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Resistant History: Revising the Captivity Narrative in "Captivity" and *Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues*

ROBIN RILEY FAST

Many contemporary American Indian writers are engaged in the shared project of complicating and revising the received history of the Americas. Kimberly Blaeser reminds us that survival is at stake here when she says that "the creation and interpretations of histories have . . . functioned directly as the justifications for possession or dispossession." In "Captivity" and *Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues* respectively, Louise Erdrich and Maurice Kenny reread histories of captivity among the Indians recorded by the colonizers. Their revisionary agendas necessarily foreground interpretive conflicts and draw attention to cultural and linguistic dialogism. As Blaeser observes regarding Gerald Vizenor's writings about history, these poems "force recognition of the already embattled visions all readers bring to the text[s]." ¹ In doing so, the poems become implicitly ironic, as their Native authors turn to colonizers' writings about Indians as sources of inspiration for their own work. As they imagine alternative readings of the European-written accounts, they both highlight the fact that written American history still belongs almost entirely to non-Natives and resist that domination.

Erdrich begins with a story that is virtually a cornerstone of popular American history. Mary Rowlandson, a Puritan minister's wife, was captured in the Narragansett attack on Lancaster, Massachusetts, on February 1, 1675-76, in what became known as King Philip's War, after the English name of its Wampanoag leader, Metacomet. She traveled with her captors for almost twelve weeks, until she was ransomed and returned to Boston. Her account of her ordeal, first published in 1682, went through numerous editions into the middle of the nineteenth century (and has been republished several times in the twentieth). Its full title conveys Rowlandson's intent and some of the

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impact her story must have had on early readers: *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*. Later American editions (and the 1682 London edition) modified the title to deemphasize the “sovereignty . . . of God” and foreground the dangers encountered by the captive; thus several editions from the late eighteenth century are entitled *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Who Was Taken Prisoner by the Indians with Several Others; and Treated in the Most Barbarous and Cruel Manner by Those Vile Savages: With Many Other Remarkable Events during her Travels*.²

Not only, as its titles suggest, did Mrs. Rowlandson’s narrative serve important cultural purposes for generations of European Americans, but it was the first publication in English of what was to become an enormously popular genre of American writing, right up to and beyond the “closing of the frontier” in the 1890s. The genre produced numerous true accounts, which fostered the fascination with “Indian captivity” that has marked American fiction since its beginnings.³

In her poem “Captivity,” Louise Erdrich draws on Rowlandson’s language to reinterpret not just this narrative—it is not absolutely necessary to read the poem’s voice as that of Rowlandson herself—but possibilities perhaps inherent in many such experiences and accounts. While retaining the point of view of a white woman, Erdrich creates an alternative version of the captivity narrative, a version that, among other differences, contrasts to Rowlandson’s as it replaces assertions of moral and theological certainty (Rowlandson’s bulwark against the nearly total physical uncertainty she faced—and perhaps also against skeptics in the New England community) with a pervasive, destabilizing uncertainty. The poem makes transparently clear a contemporary Indian writer’s dialogue with diverse traditions and heightens the reader’s awareness of the generally suppressed dialogic potential of Rowlandson’s account; these effects simultaneously multiply the layers of meaning in Erdrich’s own text.

Erdrich’s poem begins with an epigraph attributed to Mary Rowlandson: “*He [my captor] gave me a bisquit, which I put in my pocket, and not daring to eat it, buried it under a log, fearing he had put something in it to make me love him.*”⁴ This sentence refers to one of Rowlandson’s most constant concerns—food—and introduces a theme that surfaces only rarely in the *Narrative*, sexual fear. She twice expresses wonder and gratitude that she was never imposed upon sexually. In the ninth Remove,⁵ a little less than halfway through the account, she remarks upon “the goodness of God to me, in that, though I was gone from home, and met with all sorts of Indians, and those I had no knowledge of, and there being no Christian soul near me, yet not one of them offered the least imaginable miscarriage to me” (p. 33). And again, in the twentieth Remove, near her book’s end: “I have been in the midst of those roaring lions and savage bears that feared neither God nor man nor the devil, by night and day, alone and in company, sleeping all sorts together, and yet not one of them ever offered me the least abuse of unchastity to me in word or action. Though some are ready to say, I speak it for my own credit; But I speak it in the presence of God, and to his Glory” (pp. 70–71).

In short, the epigraph does not appear in Rowlandson's *Narrative*.⁶ Even the epigraph, then, raises questions about history, truth, and their uses (just as seventeenth- and eighteenth-century changes in the title draw attention to interpretive questions). Of course it is possible that this sentence is attributed to Mary Rowlandson in some source other than the *Narrative*. It seems more likely that Erdrich, who plays freely in the poem itself with incidents and language from the *Narrative*, is beginning with an intentionally ironic invention: ironic in that, if we accept the epigraph at face value (as most readers must), then we have begun our reading by replicating earlier readers' likely acceptance of Rowlandson's assumptions. Further, our subsequent recognition of ironic complexity in the poem itself must be shadowed by our having granted credence to a questionable text. The questions thus raised by the epigraph parallel questions that the poem differently raises about Rowlandson's and Erdrich's accounts; the epigraph itself becomes part of the poem's project of destabilizing received history.

