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# Suburban Captivity Narratives: Feminism, Domesticity, and the Liberation of the American Housewife

*Megan Behrent*

On February 4, 1974, the heiress Patricia Hearst—granddaughter of the media mogul William Randolph Hearst—was kidnapped from her home in Berkeley, California.<sup>1</sup> In reporting the story, the media reproduced a trope even older than the U.S. itself: a captivity narrative. To do so, they conjured an image of racially other captors defiling a white woman's body. *The New York Times* describes Hearst being carried off “half naked” by “two black men” (W. Turner), despite the fact that only one of the abductors was African-American. From the earliest recounting of the story, Hearst was sexualized and her captors racialized. The abduction was portrayed as an intrusion into the domestic space, with Hearst's fiancé brutalized as she was removed from their home. The most widely used image of Hearst was one of idyllic bourgeois domesticity, cropped from the announcement of her engagement in the media—which, ironically, provided her would-be captors with the address to the couple's Berkeley home. As it turned out, Hearst's captors, members of a group known as the Symbionese Liberation Army, were almost all white, middle-class youth—with the exception of Donald DeFreeze (who went by Cinque in tribute to the leader of the Amistad rebellion), an African-American man who, after escaping from prison, sought refuge with the white radicals of the SLA whom he had met while incarcerated. DeFreeze's prominent role in the SLA provided a link to Black nationalist militancy, aiding in the construc-

tion of the group as other. Nonetheless, that Hearst's abduction was carried out by a group of mostly white, middle-class radicals was all the more threatening, enacting growing fears about the permeability of the suburban American ideal and the danger of a growing radical and interracial movement that seemed poised to destroy it. The heavy symbolism deployed by the SLA took everything that middle-class, white culture feared most in the 1970s and wrapped it up in one countercultural ball of middle-class revolutionary politics. Each member had a party name—including De-Freeze who called himself Cinque Mtume, the first name a tribute to the leader of the Amistad slave rebellion while Mtume comes from the Swahili word for prophet—and a rank of General Field Marshal of the United Federated Forces of the Symbionese Liberation Army. The name of the group referred to the symbiosis between struggles of all oppressed peoples, a point emphasized by their ransom demand that Randolph Hearst (Patty Hearst's father) distribute food to the poor in Oakland. Fears stoked by Hearst's abduction grew all the more palpable on April 3, 1974, when Patty Hearst announced that she was no longer being held against her will, but had joined the SLA. She changed her name to Tania, after the *nom de guerre* of Che Guavara's comrade, and declared, "I have chosen to stay and fight" (Caldwell). From this moment on, Patty Hearst/Tania became the ultimate symbol of the countercultural wars and the anxieties they produced in 1970s America. The lesson was clear: if it could happen to Patty, it could happen to anyone.

Indeed, it *was* happening to everyone in 1974, or at least to young white women, who had been raised to aspire to postwar constructions of domestic femininity that Betty Friedan dubbed the feminine mystique, and who were suddenly escaping the rigid confines of its white picket fence. Controversial critic of feminism Caitlin Flanagan<sup>2</sup> describes the resonance of Hearst's case as follows:

The thing you have to understand about Patty Hearst, the reason that her fantastically sui generis story resonated so deeply within so many millions of ordinary American households, is that back then a lot of girls like her were disappearing. . . .

All of the mothers of all the missing daughters said the same thing back then, with the same mixture of loathing,

despair, and impotent anger. What had happened to turn that lovely daughter against you? “The culture.” (“Girl, Interrupted”)

Like the stories of ordinary American daughters disappearing from ordinary homes, Patty Hearst’s was disturbing precisely because of the apparent ordinariness of her femininity prior to captivity and conversion even as her family’s extraordinary wealth and influence made her conversion to radical guerilla warrior all the more shocking, and therefore threatening. In media reports of the period, her conformity to normative femininity is reiterated *ad nauseam*. The reporter Lacey Fosburgh notes that prior to captivity, Hearst “selected chinaware and silver patterns” and “look[ed] forward to living a peaceful existence in which she would pot plants, grow vegetables, get married, have children, buy antiques and be happy.” Hearst’s friends, when interviewed, said that the Patty they knew would be “totally bored” by the SLA, as she “intensely disliked rhetoric and stridency, especially in women,” and was decidedly “apolitical.” As Fosburgh concludes, “the most concrete thing about Patty Hearst” is the absence of “angst and alienation that has marled so many people today.” That Patty could become Tania was unthinkable—and yet, her story resonated nationally precisely because it tapped into the broader phenomenon of women who, it seemed, were *willingly* rejecting suburban homes and marriages to join the movement.<sup>3</sup>

In this article, I explore the emergence of a genre of fiction that depicts the awakening of these suburban wives and daughters, a genre that I call suburban captivity narratives. Suburban captivity narratives developed out of second-wave feminism, enacting in literary form the consciousness-raising groups that were central to the development of a feminist consciousness in this period. I argue that these texts draw on tropes of captivity and subvert them, redefining the captivity and savagery threatening women’s lives not as external threats to the domestic space but as emanating from the domestic sphere itself. Nancy Armstrong argues that the ideological project of the captivity narrative had an immense influence on the development of both the American and English domestic novel, noting that the “imagined community” created by these narratives is “the basis at once for a new concept of nationality and for a new ruling class” (376).<sup>4</sup> In addition to Armstrong’s work on captivity narratives, there is a large body of

critical work from scholars such as Rebecca Blevins-Faery, Christopher Castiglia, Cathy Rex, Gordon Sayre, and Susan Scheckel that attests to the foundational role of captivity narratives in the development of the imagined community of American national identity. Captivity narratives have become a crucial part of the American political unconscious and, as such, have created lasting tropes of national identity, of hostile and un-American forces (whether domestic or international) that threaten to subsume it. Central to the symbolic legacy of captivity narratives is the glorification of domesticity. This legacy, revised in the 1950s to create the suburban domestic ideal of *Ozzie and Harriet*,<sup>5</sup> inevitably came into conflict with the emergence of a women's liberation movement, a movement depicted—as in the case of Patty Hearst—as a hostile force threatening American femininity and domesticity.

Drawing on the work of the theorists cited above, I analyze the first-person fictions of Dorothy Bryant and Marilyn French, which emerged like that of other feminist writers, such as Sue Kaufman, Alix Kates Shulman, Marge Piercy, and Lisa Alther, alongside the consciousness-raising circles of the Women's Liberation Movement in the 1970s, to describe how narratives of the American housewife's political awakening revise early American captivity narratives and chart the protagonist's progress from captivity within the oppressive grip of domesticity to a new consciousness and some level of personal (albeit limited) liberation. As foundational myths of American identity, captivity narratives—usually first-person accounts by colonial settlers describing the experience of being held captive by Native Americans—employed female bodies and sexuality in the service of political and territorial domination and cultural hegemony. As foundational texts of the Women's Liberation Movement, the housewife fiction of the 1970s subverts the formal conventions established by the captivity genre and reclaims female bodies and sexuality. In so doing, it articulates the suppressed feminist consciousness that had been held captive by ideals of 1950s domesticity to forge a new feminist identity. In the first part of this article, I examine the legacy of early American captivity narratives to provide a framework for understanding their role in the development of what Benedict Anderson calls "print-capitalism" (36) and an imagined national community in the United States. In particular, I focus on *A Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, a foundational work of its genre. I will follow this with an examina-

tion of what I call suburban captivity narratives, an important genre within print-feminism, which played a central role in the creation of a feminist community. Through a reading of Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal*, I examine how these narratives employ tropes of captivity and subvert them by reworking or rejecting some of the conventions of the genre. Whereas Rowlandson's narrative traces her journey from captivity to liberation in colonial Massachusetts, Bryant's novel follows Ella's development from captivity within the domestic sphere to her emergence as a literate, writerly, and feminist subject. The identities established in these texts participate in the creation of their respective imagined communities. In both temporal settings, I also examine texts that complicate the norms of the captivity genre, particularly the reincorporation of the protagonists into the society from which they were removed. Thus, I examine *The Life of Mary Jemison*, published over one hundred and fifty years after Rowlandson's narrative, and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room*, written as the Women's Liberation Movement began to decline, to show how both texts express far more anxiety about the stability of that imagined community which the earlier narratives were invested in creating. I conclude by arguing that in both suburban and colonial versions of the captivity narrative, the act of writing is a crucial means by which the narrative is endowed with meaning, becoming a political allegory with national implications.

