

Abstract: This paper argues that the origins of the Indian captivity narrative should be understood in the historical contexts of its production in the New World as a narrative that is at once descriptive of the personal experiences of frontier captives of the seventeenth century, and is symbolic too of the Puritan errand of separation, settlement and eventual conquest of the land.

## ‘*God was with me in a wonderful manner*’: The Puritan Origins of the Indian Captivity Narrative.

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### Introduction

This article argues that the North American Captivity Narrative, with its textual origins in the Puritan imaginary and lived experiences of the New England frontier, should be understood as ideologically structured through the distinctive Puritan vision of an emigrant sacred ‘errand’ from the Old World, to what it envisioned was a new one. It focuses on Mary Rowlandson’s autobiographical account, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, which was first published for an embattled Puritan congregation of Massachusetts in 1690, and constitutes the earliest published example of the tradition of captivity narratives published in North America. This article argues that the North American captivity narrative may not simply be shorn of its ideological and rhetorical contexts, nor the Puritan habitus in which the work was produced. Rather, as I contend here, the significance of Rowlandson’s narrative is as Sacvan Bercovich describes it, ‘evidence of private regeneration into a testimonial for the colonial cause.’<sup>1</sup>

The American captivity narrative is a literary genre based on the historical reality of captivity by Indians experienced first by colonial settlers of the eastern seaboard in the seventeenth century. In New England, where woman and families were numerous relative to other New World colonies, and settlements were designed to be domestic and permanent ones, these constituted the borders of a frontier space beyond which

was the domain of the ‘lurking’ Indian. Puritan settlers in New England believed themselves to be ‘in continual danger of the savage people, who are cruel, barbarous and most treacherous, being most furious in their rage and merciless where they overcome’.<sup>2</sup> Rowlandson’s account of her abduction by Indians during the conflict known as Metacom’s War (1675-76) became a best seller on publication and is considered to be among the most popular selling books in all American literature.<sup>3</sup> *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* was the first captivity narrative to be published as a full length book and was extremely rare in being written by a Puritan woman.

Formerly of Somerset England, Mary Rowlandson, a mother of three young children, was attacked and removed from her home in Lancaster, New England. She describes the first moments of her ordeal with spare literary power in the opening line of her account. ‘On the tenth of February, 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster’.<sup>4</sup> Rowlandson describes her own physical injuries and the sickening sight of the attacks she witnesses upon family members in the first minutes of the assault. Subsequently, she, along with several of her children and a sister and her young child, is set on a forced march by their Indian captors.<sup>5</sup> During the eleven week captivity from which she is eventually freed on the payment of ransom, Rowlandson experiences a physically and emotionally shattering ordeal. Ultimately Rowlandson attributes her salvation not to the cold currency with which her life is actually bought, but entirely to the providential intervention of God. At the conclusion of her ordeal she declares, ‘Thus hath the Lord brought me and mine out of that horrible pit, and hath set us in the midst of tender-hearted and compassionate Christians.’<sup>6</sup>

The swift and ferocious dawn raid on her home, her capture and removal along with several of her children shatters a previously peaceful frontier existence. Rowlandson constructs her narrative with care and skill to show that the experience provides an emotional and spiritual watershed in what was hitherto an unremarkable life. Once captured she is forced to obey the instructions of her captors to travel beyond the relative security of her previous life to a world of ‘those barbarous creatures - a lively resemblance of hell’.<sup>7</sup> She describes her journey as a forced removal from civilisation by employing a unique literary device that she describes as a series of ‘removes’. Each remove is symbolic of her journey into the ‘heart of darkness’ and each provides her with the opportunity to reflect on the contrasts between her present circumstances

and former life, drawing as she does from this renewed comfort and strength in her faith in God. Richard Slotkin argues that ‘this method of marking the passage of time reinforce(s) the impression of captivity as an all-envirning experience, a world in microcosm, complete even to having its own peculiar time-space relationships’.<sup>8</sup>

