

**Zeitschrift:** SPELL : Swiss papers in English language and literature  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Association of University Teachers of English  
**Band:** 23 (2009)  
  
**Artikel:** The competing voices of "Narrator", "Author", and "Publisher" in women's captivity narratives  
**Autor:** Messara, Dahia  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-131127>

### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 09.08.2025

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

# The Competing Voices of “Narrator,” “Author,” and “Publisher” in Women’s Captivity Narratives

Dahia Messara

Many critics have questioned Mary Rowlandson’s authorship and postulated the existence of a strong male voice behind that of the ex-captive. This essay compares Rowlandson’s *A True History* to other Puritan women’s captivity texts written by influential men of the time such as “A Narrative of Hannah Dustan’s Notable Deliverance from Captivity” by Cotton Mather, and “A Narrative of Hannah Swarton Containing Wonderful Passages Relating to Her Captivity and Deliverance,” also by Cotton Mather. Is a Puritan female ideal represented by Rowlandson’s passive attitude of a vulnerable woman who relied on domestic tasks to survive her captivity and to make her captors happy, or is it represented by the rebellious Dustan who killed and scalped her captors to escape from their hands? Likewise, did the Puritan captive women speak their minds or did they remain passive when men appropriated their experiences to enhance the values of a patriarchal society?

When dealing with captivity narratives by women in general and Puritan women in particular, beside the actual physical and moral experience of the female captive of the wilderness among the Indians, we are also confronted with issues of gender, power, reputation, social status, and authorship. By telling, writing or publishing their narratives, these women were subject to the expectations directed at them by representatives of the elite who helped describe the experience of their ordeal as hostages of the Indians. The publication of their narratives thus created a dependency which, as it were, “imprisoned” them a second time, although the relationship between the former captives and their male co-writers or

or publishers was obviously much closer than the one the women had had with their abductors. In a sense, the women became instruments in the hands of the ministerial and political authorities of the time. Publication required either a male author writing the narratives on behalf of the former female captive, or a male publisher to help edit and lend authority to a text allegedly written by the former female captive.

Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative (1682), an account allegedly stemming from the pen of the captive herself who appears as the narrator in the text, received significant support from the illustrious Puritan minister Increase Mather, who prefaced the narrative, therein introducing Mary Rowlandson as a "worthy and precious gentlewoman, the dear consort of the said Reverend Mr. Rowlandson" ("Preface"134). The first release of the narrative in 1682 carried her late husband's last sermon as an appendix. By mentioning the husband and thereby indirectly raising Mrs. Rowlandson's social status, the author of the preface likewise lends additional male and ministerial "legitimacy" to a narrative written by a woman. Two other narratives illustrate other kinds of male co-involvement in the authorship of captivity narratives: "A Narrative of Hannah Swarton Containing Wonderful Passages relating to Her Captivity and Deliverance" and "A Narrative of Hannah Dustan's Notable Deliverance from Captivity." Both were first published by Cotton Mather, the son of Increase Mather, in his book *Humiliation Followed with Deliverances* (Boston, 1697), and then in *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702).<sup>1</sup>

In Dustan's narrative, Cotton Mather does all the storytelling himself and the former captive does not even feature as narrator in the text. Mather presents himself as the author of the text while reassuring the reader of his commitment to authenticity with these words: "I must now publish what these poor women assure me," referring to Dustan and her nurse (163). In writing captivity narratives on behalf of former captives, it was common for the Mathers to insist on the authenticity of their accounts.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the authorship issue is more complicated in Swarton's narrative as no copy of her original account has survived. Al-

---

<sup>1</sup> In this paper I will use the text based on Mather's last version of Dustan's narrative published in his work *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), as selected in Vaughan's *Puritans among the Indians*.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in the introduction to Quintin Stockwell's narrative, Increase Mather assures the reader: "*A worthy person* hath sent me the account which one lately belonging to Deerfield (his name is Quintin Stockwell), has drawn up respecting his own captivity and redemption, with the more notable occurrences of Divine Providence attending him in his distress, which I shall, therefore, *here insert in the words by himself expressed*" (Increase Mather, *Remarkable Providences* 27-28, emphasis mine).

though the former captive is mentioned as the narrator, the only narrative at our disposal is that related by Cotton Mather.<sup>3</sup>

As the above listing shows, the Mathers (father and son, both members of the political elite of the time) were, in one way or another, actively involved in the editorial process of all three narratives. The fact that the Mathers published the narratives or allowed their publication tells us that a female work at the time required support in the form of legitimization; in other words, it needed approval by the powerful male establishment. Thus the questions we may ask are: What is the counterpart of this approval in the text? Apart from allowing the publication of the works and furthering their dissemination, how did the Mathers contribute to the writing process? To what extent do the Mathers actually "speak" for themselves in these works under the guise of their role as well-meaning editor, publisher, prefacer, etc? Is the female narrative "voice" able to stand up to the competition coming from the voice of male authority or is it subdued by the publisher, in the cases at hand, the Mathers?

