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# Female Captivity Narratives in Colonial America

## **Abstract**

The female captivity narrative provides a complex view of colonial American history by recounting the experiences of women captured from their colonial homes by Native Americans. Male editors, often family friends or town ministers, generally compiled the experiences of female captives, and separating the voice of the female captive from influence of the male editor presents a challenge. Puritan captivity narratives in particular demonstrate conflict between attempts by Puritan ministers to impose a unified religious message in the sagas and the captives' individual experiences, which often contradicted Puritan doctrine. During the early colonial era, ministers' attempts to promote the Puritan covenant conflicted with the individual salvation testimonies of the female captives. In later narratives, white male editors attempted to impose white cultural values on the female stories, while the captives' experiences reflected acculturation and integration into Indian society. Female captivity narratives played contradictory roles; while they recorded each captive's unique experience, male editors often included their own cultural, moral and religious values in the written work.

## **Keywords**

Colonial America, Native Americans, female captivity narrative

## *Female Captivity Narratives in Colonial America*

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The female captivity narrative provides a complex view of colonial American history by recounting the experiences of women captured from their colonial homes by Native Americans. Male editors, often family friends or town ministers, generally compiled the experiences of female captives, and separating the voice of the female captive from influence of the male editor presents a challenge. Puritan captivity narratives in particular demonstrate conflict between attempts by Puritan ministers to impose a unified religious message in the sagas and the captives' individual experiences, which often contradicted Puritan doctrine. During the early colonial era, ministers' attempts to promote the Puritan covenant conflicted with the individual salvation testimonies of the female captives. In later narratives, white male editors attempted to impose white cultural values on the female stories, while the captives' experiences reflected acculturation and integration into Indian society. Female captivity narratives played contradictory roles; while they recorded each captive's unique experience, male editors often included their own cultural, moral and religious values in the written work.

Developments in historical scholarship on female captivity narratives demonstrate efforts by historians to consider the perspectives of colonial Americans as well as Native Americans. More emphasis on identifying the voices of the female captives in works edited by males reveals the strong influence of male editors conflicting with the determination of female captives to tell their own stories. Recent research also attempts to interpret the narratives from Native American

viewpoints. The general trend in the scholarship on female captivity narratives reflects an effort to separate the captives' voices from the influence of male editors and to consider how the captives' acculturation to Indian life affected their stories.

Nineteenth-century American writers John Greenleaf Whittier, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Sarah Josepha Hale reevaluated Hannah Dustan's captivity saga in prose and poetry. Whittier's piece, "The Mother's Revenge" is written for entertainment and to preserve the legend of Dustan's escape.<sup>1</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Duston Family" illustrates strong criticism of Dustan's violent escape and traces her desire for revenge to the murder of her infant.<sup>2</sup> Thoreau's piece comes from his work *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and describes Dustan's escape.<sup>3</sup> His account is not as blatantly critical as Hawthorne's is, but he also does not praise Dustan as a heroine. Sarah Hale's poem "The Father's Choice" addresses only Dustan's husband and his struggle to save his children; she ignores Hannah Dustan's captivity and escape completely.<sup>4</sup> These sources illustrate changes that developed in the treatment of female captivity narratives in media depictions during the century following the narratives' publication.

Edited collections of the captivity narratives generally include the editors' commentary on each individual narrative, and these commentaries do not attempt to examine the narratives from a new perspective. Carla Mulford's introduction to Mary White Rowlandson's narrative in *Early American Writings* places the saga in the context of King Philip's War and examines the

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<sup>1</sup> John Greenleaf Whittier, "The Mother's Revenge, from *Legends of New England*," in *American Voices, American Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 121.

<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Duston Family, from *American Magazine of Useful and Entertaining Knowledge*" in *American Voices, American Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 124.