### Contexts of Captivity in Puritan New England

Recently Linda Colley has suggested that the Indian Captivity narrative should be understood as emerging through the established tradition of European captivity narratives.<sup>9</sup> European narratives of captivity centred on the experiences of soldiers and seamen along the Barbary Coast and described their ordeals in bondage amongst the Muslim nations of North Africa. These, she suggests, are adapted through the captivity contexts of early English migrants to America to form an embryonic American genre, substituting Native Americans for North Africans in what is still though, fundamentally, a geo-political drama centred on the imperialist expansion of the English state in familiar centuries old contexts of inter-nation rivalry and competition centred on the Mediterranean Sea. More personally, Colley identifies in *Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, perhaps the most famous of these narratives, numerous references Rowlandson makes to her native country of origin England, and extrapolates from this that ‘at one level, this is a narrative that is fixated on the bonds of Englishness’.<sup>10</sup>

Richard Slotkin however, contends that the Indian captivity narrative serves as an archetypal drama for the early American colonies, the earliest examples of which dramatise the traumatic experience of Puritan relocation and subsequent struggles to settle the New World.<sup>11</sup> Sarah Pike also observes that ‘early New England was a site of spiritual warfare for colonists who cast American Indians and witches as their demonic adversaries.’<sup>12</sup> In the Puritan imaginary the individual captive in their suffering comes to represent the perilous existence of the whole community, an individual who stands in for a society in torment ‘betwixt God and the Devil’, on the cusp of civilisation and barbarity.<sup>13</sup> The narrative thus forces to prominence the individual sufferings of those taken captive, removed from their frontier home and taken against their will by hostile Indians into a wilderness domain. The Indian captivity narrative is located in historical contexts of conquest and colonisation. So far

as the English Puritans are concerned this is primarily undertaken to fulfil a mission of Sacred Errand identified by Perry.<sup>14</sup> In addition to this there is also a larger geopolitical context, the struggle by European powers and their North American proxies to secure influence, territory and wealth in the Americas. The Indian Captivity narrative arising from these contexts thus provides a historically and politically meaningful text for the study of emergent American identities, one in which the cruelties and privations suffered by individual citizens are ideologically portrayed as the symbolic trials of the entire colonial community to establish the right of settlement and ultimately of environmental conquest. Linda Colley ignores the radical Puritan origins of the earliest American examples of the captivity narrative of the New World, and focuses instead almost exclusively on the wider struggles of European powers for geopolitical dominance of North America. In doing so she identifies the Massachusetts migration as commensurate with that of others in Virginia and the West Indies, as an imperialist adventure on behalf of the emergent English state to expand its territorial authority to the New World. This in turn, wrongly I think, leads her then to use examples of captivity narratives from Virginia and New England interchangeably, and so neglects the distinction between the very different communities from England that settled these two geographically distant and ideologically distinct colonies.

That Mary Rowlandson was a Puritan and member of a revolutionary religious community is of vital importance to understanding the meaning that is able to be made of her captivity, her motivations in writing it, those of her Puritan sponsors and publishers in distributing it, and therefore the extent to which her narrative may be read uncomplicatedly as an extension of a prior Old World narrative tradition. Stephen Mennell makes the point that American development preceded quite differently to that typically found in Western European countries where more or less unified elites emerged to become dominant. By contrast he observes that American development was characterised by the emergence of ‘several competing model setting elites. There is no single homogenous American habitus.’<sup>15</sup> So, whilst settlement of Virginia *was* indeed intended to extend the religious and moral virtues of God’s ‘elect nation’ to new territories, the New England colony of Massachusetts Bay was envisaged by its proselytisers and settlers not as an extension of the English state but as a radical re-imagining of it, a deliberate and defiant withdrawal from an old world

believed by many of their most prominent and influential ministers to be corrupted beyond redemption. This Puritan rejection of England as elect nation followed by emigration and resettlement is based on the radical re-envisaging of providential history, the apocalypse of Puritan eschatology.