From the beginning to the end of her *Narrative*, Mary Rowlandson maintains that her ordeal was a punishment and a test sent to her by God, and thus a sign of God's goodness and concern for "his people" who, so chastised, might be moved to accept divine grace. In this scheme of things, the Indians become agents of the devil, and even though she describes many individual kindnesses to her, her account never really breaks free of this conviction. Even her many references to Quannopin, her master, "the best friend that I had of an Indian, both in cold and hunger" (p. 37), are always in tension with all-encompassing references to "the heathen," "pagans," and "our enemies." Thus a major change in Erdrich's rendition is to focus the captive's attention on one particular individual and to trace the developing complexity of her response to him. The poem's first incident establishes this focus as it revises one from the *Narrative*. In Rowlandson's text, the sixteenth Remove begins as follows: "We began this remove with wading over Baquag river. The water was . . . very swift and so cold I thought it would have cut me in sunder. . . . The Indians stood laughing to see me staggering, but in my distress the Lord gave me experience of the truth and goodness of [His] promise" (p. 49). In contrast, Erdrich's poem begins with the recollection of being rescued from the icy stream by an Indian man.

The poem's second verse paragraph illustrates the frightening disorientation that the captive experiences. It first displays the dichotomous thinking fundamental to Puritan theology and animosity toward indigenous peoples: the speaker characterizes the unknown pursuers of the Indians and their captives either as "God's agents" (colonial troops) or "pitch devils" (another party of Indians). The dichotomy may be slightly blurred when she tells that her child was fed by an Indian woman. That this action has at least jostled her assumptions is implied in the section's final line: "The forest closed, the light deepened." This ambiguity forecasts the pained ambivalence of the poem's ending.

The sexual theme introduced in the epigraph culminates in the middle of the poem. The speaker recalls that although she intended to starve rather than accept food from her captor, when he killed a pregnant deer, he shared the meat of the fawn with her:

It was so tender,
 the bones like the stems of flowers,
 that I followed where he took me.

.....

After that the birds mocked.

.....

He did not notice God's wrath.

In the empty white space between verse paragraphs, something unspeakable happens. In the *Narrative* Rowlandson, always hungry, does not resolve to starve; she does fear God's wrath, but for her own earlier failings. The *Narrative* does include this passage in the fourteenth Remove: "As we went along they killed a deer with a young one in her. 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" (p. 47). Within the poem, revision proceeds as the captive apparently realizes that sin fails to produce its expected consequences, that what she sees as obvious signs of divine wrath has no effect on the Indian. The certainties on which she has relied for emotional and spiritual survival are crumbling (the same certainties that were used to justify the expansion of the English colonies and later of the United States). And this, not the implied sexual transgression, is what is most devastating.

The captive is rescued, but unlike the historical Rowlandson, she does not claim to find in Scripture the assurance that would sanctify her experience and reinforce her belief. She prays, but her prayer is to no orthodox avail: rather than being reassured of her place within the Puritan community, at night she recalls her exclusion from the Indians' "circle." Here is the worst of this captive's experience: she has been rescued into the knowledge of unremitting loneliness. (Perhaps this depiction of loneliness implies, too, something of what led a considerable number of white captives to remain by choice with the Indians, even when offered "redemption.") She continues, remembering how he "led his company in the noise / until I could no longer bear / the thought of how I was." Beating with a stick on the earth, she "begg[ed] it to open / to admit me / ... and feed me honey from the rock." These, the poem's final lines, reveal a terrible ambivalence. Twice the words seem to invite one reading, then imply another, and this seeming invitation reveals the cultural heteroglossia and dialogism of the poem: what the speaker can "no longer bear" is not the "noise," but her isolation; she begs the earth not to swallow her (and her presumed sin), but to unite her with "him"—and to "feed [her] honey from the rock."

The allusion to Psalm 81 echoes Rowlandson's reflection on her experience, near the end of her *Narrative*. "I remember in the night season how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies and nothing but death before me. It was hard work to persuade myself that ever I should be satisfied with bread again. But now we are fed with the finest of the wheat, and (as I may say) with *honey out of the rock*" (p. 78—emphasis in the original). In Rowlandson's account, the allusion implies that God has rewarded her submission to his ways. In the poem, it is virtually blasphemous, a fitting culmination to the subversive potential Erdrich has detected in the captive's response.

Having lived with the "enemy" and returned to Christian civilization, Erdrich's captive knows herself to be effectively excluded from both worlds, her former certainties undone, the possibility of a new way of seeing and being decisively cut off. Perhaps a similar intimation stirs below the surface, as Rowlandson continues, after the passage just quoted, "O the wonderful power of God that mine eyes have seen, affording matter enough for my thoughts to run in, that when others are sleeping mine eyes are weeping" (p. 78). Both Susan Howe and Mitchell Breitwieser suggest that such lines adumbrate an estrangement similar to that imagined in "Captivity," though not grounded in sexual experience as Erdrich implies.

Howe emphasizes Rowlandson's status as a Puritan woman and implies that she might have told a different story had she not been subject to the requirements of the New England theocracy. On the day of the Narragansetts' attack she finds Rowlandson "look[ing] out at the absence of Authority and see[ing] that we are all alone"; "abducted from the structure of experience[,] Rowlandson wraps herself in separateness for warmth," and to defend herself against "[l]imitlessness, where all illusion of volition, all individual identity may be transformed—assimilated." Back in the English colony, "Perhaps she told her story to assure herself and her community that she was a woman who feared God and eschewed evil." Such persuasion would have been necessary if, in her memory, "captives and captors . . . [were] walking together beyond . . . Western culture."⁸

In a similar vein, Breitwieser finds Rowlandson's *Narrative* an "intense and unremitting representation . . . of experience as a collision between cultural ideology and the real," a "narrative . . . which fails to annul the powers of anomaly." For Rowlandson, he argues,

experience came to mean disconnection from enclosing contexts, not only from the life she enjoyed before the war and the Algonquian life amidst which she survived, but also from the social reality constructed in the aftermath of the war, a labor of construction to which her narrative was supposed to be an important contribution.

