



This is My Body: Communion and Cannibalism in Colonial New England and New France

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DEERFIELD, Massachusetts, 1720. Worshippers pass a silver cup from hand to hand, down the pews of the meeting house, drinking wine.

Quebec, 1730. A priest holds fragments of the Host above a silver and gilt ciborium and places them on the tongues of kneeling worshippers.

Huron, 1636. A group of Wendat (Huron) men torture an Iroquois captive, drink his blood, eat his heart, then cook the rest of the remains in a kettle to share with the community.

Tabusintac River, seventeenth century. A group of Mi'kmaq people bury one of their own beneath three upturned copper kettles.

These three meals and a burial in a cooking vessel were all ceremonies of communion, designed to bring communities together and exclude outsiders through the ritual processing of real or imagined human flesh. Each of these ceremonies centered around a vessel made of precious metals, and made to contain real or imagined bodily substances. For Protestants and

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Catholics, these vessels metaphorically transformed the human body and made acceptable the consumption of human flesh and blood for those leery of cannibalism. In spite of the remarkably similar purposes that vessels played in these communal ceremonies, English Puritans, French Catholics, and native groups such as the Mi'kmaq and Wendat fixated on the differences between their ideas about communion. The stakes of these disagreements were high: these bloody rituals took place in the borderlands in a time of brutal warfare.

This article examines the material culture of communion vessels, and debates over rituals of cannibalism and communion, to analyze the cultural similarities that peoples at war in colonial New England and New France shared yet refused to recognize. In the end, the English, the French, the Mi'kmaq, and the Wendat resisted the striking similarities between their communion vessels *precisely because* these vessels and their uses were so similar.¹ They feared *becoming* cannibals even though they *were* cannibals. The parallel material realities of communion vessels did not translate into parallel thinking about shared, ritual meals. Instead, just as communion brought communities together, “the common pot” also drew the boundaries between *us* and *them*.²

¹Historians have argued that the Indian-European violence of the era originated not in irreconcilable difference, but from Indians and Europeans seeking to construct difference in the face of what they saw as too much cultural hybridity. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Phillip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Knopf, 1998); Joyce E. Chaplin, *Subject Matter: Technology, the Body, and Science on the Anglo American Frontier, 1500-1676* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001); Nancy Shoemaker, *A Strange Likeness: Becoming Red and White in Eighteenth-Century North America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004). Recently, historians have complicated this narrative by focusing on the many factions found within European and Indian cultures, and how these layers of difference violently shaped colonial America. See Peter Silver, *Our Savage Neighbors: How Indian War Transformed Early America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008); Erik Seaman, *Death in the New World: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1492-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Laura M. Chmielewski, *The Spice of Popery: Converging Christianities on an Early American Frontier* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011).

²“The common pot” served as a metaphor for community among many Indian groups in the colonial Northeast. See Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008). New

Between the late seventeenth and late eighteenth centuries, a series of European clashes—King William’s War (1688-1697), Queen Anne’s War (1702-1713), King George’s War (1744-1748), and the Seven Years’ War (1754-1763)—spilled over into colonial outposts. The coveted borderlands between New England and New France (present-day western Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire, Quebec, and the Maritime Provinces) served as home and front lines of brutal warfare.³ In these contested borderlands, English and French colonists and Native peoples including the Mi’kmaq and Wendat used metal vessels in their rituals of communion as they attempted to keep their respective communities together. The Wendat provide some of the most striking accounts of rituals involving vessels, and scholars have pointed to these accounts’ significance to understanding relations between Europeans and Native peoples in early America.⁴ While Iroquoian cannibalism has received considerable scholarly attention, it appears, from the number and consistency of accounts, that the Wendat also practiced ritual cannibalism.⁵ While Mi’kmaq rituals did not involve cannibalism, the kettles that survive from their burial ceremonies provide vital material links to Wendat practices (since Wendat rituals also made use of copper trade kettles).⁶

Materialists have argued that objects have agency and can make the world around them. Finbarr Barry Flood cautions against relying on “semiotic models that treat material forms and practices [merely] as wrappings for immaterial concepts and ideas” in “Bodies and Becoming: Mimesis, Mediation, and the Ingestion of the Sacred in Christianity and Islam,” in *Sensational Religion: Sensory Cultures in Material Practice*, ed. Sally Promey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 484. Nevertheless, the similar material realities of communion rituals, and their users’ struggle to delineate differences between these rituals, suggest that the path from object to meaning can be very complicated. People can and do resist the agency of things.

³See Guy Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003); and Christian Ayne Crouch, *Nobility Lost: French and Canadian Martial Cultures, Indians, and the End of New France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014).

⁴Erik Seeman, *The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), pp. 2-4.

⁵Thomas S. Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact Not Fiction,” *Ethnohistory* 27, no. 4 (1980): 309-16.

⁶Laurier Turgeon, “The Tale of the Kettle: Odyssey of an Intercultural Object,” *Ethnohistory* 44, no. 1 (1997): 1-29.

Wendat and Mi'kmaq practices spoke to each other and to English and French rituals in provocative ways. Of course, to compare these practices is not to collapse the differences between them—cannibalism did not play a role in the Mi'kmaq burial ritual. Nevertheless, it seems like more than coincidence that the Mi'kmaq ate out of these kettles and then buried their dead inside them, where the Wendat cooked the dead in kettles and ate from them.

While religious studies scholars define communion as the communal consumption of consecrated bread and wine, this essay interprets communion more broadly, as the ritualistic consumption of the human body as an expression of community.⁷ Scholars of religion in the Atlantic world have pointed to similarities between various Indian groups' ritual cannibalism and Protestant and Catholic communion; however, the materiality of these practices, and especially of the vessels used in them, has not been explored.⁸ This essay pushes back against assertions that objects make the world around them, contending that in the face of tremendous material similarity between their objects and practices, colonists and Indians refused to create or even acknowledge the possibility of shared cultures.⁹ In doing so, this essay helps explain the persistence of borderlands violence in the colonial era, by pointing to the ways that colonists and Native peoples justified conflict with each other on the grounds of cultural difference despite evidence of cultural similarities.¹⁰ Symbolically or literally destroying the human body, communion was a violent way to show community belonging in the midst of conflict.

⁷Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 4-5, 8.

⁸Susan Juster, *Sacred Violence in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 17-75; Chmielewski, *The Spice of Popery*, pp. 211-69.

⁹William Sewell, "The Concepts of Culture," in *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 166.

¹⁰While acknowledging the roots of colonialist violence lay in the fight for land and resources, Ann Little has called on historians to analyze why cultural difference remained a rallying cry for cross-cultural violence in this period. *Abraham in Arms: War and Gender in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), pp. 2-3.



FIG. 1.—John Dixwell, Beaker, c. 1720. Silver; $4 \frac{5}{8}$ in \times $2 \frac{3}{8}$ in. (Henry Needham Flynt Silver and Metalware Collection, Historic Deerfield, Massachusetts.) Courtesy of Historic Deerfield. Photo by Amanda Merullo.