For Puritan emigrants, England is thus rejected as sacred space and in sacred time, and instead, appropriating Exodus as analogous to describing their migration to the New World, the Puritan emigrants envisage the New England landscape not only as the site of a new biblical commonwealth, but as 'the New Jerusalem of the Apocalypse'.<sup>16</sup> Rowlandson's attachment to her Englishness and the interpretation she makes of this therefore, as a member of the radical Puritan colony of Massachusetts, is unlikely to be so unproblematically envisaged as that of an 'ex-pat', to use modern terminology; simply because England as elect territory, England as elect nation, is rejected in the eschatological reading of history to which Rowlandson and her contemporaries so piously and strictly adhered.

The account of her captivity, and as the first published in America for an emigrant audience, must then I think be understood as an innovative New World text because the experiences it describes are imagined and understood in the contexts of a profound re-ordering of ecclesiastical history by a revolutionary community in the sacralized space of the New World. Though breakaway and separatist protestant communities had previously envisioned such radical breaks with eschatological orthodoxy in Europe, such communities arose especially in France; the community to which Rowlandson belonged was the first to envisage the Promised Land as residing beyond Eurasia and the known world of biblical knowledge. The Indian Captivity Narrative then, whilst not describing in printed form a unique human drama, since examples emerged first in Europe to describe the plight of Barbary captives in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, nevertheless provides for a radically different captivity tale from these because the conditions of its production occur in a place and from within a community of self proclaimed 'visible saints' that has made a revolutionary break with its past, and that believes itself to be elected by God to fulfil a sacred historical mission.

## Travel Literature, Captivity Tales and the Veracity of Authorship in an Emerging World Market

Joe Snader's examination of the European origins of the American captivity narrative makes a number of important contributions to understanding the development of the genre as a literary tradition, as well as highlighting distinctions between the captivity genre as it develops in an Old World context and a New World variant.<sup>17</sup> What becomes apparent in Snader's approach is that the American captivity tradition is not structurally unified but rather develops unevenly and draws from many sources, narrative tropes and traditions. The captivity tradition, as understood by Snader is an 'adaptable, expansive genre.'<sup>18</sup>

Snader begins by making Colley's point, noted earlier, that the claims to a uniquely American captivity tradition fail to recognise or properly include the already long history of such narratives prior to the emergence of captivity tales written by New World immigrants. Snader emphasises instead the impossibility of ascribing a single nation of origin for the captivity text, more usefully suggesting that the captivity narrative, coming as it did out of Europe, 'grew out of the tensions surrounding several early modern historical developments of global significance: not only the expansion of European colonialism and trade, but also the rise of liberal individualism and the elaboration of the self-consciously modern intellectual systems of enlightenment'.<sup>19</sup> Snader also makes the point that the captivity narrative in its sixteenth and seventeenth century written forms is as yet not generically defined or internally structured as such, but is rather included in the broader narrative circumstances of emerging travel literature, the *travail* narrative. The *travail* narrative, Snader argues, carries a dual interpretive meaning, 'suggesting both the painful labours and curious adventure of journeys far from home'.<sup>20</sup>

Captivity in such narratives is an episodic occurrence within a much broader textual framework that encompasses the experience of travel in new and exotic lands and is consistent with the expansion of colonisation and trade by early modern European states. Snader makes the significant point that the *travail* narrative introduces a number of distinctly modern literary concerns and observations, 'including... the

creation of scientific ethnography, and western Europe's increased intervention in the affairs of foreign peoples'.<sup>21</sup> Emerging from these, the captivity narrative as it gradually develops generic distinctiveness is also concerned with empirical inclusiveness. The captive, he points out, is often at pains to record in their account everything that is remembered, everything that is witnessed or heard from other captives especially regarding their captors, including their behaviour, their rites and their perceived depredations. In the seventh remove of her captivity Rowlandson at length describes the distribution of a meagre meal amongst both captors and captives in which, in her hunger, she tries a piece of raw horse liver and finds, somewhat to her shame that she enjoys it.<sup>22</sup> Such concerns according to Snader reflect authorial considerations with the saleability of their product in an emerging literary marketplace developing scientific consciousness demanding evidential based truths.<sup>23</sup> Snader points out that increasingly published captivity narratives were accompanied by 'complex mechanisms of extra-textual authority, such as certifications of the captive's truthfulness, carefully documented editorial frameworks, and citations of parallel reports from competing ethnographic accounts'.<sup>24</sup> The emergence of literary blurb!