<sup>3</sup> Henry David Thoreau, "A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers," in *American Voices, American Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 127.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Josepha Hale, "The Father's Choice, from *Woman's Record*," in *American Voices, American Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 129-130.

characteristics of the captivity narrative genre but does not provide new insight into the narrative.<sup>5</sup> Wayne Franklin's comments on Hannah Dustan's captivity tale and on Elizabeth Hanson's narrative give a detailed and chronological review of the captives' experience but do not provide a drastically innovative interpretation of the narrative or its place in historical scholarship.<sup>6</sup> In *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, editor Kathryn Derounian-Stodola offers historical background on each captive and some insight into potential discrepancies or inconsistencies in the narratives of each captive.<sup>7</sup>

*The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England*" by Teresa Toulouse examines how colonial male leaders used the Puritan female captivity narratives to facilitate transformations in cultural identity at the end of the seventeenth century.<sup>8</sup> Toulouse identifies areas that she feels other historians have neglected, particularly in relation to shifts in political and religious authority.<sup>9</sup> Toulouse's article "'My Own Credit': Strategies of (E) Valuation in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative" examines the representation of valuation shown through status, martyrdom and providence.<sup>10</sup> Toulouse's work reflects a strong focus on the role of gender in Rowlandson's narrative and she argues that Rowlandson pursues several avenues of gaining credit, or valuation, for her story and redemption from her readers because of her gender.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Carla Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," in *Early American Writings*, ed. Carla Mulford (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 306-307.

<sup>6</sup> Wayne Franklin, "The Bloody Escape of Hannah Dustan: A Cultural Reader," in *American Voices, American Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 109-112, 148-149.

<sup>7</sup> Kathryn Derounian-Stodola, ed., *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Teresa Toulouse, *The Captive's Position: Female Narrative, Male Identity, and Royal Authority in Colonial New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1-2.

<sup>9</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> Teresa Toulouse, "'My Own Credit': Strategies of (E)Valuation in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative," *American Literature* 64, no. 4 (December 1992): 667, JSTOR, pdf (accessed March 29, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Toulouse, "'My Own Credit,'" 656.

Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney's book *Captors and Captives: the 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield* examines the political and economic catalysts for the French and Indian War and the attack on Deerfield, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup> They question earlier examinations of the American colonial frontier<sup>13</sup> and examine the lives of the captives once they reached New France and cultural competition between the French and the Indians for control of the captives.<sup>14</sup> In "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," Tara Fitzpatrick examines the paradoxical role of captivity narratives in the context of Puritan theology.<sup>15</sup> She argues that while Puritan ministers attempted to impose a socially and theologically unified interpretation of the captive experience, the captives maintained unique understandings of their captive experience and their spiritual destinies.<sup>16</sup> Fitzpatrick also explores the changing perceptions of the American wilderness.<sup>17</sup> Susan Walsh evaluates the narrative of Mary Jemison's captivity narrative as recorded by James Seaver. She contends that previous scholarship on Jemison's narrative focuses only on the white perspective and questions the accuracy of the account written by Seaver.<sup>18</sup>

Relations between colonial communities and local Native American tribes evolved over time, and the outbreak of conflict between the two often contributed to an increased number of raids on colonial communities. Encroachment of the British onto Indian lands and insensitivity by the British towards surrounding Indian communities contributed to the outbreak of King

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<sup>12</sup> Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: the 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield*, a volume in the series *Native Americans of the Northeast: Culture History and the Contemporary*, ed. Colin G. Calloway and Barry O'Connell (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 146-148.

<sup>15</sup> Tara Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative," *American Literacy History* 3, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 1-26, JSTOR, pdf (accessed March 29, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 2.

<sup>17</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 3, 17.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Walsh, "'With them was my Home': Native American Autobiography and a Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison," *American Literature* 65, no. 1 (March 1992):49-70, JSTOR, pdf (accessed March 29, 2008), 51-52.

Philip's War.<sup>19</sup> Carla Mulford sees the collaborative efforts of the traditional enemies, Nipmucks, Narragansetts and Wampanoags, as a fight to preserve a Native American way of life, which British cultural practices and materials increasingly overwhelmed.<sup>20</sup> John Easton, a Welsh immigrant and governor of Rhode Island during King Philip's War,<sup>21</sup> recounted the murder of the Indian John Sassamon and maintains that three other Indians confessed to murdering Sassamon but accused Metacomet, the Native American chief, of ordering the murder.<sup>22</sup> The Indians feared English retaliation against Metacomet and therefore claimed the English coerced them into accusing Metacomet.<sup>23</sup> The complicated origins of this conflict demonstrate the complexity of Indian and British relations during this period. A single murder sparked King Philip's War, which resulted in high casualties for both sides, and these tenuous relations continued to evolve throughout the century.