He argues that "despite her best intentions," in the course of her writing "things get loose or come forward that . . . signal the vitality of a distinctly non-Puritan view of her experience," and thus her text "allows various anomalous glimpses, not only of her own emotions, but also of her captors." Rowlandson's narrative thus becomes, "an account of experience that breaks through or outdistances her own and her culture's dominant means of representation."⁹

Howe's and Breitwieser's readings complement Erdrich's poem by arguing that Rowlandson's text reveals traces of suppressed doubt and a disruptive vision. As Erdrich, Howe, and Breitwieser look through the surface of Puritan didacticism, they illuminate the dialogism hidden in the *Narrative*. Prompted by their insights, we can recognize that even the Biblical quotations expose heteroglossia and dialogic potential, as Rowlandson struggles to bring her experiences into line with her culture's most authoritative language.¹⁰

Erdrich cannot have read the *Narrative* without noting Rowlandson's unending search for food and for shelter against the cold and dark; her poem depicts the captive as engaged in a parallel search for spiritual and emotional

shelter. One of the poem's most powerful dialogic reversals is its suggestion that she might have been able to find such shelter in the alien world of the Indians. Further, Erdrich recognizes that the need for shelter is the need for inclusion, for community. The historic Mary Rowlandson sought inclusion by reading the Bible she'd been given by an Indian, searching out opportunities to see her children and other English captives, and anticipating her eventual rescue. Perhaps prompted in part by passages in Rowlandson's text that record changes in attitude—toward food, tobacco, herself—Erdrich envisions for the captive an elusive opportunity for integration with a Native community (perhaps prompted too, as Breitwieser suggests, by evidence of Rowlandson's economic integration, as she knits and sews and is paid for her work).

The history Erdrich constructs, in dialogic response to Rowlandson's *Narrative*, is one not of rescue and return, however problematical that might have been, to the colonists' community; rather she tells of a lost opportunity for a new vision of relationship and community. One might ask whether Erdrich's history is too easy—what about the terrible suffering that Rowlandson and other captives endured? But Erdrich does not deny them. Once Rowlandson's name appears in the epigraph, the story she told is unavoidably part of the poem's dialogical struggle, even the focus of that struggle, grounded as it is in the question whether the history might reveal more truths than those Rowlandson could see or acknowledge.

In *Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues*, Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny, too, exposes the contested nature of history and vision. Like Erdrich's poem, Kenny's poetic sequence engages multidimensional language in dialogic discourse that recreates the political and interpretive conflicts recorded and embodied in historical accounts. Kenny complicates the project and its effects further by recounting his history through the diverse voices of French and Dutch colonists in North America, the Jesuit missionary Isaac Jogues, and Mohawks who encountered him. The history thus becomes a web of stories in dialogue across cultural, geographic, and temporal borders, as Kenny shows us how diverse voices created meanings and realities in the past and continue to do so now as well.

Isaac Jogues' story (documented in his own *Narrative* and letters, as well as by others) may not be as widely known as Mary Rowlandson's. However, it is evidently quite familiar to Mohawk people. "For generations now," Joseph Bruchac says, "the Mohawk people have been told they must feel guilty about killing this holy man and approaching that story is like cauterizing an old wound for Kenny."¹¹ Like Rowlandson's story, Jogues' represents that major theme in European American versions of the history of North America, the colonizers' dedication to a transcendent mission, and their sufferings at the hands of indigenous aliens. Indeed, the pervasive piety of both Rowlandson and Jogues affords Erdrich and Kenny alike an opportunity to expose the Europeans' sense of divinely established prerogative, and to contest the Christian construction of colonial experience as a conflict between "saints" and "savages."

Jogues arrived in New France in 1636 and joined a mission to the Hurons in southern Ontario. In June 1642 he was sent to Quebec to obtain supplies, and in August, on their return trip, he and his party of forty, mostly Hurons,

were attacked by a larger force of Mohawks. Jogues' account of his subsequent captivity graphically details the tortures he witnessed and endured, while it reveals his dedication to his priestly work of instructing, baptizing, absolving, and comforting both the Huron and the French captives and his readiness for martyrdom. In the course of this captivity he may have been adopted into the Wolf clan; in any case, he was sheltered by an older woman of that clan who had recently lost a son and whom he called "aunt."¹² Brought eventually into the vicinity of the Dutch colony at Renselaerwyck (Albany, New York), he became the object of unsuccessful Dutch efforts to ransom him; finally, after Jogues had persuaded himself that by fleeing he could better serve God, the Dutch helped him to escape. He returned to France, but only to recover his strength and secure permission to return to Canada, which he did in the spring of 1644.

Back in Montreal, he accepted an assignment to establish a mission among the Mohawks, with whom a tenuous peace agreement had recently been made. He set out in May 1646 as an ambassador from the French. The Mohawks "welcomed [him] as a friend"; he dispatched his ambassadorial duties by exchanging greetings and gifts, then "turned to his spiritual avocations,"¹³ but the Indians pressed him to leave, and he turned back to Canada in mid-June. Eager to return to the Mohawks, he was delayed until September by rumors that the peace had failed. On this final journey, Jogues, his assistant, Jean de La Lande, and Otrihoure, a Huron envoy, were captured by a Mohawk war party and taken to Ossernenon, the town where Jogues had previously been a captive. As had happened before, he was told that he would die. Though the Turtle and Wolf clans were opposed, members of the Bear clan were determined to kill the missionaries. (Kenny describes the Bear clan as "holding a strong religious persuasion" [p. 68], perhaps suggesting an additional motive.) On October 18, 1646, while a council of Mohawk leaders was meeting in another town to determine the prisoners' fate, he was summoned to eat in a lodge of the Bear clan and was killed on the way. De La Lande was killed within a day. A letter from the Dutch governor indicates that some of the Mohawks believed that religious paraphernalia left behind by Jogues in June had blighted their corn.¹⁴ Jogues was canonized in 1930.