Publication conventions such as these were adopted for captivity accounts printed in New England. In the case of Rowlandson's narrative this results in a significant alternative titling of her account between that considered suitable for a New England audience by her Boston publisher, and that of her London publisher for an English audience.<sup>25</sup> In Boston her account was titled *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, and in London; *A True History of the Captivity and Restoration*. A couple of important points may be made here. Firstly, in what today would be credited as a canny marketing decision the two titles would seem to reflect the anticipation of two distinct audiences for the same work. The New England title is not only designed to appeal to an expectant religious audience in the Puritan colonies of Massachusetts, but is also the title that most accurately reflects Rowlandson's own understanding of her experience. The London title reflects perhaps the broader tastes and sensibilities of a more cosmopolitan and proto-urban audience, and according to Snader was chosen to place it more obviously within a tradition of captivity accounts widely recognised by a European audience at that time.

Thus New England readers approach Rowlandson's account of her captivity experience not in prior expectation or knowledge of a captivity tale or more broadly an adventure tale as it is presented in London, but as an allegorical tale, or providence tale. This distinction is important. Published in Boston in 1682, some fifty years after the founding of the New England colonies, it reveals a growing distance of the colonist's experience between that of the new country to which they now emphatically belong, and the old one that is increasingly consigned to memory. This, coupled with the particular separation made between the New World and the Old in the historical worldview of the New England Puritans, further indicates that Rowlandson's narrative of captivity experience is an extraordinary one for her and her audience.

As a Puritan settler of a radical frontier community in North America Rowlandson is not concerned that her experience be understood within a wider context of emergent English national expansion, nor that it is presented as a tribulation affecting a traveller 'far from home', as is the case with captivity narratives originating in England. Instead Rowlandson's narrative documents her capture, captivity and eventual return to the colonies, mimicking biblical type mythic structures and providence tales of redemption through suffering. Such is its enduring importance for American literature and American colonial history more generally, Rowlandson's account is said to provide an original template for a distinct American genre, though Snader disagrees by arguing instead that her narrative of capture in a secure domestic environment, trial amongst the Indians and eventual return, or more appropriately within its ecclesiastical context, deliverance from them; does not become the sole or dominant structure of succeeding American captivity narratives. Rather it is one among a number of succeeding variants, until the present day. These he argues, especially after Independence, are concerned with 'expansionist ideology' and further emphasises the 'adaptable, expansive genre.'<sup>26</sup>

#### Divine Providence or Supernatural Drama?

James Hartman connects the American captivity narrative to the providence tale which he defines as 'stories that relate the activities of God on earth' (introduction,



p1).<sup>27</sup> Providence tales traditionally include accounts of miracles, of prayers answered, and of natural disasters brought forth as divine judgements. Widening his scope, Hartman includes within this framework ‘stories of any remarkable, ‘unnatural’ events,’ such as apparition tales and possession, ‘not explainable by natural law’.<sup>28</sup> Hartman argues that the English providence narrative is transferred to a New England setting in the mid seventeenth century and is significant to the development not only of the later gothic strains in American literature, but also and more immediately for the precursors of this popular style, the New England witchcraft narrative and the Indian captivity narrative. The testimony of Mercy Short, whose accusations of witchcraft led to the Salem Witch Trials, is the most notorious example of Hartman’s ‘hybridised’ providence tale. This example is interesting also because Short, before her famous intervention in the history of New England witchcraft, was herself a victim and survivor of Indian captivity.<sup>29</sup>