In this paper, "voice" does not refer to multiple voices in the Bakhtinian sense of polyphony,<sup>4</sup> but it should be understood in the sense intended by Susan Lanser as a "trope of identity and power" (4). Lanser distinguishes between two conceptual definitions of voice: the feminist and the narratological, "the one general, mimetic, and political, the other specific, semiotic, and technical. When feminists talk about voice, we are usually referring to the behavior of actual or fictional persons and groups who assert woman-centered points of view" (4). In this paper, I examine the predominant narrative "voice" and see how it stands for feminine values such as motherhood, femininity, domesticity and reputation. I will ask to what extent, if at all, the women were able to boost their own authoritativeness by publishing or having published "their" narratives. I also consider whether the male authorities, who played a role in authorizing and/or endorsing publication of the narratives, were able to control the contents of the published text. One can assume that

---

<sup>3</sup> In this paper I will use Mather's second version of the narrative (*Magnalia* 1702).

<sup>4</sup> The concept of "polyphony" was first introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Bakhtin sees in Dostoevsky's "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses. [. . .] A character's word about himself and his word is just as fully weighted as the author's word usually is; it is not subordinated to the character's objectified image as merely one of his characteristics, nor does it serve as a mouthpiece for the author's voice." Bakhtin sees Dostoevsky's text as dialogical in that each character has his own voice. I do not use the term voice in the polyphonic sense since I do not intend to separately analyze the voice of each character or participant in the texts or the dialogues between the different protagonists, but rather to focus on the predominant narrative voice.

he who controls the weighting of the narrative voice also reinforces his own position of moral or ideological authority. Still, the resulting voices (narrative and editorial) sometimes clash with one another within a single narrative, creating the occasional airing of even controversial views. The discourse is at times so inconsistent that it is interesting to find out who is really controlling the narrative voice, on whose behalf, and for what purpose. Thus this paper offers a debate over the authority assumed to prevail over the narrative voice in the texts.

Critics tend to attribute women captivity narratives to the male intellectual establishment of the time. There are conflicting views among critics regarding the degree of alleged male influence in Rowlandson's text. Teresa Toulouse and Anne Kusener Nelsen, for instance, place Rowlandson in two rival clans. Toulouse interprets Rowlandson's text as a pro-Matherian approach to the political situation of the time:

Given her connection to the Mather group, the support for her text should be read as part of a strategy that involved not simply a well-worn interpretation of the Indian War, now six years past, but a reading of that war in relation to current unstable contexts as well. (931-932)

Kusener conversely argues that Rowlandson was a helpful informant of William Hubbard:

Hubbard had been the first to give the Rowlandsons authoritative news that their son Joseph had been redeemed, and he also appears to have been on friendly terms with Thomas Shepard of Charlestown, with whom the Rowlandsons stayed for some time after Mrs. Rowlandson's redemption. Hubbard appears to have obtained more information from Mrs. Rowlandson than did any of the other narrators. (627)

Knowing that Hubbard was Increase Mather's fervent political opponent, it is paradoxical to see critics associate the same text with different male authorities of the time. Thus both Toulouse and Kusener see Rowlandson's text as an instrument in the hands of two separate influential Puritan Ministers of the time who are pulling the strings. I do not intend to side with one position or the other (Toulouse's over Kusener's or vice-versa) in positioning Rowlandson's political partisanship, but I shall focus on Mather's rhetorical influence as the prefacer and a strong supporter of the publication of the narrative and assess the relative weight of the politically dominant establishment versus the female voice in the narrative at hand.

Rowlandson's narrative clearly presents the Indians as agents of God. She presents her experience in captivity as God's plan for her sal-

vation, wondering, for example: "And here I cannot but take notice of the strange providence of God in preserving the heathens" (44). She adds later on that "the Lord preserves them for His Holy ends" (69). Here Rowlandson essentially echoes Increase Mather's following passage from his preface to the narrative: "That God is indeed the supreme Lord of the world, ruling the most unruly, weakening the most cruel and savage, granting His people mercy in the sight of the unmerciful, curbing the lusts of the most filthy, holding the hands of the violent, delivering the prey from the mighty, and gathering together the outcasts of Israel" (Mather, "Preface" 136). Mather strongly believes that mankind is an instrument under God's watchful eye and that God tests out His people's faith by inflicting ordeals on them. Rowlandson likewise presents sets of providential issues which she experienced during her captivity and reaches conclusions in keeping with Mather's point of view of the effect that "the savages" and their actions play a role in God's plan for His people. Just like Mather who claims that the Lord grants "His people mercy in the sight of the unmerciful" (Mather, "Preface" 136), so Rowlandson sees her captivity as a necessary and inevitable path to salvation to which she refers as God's "Holy end." She assumes that the "Holy end" will eventually manifest itself in her release from captivity, an outcome she strongly believes in, as the following quote suggests: "Even as the psalmist says, to declare the works of the Lord, and His wonderful power in carrying us along, preserving us in the wilderness, while under the enemy's hand, and returning of us in safety again" (46). Rowlandson's choice of this scriptural quotation informs the reader about her attitude towards her Indian oppressors.

