THE LOVE BISCUIT LODGED UNDER A LOG: (RE)TELLINGS OF CAPTIVITY AND REDEMPTION IN MARY ROWLANDSON’S *CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE* AND LOUISE ERDRICH’S “CAPTIVITY”

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THE LOVE BISCUIT LODGED UNDER A LOG: (RE)TELLINGS OF CAPTIVITY AND REDEMPTION IN MARY ROWLANDSON’S *CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE* AND LOUISE ERDRICH’S “CAPTIVITY”

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ABSTRACT

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This paper aims to uncover the role that culture and religion play in establishing and justifying a fear to love the Other that divides Euro- and Native Americans by examining Mary Rowlandson’s *Captivity Narrative* and Louise Erdrich’s poem “Captivity.” “Captivity” is a retelling of the *Narrative* that reveals its primary message: fear to love the Other. Rowlandson’s *Narrative* justifies the Puritan notion of their superior cultural and religious identity through appeals to religion, sustaining a fear to love the Other. The religious justification of the fear is examined in Erdrich’s “Captivity,” wherein Native American spirituality and Puritan religion are compared and contrasted. Erdrich’s assertion that Native Americans are spiritual renders religious justification of the fear to love the Other invalid. By pulling apart the religious justification into the separate strands of the spiritual and the cultural, it is evident that culture is the cause for divide between the Euro-and Native Americans.
For my Mother
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INTRODUCTION

THE LOVE BISCUIT LODGED UNDER A LOG: (RE)TELLINGS OF CAPTIVITY AND REDEMPTION IN MARY ROWLANDSON’S *CAPTIVITY NARRATIVE* AND LOUISE ERDRICH’S “CAPTIVITY”

I haveing nothing to eat […] but a few crumbs of Cake, that an Indian gave my girl the same day we were taken […] I put it in my pocket […] till it was so mouldy […] [that] it fell all to crumbs […] this refreshed me many times […] (Rowlandson 92-93).

He (my captor), gave me a bisquit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him (Erdrich).

These two excepts, taken respectively from Mary Rowlandson’s *Captivity Narrative* (1682) and Louise Erdrich’s poem “Captivity,” (2003) have a common speaker, Mary Rowlandson, and a common plot: a person gives the speaker¹, historical Rowlandson and poetic Mary, a biscuit, which the speaker proceeds to bury away. Yet, the relationship between the two passages is more significant than the possession of a common speaker and plot. As the poem is a retelling of the *Narrative*, the second set of lines draws out and makes explicit the underlying message in the first: the speaker fears to embrace the Native Americans that give her nourishment. Implicit in these two passages is the

¹ For clarity, I distinguish historical Mary Rowlandson, the writer of the *Captivity Narrative*, from the narrator in Erdrich’s poem by referring to historical Mary Rowlandson as “Rowlandson” and the narrator as “Mary.”
division between the Euro-American speaker and the Native Americans that give her food. While most readings of Rowlandson’s text and Erdrich’s poem focus on this division between the Euro-and Native Americans, by reading the texts together it is possible to more thoroughly understand that the cause of this division arises out of a Euro-American religiously justified and culturally conditioned notion of Native Americans as the Other.

Mary Rowlandson’s Captivity Narrative was written after Indians captured historical Rowlandson during King Phillip’s War (Salisbury vii) and tells of her redemption from captivity by a benevolent God. In his edition of the Narrative, Neal Salisbury frames the action in the Narrative as well as the tension between the Euro- and Native Americans by thoroughly examining historical documents and Puritan-Native American relations at the time. His aim is to discover the cause of the War and the cultural significance of Rowlandson’s text. Ultimately, Salisbury describes Rowlandson’s Narrative as “a powerful rendering of a cross-cultural encounter […] in which the protagonist/author [Rowlandson] finds the very boundaries of her cultural identity being tested” (Salisbury vii). He claims that, although the Narrative offers no insight into the Native American view of the war and of the Euro-Americans, it does “upon, our careful scrutiny, tell us more about cultural identities and boundaries in colonial New England…” (Salisbury vii). Salisbury’s discussion of the Narrative and cultural context surrounding it illuminates two important points: first that a Euro-American cultural identity and boundary both existed and was tested by contact with the Native Americans. Secondly, he asserts that the Narrative offers no insight into the Native American point of view. Underlying these points is the idea that a limiting cultural view formed the
boundaries between and identities of the Native Americans and the Puritans in the
*Narrative*. Indeed, culture – the beliefs and values, the spiritual and social practices, and
the language and food of a particular social group – is a point of contrast in
Rowlandson’s text between the Puritans and the Native Americans. Salisbury’s initial
attention to culture illuminates its role throughout the text as a forming the view of the
Native Americans as the Other, suggesting that culture must play an important role in
dividing the Euro- and Native Americans in her *Narrative*.

Most evident in fashioning the Native Americans as the Other in Rowlandson’s
*Narrative* is religion. Closely connected to culture in Puritan society, religion – a
culturally bound and socially binding understanding of the Divine – plays a significant
role in the *Narrative*. First, Rowlandson’s religious beliefs concerning God frame her
story, fashioning it as a religious tale of the redemption of Rowlandson, one of God’s
faithful, by God from her captivity by the “devilish” Native Americans. Furthermore,
Rowlandson uses religion in the *Narrative* to justify a difference in sacred spirit between
the Puritans and Native Americans, deepening the boundaries between identities of
Puritan self and Native American Other. This Euro-Americans notion of Native
Americans Otherness results in a fear to love the Other – the resistance to embrace
another group because one believes that by embracing that group one will also be marked
as the Other. Indeed, together Rowlandson’s burying of the biscuit in her pocket and
Mary’s burying of it in the ground is representative of this fear; Rowlandson does not
regard Indian food as fit for a Puritan to eat and Mary fears by eating the biscuit she will
“love” or embrace and become associated with the Other.
Yet, these cultural and religious views of Native Americans as the Other are, as Salisbury asserts, tested. The challenge of the notion of Native Americans as cultural and religious Other is evident in the cracks in Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, wherein she concedes to Native Americans an identity similar to the Puritan self. However, as Rowlandson’s *Narrative* primarily offers a Euro-American, specifically Puritan, point of view, the cracks in her *Narrative* are quickly concealed by assertions of difference. This concealment permits the message of a fear to love the Other to be communicated within the message of redemption in Rowlandson’s *Narrative*. These two intertwined messages of cultural fear and religious redemptions cause one to inquire more about the text, specifically: are Native Americans identified as the Other because they are culturally different, spiritually different, or both? Can Euro- and Native Americans be redeemed from this cultural and/or spiritual difference that divides them?

To answer these questions, it is necessary to examine the use of language in Erdrich’s poem put forth by Robin Riley Fast. Fast asserts that the poem “draws on Rowlandson’s language to reinterpret not just the narrative […] but possibilities of […] [the] suppress[ed] dialogic potential of Rowlandson’s account” (Fast 70). Although significant, “Captivity” draws upon more than Rowlandson’s language to reveal the suppressed potential of Rowlandson’s rhetoric in the *Narrative*: it also relies upon religious discourse. In my reading of Erdrich’s contemporary poem, “Captivity,” I first seek to find the cultural and/or spiritual cause of difference presumed between the Euro- and Native Americans. Secondly, I aim to determine the possibility of the redemption of Euro- and Native Americans from this division. To accomplish both tasks, I examine the
use of Puritan religious discourse in the retelling of Rowlandson’s *Narrative* to compare and contrast Native spirituality and culture with Puritan religion and culture.

It is important to note that the term “religion” is not interchangeable with “spirituality” within the context of this paper. Although both discuss the Divine, religion and spirituality differ in terms of the effect of cultural understanding on the determination of who possesses the sacred spirit of the Divine. First, one must understand that “sacred” refers to the spirit of the Divine that is manifest in all creation; the recognition of the sacred spirit, or the possession of the spirit of the Divine, in creation is the root of all spirituality. In contrast, “religion” is a limited type of spirituality that only recognizes the sacred spirit of the Divine in a particular cultural group. The exclusive nature of the religion’s spirituality divides a social group from the rest of creation and establishes it as unique with the aim of further binding the group together. As a result, cultural beliefs and values become the basis for understanding spirituality in a culture and religion becomes the basis for cultural practice, illustrating an interdependent relationship between spirituality and culture within religion and between religion and culture among a social group. Therefore, religion is both a culturally specific and socially binding understanding of the sacred that divides self from the Other. Dissimilarly, spirituality is the understanding that all creation is a manifestation of the sacred, regardless of cultural beliefs and values. As opposed to religion, the absence of a cultural limitation in spirituality functions to unite all creation under a common spirit.

Drawing upon Sheila Hassel Hughes’ assertion that a “smudging of the line between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’” (59) the borders of Christianity and Native belief occurs in Erdrich’s other works, I employ this notion as a guiding principle for understanding
The use of religious discourse in the poem in order to uncover the role that culture and religion play in establishing and justifying a fear to love the Other that holds captive, or divides, Euro- and Native Americans. To understand culture and religion’s ability to divide, it is necessary to first examine European cultural and Puritan religious notions of superiority and the influence of these ideas on the regard and treatment of Native Americans. The Puritan’s “superior” cultural and religious identity is defended in the Narrative by Rowlandson’s appeals to religion, which justifies European cultural stereotypes of Native Americans. This perceived difference in sacred nature and culture of Native Americans assert in Rowlandson’s text results in a sustained fear to love the Other.

