity, both those that describe tangible fetters as well as those that describe cultural and psychological restraints. Upon reflection, I realize that the stories that engaged my imagination the most were those narrated by American women who struggled to free themselves from their real or imagined bindings, such as: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Kate Chopin's "The Story of an Hour" and *The Awakening*, Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Susan Glaspell's *Trifles*, and the poetry of Emily Dickinson and Dorothy Parker. Later academic study introduced me to genres of American literature that used captivity as a defining quality, such as the Indian captivity narratives and slave narratives, and I was intrigued. The forced captivities of Mary Rowlandson, Harriet Jacobs, Mary Jemison, Elizabeth Hanson, and Rachel Plummer enthrall me, especially the fact that these women employed varying means to survive, including being adopted by their captors in the cases of Jemison and Plummer. However, Indian captivity narratives and slave narratives are dominated by accounts written by men, and I noticed distinct points of difference that separated the narratives written by men and those written by women, such as the role reproduction and childrearing played in female accounts of captivity as well as the different coping strategies employed by women in response to trauma.

Due to the profound and inherent differences between the male and female captivity experience, I sought to redefine the genres, not using the means of captivity as the defining quality of the narratives but rather the gender of the captives instead. Refocusing the narratives in this way revealed surprising conventions in these “narratives of confinement,” whether they are fictive or not, such as: 1) the first-person narrator is an adult female, often a mother; 2) her narrative follows a generally predictable pattern of forcible separation from her home and/or children; the narrator suffers physical confinement and seeks a new identity while confined; she achieves freedom due to her efforts, finally becoming reunited with children and/or family; and she struggles with the psychological aftermath of the trauma of captivity; 3) these narratives demonstrate the transformative power of the captivity experience, urging the confined women to seek alternate identities and often to subvert the idealized contemporary feminine identity that was prevalent at the time the narrative was published; and 4) many of these narratives of confinement describe threads of resistance as female captives seek ways to gain power in their efforts to survive incredible hardships. While captivity narratives written by both males and females frequently highlight the subject’s overarching need to survive, the women in narratives of confinement often communicate their efforts to survive by using domestic metaphors that subtly describe their efforts to subvert dominant power structures, often patriarchal, to appropriate individual identities that suggest a type of rebirth.

Domestic metaphors operate in narratives of confinement as subtle communicators between women, including the characters existing within the text as well as between the writer and her female readers. Needlework and references to food and

its preparation emerge as frequent domestic metaphors in these narratives and often symbolize the narrators' efforts at resisting their captivity and redefining themselves independently of the patriarchal and social forces that limit them. However, the women's efforts to resist are obscured, possibly even to the narrators themselves, behind feminine chores as they struggle with physical confinement and subsequent social and psychological captivity. Although other domestic tasks are sometimes discussed in narratives of confinement, these have been excluded from this study due to its determinate scope and the breadth of the various metaphors. I contend that further study needs to be conducted regarding other domestic metaphors, such as gardening and cleaning, in order to determine their significance in narratives of confinement.

Inherent to the notion of confinement, in both the physical and psychological sense, exists trauma, experienced initially as a traumatic event and then re-experienced as a traumatic memory, or "rememory" as Sethe describes it in *Beloved*. In "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies," Geoffrey Hartman contends that:

[T]he knowledge of trauma, or the knowledge which comes from that source, is composed of two contradictory elements. One is the traumatic event, registered rather than experienced. It seems to have bypassed perception and consciousness, and falls directly into the psyche. The other is a kind of memory of the event, in the form of a perpetual troping of it by the bypassed or severely split (dissociated) psyche. (537)

Hartman asserts that trauma continues to exert its force on those who experienced it, having an afterlife that might emerge as a recurrent image or idea due to the victims' attempt at assimilating the experienced trauma into their consciousness. In narratives of

confinement, the memory of the traumatic event often seems to be connected to domestic metaphors in which the female victims attempt to cope with the recurrent memory of the trauma by engaging in domestic chores and then recording the act to demonstrate their efforts at regaining identity and power. In a sense, the integration of domestic metaphors in a narrative of confinement builds on the work of Judith Lewis Herman in trauma theory, which posits that victims of trauma must record the traumatic event in order to assimilate and heal in the aftermath. The domestic metaphors become an integral part of the narratives and serve as a subtle, feminine language that offers the reader a glimpse into the restorative effects of recording the traumatic story with words as well as the creative acts of needlework and cooking, emerging simultaneously as the “wound that cries out” (Caruth 4) and a therapeutic process.

