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Creating a New Genre:  
Mary Rowlandson and Her Narrative of Indian Captivity

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of English  
East Tennessee State University

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by  
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August 2002

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Dr. Michael Cody, Chair  
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Keywords: Mary Rowlandson, Early American literature, American female  
authors, Captivity narratives, Puritan jeremiads, Conversion  
narratives

## ABSTRACT

Creating a New Genre:

Mary Rowlandson and Her Narrative of Indian Captivity

by


Rachel Bailey De Luise

In the aftermath of King Philip's War, Puritan Mary Rowlandson recorded her experiences as an Indian captive. In a vivid story that recollects the details of these events, Rowlandson attempts to impart a message to her community through the use of a variety of literary techniques. The genre of the Indian captivity narrative is a literary construct that she develops out of the following literary forms that existed at the time of her writing. These are the spiritual autobiography, a documentary method meant to archive spiritual and emotional growth through a record of daily activities; the conversion narrative, which made public one's theological assurance of God's grace; and the jeremiad, a sermon form designed to remind Puritans of their Covenant with God. To her contemporaries, Rowlandson served as an example of God's Providence. To later generations and specifically twenty-first century scholars, she represents America's first female literary prose voice.

## DEDICATION

To my husband whose work ethic is inspiring,  
and to my family for their loving support . . .

CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT .....	2
DEDICATION .....	3
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION .....	5
2. UNDERSTANDING SELF: THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY .....	13
3. EXPERIENCING GOD: THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE .....	30
4. LIVING THE COVENANT: THE JEREMIAD .....	44
5. CONCLUSION .....	56
WORKS CITED .....	60
WORKS CONSULTED .....	63
VITA 	

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In Lancaster, Massachusetts, a group of Puritans waited in fear of an Indian attack because of increasing tension between the Indians and settlers. Fifty families made up the small village, including the town minister, Joseph Rowlandson, and his family. Nearby, in desperate need of supplies to keep their populations alive, a band of Wampanoag Indians was planning a surprise sunrise attack. Joseph Rowlandson was away, in Boston to alert the magistrates to the growing Indian situation. His wife Mary and their four children huddled in their garrison house with thirty-seven other people. Early on the morning of 10 February 1675, the household smelled smoke. Minutes later, the surrounded Puritans poured out of the burning house only to be caught in a hail of gunfire.

Mary Rowlandson watched as her brother-in-law, nephew, and sister lay dying from bullet wounds. One bullet entered Mary's side and tore through the child she carried in her arms. She was taken captive with her wounded daughter who died in her arms eight days later and was buried on a hillside in the wilderness.

For eleven weeks, Mary traveled as an Indian captive westward to the Connecticut River, and then northward into Vermont and New Hampshire, and finally, back eastward to Petersham and Mount Wachusett. On 2 May, she was exchanged at Redemption Rock for twenty

pounds. At the end of her captivity, she was reunited with husband Joseph and remaining children.

Mary Rowlandson lived to tell her story, a story that became popular in America and England as a tale of adventure and piety. The work was originally titled The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together With the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Commended by Her, to All That Desires to Know the Lord's Doings To, and Dealings With Her, Especially to Her Dear Children and Relations. The Second Addition Corrected and Amended. Written by Her Own Hand for Her Private Use, and Now Made Public at the Earnest Desire of Some Friends, and for the Benefit of the Afflicted. According to Alden Vaughan and Edward Clark, three issues appeared within the first year, and others followed periodically throughout the Puritan era (3). The book eventually went through thirty editions and was one of the most popular books in the eighteenth century.

Rowlandson's narrative triggered a wave of Indian captivity narratives and her influence is evident centuries later. Beginning in 1697, Cotton Mather utilizes the captivity narrative in a sermon entitled "Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances," in which he relays the captivity stories of Hannah Swarton and Hannah Dustan. In 1704, John Williams' The Redeemed Captive was published, to a receptive audience. In 1706, Mather again incorporates captivity narratives into his sermon entitled "Good Fetch'd Out of Evil," which includes the story of John Williams and adds Mary French, another female captive. Then in 1707, Mather relates Hannah Bradley's captivity experience,

who was captured twice, in a sermon entitled "A Memorial of the Present Deplorable State of New England."

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Rowlandson's influence is apparent in narratives such as An Affecting Narrative of the Captivity and Suffering of Mrs. Mary Smith (1815), Fanny Wiggins Kelly's Narrative of My Captivity Among the Sioux Indians (1870), and Minnie Bruce Carrigan's Captured by the Indians: Reminiscences of Pioneer Life in Minnesota (1903).

With the exception of John Williams' account in 1704, the captivity narrative genre is dominated by the female experience, at the head of which is Mary Rowlandson. In addition to its wide popularity with the public in the eighteenth century, her narrative is recognized as the first product of a new genre, a genre created by Rowlandson. The genre of the Indian captivity narrative is a literary construct that Rowlandson develops out of a variety of existing literary forms: the spiritual autobiography, a documentary method meant to archive spiritual and emotional growth through a record of daily activities; the conversion narrative, which made public one's theological assurance of God's grace; and the jeremiad, a sermon form designed to remind Puritans of their Covenant with God. Not only did Rowlandson begin a new genre, but Kathryn VanSpanckeren considers Rowlandson "the earliest [American] woman prose writer" (1). An interesting dimension is that the female-led genre emerged from the early American patriarchal Puritan society within which Rowlandson lived. Vaughan and Clark in their book Puritans Among the Indians note that captivity narratives like Rowlandson's provide "the most



insightful clues to the tensions and expectations of Puritan society" (3).

In the late 1600s, Puritan society was under stress: the Church was experiencing a decline in membership, there was growing tension among the Indians and settlers, and the return of the Stuarts to the throne in England. All of these conditions contributed to a gap in Puritan ideology as it tried to reconcile Puritan religious and cultural traditions with changes in societal elements. In an attempt to fill the gap, Rowlandson sought to relate her experience within the bigger picture of spirituality because, in light of the patriarchal structure of the time, Puritan women did not have a voice. As Laurel Ulrich states in her article, "Vertuous Women Found: New England Ministerial Literature, 1668-1735," Puritan women

never preached or sat in a deacon's bench. Nor did they vote or attend Harvard. Neither, because they were virtuous women, did they question God or the magistrates. They prayed secretly, read the Bible through at least once a year, and went to hear the minister preach even when it snowed. Hoping for an eternal crown, they never asked to be remembered on earth. And they haven't been. (215)

Although this view is commonly accepted, Ulrich's search for an accurate representation of early Puritan women reveals that women were often a popular topic in Puritan society. According to the Evans Bibliography, between the years of 1668 and 1735, there are 70 published items wholly or in part directed at women (Ulrich 216). The most predominant author amongst these works is Mather, known for such

female-focused works as "Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion" and "Eureka the Vertuous Woman Found." Mather, Ulrich argues, sought ways to encourage women to speak out and write, in effect, serving God by their involvement: " [ . . . ] he [Mather] was continually devising metaphorical detours" (225) in order to allow women a spiritual voice.

Mather states, in "Bethiah. The Glory Which Adorns the Daughters of God," that "There are people, who make no noise at all in the world; Persons of the Female Sex, and under all the Covers imaginable. But the world has not many people in it, that are fuller of the truest glory" (qtd. in Ulrich 225). Ulrich contends that it bothered Mather that females had no voice, and he encouraged women like Rowlandson to tell their stories. Rowlandson's decision to incorporate religious elements into her autobiography may have been a concerted effort to self-govern and control her spiritual destiny, even if she allowed her physical self to be controlled by her father, then by her husband.

In a very real sense there is no such thing as female piety in early New England: in preaching sermons for women, the ministers universally used the generic male pronouns in enlarging their themes, even when the text had reference to a scriptural Bathsheba or Mary; the same Christ like bearing was required of both male and female. (Ulrich 220)

In the eyes of God, early Puritan females that turned to writing found a way to stand on equal ground with men in a society that commonly only revered men's contributions. Whether or not a woman's autobiographical writings received the attention Rowlandson's narrative did, the importance lay in the fact that, in the spiritual

realm, equality between the sexes was achieved. Anne Bradstreet, the earliest published American female writer, established a path for women who would follow in their literary pursuits. Through her religious meditations and conscious awareness of a woman's dual role in society as both domestic leader and spiritual center, Bradstreet helped create an atmosphere in which virtuous women could be recognized and revered for their spiritual writings. A "virtuous" woman wrote because, through spirituality, a woman could align herself next to a man and be judged equally. Ulrich maintains that,

[w]hile a godly woman was expected to act appropriately in all the relations in which she found herself, to be a dutiful daughter, an obedient and faithful wife, a wise parent and mistress, a kind friend, and a charitable neighbor, in her relationship with God, she was autonomous.