The religious justification of fear to love the Other is more closely examined in Erdrich’s “Captivity,” wherein Native American spirituality and Puritan religion are compared and contrasted. By indicating that the Native Americans are spiritual, Erdrich renders the religious justification of the fear to love the Other as invalid. Pulling apart the religious justification for the fear to love the Other into the separate strands of the sacred or spiritual and the cultural, I demonstrate that it is the cultural, not the spiritual, aspects of the religious justification that divides. Culture as the cause for religious division locates culture as the cause for divide between the Euro-and Native Americans, as the fear to love the Other still persists three hundred years after the penning of Narrative, although the specific Puritan religious notions are no longer used to justify difference. Therefore, I argue that Erdrich’s “Captivity” poem is a retelling that changes Rowlandson’s Captivity Narrative from a story of religious redemption to one of cultural captivity by revealing the primary message of the narrative: fear to love the Other. By
revealing this message of fear and its cultural origins, Erdrich exposes the power of
culture to deny unity by asserting difference, dividing and holding captive all peoples
from the fulfillment gained through essential unity. As a result, Erdrich’s poem functions
to alert contemporary readers of their cultural captivity in order to move towards
redemption through an embrace of unity.
In order to understand Erdrich’s retelling of Rowlandson’s story, it is first necessary to examine Rowlandson’s original *Captivity Narrative*. Rowlandson’s *Narrative* concurrently tells three stories: the literal story, a cultural story, and a religious story. The first story Rowlandson tells concerns her literal capture from Lancaster in February of 1676 and her return to Boston in May of that year. This literal tale is important insofar as it is the vehicle by which the latter two stories are told. The cultural and religious stories implied in the events of the literal story are significant in indicating and constructing the fear to love the Other. Further, the latter two tales act as the basis upon which Erdrich constructs her poem. To understand Erdrich’s response to Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, both the cultural and religious stories within the literal story must be examined to reveal the function of culture and religion on the formation of Puritan perspective of Other, which justifies and perpetuates the fear to love the Other. The *Narrative* is, in part, a cultural story because it provides evidence of Euro-American views of the Other and illustrates the influence of this view of the Other on Euro-American, specifically Puritan, and Native American relations. To understand Puritan views of the Other in America during Rowlandson’s time, it is necessary to return to
Europe, where the Native peoples of America were “rhetorically compared” to certain
types of Other. This comparison encouraged the Puritans and other Euro-Americans who
encountered the natives to regard and treat them as these types (Vaughan 35). The two
most significant types to which Native Americans were compared were the mythic “wild
man” of European forests and the pre-Roman conquest Britons of the fourth century. The
wild man “was portrayed as a savage – a crude, rude, forest creature, untamed and
untrustworthy […] easily recognized by his nakedness […] he lived on […] forest fare
[…] He was godless, lacked right reason, and was inclined to evil rather than good”
(Vaughan 35-36). Rowlandson illustrates this view of Native Americans in the preface to
her narrative wherein she establishes the context for her capture as arising from “the
causeless enmity of these Barbarians, against the English, and the malicious and
revengefull spirit of these Heathen” (Rowlandson 64). Evident in the term “barbarian” is
the notion of the Native American as a savage creature. Rowlandson adds to this apparent
Native crudeness the notion that her captors lacked right reason, as their hostility was
“causeless,” “malicious,” and “revengefull.” These terms indicate that the Native attack
arose out of an unwarranted, uncontrolled, and irrational hatred against the innocent
English, rather than as a reasonable retaliation. Rowlandson, thereby, identifies the
Native Americans as savage.

Rowlandson builds upon and exacerbates this initial depiction of the Native
Americans in her description of her first night as a captive. Rowlandson claims that this
night was the most miserable of her life, which was made more miserable by the
“roaring, and singing, and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night,
which made the place a lively resemblance of hell” (Rowlandson 71). Evident in
Rowlandson’s description of the Natives’ loud and chaotic voices as they celebrate the successful plunder of Lancaster is the parallel between the Natives and the devil. The link between these godless people and their inclination to evil is further illustrated in the phrase “black creatures.” The term “creatures” divests the Native Americans of their personhood, while “blackness” illustrates not their physical color, but the corruption of their unchristian souls alluded to earlier when Rowlandson refers to the Natives as “heathens.” Taken together, the Natives celebrating in the forest are transformed into devils in a “lively […] hell” (Rowlandson 71).

The Native American as savage and godless creatures disposed to evil is solidified throughout the narrative in more subtle statements. For example, Rowlandson comforts herself in the Thirteenth Remove after a Native tells her he ate a piece of her son, claiming, “I considered their horrible addictedness to lying, and that there is not one of them that makes the least conscience of speaking the truth” (Rowlandson 87). While this passage is not as harshly condemning of the Native Americans as the account in which she likens them to demons, it does fashion Native Americans as untrustworthy. Taken together, Rowlandson’s depiction of Native Americans as savage, without reason, godless, inclined to evil, and untrustworthy actualizes the Native Americans as the mythic European Other. As the wild man functioned as “the symbol of incivility” against which the Europeans proudly defined their own superior civility (Vaughan 36), Puritan discourse about Native Americans defined them against the Puritans, civilized “by virtue of their religious […] and cultural institutions and practices” (Salisbury 3). Thereby, it is evident in Rowlandson’s discourse about Native Americans that the Puritans regarded them as an uncivilized, inferior Other.
The Puritan understanding of the Native Americans as uncivilized beings informs the rhetorical comparison of the Indians to the second type: the Britons of the fourth century. The sixteenth and seventeenth century English regarded their ancestors living prior to the Roman invasion of Great Britain as “barbarous, heathen primitives” (Vaughan 45), terms that parallel Rowlandson’s initial description of the Indians in her *Narrative*. The ancient Britons “might have remained in idolatry and ignorance,” but their conquerors, the Roman soldiers, “introduced them to Christianity and European civility” (Vaughan 45), enabling them to become “civilized” through adopting European religious and cultural practices. It is this historical paradigm, the improvement of the heathen through European religion and culture, coupled with the view of the Native Americans as an uncivilized Other that established a standard of Puritan cultural arrogance. Indeed, this Puritan haughtiness is evident the justification of their pressure on Native Americans to surrender their lands and the control of their communities – a threat to Native culture (Salisbury 2) – by citing the Romans’ “necessary” use of force against the Britons in order to “better” them culturally (Vaughan 49), causing tension between the two groups.

The rhetoric Rowlandson uses in her *Narrative* illustrates the tension between Puritans and Native Americans as a result of Euro-American cultural bias. Evidence of Euro-American cultural bias arises most profoundly in Rowlandson’s unflattering discussion of the “Praying Indians” as she awaits Saggamore’s decision on the cost of her ransom in the Nineteenth Remove. She states:

There was another Praying-Indian, who told me, that he had a brother, that would not eat Horse; his conscience was so tender and scrupulous (though as
large as hell, for the destruction of poor Christians). Then he said, he read that scripture to him, 2 Kings, 6.25 […] He expounded this place to his brother, and shewed him that it was lawfull to eat that in a Famine which is not at another time. And now, sayes he, he will eat Horse with any Indian of them all.

(Rowlandson 98)

The brother’s reluctance to eat the horsemeat arises out of a cultural taboo strengthened by religious conviction, implying his European cultural leanings. The brother’s adherence to European and Christian dietary regulations, in tandem with Rowlandson’s appellation for his brother, the narrator, as a “Praying Indian,” indicates that both the narrator and the brother are converts to Christianity.

Despite the apparent commonality of religion shared between Rowlandson and the “Praying Indians,” Rowlandson indicates in this passage that she views these Christian Indians as both non-European and non-Christian. Rowland’s acerbic response to the speaker’s assurance that his brother possessed a “tender and scrupulous” conscious provides evidence for the Praying Indians as the Other. Rowlandson claims that the brother’s consciousness must be as gentle and fastidious as it was “large as hell,” or vicious for it allowed for the “destruction of poor Christians.” Rowlandson’s juxtaposition of “Praying Indian,” those Natives claiming Christian conscious while still committing evil, with “poor Christians,” or those Euro-Americans such as herself who are victims of the Native evil acts, demonstrates that she does not consider the “Praying Indians” to be Christian. The cause for the “Praying Indians’” classification of un-Christian arises from the evil act of retaining their cultural alliances and practices. The presence of the narrator and other “Praying Indians” at the Saggamore’s conference
during King Philip’s War, a time of great animosity between the two groups, illustrates their support for the Native American position. Further, Rowlandson’s comment that the brother, after listening to the speaker’s interpretation of scripture, will now eat horse with “any Indian of them all” indicates that the brother has no scruples against transgressing the cultural food taboo. The purportedly evil act of eating horse at any time arises from the speaker’s misuse of scripture to justify the Native practice of eating horsemeat in times of famine and then ignoring the command of the scripture against this meat by accepting his brother’s transgression of the rule in times of plenty. Rowlandson creates a tension between the “Praying Indians’” claims of Christianity and their Native alliance and deeds, to demonstrate that all Native peoples, even those claiming to be Christian, are essentially untrustworthy, godless, and prone to evil. Native Americans, Rowlandson asserts, are irredeemably savage.

It is the uncivil speaker’s false claim of civility that engenders animosity in Rowlandson and creates tension in the text. This tension is evident in Rowlandson’s sarcastic tone and denigrating view of the narrator and his brother’s practice of Christianity. This tension illustrates the Puritan notion that one practicing Native culture is essentially inferior, despite religious conviction. The tension in Rowlandson’s text alludes to the Puritan belief that “conversion to white man’s ways [was] a prerequisite for religious conversion” (Emerson 63), or that true religious conviction can only arises out of correct cultural practice. Therefore, the Puritans “never considered Indians their equals” (Salisbury 3) because of their incivility arising from a crude, godless, and deceitful culture.
As is evident in Rowlandson’s account of the “Praying Indians,” Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, as a religious story, illustrates the interdependence of religion and culture in Puritan society. Since religion is the basis for cultural practices and cultural understanding the foundation of spiritual understanding in a religion, the practice of Puritan religion is essential to the practice of Puritan culture and vice versa. The close link between religion and culture in the *Narrative* functions as both argument and evidence for the Puritan notions of their cultural and religious superiority. Written during a time of great affliction for the Puritans – King Phillip’s War – the religious story functions to preserve Puritan religious and cultural superiority by offering the Puritans proof and reassurance of God’s love for them. By encouraging the classification of Native Americans as Other, the *Narrative* instills and justifies the fear to love the Other.

