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Analucia Lugo
Purdue University, lugo3@purdue.edu

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The Experience of White Captives Among the Natives of the Old Northwest Territory Between
1770 and 1850

In the late fifteenth century, when the first Europeans landed in the New World, stories of the Indigenous peoples who inhabited the lands were quickly penned and spread, creating inferior depictions that would influence the way white individuals viewed and interacted with these native groups. In North America, beginning in the mid-seventeenth century and continuing through the nineteenth century, captivity narratives made up a decent portion of these stories, grabbing the attention of colonists, and later, settlers that were eager to expand throughout the entire continent.

Often considered by scholars to be a uniquely American literary genre, captivity narratives were seen as revealing the mysteries of Native American customs, beliefs, and ideas framed by the experience of the captive who had direct contact with these cultures.¹ The captivity experience itself shaped the way white settlers and Natives viewed and interacted with each other through these centuries, especially after the United States gained its independence in 1776. The growing hostility from the Americans threatened Natives' lands and livelihoods and frequently led to violent struggles along the western frontier. Captivity of white settlers was one of the many Native reactions that resulted from these conflicts. Experiences of these captives varied greatly, ranging from constant, debilitating feelings of fear and helplessness to eventual assimilation into the captor's community. Regardless of these vast variations, many captivity narratives can act as sources that provide both historical and ethnological data, such as observations of the Indians' way of life and the relationships that were developed between the two groups.² Although never completely reliable, these narratives can be valuable supplemental

1. Annette Kolodny, "Among the Indians: The Uses of Captivity," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 21, no. 3/4 (1993): 186.

2. Dwight L. Smith "Shawnee Captivity Ethnography," *Ethnohistory* 2, no. 1 (1955): 31.

materials when conducting research. This paper will focus on the investigation and analysis of a handful of white captivity narratives among different Native groups that inhabited the Old Northwest Territory between 1770 and 1850, focusing on the interactions during these individuals' time in captivity, what roles they played inside of the community, how gender was an important factor in the type of treatment received, and if new feelings and/or perspectives developed based on these situations they found themselves in.

Captivity Narratives as a Genre/Literature

Up until the mid-eighteenth century, many captivity narratives had already been published and read in the colonies. Most of these stories were marked by heavy religious undertones, meant to stir audiences against the “savage” Indian who threatened the white, often female, captive. However, by the 1750s, these narratives began to shift away from religious themes to more political ones. Narratives became increasingly dramatized, with many of those published after this period being completely fictitious to resemble the growing fiction literature of the time.³

Almost all of these accounts contained common characteristics and themes that made them distinct American captivity narratives. There was always a common plotline that defined these stories: capture, imprisonment/residence, and redemption/assimilation. This pattern was seldom broken, but it provided readers with a familiar structure that could be associated with the captivity narrative. The common depictions of the Native American individual were also a

3. Kolodny, “The Uses of Captivity,” 187-188.

shared trait among these stories, with most of them being comprised of archetypal racist stereotypes. Not only did these stereotypes consist of the Indian being a threat to the ideals of “civilization,” but they also produced the idea of the “noble Indian” that faced the inevitable vanishing of its home in the wilderness.⁴ During a time when the desire to acquire Indian territories was running rampant among settlers and the American government, representations such as these were meant to create a negative image of Indians and encouraged the position of superiority over their way of life, even if the intention of doing so was never explicitly stated. They were seen as obstacles towards the goal of westward expansion, and it would not be until the mid-eighteenth century when these images would dominate most accounts.⁵

Because of underlying biases and as previously noted above, captivity narratives should not be used as reliable historical and ethnological evidence. Just as with any other piece of literature, they too were written with personal goals and political agendas in mind, influenced by preconceptions, intentions, opinions, as well as affected by external causes such as the time of their composition, the completeness of the account, and authorship. As Kathryn Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier state, if they are to be used as sources for the purpose of providing precise historical data, then they must first be thoroughly examined with the combined efforts of experts and critics from the appropriate fields.⁶ The study of the captivity narrative concerning its authenticity or accuracy does not fall into the scope of this research, but it must be noted that caution should be exercised when evaluating and considering the contents within this paper.

4. Kolodny, 186

5. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola and James Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative, 1550-1900* (New York: Twayne, 1993), 63-64.

6. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 13.