(220)

If indeed, she is self-governed in the spiritual realm, then what better way to gain an appreciation of womanhood and expression of self than through a careful examination of spiritual questions and concerns? In a historical context, Rowlandson represents an early feminist's search for equal recognition, using spiritual subjects as her medium.

Rowlandson's desire and success in writing and publishing her experiences is in accordance with Mather's encouragement of women to write. Ulrich argues that in Mather's tracts and sermons, he is suggesting that women be provided with "examples of illustrious women" (225). In this respect, Mather illustrates the idea that society could

look to women, as well as men, for a code of conduct and Christian behavior. In essence, Mather's opinion further justifies Rowlandson's chosen venue for self-expression. In numerous elegies, Mather regards the female sex as one from whom much can be learned, as is noted in his elegy to Abiel Goodwin, that "she had taught him much of salvation" (Ulrich 225).

Although Ulrich limits her focus to funeral literature as an example of religious equality, a further illustration is evident throughout early Puritan women's writings, in works like Rowlandson's narrative. Ulrich notes that, "Because dying is an individual rather than a social act, it is in the funeral literature that we see clearly the equality of men and women before God" (220). Although Ulrich makes this distinction, the notion is further expanded in this thesis that "writing" is also an individual act, one in which males and females can explore their hopes, fears, ideas, and concepts in an effort to articulate human truths. Regarding Rowlandson's choice of subject material, she, like other female Puritans, uses the outlet of spirituality, which was an accepted, even required, venue. The theological emphasis was one recognized by Puritan men, such as Mather, that encouraged Rowlandson to make sense of her experience and fully expound on her newfound spiritual identity.

Within this changing period of Puritan history, Rowlandson's voice arose. It was a voice of heartache and renewal, despair and hope, and the voice of one of the Puritans' own, forsaken and redeemed. To her contemporaries, she served as an example of God's Providence. To later generations and, specifically, twenty-first

century scholars, she represents America's first female literary prose voice.

## CHAPTER 2

### UNDERSTANDING SELF:

#### THE SPIRITUAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

*Monopolizing Hee's, pretend no more  
Of wit and worth, to hoard up all the store.  
The females too grow wise and good and great.*  
Mather, Eureka the Vertuous Woman Found, 1

In order to structure a discussion of Rowlandson's emergence as a pioneer of the Indian captivity narrative, it is essential to analyze her method as a progression towards a new genre. Gordon M. Sayre notes that "One might say that more than any other author since Thomas More and his Utopia, she [Rowlandson] created a genre" (9). This thesis argues that Rowlandson's literary style developed as a result of combining genres that build upon, and out of, one another, thus creating an innovative and effective outlet of female self-expression. Rowlandson lays the groundwork of her narrative within the framework of a spiritual autobiography. This foundation provides the introspective examination and chronological historical account that is necessary for Rowlandson to explore successfully her personal conversion which, ultimately, expands to form the didactic emphasis required by the jeremiad technique.

Through the style of spiritual autobiography, Rowlandson is able to relate to the average Puritan's experience. The autobiographical elements, such as factual details presented in a personal, honest method, provide the reader with a structure from which empathy can arise. In addition to relating to her captivity experience, Puritan readers could recognize their own inner struggles within the pages of Rowlandson's narrative while also deriving pleasure from the adventure. Vaughan and Clark state that "in a society without fiction and plays, and almost barren of poetry, real-life dramas filled a crucial cultural void" (3). Although her captivity is a harrowing experience, Rowlandson survives and reunites with husband and family, in addition to establishing a new relationship with God. By presenting a detailed account of her "removals" and the basic movement of her captivity, Rowlandson builds a progression that is full of plot and climatic twists and turns. She creates a story in which the reader can essentially join her on the road to freedom. In the Puritan view, if someone who is not only a Puritan, but also a "mere woman," is saved from imminent death by the hand of God, then he, too, can be rescued from the perils of life.

Rowlandson is not the only female who wrote in the spiritual autobiographical mode. Bradstreet's poetry is also considered autobiographical in nature and touches on the same strains of the Puritan struggle to understand life in the New World. Bradstreet and Rowlandson use similar techniques in their writings as both try to reconcile the natural world with God's greater plan for the Puritans. Esther Edwards Burr, the daughter of renowned minister Jonathan

Edwards, and Elizabeth Ashbridge are also recognized as autobiographical writers. Their introspective works acted as illustrations of faith, while also providing evidence of their constant self-examination. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker, in their introduction to The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr, note that "[t]he journal is a continual self-examination, itself a spiritual quest rather than simply a description of a quest" (19). Reflecting on the reasons why Esther Burr and her friend, Sarah Prince, kept each other's journals, Karlsen and Crumpacker contend that they had specific goals in mind, the central aim being to monitor one another's spiritual and emotional growth (19). As a Puritan and the daughter and wife of ministers, religion was an important part of Burr's daily life. Her journals illustrate her belief that she "[. . .] saw her life in terms of the soul's journey to God—an undertaking that began with conversion and assurance of God's grace, but that required lifelong vigilance against backsliding" (Karlsen 19). Rowlandson, also a minister's wife, regarded her narrative as not only a record of her traumatic experience, but also as an outward sign of her Puritan vocation.

Although an earlier Puritan than Burr, Rowlandson's narrative reflects the same notions and motivations that urged Burr to write her experiences, although not to the popular acclaim Rowlandson's afforded. Burr's journal is a private pursuit and does not document an Indian captivity and eventual restoration to her community, but it does echo the earlier sentiments Rowlandson attempts to bring forth. Both women, in spiritual autobiographical style, document their life



experiences within a larger Godly realm that exists as the central focus of their Puritan faith. Karlsen and Crumpacker maintain that Burr knew her proper duty as a Puritan required her to teach others through the model of a virtuous women, in the possibility that her journal may be published so others could benefit from the record of her spiritual struggles (20). In the same way, Rowlandson published her account of Indian captivity in an effort to help others as her religious convictions compelled her to do.

Although published almost a century later than Rowlandson's narrative, Elizabeth Ashbridge's spiritual autobiography, Some Account of the Early Part of the Life of Elizabeth Ashbridge, is an example of another exceptional and popular autobiography that characterizes a female success story with an emphasis on spirituality. Although Ashbridge represents the Quaker faith, her autobiography documents an exciting and unique life in which she tells the story of her arrival in America as an indentured servant. In this autobiography, Ashbridge, like Rowlandson, is reduced to servitude, a bondage that is only relieved by Providence. Another similarity between Rowlandson and Asbridge's autobiographies is the emphasis on the instructive qualities of their works. In the case of Ashbridge's account, the Quaker Society of Friends had to determine that it offered sufficient didactic materials to warrant publication. Ashbridge's autobiography has also survived in popularity and is considered an accurate representation of the Quaker tradition. Some Account's popularity is evident in that it was "published, circulated, and republished

throughout the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries" (Mulford 602).

Although somewhat similar to other autobiographical accounts, Rowlandson's differs in significant ways from her seventeenth-century counterparts whom Daniel Shea refers to as "Relatively temperate and subdued" (90). Shea adds that "the typical seventeenth-century spiritual narrative written in New England tends more toward formalistic recitation and mechanical pattern [. . .]" (90). Instead of following a pattern, Rowlandson finds her niche in the combination of literary styles based on the constructs of the spiritual autobiography. Shea states that

[. . .] the autobiography represents a further stage in the refinement of immediate experience, a stage at which the writer himself has attempted to introduce pattern and moves consciously toward generalization about his [her] life.