Before the ability of the religious story to assert religious and cultural superiority and instill the fear to love the Other can be discussed, an examination of Puritan understanding of their relationship with God is necessary. The Puritans believed themselves to be “God’s instruments […] [used] to create pure churches in the American wilderness” (Emerson 40). The Puritans as “God’s instruments” made them akin to the Israelites in the Bible: God’s chosen people, bound to Him by covenant. John Winthrop illustrates the notion of the Puritans as God’s chosen: “Because of the closer bonds of marriage between the Lord and [the Puritans], wherein He has taken us to be His own in a most strict manner, which makes Him more jealous of our love and obedience” (“A Puritan Vision” 50). This “marriage bond” refers to a covenant the Puritans believe existed between themselves and God. This covenant encompassed both a “church” contract and a “social” contract (Emerson 56). The church contract required the Puritans
to continue the mission of “the right worship of God and the discipline of Christ […] according to the simplicity of the gospel and to be ruled by the laws of God’s Word” (Bradford 6), or to properly love God.

To fulfill the religious goals of the church contract, the Puritans must adhere to the social contract. John Winthrop outlines the terms of this social contract in his “A Modell of Christian Charity” (1630) sermon: “first, that every man afford his help to another in every want or distress; second that he perform this out of the same affection which makes him careful of his own good, according to our Savior” (“A Puritan Vision” 46). Simply put, Winthrop commands the Puritans to love their fellows as they love themselves, reminiscent of the Bible wherein Jesus proclaims the two commandments upon which religion and society were founded: loving God and loving one’s neighbor (The New American Bible, Matthew 22:34-40). This biblical passage is the basis for Puritan social behavior. To behave in a socially correct manner according to God’s word, or to fulfill the social contract, one must adhere to the biblical teachings on society by loving one’s neighbor. Fulfilling the social contract enables one to “rightly” love God, for one is living according to the “laws of God’s Word,” or fulfilling the church contract. The “religious motivation” of both church and social contracts “served as a unifying force” (Carroll 115) among the Puritans. Therefore, the covenant, with its intertwining of religion and culture, served as “an instrument of collective identity, purpose, and order” (Emerson 57), uniting the Puritans by giving their society a Divine purpose and sanction. The identity of a social group appointed by God to spread His word in the new world, identified the Puritans as both a religiously and culturally superior group.
Fashioning the Puritans as “married” to God, Winthrop uses the strongest spiritual and social bond between individuals to assert Puritan superiority as God’s chosen people. Similar to marriage, this strong spiritual and social bond was symbolized in the tangible. However, rather than a gold ring to signify the relationship, the covenant between the Puritans and God was actualized in the land. The Puritans understood the land in America as that which “God hath provided […] to be a refuge for many whom he means to save out of the general calamity” (“An American Colony” 36), or a land given to the Puritans because of their covenantal relationship with God. Similarly, God provides the Promised Land to the Israelites, his chosen people, through a covenant with Abraham, wherein Abraham consents to follow and worship God’s word (The New American Bible, Genesis 12: 1-8).

The Puritan notions of the covenant between themselves and God coupled with their regard of the land as a sign of this promise, casts the Puritans as the “New Israelites.” As a result of this identity, the Puritans looked to the land for signs of God’s favor. Indeed, John Cotton justifies Puritan encroachment on Native American land by claiming, “A little before our coming, God had by pestilence, and other contagious diseases, swept away many thousands of the Natives” (161). This notion that God “cleared” the land of its former inhabitants for the Puritans is founded in the belief articulated by John Winthrop that God gives the land to his people to “enjoy the fruits of the earth” and to “glorify” Him (“An American Colony” 36). The Native Americans, Winthrop asserts, “find benefit already by our [Puritan] neighborhood and learn of us to improve part to more use that before they could do the whole […] they have of us that which will yield them more benefit than all the land which we could have from them”
(“An American Colony” 39). Unlike the Native Americans, who experience death and low productivity of the land (according to European standards), the Puritans, as the glorifiers of God, experience prosperity on the land. The Puritans’ belief that they have made the land more fruitful than the Native Americans arises out of the notion of their covenant with God. Thereby, it is through the land that the Puritans provide evidence for their superior position as His chosen.

However assured of their “superior” position as God’s chosen, the Puritans believed God’s favor towards His beloved people was tenuous for favor depended upon the ability to successfully uphold the covenant. Worried about fulfilling the covenant to attain God’s favor, the Puritans searched for evidence of God’s love, or anger, by examining “the biblically promised effects in their lives” (Thuesen 66). The method by which the Puritans sought to discover God’s pleasure or displeasure with them, whether on a community-wide or personal level, concerned interpreting life occurrences. Winthrop illustrates the paradigm for interpreting these effects in his discussion of the covenant: “Now if the Lord shall please to hear us, and bring us in peace to the place wee desire, then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission […] but if we neglect [the covenant] […] the Lord will surely break out in wrath against us” (“A Modell” 41). Puritans viewed “peace” or good fortune as evidence of God’s satisfaction with one’s actions, evident in the notion of the Puritan belief in their right to the land because of sign of God’s favor through prosperity. Hardship was an indication God’s “wrath,” or displeasure with one’s actions.
Rowlandson illustrates in her *Narrative* the Puritan practice of examining good and ill fortune as proof of God’s influence in her life. For example, at the end of the *Narrative* Rowlandson states:

and that Scripture would come to my mind, *Heb*. 12.6. *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourge every Son whom he receiveth*. But now I see the Lord had his time to scourge and chasten me […] yet I see, when God calls a Person to any thing, and through never so many difficulties, yet he is fully able to carry them through and make them see, and say they have been gainers thereby.

(Rowlandson 112)

Rowlandson recreates the negative experience of her captivity as a positive experience of God’s love. Rather than giving her good fortune, God “scourged and chastened” her in order to “make her see,” or realize her dependence and love for Him as she claims God alone saved her. Rowlandson warrants her experience as one of God’s love rather than His wrath by referencing the scripture passage. She asserts that God afflicts all of His “sons,” or his beloved, because he wanted them to “gain” knowledge of His love, evident in His choice to “carry them through,” or the beloved’s survival of the hardship. Therefore, the *Narrative*, similar to the land, is evidence of Rowlandson’s discovery of God’s love for her, assuring her of God’s favor.

The religious story also functions on a social level to offer reassurance to the entire Puritan community of God’s love and favor. As King Phillip’s War “began disastrously for the English” (Salisbury 21), the Puritans interpreted the War as evidence of God’s wrath against them for failing to uphold the covenant. Rowlandson alludes to this Puritan fear through her observation of the productivity of the land for the Native
Americans: “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” (Rowlandson 105). Although Rowlandson’s doubts of God’s love are quickly followed by the assertion that God provided for the Native Americans as a means to save the souls of the Puritan, this lapse reveals Puritan insecurity. The Native American’s success at the beginning of the conflict coupled with an adequate food supply follows the paradigm wherein “peace” or good fortune of the group suggests God’s favor and love. God’s sign of favor to the Native Americans through the prosperity of the land is religiously troubling to the Puritans’ notion of themselves as God’s chosen people. William Stoughton asserts the Puritan view of themselves as God’s beloved people in his sermon “New-England’s True Interest; Not to Lie” (1668):

> God had his Creatures in this Wilderness before we came, and his Rational Creatures too […] but as to Sons and Children that are Covenant-born unto God, Are not we the first in such a Relation? […] Of the poor Natives before we came we may say as Isa. 63. 19 They were not called by the Lords Name, he bear not Rule over them: But we have been from the beginning, and we are the Lords.

(Stoughton 60)

As God’s chosen people, the Puritans should ostensibly be the “lords,” or dominate over the land and the “heathen” because they possess His love. However, despite the Puritan’s “greater numbers and their seemingly superior organization and technology” (Salisbury 22), the Native Americans were victorious over the English. To the Puritan mind, “as long as the Puritans stood with God, the Lord would stand with them and fight at their sides” (Carroll 91). As Native success could only arise from God’s favor towards them,
Puritans interpreted their failure in battle as evidence of God “changing sides” due to the Puritan failure to uphold the covenant. Thereby, the Puritans were troubled by their seeming fall from God’s favor.

The fall from God’s favor is further troubling to Rowlandson and other Puritans interacting with the Indians due to unsettling discoveries of cultural commonalities existing between the two groups. Rowlandson subtly alludes to this similarity between herself and her captors throughout her Narrative. For example, in the Nineteenth Remove, Rowlandson mentions an Indian that “many times refresht me: five or six times did he and his Squaw refresh my feeble carcass. If I went to their Wigwam at any time, they would alwayes give me something, and yet they were strangers that I never saw before” (Rowlandson 101). The actions of the Indian man and his wife towards Rowlandson closely parallel the social contract of the covenant. The Indian and his wife fed a starving Rowlandson, following the first requirement of the Puritan social contract whereby one must help one’s neighbor in times of want and distress. Further, the couple’s kindness towards Rowlandson was without ulterior motive or expectation of recompense, as she mentions no such demands from the Native Americans. The charity of the Indian couple coincides with the second requirement of the Puritan social contract, illustrating their goodness as they fulfill Jesus’ command to love others. Indeed, Rowlandson mentions similar social acts of kindness shown to her by the Native Americans throughout the Narrative: the Indian that allows Rowlandson and her sick child to ride with him on his horse in the Third Remove (Rowlandson 73), the Squaw in the Nineteenth remove that gave her pork and a pan to fry it in (Rowlandson 101), and the Squaw in the Ninth Remove that gave her bear meat (Rowlandson 84-85). The numerous
instances of Native Americans acting in accordance with the Puritan social contract demonstrates loving one’s neighbor as a common social principle and practice. The common social values of the Native Americans and Puritans implied to the Puritans that Native Americans were civil and moral. These cultural commonalities, coupled with evidence of God’s favor, suggest that the Native Americans are both cultural and religious cousins of the Puritans, thus closing the gap between self and the Other. The cultural and religious similarity of the Native Americans was troubling to the Puritans because the Native Americans were neither “civil” Europeans nor God’s chosen Christians. As a result, deeply held European and Puritan notions of the Other are violated.