Kenny's *Blackrobe* tells not only of Jogues' life and death, but also of the French in North America and the Mohawk people—and of the rifts among the Mohawks perhaps occasioned, or at least aggravated, by European colonization, trade, and proselytizing. The sequence is framed with history and prophecy. Two poems, titled "Peacemaker" (pp. 3, 5) and "Aiiionwatha" (p. 6), tell of the establishment of the Iroquois confederacy for peace and protection. An ominous note is sounded, though, by the first "Wolf" poem (p. 4), in which the forest is "trampled" by "heavy footsteps." "Little People" (p. 7) seems to identify the intruder as a Christian priest who enters the woods and fails to acknowledge the presence of the little people, protectors and benefactors of the Iroquois. The poem which follows, "Wolf (Snakes)" (p. 8), intensifies the sense of foreboding as it alludes to "the Mohawk Prophecy" of two devouring snakes, Canada and the United States (p. 67). These first poems, then, both establish the context of traditional values and ways of life,

and foreshadow the impending cultural disruptions.

In the body of the work, Kenny creates direct speech, journal entries, letters, commentaries, and accounts by Jogues, individual Mohawks, and observers of or participants in the French colonial effort. Thus we read statements by Cardinal Richelieu, the explorer La Salle, and the Jesuit Father Superior of New France, Vimont, as well as letters from Jogues to his mother and an assessment of the missionary by a Dutch official, Arendt Van Corlear; there are also recollections from Jean de La Lande and Hoantteniate, "Jogues' Adopted 'Wolf Brother.'" Kenny follows a basically chronological order, from Jogues' eager but somewhat fearful first voyage to Canada ("how happy I am . . . that now / I will have the opportunity / of saving these lost souls for God" [p. 10]; "I shall / manage this boat! This storm! / This fear! God is in my heart." [p. 11]) to his death. However, he condenses and somewhat conflates Jogues' several sojourns and two captivities so that the sequence not only tells the French priest's story but also evokes cultural conflicts and explores the meanings of Jogues' entry into the Native world. A number of poems dramatize a difference in views and feelings between "Bear" and "Wolf 'Aunt'"; far from simply illuminating the Jesuit's impact, these poems deepen the depiction of the Mohawk people, whom he wished to convert.

The sequence concludes as Kenny completes the frame of history and prophecy: first, two later historical Mohawk converts speak, in poems that bear their names. "Tekakwitha (Kateri)" (p. 57) combines full commitment to the new faith with alienation from the earth, the Mohawk community, and the flesh; "Aroniateka" (p. 58), who also speaks in "Hendrik" (p. 59) using his European name, suggests a return, perhaps after death, to older ways. Then "Turtle" (p. 60) offers a prophecy about the colonizers' descendants. This poem is somewhat ambivalent, yet it represents, I think, an effort to be hopeful: "Someday they will come / to learn . . . not to teach" (Kenny's ellipsis). However, it is followed by "Rokwaho" (p. 61), dated 1978, which returns to history and grief:¹⁵

From his prayers flowed death
of salmon and trout in mercury pools.

. . . .
. . . settlers followed
soldiers behind hooded priests.

In his pouch he carried raisins
to cure the influenza his people
brought to the shores of the lake.

. . . .
My hair and tongue are cut!

Only after so painfully testifying to the ongoing consequences of colonialism can Kenny bring his book to end with serenity and unambiguous hope. He does so in a poem dated 1979 (p. 62), in which Rokwaho speaks directly to Kenny, reminding him that though "we do not speak [the Peacemaker's] name / in an act of respect," still

His thought moves among us
 through the pine,
 and his power.¹⁶

This final poem reveals most clearly Kenny's commitment not only to historical reclamation, but also to continuity and survival.

The struggle for survival is embodied in the dialogic contests of the poems that make up the book's core, particularly those that juxtapose French and Indian voices and the differing perspectives of Wolf "Aunt" and Bear. A number of poems tellingly counterpoint Jogues' voice to those of Indians with whom he came into contact. In "First Meeting with Kiotsaeton" (p. 19), Jogues responds (inwardly) to the Mohawk chief sent both to welcome the Jesuits as visitors and persuade them not to stay (p. 67). The poem begins in the vein of exoticism with which Kenny has already had Jogues, in his journal, describe the Hurons ("Les Hures," p. 14). "Like some marvelous bird," Kiotsaeton "stood on the river bank in plumage [*sic*], . . . in rainbow colors." The Natives' physical presence is powerful: Kiotsaeton's "air of royalty stunned my sensibilities"; and Jogues fears the motives of his warriors, "whose faces—on which I can discern / paint!—margin the woods."¹⁷ Jogues "exchange[s] gifts of food" with Kiotsaeton, but he resists recognizing Native prerogative: "I / represent the French crown! / and shall not be . . . denied my route"; secure in his knowledge that he is "son of God and priest / of Christ's blood," he comes away from this meeting determined to prevail. The following poem, "Kiotsaeton," gives us the Mohawk's speech to Jogues (p. 20). He counters European claims with indigenous authority when he begins, "through my lips / the Nation speaks." He offers Jogues reassurance and hospitality, but also defines his people's terms: they "will respect your customs / and invite you into the lodge / if you maintain respect for ours." Placing this poem after the preceding one throws into relief Jogues' failure to accept the requirement of mutual respect. These two poems together highlight his (and the Church's) breach of the rules of the traditional culture, and prepare us for his part in the fulfillment of the prophecy of "Wolf" (p. 8) when he becomes in effect an accessory to the devouring snake.