The Material Culture of Communion

Examining the material culture of three communion vessels used in the borderlands of New England and New France reveals suggestive parallels in their forms and uses: these precious, metal vessels contained, protected, and mediated real or imagined bodily substances. Nevertheless, their makers and users would have seen differences, illustrating that the objects themselves tell a more complicated story. The two-handled silver cup (fig. 1) made by English silversmith John Dixwell for the First Church of Deerfield around 1720 was used in Puritan communion services. Dixwell made over twenty silver communion cups for New England congregations, pioneering the two-handled communion cup form in America, perhaps after seeing it on a trip to England. Simplicity and balance characterized the silver Deerfield cup, which was nearly cylindrical in form.

Simple decorative bands encircled the shallow, narrow foot. A delicate S-curve handle protruded from either side. Minimal ornamentation on the cup drew attention to the sleek surface of the silver itself, and the plain inscribed letters with which the cup advertised its residence in the Deerfield church.¹¹

The second vessel is a silver and gilt ciborium made in Paris by Guillaume Loir in 1730, and used in New France for Catholic masses (fig. 2). Loir, an influential silversmith in Paris, did a brisk business in domestic and ecclesiastical silver commissioned in New France.¹² The ciborium stood a little over eight inches tall. It was far more lavishly ornamented than the cup, with bands of elaborate decoration from top to bottom. At the top of the cover rose a finial in the shape of a flat cross. The bowl that held the Host was the least-ornamented part of the object, showing off smooth curves of silver that drew attention to the holy matter within.¹³

The third vessel is a copper kettle with a cast iron handle, made in France, and buried in a Mi'kmaq grave sometime during the seventeenth century; a similar trade kettle would have been used in Wendat rituals (fig. 3).¹⁴ An unknown maker created the kettle in France before it traveled to Canada for trade with the Indians. Wider than it was tall, the kettle stretched over two feet in diameter. The kettle was flat-bottomed, with walls that flared gently at the rim. Two iron bands, riveted to

¹¹Barbara McLean Ward, "In a Feasting Posture: Communion Vessels and Community Values in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century New England," *Winterthur Portfolio* 23, no. 1 (1988): 6, 19-22. The original handles of the Dixwell cup appear to have been replaced, as the extant handles are of much cruder craftsmanship than the rest of the cup. A 1710 Dixwell caudle cup held at the Winterthur Museum showcases more ornate handles. John Dixwell, caudle cup, Boston, ca. 1710, Silver; H. 3 3/4", Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Del.

¹²Jean Trudel, *Silver in New France: An Exhibition Organized by the National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1974* (Ottawa: The National Gallery of Canada for the Corporation of the National Museums of Canada, 1974), pp. 104-8.

¹³Ross Allan C. Fox, *Quebec and Related Silver at The Detroit Institute of Arts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978), p. 84.

¹⁴Kettle, copper and cast iron, ca. seventeenth century, Collection of the New Brunswick Museum – Musée Nouveau Brunswick, Saint John, New Brunswick. Because the kettle is a sensitive cultural artifact under Canadian law pertaining to First Nations objects in museum collections, only replicas or historic illustrations may be represented.



FIG. 2.—Guillaume Loir, Ciborium, 1730. Silver with gilt; H. 24.1 cm. A56.2 (Collection of the New Brunswick Museum, Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, New Brunswick.)



FIG. 3.—Brigitte Clavette and Rick Séguin, *Reproduction Kettle*, 1994. Patinated, hammered copper and wrought iron; H. 33 cm., W. 76.2 cm. R1994.1 (Collection of the New Brunswick Museum, Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, New Brunswick.)

the sides of the kettle just below the lip, affixed two loops to the lip. Through these loops threaded the handle, also made of iron.¹⁵ Unlike the glossy surface of the Dixwell cup or the bowl of the ciborium, the kettle revealed the violence of its making, its copper surface textured in concentric circles by the blows of a hammer.

These vessels performed similar roles throughout ceremonies of communion. Communion vessels united body and soul and joined the body of the communicant with the bodies in communion. The vessels were made to be handled, to respond to touch. The kettle, though large and heavy (especially when filled), had a sturdy iron handle, which would have enabled users to carry it from place to place and hang it on a trammel over a fire. The Dixwell cup's smaller size and two handles enabled communicants to pass it down the pew. Other Puritan vessels of the time—tankards or standing cups—would have

¹⁵Turgeon, "The Tale of the Kettle," p. 7 and "On the Pre-Historic Remains, and on an Interment of the Early French Period, at Tabusintac River, N.B.," 3 November 1879, *Bulletin of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick*, no. 5 (1886): 14-15; Samuel W. Kain and Charles F. B. Rowe, "Some Relics of the Early French Period in New Brunswick," December 4, 1900, *Bulletin of the Natural History Society of New Brunswick* 19, 4 (part 4): 307-8.

been more difficult to hand along the pew, as they either had only one handle or none at all. Many communicants easily handled the Dixwell cup each time they took communion, yet its delicate handles encouraged them to treat the precious wine within with care. By contrast, with no obvious places to hold it, the ciborium would have been the most difficult object to handle. It had to be carefully balanced to keep from tipping and spilling the precious Host. To carry it, a person with specialized knowledge, a priest, had to hold the ciborium somewhat awkwardly around the stem with its several decorative knobs. He would have to grasp it just below the finial's cross decoration to remove the lid. Unlike the two-handled cup or the kettle, the ciborium did not openly reveal how it was meant to be handled. Only the priest was meant to touch it. The shapes of all three objects enabled users to touch the vessels without improperly contacting their contents. The distance between user and contents would have been particularly important in rituals that involved a sacred or purified substance, such as the Host in the Mass.

Thus, although these objects were made to be touched with hands and mouths, each of these vessels carefully policed contact between the body of the consumed and the body of the consumer. Even as the ritual of communion united the members of a community, the communion vessels also enclosed and protected the body of the consumed.¹⁶ The ciborium, made to contain the holiest of substances, was the only one of the three to have a lid. Catholic doctrine dictated that only gold or silver could touch the Host, so the inside of the ciborium cup was gilded. The ciborium enclosed the Host in a lidded chamber surrounded by gold, protected from the contamination of

¹⁶Elaine Scarry posited that the process of making objects inverts the “inside” and “outside” of the human body, externalizing and then addressing human needs and desires in the material world. Most abstractly, these communion vessels satisfied the desire for connection with community and god(s). They also enabled people to carry, contain, and enclose sacred substances—even to heat them over a fire or bury them. Communion vessels contained bodies (of the consumed), were bodies themselves, interacted with—sometimes even entered—other bodies (those of the consumers), and were manifestations of the needs of bodies (the consumers’ bodies, again). *Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 283-92.

the profane world. Where the ciborium could shelter only a handful of wafers, the large kettle could hold an entire set of human bones. At the Tabusintac grave site, the inverted kettle formed its own lid, protecting the remains from soil, digging animals, and whatever other forces might come to harass the bones of the dead. Grasping the Dixwell cup by its handles, communicants did not touch the body of the cup, much less the precious wine within.