The Indian attack on Deerfield, Massachusetts in 1704 demonstrates a culmination of the cultural conflict between local Indian tribes and the colonial communities. Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney assert that Deerfield held more significance than simply an isolated frontier settlement; rather, it represented the aggressive and expansionist colonial culture which threatened Indian society.<sup>24</sup> The Native Americans who attacked the community held distinct cultural, political and economic interests, and the authors distinguish the varying interests of the different Indian tribes involved in the attack.<sup>25</sup> While the Abenakis and Pennacooks viewed the raid as an act against English threats to their land, the Huron, Iroquois and Mohawks waged a

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<sup>19</sup> Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," 306.

<sup>20</sup> Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," 306.

<sup>21</sup> Wayne, "The Murder of John Sassamon," 59.

<sup>22</sup> Easton, "A Relation of the Indian War," 60-61.

<sup>23</sup> Easton, "A Relation of the Indian War," 61.

<sup>24</sup> Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: the 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield*, a volume in the series *Native Americans of the Northeast: Culture History and the Contemporary*, ed. Colin G. Calloway and Barry O'Connell (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 1.

<sup>25</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 2.

“parallel war.”<sup>26</sup> The authors cite historian Peter MacLeod, who defined a parallel war as “a war within an imperial war for personal goals rather than national interests.”<sup>27</sup> The lives of Native Americans in the Deerfield area changed dramatically with colonization; deadly diseases decimated the population of the Pocumtucks, who had inhabited the area for thousands of years.<sup>28</sup> Settlement and hunting depleted natural resources such as beaver and alliances between Europeans and natives caused conflict with neighboring tribes.<sup>29</sup> King Philip’s War affected the English settlement at Deerfield as well as the native inhabitants; over half of the village’s adult males died in battle.<sup>30</sup> While Deerfield remained a center of conflict and vulnerability, by 1682, families returned to reestablish the community.<sup>31</sup> Fighting broke out again in 1688 during the Second Anglo-Abenaki War,<sup>32</sup> but by 1703, peace returned to Deerfield. The outbreak of the War of the Spanish Succession again placed the community in a vulnerable position; the town minister, John Williams recorded his concerns and wrote, “Strangers tell us they would not live where we do for twenty times as much as we do....”<sup>33</sup> His statement reflects the extremely vulnerable position of the Deerfield community prior to the 1704 raid.

Governmental and religious structure in New England influenced the development of Puritan captivity narratives. Toulouse identifies four political events that not only influenced Massachusetts governmental structure but also the decisions of New England ministers to promote women’s captivity narratives.<sup>34</sup> Threats to the original Massachusetts charter began in

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<sup>26</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 2.

<sup>27</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 12-14.

<sup>29</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 12- 14.

<sup>30</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Haefeli and Sweeney, *Captors and Captives*, 28.

<sup>33</sup> John Williams, quoted in Evan Haefeli and Kevin Sweeney, *Captors and Captives: the 1704 French and Indian Raid on Deerfield*, a volume in the series *Native Americans of the Northeast: Culture History and the Contemporary*, ed. Colin G. Calloway and Barry O’Connell (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 33.