Jogues' perspective is next voiced in "Approaching the Mohawk Village," an excerpt from his "Journal" (p. 24). Defying advice, he "enter[s] the village" holding his "silver cross . . . upright" before him.¹⁸ The rest of this "journal" entry demonstrates that converting the Indians would in essence mean possessing them:

Iroquois, give me your children,

 Iroquois give me your chieftains.
 Give me your pride and arrogance.
 Give me your wildness.
 Give me your souls for God
 and your sins for hell.

Further, a "Marginal Note" implies material wealth to be had, if not by Jogues then by others, for he comments on the "Richly furred / beaver pelts" at the

lodge entrances.

Using the church's language in such a compromised circumstance, Kenny has already drawn attention to its heteroglossia and conveyed his own dialogic intention. In "Bear" (p. 25), the poem that immediately follows (and the first of five so titled), he draws attention to the dialogic struggle between Jogues and the Indians. The priest had offered "French raisins / to cure your influenza" (p. 24); now Bear begins angrily, "What do I want with his raisins!" His challenge continues as he claims that "[t]here is blood on that cross he wears" and that Jogues' rosary "beads are / the spittle of a snake." That the Mohawk's objection is political, too, is apparent: "Didn't he come / from Huron country[?]" Bear seems to demonstrate a limitation analogous to Jogues' when he questions the humanity of one who doesn't conform to his own cultural expectations: "What kind / of human is this who does not hunt for his own food[?]" Then he voices his primary concern, one certainly not limited to his own culture: "If he would leave / the children alone . . . children make men . . . / I would not interfere" (Kenny's ellipses). In fact, Jogues' *Narrative* indicates that another French captive, Rene Goupil, was killed precisely because, "taking off the cap of a child in the hut where he lived, he made him make the sign of the cross on his breast and forehead" (pp. 30–31). An act of piety and love to a devout young European Catholic, this gesture evidently conveyed dreadful possibilities to the child's Mohawk grandfather; Goupil might be said to have died of cultural heteroglossia.

Bear, I think, can be read as one member of the Bear clan or as several speaking in succession; he might perhaps be read as speaking for his clan. The five "Bear" poems give this voice an importance almost matching that of Jogues. Bear speaks next in two consecutive pairs of poems that juxtapose his words to those of Wolf "Aunt" (the name Kenny gives to the Wolf clan elder who sheltered Jogues). In the first pair, the speakers justify their actions: Wolf "Aunt," her "adoption" of "Blackrobe" ("I had the right to choose. / It is customary," p. 37), and Bear, his anticipated killing of Jogues ("Our corn withers! . . . We will starve / if this Blackrobe remains," p. 38).

In the second pair, each tells the story of Jogues' death. Wolf "Aunt" speaks from inside her lodge (pp. 39–41). She describes her efforts to persuade the priest to leave the village and to instruct him in propriety and respect, her hope that "he would learn our ways," his obstinacy, and finally the moment of his death: "they came to the door, / called him by name," he stepped out of the lodge, and she "heard a thump and . . . knew / his body crumpled under the club." Bear (pp. 43–45) recounts Jogues' offenses, focusing on "his preaching, / his determined wish to change, . . . his power to strike out a past / that has taken centuries to build"; he also admits his own dislike of "the hook of his nose," an ironic echo of Jogues' "journal" description of the Hurons (p. 14) and further evidence that Kenny sees these figures as complex and flawed—there are no paragons in *Blackrobe*. After affirming that the Mohawks had "carr[ied] out the law" by offering "sanctuary" and "hospitality . . . to satisfy the demands / of the Seneca," Bear recalls the night of Jogues' death: his own preparations, how he and two friends summoned Jogues and heard "his aunt's . . . arguments," her last effort to protect the priest. "Then

the clubs rained upon his head." Afterwards, Bear "returned to [his] lodge," where "the doctors purged [his] flesh / with burning cedar smoke," and he "awaited the Seneca runners." Mentioning the Senecas again, Bear alludes to the dissension not only among the three Mohawk clans, but also among the peoples of the Iroquois League over how to deal with the French; Kenny thus silently reminds us that by killing Jogues, the Bear clan members preempted the right of the council to decide on an appropriate, communal resolution. These paired poems spoken by Wolf "Aunt" and Bear powerfully demonstrate the dialogism of history. Both accounts are true, and both Bear and Wolf "Aunt" justify their attitudes and actions in terms of their culture's traditional expectations, yet obviously their emphases and implications differ, even while each leads to the same conclusion, Jogues' death.

If Wolf "Aunt" and Bear reveal a dialogics of conflict within Mohawk culture, an analogous dialogic tension is evident within European culture, for Kenny gives us not only poems from Jogues' perspective, but others in the voices of more secularly oriented Europeans. "The French Informal Report" (p. 51) is representative. It shares the Natives' assessment of Jogues as a fool; it also shares with the fourth "Bear" poem (p. 50), which precedes it, a view of the commercial-political agenda as primary for the French in North America. Bear states that "The French . . . demand retribution, / but will settle for beaver pelts, . . . and an opened gate to the Mohawk / Valley." And the "Informal Report" rages that Jogues "foiled our plans. The Dutch laugh / in our face, and the English frigates / approach New Amsterdam harbor." Ironically, Bear is the speaker who most unambiguously honors the courage of La Lande and Jogues. In the fifth "Bear" poem (p. 52), his last word, he acknowledges that "It is that very courage, bravery / in men that I fear most."