Reasons for Captivity

There were several reasons for Native Americans to take white captives in the Old Northwest Territory, many of which stemmed from reactions to increasing European and later American aggression upon Indian land and groups. One of the most widespread motivations among Native nations in the area was revenge.⁷ Resentment for settlers and their role in the destruction of Indian communities led to raids, capture, and murder. Even if a captive was taken and kept alive for other purposes, the threat of death constantly loomed close by. Some were taken with the intention of being tortured and killed back at the captor's village through methods such as scalping or being burned at the stake.⁸

With the expansion of Anglo-American settlers came the general decline of Native populations. Whether it was the direct result of casualties from violent conflict or other factors such as disease, the need to restore community numbers led to the adoption of some captives. Children were the most likely of all captives to be adopted since they were younger and more easily able to assimilate into their new surroundings.⁹ Regardless of age, adoptees were often considered a part of the community almost immediately, with some Natives viewing adoption to be equivalent to being born into the respective group.¹⁰

A couple of more reasons for Indian captivity were the opportunities of receiving the profits of ransom and the intention of holding the captives as slaves. Through ransom, captors

7. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, 2.

8. Smith, "Shawnee Captivity Ethnography," 29.

9. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 5.

10. Smith, "Shawnee Captivity Ethnography," 29-30.

could receive compensation for the return of their captives in the form of money or goods. Captives who were not killed or adopted frequently took on the role of a slave for an individual or the whole community. However, as mentioned above, neither of these situations promised the safety of avoiding harm or death, but it also did not exclude the possibility of adoption or release at an earlier date.¹¹

The Female Captivity Experience

In the Indian captivity narrative, a majority of female accounts ranging across the United States territory during the mid-eighteenth to mid-nineteenth century derived from the frontier regions. English and Anglo-American Protestant women between the ages of twenty and forty-five made up a large part of these published narratives, including children who were able to pen their experiences later in their lives through relatives or writers who picked up their stories.¹² In June Namias's work, *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier*, she presents three archetypes based on the dominate female type found in narratives in a specific time period: the Survivor from 1675 to 1763, the Amazon from 1764 to 1819, and the Frail Flower from 1820 to 1870.¹³ With a look at three different female narratives, this paper will focus on the two latter archetypes. Namias describes the Amazon type as originating from the Appalachian frontier and the Ohio Valley, brave in the face of danger but also resilient throughout her ordeal as a captive. She is cunning and clever, able to find ways to escape her

11. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 8.

12. June Namias, "White Women Held Captive," in *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 24.

13. See note 12 above.

Indian captors.¹⁴ Unlike her predecessor, the Frail Flower is a poor, weak, and powerless woman, unable to save herself from her own shock, misery, and distress. Her narrative is characterized by brutal themes, racist language, and a desperate plea for compassion and empathy from the audience.¹⁵ The captivity narratives of Jennie Wiley and Mary Kinnan each represent one or part of these archetypes through their reactions, roles, and feelings during their captivity. Although Frances Slocum's story does not fit into either one of these categories, her unique experience of female assimilation does offer different perspectives that can only be found in a few accounts.

Almost every captivity narrative begins with the scene of capture, immediately followed by some description of the captive's initial thoughts and emotions of the situation they find themselves in. Jennie Wiley, a mother of four, and her infant child were taken from their home in eastern Kentucky by an Indian group comprised of Shawnee, Cherokee, Wyandot, and Delaware in the year 1788. The group had confused their cabin for that of another man whose son had killed one of their own. When they realized their mistake, the Shawnee chief argued to keep her and her baby alive against everyone else's desire to kill her, saying that he wanted to adopt her in place of a daughter he had recently lost.¹⁶ As they traversed through the woods for several days with her, the author describes Mrs. Wiley in a state of "despair" and "nervous delirium" during that time, and that she "could not sleep, neither could she rest."¹⁷ Mary Kinnan also faced helpless feelings when she was taken by the Shawnee from her home in Virginia in 1774, with

14. Namias, 29.

15. Namias, 36-37.

16. William Elsey Connelley, *Eastern Kentucky Papers; the Founding of Harman's Station...* (New York [State]: The Torch Press, 1910), 38-39.

17. Connelley, 42.

her narrative stating, “I became indifferent to my existence; I was willing to bid adieu to that world... nevertheless so deeply was I afflicted that I cared not for the food...”¹⁸ The kind of emotion presented here is typical for almost every female captivity narrative. With the conditions along the western frontier at the time, the fear of being taken by Natives and not being able to predict what will happen, but expecting the worst, demonstrates the general picture of how Natives were negatively perceived.