<sup>34</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive’s Position*, 2.



the 1660s and resulted in the eventual loss of the original charter in 1685.<sup>35</sup> A group of colonists used the example of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 to justify the overthrow of Edmond Andros, the first royal governor of the New England Dominion in 1689.<sup>36</sup> Toulouse also maintains that reactions to the Glorious Revolution influenced the new Massachusetts charter, negotiated by Increase Mather with King William.<sup>37</sup> King William's and Queen Anne's War, which Toulouse identifies as the third and fourth events, instigated boundary and trade wars in New England that involved continually changing Indian allies.<sup>38</sup> A dramatic increase in the number of captives taken in New England occurred as a result of these wars; Toulouse cites a study which estimates that up to seven hundred New Englanders experienced captivity between 1675 and 1713.<sup>39</sup> The close connection between government and religion in New England resulted in a religious context surrounding the political changes that Toulouse identifies. The association of religious affiliations with national identity characterized King William's War and Queen Anne's War, and while France identified with Catholicism, the English became identified as overwhelmingly Protestant.<sup>40</sup> Prominent Puritan ministers including Increase and Cotton Mather supported William after the Glorious Revolution.<sup>41</sup> Toulouse, however, argues that these religious elites supported a Whig policy of political rights and religious toleration to protect "certain traditional New England charter and church privileges which deny rights and toleration to those who dissent from them politically or religiously."<sup>42</sup> The publication of Puritan female

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<sup>35</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 2.

<sup>36</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>38</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>41</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>42</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

captivity narratives coincided with these religious and political threats; the publication of Mary White Rowlandson's narrative in 1682 occurred during a time of renewed charter threats.<sup>43</sup>

The majority of captivity experience during the colonial period came from women; the Native Americans considered women to be ideal captives,<sup>44</sup> and women's narratives served as a useful tool for promoting Puritan theology. Toulouse identifies three explanations for the use of female captivity narratives to promote Puritan theology and address threats to the community.<sup>45</sup> Women comprised the majority of New England captives and therefore held the largest base of experience with captivity. In addition, many captives, including Mary White Rowlandson, Hannah Dustan and the Williams family, had personal connections to either Increase or Cotton Mather. Toulouse also asserts that ministers promoted stories of women surviving captivity and returning to the Protestant community to counter tales of women converting to Catholicism or entering into French or Indian marriages in Canada.<sup>46</sup> While several female captives including Mary White Rowlandson and Elizabeth Hanson recorded, or allegedly recorded, their own experiences, many female captives, including Hannah Dustan and Mary Jemison dictated their stories to a male editor. Each captive experienced captivity uniquely, and their narratives create a complex picture of intercultural relations and tensions.

Mary White Rowlandson's narrative provides a clear example of the paradoxical roles of a captivity saga. Rowlandson wrote her own narrative but did not publish it until 1682, probably with encouragement and possibly assistance from Increase Mather.<sup>47</sup> Rowlandson wrote her narrative with a two-fold message; while she testifies that all must repent or face severe

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<sup>43</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, xvii.

<sup>45</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> Toulouse, *The Captive's Position*, 7.

<sup>47</sup> Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," 306.

afflictions, she simultaneously affirms the redemptive opportunity in her affliction, her captivity.<sup>48</sup> The covenant at the center of Puritan theology plays an essential role in understanding the contradictions in Rowlandson's narrative. According to Puritan doctrine, the covenant depended upon the entire community's adherence to sacred principles; if a single community member disobeyed or lost faith, the entire community suffered.<sup>49</sup> To Puritan ministers, including Cotton Mather, Indian raids reflected punishment for the disobedience of community members. Colonists also interpreted the Indian attacks as punishment for corruption and sin in their communities.<sup>50</sup> Through sermons, or jeremiads, Puritan preachers expressed their concern to their communities, and captivity narratives mirrored the structure of jeremiads.<sup>51</sup> Fitzpatrick argues that Cotton and Increase Mather, who transcribed many captivity narratives, attempted to impose a uniform theological message in the narratives as a means of bringing the community back to the covenant.<sup>52</sup> The publication of Rowlandson's narrative coincided with a decline in membership in the Congregational Church,<sup>53</sup> and this evidence supports that Increase Mather may have viewed her narrative as a means of promoting traditional Puritan theology and a method of bringing the community back to the church.

Religious themes appear constantly in Rowlandson's work. Fitzpatrick also, however, identifies a distinct conflict between the ministers' attempts at orthodoxy and the captives' insistence on relating their individual experience and salvation.<sup>54</sup> In describing the Indian raid on her home, Rowlandson writes, "The Lord hereby would make us the more to acknowledge His

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<sup>48</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 1.