In *Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues*, Maurice Kenny revises the documentary record in a number of significant ways, each of which foregrounds the inherent heteroglossia and intensifies the dialogism of the history—or histories—and the telling. He does so, perhaps most importantly, by giving voice to Native speakers who've been "heard," if at all in writing, in records written by the French and their successors; in so doing, he implicitly counterpoints and revalues the oral and the written. Conversely, he barely alludes to a major theme of Jogues' *Narrative*, the excruciating tortures suffered by the Mohawks' Indian and French prisoners. This may have been a choice he felt necessary if he was to lead his audience to think beyond stereotypes; it may also be appropriate to his focus on his Mohawk characters' (and ancestors') motives.

Kenny also complicates the position and characterization of Isaac Jogues by suggesting his implication in worldly motives. First, there is the suggestion that Jogues may not have escaped complicity in the French pursuit of wealth. His "journal" note delightedly describing the "[r]ichly furred / beaver pelts" in the Mohawk village (p. 24) and his statement in a "letter" to his mother that the pelts "will make handsome chapeaux for our French / gentlemen and the grandees of China" (p. 29) might imply such complicity. That he was expected not to interfere with commercial interests and, if only by deferring, to promote them, is implied in the "French Informal Report." That he in

effect served the larger European agenda of conquest foretold in “Wolf” (p. 8) is the claim of the sequence’s penultimate poem: “Out of his black robe came Kraft, / feedmills, blight, Benson Mines” (p. 61). Ironically, perhaps tragically (and even if unwittingly), the man who would be a tool of God became a tool of commerce, and worse.¹⁹

More difficult to assess are the passages in which Kenny attributes sexual interests to the priest. Sexual fear—somewhat akin to that implied in Rowlandson’s *Narrative* and directly attributed to Rowlandson in Erdrich’s epigraph—is evident in the first such passage from Jogues’ “letter” to the Jesuit Father Superior in France:

. . . . I hardly dare
speak of the danger there is
. . . . amongst
the improprieties of these
savages. I understand adultery
flourishes throughout their country. (p. 11)

This passage might echo one from near the end of Jogues’ account of his first captivity: “Purity is not, indeed, endangered here by delights, but is tried, amid this promiscuous and intimate intercourse of both sexes, by the perfect liberty of all in hearing and doing what they please; and, most of all, in their constant nakedness” (p. 45).²⁰ Kenny gives Jogues himself only one other expression of sexual interest. It comes in the “journal” passage entitled “Les Hures” (p. 14), which focuses on the exotic physicality of “[n]aked, reddish-brown bodies” and concludes (the ellipsis is Kenny’s):

It is exciting to be
here among these fetching
people . . . rogues which we Jesuits
will change into angels and saints.

This poem’s evident fascination with the Indians’ bodies and its language (exciting, fetching, rogues) make the more directly stated suspicions of Bear and Wolf “Aunt,” that Jogues is unusually interested in boys, seem not implausible. Bear objects that “[h]is eye / is always either on pelts or dis- / tracted by the boys” (p. 25); after Jogues’ death, Bear elaborates:

he could not bear the sight
of naked flesh, nor two people
coupling in the shadows of the lodge.
Chastity, he called, chastity!
. . . .
. . . . Yet, he stared
at the young boys swimming nude
in the river. And flew to make signs
over their heads. (p. 43)

Wolf "Aunt," concerned for Jogues' safety, fears that "one day . . . some boy would resent his stares" (p. 41). And in "Hoantteniate" (p. 53), "Jogues' Adopted 'Wolf Brother'" remembers "treml[ing] / when his warm hand touched / my bare shoulder"; Hoantteniate says that he

. . . will miss the touch of his fingers
and his whispering through the corn fields
while reading his book, and the sweet
raisins he offered the boys and myself. . . .

These passages don't lend themselves to a clear, singular conclusion about the meanings of the characters' (including Jogues') statements, suspicions, and memories. Each is entangled in her or his own needs and commitments. Would Bear, for example, condemn a homoerotic interest as such? Another passage (p. 44) might suggest that he would. Is he rather objecting to the possibility of an adult's exploiting the young? His earlier statement that if Jogues "would leave / the children alone" he, Bear, would "not interfere," might suggest that interpretation. Could these objections of Bear's actually be ironic, revealing his own intolerance? And is Hoantteniate remembering Jogues' seduction, or the seductiveness of unfamiliar sensory experiences? These questions, I think, are unanswerable. Two things do seem clear. First, by inviting such questions Kenny again undercuts the image of Jogues as a purely religious person, one who transcended worldly needs and desires. Second, he may be responding critically and ironically to the Europeans' sexualization of the American landscape and of Native peoples as "parts of" the landscape, which converted land and people into objects to be enjoyed and exploited by outsiders.²¹ (Erdrich, too, may respond to the implications of such a view; in "Captivity," though, the dread that follows from sexualization is subverted, as the captive's perception is transformed.)

Another possibility is that implying Jogues' perhaps homoerotic interest in the boys might be a way for Kenny, a gay poet, obliquely to signal sympathy for him. Walter Williams includes the Iroquois among "aboriginal American cultures [that] did not recognize berdaches" (men who do not conform to standard men's roles, usually blending men's and women's work and roles) "as a respected status."²² Kenny himself, in his essay "Tinselled Bucks: A Historical Study in Indian Homosexuality," does not refer specifically to Mohawk or Iroquois attitudes, though he maintains that "[h]omosexuality was found in all American Indian tribes." A young man, he says, who had "forfeit[ed] his right to masculine privilege" by choosing not to take the warrior's path, "possibly exposed himself to insulting ridicule and abuse though rarely would he have been castigated, ostracized, or expelled."²³ His poem "Winkte" emphasizes the respect accorded berdaches in Sioux, Cheyenne, Crow, and Ponca cultures, contrasting such acceptance with the intolerance that, it implies, gay Indians and berdaches meet elsewhere—and perhaps met even in some traditional communities.²⁴ Bear's words about Jogues, then, could anticipate and echo scornful words that gay and lesbian Indians have heard even from within Native communities.²⁵ If so, Bear's remarks might veil

Kenny's own engagement in dialogic discourse with tribal forebears and contemporaries.