### **The Birth of a National Genre:**

#### **The Captivity and Restoration of Mary Rowlandson**

The genre of the captivity narrative plays a particularly important role in the history of print-capitalism and the development of nationalism in the United States.<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that Mary Rowlandson's narrative was printed on the Harvard Press, which was the "first piece of equipment in a publishing operation that was to print English America's first book" ("Harvard's First Impressions"), and was arguably the nation's first bestseller. Benedict Anderson argues that "print-capitalism"(36) is central to the creation of the idea of the nation as "an imagined political community" in which "regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation . . . the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (6-7). Early American captivity narratives played an important ideological role in constructing such an imagined national community and reflected the contradictions

of a nation founded on principles of freedom and equality, while relying on slavery and genocide. Ironically, what Annette Kolodny calls “the single narrative form indigenous to the New World” (qtd. in Sayre 4) is founded on the denial and suppression of indigenous civilizations. Citing Ernest Renan, Anderson notes that this imagined national comradeship required that “everyone forgets many things” (my trans.; 6). Crucial to the ideological function of the captivity narrative is the portrayal of colonizers as victims, enacting a collective act of forgetting and rewriting the history of colonial displacement and genocidal violence which would wipe out 90 to 95 percent of the native population by the end of the nineteenth century. Within this tradition, Rowlandson’s narrative plays the pivotal role of “initiat[ing] what would become a persistent trope in articulations of racial difference in the United States: white women, their bodies and their sexuality, positioned as guardians of the boundaries of race to serve the territorial and political purposes of white men and their claim to dominance” (Faery 10).<sup>7</sup> Thus, captivity narratives are “a crucial vehicle for Anglo-Americans to become white, as well as for the construction of a ‘dark’ . . . ‘other’ whom whites had to displace, discipline, and control in order to achieve their colonial aims” (12). In the captivity narrative, America is a country under siege; there is always a ‘they’ somewhere who ‘hates our freedoms,’ no matter how much those denied ‘freedom’—from Native Americans, to slaves, and tear-gassed protestors against police brutality in Ferguson—might disagree.<sup>8</sup>

Published in New England in 1682, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together, with the Faithfulness of his Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* was an immediate popular success, with twenty-three editions published by 1828. Considered a “classic of the captivity genre,” the narrative structure and literary conventions employed in the narrative would provide the model for subsequent captivity narratives (Sayre 127). Rowlandson (like subsequent authors of captivity narratives) employs a three-part structure: the narrative begins with an act of separation from the familiar (and domestic) world. She specifies the date and time of attack, thrusting the reader into the midst of action, as she depicts the process by which she is ripped from Puritan domesticity. Then, the captive enters a liminal stage in which she lives among the captors and adapts to their customs, while never fully belonging. Ethnographies were central to this part of the captivity

narrative, providing a window into the world of the 'Indian.' While captivity narratives distance and dehumanize Native Americans, portraying them as "hostile, foreign peoples" (Sayre 11), they also provide the closest glimpse and most intimate view of Native American life. Lastly comes the reincorporation or restoration, as the captive returns to her familiar world, albeit changed by her experience of captivity (Scheckel 79). Crucial to reincorporation is the writing of the narrative itself.

Victor Turner's understanding of liminality is useful in examining the cultural function of captivity narratives. Turner argues that "all rites of transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and aggregation" ("Betwixt" 47). The liminal period is an essential period for rites of transition, allowing a neophyte to reflect on and critique his or her society before rejoining and assuming status within it (53). The liminal period is characterized by the absence of status and social structures, as well as androgyny and sexlessness (49). Within captivity narratives, this stage represents the bulk of the narrative as the narrator-neophyte is separated from all familiar social structures, while remaining marginal to her new world.<sup>9</sup> For Puritan captives, this space, while neither androgynous nor sexless, is characterized by a removal from the rigidly gendered Puritan social structures, thus providing an impetus for reflection and experimentation, which is both freeing and threatening. In a sense, captivity narratives themselves represent an attempt to establish order and structure during a liminal stage in the development of the American nation and national identity—a moment in which old structures had been challenged or left behind, but new political structures, a new social order, and a new nation were still in formation.

Rowlandson's initial capture is described in her narrative as a rupture in the domestic sphere as the author and her family are literally ripped from their home and either killed or transported to the wilderness. The house, depicted as a fortress, protecting the domestic sphere from a wilderness that threatens to destabilize Puritan ideals of womanhood, is destroyed. Rowlandson portrays the Indian attack as an assault on maternity, recalling "infidels haling mothers one way, and children another." She describes her sister's death as a maternal sacrifice: her sister vows to die with her son William after hearing of his demise, and is subsequently shot on the threshold of their home (Rowlandson 138). Rowlandson's own maternity is attacked as her child, Sarah, is fatally wounded in her arms.



The bullet that kills the child also wounds the mother, ripping through her side, as she is symbolically severed from the home and her children. While Rowlandson believes her sister's maternal sacrifice will be rewarded in heaven, she herself chooses to live and is captured, taken "several removes . . . up and down the wilderness" (139).

Rowlandson describes her "first remove" into the wilderness as above all a separation from the domestic sphere, as she desperately clings to her dying child, the last vestige of her maternal identity (140). As Rowlandson is physically transported further from her home, she is also metaphorically separated from her gendered role as wife and mother in Puritan society. By the third remove, her role as guardian of the domestic sphere has been entirely stripped from her: she is no longer mistress of the house but servant or slave to another mistress, subjected to a new master, Quinnapin, and robbed of her maternal role by the death of one child and her separation from her other children in captivity. A new identity is thrust upon Rowlandson when "one of the Indians" offers her a Bible thought to have been plundered during a fight in Medfield. Rowlandson interprets this gift as sent by God (144). This narrative move provides a textual tool to mark her continued allegiance to Puritan morality despite her growing separation from its physical and moral landscape. Henceforth, she clings to the Bible to maintain her Puritan identity while also giving new meaning to her narrative, portraying both her capture and survival as divine intervention, meant to chasten her and preserve her virtue in the midst of a wilderness that she experiences as constantly threatening her morality.

Nonetheless, liminality poses challenges to her identity as a gendered subject. To survive, she enters into an economy of exchange that threatens Puritan notions of gendered separate spheres. Using her training in domestic duties, she creates commodities such as shirts, caps, and stockings for exchange with Indians (150). As some critics have noted, these moments provide her with a sense of freedom from the oppressive gendered power structures of Puritan society (Castiglio 41–86). There are textual gaps that suggest that the boundaries she seeks to maintain are far more permeable than she would care to admit. In particular, the repeated references to hunger and food provide some insight into the limitations of her faith in maintaining her Puritan identity. Rowlandson at first rejects the food offered to her as "filthy trash" (147). Later, when she describes herself devouring the flesh of deer and bear in a sensuous manner, her narration de-

parts from the ascetic Puritan identity to which she clings. These depictions also suggest an attack on the maternal role itself. She eats meat taken from a “deer, with a young one in her,” noting “they gave me a piece of the fawn, and it was so young and tender, that one might eat the bones as well as the flesh, and yet I thought it was very good” (159). Later, after eating the “boil[ed] horse’s feet” offered to her, Rowlandson sees a child struggling to eat a piece of tough meat and “took it of the child” to eat herself, declaring “savory it was to my taste” (162). In these scenes, Rowlandson abandons her maternal role completely, symbolically eating a pregnant deer’s young and literally taking food from a hungry child. These scenes point to a destabilization of her femininity once she is removed from the domestic sphere, and they trouble the narrative’s insistence on her maintenance of an impermeable Puritan identity.

At the end of the narrative, however, gender roles are re-stabilized by Rowlandson’s return to a home, her husband and her children. Nonetheless, the return is not easy. Her house has been destroyed and she returns to an unfamiliar domestic space, and, as several critics have noted, to questions about her piety, which her narrative and the preface by Increase Mather seek to quell (Sayre 13). Ultimately, it is not so much the return ‘home,’ but the creation of her narrative itself that allows her to reconstruct her Puritan identity, asserting her own Englishness and spirituality. In doing so, she reframes the liminal space of captivity as something to be survived and repudiated to maintain her inclusion in Puritan civilization. She reinterprets her captivity as an ordeal to strengthen her spiritual resolve and her adherence to the tenets of Puritan morality. Thus, her narrative becomes a foundational myth, which seeks to create a new national, racial, and spiritual identity premised on the rejection, domination, and ultimate destruction of the imagined wilderness and its inhabitants.

Not all captivity narratives provide this type of closure. One notable exception is *The Life of Mary Jemison*. Published in 1824, and an immediate bestseller, Mary Jemison’s story, as told to (and written by) retired physician James E. Seaver, begins with her childhood, when she is taken captive with her family. The rest of her family is killed, but she is adopted by the Seneca. She is married twice to Seneca men, and has several children by them. Despite her immersion in Seneca culture, she names her children after family members from her Puritan past and continues to pray, holding on to some formal aspects of the religion of her youth, even as she

forgets others, adopting instead the spiritual beliefs of the Seneca. She remains neutral during the American Revolution, and by the time she narrates her life story to Seaver, she has been removed from both Seneca and Puritan societies, living on the border between the two, a frontier land of sorts. Her Seneca name, "The Sound of Two Voices Falling," highlights her duality. Scheckel notes that Jemison, despite attempts to sanitize her narrative for Puritan consumption, is able to forge an identity that resists categorization.