While the forms of vessels separated their contents from the outside world, rituals of communion relied on contact between the eaten and the eater. The body of the consumed needed to be assimilated into the body of the consumer—these were meals, after all. In accordance with the hierarchies in Catholic doctrine, the ciborium interacted the least with the body of the communicant. Only a priest could reach into the ciborium and place a wafer on a communicant's tongue. By contrast, the Puritan communion service, in a manifestation of the priesthood of all believers, granted the communicant direct contact: communicants raised the lip of the cup to their own lips and drank. The kettle, meanwhile, operated more like the ciborium, partly because its massive size prevented a user from stepping up and taking a drink and partly because its contents might be too hot to touch with lips or bare hands. One person might serve up the contents of the kettle into the hands or onto the dishes of others, as the Jesuit Sébastien Rale reported of a meal among the Abenaki: "When they have filled their kettle with meat, they boil it, . . . after which they take it off the fire, serve it in basins of bark, and distribute it among all the people who are in their cabin." The contents, however, were more widely available since an eater could reach into the kettle to take a portion, with a spoon or with hands if the contents were cool enough to touch.¹⁷

As each of these vessels made contact, they were also separate bodies for the body in communion. The precious substances of

¹⁷*The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents: Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France, 1610-1791*, vol. 67, ed. Reuben Gold Thwaites (Cleveland: Burrows Brothers Co., 1900), p. 141.

communion wine and bread, or the blood and flesh of Christ, or the blood and body of one's relations or enemies, deserved the most precious vessels to surround, enclose, and convey them. Touched with the heat of a human hand or a cooking fire, metal vessels became as living beings, blood or wine pulsing beneath their skins. When the Wendat cooked a captive in a kettle, they nestled one warm body inside another. The tools of smiths, melting and bending, released the living essence of metals, their power to transform. The flickering of polished metal implied a kind of liveliness. For this reason, miniature portrait painters layered foil beneath thinly-sliced ivory, or copper under enamel, to create the illusion of blood beneath skin. Alchemists believed that precious metals grew in veins under the mountains. The Puritan poet Edward Taylor compared Jesus's "Humane Veans" to "Golden Pipes."¹⁸

Debating Cannibalism

Believers made explicit the connections between their own bodies and souls, the bodies of congregations, and the body in communion: as Cotton Mather wrote, "Many *Grains* make but one *Loaf*, (and many *Drops* make one *Cup of Wine*) even so, many *Saints* make but one *Church*, which is the mystical Body of the Lord Jesus."¹⁹ Mather's declaration implied a slipperiness between bread and wine, church and body that caused intense debate among Protestants and Catholics during the Reformation and beyond. Nevertheless, Christians expressed horror at Indian consumption of human flesh. Europeans lived in fear of needing to resort to survival cannibalism, but acknowledged that in some dire situations, it was necessary. But actually craving the taste of other people was, to Europeans, the lowest

¹⁸Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 53-61; Robin Jaffee Frank, *Love and Loss: American Portrait and Mourning Miniatures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), fig. 5, pp. 61-69; and Edward Taylor, *The Poems of Edward Taylor*, ed. Donald E. Stanford (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), p. 21.

¹⁹Cotton Mather, *A Companion for Communicants* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1690), p. 25.

form of savagery.²⁰ “What feed on Humane Flesh and Blood? Strang mess! What Barbarousness is here?” exclaimed Edward Taylor.²¹ Pierre Roubaud, a Jesuit missionary, alleged that the Ottawa Indians “satiated” a “more than canine hunger” for the flesh of their prisoners “with a famished avidity.” Roubaud saw this hunger as animalistic, the hungry as “inhuman creatures.” “I have seen Savages in our Cabin speak with gusto of the flesh of an Iroquois,” reported Jean Brebeuf, another Jesuit missionary, of his experiences among the Wendat. To discuss the particular tastes and textures of human flesh “in the same terms as they would praise the flesh of a Deer or a Moose” was “certainly very cruel,” Brebeuf declared. Indian hungers for human flesh provided colonizers with rationalizations for spreading Christianity and suppressing Indian ritual practices: “we hope . . . that the knowledge of the true God will entirely banish from this Country such barbarity,” concluded Brebeuf.²² But as the importance of communion rituals attests, the colonizers knew such hunger themselves.²³

It is impossible to discuss cannibalism without acknowledging how early modern Europeans produced and consumed stories of Indian cannibalism, then used these accounts to justify imperial expansion and settler colonialism.²⁴ The word “cannibal” arose out of European exploration of the Americas and referred

²⁰Richard Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 112-34; and Catalin Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, trans. Alistair Ian Blyth (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), pp. 173-75.

²¹Taylor, *Poems*, p. 231.

²²*Jesuit Relations*, 70:125, 10:229.

²³Sugg, *Mummies, Vampires, and Cannibals*, p. 130.

²⁴Although anthropologist William Arens (*The Man-Eating Myth: Anthropology and Anthropophagy* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979]) claimed that Europeans invented ritual cannibalism as an excuse for imperial expansion, anthropologists and archaeologists have documented numerous cultures, including early modern Europeans, that practiced some form of ritual cannibalism, and have argued that this widespread practice cannot be reduced to a rationalization for colonial ambition. For rebuttals to Arens, see Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact Not Fiction,” pp. 309-16; Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, pp. 117-21; and Kelly L. Watson, *Insatiable Appetites: Imperial Encounters with Cannibals in the North Atlantic World* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

to the first indigenous groups to encounter the Spanish. Europeans profited from their caricature of the cruel, bloodthirsty, man-eating savage.²⁵ At the fall of Fort William Henry in 1757, English soldier Jonathan Carver saw Indians drinking “the blood of their victims, as it flowed warm from the fatal wound.”²⁶ At this same battle, Roubaud claimed he witnessed Ottawa Indians washing down the flesh of English prisoners with “skullfuls of human blood,” which left them with “still besmeared faces” and “stained lips.” Roubaud asked one of the Ottawa men why they were eating their prisoner, and the man replied, “*Thou have French taste; me Savage, this meat good for me,*” before offering Roubaud a piece of the “English roast.” The Jesuit rejected the gift of meat and called the Ottawa man’s argument “worthy of a barbarian,” a cannibal who defended his unnatural hunger in broken French.²⁷ It seemed that cannibals violated the ultimate human taboo, giving in to the violent “antisocial power of hunger.”²⁸ For Europeans, sensationalized stories about cannibalism justified the violent suppression and displacement of Indians.