(Shea X)

In Rowlandson's ability to direct her experiences toward an instructive yet entertaining avenue, she achieves a brand of literature that adheres to Aristotle's claim that literature's purpose is to instruct and delight. To expand further on Aristotle's theory, Rowlandson's narrative, albeit a true experience instead of drama, exemplifies the impact of tragic literature on an audience, which Aristotle held was tragedy's value as an art form. In his view, tragedy's aim should be to effect a cathartic release as a result of heightened emotional state wrought by the events of the story. This idea asserts that strong emotion is evoked, along with its

insecurities, that allows the average person to experience the events vicariously (Miller, A. K. 1). In this vein, the success of Rowlandson's narrative and its survival as a classic of colonial American literature represent the impact it has had on audiences throughout the centuries since its first publication.

This popularity, and the popularity of other spiritual autobiographies, created a genre that consists of conventions now attributed to the form. As outlined by the Columbia Literary History of the United States, essential elements of the spiritual autobiography must include:

- (1) a first-person account of a deliverance from earthly peril by divine providence, (2) the journey motif, suggesting a circular migration governed by God, who moves the action forward toward a predetermined end known only to him, (3) the essential, innate depravity of mankind, except for those saintly few who are especially designated to carry forward the course of divine history. (Lowance 69)

Rowlandson's narrative fulfills these requirements as it reflects the same motivation of duty that led other early women, like Bradstreet, Burr, and Ashbridge, to record their experiences.

The first convention Rowlandson adheres to is to make an account of the earthly perils from which she must be delivered. She achieves this by providing evidence of the disaster and despair she experiences as her captivity begins:

My eldest sister being yet in the house and seeing those woeful sights, the infidels hailing mothers one way and

children another and some wallowing in their blood, and her elder son telling her that her son William was dead and myself was wounded [. . .]. (Rowlandson 308)

The level of misery and hopelessness leads Rowlandson into a state of despondency as she watches helplessly as her child dies in her arms:

Thus nine days I sat upon my knees with my babe in my lap till my flesh was raw again; my child being even ready to depart this sorrowful world, they bade me carry it out to another wigwam [. . .] whither I went with a heavy heart, and down I sat with the picture of death in my lap. About two hours in the night my sweet babe like a lamb departed this life on Feb. 18, 1675, it being about six years and five months old. (310)

From the death of her child to the insensitivity shown towards her occasionally, Rowlandson is the victim. She has no one and makes references to the fact that there are no Christians around to help her. She is alone in her anguish and desolation and separated from all that she knows. This convention allows her to show that the perils she faces on earth can only be relieved by a Providential force. Without God, she emphasizes, existence on earth is filled with turmoil and disorder, grief and misfortune:

All was gone: my husband gone (at least separated from me, he being in the Bay, and add to my grief, the Indians told me they would kill him as he came homeward), my children gone, my relations and friends gone, our house and home and all our comforts within door and without, all was gone

except my life, and I knew not but the next moment that  
might go too. (309)

Mary believes that the hand of Providence guides her through a series of signs, keeping her alive. She is given a Bible that has been stolen from the settlers, and she finds comfort in her readings: "[. . .] many and many a time have I sat down and wept sweetly over this scripture" (Rowlandson 312). Although she designs her story as a tribute to her rescue through Providence, Rowlandson uses her role as an autobiographer to question its mysterious ways: "And here I cannot but take notice of the strange Providence of God in preserving the heathen. They were many hundreds, old and young, some sick and some lame, many had papooses at their backs" (Rowlandson 312). Without questioning the actual existence of Providence, she is able to analyze and wonder at God's actions. Through this autobiographical style, she allows the reader to see the inner workings of her mind, both advantageous and disadvantageous to the Puritans' fight against the Indians. As an advantage to the Puritan cause in the aftermath of King Philip's War, Rowlandson's story acts as proof of Indian brutality. But through her insider's look at how the Indians truly lived, Rowlandson also shows the Indians' basic humanity in their own struggle for survival, which might have proved disadvantageous in the settlers' rally against the Indians.

The journey motif corresponds with Rowlandson's storytelling style, her description of topographical details, and her use of mileage terminology. The storytelling style she adopts includes a series of "removals" which separate events and indicate time passage:

"And that I may the better declare what happened to me during that grievous captivity, I shall particularly speak of the several removes we had up and down the wilderness" (308). This method helps Rowlandson separate her journey into fragmented experiences, similar to journal entries that account daily progression. Rowlandson maintains the story's movement through the continual use of "removals" which successfully keep the story moving forward. She uses time to show her growing distance from freedom and the eventual return to it:

But to return to my own journey, we traveled about half a day or little more and came to a desolate place in the wilderness where there were no wigwams or inhabitants before; we came about the middle of the afternoon to this place, cold and wet, and snowy, and hungry, and weary, and no refreshing for man but the cold ground to sit on and our poor Indian cheer. (Rowlandson 312)

She uses "half a day" and "the middle of the afternoon" to keep the reader current with the progress of her journey. Rowlandson's detailed remembrance of the actual time allotments spent in each place and time spent traveling contribute to the autobiographical style that holds the story together.

In her effort to recall places in her travels with the Indians, Rowlandson uses nature's details such as the topographical features of hills and the wilderness, both of which are troublesome and threatening: "Before I got to the top of the hill, I thought my heart and leg and all would have broken and failed me. What through faintness and soreness of body it was a grievous day of travel to me"

(313). Her journey can be read as a sequence of movement uphill, as the band of Indians with Rowlandson in tow make slow progress. The symbolic significance of the "hill" Rowlandson is trying to climb is representative of a Puritan's battle with sin as he or she backslides because of sins and inadequacies:

One hill was so steep that I was fain to creep up upon my knees and to hold by the twigs and bushes to keep myself from falling backward. My head also was so light that I usually reeled as I went, but I hope all these wearisome steps that I have taken are but a forewarning of me to the heavenly rest. (Rowlandson 316)

At this stage, Rowlandson isn't prepared realistically to traverse the terrain, while symbolically her soul also isn't ready to be relieved by the hand of God. In essence, she hasn't quite reached a point at which conversion can take place: "[. . .] we were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance. If we had been, God would have found a way [. . .]" (Rowlandson 313).

To document her journey's actual advancement, Rowlandson uses distance terminology to show distance traveled and also to show the distance between her location and those for whom she cares: "My daughter was also now about a mile off, and I had not seen her in nine or ten weeks as I had not seen my sister since our first taking" (Rowlandson 321). Numbers and measurements appear often in the narrative as Rowlandson provides the background material necessary for a thorough understanding of the travails of her experience. The spiritual autobiographical method allows her to record the figures

that she must have kept in her mind while the experience was taking place. She documents the statistics as if recording a part of her daily practice: "There were now besides myself nine English captives in this place, all of them children except one woman" (Rowlandson 311). The immediacy of Rowlandson's automatic tabulations contributes to the narrative's ability to capture the moment. An examination of her narrative as a spiritual autobiography must include the journal-like ritual with which each passage is recorded.

Although Rowlandson's entire story is told in retrospect two years after her restoration, several elements provide a sense of immediacy, like her incorporation of dialogue into the narrative as if she had recorded it immediately after it was spoken: "'Come go along with us.' I told them they would kill me. They answered, if I were willing to go along with them they would not hurt me" (308). She also uses episodic anecdotes, indications that the events are recent in her memory, as if they are happening as she writes. One instance occurs as she remembers a conversation in which an Indian tries to outwit her:

I [. . .] asked him what he would have. He said two coats and twenty shillings in money and half a bushel of seed corn and some tobacco. I thanked him for his love, but I knew the good news as well as the crafty fox. (Rowlandson 324)

The detail she provides is another example of the immediacy with which she writes. After having been away from the Indians for such a period of time, it seems impossible that she can recall specific



images such as her precise remembrance of a certain squaw's appearance:

She had a kersey coat and covered with girdles of wampum from the loins upward; her arms from her elbows to her hands were covered with bracelets; there were handfuls of necklaces about her neck and several sorts of jewels in her ears. She had fine red stockings and white shoes, her hair powdered and face painted red that was always before black.

(Rowlandson 324)

Although her description may seem implausible as a true representation of the accuracy expected in autobiographical writing, quite possibly, it is this very same quality of keen observation that affords Rowlandson the ability to depict the Indians as both horrible savages: "[. . .] one of the company drew his sword and told me he would run me through if I did not go presently" (316) and also in instances of good will: "[. . .] the squaw laid a skin for me, bid me sit down, gave me some groundnuts, bade me come again, and told me they would buy me if they were able, and yet these were strangers to me that I never saw before" (315).

