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> The Lord hath showed me the vanity of these outward things....that they are but a shadow, a blast, a bubble, and things of no continuance. That we must rely on God Himself, and our whole dependence must be upon Him.
> Mary Rowlandson, *Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*

1 The above words, spoken at the close of the Twentieth Remove as a form of conclusion to the whole narrative, contain an unintended irony: as it is made clear by the *Narrative* itself, but mostly by Billy Stratton's well-rounded critique of it, it is precisely those shadowy and fleeting things that have the greatest impact on our lives and generations thereafter. It was, by Rowlandson's admission, the blind belief in God's sovereignty and goodness that helped her through her harrowing ordeal, transforming faith into physical endurance; and it is, according to Stratton, the larger and immaterial forces of cultural

indoctrination and Puritan-style imperialism, which functioned as what Stephen Greenblatt has called the "invisible bullets" of cultural warfare, that gave the text its utilitarian value and staying popularity, ascribing to it canonical status. Stratton goes further though to critically examine what it was, really, that was canonized, questioning not only the premises of the text itself, but its very authorship.

2 Both the Native-penned Foreword and Afterward stress the book's iconoclastic value, and rightly so: Stratton's bold move to infuse his examination of a 17th-century text with contemporary theoretical perspectives still rings sacrilegious to some academic circles; however, the value of such an approach is that it eschews what Stratton identifies as the traps of *bona fide* historiography or even modern approaches, e.g. gender-based analyses, that assume the veracity and authenticity of the artefact they examine, viz. Rowlandson's account. Stratton instead shows how such an *a priori* acceptance is both epistemologically suspect, and leads to the perpetuation of racist stereotypes about the Native Americans. Furthermore, by using primarily Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization, as well as Jacques Derrida's critique of communicative discourse, Homi Bhabha's and Edward Said's figurations of the ideological mechanisms of imperialist colonialism, and Paul Virilio's understanding of "pure war," the author demonstrates solidly how the Rowlandson account becomes an active agent in a war of propaganda and white colonialist rationalization from the 15th century onwards until now—which war comprises "the transatlantic history of the captivity narrative form" (Washburn xi). In the context of this operation, the author duly pays homage to the true victims of those "invisible bullets," the Algonquin sachem Metacomet (known as King Philip) and his "nearly wiped out" Native tribes (Stratton 4), systematically demonized and cast in the "wilderness" of "beasts" that would be reclaimed by whites as proper geopolitical "territory." Finally, through careful recourse to textual data of Rowlandson's era, Stratton carefully proposes a reconsideration of the text not as an authentic—and thus far more effective in inciting white spirits—organic witness account by a down-to-earth Puritan woman (who suddenly developed prodigious literary powers yet, notably, never wrote another line in her entire life), but as a ghost-written effort by the indeed prodigious and famous Increase

Mather, to be used as another exemplum of “miraculous” or “saints’” lives (common Puritan stock) in his ideological war against Puritan reformists that threatened his hardcore line. To that, I believe, we may attribute Stratton’s choice to use the “original” beginning of the text’s title, referring to it as *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God* (*TSGG*) rather than the more popular appellation of the *Narrative of…Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, stressing the influence of the formal Puritan ideologemes on the raw factual data of the event—and, personally, answering a question I’ve had since I first read the text as a student, i.e. whether Mrs. Rowlandson had actually gone crazy with all her ordeals, to praise her good God so while cradling her dead child in her arms.

3 Following an Introduction that sets the theoretical stance of this investigation, contextualizing this and all captivity narratives as “essential instruments of ideology and particularly adaptive vehicles for the dissemination of hegemonic knowledge in the name of historical discourse” in a battlefield of clashing cultures (5), Chapter 1 carefully traces not only similar texts within the whole global terrain of colonialist operations, debunking the myth of this being a particularly American genre, but also shows how these texts served mainly as white propaganda against an demonized, bestialized and, effectively, dispossessed native Other; this in turn answers for Stratton the strange publication history of *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God* , whose spurts seem now tied to “corresponding periods of national trauma and societal change” (23), mostly wars against Native people (fighting by themselves or as allies of the British).

4 Chapter 2 deals with “Exile, Deterritorialization and Intertextuality,” showing how, at the same time the Rowlandson account was finding its niche within the larger genre of Puritan hagio-historiography, the Native people were losing their homes by virtue of the ideology disseminated by those texts, which designated them as nomadic, homeless beasts, their territory a no-man’s land intended by God’s providential design for its white “Chosen” children. The argument flows smoothly on to Chapter 3, where the genre of eyewitness testimony—with strong elements of martyrology—that gives *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God* its lasting appeal is examined both historically and from a postcolonialist perspective to bring to scrutiny, first, its (demands for) exclusion of Native peoples from the narrative (and all subsequent ones), and

secondly, the claim of Rowlandson's account "being pathetically written by her own hand" (qtd. in 70). What is finally revealed is how, while the artifice—firmly situated in European and Puritan discursive tropes—that informs Rowlandson's supposedly "raw" narrative is artfully obscured, "the figure of Metacomet and what he fought and died for continues to 'lie buried in shades of night'" (William Apess qtd. in 94).

5 Chapter 4, accordingly, moves beyond the textual to the metatextual, and by drawing heavily on, while contradicting too, the work of Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, shows how "The Masque of Textual Effacement" worked to conceal not simply an editorial involvement of Increase Mather and John Rowlandson with Mary's text, as it was until now generally admitted, but an actual hijacking of the text's identity by Mather as either its co-author or most probably ghost-writer; so that, in Stratton's words, "it could be argued that Rowlandson herself is doubly captive in *The Soveraignty and Goodness of God*, both by the Native forces that attacked Lancaster and also by Increase Mather" (120). Following that, which is I believe the book's more "provocative" argument, Chapter 5 rounds off the critical examination by echoing, in a sense, Chapter 1; yet this time it situates the text as an influence and a lasting ideology that not only continues to shadow Native representations, but also informs captivity narratives well into the 21st century, with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. At the same time, Stratton also notes how "anticolonial counter-narratives in the form of slave narratives, Indian boarding school narratives, and memoirs detailing the experiences of Japanese Americans confined to internment camps during World War II…illustrate the liberating capacity and subversive promise of written and spoken words" (132). In conclusion, Stratton's book offers not only "a particularly new history of puritan north America as conceived from a postcolonial vantage point" (Tinker 147), but must from now on become indispensable reading for scholars of early American (women's) literature, as it reveals paradigmatically the pitfalls and complexities of reconstructing the history of marginalized voices.

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