These stories of Indian cannibalism were pervasive and formulaic. For example, the trope of Indians threatening to eat English children recurred over and over in women’s captivity narratives. The Indian man that Elizabeth Hanson identified as her “master” sent her “to fetch him a Stick that he had prepared for a Spit, to roast the Baby upon.” He then undressed her child, and “felt its Arms, Legs, and Thighs” appraisingly. Hanson’s captor repeated this routine several times, but always decided that the child remained too thin to eat. “I could not persuade my self, that he intended to do as he pretended; but

²⁵Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, p. 125; and Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, pp. 10, 75-77.

²⁶Jonathan Carver, “Captain Jonathan Carver’s Narrative of His Capture,” in *Tragedies of the Wilderness; or True and Authentic Narratives of Captives Who Have Been Carried Away by the Indians*, ed. Samuel Gardner Drake (Boston: Antiquarian Bookstore and Institute, 1841), p. 174.

²⁷*Jesuit Relations*, 70:125.

²⁸Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 102.

only to aggravate and afflict me,” Hanson concluded.²⁹ In Mary Rowlandson’s account of her captivity during King Philip’s War, she reported asking an Indian for news of her son who was traveling with another group. The Indian replied “that such a time his master roasted him, and that himself did eat a piece of him, as big as his two fingers, and that he was very good meat.”³⁰ Whether these Indians were teasing Rowlandson and Hanson, or Hanson’s captor actually intended to consume her child, or Hanson and Rowlandson completely invented these stories, this trope of threatened children and cannibalistic Indians pointed to a presumption of cannibalism that gnawed at the English imagination.

Moreover, the figure of the terrifying cannibal Indian exerted such power on the English imagination that writers often implied or invented cannibalism when it had not actually taken place. When Indians told the English captive Jemima Howe that her young children had died, she envisioned “the naked carcasses of my deceased children hanging upon the limbs of the trees.” Grieving and frightened, Howe imagined her captors treating her children like game, hanging up their bodies “as the Indians are wont to hang the raw hides of those beasts which they take in hunting.”³¹ In fact, the children were alive, and Howe reunited with them weeks later. For European observers, the menace of man-eating permeated even innocuous Indian actions.

Despite the sensational tone of many European accounts, the descriptions of ritual cannibalism among the Wendat and Iroquoian groups suggest that they were based to some

²⁹*God’s Mercy Surmounting Man’s Cruelty, Exemplified in the Captivity and Redemption of Elizabeth Hanson* (1728), in *Women’s Indian Captivity Narratives*, ed. Kathryn Zabelle Derounian-Stodola (New York, London: Penguin, 1998), p. 74.

³⁰Mary Rowlandson, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682) in *American Captivity Narratives*, ed. Gordon M. Sayre (Boston, New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 155. Rowlandson’s son was still alive, and she reunited with him a few months later.

³¹“A Particular Account of the Captivity and Redemption of Mrs. Jemima Howe,” in *Tragedies of the Wilderness; or True and Authentic Narratives of Captives*, ed. Samuel Gardner Drake (Boston: Antiquarian Bookstore and Institute, 1841), p. 160.

degree on actual practice.³² Ritual cannibalism performed a social function, constructing an “eating culture” that reinforced boundaries both within and across communities.³³ Eaters are powerful; the consumed rarely are, though the flesh and blood of Jesus Christ makes a notable exception. The Wendat told their own tales of powerful cannibals among the gods, reporting to the Jesuit missionary Joseph François Lafitau that “Ata-entsic,” the grandmother of the god “*Tharonhiaougon*,” “sucked the blood of men, causing them to die of illness and weakness.”³⁴ In a world where gods were cannibals, eating someone, such as a captive taken in war, dramatically demonstrated power over one’s enemies. Eating other people dehumanized them, turning them into animals unworthy of humane treatment. Eating defined the borders of the community: a community member could not be eaten, but an outsider or enemy could. At the same time, consuming the flesh of another incorporated whatever power the enemy might have over the consumer.³⁵ Witnessing the Wendat ceremony of torture and cannibalism, Brebeuf wrote that the Wendat believed that “since they have mingled [the captive’s] blood with their own they can never be surprised by the enemy, and have always knowledge of their approach, however secret it may be.”³⁶

The Wendat might have had particular reason to show this ritual to Brebeuf in 1636, as this decade saw tremendous cultural flux for the group. European colonization destabilized

³²Abler, “Iroquois Cannibalism: Fact Not Fiction,” pp. 309-16. Many accounts of cannibalism cannot be ascribed to a particular group because European writers frequently referred to generic “Indians.” Lieut. Dudley Bradstreet Diary, 27 May 1745. Pre-Revolutionary Diaries 2.23, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.; and John Norton, *The Redeemed Captive* (Boston: Samuel Kneeland and Timothy Green, 1748), p. 10.

³³Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, pp. 25-26; Kyla Wazana Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the 19th Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), p. 8; Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, p. 5.

³⁴Joseph François Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians Compared with the Customs of Primitive Times* (1724), vol. 1, ed. and trans. William N. Fenton and Elizabeth L. Moore (Toronto: The Champlain Society, 1974), p. 168.

³⁵Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, pp. 6, 25-26, 125; and Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, p. 129.

³⁶*Jesuit Relations*, 10:227-29.

Indian communities' social balance by introducing new economic, political, and environmental forces, such as the fur trade, wars and alliances, and devastating epidemic disease. Through a ceremony of torture and cannibalism, the Wendat sought to shore up their own social order, demonstrating to a European outsider the power relations within their culture. A decade and a half after Brebeuf wrote his account of this ritual, as war with the Iroquois uprooted and scattered Wendat communities, the Wendat tortured and executed him, drank his blood, and ate his heart.³⁷

In light of Brebeuf's ritual death, it seems that however utilitarian cannibalism may have been in keeping communities together, it also forced different cultures farther apart. The many groups at war in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries eagerly accused other people of being cannibals. Algonquians told early New England colonists that the proper name for the group living just to their west was "Mohawk" based on the Algonquian term for "cannibal." (The Mohawk call themselves Kanien'kehá:ka, the "People of the Flint.")³⁸ With the exception of the Ottawa man who matter-of-factly told Roubaud, "*this meat good for me,*" cultures tended to see cannibals everywhere but amongst themselves. While Europeans were quick to catalog what they deemed Indian atrocities, they also committed plenty against each other.³⁹

The English called all their enemies cannibals, and their accounts of cannibalism among both French and Indians shared provocative similarities. First, as in other English or French accounts of Indian cannibalism, eating people took its place in

³⁷Seeman, *Death in the New World*, pp. 141-42.

³⁸*Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "Mohawk," accessed 10 December 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/120734?redirectedFrom=mohawk>. The Wendat likewise bestowed an insulting name upon the Algonquians: "Rontaks," meaning "Tree-Eaters," because Algonquians ate lichen in times of food scarcity. Lafitau, *Customs of the American Indians*, 2:62.