The reality of the autobiographical framework provides the reader with accounts of despair and survival as Rowlandson struggles to stay alive. As one of the more graphic and illustrative passages indicates, Rowlandson eats an already-chewed piece of food taken from the mouth of a child. In this instance, she loses her humanity as she becomes an animal herself while savoring its flesh:

Being very hungry, I had quickly eat up mine, but the child could not bite it, it was so touch and sinewy but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing, and slabbering of it in the mouth and hand. Then I took it of the child and ate it myself and savory it was to my taste. (Rowlandson 320)

Rowlandson struggles with the human question of survival and adapts herself to the notion of "survival of the fittest." In order for her to share her human responses in dire situations like the scene described, she acknowledges an acceptance of her own humanity. Although this is an unpleasant image of her, she presents the reader with the truth, as if in writing it down she confronts and accepts the baser nature of mankind. Passages like this help Rowlandson to explore and emphasize the third convention outlined by the Columbia Literary History of the United States of "the essential, innate depravity of mankind" (93). From the basest level of humanity, the only direction Rowlandson can move is up, creating a spiritual ladder by means of which her eventual rise and redemption can be realized.

In other instances recorded in her narrative, she relates similar human experiences, separate from God. As the Indians take possession of their captives at the raid, Rowlandson makes a self-assertion that betrays her former convictions: "I have often before this said that if the Indians should come I should choose rather to be killed by them than taken alive, but when it came to the trial, my mind changed" (Rowlandson 308). In one instance, she reaches a spiritual low, representing her distance from God when the word of God no longer revives her:

Then also I took my Bible to read, but I found no comfort here neither, which many times I was wont to find. So easy a thing it is with God to dry up the streams of scripture-comfort from us. (Rowlandson 317)

Through these feelings of abandonment, Rowlandson begins a pattern of behavior that indicates that, through her introspection, reliance on self becomes a strength instead of a weakness. In later episodes, she expresses a desire to fight and control her own destiny. Rowlandson begins to assert a place for herself in the community of mankind, a place consisting of both Christians and "heathens." She regains the necessary spirit of survival and begins to see life on her own terms:

The maid told me if I would not give her a piece she would tear a piece off it. I told her I would tear her coat then; with that my mistress rises up and takes up a stick big enough to have killed me and struck at me with it, but I stepped out, and she struck the stick into the mat of the wigwam. (Rowlandson 317)

Rowlandson develops an attitude of aggression instead of her previous composure of defeat. She begins to speak out and finds her voice filled with vitality: "I told them they has as good knock me in head as starve me to death" (Rowlandson 320). Rowlandson adapts to her environment by acquiring her own food, accommodation, and means to see her family members who are also captives. In her newly developed sense of self, her intellect finds a place to assert itself when it comes to bargaining her way to restoration when the question of her ransom price arises: "I thought if I should speak of but a little, it would

be slighted and hinder the matter; if of a great sum, I knew not where it would be procured" (Rowlandson 321). From the autobiographical outlook, a new appreciation is gained of who Mary Rowlandson really is and the levels on which her transformation occurs. In addition to a story of grace, the essential element that the autobiographical framework provides is a setting in which the human spirit is able to transcend circumstance in order to survive.

In terms of Puritan literary techniques, the autobiographical outlet had the same ultimate intentions as both the conversion narrative and the jeremiad: "The Puritan autobiographer was engaged in [. . .] acknowledging divine blessings and providential intercessions and weighing the positive benefits of the most dismal calamities" (Shea 119). Although Rowlandson's aim is public instruction with a religious emphasis, the autobiographical dimension allows her room to explore honest emotion about her experience, such as her first sighting of possible restoration:

Then came Tom and Peter [. . .]. I got them by the hand and burst out into tears, my heart was so full that I could not speak to them, but recovering myself, I asked them how my husband did and all my friends and acquaintances.

(Rowlandson 321)

In addition to exploring her emotions regarding her experience, she is also able to sort out the events as her memory recalls it. Writing as a therapeutic exercise may perhaps form the base of Rowlandson's particular autobiographical mode. But, although she may have been

writing partially for herself, the Puritan autobiographer cannot avoid the societal reason that urges her to put pen to paper:

As the member of a family, a church, and a body politic, he [she] could never speak simply to hear his echo, nor was he free to consider his autobiographical reflection of himself [herself] totally apart from the faces that surround it.

(Shea 111)

What separates Rowlandson from other Puritan autobiographers is that she actually lived to document the events. Rowlandson has a wealth of depravity from which to draw inspiration, which keeps her from falling into the conventions of other writers of the form. The trap Rowlandson escapes is a false distress and trauma that became common as Puritans created and documented their autobiographies as a service to their faith without the life experience to exploit in the pursuit of piety. Shea states that it is not too severe a judgment to say, "many spiritual narratives of the period were not so much composed as recited" (106). The common seventeenth-century Puritan spiritual autobiography began to take on a pervasive uniformity in structure and vocabulary as legions of Puritans sought to document their daily experiences in faith.

Rowlandson's narrative, as a spiritual autobiography, works within these conventions but transcends the genre because it incorporates other styles, making her narrative an exception to the rest. In using various techniques, Rowlandson follows certain constructs but moves far beyond the norm. Thus, the attention paid to her unique narrative is an expected response in a Puritan population

that was inundated with hundreds of identical autobiographies of pious men and women intent on leaving their mark on society. The narrative's appeal is evident since it went through thirty editions and continues to be read and studied. Tapping into the fears of human captivity, Rowlandson reaches the human psyche and, quite possibly, appeals to women, specifically of her time period, who were held in "bondage" within the patriarchal Puritan society.

## CHAPTER 3

### EXPERIENCING GOD:

#### THE CONVERSION NARRATIVE

*Come and hear all ye that fear God, and I will declare what  
he hath done for my soul.*

Psalms 66:16

In her effort to step out of the traditional woman's role and find her place in Puritan patriarchal society, Rowlandson uses another sub-genre, the conversion narrative, in her tale of Indian captivity. After her exploration of selfhood is set into motion through the experience of writing her autobiography, Rowlandson focuses her efforts on asserting and establishing her image within the community. By emphasizing the conversional dimension of her narrative, she adapts her story into a pattern recognized by Puritan community as one of conversion. In an effort to show the link between the autobiographical element and the conversion narrative dimension, it is essential to highlight the relationship discussed. Because the autobiographical aspect forms the body of Rowlandson's narrative and keeps the story strung together in a series of events, it acts as a base from which Rowlandson can move upward in search of a higher meaning. She is able to present her experience from a factual point of view while also

expanding her central focus to include the bigger picture of her role in Puritan community.

The conversion narrative was a pattern not only recognized by Puritan society, it was also expected of Puritan church members. In choosing to relate her experience as a God-ordained, life-changing event, Rowlandson uses a commonly held tradition to present an image of self, designed to leave an impression on Puritan society. In the account of her captivity, she decides how society will envision and remember her by using what they already know and accept, for example, a belief in a chosen "elect." She explores the conversion dimension further in the twentieth remove, in which she outlines five evidences of God's providence. After establishing her narrative as a form of conversion experience, Rowlandson incorporates symbolism, instances of dramatic transformation, and scriptural reinforcement in order to actualize her image fully within society.

In that her autobiography contains the story of her conversion experience, Rowlandson's narrative provides the evidence of her conversion by which she becomes part of a "visible sainthood," a group of Puritans who were among the "elect." In the Congregationalist churches of Puritan New England, the "elect" were those recognized as God's chosen individuals. The early churches attempted to form pure churches, in which all members were of the "elect" and had experienced conversions: "Only these visible saints qualified for the sacraments and were subject to church discipline" (Pope 4).

The conversion experience is documented in many early Puritan records as the church began to make it a requirement of its members:



"The 'morphology of conversion,' initially developed by English Puritan divines as a guide for individual souls, was transformed into a yardstick for measuring the faithful" (Pope 5). As a distinct representation of Thomas Hooker's stages of conversion, Rowlandson's narrative moves from contrition to exaltation as her story exemplifies the progress of a person's struggle on the edge of a broken covenant that is only saved through the mercy of God: "as he wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other" (Rowlandson 221).