Jemison's narrative is best understood as a contested text that is unable to perform the role of earlier captivity narratives in constructing an imagined national community. Jemison's voice is mediated by Seaver's authorship and her narrative bookended by his introduction and an appendix, in which Seaver includes history gleaned from other sources that he notes Jemison was hesitant to discuss. The battle between Seaver and Jemison for textual control throughout the narrative is a reminder of the instability of the myth of "deep, horizontal comradeship" upon which nationalism is based. Seaver emphasizes Jemison's whiteness throughout the text, and by foregrounding her domesticity and role as a mother draws attention to her cultural adherence to Puritan society even amidst the Seneca social order. Scheckel thus argues that difference is "familiarized" within the text even as Jemison's narrative "undermines the nationalistic project" (74). Noting that Jemison herself left her position on the border to join a reservation in 1831 when the encroachment of white settlers compelled the Senecas to sell their land, Scheckel reads the text as enacting the Indian removal policy, "representing the transformation of Indians from members of independent social orders to disempowered, liminal figures in American society" (96). In this historic moment, the Puritan national identity embodied by Rowlandson can no longer be conceived of as embattled and under siege, since the imagined national community her narrative helped forge has become an oppressive colonial settler state, one in which women's subordination in the domestic space has been reified. As a result, the sense of unitary identity that emerges from Rowlandson's text has splintered and been replaced by anxiety in Jemison's.

Jemison remains in a liminal state as the narrative elides the reincorporation into Puritan society that was crucial to earlier texts, even as the vision of Jemison at home recalls more conventional endings of earlier captivity narratives. Her eventual removal to the reservation is foreshadowed

but not enacted, hovering over the text but eluding finality, thus allowing the reader to imagine alternate narrative possibilities despite the extra-textual reality, which denies them. In this sense, she prefigures the uneasy position of the heroines of 1970s feminist housewife fiction, for whom reincorporation into a 1950s suburban domesticity is impossible, but for whom liberation is equally unattainable. Fittingly, then, Jemison's narrative concludes with her living on the border, "in the midst of my children," where she "expect[s] [she] . . . shall soon leave the world, and make room for the rising generation" (Seaver, Chapter XVI). A century and a half later, women writers of a new rising generation dusted off the narratives of earlier women writers and profoundly transformed and subverted the literary conventions that had held them captive.

### **Suburban Captivity Narratives: The Captivity and Liberation of Ella Price**

As Patty Hearst's case exemplifies, captivity was everywhere in the 1970s. In examining Hearst's narrative (as well as the popularity of *The Exorcist*), Castiglia argues that the rhetoric of captivity "provided a useful metaphor for the struggles of the mid-1970s over oil, power, and gender" (88). The period saw a "surge of scholarly interest in the captivity narrative genre" (Sayre 16), driven in large part by growing interest in gender and women's studies post-1970s. Feminism's influence in the academy—most notable in the growth of women's studies programs—inspired scholars to recover forgotten or marginalized women writers, rekindling interest in early American captivity narratives. While there is no causal relationship between the captivity narrative genre and the housewife fiction of the 1970s, these tropes saturated American culture. The inaugural issue of *Chrysalis*, a feminist literary journal, prominently featured an article about Patricia Hearst (Kathleen Barry's "'Did I Ever Have a Chance?': Patriarchal Judgment of Patricia Hearst"), while the first issue of another feminist journal, *Maenad*, published a few years later, included an article on Mary Rowlandson's narrative (Della Smith's "Mary Rowlandson's Narrative: A Puritan Best-seller"). A key feature of captivity narratives, identified by Nancy Armstrong as typical of sentimental fiction, is likewise central to the feminist fiction of the 1970s: "a lone heroine whose self-definition and cultural value are under assault. . . . who manages to hang onto her value and

identity by transcribing personal experiences under extreme circumstances” (N. Armstrong 373). With the emergence of the WLM, and inspired in part by Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* and other texts that challenged the image of the happy housewife, a new genre of “housewife” fiction arose. Beginning with Sue Kaufman’s *Diary of a Mad Housewife* (1967) and Alix Kates Shulman’s *Memoirs of an Ex-Prom Queen* (1969), this new genre inspired a rapid succession of works, including Marge Piercy’s *Small Changes* (1972), Dorothy Bryant’s *Ella Price’s Journal* (1972), and Lisa Alther’s *Kinflicks* (1973), among others. The “lone heroine” that would emerge from 1970s feminist housewife fiction echoes the collective political unconscious of captivity narratives.

Feminism itself was frequently depicted as a hostile force, a band of bra-burning savages refusing to shave, holding women captive in Rap groups or CR (Consciousness-Raising) sessions and brainwashing them into Lesbianism. The media depicted Feminism as a political movement that was un-American (and anti-Miss America). Patty Hearst became the ultimate emblem of the dangers of the radical edges of the New Left, as she was torn from a ruling-class domestic ideal, held captive, and ultimately converted. More broadly, feminists, hippies, radicals, and leftists were often portrayed in mainstream media as removed from or opposed to all domestic norms—a threat to the suburban fabric of American society. In the late 1960s and 70s, the language of captivity emerges frequently in mass media and literary texts, to evoke a whole generation gone awry: the generation who was supposed to rally to the defense of American capitalism against the communist threat of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF), and instead turned their guns on their commanding officers and the nationalist rhetoric that justified the war, expressing solidarity with the NLF.<sup>10</sup> As the cultural work of early captivity narratives broke down amidst this mass anti-war movement and soldiers’ rebellion that drove a broader radicalization, key tropes of these early narratives were remobilized to depict the New Left as a force hostile to American identity, and—as given dramatic expression by the kidnapping of Patty Hearst—to American femininity, along with the upper-class ideology of bourgeois domesticity Hearst was made to represent. The ubiquitous presence of Freudian pseudo-psychiatrists in feminist housewife fiction is a testament to the ideological heavy-handedness with which unhappy housewives were herded back into suburban domesticity and away from the influence of a

hostile other that threatened to undermine it. It is worth noting that in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*, Esther is associated with "the Indian" after fighting back against the would-be rapist, Marco. She draws "diagonal lines of dried blood" on her cheeks from her battle with Marco and sees herself as a "sick Indian" (Plath 112). The fact that she fights back in response to an assault on her body places her firmly in the Indian camp—at odds with the ideal of femininity of the glossy magazine world of New York City.

Both the news media and feminists mobilized the tropes of captivity narratives in the 1960s and 70s, if for opposite purposes: either to depict feminism as a hostile force encroaching on the suburban ideal of 1950s domesticity, or to reframe that suburban ideal as a force hostile to the full development of women's potential. *Time* (1970) ominously declared:

These are the times that try men's souls, and they are likely to get much worse before they get better. . . . Now the din is in earnest, echoing from the streets where pickets gather, the bars where women once were barred, and even connubial beds, where ideology can intrude at the unconscious drop of a male chauvinist epithet. ("Who's Come a Long Way, Baby?")

The movement's encroachment on the previously off-limits private space of the bedroom was indeed one of its greatest threats. Similar to depictions of Native-American attacks on Puritan homes, feminism was portrayed as dangerous because it invaded the bedroom, challenging the domestic space and by extension the political foundations of the home, the patriarchal family, and women's subjugation within it. While *Time's* commentary on the Women's Liberation Movement (WLM) was hardly representative of media depictions of the movement as a whole,<sup>11</sup> it testifies to the sensationalized fears elicited by challenges to women's oppression within the domestic realm. It serves as an apt expression of what Susan Faludi calls the "terror dream" of the captivity narrative, invoked to counter radical feminists who challenged domesticity, such as Shulamith Firestone, who argued, "a revolutionary in every bedroom cannot fail to shake up the status quo" (36). Firestone continues this reasoning with the comment, "And if it's your wife who is revolting, you can't just split to the suburbs"(36),

underscoring the growth of the suburbs as a reactionary response to urban rebellions while also emphasizing the threat that feminism posed to that suburban ideal. While Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* was the most notable critique of the suburban domestic ideal espoused by liberal feminism, the radical feminist movement also targeted ideals of domesticity. Thus, Deborah Siegel notes that WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell) "launched its national attack on domesticity" in 1969 by "storm[ing] a Madison Square Garden bridal fair" chanting "Always a Bride, Never a Person!"(2). Meanwhile, some socialist feminists campaigned around the international "Wages for Housework" campaign (Vogel et al.). 1970 also saw a sit-in of several hundred women at the *Ladies Home Journal* whose demands included the publication of a housewives' bill of rights (Douglas and Michaels 38). In a testament to the popular appeal of such struggles, Shulman's "A Marriage Agreement," which promoted a formal contract to ensure equal participation in domestic work, earned widespread fame (Coontz, *Marriage, a History* 255). Though such challenges to domesticity were widespread, they nonetheless reflected race and class divisions within the women's movement (see Coontz, *A Strange Stirring*; Davis)

In response, women writers, particularly those who contributed to the growing genre of feminist housewife fiction, sought to defamiliarize the domestic space, redefining the nature of the captivity and savagery that threatened women's femininity and lives. As early as 1953, Shirley Jackson ironically evoked the language of the captivity narrative in her novel *Life among the Savages*, a fictionalized memoir about her home and family. The title defamiliarizes the domestic and underscores the absurdity of the suburban ideal, thus subverting—however mildly—the ubiquitous narrative of the smiling housewife. The "housewife" fiction that would emerge from the WLM of the 1960s and 70s created a new genre emblematic of the broader development of print-feminism. Early feminist presses emerged out of informal networks of printer-publishers, who produced small print runs of texts on mimeograph machines, letterpresses, and off-set printers. Their founders, like many radicals before them, funded their publishing houses by operating as print shops, i.e. establishments where newspapers, books, and other materials were printed for paying customers. The year 1972 alone saw the creation of Diana Press, Aunt Lute Book Company (which began as Iowa City Women's Press), and Daughter's, Inc.