Like the travel narratives described by Snader above, the English providence tale is profoundly affected during this period by the influences of the Enlightenment in the increasing use of empiricism, scepticism and, Hartman argues, atheism. For Hartman, this appropriation of the discursive strategies of science is a tactic aimed at defending biblical allusion in an age of gradual religious decline and the slow advance of secular culture. The providence tale, its stories of divine and other supernatural phenomena, thus deploys the language of scientific rationalism to construct the basis of an empirical system of evidence for the veracity of the events depicted. In addition to this, Hartman observes, ‘they infused their tales with violence, sentimentality, and melodrama’, all marketable qualities in an age of developing mass communications through new printing technologies.<sup>30</sup> Taken together, the discourses of science and melodrama constitute a hybridised providence tale that is not, ‘strictly religious, solely scientific or merely entertaining’.<sup>31</sup> The New England providence tale sets out, according to Hartman, to counter scepticism and materialism and to reassert the primacy of God’s intervention and influence on the activities of everyday life, ‘and in so doing, combined in one story the reading public’s interest in sensationalism, violence, strangeness, truth, and God’s power and providence on earth’.<sup>32</sup>

The literary source immediately responsible for the changes Hartman detects in providence tales of this time, and which become important to understanding the

development of the Indian captivity narrative in New England, is interestingly the travel narrative. The travel narrative as previously discussed often contained episodic experiences of captivity as a part of an extended picaresque narrative. Like Hartman's hybridised providence tale of the seventeenth century, Snader's travail narratives also combined the language of scientific evidence with accounts of the exotic and strange in far flung lands. For Hartman, the travail narrative is important to his understanding of the providence tale in that it provides for an unstable account in which boundaries of truth and sensationalism are blurred. He argues that in the travel tale's association with 'tall tales' and the new discursive strategies of scientific evidence, the travail narrative becomes, 'pre-occupied with the question of its own historicity and how it might be authenticated.'<sup>33</sup>

This, as we have seen, is a concern also of Mary Rowlandson, though Hartman fails to link the travail narrative with the captivity narrative as Snader does, perhaps because of his assertion that the travail narrative whilst containing significant elements found in the providence tale does not have as its overarching concern God's intervention in human affairs. Turning specifically to them, Hartman emphasises those aspects that most closely connect with his understanding of the providence tale narrative, specifically, the overarching theme of God's intervention in the activities of both captives and their captors leading ultimately to the captive's rescue, and the use of a carefully documented authorial style providing rational and observable evidence to attest to this.

In arguing that the New England captivity narrative is a variation of the providence tale, a form influenced by a traditional narrative structure that seeks to provide evidence of God's divine intervention in the affairs of the material world, Hartman's argument is certainly persuasive up to a point. Clearly, Rowlandson's *Sovereignty and Goodness of God* in its assertion of God's intervention in her ordeal certainly qualifies as a providence tale, though this is problematic since as Hartman himself acknowledges the Bible by definition is itself a providence tale, and any narrative concerned directly with God's influence on earthly matters qualifies as such to this extent. Hartman, like Colley and Snader, misses a number of historically salient features of the New England experience of its Puritan colonisers that makes any

attempt to understand Rowlandson's narrative as an exemplar of the kind of hybridised providence tale described by Snader less persuasive.

I have already suggested that Rowlandson does not consciously produce a captivity narrative in the European tradition and is not working within that authorial framework. Neither I think does she produce self-consciously and cynically a providence tale, one that seeks to defend the ecclesiastical from advancing secularism as Hartman suggests it does. The radical Puritan community to which Rowlandson belonged (her husband was also a minister) would have readily understood the whole of human history and experience as a providence tale, as God's intervention in mortal earthly affairs. Her ordeal amongst the Indians and God's intervention that leads to her salvation and deliverance is a providence tale by virtue of this, but it seems an attempt to defend the religious from the secular. According to the ideology of radical Puritanism so powerfully and eloquently extolled in Rowlandson's account, the entire unfolding of history is a struggle between the 'true church' and Satan for mastery on earth; and history and the whole of human life are thus enacted through divine providence.