Three narratives were selected as being representative of the newly defined genre, narratives of confinement: Mary Rowlandson’s 1682 Indian captivity narrative, *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*; Harriet Jacobs’ 1861 slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself*; and Toni Morrison’s 1987 fictional neo-slave narrative, *Beloved*. While the narrators of these accounts originate from divergent backgrounds and locations, their accounts were selected due to shared similarities that point to the universality of narratives of confinement, spanning centuries and across geographical borders yet adhering to similar principles and patterns. The narrators of these works use a common feminized language of domestic chores, especially sewing and food preparation, to give a voice to the “wound that cries out” (4), using a structure that Herman identifies in survivor

accounts of trauma, centuries after some of early narratives of confinement were written and published.

The works chosen to exemplify narratives of confinement provide accounts of physical captivity in which the female protagonists have lost freedom due to outside, tangible forces; although these women suffer psychological distress due to the trauma of captivity, their physical loss of freedom remains paramount to the narrators' and readers' understanding of the events. However, a closer examination needs to be done on narratives in which the female protagonist has lost freedom primarily due to intangible forces, such as cultural norms and psychological distress, with physical confinement emerging as a secondary, rather than the primary, restraint. A cursory examination of a handful of works written by American women shows the possibility that many other texts, both fictional and non-fictional, might be defined as narratives of confinement and utilize metaphors and references to domesticity as a means to convey shifting identities and subtle resistance to forces that seek to repress and imprison. For instance, Sylvia Plath's autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar*, describes the mental deterioration and self-imposed isolation of the protagonist, Esther Greenwood, which results in her suicide attempt and subsequent confinement in a mental institution. Esther primarily experiences confinement due to her mental state, which results in the physical confinement in an institution. The significant role of food in the novel has received critical attention, especially as a metaphor for conflicting cultural messages regarding the role of women in the United States in the mid-twentieth century. Caroline J. Smith observes:

Reading both articles and advertisements in 1953 editions of *Mademoiselle* and looking specifically at passages in *The Bell Jar* that deal with Esther's eating and housekeeping habits, I assert that 1950s consumer culture – a culture that encouraged women to navigate beyond the private sphere of the home while limiting those options by simultaneously discouraging that navigation – is not conducive to Esther's being properly nurtured – a circumstance that contributes to the metaphorical starvation that Esther envisions for herself (4)

Various food references emerge in the novel, such as a fig tree, poisoned crabmeat, and scrambled eggs, while cooking seems to be connected to traditional gender roles and domesticity, ideas that simultaneously attract and repel Esther (11). Conversely, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* offers few food references but connects sewing with the traditional, idealized domestic skills of the late nineteenth-century:

Mrs. Pontellier's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations. But she did not want to appear unamiable and uninterested, so she brought forth newspapers, which she spread on the floor of the gallery, and under Madame Ratignolle's directions she had cut a pattern of the impervious garment. (Chopin 183)

Chopin's protagonist, Edna Pontellier, bristles under the demands of motherhood and housekeeping, and her ambivalence regarding sewing illustrates her conflicting desires between adhering to accepted traditional gender roles in 1890s Creole culture of the

American South and rejecting the confines of wifedom and motherhood. Ultimately, Edna rejects traditional gender roles, and domestic chores, in favor of an isolated and creative life of writing, music, and passion. The voluntary effort to shift her identity from that of wife and mother leads to her suicide once she realizes that her unconventional identity will not be accepted by anyone other than herself.

This study begins the dialogue regarding the connection between domestic metaphors and narratives of confinement, yet more scholarship needs to be done. The examination of the study's three foundational narratives offers a comprehensive analysis of how female writers use the domestic metaphors of sewing and food preparation in narratives of confinement to show how their female narrators survive and cope with the trauma of physical, and often psychological, captivity. Trauma resonates within these narratives as the women experience the consequences of their captivity, including the loss of freedom and loved ones, physical and psychological abuse, and shattered identities. The female narrators strive to recreate themselves in the telling of their stories, using domestic metaphors to give voice to "the wound that cries out" (Caruth 4) and to forge new lives that are marked by more independence and control. However, other American works, such as *The Bell Jar* and *The Awakening*, show promise since they also address trauma and captivity with domestic metaphors, although their captivities emerge as cultural and psychological, rather than physical. Other works by female writers across the globe also need to be studied to determine whether they fit the conventions of narratives of confinement and how the female narrators use domesticity in their culture to show resistance and survival. Furthermore, it would be interesting to expand the definition of narratives of confinement to include

female narrators who experience the physical captivity of their bodies due to the mandates of reproduction (such as high-risk or unwanted pregnancies) or debilitating conditions brought on by illness or injury.

Trauma undergirds narratives of confinement, yet it is the ways in which the narrators survive, assimilate, and record the traumatic events that are most noteworthy to this study. Narratives of confinement ostensibly describe the captivity and abuse of women who inhabit a patriarchal, and sometimes misogynistic, culture, but between the narrative threads emerge stories of courage, survival, and freedom from oppression. The female protagonists in these narratives use domestic metaphors, especially needlework and food preparation and consumption, to illustrate the imperious nature of the human spirit.

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