As part of the conversion process, Rowlandson had to undergo certain steps to achieve salvation that include, according to Hooker, contrition, humiliation, vocation, implantation, exaltation, and possession. Her narrative clearly shows her progress toward conversion. The humiliation stage occurs when she realizes that she has been sinful and that her traumatic experience is a consequence of that sin. Implantation takes place soon afterward in her darkest moment of despair, the death of her child, and leads her to exaltation, the stage that Donna Campbell describes as "the first entrance into the state of saving grace" (Forms 4).

In her last stage of conversion, described as possession or "awareness of presence of faith" (Campbell, Forms 4), Rowlandson is so filled with gratitude for her release that she begins to live a life of thanksgiving: "I may well say as his Psal. 107.12, Oh give thanks unto the Lord for he is good, for his mercy endureth forever" (Rowlandson 228). According to Harry Stout, even after recording such a convincing conversion, Rowlandson still would have had to "monitor

her spiritual state and repeat the process of conversion if necessary" (qtd. in Campbell, Forms 4).

Scholar Patricia Caldwell sees the conversion narrative as inevitably tied up with this migration and expectations in the New World (35). She states that, because a Puritan's conversion experience was a requirement for church membership, it played a central role in the New English effort to "work out, often with blood, sweat, and tears, the exact nature of the church and the best way to define and gather its membership" (35). The emphasis on the conversion requirement usually led members to give an oral recollection of their experience, usually delivered in front of the church congregation. During the oratory process, the members gained a new identity, if not in the eyes of God, then in the eyes of the community. The great outpouring of conversion narratives, as a response to the Puritan movement in the 1600s, provided a ready source of materials for Rowlandson to absorb and allowed her to intermingle her own conversion story with other literary elements in her narrative.

In the New World, Puritan society experienced rapid changes as it strove for its place and position in the world. There were three major standards for the typical testimonial/conversion story: 1) relation before the entire congregation of 2) a genuine experience of conversion (not doctrinal "knowledge" or "belief"), which 3) was required of all who would join the church (Caldwell 46). Rowlandson's narrative follows these typical conventions by its mere publication, but it is in Rowlandson's twentieth remove that she clearly identifies her work and its conversion dimension. In this section, Rowlandson's

narrative mirrors a conversion narrative published in England in the 1660s, written by another Puritan female named Mrs. Elizabeth White. At the end of Mrs. White's conversion experience, she provides, as does Rowlandson,

[. . .] a final listing of five "Evidences," given "as a Further Testimony of my Interest in Christ, by the Effects of My Faith." Here is the expectable sequence of sin, preparation, and assurance: conviction, compunction, and submission; fear, sorrow, and faith. (Caldwell 2)

White's conversion narrative was published under the title The Experiences of God's Gracious Dealing with Mrs. Elizabeth White. As they were written under her own Hand, and found in her Closet after her Decease, December 5, 1669. Caldwell notes that this narrative reflects the ideas and structure of numerous accounts that circulated in both England and America (1).

In the twentieth remove, Rowlandson recounts her evidence of God's omnipotent reign with five numbered reasons preceded by an explanation of what follows: "But before I go any further, I would take leave to mention a few remarkable passages of providence which I took special notice of in my afflicted time" (Rowlandson 324). As a Puritan facing the wilderness within which the Indians live, Rowlandson struggles to make sense of the Indians' survival and can only account for it as God's providence. The cultural differences contribute to the deeper wedge driven between Puritans and Indians and is strengthened by Rowlandson's constant reminder that only the power of Providence could account for creating such diversity among men. In

the Puritan egocentric view, only those who conform to the way of the Chosen people are worthy of God's preservation. But in light of what God does for the Indians during Rowlandson's captivity, the only explanation is that God is using the Indians as a vessel of change, change that would encourage Puritan conversion.

In the first evidence, Rowlandson attempts to justify God's willingness to allow the attack in the first place: "They are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, therefore shall they go captive with the first that go captive. It is the Lord's doing, and it should be marvelous in our eyes" (324). She uses the sin of apathy as justification for the enemy to destroy their town like "bears bereft of their whelps or so many ravenous wolves, rending us and our lambs to death" (Rowlandson 324). In the second remark, she recalls the slowness of the English army in pursuing the Indians. In her recollection, this can only be the hand of God slowing them in order to prolong the lesson he intends the Puritans to learn. In the third remembrance, she describes an impassable river that God allows the Indians to cross, but not the English: "They [the Indians] could go in great numbers over, but the English must stop. God had an overruling hand in all those things" (Rowlandson 325). Rowlandson believes that God is "preserving the heathen for further affliction to our poor country" (325). In this statement, Rowlandson exemplifies the egocentric belief of American Puritans that they were God's chosen people, and that all others, like the Indians, were only instruments meant to thwart or enhance the progress of the Puritan soul.

Rowlandson's fourth example of God's providence illustrates the idea that, although the English had chosen the most obvious path to victory, in the end, they would only lose, because the power of God was working against them:

It was thought if their corn were cut down they would starve and die with hunger, and all their corn that could be found was destroyed, and they driven from that little they had in store into the woods in the midst of winter. And yet how to admiration did the Lord preserve them for His holy ends and the destruction of many still amongst the English! (Rowlandson 325)

In the above passage, Rowlandson shows the power of God while also presenting the brutality of the English method of war against the Indians. Rowlandson does not recall watching any Indian man, woman, or child die from starvation, although it was the English who were using this type of warfare against the Indians. Though written over three hundred years ago, Rowlandson's accurate description of wartime methods between the Puritans and Indians serves as a document of the horrific measures taken during King Philip's War, and a modern reader can trace the marketability of her narrative as a source of war propaganda. She describes the food the Indians ate and their penchant for edibles that "a hog or dog would hardly touch" (325).

To a Puritan reader, Rowlandson's fifth and final evidence of God's providence would have served to incite anger toward and rivalry with the Indians as she recounts the Indians' verbal exclamations of brutality against the Puritans:

They would boast much of their victories, saying that in two hours' time they had destroyed such a captain and his company at such a place, [. . .] and boast how many towns they had destroyed [. . .] again they would say this summer that they would knock all the rogues in the head, or drive them into the sea, or make them fly the country. (325)

In this fifth evidence presented of God's providence, Rowlandson provides examples of boastful and rejoicing Indians as she envisions a time when the Indians would eventually get their due as God's vengeance would soon come upon them: "And the Lord had not so many ways before to preserve them, but now He hath as many to destroy them" (325). She uses the story of the King of Amalek in 1 Samuel, who thought he had been spared by Saul only to be killed eventually by Samuel, to explain the dismal future that awaited the Indians when they were no longer acting as God's vessels, but as his enemies.

In addition to documenting her soul's progress through the various stages and the conventional listing of the evidences of God's providence, Rowlandson also uses symbolism, certain instances of dramatic transformation, and scriptural reinforcement to enhance her example of conversion further. In her attempt to identify with the Puritan community, Rowlandson creates a combination of symbols that represent an unchanged soul in preparation for a deeper spiritual meaning. When she describes her physical discomfort, her hunger for food represents a deeper hunger for God's love: "And after I was thoroughly hungry, I was never again satisfied. For though sometimes it fell out that I got enough and did eat till I could eat no more,

yet I was as unsatisfied as I was when I began" (Rowlandson 319). Rowlandson's anguish could only be satisfied by food for the body, which in turn, represents food for the soul. Since her sinfulness, and on a greater level, the sinfulness of Puritan society, brings her to this desperate state, Rowlandson must undergo a transformation in order to deserve preservation. In essence, Rowlandson's nourishment must come from God's providence, and her worthiness can only present itself in the form of a conversion experience.

As an example to her fellow Puritans, Rowlandson shows that she was once an untouched soul who undergoes a dramatic transformation: "There I left that child in the wilderness and must commit it and myself also in this wilderness condition to Him who is above all" (Rowlandson 310). After she experiences the traumatic death of her child, she gives up a sense of control over her own life. Even in her most distressing situations, Rowlandson asserts that God pushes her further beyond what she can imagine towards self-realization, which will lead her to self-fulfillment: "But the Lord renewed my strength still and carried me along that I might see more of His power; yea, so much that I could never have thought of had I not experienced it" (Rowlandson 309).