<sup>49</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 3-4.

<sup>50</sup> Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," 306.

<sup>51</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 4.

<sup>52</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 6.

<sup>53</sup> Mulford, "Mary White Rowlandson," 306.

<sup>54</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 6.

hand and to see that our help is always in Him.”<sup>55</sup> This statement clearly reflects Rowlandson’s faith and her belief that the Lord would guide her through her affliction. The death of her sister profoundly affected Rowlandson; she writes of her hope that, “she is reaping the fruit of her good labors, being faithful to the service of God in her place.”<sup>56</sup> Her account demonstrates a strong connection to Puritan doctrine; Rowlandson believes that her sister will be rewarded in heaven for her service to the Lord, as the covenant promises. The theme of God supporting Rowlandson and fulfilling the promises in the covenant figures prominently in Rowlandson’s narrative.

Rowlandson’s description of the Indians’ feast the night of the raid illustrates a belief in the immorality and sin outside of the Puritan community. She describes it as “the dolefullest night” and compares the Indians’ celebration to a “lively resemblance of hell.”<sup>57</sup> The belief that the Lord would provide and guide Rowlandson through her trials shapes her narrative; she testifies that, “I thought we should there have ended our days, as overcome with so many difficulties. But the Lord renewed my strength still and carried me along...”<sup>58</sup> Rowlandson emphasizes how her spiritual disobedience led to her affliction when she writes, “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 the thread of my life and cast me out of His presence forever.”<sup>59</sup> This statement demonstrates Rowlandson’s belief that her failure to respect the Sabbath directly influenced her captivity and suffering and reflects a strong connection to the doctrine of the Puritan covenant. Clearly, Puritan theology played a major role

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<sup>55</sup> Rowlandson, “Narrative of the Captivity,” 307.

<sup>56</sup> Rowlandson, “Narrative of the Captivity,” 308.

<sup>57</sup> Rowlandson, “Narrative of the Captivity,” 308.

<sup>58</sup> Rowlandson, “The Narrative of the Captivity,” 308.

<sup>59</sup> Rowlandson, “The Narrative of Captivity,” 309.

in Rowlandson's experience, however, her narrative also demonstrates contradictions between her unique experience and salvation and the orthodoxy of Puritan doctrine.

While Rowlandson's Puritan faith clearly shaped her experience, her unique individual experience contradicts the community based Puritan covenant. Captivity narratives emphasized the redemption of the individual captive, not the entire Puritan community.<sup>60</sup> Rowlandson testifies to the Lord's strength in carrying her through her ordeal "so much that I could never have thought of it had I not experienced it."<sup>61</sup> Her statement emphasizes that her personal experience is unique; by enduring captivity, Rowlandson achieved an understanding of the Lord's power that she could not have achieved otherwise. Her knowledge of the Lord sets her apart from the rest of the community; through her affliction, Rowlandson achieved redemption for herself but not for her community. In the final sentences of her narrative, Rowlandson states, "But now I see the Lord had His time to scourge and chasten me" and claims unique understanding of the Lord's mercy as she has "learned to look beyond present and smaller troubles and be quieted by them."<sup>62</sup> When Rowlandson's hope of rescue by the English and her husband failed during her captivity, she asks her captors to allow her privacy so she "might get alone and pour out my heart unto the Lord."<sup>63</sup> This incident demonstrates a very personal relationship between Rowlandson and God; Rowlandson alone communicates with God without the mediation of a minister. Her direct communication and personal relationship with God challenges the community based Puritan doctrine, and it demonstrates that the isolation of wilderness captivity allowed for an unmediated connection with God.

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<sup>60</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 6.

<sup>61</sup> Rowlandson, "The Narrative of the Captivity," 309.

<sup>62</sup> Rowlandson, "The Narrative of the Captivity," 328.

<sup>63</sup> Rowlandson, "The Narrative of the Captivity," 317.