(Short). Like Friedan, feminist writers of the early seventies avidly exposed the “problem with no name” and tore apart the glossy, idealized, and entirely fictional image of the smiling 1950s housewife. These feminist authors, writing in the form of first-person fictional narratives, charted women’s progress from what Friedan had dubbed, in 1963, the “feminine mystique” into a new feminist consciousness. The politics of the family, housework, and childcare were issues of utmost political importance for second-wave feminists who sought to liberate women from the confinements of the domestic realm. As Nancy Armstrong argues, “during the 1970s, feminism succeeded in redefining the comfortable one-family home of the 1950s as home imprisonment” (392). In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan goes so far as to refer to these suburban homes as a “comfortable concentration camp,” mitigating this claim by saying, the “suburban house is not a German concentration camp, nor are American housewives on their way to the gas chamber,” before concluding, “But they are in a trap” (298).

The ideological force of the suburban domesticity ideal was crucial to 1950s American cultural hegemony. It was spurred by the massive expansion of suburban living during the 1950s when, as Ruth Rosen explain, “the suburban population doubled in one decade from thirty-six million to seventy-two million people. By the end of the fifties, one-fourth of all Americans had found a small, sunny oasis of open space in the suburbs” (9). The growth of suburbia contributed to growing racial segregation, while also creating greater distance between suburban families and single urban populations (Rosen 12; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* 76–91). The famous 1959 Krushchev-Nixon “kitchen” debate attests to the international power of the suburban domestic ideal. Touring model American homes, Nixon pointed to labor-saving devices as a key to the American project of “mak[ing] easier the life of our housewives” (qtd. in Rosen 11), holding up the suburban housewife as the ultimate symbol of the triumph of American capitalism. As Rosen notes, “The belief that American superiority rested on its booming consumer culture and rigidly defined gender roles became strangely intertwined with Cold War politics” in this period (10). Faludi likewise argues for a “connection between nuclear insecurity and the securing of American domesticity” in the 1950s, noting that the Federal Civil Defense Administration “warned that the Cold War’s home-front ‘actually exists in our homes, right in our living rooms’” (*The Terror*



*Dream* 279). Like its Puritan antecedent, 1950s suburban domesticity was racially coded as white; so was the feminine mystique against which the writers of 1970s housewife fiction, invariably white and middle class themselves, rebelled.<sup>12</sup> While housewife fiction does not reflect the experience of the majority of women, the ideological construction of the ‘housewife,’ as Angela Davis argues, had implications for all women, by diminishing the value of domestic labor and women’s labor more generally (228-29). At the same time, it served to prop up a vision of the nuclear family as the solution to all social problems, allowing moments of political and social turmoil to be reinterpreted as a crisis in family values. Because the image of suburban domesticity is central to the national allegory of the United States, rebellion against it is a challenge to the cultural capital of American society.

Like captivity narratives before them, 1970s narratives depicting the political awakening of the housewife have remarkable structural similarities, intimating the construction of a new genre of modern captivity narratives. Much as print-capitalism was central to the development of nationalism, print-feminism was central to consciousness-raising and the creation of a new imagined feminist community for second-wave feminism. While feminist memoirs and autobiographical writing flourished, many feminist writers turned to fiction for greater flexibility in constructing these modern captivity narratives, and to give narrative expression to the voices of those not yet radicalized by the newly forged feminist consciousness.<sup>13</sup> The ‘I’ in these narratives remains central; it provides an aura of authenticity that helps to underline the narrative’s collective and political truth. As fictional protagonists, who are also characters representative of a broader feminist awakening, these narrators hover between the fictional voice of the novel and the ‘I’ of earlier captivity narratives, claiming a form of narrative authenticity based on personal experiences of oppression that transcend the fictional nature of the work. As literary expressions of the WLM, these narratives connect personal experience to the social movements and political radicalization of the period—creating what Adalaide Morris calls the “first person plural” (11).<sup>14</sup>

Most of these narratives share a basic plot structure: the female protagonist begins the narrative in a state of domesticity, but unconscious (or only vaguely conscious) of her own oppression within it. The narrative is structured around the protagonist’s gradual recognition of oppression as she is

introduced (whether forcibly or by choice) to the world of the radical left, or the WLM outside of the home. Like captivity narratives before them, these novels provide an ethnographic introduction to the other, here the radical milieu of the 1970s. The protagonist's experience in the radical milieu of 'the movement' transforms her consciousness, leading to some form of breakdown or fragmentation from which a new self is reconstructed or re-born. Frequently, this new self is the product of disillusionment with the radical left. Yet the 'return' of the female protagonist is not a return to the suburban domestic ideal, but to a new consciousness, marked, like that of earlier women writers in the captivity genre, by the act of writing.

Dorothy Bryant's *Ella Price's Journal* (1972) is a prime example of the awakening-housewife genre of feminist literature. Bryant struggled to find a publisher for many of her works, and experimented with self-publishing and feminist presses before ultimately creating her own small press. When *Ella Price's Journal* was issued by Lippincott, it initially had only a small print run. The novel achieved a much wider audience when the magazine *Redbook* printed a condensed version and received twenty times the usual reader response mail (Bryant, "My Publisher/Myself" 36) – a sign that the story had tapped into the frustrations of women who identified with Ella's plight. As a result, it was reissued by Signet as a mass-market paperback, which Bryant initially welcomed, thinking the novel would reach a wider audience of women readers. The Signet paperback edition, however, appeared with a cover featuring a woman in a negligée that obfuscated the content of the book and undermined sales (Bryant, "My Publisher/Myself" 36). Today, *Ella Price's Journal* is still in print, having been republished in 1997 by the Feminist Press, which was founded in 1970. Bryant's novel, which is emblematic of the genre as a whole, consciously (perhaps didactically) sets out to trace the broader radicalization of a generation of women through the personal story of its protagonist, a literary 'every-woman' (albeit a white, suburban one) whose story is anything but exceptional. The novel traces the political awakening of Ella Price, a working-class suburban wife and mother who enrolls in a community college while in her thirties. Bryant's novel uses consciousness-raising as a framing technique, as Ella Price is challenged to reexamine her personal life and identity through a journal required for her English class by Dan Harkan, the radical professor who becomes her political guide in the first part of the novel. A key audience for the book was women in re-entry programs in

community colleges, where it was assigned by professors eager to connect with the Ella Prices in their own classrooms. In 1977, for example, Bryant was invited to speak in New York City at a multi-campus re-entry program in which the novel was required reading (Bryant, "My Publisher/Myself" 38). In the novel, however, Ella initially resists Harkan's invitation to explore her life through writing, longing instead for traditional grammar lessons, but gradually embraces her journal as a means to grapple with the roots of her own dissatisfaction. As the narrative progresses, Ella's encounters with literature, other feminists, and radicals push her forward; she begins to reexamine and analyze every aspect of her life from a new political perspective.

At the beginning of novel, Bryant goes to great pains to distance Ella and her family from the radical milieu of the 'movement.' Instead, like earlier heroines of captivity narratives, Ella is firmly entrenched within the domestic sphere. Despite her stultifying suburban environment, Ella does not consider herself unhappy. She is in many ways the ultimate antifeminist, rebuking Friedan by insisting, "I don't have any real problems. I'm healthy. I have a happy marriage. My daughter is pretty and happy. No problems. No real problems" (Bryant, *Ella Price's Journal* 26). Yet, as the qualifier "real" suggests, beneath the surface, Ella is plagued by a host of "problems" she has yet to name. These problems erupt less than a page later, as the controlled voice of the satisfied housewife breaks and we gain a glimpse into the real Ella smoldering beneath the surface. Just as she is about to turn in her journal and drop Harkan's writing class, she writes,

My problem.

There's something wrong with me, I was all right until about a year ago, but then . . . no, that's not true. I was never all right.

Sometimes I'm doing something, just going through my normal day, and . . . but I'm not. Inside, I'm thinking things; inside, things are happening to me—I don't know where they come from. And they are starting to break out.  
(27)

This rupture in Ella's attempts to project an image of herself as a happy, self-controlled housewife is reflected in the writing itself as she breaks

from her professed concern with grammar, complete sentences and paragraphs. Instead, fragments and ellipses characterize her writing in this passage, as she struggles to express her “problem.” In the gap between her sense that nothing *should* be troubling her and the deep, gnawing feeling that something *is* troubling her, she provides our first glimpse of Friedan’s “problem with no name.”