³⁹Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, p. 129; Lynn Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 100.

a liturgy of violence: torture, kill, consume.⁴⁰ Second, cannibalism seemed almost addictive or contagious, as cannibals tried to convert others to a taste for human flesh. Dudley Bradstreet, a Massachusetts soldier at the siege of Louisbourg in 1745, related how Indians allied to the French tortured and killed an English soldier, then “Obligd one of our men to eat a part of him.”⁴¹ John Norton, the English minister taken captive by French and Indians at the fall of Fort Massachusetts in the Berkshires in 1746, told of how a group of Indians killed the fort’s watchman and mutilated his corpse. Next, “a young Frenchman took one of the Arms and flay’d it, roasted the Flesh, and offer’d some of it to *Daniel Smeed*, one of the Prisoners, to eat; but he refused it.”⁴² It seems particularly significant that neither Bradstreet nor Norton accused the Indians or French of actually *being* cannibals themselves; rather, the Indians of Bradstreet’s story and the “young Frenchman” of Norton’s tried to make other people *become* cannibals. As part of a routine of atrocity, captors forced (or tried to force) their prisoners to eat the corpses of their comrades. They used the fear of becoming a cannibal (however unwillingly) to torment their prisoners.

For Norton and Bradstreet, the fear of conversion to cannibalism echoed other conversion fears. In English eyes, the French, believing in transubstantiation, were not just cannibals themselves: they were trying to convert others to their ways. As a Protestant minister, Norton would have been a particular target of spiritual attack from the French. The narrative of John Williams, another Protestant minister taken captive and brought to New France, hinged on the peril of “spiritual seduction.”⁴³ Over lavish dinners, Williams sparred theologically with Jesuits, and reported that one wrote a poem calling him “a

⁴⁰Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, p. 75.

⁴¹Bradstreet, *Diary*, 27 May 1745.

⁴²Norton, *The Redeemed Captive*, p. 10. The same Frenchman, Norton reported, made a tobacco pouch of the watchman’s skin.

⁴³Teresa A. Toulouse, *The Captive’s Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), p. 142.

Wolf, who was shut up,” to keep “the Sheep . . . in safety.” No, Williams was certain, the priests were the wolves, not he. He feared that they would tell other English captives “that I was turn’d, that they might gain them to change their Religion.”⁴⁴ Williams and the Jesuits saw the battle for souls as a struggle to protect sheep from a hungry wolf. They worried that the enemy’s faith would devour and damn the innocent.

In this context of religious conflict, the English neither wanted to consume what the French were eating, nor to be consumed themselves. Again, even if Norton’s anecdote about the Frenchman offering human flesh to English prisoners were not factually true, his willingness to accuse the French of this kind of cruelty speaks volumes about the animosity between Protestants and Catholics in this era. The same denial of the humanity of the other that characterized cannibalism also marked the way Protestants and Catholics treated each other.⁴⁵ Jonathan Swift was well aware of the irony when he wrote of English Protestants roasting Irish Catholic children like suckling pigs in “A Modest Proposal.” In a jab at the scarcity and violence in the colonies across the Atlantic, he credited this cannibalistic solution to hunger to “a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance.”⁴⁶

Debating Communion

One of the most intense controversies over cannibalism did not directly concern Native peoples, but Protestant and Catholic Europeans. The debate, centered on *what* communicants consumed during the Lord’s Supper—wine or blood,

⁴⁴John Williams, *The Redeemed Captive, Returning to Zion*, 2nd ed. (Boston: T. Fleet, 1720), pp. 40, 48, 80–82. The reference to a wolf among sheep is from Matthew 7:15, “Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.” Williams felt particularly vulnerable because his eleven-year-old son, Samuel, became interested in converting to Catholicism during captivity.

⁴⁵Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, p. 8; Sugg, *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires*, p. 129; Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism*, p. 100.

⁴⁶Jonathan Swift, “A Modest Proposal” (1729), in *The Essential Writings*, ed. Claude Rawson and Ian Higgins (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2010), p. 297.

wafer or flesh—defined the boundaries of white communities and threatened to dismember Europe and its outposts in America with religious war.⁴⁷ Moreover, the regulations dictating who could participate in communion not only divided Protestants from Catholics, but members of these communities from one another, divisions that Native rituals also echoed.

Believing in transubstantiation, Catholics took literally Jesus's declaration in 1 Corinthians 24-25: "This is my body . . . This cup is the new testament in my blood." A priest, channeling "the Divine Power," transformed sacramental wafers and wine into Jesus's actual flesh and blood.⁴⁸ The Douay catechism decreed that the Eucharist was indeed "the Body and Blood of Jesus-Christ," but disguised "under the forms or appearances of Bread and Wine."⁴⁹ By contrast, Protestants interpreted Jesus's words as a metaphor. In their Westminster catechism, communicants partook of Christ's flesh and blood "not after a corporal and carnal manner, but by faith."⁵⁰ In 1690, Cotton Mather likened the "Heresy" of transubstantiation to lascivious drunkenness and expressed the hope that Protestants would eventually triumph in Europe's religious wars: "All the Wheels now move apace towards that Revolution," he declared, "when mankind shall no more be Inebriated with the *Cup of Abominations* in the Hand of the old Scarlet Romish *Whore*." Protestants argued that Christ spoke metaphorically and that communion bread and wine, while holy, did not change into Christ's actual body and blood. For Protestants, the doctrine of transubstantiation implied a continuous dismemberment and destruction of Christ's body. Transubstantiation "Crucifies over again Him that was to Dy, *but once for all*," Mather fretted. The idea that Christ gave his actual body to his followers to

⁴⁷Avramescu, *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism*, pp. 129-35.

⁴⁸John Gother, *Instructions for Confession and Communion* (London: Thomas Meighan, 1726), preface. On transubstantiation, see Kilgour; and *The Poetics of Transubstantiation: From Theology to Metaphor*, ed. Douglas Burnham and Enrico Giacherini (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2005).

⁴⁹*An Abstract of the Douay Catechism* (Douay: Mairesse, 1716), p. 57.