Once captured and taken to a camp or village, captives were often made to participate in new customs and to take on new roles within the Indian community. For women, one of the most common positions had to do with manual labor. Mrs. Wiley was made to “perform all of the drudgery,” including planting corn, gathering wood for fires, and accompanying hunting parties to skin and carry the game that was killed.¹⁹ When Kinnan was brought to one of the Shawnee towns, she was put through an initiation ceremony. The Shawnee painted her and themselves “in the most horrid manner” and called out the “scalp-whoop” five times as people from the town gathered around them. Each person then struck her “with great violence over her head and face” until she passed out. They later explained that these acts were meant to welcome her into the group.²⁰ She would later be sold to a Delaware woman as a slave and be made to do the “menial

18. Shepard Kollock, “A True Narrative of the Sufferings of Mary Kinnan,” in *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York: Corinth Books, 1961), 110-111. This account of Mary Kinnan’s experience was produced by Shepard Kollock, though it is written in the first-person perspective. It is widely believed that most of the details were fabricated and loosely based on the true story, given that there are obvious indications of political and religious motives and the use of dramatic language throughout the text.

19. Connelley, *The Founding of Harman’s Station...*, 57-58.

20. Kollock, “A True Narrative,” 111-112.

and laborious” tasks.²¹ Her narrative takes note of the “humiliating” condition of women in the community, stating that “instead of polishing and improving the rough manners of men, [they] are equally ferocious, cruel, and obdurate.”²² Although not all accounts explicitly describe the position of Native women among the community, those that do typically share a similar sentiment of astonishment as Kinnan’s.

Treatment from Native captors varied greatly from nation to nation and was also determined by the individual or specific group that claimed the captive. Although Kinnan’s narrative does not give the best detail of her captors’ treatment towards her, it can be assumed that she was not well regarded during her three-and-a-half-year imprisonment. For Mrs. Wiley, the Shawnee chief who vouched for her life frequently took care of her and her child, in one instance providing ailments for their weakening health and medicine for Mrs. Wiley’s sore and splintered feet.²³ Despite this display of kindness, her Cherokee captor did not show the same concern, wishing to have her killed when she was first captured. After Mrs. Wiley was caught attempting to flee, the Cherokee chief punished her by “seiz[ing] her child by the feet and dash[ing] its brains against a big beech tree.”²⁴ Later on in her captivity, however, when she was tied to a stake and threatened to be burned, her courage and still demeanor impressed the chief, leading him to suspend the burning.²⁵ These episodes show that the female captive’s behavior

21. Kollock, 112-113.

22. Kollock, 112.

23. Connelley, *The Founding of Harman’s Station...*, 44.

24. Connelley, 46.

25. Connelley, 61.

was a large factor in the manner in which they were treated, although it is clear that their gender did not prevent them from receiving the harshest of abuses on occasion.

When female captives were taken for the purpose of being adopted, especially when young, Indian treatment in these narratives tended to be more caring and accommodating. In 1778, Frances Slocum was stolen by a group of Delaware from her family farm in the Wyoming Valley when she was five years old. After being found by her biological family almost sixty years later, she was asked to recall what she remembered of her capture. From the beginning, she said, “the Indians were very kind to me... When they had anything to eat, I always had the best, and when I was tired, they carried me in their arms.”²⁶ She became a favorite among the group, being hidden away “whenever a white man came near...”²⁷ She was loved and cherished by her Delaware family as well as her Miami family once she married a chief named She-pan-can-ah, also known as Deaf Man among the white settlers. She became well respected in her community, gaining a revered and wealthy position.²⁸

Initial reactions and attitudes of female captives did have the potential to change the longer they remained with their captors. However, this was not the case for every account. Mrs. Wiley never came to view her captors favorably during her eleven-month stay, even when she was shown kindness by the Shawnee chief. She constantly looked for ways to escape, determined to succeed or die trying.²⁹ Kinnan also expressed her desperation to leave by describing her

26. Martha Bennet Phelps, *Frances Slocum: the Lost Sister of Wyoming* (self-pub., 1916), 97-98.

27. Phelps, 28.

28. Phelps, 34-37.

29. Connelley, *The Founding of Harman's Station...*, 58-59.

misfortunes, most of which were descriptions of her own hopeless feelings amongst the group of Natives that she no doubt viewed as inferior. As Namias states, these women's experiences were also shaped by the ideals of the periods they lived in. Both Mrs. Wiley's and Kinnan's reactions to their situations reveal the predominant perspectives of the "brutal Indian" that were seen as a "'savage' race, antithetical to domestic purity."³⁰ Kinnan's narrative best exemplifies the archetype of the Frail Flower, evident by her perceived helplessness and fear throughout her story. Although Mrs. Wiley's narrative also contains characteristics of the Frail Flower, most notably in the moments describing her fragile frame of mind, her displays of bravery and daring escape at the end from the Cherokee chief attribute her to the Amazon archetype.³¹ Unlike the Frail Flower whose use of "prayer and goodwill" are reasons for their redemption, Mrs. Wiley's determination to escape was acted upon that led to her freedom.³²