Further, Hartman makes the claim that in the portrayal of Indians as 'flesh and blood demons' the hybridised providence tale of the Indian captivity narrative merely substitutes the native inhabitants for the apparitions or spectres of traditional providence tales. These physical devils, standing in for supernatural ghouls inhabit a frightening physical environment analogous to the biblical hell, the dark forested wilderness of New England.<sup>34</sup> However, the New England Puritans had a far more complex and nuanced understanding both of the Indians and of their wilderness environment, formed by their unique understanding of the unfolding of history and their elevated role within it. Whilst these were inextricably and hopelessly bound up with biblical allusion and mythic allegory, the Indians were neither always only 'flesh and blood demons', nor the wilderness an earthly hell. Rather, these constituted the observable earthly terrain in a historic struggle with Satan in which they were unstable elements potentially saved by the grace of God in His wisdom, or appropriated ultimately as instruments of the antichrist; as indeed, and as they were so fearfully and increasingly aware, were potentially the colonists of New England themselves.

## The Captivity Story and the American Jeremiad

The New England captivity narrative, then, whilst containing some elements of both the European captivity narrative and tradition, and some of those of the travail and providence tales suggested by Snader and Hartman, is unable to be entirely and adequately accounted for by any of the genres. Gary Ebersole argues alternatively that the Rowlandson narrative provides an 'interpretive frame' for the earliest captivity narratives by 'imposing the then Calvinist covenantal theology on the historical reality of captivity.'<sup>35</sup> He goes on to suggest that influences such as the sermon and spiritual autobiography are informative of its rhetorical style and narrative organisation, and that in particular the early New England captivity narrative is influenced most profoundly by the protestant jeremiad. The traditional jeremiad of the Old World pulpit 'decried the sins of the people – a community, a nation, a civilisation, mankind in general – and warned of God's wrath to follow'.<sup>36</sup> It was an attempt by rhetorical bludgeon to demonstrate the vengeful destructiveness of God's displeasure, [who] 'writes his *severe* truths with the *blood* of his disobedient subjects'.<sup>37</sup> Mary Rowlandson's account of her captivity by Indians is described by Ebersole as inspired in large part by the jeremiad, arguing along conventional lines that the narrative functions in New England in a traditional sense to warn against 'backsliding' in the colonies and the terrible consequences that follow.

This interpretation is countered to some extent, though significantly by Sacvan Bercovitch, who argues that the traditional protestant jeremiad described by Ebersole actually undergoes significant modification by English Puritan radicals prior to their emigration to the New World. The jeremiad which they take to New England, and which subsequently inspires Rowlandson, is designed primarily 'to direct an imperilled people of God toward the fulfilment of their destiny, to guide them individually toward salvation, and collectively toward the American city of God'.<sup>38</sup> The American jeremiad functions not only as a corrective for individual and community sin or disobedience as is the tradition in Europe, but is at the same time a reminder to the New England congregation that they remain chosen by God. The American jeremiad insists that the fulfilment of sacred history, the creation of the 'City on the Hill', is God's divine plan for them. Thus the American jeremiad

‘inverts the doctrine of vengeance into a promise of ultimate success, affirming to the world, and despite the world, the inviolability of the colonial cause’.<sup>39</sup> This important modification of the traditional form can be accounted for, Bercovitch argues, by the particular interpretation made by the New England Colonists of their role in the unfolding of sacred history. The Puritan radicals understood this role and their part in it as instruments specifically *chosen* for a sacred historical design.

Avihu Zakai similarly emphasises the exceptional project of the New England colony. He begins by arguing that New England was envisioned by the earliest proponents of the migration as sacred space within sacred history, whilst England and the Old World was, concurrently, desacralized. The migration itself was justified with reference to two biblical accounts concerning what Zakai calls the ‘human drama of salvation and redemption’.<sup>40</sup> Drawing from the account of the Jewish’ flight from Egypt contained in the Book of Exodus, and from the flight of the woman, who is analogous with the true church of God, from the ‘dragon’s rage’ in the Book of Revelations, leading Puritan separatist John Winthrop sets out the proposed migration in a correspondence with his wife as an unfolding cosmic drama in three acts: deliverance, pilgrimage and glorification.<sup>41</sup> In act one the separatists, whom he likens to Lot in his miraculous escape from Sodom, were chosen to be delivered from the corruption of the world; whilst in act two he uses the story of Elijah and the care shown him by God on his journey to describe the colonists’ physical pilgrimage towards refuge and ultimately salvation in the New World. Finally, Winthrop uses an example of Jesus miraculously curing a paralysed man and the subsequent glorification of him to describe the ultimate meaning of ‘the Great Migration’ itself, the glorification of God.<sup>42</sup>