The perception of the American wilderness by New Englanders changed as a result of the captivity narratives. Prior to the publication of captivity narratives, many Americans viewed the wilderness as a frightening wasteland.<sup>64</sup> Female captivity narratives, however, depicted survival in the wilderness and the wilderness came to be viewed as a place of opportunity for success.<sup>65</sup> The transformation of colonial perceptions of the wilderness also included a strong religious element. The wilderness came to reflect an opportunity for religious enlightenment;<sup>66</sup> while Rowlandson's isolation from her community tested her faith, it simultaneously provided her with a unique chance to rely fully on God and to develop a strong personal connection to her faith. In the Thirteenth Remove of her narrative, Rowlandson writes, "Thus the Lord carried me along from one time to another and made good me this precious promise and many others."<sup>67</sup> The Lord fulfilled promises specifically to Rowlandson, not to the entire Puritan community, and only in the wilderness did Rowlandson experience this direct connection with God.

The narrative of Hannah Dustan reflects discrepancies between Puritan theology and her captivity experience. Indians attacked Haverhill, Massachusetts in 1697 during King William's War and captured Dustan and her midwife Mary Neff.<sup>68</sup> While Dustan's captivity experience and escape lacked any basis of religious inspiration, Cotton Mather incorporated religious themes in his text on her experience to justify Dustan's murder of her captors.<sup>69</sup> Dustan's escape from her captors lacked any divine inspiration; after her Indian captors told her that she would be forced to run the gauntlet, Dustan made her desperate decision.<sup>70</sup> Dustan enlisted captive Samuel Lennardson to help her murder ten Abenaki and wound another, and she scalped her victims to

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<sup>64</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 3.

<sup>65</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 3.

<sup>66</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 17.

<sup>67</sup> Rowlandson, "The Narrative of the Captivity," 318.

<sup>68</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 55.

<sup>69</sup> Fitzpatrick, "The Figure of Captivity," 14-15.

<sup>70</sup> Franklin, "The Bloody Escape," 111.

provide evidence of her exploit to her community.<sup>71</sup> In Cotton Mather's record of Dustan's experience, "A Notable Exploit: *Dux Faemina Facti*," Mather includes religious themes and justification for Dustan's actions. In describing the plight of Dustan and another female captive, Mather writes, "the good God, who hath all 'hearts in his own hands,' heard the sighs of these prisoners, and gave them to find unexpected favor from the master who hath laid claim unto them."<sup>72</sup> Mather inserts the influence of God into this situation; however, it is unlikely that it reflects Dustan's belief in deliverance by God. Mather depicted Dustan as the model of a captive female; her physical, intellectual and spiritual superiority to the Indians allow her to escape.<sup>73</sup> However, later writers challenged this depiction of Dustan.

Interpretations of Dustan's experience in the nineteenth century reflect a stronger influence on Dustan's maternal role than in Mather's original text.<sup>74</sup> In John Greenleaf Whittier's interpretation of Dustan's story, he examines how despite the inherently "milder and purer" attributes of women, the perils of early New England settlements brought manifestations of female strength and courage.<sup>75</sup> Whittier extols Dustan as a symbol of this heroism and describes Dustan's strong maternal attributes prior to the attack on her home.<sup>76</sup> However, he sees a transformation in Dustan when the Indians murdered Dustan's infant daughter. The murder of Dustan's daughter, to Whittier, marks the beginning of Dustan's desire for revenge on her captors, which he describes as, "an insatiate longing for blood."<sup>77</sup> Whittier's statement that, "an instantaneous change had been wrought in her very nature; the angel had become a demon"<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Franklin, "The Bloody Escape," 111.

<sup>72</sup> Mather, "A Notable Exploit," 117.

<sup>73</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Franklin, "The Bloody Escape," 114.

<sup>75</sup> Whittier, "The Mother's Revenge," 120.

<sup>76</sup> Whittier, "The Mother's Revenge," 120.

<sup>77</sup> Whittier, "The Mother's Revenge," 121.

<sup>78</sup> Whittier, "The Mother's Revenge," 121.

demonstrates Whittier's belief that Dustan's desire for revenge overcame her maternal nature only after daughter's murder. Nathaniel Hawthorne, however, demonstrates much less sympathy toward Dustan.

