Introduction to Literary Studies

Mary Rowlandson,
*The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682):
The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative

Prof. Dr. Michael Butter
On the tenth of February 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster: their first coming was about sunrising; hearing the noise of some guns, we looked out; several houses were burning, and the smoke ascending to heaven. There were five persons taken in one house; the father, and the mother and a sucking child, they knocked on the head; the other two they took and carried away alive. There were two others, who being out of their garrison upon some occasion were set upon; one was knocked on the head, the other escaped; another there was who running along was shot and wounded, and fell down; he begged of them his life, promising them money (as they told me) but they would not hearken to him but knocked him in head, and stripped him naked, and split open his bowels.
Mary Rowlandson (1770)
What Is Cultural Work?
“This book […] sees literary texts not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order. In this view, novels and stories [and all other kinds of texts as well, of course] should be studied not because they escape the limitations of their time and place, but because they offer powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment.”

The Genre of the Captivity Narrative
• structure: freedom – captivity – freedom

• the first genuinely American genre

• originally about captivity among Native tribes

• originally autobiographical texts, i.e. not fictional, not literature in the narrow sense

• originally by Puritan authors
Who Were the Puritans?
• “dissenters” from the Church of England who wanted to “purify” the church

• “hardcore” Protestants

• “The New-Englanders are a people of God settled in those, which were once the Devil's territories” (Cotton Mather, Wonders of the Invisible World)
  → sense of election
  → sense of mission
What Did the Puritans Believe in?
• predestination, i.e. God has decided already who will go to heaven and who to hell

• personal, direct relationship with God

• bible of utmost importance

• sense of election, special relationship to God → obligations, punishment
Mary Rowlandson,
*The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (1682)
Captivity as Being in Hell
This was the dolefullest night that ever my eyes saw. Oh the roaring, and singing and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell.

I had not seen my son a pretty while, and here was an Indian of whom I made inquiry after him, and asked him when he saw him. He answered me that such a time his master roasted him, and that himself did eat a piece of him, as big as his two fingers, and that he was very good meat.
Captivity as Divine Punishment: Individually
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 evilly I had walked in God’s sight; which lay so close unto my spirit, that 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. Yet the Lord still showed mercy to me, and upheld me; and as He wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other.
I had formerly used Tobacco, yet I had left it ever since I was taken. *It seems to be a Bait the Devil layes 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; but I thank God he has now given me the power over it.

(emphasis in the original)
On that very day came the English army after them to this river, and saw the smoke of their wigwams, and yet this river put a stop to them. God did not give them courage or activity to go over after us. We were not ready for so great a mercy as victory and deliverance. If we had been God would have found out a way for the English to have passed this river, as well as for the Indians with their squaws and children, and all their luggage. “Oh that my people had hearkened to me, and Israel had walked in my ways, I should soon have subdued their enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries” (Psalm 81.13-14).
Now I had time to examine all my wayes; my Conscience did not accuse me of unrighteousness toward one or other, yet I saw how in my walk with God I had been a careless creature.

[...] and that Scripture would come to my mind, *Heb.* Xii 6, *For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every Son whom he receiveth*; but now I see the Lord had his time to scourge and chasten me.
Narrating I vs. Experiencing I

Rowlandson in 1682

Rowlandson in 1675
freedom $\iff$ captivity $\iff$ freedom

sinner $\iff$ saint

CONVERSION NARRATIVE
The War as Divine Punishment: Collectively
It is said, _Psal. lxxxi. 13, 14_, Oh that my people had harkened to me, and Israel had walked in my wayes, I should soon have subdued their Enemies, and turned my hand against their adversaries. But now our perverse and evil carriages in the sight of the Lord have so offended him; that, instead of turning his hand against them, the Lord feeds and nourishes them up to be a scourge to the whole land.
King Philip’s War (1675-76)
King Philip/Metacomet, Chief of the Wampanoags
“One in every sixteen man of military age died as a result of the war.”

→ in terms of relative loss, the most devastating war in American history

Rowlandson as Representative of the Community
• indicates that God punishes the Puritans because he loves them, they are still his people

• carries the promise of salvation for the whole community

• if they mend their ways, God will forgive them and grant them victory in the war
The Preface
• a “paratext” (Gerard Genette)

• written by Increase Mather, an important spiritual leader

• legitimizes the publication

• highlights the function for the community
Some friends having obtained a sight of it, could not but be so much affected by the many passages of working providence discovered therein, as to judge it worthy of publick view.

This Gentlewoman’s modesty would not thrust it into the Press, yet her gratitude unto God, made her not hardly persuadable.
Here *Reader*, you may see an instance of the Sovereignty of God, who doth what he will with his own as well as others.
The Title
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
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. [...] 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 all the night after. I have thought since of the wonderful goodness of God to me in preserving me in the use of my reason and senses in that distressed time, that I did not use wicked and violent means to end my own miserable life.
Forms of Cultural Work I
• confirms the author’s election, her special status

• confirms the community’s election, its special status
But That’s Not the Whole Story!
This morning I asked my Master, whether he would sell me to my Husband? he answered, *Nux*, which did much rejoice my spirit.
He was the first Indian I saw drunk all the while that I was amongst them. At last his squaw ran out, and he after her, round the wigwam, with his money jingling at his knees. But she escaped him.
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Forms of Cultural Work II
• counters allegations about Rowlandson’s relationship to the Native Americans

• conveys ethnographic information

• negotiates the relationship between self and other

• offers sensationalist entertainment
A TRUE HISTORY
OF THE
Captivity & Restoration
OF
Mrs. MARY ROWLANDSON,
A Minister’s Wife in New-England.
Wherein is set forth, The cruel and inhumane Usage she underwent amongst the Heathens, for Eleven Weeks time: And her Deliverance from them.

Written by her own Hand, for her Private Use: And now made Publick at the earnest Desire of some Friends, for the Benefit of the Afflicted.

Whereunto is annexed,
A Sermon of the Possibility of God’s Forsaking a People that have been near and dear to him.
Preached by Mr. Joseph Rowlandson, Husband to the said Mrs. Rowlandson, It being his Last Sermon.

Later Forms of the Captivity Narrative