Zakai’s identification of the narrative structure of deliverance, pilgrimage and glorification to describe the processes of the New England journey towards the ‘American city of God’, has similarities with the structure of Rowlandson’s narrative as well, and subsequently to the structure of succeeding captivity tales even when these are no longer religious in tone or content . Richard Slotkin describes the typical structure of the captivity narrative following its religious phase as ‘capture, trial and return’, and argues that this dominates in the era of mass communications and the emergence of a full blown American popular culture.<sup>43</sup> This then further cements the

Rowlandson narrative as descending not from the European tradition of Barbary captivities, or the newly hybridised providence tales of the sixteenth century as Hartman suggests, but rather as emerging through a distinctive American jeremiad, itself a modification of the traditional form found in European contexts.

#### War, Text and Conquest on the New England Frontier

The form in which the American jeremiad emerged in seventeenth century New England 'was not a matter of crime and punishment, but of regeneration through suffering'.<sup>44</sup> This subtle if significant modification of the jeremiad as traditionally delivered is further reconstituted according to Madsen 'since popular forms such as the captivity narrative' were also made to function as jeremiads.<sup>45</sup> Understood in this way, Rowlandson's account may be read, as Bercovitch puts it, for its intention 'to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the 'progressivist' energies required for success of the venture'.<sup>46</sup> For the colonists this *venture* was an 'errand into the wilderness' as a chosen people of God.

Rowlandson's captivity account should thus be understood as entirely subordinate to the main covenantal exercise which was to 'portray the settlers as a people of God in terms of election, the body politic, and the advancing army of Christ'<sup>47</sup>. Rowlandson's narrative, sponsored and circulated by Puritan authority Increase Mather is designed to achieve and promote just such an ideological effect. The published account, after a relatively long history of transfer from Puritan pulpit to written auto-biography, takes place at a pivotal moment of the Colony's history. Published in 1682 but having undergone her captivity during Metacom's War (1675-76), *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* advances the Puritan project of progressive colonisation through sacred errand by advocating 'regeneration through suffering' of its frontier inhabitants in a period of the rapid escalation of land seizure for domestic settlement and the brutal expansion of farming.

The causes of Metacom's War are instructive of the future progress of the colonies and the consequent demise of Native American tribes and were twofold. Firstly local tribes became increasingly angry at the colonist's insistence on fencing land which

had the effect of disrupting the settled migrations of deer upon which local tribes depended. Secondly, anger mounted also at the practice of allowing the periodic free foraging of domestic cattle which destroyed vital Indian crops. On the colonist's side, their resentment was sharpened by a growing refusal of Indians to accommodate frontier expansion by selling their lands. The relationship of colonists to the land they believed was decreed them by divine providence was fraught with complex considerations and accommodations, between pious adherence to radical scriptural interpretation and the emergence of acquisitive entrepreneurial capitalism. The resolution of this conundrum was settled finally by an ingenious reconciling of both sacred and secular elements of the puzzle, the accommodation of land speculation and profit-based ownership with the divine mission of settling the wilderness for the Glory of God. Ultimately, in New England, the religious and the economic as Taylor acknowledges, 'were interdependent in the lives of people who saw piety and property as mutually reinforcing',<sup>48</sup>.