To cope with the disruption of the view of the Other, the Puritans responded to the Native Americans in a manner parallel to Rowlandson’s response to her captors – asserting more strongly the notion of Native American Otherness. Although Rowlandson notes “many details of Indian kindness,” (Ziff 177) she follows these instances with a discussion of great Native American cruelty. Rowlandson frames her observations of Native kindness with those of Native malice because of “her greater need for psychological stability [during] severe travail” wherein her “perception of reality […] excluded such considerations” (Ziff 177-178) of her Native Americans as similar to the Puritan self; for Rowlandson, the Native Americans were both evil and magnanimous. On a social level, the “considerations” that the Puritans ignored were evidence of God’s kindness towards the Native Americans and the parallels between Native American social practice and the Puritan social covenant. To attain “psychological stability,” the Puritans turned to the “written word […] the central way of apprehending reality […] [because] to
control [the written word] was to control the essence of what [the written word] designated” (Ziff 165). Rowlandson’s Narrative is an example of text written to control message as “Mather worked on the [Rowlandson’s] narrative to ensure that it was properly framed as a tribute to God’s mercy on the repentant and the vulnerability of the Puritans at the hands of the Native Americans” (Messitt 142). Evidence of this reshaping of the Narrative is evident in the previously discussed passage, wherein Rowlandson implies God’s favor towards the Native Americans. Rowlandson notes that despite the Puritan tactic to starve the Native Americans by destroying their crop fields, God presumably preserves the Native American through their ability to eat off the land (Rowlandson 105-106). However, after Rowlandson makes note of this in the narrative, she soon refutes it as evidence of God’s favor. Rather, Rowlandson claims, “Our perverse and evil carriages in the sight of the Lord, have so offended him, that instead of turning His hand against them [the Indians], the Lord feeds them and nourishes them up to be a scourge” (Rowlandson 106). God feeds the Native Americans not because he favors them, but because the Puritans have failed to uphold the covenant, resulting in the wrath against them – the consequence Winthrop asserted in “A Modell” if the Puritans were to fail to uphold the covenant. Rather, God’s wrath was anger arising out of love for the Puritans for, Native success caused

the poor Christians hopes to fail […] and now their eyes are more to God […] [they] say in good earnest Help Lord, or we perish. When the Lord had brought his people to this, that they saw no help in any thing but himself: then he takes the quarrel into his own hand […] And the Lord had not so many wayes before to preserve them, but now he hath as many to destroy them.
In Rowlandson’s retelling of her experience from a distinctly Puritan perspective, she illustrates that God used the Natives to remind the Puritans of His power and ways. Once the Puritans regained God’s favor by dedicating themselves to His word and work, God turns against the Native Americans, for they are “heathens” that think “all is their own” – interpreted as illustrating Native American incivility and godlessness. Similar to Rowlandson’s discussion of her captivity, her narrative manipulates King Phillip’s War by illustrating it as a “scourging” and “chastisement” of the Puritans to make them realize their promise to God in the covenant and their dependence upon Him. Thereby, the Puritans reading her Narrative are reassured of God’s love for them and allude to God’s hatred of the Native Americans.

The narrative manipulation of the War results in the perpetuation of notions of Native American incivility. A return to a deeper examination of the aforementioned tendency of Rowlandson to couch instances of Native American kindness in discourse of Native American evil and godlessness reveals Rowlandson’s role in transforming Native Americans into savages. For example, Rowlandson includes in the discussion of the Indian who feeds her five or six times in the Nineteenth Remove an encounter with another Indian who tells her, “he [the Indian that feeds Rowlandson] killed two Englishmen at Sudbury, and there lie their Cloathes behind you; I looked behind me, and there I saw bloody Cloathes, with Bullet holes in them” (Rowlandson 101). Although the Indian in Remove Nineteen has the ability to show kindness, similar to the brother of the “Praying Indian,” he also has a capacity to commit great evils. In this manner, Rowlandson strengthens the Puritan belief in the distrustfulness of Native Americans.
through asserting Native goodness is merely a façade. Further, Rowlandson communicates the brutal nature of the Indian through the description of the clothing as “bloody” and full of “bullet holes,” recalling the events of her capture, which she describes in detail at the start of the *Narrative*. Finally, the second Indian’s warning to Rowlandson illustrates a violation of Jesus’ rule to love others, because he is uniting with an outsider against his neighbor by gossiping about him. This act disrupts the social unity constructed through love of neighbor that was central to Puritan culture. The transgression of this rule is exacerbated by Rowlandson’s discussion of the Battle of Sudbury immediately preceding the account of the Indian who fed her. Rowlandson claims, “When they went, they acted as if the Devil had told them that they should gain a victory: and now they acted, as if the Devil had told them they should have a fall” (Rowlandson 100-101). By portraying the Native Americans as violating God’s rules and communicating with the Devil, Rowlandson asserts that they are godless, rendering cultural similarities impossible as religion is the foundation of Puritan culture. Therefore Rowlandson’s depiction of the Indians illustrates that they are untrustworthy, brutal, and without God, nullifying the possibility for Native American civility, instead fashioning them as savage, and preserving the notions of Puritan cultural and religious superiority.

The *Narrative’s* interpretation of the events of King Phillip’s War coupled with Rowlandson’s first-hand account of Native Americans savagery “convinc[ed] [the Puritans], in the face of considerable evidence to the contrary gathered during the war as well as before it, that the Indians were, on the whole, to regarded in the mass as satanic” (Ziff 169). The function of the *Narrative*, then, was to defend notions of Native American Otherness and to justify it through appeals to culture and religion. Indeed, Rowlandson’s
Narrative functioned to “maintain […] [those] dominant devaluing images of Native Americans among European Americans” (Messitt 146) created in the Narrative’s cultural story by proving these cultural notions of Native Americans as the Other true in the religious story. The result of the cultural story working in tandem with the religious story is the message to fear to love the Other. This message is one of fear because of the manner in which the Other is presented. The Other is portrayed as the antithesis of one’s own culture, evident in the cultural and religious stories of the Narrative. To find commonalities between self and the Other threatens the identity of a people. Without a strong identity, the potential for the destruction of unity exists as no definition under which the people can cohere exists. By fearing to love the Other, one can maintain psychological stability, as Rowlandson does, because one simply ignores these upsetting commonalities; however, if one does recognize them, one may rationalize seeming commonality into difference. Rowlandson and her Narrative illustrate the fear to love the Other as the means by which to regard and react to Native Americans and their culture. As the fear to love perpetuates Puritan cultural and religious beliefs about the self as superior and the Other as inferior, it is not questioned. As a result of the reassurance of self given by the fear to love, the division it communicates become naturalized, more deeply dividing self from the Other. Therefore, Rowlandson’s Captivity Narrative is a story of religious redemption that holds both Euro- and Native Americans captive by asserting and justifying the religious and cultural divide between the two peoples.
PART 2: ERDRICH – A SACRED SPIRIT, A SPIRITUAL SIMILARITY

Although Rowlandson’s narrative asserts the spiritual and cultural divide between Euro- and Native Americans and justifies it through an appeal to religion, Louise Erdrich notices those aforementioned inconsistencies in the *Narrative* – moments in which Rowlandson concedes to Native Americans instances of goodness or civilized behavior. This goodness is significant because it recalls those biblically based social rules of Puritan society. Parallels between Puritan and Native American society, as I have demonstrated, are troubling to Puritans because they suggest religious and cultural similarity between the two seemingly opposed groups. For Erdrich, the *Narrative* is, as Fast argues, “an account of experience that breaks through or outdistances her [Rowlandson’s] own and her culture’s dominant means of representation […] revealing traces of suppressed doubt and a disruptive vision” (Fast 73). While I have argued that the dominant means of representation of the Native Americans in the *Narrative* arises from cultural notions of the Other, the importance of religious justification to this depiction needs to be explored. Puritan religion functions to bind together the Puritans as a social group through a similar understanding of the sacred. Yet, Puritan religion is limited to that culture’s understanding of the sacred, as evident in the rules of the Puritan covenant, making religion a combination of spiritual and cultural elements. Puritan
religion – the cultural understanding of the Divine, those that possess the sacred spirit, and the correct means by which to recognize the Divine – transforms spirituality from a view of the sacred that unites all creation to one that divides those within the culture from those perceived as without. As a result, Puritan religion functions to mask unity. To counter the culturally dominant means of understanding Native Americans, Erdrich first seeks to deconstruct the religious justification for Euro- and Native American difference. To break apart the religious justification, Erdrich must separate the unifying spiritual elements of Puritan religion from its dividing cultural aspects by revealing the similarities between Puritan religion and Native Americans spirituality, as both groups possess the sacred spirit. To achieve this end, Erdrich constructs her contemporary retelling of Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, her poem “Captivity,” upon Rowlandson’s, ever-so-brief, recognition of Native American goodness, implying the possession of a sacred spirit and a spirituality, with the purpose of drawing out rather than masking the similarities in spirit and spirituality between the two groups.

To illustrate this unity, Erdrich must enlarge the “traces” of “doubt” in the poem by “disrupting” those “visions” of Native Americans as the devilish heathens forsaken by God held by Mary (the poetic version of Rowlandson) and justified by her religion (Fast 73). However, before Erdrich can deconstruct Mary’s vision, she must first reconstruct the notion in Rowlandson’s *Narrative* of Native Americans as satanic, godless, and forsaken by God in the poem. This reconstruction in the poem, based upon the view of the Other expressed in Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, begins subtly and gradually builds to illustrate the difference Mary perceives between the Puritans and Native Americans. Mary states that her captor spoke in a language that “was not human” (line 8), illustrating
that her captors are an inhuman Other. This inhuman Other is identified in Mary’s
depiction of her potential pursuers as either “pitch devils” (line 11) – referring to the
Native Americans (Fast 71). As devils, the Native Americans are portrayed as godless
because they act against “God’s agents” (line 10) the Puritans (Fast 71), so called by
Mary to reflect the Puritan belief that the covenantal relationship made the Puritans
God’s representatives on Earth. Deepening this divide is Mary’s comment that her
captor’s wife had “teeth black and glittering” (line 17). Coupled with Mary’s appellation
of “pitch devil” (recalling the term “pitch black”), the teeth reinforces the satanic nature
of the Native Americans – for the darkness they are associated with contrasts with the
light typically attributed to God. This dark/light contrast implies that the Native
Americans are allied with the devil, illustrating that God had forsaken them, given that
He had renounced the devil with whom they are allied.