As for Frances Slocum, she did not express any opinion on her Delaware captors for taking her away. Instead, her story of assimilation revealed her deep ties with her adopted family. It is her siblings' and artist George Winter's reactions that perhaps provide the most thoughts on her story at the time. After the siblings went to meet Frances at her home near Peru, Indiana, they were pleased with their visit, finding her living conditions suitable for an "Indian" home and her Indian family respectful and accommodating.³³ A few years later, they commissioned George Winter to paint her portrait at her home in Deaf Man's Village. In his personal journal, Winter

30. Namias, "White Women Held Captive," 42-43.

31. Connelley, *The Founding of Harman's Station...*, 71-73.

32. Namias, "White Women Held Captive," 31.

33. Phelps, *Frances Slocum: the Lost Sister of Wyoming*, 59-60.

describes Frances's aged facial features with detail, using racial descriptions that take note of her appearance being attributed to both her white and Indian families:³⁴

“Though bearing some resemblance to her [biological] family, yet her cheek bones seemed to bear the Indian characteristic in that particular—face broad, nose somewhat bulby [*sic*], mouth perhaps indicating some degree of severity. In her ears she wore some few ‘ear bobs.’”³⁵

The way Winter views Frances is interesting; he acknowledges her white ancestry only briefly, deciding to focus on her adopted Indian side through stereotypical characteristics. A look into outsiders' reactions like these can corroborate the captive's experience and provide further insight into the prevalent mindset regarding the female captivity narrative of the time, especially when it comes to feminine themes of frailty, helplessness, or, in Frances's case, the white woman turned “savage.”

The Male Captivity Experience

Similar to female captivity narratives, a large portion of male narratives from the Old Northwest Territory were written by or about English and Anglo-American Protestant settlers between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Their ages also ranged similarly, with many male children captives also having the opportunity to share their stories when they were older. In her work, Namias presents two archetypes based on two dominant types of male

34. Ashley Falzetti, “Settler Histories of Place: Frances Slocum and Miami Dispossession” (PhD diss., Rutgers University, 2014), 97-98.

35. George Winter, “A Visit to Deaf Man's Village,” in *The Journals and Indian Paintings of George Winter, 1837-1839* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1948), 177.

captivity narratives that were produced during this period: the Heroic Mode and the White Indian. Dominant during the colonial period, the male captive characterized by the Heroic Mode is the epitome of “civilization” in a world of “savagery.” He believes that his situation is a trial sent by God to test his faith as well as to spread the gospel to the “heathens” that need it.³⁶ By the mid-eighteenth century, a tougher and more family-oriented hero emerges from these stories, taking on a more protective role of the weak, particularly women.³⁷ The White Indian archetype, on the other hand, portrays a very different type of captive. Instead of looking down on the Indian way of life, he shows empathy towards it, perhaps eventually embracing it as well. Many of these captives were adopted as children, giving them the perspective of two worlds, one of which they were able to appreciate the natural world and what it had to offer.³⁸ The following captivity narratives will each contain features of these two archetypes.

For male captivity narratives, the sequence of events begins with the story of capture followed by a description of initial reactions to their captor or captor group. There was a greater emphasis on the struggle between the captive and the captor, as well as on general interactions between both parties. William Biggs, a fur trader, was attacked and captured by a band of Kickapoo Indians in southern Illinois in 1788. Throughout the first few nights, he did his best to stand his ground, attempting to show his strength and bravery when faced with threats of death, even going as far as to goad one Indian to “kill away.”³⁹ However, as he began to familiarize

36. June Namias, “White Men Held Captive,” in *White Captives: Gender and Ethnicity on the American Frontier* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 53.

37. Namias, 67.

38. Namias, 70-71.

39. William Biggs, *Narrative of the Captivity of William Biggs Among the Kickapoo Indians in Illinois in 1788, Written by Himself* (C. F. Heartman, 1922), 17.