Ella’s experience in Harkan’s writing class serves to remove her from the domestic space in which she deems herself happy, and increasingly puts her at odds with her family. Her sister-in-law “ask[s] if it was true that all the professors were communists” (17). There is an underlying fear expressed primarily by her family, but also initially shared by Ella herself, that the class will somehow contaminate her, that she’s been taken advantage of by a hostile force. Harkan functions as one of the narrative’s captors, whom her family (and at times, Ella herself) perceive as a threat to Ella’s marriage and monogamy, while exposing Ella to radical politics and literature against her will. Ella’s education and political awakening put her at odds with her husband, Joe, and his simple life. She has outgrown Joe and his mantra that “I’m happy if I can eat, drink and screw,” to which she responds, “So is a pig!” (213). As Ella develops a stronger sense of her own subjectivity, her marriage becomes confining. Joe increasingly takes on the role of captor. Indeed, Ella’s new feminist friend, Laura, goes so far as to characterize their relationship as “cannibalism,” invoking the language of earlier captivity narratives to depict their marriage (225). In rejecting Joe, Ella repudiates the conformity of the 1950s suburban family ideal. Most importantly, she disavows the marriage bargain and the loss of self, independence, and critical subjectivity it entails.

Harkan, as a foil for Joe, plays a crucial role in Ella’s personal and political development. At first, Ella hates Harkan for puncturing the world of conformity symbolized by Joe. She is initially shocked by the reading list for Harkan’s class, which includes Black nationalists, radicals, and feminists. She rejects Harkan’s teaching methods, yearns for grammar and canonical literature, and finds political discussion and radical ideas a waste of time and energy. Initially, Ella shares her family’s despairing view of the influence of the radical left (and communist professors) on the campus. For Ella, campus radicals are at odds with the goals of the university and their political struggles destructive to the education process itself. She defends domestic values and consumer ideology. Nonetheless, as Ella halt-

ingly heeds Harkan's call to develop her political consciousness and examine her life through writing, she veers from hatred to adulation. In a sense, her abductor from the domestic suburban ideal succeeds in acculturating her to the world of the radical left. Her early characterization as an upholder of the same values she ultimately rejects makes her transformation all the more dramatic, enacting on a personal level the broader radicalization and shifts in mass consciousness that would transform American society and culture.

Like other narratives in the 1970s housewife-fiction genre, Bryant provides an ethnography of the suburban nuclear family, which defamiliarizes it so as to expose readers (who themselves may be captives within it) to its dangers. At the same time, through Dan Harkan and his class, Ella, like heroines of earlier captivity narratives, also imparts an ethnographic view of the world to which she has been removed: the radical left. This is a crucial function of 1970s housewife fiction. As consciousness-raising texts, they introduced debates about Black Power, the movement against the war in Vietnam, and women's liberation to women readers—most of whose lives were far removed from 'the movement' and radical politics. Thus, the text itself becomes a link to a broader political radicalization that was, at once, unfamiliar and deeply connected to the personal or individual radicalizations that drove readers to pick up these texts.

Central to Ella's changing political consciousness is her newfound recognition of the intersections between race and class woven into the fabric of American society and her own family's narrative. Ella's working-class family typifies the 'white flight' of the postwar period. The prolonged economic boom and growing urban sprawl, along with increased residential segregation and redlining, led to profoundly unequal access to the new suburban dream homes. For Ella's family, civil rights pose a threat to the meager "wages of whiteness" (Roediger 13) that separate them from the bottom rung of American class society in which poverty is associated with blackness. While Bryant emphasizes the racism present in the community college setting, she also expresses a deep ambivalence about the politics of the radical Black Power movement on campus. Ella's experience at the community college with a student body that is primarily poor, working-class, and people-of-color removes her from racially segregated suburbia and forces her to confront her own biases, while recognizing that she shares with students of other races a sense of alienation from elite so-

cial and cultural institutions. Nonetheless, Bryant relies on stereotypes of the Black Power movement as angry, unthinking students caught up in a wave of outrage and hostility. Bryant's depiction of the Black Power movement echoes the rhetoric of earlier captivity narratives in which the aspirations of people of color are threats to the colonial ideology with which Puritan society was imbued. Indeed, while 1970s housewife fiction rebelled against the historic use of white womanhood to bolster a sense of nationalism premised on racial difference, it also reflected contradictions within the WLM and the failure of many white feminists to take up the question of racism.<sup>15</sup> This failure became all the more acute as the movements themselves increasingly fragmented and fell into decline in the mid-to-late 1970s.<sup>16</sup> Suburban captivity narratives provide ethnographies of 1970s radicalism that are replete with contradictions, much as the ethnographies of early captivity narratives both reified and defied stereotypical depictions of Native Americans.

Ella's experience in the radical milieu of her college marks her forays into the liminal stage of her captivity narrative. Her political awakening increasingly puts her at odds with the family and her suburban ideal of femininity while she attempts to find a space on the border between her suburban home and the New Left and feminist movements she encounters. Increasingly, her house becomes "solitary confinement" and the university becomes "home," thus emphasizing the novel's symbolic shift away from confining myths of female domesticity (95). The idea of liminality is particularly relevant here as Turner himself associates the *communitas* of liminality with the "beat generation" and "hippies" and, by extension, the New Left (V. Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," 112–3). If the Black Power movement occupies a somewhat contradictory place in Ella's political development, the war in Vietnam provides the linchpin for Ella's entry into the political movements of the period. Her growing concern with the war puts her in conflict with her family, who see her views as the product of brainwashing by communist professors and a diversion from her "first duty . . . to her family, not to get mixed up in other people's problems" (Bryant, *Ella Price's Journal* 74–75). When Ella attends her first anti-war protest, she initially remains on the sidewalk, but eventually "steps off the curb," symbolically leaving behind the world of home and familial duties to join a burgeoning political movement. The "closeness" (125) Ella feels amidst collective political struggle and action stands in stark contrast to

the alienation and self-negation that characterize her family life. It is through political, rather than personal, relationships that Ella first experiences the sense of peace and belonging that has eluded her throughout her life. Ella's stepping off the curb at the anti-war protest is a rite of passage as she joins that liminal community, feeling a sense of collectivity and belonging that fundamentally changes her. Ella's experience on the march also forces her to confront the role of law enforcement and state-sanctioned violence, challenging her previous faith in American democratic political institutions. As she watches the police use force to prevent marchers from crossing the Oakland line, but merely stand by as hecklers attack the crowd, her guiding principles are reversed and she blames the savagery of the police or the state, not the protesters or those who resist it. The march is also a crucial turning point in her relationship to domesticity. Afterwards she lies to her husband for the first time, waiting until he goes to sleep to secretly write about her experience in her journal, noting: "The peace march did something to me, changed me. I'm not the same person anymore" (139).

At the same time, Ella increasingly runs up against the limits of Harkan, who becomes a symbol for the male-dominated New Left. Despite his professed radicalism and sexual liberation, he provides no fulfillment for Ella. Harkan's radicalism is limited to the classroom. After their first sexual encounter, Ella writes, "It was like rape. Not, because I was fighting him. It was more like the way a man might act with a prostitute—a very conventional puritanical man who is ashamed of what he is doing" (167). As Harkan's radicalism collapses in the bedroom, Ella employs the language of early captivity narratives, and the threat of rape that was central to the fear they evoked. The difference, however, is that Ella invokes Puritanism and its concomitant sexual repression and conventional morality to describe Harkan's assault on her newfound feminist identity. This marks a significant shift in Ella's consciousness. Harkan becomes a threat to her sense of self because of his sexual conventionality, even as his radicalism in the classroom initiates her into a world that makes such a realization possible. He serves as a symbol for the persistence of sexism within radical movements, which kept women confined while providing them with a new political language to demand their own liberation. It's worth noting that the radical feminist Robin Morgan also employed the language of captivity to denounce the sexism of the New Left. In *Goodbye*

to *All That*, she writes, “to become a true revolutionary one must first become one of the oppressed” even if this realization leads to hurt, including the hurt of “learn[ing] that the sisters still in male-Left captivity are putting down the crazy feminists to make themselves look unthreatening to our mutual oppressors” (56).

For Shulamith Firestone, the alternative to captivity in the “male-Left” is the WLM. It is thus fitting that in *Ella Price’s Journal*, Ella’s rejection of Harkan marks the textual moment when Laura Wilkens, a divorced returning college student, replaces the male role models in Ella’s life, taking her beyond the confines of the college and initiating her into the feminist movement. Nonetheless, in the immediate aftermath of her failed relationship with Harkan, Ella abandons the possibility of change and returns to the safety and sanctity of her family, vowing to try anew to be the perfect wife and mother. The failure of her personal sexual revolution sends her running back into the domestic sphere. Despite Laura’s warnings, Ella reenters psychoanalysis, with terrifying results. In a sense, this marks Ella’s restoration into suburban domesticity and one ‘end’ to Ella’s tale. The victory of Freudian misogyny over Ella’s politically awakened self occurs when she internalizes her psychoanalyst’s ideology by joyfully greeting her newly discovered pregnancy as a second chance at true Freudian femininity. She quits her job and gives up writing with a triumphant THE END (in all caps) in the journal she began for Harkan’s class. Here is an end to the captivity narrative of yore, as the protagonist’s written narrative serves to reincorporate her into the society from which she had been removed. But this apparent ending is short lived, as Ella begins a new and last notebook, whose open ending, “I feel” (227) contrasts starkly with the finality in the passage above.