Jogues has his last word in "His Visions" (pp. 47–48), which follows the accounts of his death. Here Kenny alludes to visions that may allow us more directly to sympathize with Jogues. In the poem itself, Kenny only implies the import of these visions, but their significance becomes clear if we read this poem's tone and language in the context of words earlier attributed to Jogues. The most important element of the visions is contained in these lines (emphasis added):

What greater sacrifice can I
make for God and the salvation
of these *brothers* who I shall
and must lead to God.

. . . .

I will example my life for Jean
and for these *innocents*
who are in need of God's love

No longer do we hear him speaking of "lost souls," "savages," "rogues," or the "wildness" of exotic and dangerous warriors, for he has had a vision of the Natives' humanity. Kenny makes this clear when he responds to Bruchac's observation that his picture of Isaac Jogues is "almost sympathetic." He reveals his own ambivalence when he responds at first, "No, it's not really sympathetic at all. . . . I try to show him in the round as much as possible." However, as he speaks of the visions, Kenny seems to modify his position:

But what did happen with Isaac was that he had two visions when he came to this land . . . totally believing the bilge that Indian people were just plain wild savages. . . . he had his first vision in which was told, and he came to understand and accept, that the Indian people . . . were his brothers and sisters. . . . That's a lesson we can all still learn, not just about Indian people but about each other. . . . And his second vision told him that because he had finally accepted the people as his brothers and sisters that he must remain with them and die.²⁶

As Kenny describes them here, the visions offer a way of imagining a sympathetic potential in Jogues. The Jogues of "His Visions" has already moved beyond the insistent preacher who "openly refute[d the Indians'] foolish tales / that the world was built on a turtle's back" (p. 36). But Kenny sees in these visions the potential for further growth, foreclosed though it was by Jogues' death: in accepting the need to remain with his "brothers and sisters," Kenny believes, Jogues

was throwing The Crown away. He would eventually, I am sure, have fought against The Crown . . . it would have been a different story. But because of Isaac Jogues the state of New York . . . and . . . the United States of America is a different place. . . . He was the first missionary to come to this area and survive for any length of time. . . . So it is

directly upon his head. So you see where I might favor him a little bit. . . . had he lived longer, it might have been different.²⁷

Like Erdrich, it seems, Kenny sees at least the intimation of a different relationship between Europeans and Indians. Though in each case the possibility is cut off, perhaps simply suggesting an alternative (albeit a tenuous one) to stark animosity may be taken as a hopeful consequence of reinterpreting history. Or perhaps not.

"What should we make of this man-priest . . . [?]" Kenny has the Dutch official Arendt Van Corlear ask (p. 31). In the poems of *Blackrobe* and his comments to Bruchac, he demonstrates his knowledge that we do *make* something of Jogues, and of history, and that history is susceptible to revision. The successive monologues, speeches, journal entries, letters, and recollections of *Blackrobe* illuminate each other, complicating and deepening the meanings of the parts and the whole. In doing so they demonstrate the vitality of history and show that true history, or history that approaches being adequate to lived experience, must be polyvocal and dialogic. Early on, Kenny allows the explorer La Salle to assert confidently that "we have all plotted our places in history" (p. 9), but he proceeds to show that the stability La Salle takes for granted is illusory. Every voice, every piece, in *Blackrobe* implies dialogic struggle in some sense, even if only (as is probably so for La Salle's) in the relationship between a voice or a poem and its contexts.

Like Erdrich, then, Kenny shows us that the still-contested histories and interpretations of colonization demand, even create, dialogic discourse. As they write against such colonialist impositions as the "saints-vs.-savages" construction of colonial history, both poets complicate received history and raise questions about the meanings and limits of documentary truth. Erdrich does so by revising Rowlandson's *Narrative*; Kenny, through the proliferation of invented "documents" in *Blackrobe*, as well as by indirectly responding to published accounts of Jogues' life. Directly confronting and reimagining the victors' accounts, they offer resistant alternatives, imply the possibility of reclaiming other stories, and implicitly challenge their readers to respond.

NOTES

1. Kimberly M. Blaeser, *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996), 84, 85.

2. The first title is from the second edition published in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1682 by Samuel Green. The second title is from the 1773 edition, printed in Boston by John Boyle. I quote from the 1930 "Lancaster Edition," based on the 1682 Cambridge edition: Mary Rowlandson, *The Narrative of the Captivity of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, Lancaster Edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1930).

3. See Alden T. Vaughn, *Narratives of North American Indian Captivity, A Selective Bibliography* (New York: Garland, 1983). Vaughn lists narratives published into the 1890s and even some publications of new accounts, as well as re-publications, into the 1940s. Continuing popular interest in captivity narratives is evident in Frederick Drimmer, ed., *Scalps and Tomahawks: Narratives of Indian Captivity* (New York: Coward

McCann, 1961), and in movies like *Little Big Man* and *Dances with Wolves*, to cite just a few examples. For other examples, see Raymond William Stedman, *Shadows of the Indian: Stereotypes in American Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982). For another poetic reimagining of the meanings of captivity, see Mary Oliver's "The Lost Children," in *American Primitive* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1983), 12–15. Among recent studies of captivity narratives are those by Annette Kolodny, in *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 17–89, and Richard Slotkin, in *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), especially 94–145.