In the first few months of Metacom's War, initial Indian military successes threatened to forestall if not entirely disrupt the relentless westward spread of the colony. This proved to be short lived though, and by conflict's end in 1676 it is estimated that some 40% of the local native inhabitants had either been killed, or else sold into slavery.<sup>49</sup> Entire tribes were eliminated or else quickly disintegrated. Furthermore, the wilderness country under Indian control now indisputably belonged to the colonists. Rowlandson's account, whilst often demonstrating her fear of her Indian captors and sometimes using barbarous rhetoric to describe them, is not entirely unsympathetic towards them, though there is no sense of understanding of the causes of conflict other than those she attributes to God. In ultimately attributing the motives of her captors to the machinations of ecclesiastical providence, Rowlandson's narrative 'assumes a communal significance as a typological repetition of the biblical story of Babylonian captivity. In the same way that her suffering repeats that of the captive Israelites, so her eventual release signifies the glorious future destiny of God's newly chosen people in the New World'.<sup>50</sup>

Sacred Errand as construed in the Puritan's reading of sacred history involves flight from the corrupted Old World Egypt (England) to the New Israel (New England) through the design of, and by the grace and guidance of God. Justifying the separation

Thomas Brightman uses the story of the Woman's flight into the wilderness from the 'dragon's rage' contained in Revelations. Brightman declares the Woman analogous to the 'the image of the Church', and thus the Woman's flight into the wilderness is transformed by him into the Church's flight into the wilderness 'signifying the migration of saints from a corrupted nation'.<sup>51</sup> If the vision of Puritan errand is looked at in this way as Zakai suggests it should be, then Mary Rowlandson's account of her journey into the wilderness of the New England landscape written under close tutelage by Increase Mather, begins to seem intentionally symbolic of the entire enterprise which constitutes the Puritan migration to the New World, since in the Puritan imaginary the colony is enacting the unfolding of providential history contained in scriptural allusion. Thus, through the experience of Indian Captivity and using the rhetorical form established through the familiar Protestant jeremiad, but with the significant modifications Bercovich argues are apparent in the American variant, Mary Rowlandson's narrative becomes one in which 'her rhetoric renders her at once a microcosm of colonial history, and a guide to the American future'.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sacvan Bercovich, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) 117.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence* (Oklahoma: The University of Oklahoma Press, 1973), 38.

<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, *Woman's Indian Captivity Narratives* (Penguin Books, 1998), 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> Slotkin, 109.

<sup>9</sup> Colley, 141-152.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>11</sup> Slotkin, 117.

<sup>12</sup> Sarah M Pike, *Dark Teens and Born Again Martyrs: Captivity Narratives after Columbine* (Journal of the American Academy of Religion. 2009, vol 77, p3) 647-679.

<sup>13</sup> Slotkin, 94.

<sup>14</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Harvard University Press, 1975).

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Mennell, *An Exceptional Civilising Process?* (Journal of Classical Sociology, 2009, vol 9, p1) 97-115.

<sup>16</sup> Avihu Zakai, *Exile and Kingdom: History and Apocalypse in the Puritan Migration to America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). 64.

<sup>17</sup> Joe Snader, *Caught Between Worlds: British Captivity Narratives in Fact and Fiction* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000) 14-20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>22</sup> Derounian-Stodola, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Snader, 17.



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- <sup>24</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid., 22
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> James Hartman, *Providence Tales and the Birth of American Literature* (Baltimore & London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999) 1-2
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 3
- <sup>29</sup> Deborah Kelly Kloepfer, *Cotton Mather's Dora: The Case History of Mercy Short* (Early American Literature. 2009, vol 44, p1) 3-38.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, 2.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, 3.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid, 8.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid, 47.
- <sup>35</sup> Gary L. Ebersole, *Captured by Texts: Puritan to Post Modern Images of Indian Captivity* (Charlottesville & London: University Press of Virginia, 1995) 15
- <sup>36</sup> Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978) 7
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, 9.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>40</sup> Zakai, 133.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Slotkin, 116-179.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid, 51.
- <sup>45</sup> Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (BAAS Paperbacks: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) 29
- <sup>46</sup> Bercovitch, 23.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid, 46.
- <sup>48</sup> Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (London: Penguin) 158-186.
- <sup>49</sup> Hindraker, Eric & Mancall, Peter C *At the Edge of Empire: The Backcountry in British North America* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 2003) 52-3.
- <sup>50</sup> Madsen, 30.
- <sup>51</sup> Zakai, 162
- <sup>52</sup> Bercovich, 117.