Mary’s initial discussion of her captors fashions Native Americans as an
antithetical Other in terms of sacred spirit. In other words, while the Puritans possessed
the same sacred essence of God, the Native Americans shared the ungodly essence of the
devil. Erdrich deconstructs Mary’s initial supposition that Native Americans possess the
profane spirit of the devil by illustrating that Native Americans possess the sacred spirit
of the Divine. As Mary can only understand the sacred as it is mediated through her
religion, she frames her understanding of the sacred nature of her captors and her
captivity experience in terms of her religion: specifically Christian scripture, the
sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, and the covenant. For example, at the start of
the poem, Mary states, “The stream was swift, and so cold / I thought I would be sliced in
two / But he dragged me from the flood” (lines 1-3). In the Sixteenth Remove, upon which this event in the poem is based, Rowlandson claims,

the stream [was] very swift, and so cold that I thought it would have cut me in sunder […] the Indians stood laughing to see me staggering along; but in my distress the Lord gave me experience of the truth, and the goodness of [His] promise
to be with His beloved and bring them to safety as they cross the river (Rowlandson 94).

In the Narrative, the “he” that saves Rowlandson is God. However, in the poem Mary is “rescued from the icy stream by an Indian man” (Fast 71). As a result, Erdrich transforms Mary’s rescuer from “He,” God, to “he” the Indian man.

The change of the rescuer from God to Indian man is significant for two reasons. First, the corresponding accounts in the Narrative and Erdrich’s poem function to parallel the “He” – God and the “he” – Indian such that the Indian man that rescues Mary from the stream becomes analogous with the Lord that rescued Rowlandson from the stream: both are saviors. Secondly, the Indian man as savior holds a deeper implication than merely the one who saved her from drowning; he rescues her spiritually. The Indian pulls Mary out of the stream, reminiscent of the Biblical sacrament of baptism. The first baptisms were performed by John the Baptist in emulation and anticipation of the coming of the Savior who would cleanse spiritually – not with a raising of body out of the Jordan River, but by “baptiz[ing] you with the Holy Spirit…” (The New American Bible, Matthew 3: 5-6 and 11). The immersion of the body in water is a significant act: it symbolizes the conference of the Holy Spirit (the sacred spirit) on the individual, recognizing that individual and the one who baptizes as possessing the Divine spirit.
Mary’s full-body immersion in the stream is implied by the claim that she is pulled from the stream by “the ends of her hair” (line 4) paralleling the sacrament of baptism. The Indian man’s act of pulling Mary from the water recalls the figure of John the Baptist or the Savior, fashioning the Indian man as savior in a literal and sacred sense. However, unlike the traditional practice of Baptism, Mary is pulled out of the water by “the ends of her hair,” implying that her baptismal experience was painful. The physical pain accompanying Mary’s rescue implies the mental pain necessary to shock her out of her earlier notions in the poem of Native Americans as the Other. It is Mary’s jarring symbolic baptism by the Indian, her savior, which initiates Mary’s slow realization that she and the Indian man possess the same divine essence.

Indeed, the Indian man’s possession of a sacred spirit is strengthened through Mary’s second account of him in stanza three, wherein he feeds her. Mary states:

I told myself I would starve
before I took food from his hands
but I did not starve.

One night
he killed a deer with a young one in her
and gave me to eat of the fawn.

It was so tender,

the bones like the stems of flowers

that I followed where he took me. (lines 20-28)

The Indian man’s act of feeding Mary recalls the biblical accounts of the Last Supper, the model for the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist. Jesus, the Savior, feeds his disciples a
symbolic meal of bread and wine, which represents “the new covenant” (*The New American Bible*, Luke 22:20). The events of the Last Supper represent for Christians the reunification of humankind with God, or the Divine spirit, after the Fall of Man, through the sacrifice of an innocent, Jesus. As Jesus literally feeds his followers, he is symbolically feeding them the Holy Spirit, illustrating their possession of the sacred spirit through him. Similarly, the Indian man “gave me [Mary] to eat of the fawn,” phrasing that recalls the Bible wherein Jesus “gave it to them” – meaning the bread and wine to the disciples at the Last Supper (*The New American Bible*, Mark 14: 22-23; Luke 22:19), paralleling the Indian man with Jesus and illustrating his sacred spirit.

Beyond the meal’s implications of the Indian man’s sacred spirit, Mary’s meal symbolizes her reunification with the Divine. Mary’s meal of the fawn, still in the womb of the deer, is a meal of innocent meat, evident in the comparison of the “tenderness” of the bones to the stems of flowers. The fawn meat parallels the bread and wine as symbols for Jesus’ innocent flesh, for both have been unaffected by the evils of the world, alluding to the sacred nature of both meals. In addition, the suggestion that Indian man is filled with the sacred spirit is significant. Similar to Jesus feeding the disciples the symbolic bread and wine at the Last Supper and awakening them to the Holy Spirit, the Indian man feeds Mary the fawn and awakens her to the sacred spirit. Mary’s awareness of the sacred spirit is evident in her claim that in the “thick” night, or in Mary’s restricted religious understanding of the sacred, the Indian man “cut the cord / that bound me to the tree” (lines 29-30), releasing her from her understanding of the sacred spirit that limits and justifies her vision of Native Americans as satanic and godless. Beginning with her baptism, and achieved through her Eucharist experiences in the wilderness, Mary is
reunified with the Divine. The reunification occurs because she recognizes the Divine in the Native American Other, uniting Native Americans and Puritans and broadening her understanding of the sacred.

The parallels Erdrich draws between the two groups in terms of sacred spirit in the poem results in Mary’s “humaniz[ing] [of] the Indians” (Rainwater 281), which gradually collapses the gap between Euro- and Native Americans created by Puritan religion and leaves Mary “slightly less secure in her Western-Calvinist perspective” (Rainwater 281). Indeed, Mary’s theological assurances start to falter as she recognizes that Native Americans possess the sacred spirit, opening her mind to Native American spirituality. Mary’s reception of Native spirituality becomes evident in the discussion of the dance at the end of the poem. Mary reflects: “They knelt on deerskins, some with sticks, / and he [the Indian man] led his company in the noise / […] / I stripped a branch / and struck the earth, / in time, begging it to open / to admit me / as he was” (lines 49-57).

Native American dances, such as this one, are often used to “remind the tribe of its dependency on and relatedness to the Creator and the created […] [The] express[ion] [of] their connection with primordial time and space, with cosmic reality” (Maxey 48). In other words, the dance is a form of Native American reverence or recognition of the Divine and their fundamental connection to all of creation. In the poem, this experience of the spiritual attained by the dance is not limited to the Native Americans, but is also experienced by Mary in order to further disrupt her original notion of Native Americans as satanic and godless.

To understand the dance as an implication of Mary’s experience of the Divine through Native spirituality, it is necessary to return to Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, in which
the dance was first discussed. The dance recounted in the poem presumably refers to the one performed in the *Narrative* in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Removes, after the Native American victory at Sudbury. Rowlandson notes: “They [the Native Americans] came home on a Sabbath day, and the *Powaw* that kneeled upon the Deerskin came home” (Rowlandson 101). Rowlandson’s mention of return of the Natives on the Sabbath, the Euro-American day designated for worshiping the Christian God, suggests a sacred significance to the return. The spiritual nature of the return from victory is evident in the kneeling of the *Powaw*, or spiritual leader, on the deerskin. The connection of the deerskin with the spiritual leader identifies the skin as a spiritually significant object. Although, the dance as an expression of Native American spirituality is strengthen by Rowlandson’s observation in the *Narrative* that the celebration of victory dance, again, occurred on the Sabbath – that particular day suggesting that the historical dance was a recognition of or gratitude to the Divine for success in battle. However, Rowlandson uses the suggestion of the sacred elements of the dance – specifically its occurrence on the Sabbath and the knelling on the holy man on the deerskin – as a point of contrast. Rather than worshiping the Divine, Rowlandson asserts that the Native Americans are praising the devil. Rowlandson’s perception of the dance as satanic is made evident in her claim that the *Powaw* was “as black as the devil” (Rowlandson 101). The blackness of the *Powaw* kneeling on the deerskin on the day of return connects to the appearance of Rowlandson’s Indian mistress as she participates in the dance. As Rowlandson notes, “her […] face [had been] painted Red, that was alwayes before Black” (Rowlandson 103). Both spiritual leader and participant of spiritual practices are “black,” alluding to the corruption of their souls. Further, Rowlandson notes that her mistress’s face was
painted red and that a kettle of water was placed over “some embers,” recalling the flames used to “roast,” “burn,” and “boil” the meat in the First Remove after the plunder of Lancaster (Rowlandson 71). The fire imagery of the dances celebrating victory in the First, Nineteenth, and Twentieth Removes link these two events, suggesting that the latter dance (in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Removes) was spiritual as much a “lively resemblance of hell” (Rowlandson 71) as the celebration in the First Remove, according to Rowlandson.

However, Erdrich subverts this reading of the dance with Mary’s reaction to it. Mary is attracted to the dance because she sees it as a means by which to connect with the divine, evident in her act of beating on the earth with a stick, mimicking the Indians kneeling on the deerskin. The appearance of a deerskin at the dance in the poem connects to the deerskin in the *Narrative* to suggest that the dance is an expression of Native American spirituality. However, the spiritual act in the poem pays homage to the Divine, rather than the devil. Erdrich identifies the dance as a spiritual event for the Divine through the land, anchoring Mary’s understanding of Native American spirituality in the understanding of a land-based covenant. Native American spirituality recognizes all of creation as unified through the possession of the sacred spirit, or the essence of the Divine. As a result, the Divine reveals itself “in space or place” (Tinker 119), or in the creation it imbues. The Native American acknowledgement of the Divine in all creation causes spirituality to be “deeply rooted in the land” (Tinker 122), wherein the land reminds one of his or her identity as a part of the sacred essence. Similarly, Mary’s recognition of the Divine through the dance results from her understanding the Native American’s relationship with the land. Mary observes that during the dance the Native
 Americans kneel on deerskins and strike the earth with sticks (lines 49). To Mary, the striking of the earth is powerful for it “opens” and “admits” “him,” in other words, the Indian man leading the dance (lines 49-57). The terms “open” and “admits” suggest a close and favorable relationship between the Native Americans and the land. From Mary’s Puritan understanding that God’s favor is made evident through a good relationship with the land, her observation of the opening of the earth to the Indian man suggests to her an intimate relationship between the Native Americans and the Divine.