himself with the Kickapoo language and members of the community, he found himself warming up to them, noting that they were “friendly” and “full of life and very funny.”⁴⁰ While most male narratives have similar moments of praise and respect towards the captors, descriptions of fear still dominate in these stories just like their female counterparts. In 1788, Englishman Thomas Ridout made his way to the Ohio Valley in Kentucky in chase of individuals and families who owed him debts. On a day in March while traveling by boat, he and a group of passengers were attacked by a band of Shawnee. Ridout was captured by a chief who told him he would be safe. However, later that evening, Ridout witnessed how the other captives, including a friend he had made on the boat trip, were each dragged into the woods and beaten to death. He described his fear: “Words cannot express what my feelings then were, and [*sic*] when I saw him approach...[I] expect[ed] every moment that he [the Indian] would turn upon me and put me to death.”⁴¹ Similarly, when John Leith was confronted by a group of Delaware at his employer’s goods store in Ohio in 1774, he spoke to them “with a trembling heart” and “the fearful expectation he [the Delaware chief] intended to kill me immediately...”⁴² These men knew that their lives were not guaranteed while in the hands of the Natives. Despite their crippling fear and uncertainty of their fate, they often tried to do whatever they could to persuade their captors to keep them alive. William “Billy” Wells and three of his friends were caught by a group of Delaware and Miami near Louisville, Kentucky in 1784 when Wells was just thirteen years old.

40. Biggs, 221-22.

41. Thomas Ridout, “An Account of My Capture by the Shawanese Indians,” *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine*, January 1929, 10.

42. John Leith, *Leith’s Narrative: A Short Biography with a Brief Account of His Life Among the Indians* (Ohio: Clarke, 1883), 14.

The boys knew that there was a good chance that they would be killed and were therefore determined to behave themselves and follow any orders without complaint, even when they were tortured and beaten.⁴³ For those that did endure, attitudes toward their captors tended to shift depending on the treatment they received, the town or community's general atmosphere, and what roles they were assigned during their imprisonment.

Like female captives, males were immersed in a new world of various Native American rituals, ceremonies, and customs, often having little to no choice but to participate. Regardless, these interactions allowed both sides, especially the captives, to engage in a different culture and perhaps develop a new, more sympathetic outlook of their neighbors. For example, trading and gift-giving were considered by the Natives to be crucial and respectful actions towards relationship building, and they could help gain captives small favors in the future. After being captured, Biggs was forced to take part in one of these gift swaps at a Kickapoo village, having to give the women whatever they wanted off his person such as a shirt, blanket, or moccasins if they asked for it.⁴⁴ Leith was released after a few weeks of being held by the Delaware as the end of Lord Dunmore's War approached, but he decided to keep a close connection by hunting and trading with them for an additional two years, eventually becoming a valuable friend.⁴⁵ Mentions of adoption ceremonies are also prevalent in most narratives, with many captives describing how these rituals and dances were considered to be a big step towards their acceptance into a group. Biggs gave a detailed description of his induction ceremony into the Kickapoo nation:

43. William Heath, "Becoming Miami," in *William Wells and the Struggle for the Old Northwest* (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 37.

44. Biggs, *Narrative of the Captivity of William Biggs*, 18.

45. Leith, *Leith's Narrative*, 20-21.

“They made me wash, then they painted me and said I was a Kickapoo. Then they cut a pole and peeled it, painted it different colors and stuck the big end in the ground, and cleared a ring around the pole for [*sic*] to dance in. The fifth night they cut a lock of hair out of the crown of my head about as thick as my finger, plaited it elegantly and put it in their conjuring bag, and hung that bag on the pole they contemplated dancing around, and said that was their prisoner, and I was a Kickapoo, and must dance with them.”⁴⁶

Ridout also had a similar experience as he and another prisoner were being transported to a Shawnee village, including their faces being painted red, colorful ribbons being tied to their hair, and singing and shaking rattles while marching through the village.⁴⁷ Male captives of all ages were also made to take on laborious roles within their captor communities, as many were considered to be servants or slaves to the Indians who claimed them. In his narrative, Oliver M. Spencer recounts the time when he was captured by Mohawk Indians near Fort Washington in 1792 when he was only eleven years old. After a couple of weeks of travel, he was brought to the Glaize, a multicultural community in northwest Ohio that mostly comprised of Shawnee, Miami, and Delaware Indians. He was given to his captor’s mother Cooh-coo-cheeh, the community’s medicine woman, as a servant.⁴⁸ Throughout his eight-month stay, Spencer was made to take on miscellaneous chores such as fetching water, collecting wood, and hunting and often helped the women in the process of sugar making that took place in the spring.⁴⁹ Although the narratives presented here do not explicitly discuss the impact of the captives’ new positions on their views of Native communities, it is clear that participation—regardless of the degree of involvement—

46. Biggs, *Narrative of the Captivity of William Biggs*, 19.

47. Ridout, “An Account of My Capture by the Shawanese Indians,” 15-16.

48. Oliver M. Spencer, *Narrative of Oliver M. Spencer: Comprising an Account of His Captivity Among the Mohawk Indians in North America* (London, England: 1854) 147.