⁵⁰*The Grounds and Principles of Religion, Contained in a Shorter Catechism* (1646), p. 25.

eat at the Last Supper created “contradictions impossible to be defended by any rational Arguments,” wrote English minister John Williams: how could he “eat his own Body himself, whole and entire in his own hands; and after that each one of the Disciples eat him entire, and yet he sit at the Table whole, untouched at the same time”? More troubling still, unlike Christ’s body and blood, bread and wine were, according to Mather, “corruptible”—they could rot, or even be adulterated with poisons, a terrible profaning of sacred matter. Worst of all, the idea that Catholics consumed Christ’s real body and blood made them “so much worse than Canabals,” in Protestant eyes.⁵¹

Moreover, Protestants derided transubstantiation as superstition that relied on the ignorance and submission of communicants. The combination of bread and wine and a priest’s words could not possibly create God’s body in the flesh, Mather argued. The Catholic ceremony was the product of “a *Baker*, a *Wafter*, a *Charm*.” Moreover, transubstantiation flew in the face of sensory evidence: “whatever our *Senses* tell us, to the contrary, ‘tis not *Bread* but *Christ*, which we have after a wretched Priest has consecrated.”⁵² Finally, the doctrine of transubstantiation interfered with what Protestants saw as a crucial aspect of the Lord’s Supper: because Catholics believed that “the blood is in the body,” communicants were partly excluded, partaking only of wafers, not the wine. Priests consecrated only a small amount of wine and drank it themselves. By contrast, Protestants prided themselves on their inclusiveness, offering both bread and wine to all communicants, as they saw this practice as more directly following the “Laws & Commands of Christ.”⁵³

Catholic writers rebutted Protestant charges, explicating the mystery of transubstantiation in as much detail as the Protestants who dissected it. John Gother, an English convert to

⁵¹Mather, *Companion for Communicants*, pp. 10, 11-13; Williams, *The Redeemed Captive*, pp. 80-81.

⁵²Mather, *Companion for Communicants*, pp. 8, 11.

⁵³Ward, “In a Feasting Posture,” pp. 5-6; Williams, *The Redeemed Captive*, pp. 80-81.

Catholicism, saw the belief in transubstantiation as the foundation of his faith. “My Saviour Jesus Christ,” he wrote, “I firmly believe Thou art really present in the Blessed Sacrament; I believe that it contains thy Body and Blood, accompanied with thy Soul and Divinity.” Gother penned *Instructions and Devotions for Hearing Mass* to guide other converts and devoted the preface to debunking Protestant critiques of transubstantiation. Most importantly, he argued that “Divine Power” enabled transubstantiation, just as it caused many other miracles in the Bible, for God “*has Power to make things be, what he says they are.*”⁵⁴ The writer of a French treatise on the miracle of transubstantiation also emphasized God’s power to transform: “one cannot have too grand an idea of the works of God.”⁵⁵ Belief in transubstantiation was one of the fundamental requirements of Catholic identity.

Responding to the Protestant argument that transubstantiation implied a grotesque dismemberment of Jesus’s body in every communion, Gother concluded that Protestants had confused Christ’s “Corruptible, Mortal *and* Natural” body with his “Incorruptible, Immortal, and even Spiritual” body. The latter could be “*contain’d under the Form of a Wafer,*” and “*divided*” among communicants, without the risks of contamination, corruption, or bodily destruction that Protestants decried. Gother admitted that on the basis of sensory evidence alone, “*the Sacrament appears to be nothing, but Bread and Wine,*” but maintained that the truly faithful trusted more in the Word of God than in their senses: since “*God has reveal’d it in Holy Writ, . . . we confess our resolution of preferring God’s Word, before the Sences.*” Gother pointed out that communion was

⁵⁴John Gother, *Instructions for Confession and Communion* (London: Thomas Meighan, 1726), pp. 76-77; and *Instructions and Devotions for Hearing Mass* (London, 1699), preface. On “real presence,” see Robert A. Orsi, *History and Presence* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁵⁵“On ne pouvoir avoir une trop haute idée des ouvrages de Dieu,” *Traité de L’infini Créé avec l’Explication de la Possibilité de la Transsubstantiation* (Amsterdam: Marc Michel Rey, 1767), p. 3 (my translation). Scholars have attributed the book to no fewer than five different possible authors: Nicholas Malebranche (1638-1715), Henri comte de Boulainvilliers (1658-1722), Pierre Valentin Faydit (1640-1709), Pierre Varignon (1654-1722), and Jean Terrasson (1670-1750).

not the only situation in which one could not always believe one's senses. "[T]he Apothecary, the Chymist, the Perfumer," and "even . . . Cooks" combined and transformed ingredients that took on "many qualities of Colour, Taste and Smell, which belong not to them." For Catholics, "The words of the Consecration" channeled "the power of almighty God" to alter fundamentally wafers and wine.⁵⁶ The Eucharist, then, was one of many "Mysteries" in a world of culinary, medicinal, and spiritual mysteries, where Protestants and Catholics alike routinely swallowed unknown substances.⁵⁷

Countering Protestant criticism that the Mass excluded worshippers from meaningful spiritual engagement, Gother insisted that "the Mass is the Sacrifice of the whole Church, that is, both of Priest and People." *Instructions and Devotions* described the priest's actions during the Mass and, on the facing page, suggested silent prayers for members of the congregation to accompany the communion ceremony. As the priest purified the chalice with ablutions of water, Gother counseled worshippers to pray that "this Precious Body and Blood of thy Son . . . become a Heavenly Nourishment to my Soul."⁵⁸ For Catholic writers, the very complexity and pageantry of the Mass, and the priest's performative role therein, encouraged worshippers to appreciate fully the miracles taking place at the altar. The 1703 liturgy for the diocese of Quebec urged priests to emphasize "the grandeur of our Mysteries" as they performed the Mass "with . . . pomp and magnificence," in order to assure "the people's respect and veneration for the Sacraments."⁵⁹

⁵⁶Gother, *Instructions and Devotions*, preface; "La vertu de la toute-puissance de Dieu." Catholic Church, *Rituel du Diocese de Quebec* (Paris: Simon Langlois, 1703), p. 183 (my translation).

⁵⁷Cookbooks of the time advertised recipes to deceive the eye or palate: "To bake Mutton like Venison," or "To make a Collar of Fish in Rago, to look like a Breast of Veal Collared." Hannah Wolley, *The Cook's Guide* (London: Peter Dring, 1664), p. 41; Hannah Glasse, *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy*, 3rd ed. (Dublin, 1748), p. 192.

⁵⁸Gother, *Instructions and Devotions*, pp. 4, 87.

⁵⁹"Pour servir à la grandeur de nos Mysteres, les faire paroître avec pompe & magnificence, & attirer davantage par là le respect & la veneration des peuples pour les Sacremens." *Rituel du Diocese du Quebec*, p. 9 (my translation).

The battles over the communion service extended to the question of who could take communion: Puritans and Catholics drew different boundaries around their communities of communicants. Catholic communicants faced relatively straightforward requirements. As long as they had confessed their sins, fasted since midnight, and believed in the miracle of transubstantiation, they were free to receive the Host.⁶⁰ By contrast, the question of who should participate in the Lord's Supper bedeviled Puritan clergy, who "fenced" the communion table, allowing only certain laypeople to take part. Because Puritans retained only baptism and communion from the rituals associated with Catholicism, they took these sacraments particularly seriously. As a result, Puritan congregants trod a much narrower path to the communion table. In the decades following Puritan colonization of New England, congregants publicly had to describe their conversion experience before being accepted into the community of full church members and allowed to take communion. By the mid-seventeenth century, partly because of these strict requirements, full membership within many congregations had dropped to all-time lows, and church authorities began to allow people who had not undergone a conversion experience but who were the children of church members and lived godly lives to participate in the two sacraments through the Half-Way Covenant.⁶¹

The rules that regulated participation in many Indian communion rituals are far less clear to the historian. Brebeuf reported witnessing Wendat men torturing Iroquois captives in ceremonies that lasted for days, slicing the flesh of their prisoners and burning them with "glowing brands, or red-hot hatchets." Brave captives would sing throughout this torment, until their execution. If a captive had died honorably, the

⁶⁰Gother, *Instructions for Confession and Communion*, pp. 66-79, 90.