Other conversion symbolism can be found in the way Rowlandson describes her captivity. In this respect, it is applicable to refer again to White's narrative in that it is unique in its description of spiritual rebirth through a series of events distinctive to a woman's experience. According to Caldwell, the journey of Mrs. White's soul proceeds through the "'stations' of her feminine progress in life: her

marriage, her pregnancy, and 'delivery,' nursing her infant then weaning it, her apprehensions about bearing children [. . .]" (8). Caldwell describes White's narrative as a "long anxious period of waiting" that is so much like "the self-absorptive waiting of pregnancy" as if "something were gestating inside her, something both joyous and dangerous" (Caldwell 11). Rowlandson uses the conversion narrative so effectively perhaps because the style works well with the feminine physiological experience, as evidenced by the recognition of White's conversion story. The description of a "long anxious period of waiting" in Rowlandson's narrative fits Rowlandson's agitated state as she, in her isolation, stands in amazement at God's workings inside of Puritans and Indians alike. For Rowlandson, the fruition of God's plan grows with each passing day as she reorganizes and reprioritizes in anticipation of her release from exile, or spiritual rebirth. She awaits, without knowing when God will save her: he is at once present yet distant, all-knowing yet indifferent. Because the feminine experience understands the notion of gestation and reformation, Rowlandson and White are able to convey the conversion message with genuine conviction.

Although only used symbolically, the female experience of gestation is one of dramatic change. In a literal sense, Rowlandson uses many other instances of transformation to illustrate her response to God's call for conversion. She begins with behavioral change that she cannot explain:

I cannot but take notice how at another time I could not bear to be in the room where any dead person was, but now



the case is changed; I must and could lie down by my dead  
babe side by side by all the night after. (310)

In this example, she explores the idea that in extreme situations, a person is capable of uncharacteristic behavior. Thus, she creates a situation in which her soul is susceptible to the necessary transformation that must occur within her, and on a deeper, religious level, the entire Puritan population. From one extreme to the next, Rowlandson prepares her fellow Puritans for the life-changing experience of conversion that is illustrated as a series of descriptive dichotomous situations: "Thus hath the Lord brought me and mine out of that horrible pit and hath set us in the midst of tenderhearted and compassionate Christians" (Rowlandson 327). In the nature of transformation, self-realization is the base before the journey upward can begin. Caldwell describes the conversion experience as a "succession of disclosures" within which there is a "downward and upward movement or an outward and a return journey" (9). Rowlandson's path follows a pattern of spiritual mobility that is led by someone greater than she. Caldwell states that in the journey towards conversion, one

needs to climb up [. . .] step by step, presuming to reach the unknown by way of the known, but one keeps falling down again or, at least, never quite gets there [. . .]. In the end, one must be drawn up by 'something from above.' (25)

Rowlandson attempts to convey the "essence of a spiritual event that manifests itself in the material world but starts and ends elsewhere" (Caldwell 16). Through the incorporation of autobiographical and

conversional elements, Rowlandson successfully achieves the reality of an experience that is "felt in the temporal bodily existence but can be 'assured' only beyond its bounds" (Caldwell 16). During her captivity, Rowlandson journeys outward, literally, in the direction in which her captors force her, and symbolically, in regard to her increased distance from God's protection. After the appropriate conversion period, she is allowed to return to God's fold and her community as a changed soul and, in accordance with Puritan values, speak of her experience and, by example, move others: "It was in my thoughts when I put it into my mouth that if ever I returned I would tell the world what a blessing the Lord gave [. . .]" (Rowlandson 319).

In addition to incorporating symbolism and instances of transformation, Rowlandson's narrative utilizes scriptural reinforcement to complete her image as a member of the "elect." Through her use of scripture, Rowlandson attributes herself with the humbleness and servitude nature required of God's chosen instruments:

Yet I see when God calls a person to anything and through never so many difficulties, yet He is fully able to carry them through and make them see and say they have been gainers thereby. (Rowlandson 328)

In her comparisons, Rowlandson uses terminology such as "Now may I say with David, 2 Sam. 24:14, 'I am in a great strait'" (318). Using phraseology like this, Rowlandson associates herself with, and in effect, transports herself to a place beside David in the eyes of the community and God. She states, "For I must say with him, 'Father I

have sinned against heaven and in thy sight'" (319), further reinforcing the spiritual realm in which both she and David are God's chosen people. In this imaginative state of being, Rowlandson uses present tense to convince the reader that in the heavenly arena, she and David can converse and speak together in a spiritual conversation with God. She identifies with Job in the same way, drawing the parallels between dire situations: "I hope it is not too much to say with Job, 'Have pity upon me, have pity on me, oh, ye my friends, for the hand of the Lord has touched me.'" (317).

Representing humanity, Rowlandson, David, and Job cry out to the Lord in their distress. In true conversational style, God answers Rowlandson with the same answers he had for David and Job. He answers her through scripture. On numerous occasions, Rowlandson turns to the Bible looking for answers: "Afterward, before this doleful time ended with me, I was turning the leaves of my Bible and the Lord brought to me some scriptures" (317). Upon reading scripture, she calms down and tries to reconcile herself to her situation: "Many times I should be ready to run out against the heathen, but the scripture would quiet me again [. . .]" (Rowlandson 319).

All of these factors contribute to the idea that Rowlandson's narrative can be read as a conversion narrative. Through extensive symbolism, instances of transformation, and scriptural reinforcement, Rowlandson is able to fully impress upon the community that she has fulfilled the characteristics of conversion and provided the conventional evidence required of God's providence. As a representation of the level of faith a person had, the conversion

experience served as a gage by which Puritans could measure their neighbors' piety. In Rowlandson's case, she chose to tell her story and assert her place as a pious example as her Puritan forefathers had done since the migration to America. And through her tribulation and eventual release, her narrative acts as both an example of personal salvation and as an allegory for the desperate yet hopeful plight of the Puritans and their role in New England.

By choosing to write her conversion story down instead of reading it or speaking it in front of the congregation, Rowlandson broke the traditional delivery of the experience. Instead, she was able to strengthen and enhance her story with additional elements. Her narrative was carried into the homes of fellow Puritans, creating a vicarious thread through which Puritans could live and be saved. As the next chapter will further discuss, Rowlandson not only leaves her mark on the community but also creates an outlet to impart an important message.

CHAPTER 4  
LIVING THE COVENANT:  
THE JEREMIAD

*Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord.*

Exodus 14:13

The message Rowlandson is attempting to impart to her fellow Puritans is a familiar one, although it is a message that was usually delivered from the pulpit amidst talk of broken covenants and a "city upon a hill." Hidden within the story of adventure and anguish, Rowlandson's narrative brims with qualities of the jeremiad, a form usually reserved for ministers. The term "jeremiad" derives from the Old Testament prophet Jeremiah, who delivered speeches urging people to repent so that God would renew the ancient covenant. According to Emory Elliot, although originally the term applied to sermons in particular, it has expanded to include "not only sermons but also other texts that rehearse the familiar tropes of the formula such as captivity narratives, letters, covenant renewals, as well as some histories and biographies" (qtd. in Campbell, *Forms* 1).

Rowlandson's narrative, along with a few of Bradstreet's poems, are among the earliest expressions of female jeremiads. Her story provides the reader with a chilling account of Indian captivity while also acting as a model of personal covenant with God. New England

Puritans were drawn into Rowlandson's tale of adventure, anguish, and eventual reassurance of God's deliverance through the use of a different literary style than the sermon form to which they had become accustomed. In addition to the new approach utilized, another distinction characterizes the narrative. Rowlandson was one of the first females to write a narrative that was meant to instruct her fellow Puritans in spiritual matters, an issue that was usually left to the men. The possibility exists that, after Rowlandson's conversion experience assured her that she was one of the chosen, she experimented with certain techniques of the ministry such as her adaptation of the jeremiad illustrates. Often, Watkins notes, "After conversion, an event of major importance for many men was a calling to public ministry" (61). If men sometimes felt the urge to minister after an acknowledged conversion experience, so perhaps did Rowlandson. If read as a jeremiad, her narrative can be explored through an examination of the four characteristics of a second-generation jeremiad: using scriptural examples, listing a series of misconducts and sinful behavior of present society, reminding the people of God's promises, and assuring the listener's that God's blessings will return (Bush 64).