By the end of the novel, Ella recognizes her mistake: “For all the writing I’ve done in this journal about problems of women, I must have fallen into the oldest, stupidest woman’s attitude—seeing myself and my problems and my needs in terms of men. . . . And what I need to do has to happen in myself” (209). Laura is key to Ella’s final decision to leave Joe and her daughter. Instead of family, Laura offers the women’s movement. She tells Ella that her active involvement in the movement helps with her loneliness and social ostracism: “It’s wonderful . . . the way I’ve gotten to know—to love—some women” (201). On Christmas Eve, Ella leaves her



home for good and drives to Laura's house, an action that initiates her formal entrance into the women's movement.

The novel's final ending leaves us with Ella awaiting the termination of her pregnancy on Christmas Day—a dramatic and ironic representation of abortion as the precondition for Ella's rebirth. Placed within the historical narrative of the WLM and its fight for unfettered reproductive freedom, Ella's abortion is the final rejection of her life as wife and mother and, as such, a repudiation of the idealized myth of the feminine mystique. In carefully constructing an ending that avoids the despair of female protagonists in the books Ella reads including *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, *Antigone*, and *The Golden Notebook*, Bryant concludes her novel with the sense of hope and possibility contained in Ella's assertion of the 'I,' her rejection of the stultifying and emotionally deadening role of the housewife, and a sense of personal autonomy that, we assume, will continue past the pages of her journal. As she awaits surgery, Ella describes her feelings:

I feel like a sacred virgin chosen for an elaborate initiation rite, prepared and purified according to ancient rule.  
I feel like a plucked chicken about to be gutted.  
I feel (227)

The language of ritual and "ancient rule" is fitting, evoking a fantasy of primitive society, a return to the wilderness of earlier captivity narratives. By juxtaposing the language of ritual with the dehumanizing vulnerability of the plucked chicken, the narrative highlights Ella's continued entrapment in a medical establishment, even as she seeks to take control of her future. The last words, devoid of final punctuation mark, establish not an end but a beginning, as Ella escapes the confines of the grammatical rules she so desired earlier in the narrative. If nothing else, this new Ella will feel and be. Her journey has only begun and there is a sense of hope for the emergence of a new woman, a new self, and a new world.

By contrast, Marilyn French's 1977 *The Women's Room*, a novel firmly anchored in the housewife-fiction genre, concludes on a far more pessimistic note. The five years between French's and Bryant's novels reflect a political as much as a temporal gap, as the women's movement that had provided a new imagined community to Ella increasingly fractured amidst internal debates. Indeed, critical responses to French's novel give some in-

sight into contemporary debates about the WLM. An immense popular success, the novel helped launch the Summit Books imprint of Simon & Schuster; it became an immediate bestseller, eventually selling over twenty million books (Sullivan). Reprinted in 1993 with an afterword by Susan Faludi, the novel's canonical status in the history of feminist fiction was declared on the cover, which hailed it as "The Bestselling Feminist Classic." Yet, as Faludi herself notes, its popularity belied a far more controversial relationship to the WLM. Liberal feminists castigated the novel, most prominently in *Ms. Magazine*, for its harsh depiction of men, while the radical feminist press, notably *off our backs*, took it to task for its depiction of the women's movement as "something passed through like puberty" and for French's "fail[ure] to be a woman of action" (Stevens 19). Lindsay Van Gelder argues that the novel appeals to readers who are "suburban housewives, women over 40, and women who never went to college" (qtd. in Hogeland 91), describing "the novel as immature and pre- or proto-feminist" (Hogeland 91). Faludi also notes the novel's appeal to the "women from the suburbs [who] turned it in to a bestseller" and were "politicized" by it (Afterword 469). Yet in contrast to Van Gelder, Faludi considers this part of the novel's power, arguing that its "most important and formative role [was] as an agent of social and political action. It helped inspire sisterhood, by bringing women from the suburbs together by disclosing their commonly held grievances," and "offered a political framework" (Afterword 470). At stake in these debates is the definition and narrativization of feminism itself in all its contested iterations, from liberal, cultural, and radical wings of the movements to "those on the periphery of feminism" (Whelehan 108).<sup>17</sup>

*The Women's Room* chronicles the story of Mira, who escapes an oppressive marriage and goes to Harvard, where she discovers radical politics. Like Ella, Mira is an older student who functions as a link between the rebelling housewives raised in the ideology of the feminine mystique and the radical student movements of the 1960s and 70s. The optimism that imbues Bryant's ending, however, has been eclipsed in Mira's world at the novel's finale. As Mira explains:

I have opened all the doors in my head.  
I have opened all the pores in my body.  
But only the tide rolls in. (465)

Similar to Ella, Mira experiences feminism and radical student politics “like opening a door” (Bryant, *Ella Price’s Journal* 77). However, whereas the open ending of *Ella Price’s Journal* suggests the possibility that she might survive and thrive, the “But” of French’s last line negates that possibility. The women’s movement provides both protagonists with a sense of possibility, allowing them to escape the domestic spaces that threatened to destroy them, but Mira still ends up confined in a “box” (4). The window of political possibility that the radicalism of the period opened up for her, once again closes. She is left in a new liminal space in which reincorporation into suburban domesticity is impossible, the imagined community of feminism is unrealizable, and liberation is unattainable. Jane Elliot reads this “experience of time devoid of significant change as *static time*” (4), rather than as liminal space, arguing that it reflects the political trajectory of the text from the rhetoric of 1960s radicalism to the static and perpetual experience of oppression. She views this trajectory as “a recurring trope across the body of popular feminist fiction” (4), and part of the “declension narrative of American 1960s radicalism” (24).

Within the narrative, the character Val functions as a symbol of both the promise and the failures of the radical feminist movement. She is a role model for Mira and a guide in the world of Harvard’s radical student politics. A feminist and an antiwar activist who disavows capitalism and devotes herself to the ‘Movement,’ Val’s political optimism and revolutionary zeal cannot, however, survive the rape of her daughter, and she comes to the conclusion that all men are inherently violent and sexist. Not only does she reject the politics of non-violence, she also rejects the possibility of interracial solidarity. Val’s political transformation in the novel mirrors that of the New Left as a whole as the splits and fragmentation within SDS (Students for a Democratic Society) paved the way to the Weather Underground and a new type of underground guerilla style militancy—the same dynamics that would produce the Symbionese Liberation Army. Shortly after Val’s turn to militant feminism, she attempts to liberate an African-American woman who had been convicted of murder for defending herself against a rapist. In the resulting police *melée*, Val is murdered (along with the other five women who participated in the action) and her body explodes through the force of her own unused grenade. Val’s last stand recalls the fate of all too many 1970s activists turned radical militants. Her death from the unused grenade is rife with symbolism: turning to mili-

tancy and armed struggle, she dies from her unused potential power. Val's fiery demise ultimately marks the death of radical feminism, highlighting French's sense of the untenability of the imagined feminist community the early movement promised.<sup>18</sup>

Summing up the political trajectory of the period, Mira writes: "Yes. That was what happened: everything opened up, anything seemed possible, and then everything closed up, dilation, constriction. It will get you in the end" (455). By the end of *The Women's Room*, Mira teaches in a small college, but continues to be wracked by nightmares in which she is chased by a rapist and the only protection the police can offer is that she lock her door, but the handle has been taken off, thus if she closes the door, "it will lock and [Mira] will never be able to open it from the inside" (464). She describes the dream: "I stand there in terror. If I close the door I will be trapped; if I do not, I may wake up again to face a set of mindless eyes, a vacant unthinking threat" (464). Thus, a narrative that begins with Mira hiding in a bathroom stall ends with the feminist heroine trapped again in the logic of the earlier captivity narrative genre where her only options are confinement in the domestic space deprived of any agency to leave, or the "unthinking threat" that leaving the door open entails.

If feminism can accomplish the revolution within that liberates Ella and Mira from the confines of suburban domesticity, French's final lines remind us that there is no space in which such liberatory potential can be fulfilled. Both Ella and Mira have changed; the world has not. This reflects, in part, the demands of realism, as Marilyn Hacker argues, for "the individual solution, or, failing that, the individual defeat"; since feminism is "by definition, *not* individual" the genre tends to leave "the writer . . . with a pessimistic conclusion" (67–68).<sup>19</sup> The half-decade time gap between the publication of both novels closed off the potential reflected in the open ending of Bryant's earlier novel, and leaves us with a new woman, Mira, who exists in a world where the revolution has failed, liberation movements have been defeated, and the only course left is to remember and to tell one's story and not to forget, for, as Mira reminds us, "Forget: Lēthē: the opposite of truth" (465).