Hawthorne's piece, "The Duston Family" severely criticizes Dustan's murderous escape from captivity. While Hawthorne praises Dustan's husband for saving the remaining seven of his children from the Indian raid, Hawthorne criticizes Dustan for murdering her captors and traces her desire for revenge to the murder of her infant.<sup>79</sup> Hawthorne writes, "But, O, the children! Their skins are red; yet spare them, Hannah Duston," but "there was little safety for a redskin, when Hannah Duston's blood was up."<sup>80</sup> He emphasizes Dustan's vengeance and contrasts it with her husband's compassion and bravery in saving his children. Hawthorne's scathing criticism of Dustan illustrates his disapproval of her violent escape, which Mather portrayed as heroic. Cultural and religious conflict plays a role in Hawthorne's work; Hawthorne condemns Mather as "an old hard-hearted, pedantic bigot" who "seems trebly to exult in the destruction of these poor wretches, on account of their popish superstitions."<sup>81</sup> Hawthorne praises the Indians for practicing domestic worship among the "dark, mysterious woods,"<sup>82</sup> and his admiration for the Indians' religious practice reflects an attempt to acknowledge the legitimacy of a religious tradition other than Puritanism. According to Hawthorne, even though the Indians practice Catholicism, their religious beliefs and practices demand admiration.

The captivity account of Elizabeth Hanson demonstrates a surprising combination of stoicism and ethnography in her observations of her captors and reflects cultural conflict and religious influence. Indians attacked Hanson's Quaker community in New Hampshire in August

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<sup>79</sup> Hawthorne, "The Duston Family," 124.

<sup>80</sup> Hawthorne, "The Duston Family," 126.

<sup>81</sup> Hawthorne, "The Duston Family," 125.

<sup>82</sup> Hawthorne, "The Duston Family," 125.



1724 and captured Hanson, four of her children and a servant.<sup>83</sup> The attackers also killed two of Hanson's younger children.<sup>84</sup> Hanson describes her capture and the murders of her children in surprisingly calm detail; she writes, "I bore this as well I could, not daring to appear disturbed or show much uneasiness lest they should do the same to the other, but [I] should have been exceedingly glad they had kept out of sight till we had been gone from the house."<sup>85</sup> Derounian-Stodola argues that Hanson's apparent detachment from her experience may indicate a variety of factors, including acculturation, attempts to understand her captors, an attempt at ethnography, or an inability to deal with her trauma.<sup>86</sup> She also asserts that the stoic and detached tone of Hanson's narrative may reflect an outside influence, as Hanson probably dictated her story but did not actually write it herself given her lack of education.<sup>87</sup>

Hanson's efforts at ethnography occur throughout her narrative; in describing the murder and scalping of her children, she explains that scalping was, "a practice common with these people, which is whenever they kill any English people they cut the skin off from the crown of their heads and carry it with them for a testimony and evidence that they have killed so many."<sup>88</sup> Hanson's narrative also demonstrates the influence of religious themes; Derounian-Stodola asserts that Hanson's saga served as a perfect model for the Quakers' promotion of women's affliction as private submission to God's will.<sup>89</sup> Hanson describes the difficulty of her journey and notes that, "the Indian, my master, would mostly carry my babe for me, which I took as a

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<sup>83</sup> Elizabeth Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," in *American Voices, American*

*Lives*, ed. Wayne Franklin (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997), 149.

<sup>84</sup> Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," 150.

<sup>85</sup> Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," 150.

<sup>86</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 64.

<sup>87</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 63.

<sup>88</sup> Hanson, "God's Mercy Surmounting Man's Cruelty," 150.

<sup>89</sup> Derounian-Stodola, *Women's Indian Captivity Narratives*, 64.

great favor of God that his heart was so tenderly inclined to assist me....”<sup>90</sup> This statement by Hanson clearly reflects her religious faith as well as an attempt to understand her captors and represents the cultural and religious overtones in her account. Hanson evaluates the temper of her master and determines that, “when he had success in hinting to take either bears, beavers, bucks, or fowls on which he could fill his belly, he was better humored though he was naturally of a very hot temper....”<sup>91</sup> Hanson’s narrative illustrates her effort to balance her suffering during captivity with an attempt at understanding her captors and explaining their customs and beliefs.