First and foremost, however, Rowlandson's narrative expresses jeremiad qualities in its depiction of vivid and horrific scenes amidst the spectacular state of crisis in which Rowlandson must survive. Her child dies a slow, painful death in her arms, and she tells a terrifying story of a pregnant woman tortured and killed, both of which arouse heightened emotion. With images of "dear friends, and

relations lie bleeding out their heart-blood upon the ground" and of "one who was chopped into the head with a hatchet, and stript naked, and yet was crawling up and down" (Rowlandson 219), Rowlandson's narrative informs the reader of the gruesome and outlandish aspects of an Indian invasion also, attracting the reader with the expectation that the outcome will be good. The reality of the Indian captivity establishes an ominous tone, further dramatized by the spiritual metaphors that liken the Indians to animals: "O the wonderful power of God that I have seen, and the experience that I have had: I have been in the midst of those roaring Lyons, and Savage Bears, that feared neither God, nor man, nor the Devil" (Rowlandson 227). In passages such as these, Rowlandson creates hell imagery, as if captivity was "[. . .] hell on earth, a supernatural setting in which her captors were hardly human, barely even real" (Sayre 128). Rowlandson's narrative consists of imagery that follows the conventional pattern of the well-known jeremiad preacher, Jonathan Edwards, who delivered the famous Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God. Rowlandson's jeremiad in the third remove echoes Edwards' spiderweb imagery from Sinners that places sinners dangling over the precipice of eternal damnation. Rowlandson writes, "[. . .] it was easy for me to see how righteous it was with God to cut off the thread of my life, and cast me out of his presence forever" (221).

Rowlandson is aware of her role as a Puritan Jeremiah in her acceptance of God's path for her life, which is made clear to her through her experience. By relating this experience to others and attempting to teach a lesson, she fulfills the fully recognized

obligation to God's people she has discovered as a result of her captivity: "when God calls a Person to any thing, and through never so many difficulties, yet he is fully able to carry them through and make them see, and say they have been gainers thereby" (Rowlandson 230). Rowlandson not only uses scriptural examples but also identifies herself as a spiritual leader like David and Joseph. In the narrative, Rowlandson likens herself to the biblical David in her acceptance of affliction in order to fulfill her spiritual role as one of God's chosen people: "Affliction I wanted, and affliction I had, full measure (I thought) pressed down and running over" (230).

Rowlandson inserts scripture intermittently in order to support her claims of punishment and eventual salvation. She also uses scriptural examples throughout her narrative to indicate that the conditions of the Bible and the captivity conditions into which she had been placed are similar, in that biblical society and Puritan society had both formed a covenant with God that must be maintained. The connection between New England and Israel is a result of the Puritans "identifying a correspondence between events and person in the Old Testament (types) and those of the New Testament era (antitypes)" (Bremer 29). This inclination is known as typology, a quality that Francis Bremer attributes to the Puritans of New England because of their habit of prescribing typological elements in the ongoing Christian era (30). One such example is the Puritan view that their migration to America was equivalent to and even surpassed the Israelites' migration to the promised land. Rowlandson recalls the typology begun by the first-generation Puritans in her reference to



her house: "The house stood upon the edge of a hill" (307). Assuredly, Winthrop's "city upon a hill" imagery is evident within the framework of Rowlandson's narrative as her journey brings her back to hill after hill, as she attempts to recapture her home, and in essence, the favor of God.

By using typology and adding scriptural references, Rowlandson further reiterates Caldwell's belief that the Puritan tradition of scripturalism acts as a successful medium for female transformation and can be described in terms of the female passage in life:

Describing an extremely [. . .] dramatic event, she transmutes it into the reenactment of a biblical truth with, in effect, the Word as her midwife: the Word that in Christian theology embodies, in the Second Person, the creative and regenerative powers of God.  
(Caldwell 12)

In effect, Rowlandson delivers the Word of God to the people of God. The scriptures are used as reminders and as a call for change to warn Puritan society that God is ever present in their lives as he was during Rowlandson's while she was in captivity. For a jeremiad to be effective, it must show that the present situation is far from what God intended life to be: "The jeremiad always announces a major gap between actual and ideal conditions" (Bush 64). At the time of Rowlandson's narrative, New England Puritan society had begun to move away from their founding doctrines as new generations pursued other interests of the changing times. Because of the human condition, the covenant they felt they had with God was tried and tested.

Advantageous to the Puritans was the ability to see prophecies fulfilled in Old Testament examples with whom they identified, and they were able to model themselves and structure their behavior based on the mistakes and sinfulness of the people of Israel.

Because of this advantage, the Puritan jeremiad is a mixture of intellectual evaluation of the Bible instilled with the necessary hope that there is salvation if only God will find their own society as worthy as Israel's. The New England Puritan jeremiad developed as they realized "how far they had fallen and at the same time [. . .] how far we must rise to make ourselves worthy of our errand" (Bercovitch, *The Puritan* 40). Their struggle in the New World could only be explained in relation to other societies that had experienced hardships, and by exploring the connection between Israel and New England, the Puritans were able to foresee a time of future salvation when God would save them.

The jeremiad's aim was to reinsert God into the lives of the Puritans as seamlessly as scripture is interwoven into the real events of Rowlandson's narrative. The jeremiad's purpose was to recall a time when God was foremost in Puritan life, when the relationship was pure, the covenant undamaged. Rowlandson's captivity narrative is representative of Puritan society on the verge of breaking the covenant. According to Richard Slotkin, the Indian captive, in this case Rowlandson, can "represent the whole, chastened body of Puritan society" (qtd. in Campbell, *Early* 1). Other scripture and biblical references are interjected into the manuscript to draw parallels between God's covenant with Israel and God's new covenant with the

Puritans. In order to show the relation between the two, Rowlandson uses a reference to biblical Joseph when she is unable to see her children: "[ . . . ] compared the sinful brothers of Joseph to the sinful Puritan colonists of New England" (Gleason 1). Using scripture throughout her true-life account of her Indian captivity allowed Rowlandson to place God in the midst of her crisis. Rowlandson's account of her captivity capitalized on the idea that New England Puritan society "represented a community in crisis" (Bercovitch, *The Puritan* 41). Bercovitch asserts that New England Puritan society used crisis as a strategy of social revitalization and drew strength from adversity (*The Puritan*, 40). Rowlandson's captivity is a reflection of the Puritan's progress towards salvation through crisis. As Bercovitch states in The American Jeremiad:

[. . .] by the 1670s, crisis had become their [Puritan Jeremiahs] source of strength. They fastened upon it, gloried in it, even invented it if necessary. They took courage from backsliding, converted threat into vindication, made affliction their seal of progress. (62)

In this respect, Rowlandson's story is replete with instances from which to gain renewed strength and reassurance of the Puritans' role in New England.

Rowlandson's narrative fulfills the role of the jeremiad to act as scare tactic while also providing reassurance of the role of Puritan society in the New World. Rowlandson is able to use the autobiographical aspects to show the listing of a series of misconducts, her own, yet also reflecting Puritan society. She looks

back on this period of her life and discovers some of the faults that brought God's anger upon her:

The next day was the Sabbath: I then remembered how careless I had been of God's holy time, how many Sabbaths I had lost and misspent, and how evily I had walked in God's sight [. . .]. (Rowlandson 221)

Characteristic of a jeremiad, Rowlandson expounds against sinful pursuits such as vanity that exist within Puritan society and warns against it. As a result of new ideas conforming to societal changes, the New England Puritans transformed it [the jeremiad] for their own purposes into a vehicle of social continuity" (Bercovitch, *The Puritan* 38). In her narrative, Rowlandson highlights the evils and sinful behavior she recognizes forming within Puritan society: "I have seen the extreme vanity of this World: One hour I have been in health, and wealth, wanting nothing: But the next hour in sickness and wounds, and death, having nothing but sorrow and affliction" (229).