The spiritual significance of the dance and the earth becomes apparent in Mary’s claim that she wanted the Earth to open up and admit her “as he was” (line 57). To be “as he was” refers to Mary’s desire to be likewise fed “honey from the rock” (line 58). The phrase “honey from the rock” alludes to Psalm 81 (Fast 72), wherein God reminds the Israelites – another chosen people – that He saved them by feeding them with “honey from the rock” (*The New American Bible,* Psalm 81:17), or by filling them with His spirit. Mary’s reference to the psalm is significant because it refers to her desire to be filled with the Divine spirit as the Native Americans were as they performed the dance. Further, in full, the Psalm discusses the Israelite’s covenant with God in which He gave them a “promised land” in return for their reverence, linking the Israelites to God through the land. This psalm recalls the aforementioned discussion of the Puritan’s understanding of their covenant with God: the Puritans, as God’s chosen people, were given the land in America in return for their devotion to Him. The phrase “honey from the rock” unites the Israelites and Puritans with the Native Americans in terms of an understanding of the Divine and the land. Similar to these two groups, Native Americans believe that “the land was given to the people in trust,” or to be used and cared for, and it is “this land-based
covenant that gave them [the Native Americans] their identity as [...] the community special to a loving God” (Charleston 77). Coupled with Mary’s direct reference to the land as a source by which to access the sacred, Psalm 81 identifies the Native Americans as existing in a spiritual contract with the Divine that parallels that of ancient Israel and the Puritans. Since the Divine has a similar covenantal relationship with each of his “separate” peoples – ancient Israelites, Native Americans, and Puritans – revealed through the land, Erdrich illustrates that Euro- the Native Americans are permeated by the sacred spirit. This spirit that results in a similar covenant functions to identify both Puritans and Native Americans as a communities special to the Divine. Thereby, the similar understanding of land shared by the Native Americans and Puritans reveals a common foundational covenant shared between Native American spirituality and Puritan religion and draws a spiritual similarity between the two groups.

Erdrich’s “transformations of Christian sacrament, Word, and Spirit [...] pose a radical challenge to paternalistic, linear, hierarchical, and triumphalistic models of faith” (Hughes 80), or to the religiously justified cultural and religious superiority Puritans believed they possessed. Erdrich inverts Rowlandson’s use of religion to contrast the Native Americans with the Puritans by appropriating Rowlandson’s *Narrative* and her religious scripture, sacraments, and understanding of the covenant. Erdrich adapts Puritan religious dialogues in order to draw a comparison between the two groups, thus disrupting the Puritan’s belief in Euro-American spiritual superiority. Indeed, by using Puritan scripture, sacrament, and covenant, Erdrich “[reclaims] and [reinterprets] biblical narrative [...] [as] a means of changing the heart of the colonizer’s God [...] transforming the Church and its relation to those who stand at its margins” (Hughes 65). In other
words, Erdrich refashions Puritan religious discourse such that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive, revealing that Native Americans possess the same sacred spirit as the Puritans and the same understanding of self as people of the Divine. As a result, Erdrich “creates an alternative version of the captivity narrative […] [that] contrasts to Rowlandson’s as it replaces assertions of moral and theological certainty […] with a pervasive, destabilizing uncertainty” (Fast 70). It is this uncertainty that permits Mary to question the difference in spirit she presumes exists between Euro- and Native Americans. This questioning enables her to deviate from her assurance of Euro- and Native American difference in terms of sacred spirit and spiritual practices and to recognize unity between the two groups, collapsing the divide between self and the Other. Most significantly, it is this uncertainty that reverses religion’s function from that which divides to that which unites. Thereby, Erdrich transforms religion, as formerly used by the Puritans to mask similarities, into a means by which to reveal similarities between Euro- and Native American spirituality.
PART 3: ERDRICH – SPIRITUAL SIMILARITIES TO SHOW CULTURAL DIFFERENCE

In “Captivity,” as in her other works, Erdrich uses “religious syncretism […] [to] bring into view [the] underlying similarities […] between traditional [Native] and Christian beliefs” (Friedman 126). The similarities between Native American spirituality and Puritan religion that Erdrich draws on in the poem through her allusions to Christian scripture, sacraments, and notions of the covenant produce a certain syncretism between Native spirituality and Puritan religion. To reveal a correspondence between the two beliefs, a point of reference is necessary: Mary’s. As Mary is a Puritan, her means of understanding the Other naturally relies upon a comparison and contrast of the Other to self, self in this instance being founded on Puritan religious and cultural understandings. At first, this syncretism from Mary’s point of view appears to continue the Eurocentric perspective of Rowlandson’s Narrative that deems Euro-American religion and culture superior, since Native American spirituality is only recognized as connected to the Divine through its similarity to Christianity. Of course, to synthesize Native spirituality and Puritan religion in this manner would be counter-productive, for it seems to assert that Native American spirituality is only valid because it can be likened to Puritan religion. Yet, as Erdrich adopts Mary’s religious discourse to illustrate similarities, she simultaneously uses it to destabilize notions of Puritan religious superiority. The
comparisons of Native spirituality and Puritan religion challenge the Puritan understanding of the Divine as wrathful and the worship practice of prayer to reveal culture as the basis of the religiously justified divide between Puritans and Native Americans.

A more thorough examination of the correspondence between Native spirituality and Puritan religion in the poem invalidates the notion that Puritan religion is superior through the religion’s failure to be true in its cultural understanding and practice of accessing the Divine. Since Puritan religion and culture are intertwined, culture has a great influence on the spiritual understanding of God and the worship practices used to honor this God. The influence of culture on spirituality in Puritan religion becomes especially evident in Winthrop’s “A Modell of Christian Charity,” which “requires [the Puritans] liv[e] according to a prescribed way of life, God’s way” (Emerson 59), or by following the church and social aspects of the covenant. In order to maintain the church aspect of the covenant between themselves and God, the Puritans must enact the social elements of the covenant. However, “God’s way,” or the correct way to behave according to the covenant, was based as much upon Puritan cultural interpretation of scripture as it was upon scripture’s command to love God alone. The Puritan cultural interpretation of this biblical command asserts that to love God alone one must adhere to the “true church,” or the Puritan church, by upholding the covenant. To uphold the covenant, one must necessarily engage in the social practices delineated in the covenant. The necessity of an interconnection between the social and the religious is evident in the Puritan demand that prospective Native converts be “[civilized] before converting [them] […] [by] settling the Indians into European patterns in their everyday life as a necessary
prelude to saving their souls (Ziff 170). To truly live “God’s way,” Native Americans must first enact the behavior of the covenant in order to confirm the validity of their Puritan religious convictions, evident in Rowlandson’s discussion in Remove Nineteen of the “Praying Indian” and his brother. Rowlandson’s condemnation of the “Praying Indians” as “un-Christian” because they continue to engage in Native cultural practices illustrates the necessity of both the social and the church aspects of the covenant to the Puritan understanding of the means by which to love God. Therefore, in the Puritans’ religious understanding, to love God alone required exclusive adherence to the covenant.

For the Puritans, to fail to obey the terms of the covenant was to sin. In the poem, Mary embraces the “pagan” spirituality, or non-Puritan religion, of the Native Americans by engaging in Native spiritual and cultural practices, such as the eating of the fawn or the mimicking of the dance. Mary believes that by practicing Native culture, she sins. Mary feels she has sinned because she has deviated from an exclusive adherence to her own cultural practices, thereby inhibiting, in her understanding, her ability to uphold her religious convictions. As Puritans believe that committing a sin results in God’s wrath, Mary expects God’s wrath for her transgression. This belief predisposes Mary to see evidence of God’s anger in the nature around her. Mary exhibits this cultural understanding of sin as met by God’s wrath after she embraces Native American spirituality symbolically through eating the fawn. Mary states: “After that the birds mocked. / Shadows gaped and roared / and the trees flung down / their sharpened lashes. / He did not notice God’s wrath. / God blasted fire from half-buried stumps. / I hid my face in my dress, fearing He would burn us all / but this, too, passed” (lines 31-38). Mary’s failure to remain exclusive to her “true” religion as a result of the meal is a transgression
against God’s command to love Him, resulting in His displeasure. Mary’s assurance of God’s anger occurs through her perception of the land and its creatures, symbols of the Divine. For example, Mary hears the birdcalls as “mocking,” or harsh and scornful. She also imagines that shadows are leering at her, and the trees are bursting into fire and throwing down their limbs. This description of nature illustrates the “New England [Puritan’s] [fixation] on the day of doom” (Thuesen 63), the cultural belief that sin was met with apocalyptic consequences.

Although the fire and brimstone anger that Mary notes in nature is real to her, as witnessed in the note that she hides in her dress and her fears that she would be destroyed. This fantastic and detailed description of fearful nature and a destructive God is followed by the short sentence: “He [the Indian man] did not notice God’s wrath” (line 35). The simplicity of the statement, as well as its arrangement as a single line in the poem, deflates the descriptions of angry nature that precede it. Although Mary’s religion asserts God’s wrath, to the Indian man this anger is not detectable. The finality of the sentence indicates Mary’s realization “that sin fails to produce its expected consequences, that what she sees as obvious signs of divine wrath has [sic] no effect on the Indian” (Fast 72). Mary’s notion of God’s anger for her “sin” of failing to adhere to the covenant is predicated on cultural belief rather than on Divine command. As previously asserted in Part Two, the Native Americans and Puritans possess a similar sacred spirit and hold a comparable understanding of the Divine and their relation to the Divine. As a result of these fundamental parallels, Native Americans realize that they “have many symbols and rituals that […] parallel the Christian Church. [Native Americans] often practice parallel Christian/Traditional rituals and rites simultaneously” (Maxey 42). Unlike the Puritans,
Native Americans recognize and embrace the spiritual in “other” spiritual expressions of the sacred. In short, for the Native Americans to inclusively practice multiple beliefs is not to sin.