### **Die Fighting or Live Writing: The Return and Ambivalent Restoration of the Woman Writer**

Val's demise in a hail of fire is one ending to the narrative of second-wave feminism; but for survivors of war, captivity, and the movement, telling one's story is a crucial means of reintegration into some form of *communitas*. From the seventeenth century to today, the return of the female captive is only fully realized when her story is told. If the white female body has too often been part of what Lauren Berlant calls the "national symbolic" (qtd. in Scheckel 74) upon which broader anxieties are projected, then it is only through the narrative itself that the captive can at last speak. From Mary Rowlandson to Patty Hearst to Jessica Lynch during the Iraq War,<sup>20</sup> captives must write a tell-all book to put forward their own narrative of events and rejoin an imagined community of their choice. If captivity is associated with liminality and structurelessness, the captivity narrative itself becomes a means to impose order and structure on the experience.

Scheckel notes that the restoration in captivity narratives completes the process of initiation into a new American imagined community, as the captive "is restored to his old life with newly opened eyes" (Richard Slotkin, qtd. in Scheckel 79). For female captives, this process is always more complicated because anxieties about the sexual purity of the returning captive make reincorporation into the bourgeois or puritan domestic ideal all the more difficult. As Scheckel argues, "Female authors of captivity narratives often felt the need to defend their sexual conduct to avoid suspicions that might prevent their full reacceptance into the white society to which they returned" (82). For Patty Hearst, the "return" required a trial, central to which was her sexual and political conduct during captivity. In this context, her memoir, *Every Secret Thing*, published in 1982, became all the more important as testimony of her experience of captivity beyond the extreme limitations imposed by the criminal justice system. Although she was arrested and jailed for her participation in the Hibernia bank robbery, her sexual conduct posed the greatest threat to her reintegration post-captivity. Hearst's trial and conviction for bank robbery and using a firearm during the commission of a felony is only imaginable if we understand her as a symbol, rather than a living woman, and forget that she was abducted against her will, held captive, and sexually assaulted repeatedly.

Her conviction was possible because she became part of a national symbolic—a symbol of the wives and daughters who willingly chose the sexual revolution over the suburban domesticity for which they had been raised. That she was convicted and imprisoned is a stark example of the difficulty of reincorporation. By the time she writes her narrative, she has been released but not pardoned—thus, her narrative is a crucial text to mobilize popular support for her reintegration in society, even as it remains contested. As Castiglia notes, the narrative's republication under the title, *Patty Hearst: Her Own Story* distances the narrative from the author by referring to her in the third-person, thus it “takes Hearst's narrative away from her through the seemingly innocent phraseology” (101). More recent attempts to tell the Patty Hearst story by CNN's Jeffrey Toobin in “The Radical Story of Patty Hearst” have likewise received criticism for neglecting Hearst's own voice in constructing a narrative that continues to fascinate and confound as an urtext of seventies radicalism (Desta).

Like Mary Rowlandson's text, composed three hundred years earlier, Hearst's text is written at least in part to support her reintegration into her society and to defend her honor while in captivity. Rowlandson consciously invokes divine intervention throughout her narrative to explain her ability to survive threats to her chastity and virtue without relying on her own strength or on the moral restraint of the Indian ‘savages,’ either of which could have destabilized some of the very tenets upon which Puritan identity depends. But her words alone are not enough. Rowlandson's sexual history needed to be redeemed and her sexual purity guaranteed by the noted Puritan clergyman Increase Mathers in his preface to Rowlandson's narrative (Rowlandson 136), in which the woman as writer is itself a transgression. Thus, her narrative must be contained and authorized by men—Mathers and Rowlandson's husband, one of whose sermons is added as a postscript. While she would be later canonized as one of the earliest American women writers, her narrative is very much contained within the parameters of Puritan patriarchy, as all that is potentially transgressive in her experience was reinterpreted to support her reintegration within that imagined community.

For Mary Jemison, such closure was not possible. A male representative of Puritan-American society authenticates her story as well: James Seaver introduces the narrative and, in his position as interviewer, shapes the narrative (for instance, by inserting information in Jemison's own

words that she did not actually provide). Jemison's interracial children made such reincorporation impossible since their existence conflicted with Seaver's insistence on Jemison's untarnished white womanhood. Thus, unlike Rowlandson, Jemison was ultimately coerced off her land and moved to a reservation—itsself a physical, social, and political reminder of the exclusion of Indians (and those who call them family) from the newly imagined American nation-state.

The tensions over narrative control within these texts prefigure the crucial, political, role of writing in later texts by women in second-wave feminism. Ella, Mira, and other politically awakened housewives-turned-radicals of the 1970s discover that in the absence of genuine liberation in the material world, they must return to a world not so different from the one they left, albeit with a newly raised consciousness. Within this context, writing, or telling one's story, becomes crucial to the process of restoration—even if there is no possibility of reentry into the domestic sphere. From the beginning of second-wave feminism, writers of the movement saw their work as an important political contribution. Indeed, print-feminism was instrumental for the creation of an imagined community of feminists that could supersede national interests. At the height of second-wave feminism, the revolution in the realm of literature went hand in hand with the feminist revolution in society at large. As the movement in the streets declined, feminist writers and activists turned toward fiction as their primary—and sometimes only—means of enacting political change.

Both Ella and Mira remain in a liminal stage at the end of their narratives, but with an important political difference. For Ella, there has yet to be a return, but she has begun to see the world with new eyes. Her introduction to a community of women activists through Laura provides a potential home to return to—one based on *communitas*, not oppression and confinement. That it remains a possibility, imaginable beyond the pages of the narrative, reflects the novel's moment of publication in the early 1970s at the height of the women's movement; while the world had not yet changed enough to provide a place for these newly awakened women to return to, there remains hope and possibility that such a world could be realized. For Mira, the outlook is much bleaker. Writing from the other side of the 1970s, she too sees the world with new eyes, but surveying the graveyard of social movements, the only choice she can imagine is confinement or fear. In this sense, she resembles Jemison at the end of her narrative,

forever removed from the Puritan domestic life in which she was raised, and yet exiled to the border, a contested space that defies cultural hegemony, without providing a path to genuine liberation. Interestingly, the movie based on French's novel decides against ending the story with Mira alone, and by concluding instead with her lecturing on feminism and receiving a standing ovation, implying a generational transmission of feminism that allows for community and optimism (Hogeland 105).

Writing is central to Ella's radicalization and feminist consciousness, and yet, at the beginning, it is an involuntary activity. Indeed, the novel begins with its own patriarchal authenticating device, Harkan's assignment to the writing class. It is thus framed as a writer's journal, begun under duress with Harkan's grading power haunting the first notebook. Nonetheless, as the narrative progresses, Ella continues writing of her own volition. Without Harkan's omnipresent readership, Ella's journal increasingly becomes the private repository for her innermost thoughts and feelings. Like other diaries or epistolary novels, Bryant's novel places the protagonist's growth as a reader and a writer at the center of the plot, as the protagonist's language and style evolve in conjunction with her growing political consciousness. Writing in this form imbues the story with a sense of immediacy as we watch Ella develop without the benefit of hindsight. Her development from non-writer to writer is a key feature of her emergence from the consciousness-raising process. The open-ended conclusion reminds us that her story is not over. At the same time, her emergence as a writer is one way to be reincorporated into a new community of women writers that is flourishing in this period.

Mira is also a writer, but in *The Women's Room*, it is not until the final pages of the novel that we discover that the narrator is indeed the protagonist, as she switches to the "I" in closing her story. Throughout the novel, the narrator is positioned as an older and perhaps more cynical Mira, whose hindsight creates temporal distance and narrative dislocation from the character and the events chronicled in the narrative. This narrative distancing technique, in stark opposition to the immediacy of Bryant's diary fiction style, offers an implicit critique of the teleological simplicity of earlier narratives of politically awakening housewives. Like Ella, Mira turns to writing as a central means of expressing a new feminist consciousness and of actively remembering the radical social movements of



the 1960s and 70s, and particularly Val. Forgetting, French's narrator reminds us more than once, is the opposite of truth.