⁶¹Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 58-61; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 245-46. See also, Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

Wendat consumed his body, cutting out and roasting the heart, drinking blood from his veins, and then placing the body in a kettle to boil. In this ritual, some of the boundaries of participation are very clear: the Wendat ate and the Iroquois were eaten. Nevertheless, internal divisions among the Wendat—who could eat what part of the body, for example—remain vague in the historical record. From Brebeuf's account, it seems that only men consumed blood from the living body of the captive and ate the heart.⁶² According to Brebeuf, the Wendat believed that eating a "courageous" captive transferred his strength and strategic knowledge to the eater.⁶³ It is possible, then, that the Wendat ceremony served particularly gendered purposes, allowing men to incorporate the power of their vanquished enemies into themselves.

Whatever the gendering of the Wendat ceremony, eating one's enemies transformed the bodies of eater and eaten, just as Protestants and Catholics used the Lord's Supper to transform themselves and their communities. Consuming bodies together, communicants created communities. Disagreeing over what kind of bodies they consumed, and selecting different participants for their meals, communicants also marked members of their communities and excluded outsiders.

Vessels in Motion

Even as Protestants and Catholics argued over the boundaries of the communion ceremony, communion vessels for Europeans and Indians alike refused to stay within specific bounds, moving between domestic and ritual uses. Some vessels sat as easily on the communion table as on the mundane cooking surface: communion resembled other, less rarified meals. In both domestic and ritual settings, food was transformed and shared.⁶⁴ At the table, diners ate from the same dish. For

⁶²*Jesuit Relations*, 10:227-29; Sanday, *Divine Hunger*, p. 125.

⁶³*Jesuit Relations*, 10:229.

⁶⁴The transformative properties of cooking also signified "civilization" to imperialist commentators. Claude Lévi-Strauss noted that all cultures in some way cook food and

more liturgical ceremonies like the Last Supper, communicants turned meals into rituals and rituals into meals. Within communion vessels, miraculous transformations took place: chief among them, the symbolic or literal transformation of human beings into food.

French and English communion vessels had common origins in domestic use. While the Catholic ciborium was the only one of these vessels that was so specialized it lacked a clear domestic counterpart, it was still a container for serving food. In the early years of Puritan colonization of New England, the dearth of funds and available silver forced congregations to borrow silver or pewter tableware from their members for use in communion. By the second generation of the colony, Puritans adapted tableware forms as their communion cups to differentiate themselves from Catholic material religion.⁶⁵ Where priests manipulated cibori, chalices, patens, and other specialized objects, Puritans preferred to use domestic vessels such as two-handled cups, a form which did not appear in New England services until the early eighteenth century. The two-handled cup greatly resembled a caudle cup, named after the medicinal beverage served in it; Puritans believed this vessel most resembled the cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper. Perhaps not coincidentally, the two main ingredients of a caudle were wine and grain: the fundamental components of the Lord's Supper. The caudle cup form gained in popularity as congregations adopted more open communion policies and became wealthier during the early eighteenth century. The cup's two large handles made it easy to pass from communicant to communicant along the pews. But the Lord's Supper was not the only time the English drank out of the same cup: they often

argued that certain kinds of cooking, such as boiling, necessitated "a cultural object" (a pot) and were thus more civilized than direct-heat methods such as roasting. "The Culinary Triangle," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Caroline Counihan and Penny van Esterik (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 29-30; and *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York, 1969).

⁶⁵Peterson, "Puritanism and Refinement," pp. 327-29; Ward, "In a Feasting Posture," p. 12.

shared dishes, passing tankards and reaching into the stewpot during ordinary meals.⁶⁶

Indian kettles also served both in rituals and at mealtimes. In addition to being common pots at everyday meals, kettles played starring roles in a number of Indian ceremonies. During the Wendat kettle ceremony and Mi'kmaq burial process, kettles moved back and forth between sacred and more mundane uses, drawing together the bodies of the living and the dead. Like the Mass and the Lord's Supper, Wendat and Mi'kmaq burial ceremonies were rituals of communion, in which kettles transformed bodies and communities.

At intervals of twelve years, the Wendat kettle ceremony used kettles to transform the remains of the dead, and to bring together communities. First, living participants prepared the remains of the dead for burial, taking remains down from village scaffolds, and bundling the bones in new beaver robes. Next, living participants attended ceremonial meals, where they feasted out of kettles, and exchanged gifts with each other, including more kettles. Finally, as many as five villages would come together to inter the bones in a large ossuary. Alongside the human remains, living participants placed grave goods, including jewelry, beaver robes, food, and kettles. At the center of the pit, they installed "three large kettles, which could only be of use for souls; one had a hole through it, another had no handle, and the third was of scarcely more value." The Wendat spent the night beside the open pit and "slung their kettles" to cook the evening meal just above the kettles of the dead. In the morning, they folded more skins over the contents of the pit so that soil would not touch the remains, then buried the pit beneath a mound of soil and wooden poles.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Ward, "In a Feasting Posture," pp. 5, 12-13; Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners* (1939; repr., Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 85-88; Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), pp. 75-78. Individual place settings did not become common, especially among those of modest means, until well into the eighteenth century.

⁶⁷*Jesuit Relations*, 10:279, 281-83, 285-89, 293-95, 297, 299, 301. This ritual receives a thorough analysis in Seeman, *The Huron-Wendat Feast of the Dead*.

This ritual brought together not just the inhabitants of one village, or five villages, but the living and the dead, in a ceremony of communion. Kettles played crucial and diverse roles, as living participants both ate out of kettles and buried kettles with the bones of their ancestors. Much like Protestant and Catholic communion, the Wendat kettle ceremony used a metal vessel to enable miraculous transformation, in this case, releasing souls from bodies, and preparing these souls for the afterlife. The Wendat performed the kettle ceremony because they believed that each person had two souls: one that lived in the body and another that remained near the body after death and needed to be released to live in the village of souls. The grave goods of kettles provided cooking vessels for the souls as they made their journey to an afterlife that much resembled the world of the living. The ritual of the kettle set free restless spirits, who flew away in the form of doves.⁶⁸

Mi'kmaq and Wendat burial ceremonies shared many commonalities: remains gathered into bundles, and buried with grave goods, including old or mutilated kettles. Where three kettles accompanied hundreds of sets of remains in the Wendat ossuary, the Mi'kmaq buried one set of remains with three kettles. Though one kettle in the Mi'kmaq burial had been used for cooking, as evidenced by soot darkening its outside, the Mi'kmaq obviously did not place the remains inside the kettles to cook. The preparers of the Mi'kmaq grave punched holes in new kettles with metal tools, which implies that the dead only received goods that were of no use (even if intentionally made so) for the living.⁶⁹ While many grave goods would have served the dead in the afterlife, why would one person require *three* kettles in the next world? The number of kettles suggests that they also served another symbolic use. Perhaps

⁶⁸*Jesuit Relations*, 10:141-43. Brebeuf scoffed at these beliefs of the Wendat, but they were not so different than his own faith in the Resurrection. However, as worshippers of blood and bone, the Jesuits recognized some similarities between Wendat mortuary treatment of the body and Catholic veneration of relics. Seeman, *Death in the New World*, pp. 125-26; Turgeon, "The Tale of the Kettle," p. 11.