As Native Americans do not view combining the spiritual practices of the Other with their own expression of spirituality as immoral, they do not hold the same understanding of the Divine as jealous. As a result, the Indian man does not hear the scornful birds, see the leering shadows, or the fear the flaming trees. Rather, Mary’s perceptions of nature that result from her belief in her sin are entirely cultural, alluding to an important contrast between Native American spirituality and Puritan religion. The Indian man does not see evidence of God’s wrath in nature because his Native spirituality is unrestrained by social mores that assert difference and exclusivity. In contrast, Mary’s cultural understanding and practice of spirituality supports difference. The support of difference in the poem indicates that Puritan culture functions to circumscribe and limit sacred essence and spirituality to only those within the cultural group. Thus, it is culture, not fundamental spirituality, which informs Mary’s understanding of sin.

In the presence of the Indian man and his culture, Mary’s cultural understanding of God is invalidated, evident in the statement “but this, too, passed” (line 38). This final bland comment about to her fantastic experience illustrates the dissipation of her fear. Yet, this line in the poem, “but this, too, passed,” does not merely illustrate the retreat of Mary’s fear, but also the culmination of Mary’s disenchantment with her religious practices – the discrediting of her culturally conditioned convictions. This disenchantment begins after she is rescued from the stream at the beginning of the poem and begins to “recognize” and “understand” the language of the Indian man. Language is
a defining cultural element, making Mary’s familiarity with Native Americans language an indication of her acculturation to Native American ways of life. Similar to Rowlandson, Mary resists this culture by a return to religion, evident in “I knelt and prayed for strength” (lines 5-9). Yet, the effect of the prayer is never mentioned, implying that God never acknowledges Mary’s prayer for strength. Indeed, in the lines following, Mary and her child are portrayed as physically weak, for she is unable to “suckle” her child and the baby “wails” from starvation, illustrating that Mary’s prayer has gone unanswered.

Mary’s inability to access God through her religious practices requires that she turn to Native culture, through which she finds spiritual strength. The spiritual strength Mary derives from Native spirituality is evident through a discussion of food, the land, and the sacred. To soothe the baby, Mary relies upon the Indian woman’s “milk of acorns” (lines 14-18) rather than the “first wheat” (line 43) that she mentions at the end of the poem as the food she typically feeds to her children. The acorn milk and the wheat function as an important distinction between Native American culture and spirituality and Puritan culture and religion. In the poem, food possesses a particularly important cultural dimension. As asserted by anthropologists Sidney W. Mintz and Christine M. Du Bois, “like all culturally defined material substances used in the creation and maintenance of social relationships, food serves to both solidify group membership and set groups apart” (109). Similar to language, specific foodstuffs in the poem can be understood as identifying a specific culture. The “the milk of acorns,” an exotic food for Mary, is connected with the Other, the Native Americans, and familiar “first wheat” with the self, or the Puritans.
The connection between culture and specific food, in tandem with the earlier discussion in Part Two of the connection between foodstuff and the sacred, is important to understanding the authenticity of Native American spiritual and Puritan religious practices. Throughout the poem, the sacred significance of food is evident in the meal of the fawn and the honey from the rock. As food comes from the land and the land represents the sacred, food can be further linked to the sacred through the land. Thereby, food is an extension of the sacred and its essence. An understanding of food as a symbol or indication of the Divine occurs in the previously discussed the Twentieth Remove, in which Rowlandson initially believes that God favors the Native Americans because none of them starve during her captivity despite the destruction of their fields by Euro-Americans. Implicit in Rowlandson’s belief is the notion that God shows his favor to the faithful through nature, including the abundance of food or the “productivity” of the land (Thuesen 58). The ability of the Indian man and woman in the poem to eat off of the land by hunting and gathering these culturally specific foods of acorn and fawn implies a connection between the Native Americans and the Divine through the land. This notion is strengthened in the previously discussed lines wherein the earth opens to the Indian man to feed him “honey from the rock.” “Honey from the rock” coupled with the “milk of acorns” suggests a connection between the land, spirit, and food of the Native Americans as the words “honey” and “milk” recall the “land of milk and honey” (The New American Bible, Exodus 33:3) or the land promised to the Israelites by God for upholding the covenant. Thereby, Erdrich’s intertwining of land, spirit, and foodstuff illustrates that the Native Americans have a close relationship with the Divine, and thus an authentic spirituality.
The Native American bond with the Divine and the authenticity of their spirituality, as revealed through the food and the land in the poem, contrasts with the Puritans’ food and relationship with the land. The productivity of the land for the Native Americans is juxtaposed to the relationship between the Puritans and the land. As Mary claims, “My husband drives a thick wedge / through the earth, still it shuts / to him year after year” (lines 40-42). Historical knowledge that Mary’s husband was a minister in the Puritan Church draws a similarity between him and the Indian man as both lead worship practices in their respective communities. Further, her husband’s act of plowing the earth parallels the beating on the earth by the Indian man during the dance. Similar to the dance, plowing is a symbol for Puritan worship practices used to become one with the Divine. However, Mary’s husband’s worship yields a different outcome than that of Indian man, for the earth is “shut” to the husband or unproductive despite his efforts. As the earth symbolizes the connection between human and the Divine, the closure of the earth to Mary’s husband reveals that his religious practices are as ineffective at connecting him to the sacred as Mary’s unanswered prayers to God for strength. Indeed, this notion is strengthened by the use of the name “first wheat” for the food Mary’s husband harvests and with which he nourishes his family. In Psalm 81, wherein the “phrase honey from the rock” is derived, it is mentioned that also God feeds His people of “finest wheat” (The New American Bible, Psalm 81:17). Erdrich’s change from the description of “finest” to “first” for the wheat divests it of its sacred nature. No longer is the wheat the best as it is spiritual food from God, but it is merely the “first” wheat of the harvest, indicating an absence of the Divine in this culturally specific food. Unlike the honey the Indian man procures from the earth, the wheat is unable to give spiritual
nourishment. The unsacred nature of the wheat coupled with the closure of the earth to the Puritan man illustrates a disconnection between Puritan religious practices and the Divine. Therefore, the failure of Mary’s prayer and her husband’s worship to sustain them spiritually, combined with the ability of Native American spiritual practices to fill one with the sacred, suggest that the Native Americans’ spiritual practices are a more authentic means of accessing the Divine.

The authenticity of Native American spiritual practices is evident in Mary’s desire to be “admitted” or welcomed into the earth. Mary’s sacred spirit yearns for the connection to the Divine she experiences through Native spirituality. The ability of Native spirituality to fulfill her is evident when she states, “and he led his company in the noise / until I could no longer bear / the thought of how I was. / I stripped a branch / and struck the earth” (lines 49-54). Since Mary recognizes the dance as a means by which to connect to the Divine, she emulates the dance in an attempt to open the earth, unite to the Divine, and feed on the honey of the rock – become filled with the Divine. More significant is Mary’s comment that she cannot “bear” the thought of “how I was,” for she illustrates her regrets over her adherence to her religion that separates her from the Divine. Mary’s recognition of the sacred in and through Native American spirituality unifies her with the Native Americans, rendering the religious justification in Rowlandson’s Narrative for spiritual difference invalid.

The dissolution of Mary’s religious understanding of the sacred causes her to “glimpse beyond her Western artificial reality into the world of a people more elementally at home in the universe” (Rainwater 281), or to look beyond her culturally influenced religious views. The glimpse beyond her Eurocentric views of the Other
through religion “[deconstructs] social conventions and construction[s]” (Rainwater 275), or separates the spiritual aspects of Puritan religion from its cultural aspects. Erdrich restructures Mary’s understanding of Native American spirituality and culture as an authentic means by which to reach the Divine. However, the fact that Mary is able to experience the sacred through Native American spirituality does not render the spiritual aspects of her religion invalid. As both Native American spirituality and Puritan religion possess a common understanding of the Divine, Erdrich uses the comparison of Native American spirituality to Puritan religion to illustrate an underlying unity between the two peoples in terms of their recognition of the Divine in creation. This comparison fashions both spirituality and the spiritual aspects of religion as valid. The contrast of Native American spirituality and Puritan religion relies upon this comparison to reveal that it is the cultural interpretation of spirituality in Rowlandson’s religious justification that defend the divide between Euro- and Native Americans. As a result, the limits placed by culture on spirituality are exposed demonstrating that spirituality is transformed into religion – the cultural understanding of spiritually – when spirituality is used by a cultural group to reinforce cultural boundaries and exclude groups deemed Other. As a result, culture makes religion its captive for culture uses the unifying nature of the spiritual in religion to create a divide. Spirituality, by its nature unifying, is made divisive by culture, paralyzing its ability to act against its cultural controls. Thereby, Erdrich illustrates through the comparison and contrast of Native American spirituality and Puritan religion the divisive effect of the cultural on the unifying spiritual in Mary’s religion, illustrating culture is ultimately the justification for the divide Puritans and Native Americans.
PART 4: BURYING THE LOVE BISCUIT – ROWLANDSON, ERDRICH AND
THE IMPLICATION OF THE CULTURAL BASIS

After revealing the religiously justified message in Rowlandson’s *Narrative* that Native Americans are a religious and cultural Others and examining the invalidation of spiritual difference in Erdrich’s “Captivity,” it now becomes necessary to explore the continued existence of the fear to love the Other in the poem despite the invalidation of the religious justification. As the foundation of the religiously justified divide between the Puritans and the Native Americans, culture is significant to understanding the persistence of Mary’s fear to love the Other. The fear to love the Other is most evident in stanza five, in which Mary is released from captivity, She claims: “Rescued, I see no truth in things. / … / I lay myself to sleep / on a Holland-laced pillowbeer. / I lay to sleep. / And in the dark I see myself / as I was outside their circle” (lines 39-48). Although she is released from her captivity by the Native Americans, Mary “remains deeply disturbed […] [and] she cannot sleep peacefully. She can no longer see the world the way she did before her capture” (Rainwater 280-281). Although Mary is “released” from her captivity, she is rescued *into* her exclusive Puritan religion and culture. Here, she is imprisoned by the limits her culture places on the understanding of the sacred and the self, which precludes her from practicing Native American spirituality, a more authentic
means of accessing the Divine. As a result, Mary becomes disturbed, or as troubled and anxious among her kinsfolk as Rowlandson herself was during her time among the Native Americans. For example, Rowlandson claims, “Yet I had not a comfortable night's rest […] The night before the Letter came from the Council [concerning Rowlandson’s release], I could not rest I was so full of fear and troubles […] that ever I should go home again” (Rowlandson 104). Rowlandson is unable to sleep because she fears that she will be forever a captive of the unfamiliar Native American Other. Likewise, Mary illustrates the troubled nature of her spirit through an expressed inability to sleep throughout the poem.