49. Spencer, 203; Spencer, 220-221.

through meaningful roles of responsibility was a critical means for both sides to come to and understand each other.

While varying greatly from nation to nation, Natives' treatment towards male captives tended to be more violent and hostile compared to the treatment given to females. They faced a greater probability of being tortured and threatened with death if they did not behave to their captor's satisfaction. After first being captured, Spencer attempted to escape while his pair of captors had gone out to hunt for a few hours. When he was discovered to be hiding "by the ignited savage, he raised his levelled rifle to shoot me...His countenance resembled that of a malignant fiend, bent on mischief and murder."⁵⁰ His life was saved by his other captor, Waw-paw-maw-quaw—or White Loon—but his punishment was not. The pair went on to beat him with "switches from a neighbouring thicket...till their whips were literally worn out."⁵¹ Leith also experienced a similar scenario soon after his initial capture, as some "Indians proposed to kill me and put me out of the way." Like Spencer, he is saved by his "late father" who "prevented their horrid intention."⁵² However, not all male captives were simply mistreated by Natives. Many were also shown acts of kindness, given great care during their stay, and often reassured that harm would not come to them. For example, the elderly Shawnee chief that claimed Ridout as his prisoner gripped his hand as a sign of possession as well as reassurance that he would not be hurt. When Ridout was later given to another chief, the chief was pleased, calling him "Nancanah," or "his friend." He constantly checked to make sure that Ridout was

50. Spencer, 114.

51. Spencer, 115.

52. Leith, *Leith's Narrative*, 18; Leith's "late father" refers to the old Delaware chief that first captured him in 1774. He is never mentioned by name in the narrative.

physically comfortable, such as providing him with blankets on a cold night or offering to help him walk during long treks.⁵³ For Biggs, his time in the Kickapoo village was filled with caring treatment from its people, and also a bit of fun. After arriving, he was given a bath and new fine clothes to wear, and was told by one of the Indians to show off his new attire:

“I knew they wanted to have a little fun. I put my arms akimbo with my hands on hips, and walked with a very proud air three or four times backwards and forwards across the floor...The funny Indian said in Indian that I was a very handsome man and a big captain.”⁵⁴

They go on to praise Biggs for his physique, even complimenting his fast running when he was captured, comparing him to “a bird flying.”⁵⁵ Spencer was also treated with kindness from the Indian community at the Glaize and was well taken care of by Cooh-coo-cheeh. When he was first given to her, she was reluctant to interact with him. However, when she noticed that his feet had been badly scraped from his long journey through the woods, she set herself to alleviate his wounds with medicine and other methods of healing.⁵⁶ She tried her best to keep him comfortable and amused “in her plain way,” and was always happy to praise him whenever he came back successful from a hunt.⁵⁷

Each of the male captivity narratives presented here contains elements from both the Heroic Mode archetype and the White Indian archetype, though the latter has a more dominant

53. Ridout, “An Account of My Capture by the Shawanese Indians,” 7; Ridout, 13-15.

54. Biggs, *Narrative of the Captivity of William Biggs*, 23-24.

55. Biggs, 24.

56. Spencer, *Narrative of Oliver M. Spencer*, 147-148.

57. Spencer, 163; Spencer, 203.

presence throughout the first-person accounts of Biggs, Ridout, Leith, and Spencer. Within their stories, they each include several positive comments of admiration regarding the Natives and their ways of life, a characteristic that is consistent with many other male captivity narratives during this time period. In fact, Wells eventually embraced his Miami family and decided to stay with them for most of his life. However, the four former narratives also reveal senses of white superiority that are communicated through occasional comments of disgust or anger towards the Natives and their culture, clear traits of the Heroic Mode archetype.

Male vs. Female Captivity Experience

In most captivity narratives from the Old Northwest Territory, both genders appear to have been treated almost equally by their Native captor groups: they each faced threats of death, shared sentiments of white moral superiority, were shown kindness and care at times, and were forced to take on similar roles within the community. However, as mentioned above, males were more likely to be tortured and killed than women were at any point in their captivity. Religious and ethnic factors were also reasons for captives to be physically harmed, but gender was the greatest determinant, with the worst accounts of such punishment taking place during times of war.⁵⁸ On the other hand, although women did endure beatings and were less likely to be killed, they also tended to confront greater emotional distress because of the vulnerabilities that were associated with their gender. The separation from their families, the question of physical strength and defense, the worry of assault or forced marriage to Indians, and other fearful concerns were

58. Namias, "White Men Held Captive," 50-51.

central to their general narrative.⁵⁹ Male accounts do not express the same worries that female accounts do, but they still experienced dynamic feelings of fear and dread.