If the narrative conventions of realism prevent any genuine liberation for women in a world that remains sexist to its core, the politically awakened housewives of 1970s feminist narratives emerge with newly radicalized consciousness as writers of their own stories, with no Increase Mathers to contain them. As Winifred Breines argues, women use words such as "mourning," "rage," and "loss" to write about feminism "precisely because of the hopes the movements raised" (201). Literary expression, while not sufficient to bring about large-scale social change, is nonetheless a site of struggle that feminist writers transformed and democratized by refusing to remain captive to conventions that silence them. The world at large remains a hostile force to women writers in the 1970s, but in drawing upon a female tradition of writers who forged a new American canon around their experiences of captivity, they consciously thematize the role of writing in forging a new feminist identity, community, and political unconscious. In these suburban captivity narratives, the liberation of women's bodies from captivity serves not to justify war and empire but is the pre-condition for a new women's liberation movement. While the movements themselves might have failed to achieve their desired results, the writing lives on—the print-feminism that was crucial to the development of second-wave feminism acts as a collective record of the captives who escaped the confines of their suburban homes to join a movement and, against all odds, chose to stay and fight.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank Susan Scheckel and my colleagues in the Faculty Fellowship Publication Program at the City University of New York, in particular, Matt Brim, Ria Banerjee, Alison Better, Allison Curseen, Sarah Hoiland, María Julia Rossi, and Alex Welcome for their comments on earlier drafts of this paper.
2. As *Ms. Magazine* notes, Flanagan is a "self-described anti-feminist" (Frey) who has made a career out of attempting to revive the feminine mystique through her own writing. Thus, her analysis of the resonance of Patty Hearst's abduction expresses a vision of "the culture" as it exists in the conservative imagination. Indeed, in a different piece in *The New Yorker*, Flanagan expresses her sense of abandonment after her mother returned to work ("To Hell With All That"), suggesting she might be projecting her own

feelings of desertion onto millions of American households. Nonetheless, Flanagan gives expression to conservative anxieties about the political significance of Patty Hearst. She invokes the legacy of captivity narratives in her depiction of the “culture” and second-wave feminism threatening the domestic foundations of the nation in a manner consistent with the backlash against feminism that began in the 1970s. For more on the cultural expression of the backlash against feminism, see Susan Faludi’s *Backlash* and *The Terror Dream*.

3. Rosen’s *The World Split Open* provides a useful historical account of the growth of the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) in these years as it chronicles the movement’s ideological impact in obliterating the suburban ideal and spurring the growing rejection of suburban materialism by young women as well as older women, who left such homes and, in many cases, joined the movement. The “Strike for Equality” in 1970 gives one indication of the breadth of the movement with participation in 42 states, and a march of over 50,000 in New York. In the aftermath of the march, widely covered in the media, NOW experienced a 50% growth in its membership, and a CBS News poll reported that 80% of people over eighteen had read or heard about women’s liberation (Rosen 92-3). Victoria Hesford also notes that the same year saw increased news coverage of the movement, and the WLM’s “emergence onto the national scene” (40). This led, she argues, to a “pervasive anxiety concerning the willingness of white, middle-class women to reproduce [femininity] . . . accentuat[ing] the sense that femininity as a social norm was under attack. As a consequence, reasserting gender distinctions through the reproduction of idealized bodies . . . became a dominant tactic of the mainstream media in the latter half of 1970” (70). This phenomenon is apparent in the media coverage of Patty Hearst’s abduction as described here.
4. See also Armstrong and Tennenhouse’s examination, in *The Imaginary Puritan*, of Rowlandson’s account as a model of puritan captivity narratives and precursor to English domestic fiction, most notably the novels of Samuel Richardson, which they read as captivity narratives. In “The Problem of Population and the Form of the American Novel,” the authors revise their early argument to account for the influential role of Barbary captivity narratives on American novels in the early years of the republic.
5. The suburban domestic ideal was a product of the post-WWII effort to recreate a myth of female domesticity that had been fundamentally challenged and altered by previous generations. In the midst of the post-war economic boom, as the Cold War dominated the political landscape, the new American housewife of the 1950s was promoted as a symbol of the triumph of American consumerism and the liberatory potential of capitalism. Yet, this was not an image to which women surrendered easily. The massive increase in advertising to promote consumerism was heavily geared toward housewives

playing on fears and anxieties to perpetuate mass consumer spending. Deconstructing this mythology was central to Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). (For more on this, see Friedan; Coontz, *The Way We Never Were* and *Marriage, a History*; Rosen; and Vandermeade).

6. There is a large body of work attesting to this foundational role of captivity narratives. I am particularly indebted to the work of Nancy Armstrong, Rebecca Blevins-Faery, Christopher Castiglia, Cathy Rex, Gordon Sayre, and Susan Scheckel.
7. See also Castiglia, Rex, and Scheckel.
8. For an incisive analysis of the deployment of the cultural mythology and rhetorical and narrative strategies of early captivity narratives in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, see Susan Faludi's *The Terror Dream: Myth and Misogyny in an Insecure America*, which analyzes the post-9/11 political moment; the creation of the security state and the simultaneous backlash against women and feminism; and a championing of feminine domesticity and masculine virility as an example of a return to the cultural logic of early American captivity narratives, "a national fantasy in which we are deeply invested" (*The Terror Dream* 14) or the "hauntings of a fabricated past" (*The Terror Dream* 284).
9. Castiglia's analysis of Turner's distinction between "liminars" and "marginals" as it applies to captivity narratives further explores the tensions between racial and gender critiques in these narratives (44-45) and the contradictory position of captive women within them.
10. Students for a Democratic Society was one expression of this phenomenon, as was the growth of resistance among soldiers, including the 'fragging' of officers. Muhammad Ali's refusal to serve in the Vietnam War and Jane ("Hanoi Jane") Fonda's activism amplified the anti-war movement's message of solidarity with the NLF and rejection of pro-war nationalism.
11. For an incisive analysis of this article and other media depictions of the Women's Liberation Movement, see Victoria Hesford, "From Lady Protestors to Urban Guerrillas: Media Representations of the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970" in *Feeling Women's Liberation* (1-25).
12. See Stephanie Coontz's *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s* for a full history and analysis of the significance, impact, and limitations of *The Feminine Mystique*, especially the chapter, "African-American Women, Working-Class Women, and the Feminine Mystique." See also Angela

- Davis's "The Approaching Obsolescence of Housework: A Working Class Perspective" in *Women, Race & Class*.
13. See Lisa Maria Hogeland, *Feminism and Its Fictions: The Consciousness-Raising Novel and the Women's Liberation Movement* for a fuller discussion of the role of fiction in consciousness-raising groups and the WLM more generally.
  14. For Rosalind Coward, feminist fiction has its roots in the confessional novel, borrowing elements of form and structure as well as the centrality of experiences of sexuality from the genre. However, feminist fiction expands the genre through its use of consciousness-raising as a framing device to insist that the personal is indeed political, thus the "I" is representative of a collective experience of oppression. For more on the form of feminist fictions, see also Hogeland's analysis of the "consciousness-raising novel" in *Feminism and its Fictions*.
  15. Activist-writers such as Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, and Barbara Smith were among the many prominent voices to challenge white feminists in this regard. Davis's critique of Susan Brownmiller's racism in discussing sexual assault (198) is particularly germane to my reading of French's *The Women's Room*. See also Winifred Breines, *The Trouble Between Us: An Uneasy History of White and Black Women in the Feminist Movement* for a compelling in-depth history of debates about race within the feminist movement.
  16. Max Elbaum chronicles the decline of the radical Left amidst growing sectarianism and fragmentation in *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao and Che*. By the late 1970s, Black Panther Party (BPP) was decimated by COINTELPRO and collapsed as the intense repression exacerbated ideological differences, isolation, and exhaustion (see Robyn Spencer, *The Revolution has Come: Black Power, Gender, and the Black Panther Party in Oakland*). The height of the WLM thus corresponded with a period of decline in the radical left more broadly. Within the WLM itself, the mid to late 1970s saw growing debates and fractures over questions of race, sexuality, organizational structure, and privilege (See Adams; E. Armstrong; Echols; Evans; Joreen; Rosen; Siegel and Baumgardner).
  17. Imelda Whelehan uses this term in *The Feminist Bestseller* in a chapter on Marilyn French, Erica Jong, and Marge Piercy to describe women, "who were attracted to the idea that 'the personal is political' and who assumed that maybe their politicization began at home" (208). For more on the controversy surrounding French's *The Women's Room*, see Hogeland and Whelehan.

18. Val's death and French's apparent cynicism about radical feminist activism most infuriates Stevens in her review of the novel in *off our backs*. Piercy's *Small Changes* was also critiqued for its failure to represent the most overt forms of feminist political activism (Hogeland 93). Piercy's *Vida* is worth considering in comparison to French's depiction of Val. Vida, the title character, is a radical activist in a fictionalized group based on the Weather Underground, who remains dedicated to the remnants of radical movements of the 1960s, while being trapped in an increasingly anachronistic lifestyle to avoid criminal prosecution. Unable to relive the vibrant days of the radical left, she is also incapable of reentering a present in which those movements have been demolished. At the end of the novel, Vida has not given up hope, vowing to continue the fight, despite a palpable sense of despair at the battles that have been lost.
19. Alix Kates Shulman's *Burning Questions*, is a notable exception to this trend, avoiding the pessimistic ending by placing the protagonist Zane in a women's café, emphasizing the gains and *communitas* created by the movement, an ending that rejects Mira's isolation. Framing the narrative as Zane's fictional autobiography, Shulman draws on her role as an educator who continues to impart the lessons of the movement and revolutionaries before her—thus, in her “Dialectical Epilogue,” Shulman places her own narrative within a tradition of revolutionary memoirs that insist on revolutionary hope, even if the movement has ebbed.
20. The chapter on Jessica Lynch in Faludi's *Terror Dreams*, titled “Poor Little Jessi,” is a powerful analysis of the fictional captivity narrative concocted by the media about her case, as well as the predatory and dishonest manipulation of her story in the book she was supposed to have authored.

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