Mary Jemison’s experience illustrates that even at the end of the colonial period conflict existed in the female captivity narrative. The Seneca attacked Jemison’s Pennsylvania home in 1758,<sup>92</sup> and while Puritan theology no longer heavily influenced her story, Jemison’s experience reflects cultural conflict in her account of her captivity, as told to James Seaver. Identifying Jemison’s true voice in the narrative presents a challenge; as Walsh argues, Jemison had told her story numerous times before dictating it to Seaver and she knew how audiences reacted to certain elements.<sup>93</sup> Seaver’s introduction to Jemison’s narrative illustrates racist ideas towards Native Americans. In describing Jemison, he writes, “although her bosom companion was an Indian warrior, and notwithstanding her children and associates were all Indians, yet it was found that she possessed an uncommon share of hospitality, and that her friendship was well worth courting and preserving.”<sup>94</sup> Seaver’s statement demonstrates his disdain for Indians and his belief that Jemison’s hospitality stemmed from her white ethnicity. Jemison’s narratives, however, clearly

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<sup>90</sup> Hanson, “God’s Mercy Surmounting Man’s Cruelty,” 151.

<sup>91</sup> Hanson, “God’s Mercy Surmounting Man’s Cruelty,” 155.

<sup>92</sup> Walsh, ““With them was my Home,”” 49.

<sup>93</sup> Walsh, ““With them was my Home,”” 51-52.

<sup>94</sup> James E. Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison* (1824; repr., New York: The American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, 1977), viii.

illustrates her integration into Seneca culture and her adoption of the values of her new community and her detachment from the white community.

Walsh maintains that Jemison's young age at the time of her capture influenced her ability to integrate into Seneca society and adopt its cultural values and standards,<sup>95</sup> and Jemison's account demonstrates the influence of Seneca culture in her perspective. Seaver notes that, "from her long residence with the Indians, she has acquired the habit of peeping from under eye-brows as they do with the head inclined downward."<sup>96</sup> He also shares his concern that while Jemison seemed to enjoy extolling the virtues of her Indian community, "a kind of family pride inclined her to withhold whatever would blot the character of her descendants, and perhaps induced her to keep back many things that would have been interesting."<sup>97</sup> Seaver's concern indicates that Jemison may have edited her portrayal of her family members, and Walsh argues that Jemison's understanding of white etiquette led her careful telling of her story.<sup>98</sup> According to Walsh, Seaver intended his statement about Jemison's "family pride" to "circumvent serious challenges to a dominant white mythology predicated upon female purity, native savagery, and the manifest destiny of the sons of Boone."<sup>99</sup> Seaver depicts Jemison's abduction and journey with her captors in the same mold as earlier captivity narratives; as Jemison's story progresses, however, her individual voice emerges as a tribute to her adopted Seneca family.<sup>100</sup> Jemison's narrative reflects the cultural conflict between the white and Indian communities and Jemison knowledge of both communities' cultural standards affected the manner in which she discussed her Indian family and community.

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<sup>95</sup> Walsh, "'With them was my Home,'" 56.

<sup>96</sup> Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life*, x-xi.

<sup>97</sup> Seaver, *A Narrative of the Life*, xiii.

<sup>98</sup> Walsh, "'With them was my Home,'" 53.

<sup>99</sup> Walsh, "'With them was my Home,'" 54.

<sup>100</sup> Walsh, "'With them was my Home,'" 54.

Female captivity narratives serve a broader role than simply recounting the experiences of colonial women captured by Native Americans. Instead, the narratives offer insight into the religious and political contexts of colonial America, particularly New England, and reflect changes in religious thought and perceptions of the American wilderness. The captivity narratives also reflect conflicting white and Indian cultural values. While male editors often attempted to impose their own religious or cultural beliefs in the narratives, they failed to overshadow the female captives' unique experiences and knowledge, and the narratives therefore convey paradoxical messages.