The Development of Relationship/Perspectives Through the Captivity Experience

For a majority of the captivity narratives under consideration, presented within them are instances of reflection in which captives examine their feelings and understanding of the strangers they are held by. These usually occur when they are shown compassion and often consist of words of admiration and curiosity, though this does not mean that they were necessarily accepting of what the Natives did or represented. In perhaps one of the more assertive defenses of the Native American people in a captivity narrative, Oliver Spencer criticized past scholars who claimed that Natives were inherently superior to whites, saying,

“Attempts have been made by several writers to disparage both the mental and physical qualities of the aborigines of America... Others have spoken lightly of the genius and power of speech observed among American Indians. This objection...is based on mistaken notion.”⁶⁰

He defended their ability to build strong connections, to communicate, and their manners, even going as far as to say that “The native politeness of a sensible Indian is, without doubt, superior to the specimens of European behaviour usually exhibited in the middling classes.”⁶¹ However, his praise was short-lived. In the same breath, Spencer condemned their “deplorable and

59. Namias, 80-81.

60. Spencer, *Narrative of Oliver M. Spencer*, 132-133.

61. Spencer, 135.

wretched” moral condition and noted that their way of life would forever remain unchanged and unenlightened despite attempts by others (missionaries in particular) to guide them down a more “civilized” path.⁶² William Biggs shared the same ambivalent opinions of his Kickapoo family, at one point finding himself to be “comfortable” while spending time with them, though he later criticized their primitive and unsanitary way of living.⁶³ Thomas Ridout was more accommodating in his praise, as he called the Shawnee Indian who owned him his “friend” who “never once forfeited the appellation.”⁶⁴ In fact, he described his time among the Shawnee in an enjoyable and optimistic light, surprising himself during moments when he realized how he could be so calm in such a situation.⁶⁵

Unexpected forms of attachment could also develop between captors and captives, even when the captives knew how severe and dangerous their predicaments really were. Nevertheless, these intimate connections often allowed captives to experience—and perhaps appreciate—the Natives’ values of relationships within these communities. When Spencer and Cooh-coo-cheeh learned that his parents had paid his ransom for his return, she became visibly pained at the news and was greatly dismayed at the thought of losing him. Despite her grief, she wished him and his family a life of health and happiness and asked him to come visit her when he turned older. Although Spencer was eager to leave, he could not help but also feel saddened at not only his departure from the Glaize but also from a group of people that looked after him for eight

62. Spencer, 139-140.

63. Biggs, *Narrative of the Captivity of William Biggs*, 34.

64. Ridout, “An Account of My Capture by the Shawanese Indians,” 13.

65. Ridout, 18.

months.⁶⁶ Ridout's Shawnee captors reacted in a similar fashion to the news of his ransom, refusing to speak or look at him for some time. However, eleven years after his release, Ridout and his family were paid a visit by his former captor Kakinathucca as well as three other Shawnee chiefs. He observed that Kakinathucca "regarded myself and family with peculiar pleasure, and my wife and children contemplated with great satisfaction the noble and good qualities of this worthy Indian."⁶⁷ Through these kinds of attachments, bonds of mutual respect were formed that led to new perspectives of how each side viewed the other and understandings of different ways of life.

Not all narratives describe amicable interactions like the ones above. Several captives' relationships with the Natives remained hostile throughout their imprisonment and well past their release. Jennie Wiley managed to flee her Cherokee captors after she had envisioned her escape route in a dream, running through the woods and wading through streams for more than half a day. She eventually arrived at a blockhouse where she met with help from an old family friend. Just as she was about to enter through the gates, the Cherokee chief called out to her and "insisted that she had not treated him as she should have done, and closed his appeal with the words, 'honor, Jennie, honor!'" He soon realized that he had lost her for good, and "with a defiant gesture," disappeared into the woods.⁶⁸ John Leith also experienced tense relations between him and the Indian nations, particularly the Wyandot and Delaware. Despite being initially released from captivity after a few weeks, Leith remained close by his captor community for over sixteen years. However, with the increase in violent conflicts between the Indian nations

66. Spencer, *Narrative of Oliver M. Spencer*, 226-227.

67. Ridout, "An Account of My Capture by the Shawanese Indians," 30-31.

68. Connelley, *The Founding of Harman's Station...*, 75.

of the Old Northwest and the U.S. government in the 1780s and 90s, he was met with several more instances of danger by the Natives before he decided to move him and his family to Pennsylvania. His reflection of his “savage life” in his narrative is one of disbelief and disgust as he recounts the horrors he witnessed during his time among them.⁶⁹