However, that which causes Mary’s anxiety is not the idea of remaining a prisoner of the Other, but how to reconcile her experience of the Divine within the Native Americans and their spiritual practices with her religiously justified cultural understanding of Native Americans as the Other. Mary’s statement, “I see no truth in things” demonstrates that she questions the assertions of her culture that Native Americans are fundamentally the Other. Indeed, Mary is no longer able to fully accept Native Americans as the barbarous, godless, prone to evil Other as she did at the start of the poem. This change of understanding is evident at the end of the poem in her painful recollection at night, which prevents her from a comfortable night’s rest. Mary recalls her experience of “exclusion from the Indian[s’] circle” (Fast 72), or her spectator position as she watched the Native Americans participate in the spiritual dance (lines 49-54). This recollection causes Mary to “no longer bear / the thought of how I was” (lines 52-53), or to scorn the earlier understanding of Native Americans justified to her by her culture through religion.
Although Mary experiences the Divine through Native American spiritual practice, her fear to love the Other was only recently disrupted. Mary is excluded from the Native American’s circle on the night of the dance, as well as on the sleepless nights following, because long ingrained cultural beliefs prevent her from unifying with the Other. Mary reveals her desire to embrace the Other, evident in her mimicking of the Native American dance (lines 53-54). However, she cannot break her culture’s hold over her. The power of culture over Mary is evident in her solitary mimicking of the Native American dance as she “stripped a branch / and struck the earth” (lines 53-54). By practicing Native American spirituality outside of the circle, removed from the Native American community, Mary attempts to embrace the Divine without taking on Native American culture. Mary excludes herself from the Native American circle because, as a Puritan woman, she knows she must return to her society and take up again those Euro-American cultural understandings that assert their religious and cultural superiority over the savage, godless, uncivilized, and “un-Christian” Native Americans. By practicing Native American spirituality without the Native American community, she attempts to satisfy both spiritual and cultural desires.

Mary’s attempts to acknowledge spiritual unity while simultaneously asserting cultural difference after “having lived with the ‘enemy’ and return[ed] to Christian civilization” (Fast 73) or, after her return, by returning at night to the memory of the dance results in Mary becoming “effectively excluded from both worlds, her former certainties undone, the possibility of a new way of seeing and being decisively cut off” (Fast 73). After her return, Mary continues to be a captive. Mary attempts to adhere to cultural notions of Other despite her experiences that proves these restrictions false, thus
preventing her inclusion in the Native American circle. Further, she attempts to reintegrate herself into European culture, signified by laying her head to sleep on the fine European pillowcase and feeding her children the first wheat – pillowcase and wheat constituting symbols of European culture and religion. However, she cannot fully embrace her former life, evident in her inability to sleep. Mary “lays” her head on the Holland-lace pillowcase without feeling the need to sleep, suggesting that although she engages Puritan culture by laying her head on the pillow and behaves according to cultural mores by sleeping when she is told she ought, she acts in this manner without actually fully believing them in “resting” without feeling the need to sleep.

Mary’s exclusion from the Puritan community results in “psychological disruption” (Ziff 177) similar to the disturbance experienced by Rowlandson after her return to her society. The resolution of this disturbance occurs in the poem’s epigraph, an allusion to Rowlandson’s Narrative. Although the epigraph appears nowhere in the actual Narrative, alludes to the fear to love the Other depicted throughout Rowlandson’s Narrative. Mary buries the biscuit, or suppresses her understanding, because she fears that if she eats it she will imbibe Native American culture and become a part of it; in other words, she will love the Other. This taboo act would have devastating effects, for it would forever separate Mary from Euro-American culture. It is for similar reasons – to suppress aberrant understanding of the Native Americans and to assert cultural and religious notions of self – that Rowlandson writes the Narrative.

Similar to Mary’s sleeplessness, Rowlandson’s cracks in her narrative allude to her uneasy transition back into cultural norms of thinking about the Other. Feeling like an outsider, Rowlandson wrote the Narrative out of “a desire to belong again among the
lives of those from whom she had been torn […] to have been fully rather than only physically rescued” (Breitwieser 8). In other words, Rowlandson writes the Narrative to mitigate feelings of exclusion from her culture caused by her knowledge gained first-hand that her religious and cultural understanding of the Other was incorrect. To rejoin her culture, at least in a superficial sense, both Rowlandson and Mary appeal to the fear to love the Other engendered in them by their culture’s assertion of difference; they continue to be captives of culture. This appeal to culture in the Narrative and the epigraph illustrates the power of culture to control and to imprison one in its stated “truth” of difference, regardless of an experience of the truth as unity. Therefore, at the end of the poem Mary is not restored by God and reassured of her place as His beloved in the world, as Rowlandson seems to assert at the end of her narrative: “And I hope I can say in some measure […] It is good for me that I have been afflicted […] I have learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles, and to be quieted under them, as Moses said, Exod. 14.13. Stand still and see the Salvation of the Lord” (Rowlandson 112). In contrast, Erdrich’s Mary is “rescued into the knowledge of unremitting loneliness” (Fast 72), that leaves her “isolated” (Rainwater 274). Mary’s fear to love the Other persists, isolating her from Native spirituality and culture because of a Puritan cultural assertions of difference. Her knowledge of the spiritual, and her adherence to a culture that divides her from the spiritual, leaves her to sit up in the lonely night hopelessly longing for the spiritual unity that will enable feelings of belonging.

Mary’s fate at the end of the poem holds wider implications for those living in the present day. In the contemporary era, “Native Americans still face racism, poverty, and injustice at the hands of white-dominated authority in the USA” (Dix 73). In other words,
the division evident in the *Narrative* is highlighted in the poem to illustrate that this division still occurs in the present day. Even without the religious justification, and with the evidence of the Other as possessing the same sacred essence, Native Americans are still viewed and treated as the Other by Euro-Americans. Three hundred years after the publication of Rowlandson’s text, Euro-Americans continue to assert their superiority through the subjugation of Native peoples through claims to the land, or the continued possession of sacred tribal lands by Euro-Americans, and the insistence that Native American culture is marked by “suicide, alcoholism, [and] unemployment” (McFarland 251). Although for Native Americans the problems of suicide, alcoholism, and unemployment are serious concerns, these problems are exploited, as religion was in Rowlandson’s *Narrative*, to justify Native American inferiority and their continued oppression. As a result, contemporary Native Americans are marked as the Other in American society. As a result, both Euro- and Native Americans become captives of culture.

This contemporary cultural captivity arises out of the suppression of unity in Rowlandson’s *Narrative* made evident by Erdrich’s “Captivity.” Ultimately, Erdrich’s rewriting of the *Narrative* “heightens the reader’s awareness of the generally suppressed dialogic potential of Rowlandson’s account” (Fast 70), as the contemporary text reveals that Euro- and Native Americans are truly united through the sacred and only divided by culture. Indeed, Native American spiritual practices are essential to the understanding of unity and its suppression in the poem. Native American spirituality is “a way of life more than a religion […] [because] it is a way of life that encompasses the whole of life” (Tinker 125). The culturally unlimited nature of Native spirituality does not attempt to
establish or maintain superficial cultural divides, but functions to recognize natural unity. Native American spirituality makes evident that spirituality, not oppressive culture, should be the foundation upon which one understands the Other, thus promoting essential unity rather than division.

The effect of basing an understanding of the Other in spirituality rather than culture accommodates the possibility of unity. Erdrich demonstrates this in her comparison and contrast of Native American spirituality and Puritan religion: “the intersection of worlds and the margins of the Church [...] urging those within to let go of the oppositional structures which bind us to ideals of purity and dominion, and [...] let ourselves fall into the radical and paradoxical desire for transformation by the immanent other” (Hughes 80). Mary has the ability to embrace essential unity and respect differences by letting go of exclusivity, instilled in her by her culture and its assertions of Native American difference and Euro-American superiority, by embracing Native American spirituality and culture. If Mary were to act in this manner she would permit her experience of the Native American Other to transform the Puritan divide between self and other. As Mary would not merely recognize the unity of Euro- and Native Americans, but embrace it by practicing Native American spiritual and cultural practices Division would collapse, eliminating the fear to love the Other. As a result of the end of difference, Euro-Americans and Native Americans could begin to be redeemed from the division caused by cultural captivity.

Erdrich’s Mary becomes a representative of all modern people; her failure in the contemporary poem to overcome cultural captivity alludes to the imprisonment of modern peoples to culture and the injustices it creates. “Captivity,” then, is not a poem of
“rescue and return” (Fast 74), or of release from one’s culturally imprisoned understanding of the Other as different and an arrival at an understanding of the essential sacred unity of all. “Captivity” is a poem about “a lost opportunity for a new relationship and community” (Fast 74). Mary, much like the real Rowlandson, fails to overcome those “oppositional structures,” or culture and its constructs (such as religion), that “bind us” to the notions of a single “pure” culture. Therefore, Erdrich’s retelling of Rowlandson’s *Narrative* alerts the reader to the insidious effect culture has on the attainment of unity. Unity, Erdrich’s poem suggests, can rescue Euro- and Native Americans from cultural division, if one does not bury the recognition of unity in one’s pocket or under a log, disregard or discard it because of cultural assertions, but simply imbibes, or embraces, its nourishing message of sacred essence.


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