Rowlandson's purpose was to draw attention to the corruption in order for members of the community to right the wrongs that were slowly presenting themselves. She notes tobacco as a vice that had taken hold of her willpower:

It seems to be a bait the devil lays to make men lose their precious time. I remember with shame how formerly when I had taken two or three pipes I was presently ready for another, such a bewitching thing it is. (314)

She not only refers to her own problem with tobacco but uses the topic to make a broader reference to the pipe smokers within the Puritan

population as a whole and assures them that God can strengthen their wills: "But I thank God He has now given me power over it; surely there are many who may be better employed than to lie sucking a stinking tobacco pipe" (314). In this instance, the jeremiad form presents itself as Rowlandson calls out to the reader in an effort to discourage tobacco use. Rowlandson also identifies a preoccupation with worldly matters and trivial things as a rising current of sin, "I have learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles, and to be quieted under them" (230). She talks of living in prosperity as a derogatory state which she has passed through in order to serve a greater cause: "When I lived in prosperity, having the comforts of the world about me [. . .] and taking little care for anything [. . .] I should sometimes be jealous" (229).

In addition to using scriptural examples and listing society's misconducts, Rowlandson must remind the people of God's promises. When the Indian asks Rowlandson if she wants the stolen Bible, she is given the opportunity, symbolically, to place her reliance on God instead of herself. This passage illustrates the jeremiad trait of reiterating God's promises to his chosen people. She is given a second chance to acknowledge God as greater than man. By accepting the Bible, she experiences a transformation that, on a larger scale, is meant to represent the opportunities being extended to the wayward sinners within the Puritan fold. At this turning point in the sinners' spiritual lives, God will begin to fulfill his promises:

[. . .] the Lord helped me still to go on reading till I came to Chap. 30 [. . .] where I found, There was mercy

promised again, if we would return to him by repentance:  
and though we were scattered [. . .] the Lord would gather  
us together, and turn all those curses upon our enemies.

(Rowlandson 224)

Rowlandson attempts to show that once God is acknowledge to be the one in control, he will reward his followers. To relate this idea to her fellow Puritans, she uses the example of prayer:

And indeed quickly the Lord answered in some measure my  
poor prayers; for, as I was going up and down mourning and  
lamenting my condition, my son came to me and asked me how  
I did. (310)

Her prayers are answered time and again as she emphasizes God's presence during her captivity: "[. . .] she gave me also something to lay under my head, and a good fire we had. And through the good providence of God I had a comfortable lodging that night" (316).

Reflecting on her captivity, Rowlandson acknowledges her struggle with the belief that God would provide: "the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies [. . .] it is [was] then hard work to persuade myself, that ever I should be satisfied with bread again" (229). Reassurance of God's presence is typical of the jeremiad and can be illustrated by Rowlandson's following statement expressed after her earlier uncertainty: "But now we are fed with the finest of the wheat, and, as I may say, with honey out of the rock" (Rowlandson 229). Rowlandson believed that the punishment God had inflicted on the colonists via the Indians was a manifestation of his love (Gleason 2). In essence, she felt that her experience served as an example that

proved God's word true: "that scripture would come to mind [. . .] For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth" (Rowlandson 229).

Rowlandson completes her narrative by fulfilling her side of the covenant by choosing to strive towards a more perfect relationship with God, further strengthening the reassurance of God's deliverance if one follows her example. As the narrative draws to a conclusion, the verbal use of "me" is replaced with "we" as Rowlandson seeks to broaden her prophetic message, paralleling the struggle of the individual soul to uphold the Covenant with the larger plight of the Puritans as a society in God's hands, "That we must rely on God himself, and our whole dependance must be upon him (230).

Rowlandson's narrative works as a jeremiad in that it combines the mystical nature of God's covenant with the reality of Puritan life and the hardships they had to endure in an attempt to show that God and man could be close once again if Puritan society would repent and reform. Rowlandson's narrative represents harsh reality, such as the death of her child, while also showing that from the depths of despair, the progression upward towards salvation can begin.

Through Rowlandson's ordeal, the New England Puritan reader could figuratively experience the agonies of punishment for their sins and also be rewarded in the end as they witnessed Rowlandson's redemption. Rowlandson's message proved comforting to a turbulent Puritan era, as Puritans in Rowlandson's community and modern scholars recognize the hopeful tone and significance of Rowlandson's final statement: "Exod. 14:13, 'Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord'" (Rowlandson

328). The jeremiad message here implies that, only after Puritans take this instruction to heart, will they be able to witness the parting of the sea, or God's providence.

With Rowlandson's narrative, the Puritan jeremiad form takes on a new dimension as it adopts a real-life example, a woman pulled from the New England Puritan community that society could follow on the path of righteousness. Rowlandson's narrative serves as an example of a new approach to expounding the same ideas of the original jeremiad sermon. But by using the literary outlet of captivity prose to reiterate the same ideas of sin and salvation, the message of the jeremiad is invigorated.



## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Mary Rowlandson's tale of Indian captivity, the Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, is more than just an historical account of the 1676 raid on Rowlandson's town of Lancaster, Massachusetts, by the Narragansett Indians. Through the combination of spiritual autobiography, conversion narrative, and the jeremiad, Rowlandson weaves a captivity narrative full of adventure and didacticism, proving it an effective outlet for her message.

The spiritual autobiographical element allows Rowlandson to express her true state of mind and condition. Through this method, she is able to ground her story in factual content and experience true human emotion, which can be identified as separate from her relationship with God. In the relation of her story, she presents a situation that is universal to the human, earthly condition. Her struggle for survival and her ability to maintain perspective amidst the atrocities and horror surrounding her contribute to her reliability as a narrator. She faces decisions that emphasize her humanness and responsibility, apart from God, to choose realistically which path she will take:

I had often before this said that if the Indians should come I should choose rather to be killed by them than taken alive, but when it came to the trial, my mind changed;

their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit that I chose rather to go along with those [. . .] ravenous beasts than that moment to end my days. (Rowlandson 308)

Revealing the truth of her human state and condition, Rowlandson's narrative affects the reader with its stark reality. By identifying with the perils facing Rowlandson and the human emotion she experiences, the reader unites with Rowlandson in her need to search for a higher purpose. With her story grounded in both humanity's strengths and weaknesses, Rowlandson's autobiographical tone captures the lifelong battle with spiritual uncertainty that a Puritan waged in his or her journey towards a union with God. Thus, the autobiographical form provides the framework for Rowlandson to relate to her readers and show the path towards her own transformation and calling.

As a conversion narrative, Rowlandson's path towards conversion leads her to publicly recording her captivity. By publishing her conversion experience, Rowlandson, in effect, strengthens her own piety, while also helping others who may recognize their own vocation and calling by reading of her experiences. In an effort to emphasize the importance of Puritan society in God's plan, Rowlandson aligns herself as an example among the chosen people. Her conversion narrative encouraged Puritans to document and make public conversion experiences that the community could turn to for guidance. Rowlandson describes her captivity experience as a process towards God's grace that mirrors Thomas Hooker's stages of conversion. Acting as a public record of this experience, her narrative serves as tangible proof of

her self-affirmed relationship with God. Through her recorded servitude, Rowlandson indicates that she has been chosen by God, and by sharing her experience with others, she satisfies the requirements for Puritan sainthood.

Because the autobiographical element establishes her humanity and her spiritual growth is confirmed through her conversion experience, Rowlandson is able to address the growing issues within Puritan society. Rowlandson uses the jeremiad form in order to address her concerns, which results in an outcry against the alleged sinfulness of vanity and luxury. In the jeremiadic tradition, Rowlandson's narrative provides an account of a soul's search for redemption with the inevitable conclusion that life is beyond human control. In an effort to bring forth societal issues and urge early Americans to follow the righteous path, Rowlandson inserts scripture and biblical imagery into her narrative in an effort to remind Puritans of their covenant with God and to encourage them to reinsert God into their lives. Since Winthrop and Bradford originally led their forefathers across the Atlantic to the New World, Puritan society had undergone changes that stimulated certain Puritans, like Rowlandson, to urge others to revive their relationships with God. In essence, Rowlandson's intention, like that of jeremiad ministers, was to start a fire in the hearts of her fellow Puritans so they could recommit to God in order for his Providence to save them. Instead of the typical jeremiad sermon, Rowlandson deftly incorporates her message to society within her autobiographical tale of her "house on the hill," reminiscent of

Winthrop's described "city on a hill" that was to become a beacon to the world.

Rowlandson's contributions to early American literature are evident in the creation of a new genre as a result of the convergence of the spiritual autobiography, a conversion narrative, and the jeremiad. In her use of these techniques, she explores the boundaries of literature and creates a new voice, a voice that reflects the message of other writers of early America yet resonates with a defining feminine voice.

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