A certain group of captivity narratives share the stories of white captives who were raised and/or chose to assimilate into the Native way of life. But considering their obvious differences in physical appearance, ancestry, and upbringings, why did these captives decide to stay with their captors? As Namias states, age was perhaps the largest factor. For both males and females, age usually determined their degree of adaption: the younger the age, the more likely they were to remain with their adopted family.⁷⁰ Frances Slocum was only five years old when she was abducted by the Delaware. Based on her own recollection during that initial period, she remembered that although she did not understand what was happening, she felt safe and comfortable with her captors.⁷¹ Billy Wells was taken when he was thirteen, but within a few years embraced the Miami culture, even participating in his own Vision Quest, a rite of passage into adulthood that required him to fast without food or water for several days. He was given the name “Blacksnake” and was well regarded in his community.⁷² If captives were older, a difference in cultures and a newfound preference for the Indian way of life was the reason many decided to stay. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier note that these transculturized captives came

69. Leith, *Leith's Narrative*, 72.

70. Namias, “White Men Held Captive,” 80.

71. Phelps, *Frances Slocum: The Lost Sister of Wyoming*, 96.

72. Heath, “Becoming Miami,” 60-61.

to appreciate the values that Native Americans held, such as kindness, generosity, a greater sense of freedom, and their emphasis on the care of the more vulnerable members of the group.⁷³ These captives knew that they could not expect to find the same treatment within white society and opted to stay with their adopted families. When Frances Slocum was given the choice to return home with her siblings, she made clear her desire to remain with her Miami family, saying,

“I have always lived with the Indians; they have always used me very kindly; I am used to them. The Great Spirit has allowed me to live with them, and I wish to live and die with them...this is my home. I do not want to live any better, or anywhere else, and I think the Great Spirit has permitted me to live so long because I have always lived with the Indians. I should have died sooner if I left them... I have a house and large lands, two daughters, a son-in-law, three grandchildren, and everything to make me comfortable. Why should I go, and be like a fish out of water?”⁷⁴

Frances’s story of white female assimilation represents the contrast of how Native social orders operated when compared to Anglo-American social orders: the former valued relational responsibilities to one another, while the latter was structured by racial stratification.⁷⁵ For example, if female captives returned to white society, they were deemed unclean and no longer pure, left to be treated as outcasts. For most men, however, this was not the case—they could easily reenter their former worlds and be considered unchanged, perhaps even brave and heroic for surviving their horrid ordeals.⁷⁶ Although Annette Kolodny emphasizes the effects of gender in this situation, she also addresses how racial differences and affiliations were also determinants of how a person was treated in white society. Most Native communities do not operate under

73. Derounian-Stodola and Levernier, *The Indian Captivity Narrative*, 76-79.

74. Phelps, *Frances Slocum: The Lost Sister of Wyoming*, 63.

75. Falzetti, “Frances Slocum and Miami Dispossession,” 45.

76. Kolodny, “The Uses of Captivity,” 194.

these ideas, instead valuing each member's contribution and relationships with others over their origins and physical attributes.

As a result of their experiences, captives inevitably developed new perspectives not only on Native Americans, but on themselves as individuals being immersed in an alien culture. Both men and women had to reassess the roles that they thought were the norm, given to them by God and nature. Their preconceptions of gender, sexuality, family, religion, and other aspects of life were challenged by their first-hand observations in Native communities. They were forced to see the world through a new and vastly different point of view, taking on new roles and responsibilities that they no doubt saw as inferior. It tested their notions of humanity and what it meant to be a white individual living among Indians.⁷⁷

Conclusion

For the past several decades, Indian captivity narratives originating from the Old Northwest Territory have been simply regarded as literary works that shared common yet unique features of writing, themes, and experiences. Little attention has been given to the more practical aspects of these stories and how they represent Native American history. These descriptions of Natives' beliefs, customs, and habits and their interactions with white settlers allow readers potentially valuable glimpses into what is often mythologized through fictitious stories, propaganda, and accounts. Through a more ethnological approach, analysis of what captives experienced during their captivity can reveal even more information on Native culture, settler ideologies, and the general climate along the western frontier between the eighteenth and

77. Namias, "White Men Held Captive," 79-80.

nineteenth centuries. With a specific focus on gender, a better understanding of how and why captives were treated the way they were can also be observed. Further study and investigation utilizing these methods can expand the scope of research of the Indian captivity narrative in general and provide more insight into the discipline of Native American studies.

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