⁶⁹Turgeon, "The Tale of the Kettle," pp. 11, 13-15. "On the Pre-Historic Remains," pp. 14-15. Kain and Rowe, "Some Relics of the Early French Period in New Brunswick," pp. 307-8; *Jesuit Relations*, 10:141-43, 297, 281.

the Mi'kmaq meant for these kettles not to cook, but in another manner transform the body of the dead, just as vessels transformed bodies in Wendat, Puritan, and Catholic ceremonies of communion.⁷⁰

Conclusion: Miracle, Metaphor, and Meat

What are we to make of the debates over communion and cannibalism and the violence of the borderlands? Communion vessels were crucibles of transformation and community. The individual body became communal, often by becoming liquid, in the sharing of a meal. Bodies had to change shape to fit into the vessels, through either figurative or literal dismemberment. The vessels provided another kind of body for the body. The human body turned into a source of sacred food, providing spiritual nourishment. Both Protestant and Catholic communion ceremonies made use of wine, symbolizing Christ's blood, and bread or wafers, symbolizing His flesh. As Protestant critics frequently pointed out, neither wine nor bread really resembled the human body. The communion vessel, in combination with the words of minister or priest, changed bread and wine into something more than the sum of their parts—whether that something was the actual (spiritual) body of Christ, for Catholics, or a means of grace, for Protestants. Either way, the individual body of Christ became symbolically divisible, “*contain'd under the Form of a Wafer*,” a loaf of bread, or flagon of wine and shared among communicants.⁷¹

But both Protestants' and Catholics' discomfort with cannibalism and the vehement defenses of their own communion rituals as not being cannibalism point to a European need for communion vessels to do something more. Vessels created a symbolic space where the human body could become both food and a metaphor. For Europeans, communion was not

⁷⁰The historical record about Mi'kmaq burial practices is scanty. Historians know about this ceremony only through the material traces it left behind, traces that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Euro-Canadians disturbed with archaeological excavations that we now consider unethical.

⁷¹Gother, *Instructions and Devotions*, preface.

cannibalism because of the application of specific ideas and the use of specialized instruments. Protestants and Catholics did not drink blood straight from Christ's body. They distanced themselves from His flesh by drinking out of vessels in a transformative context. Writers such as Cotton Mather and John Gother could take refuge in the belief that either metaphor or miracle excused them from charges of cannibalism. Protestant and Catholic vessels wrought miraculous transformations of flesh and blood, bread and wine. They also kept communicants from becoming cannibals.

Mi'kmaq and Wendat believers also thought that metal vessels could transform bodies and communities. The kettle in the Mi'kmaq ceremony, having served in a previous life as a vessel for food, metaphorically "cooked" or transformed the remains of the dead. Placing the body in the ground, surrounded by the second womb of a copper kettle, enabled the release of the soul into the afterlife.⁷² Where the Mi'kmaq ceremony relied upon metaphorical cooking, the Wendat ritual of torture and execution obviously did not. In contrast to Mi'kmaq, Protestant, and Catholic metaphoric distancing, the Wendat ceremony did not use a vessel until late in the ritual after the prisoner had died. When participants pressed their cut flesh to that of the captive and ate his heart, they made a direct body-to-body contact that was conspicuously absent in European communion ceremonies. The kettle, meanwhile, enabled the sharing of the sacred food with the entire community as the cooked body took a new, more liquid form.⁷³

The Wendat ritual shows that even though communion vessels permitted metaphorization of the body, they were also the sites of violence. Communion was an implicitly violent way to show love for one's god. Communicants symbolically and sometimes literally dismembered sacred bodies, in a world where

⁷²The rebirth implied in Mi'kmaq burial practice is made even more explicit in other grave sites, where bodies were buried in the fetal position and surrounded by red ochre. Calvin Martin, "The Four Lives of a Micmac Copper Pot," *Ethnohistory* 22, no. 2 (1975): 114.

⁷³Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 25-26, 49.

other kinds of dismemberment were familiar. Ciborium, cup, and kettle were the centerpieces of rituals of life and death during centuries of warfare. The communion vessels were not only “glistening reflections of stability,” but also actors in a drama of faith, violence, and blood, in a time when Thomas Hobbes envisioned “the life of man” as “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁷⁴

In the borderlands between New England and New France, English, French, and Indians gathered as communities, in meetinghouse and cathedral and around the ossuary or sacrificial fire. They watched the manipulation of glistening, precious vessels of communion, filling them with blood, or wine that looked like blood, or wine that became blood; they witnessed marvelous transformations; they drank of the common cup or the common kettle or ate of the common bread to grow closer to God, and to make their communities whole. At these sacred meals, they ate to nourish body and soul. They made their most powerful rituals of life and death from humble meals, because simple food contained the essence of life itself.

Nevertheless, communion had the power to divide as well as to unite. Instead of recognizing the parallels between their vessels, ceremonies, and ideas about communion, English Puritans, French Catholics, and Native groups chose to see only the differences between their cultures. Communicants resisted the material resemblances of their communion rituals, and thereby rejected the possibility of shared meaning. “What feed on Humane Flesh and Blood? Strang mess!” wrote Edward Taylor.⁷⁵ “*Thou have French taste; me Savage, this meat good for me,*” said the Ottawa man to Roubaud.⁷⁶ Cotton Mather called transubstantiation “the *Cup of Abominations*.”⁷⁷ This irony was not merely a missed opportunity for cross-cultural understanding.

⁷⁴Edwin A. Churchill, “Glistening Reflections of Stability: The Role of Silver in Early Maine,” in *New England Silver and Silversmithing 1620-1815*, ed. Jeannine Falino and Gerald W. R. Ward (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 2001), pp. 213-45.

⁷⁵Taylor, *Poems*, p. 231.

⁷⁶*Jesuit Relations*, 70:127.

⁷⁷Mather, *Companion for Communicants*, p. 10.

Instead, it reaffirmed the divisiveness of even minute cultural difference in a war-torn era. English, French, and Indians drew the boundaries of their communities in blood, and went out to draw the blood of their enemies.

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