4. Louise Erdrich, *Jacklight* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, Winston, 1984), 26–27. All subsequent quotations from Erdrich's poem are from this text.

5. *Remove* is the term Rowlandson uses to designate chapters, each of which recounts one leg of her journey with the Indians.

6. I've consulted photocopies of the first London and the second American editions (the earliest extant), both published in 1682, as well as two other editions taken from the latter.

7. See, for example, Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 68–81.

8. Susan Howe, *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American Literary History* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1993), 94, 96, 123, 124.

9. Mitchell Breitwieser, *American Puritanism and the Defense of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 4, 6, 8–9, 10. Slotkin's assertions about Rowlandson's "insights" probably overstate matters; still, like Howe and Breitwieser, he reads her text as undermining the Puritan community's expectations (*Regeneration Through Violence*, 111–12). I mention him here especially because he is the one of these critics whose book could have been available to Erdrich before she wrote "Captivity."

10. See, for example, Howe, *The Birth-mark*, 97 and 124.

11. Joseph Bruchac, "New Voices from the Longhouse: Some Contemporary Iroquois Writers and Their Relationship to the Tradition of the Ho-de-no-sau-nee," in *Coyote Was Here: Essays on Contemporary Native American Literature and Mobilization*, ed. Bo Schöler (Aarhus, Denmark: Seklos, 1984), 158.

12. For information on Jogues' life and death see Francis Talbot, *Saint Among Savages: The Life of Isaac Jogues* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1935); see also Isaac Jogues, *Narrative of a Captivity Among the Mohawk Indians, and A Description of New Netherland in 1642–3*, with John Gilmary Shea, *A Memoir of the Holy Missionary* (New York: Press of the Historical Society, 1856; rpt. New York: Garland, 1977). See also the other documents published in the same volume: the *Memoir* by Shea, letters from Jogues to various people, and letters from others announcing his death.

Regarding the "adoption" of Jogues, Shea refers to his having been "incorporated" into the Wolf "tribe" (*Memoir*, 10); Talbot says that when he visited the Mohawks as an ambassador, he was welcomed into the Wolf clan's "special protection and their adoption" (*Saint Among Savages*, 389). Describing his first captivity, Jogues himself refers to "a good old woman, who from her age and her care of me, as well as from her compassion for my sufferings, called me her nephew, as I called her aunt" (48). Kenny states that this elder woman "did not legally, in ceremony, adopt Isaac Jogues, but sim-

ply took him into her protective house." Obviously, *adoption* is a term rife with the contending intentions of heteroglossia. See Maurice Kenny, *Blackrobe: Isaac Jogues* (Saranac Lake, NY: North Community College Press, 1982), 68. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from *Blackrobe* and Kenny's notes on that work are from this edition; page numbers will be noted parenthetically in the text.

13. Shea, 10.

14. Jogues, 68.

15. The name, Kenny tells us, means "Wolf-robe" (69); it is also the name of a younger Mohawk poet and artist, one of the people Kenny acknowledges in the dedication of *Between Two Rivers: Selected Poems, 1956–1984* (Fredonia, NY: White Pine Press, 1987).

16. Discussing Kenny's first "Peacemaker" poem, Bruchac illuminates "that dominant Iroquois image of the great pine (under whose four white roots the weapons of war were buried and at whose top an eagle always perches, vigilant, watching for any disturbance of the peace)." "New Voices," 158.

17. I quote these two lines from the poem as it appears in the selections from *Blackrobe* included in *Between Two Rivers* (109) because I think Kenny has not so much improved as corrected the lines printed in the original: "whose faces margin the woods / on which I can discern paint."

The descriptive words Kenny attributes to Jogues at the beginning of this poem ("some marvelous bird . . . in plummage") may ironically echo Talbot's description of "Kiotsaeton and the Mohawk leaders, sharp featured and barbaric in their head-dress of brilliant plumage" (*Saint Among Savages*, 386–87).

18. The Algonquian who advised Jogues not to wear his habit when he visited the Mohawks as an ambassador explained that "nothing [is] more repulsive at first, than this doctrine, that seems to exterminate all that men hold dearest," and the habit "preach[ed the doctrine] as strongly as your lips" (Jogues, 9).

19. In a note Kenny says, "There is definite thought that Jogues was sent as a pawn by the French government . . . to keep a keen eye out for beaver pelts and other valued furs. Jogues may well have been duped in the veils of his religious ardor and zeal" (68).

20. Kenny's lines are even closer to words Talbot attributes to Jean de Brébeuf, Jogues' mentor at the Huron mission: "I hardly dare speak of the danger there is of ruining oneself among the impurities of these savages, in the case of one whose heart is not sufficiently full of God to resist firmly this poison" (*Saint Among Savages*, 69). Recognizing such a likely source increases our sense of Kenny's complex dialogism.

21. See Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her* and *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

22. Walter Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1986; 1992), 39.

23. Maurice Kenny, "Tinselled Bucks: A Historical Study in Indian Homosexuality," in *Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology*, ed. Will Roscoe (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988), 18, 20.

24. Kenny, *Between Two Rivers*, 61–62.

25. Chrystos alludes to such tensions within Indian communities in "Askenet, Meaning 'Raw' in My Language," in *Inversions: Writing by Dykes, Queers, and Lesbians*, ed. Betsy Warland (Vancouver, BC: Press Gang, 1991), 237–47.

26. Joseph Bruchac, *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987), 153–54.

27. *Ibid.*, 154.