Rowlandson's full confidence in the ultimate "happy ending" allows her to patiently await God's intervention and rescue, an attitude in stark contrast to Hannah Dustan's rebellious and bloody escape from captivity. Her chosen course of action consists in bearing the ordeals of her captivity until God's intervention to relieve her, in recognition that she has suffered enough in repentance for whatever sins she has committed. Rowlandson would wait patiently for her release and redemption and she would not make any attempt to escape whatsoever. Thus she relates in her narrative that one Indian offered to accompany her home if she decided to run away, but she refused: "I was not willing to run away, but desired to wait God's time, that I might go home quietly, and without fear" (70). This submissive attitude towards God, (by which she unconditionally adheres to her prefacer/supporter's point of view) is suggestive of the traditional Puritan female subordination to men, an attitude also manifested in the belief that the appropriate time for her release would materialize in the political ransom/release negotiations between the Puritan authorities and the Indians. The same conditions the narra-

tor Swarton relates in her narrative where she clearly states: "The means of my deliverance were by reason of letters that had passed between the governments of New England and of Canada" (157). Whereas the patriarchal authorities were actively involved in both Rowlandson's and Swarton's releases from captivity, they did not play any part at all in Dustan's liberation from the wilderness. Dustan chose not to rely on a possible well-meaning intervention by the male political authorities, thereby in effect reducing their role to that of passive onlookers only taking stock of the accomplished fact of her self-obtained liberation from captivity.

But if we now conclude that both Rowlandson's and Swarton's submissive attitude in passively awaiting God's intervention and, additionally, a possible positive outcome of talks between their captors and fellow male congressionalist negotiators, was deemed particularly virtuous and consequently recommended to all self-respecting Puritan women, then what are we to make of Hannah Dustan's violent escape from captivity?

Cotton Mather relates Dustan's active participation (including the violence) in her own escape as follows:

[A] little before break of day when the whole crew was in a dead sleep (Reader, see if it prove not so) one of these women took up a resolution to imitate the action of Jael upon Sisera [. . .]. She heartened the nurse and the youth to assist her in this enterprise, and they all furnishing themselves with hatchets for the purpose, they struck such home-blows upon the heads of their sleeping oppressors that ere they could any of them struggle into any effectual resistance at the feet of those poor prisoners, "They bowed, they fell, they lay down; at their feet they bowed, they fell where they bowed; there they fell down dead" [Judges 5:27]. (Mather, "Dustan" 164)

Mather's text offers a convincing contextualization to Dustan's infamous escape. He softens his presentation of what may have been seen as an outrageous violation of the female propriety of the time (as described in Rowlandson's text), by typologically comparing Dustan's action to that of Jael and Sisera in the Old Testament, and putting to the fore Dustan's motherly motivation. He excuses Dustan's rebellious attitude and her resorting to violence by stressing her preceding traumatic experience as a mother whose child was savagely assassinated by the Indians: "They [the Indians] dashed out the brain of the infant against the tree" (Mather, "Dustan" 163). Mather adds further: "[Dustan] thought she was not forbidden by any law to take away the life of the murderers by whom her child had been butchered" (Mather, "Dustan" 164). Consequently, Dustan's daring and somehow dubious behavior –

dubious, that is, in view of the moral behavior expected of seventeenth-century Puritan women – is accepted and justified by invoking, as it were, some attenuating circumstances. After all, can Dustan really be blamed for wielding an axe on her brutal and savage oppressors, considering that they were the ones (or belonging to the group of those) who had “butchered” her innocent and defenseless infant? Thus, although Dustan is absent as a narrator in the text relating her own experience, the reader tends to side with her “voice” as a mother who was left with no option other than that of challenging the good and virtuous female standards of her time. Paradoxically, Dustan’s “maternal” voice comes across louder than both Rowlandson’s and Swarton’s since the narrative voice in the text foregrounds her own motivations to justify and legitimate her challenging behavior – a behavior which would have been considered as infamous and reprehensible in other circumstances. While contrary to the other two, Dustan does not feature as a narrator, the male author (Mather) who retells her ordeal clearly sides with her and represents her position. Conversely, the specific female viewpoint is largely absent from Swarton’s first person narration although she speaks in her own voice, with the same Mather, who is supposedly only playing the role of editor. Thus the relative prominence given to any identifiably female point of view in the narratives under consideration does not necessarily hinge on the gender of the narrator.

Although she abstained from violence, Rowlandson is no less outspoken when it comes to dealing with the grief she felt about the loss of her infant and the dispersal of her family. The form of the revenge she took could be seen as her exhibiting pointed indifference, or even open satisfaction after her mistress lost her baby:

My mistress’s papoose was sick, and it died that night, and *there was one benefit in it* that there was more room. [ . . . ] I confess I could not much condole with them. Many sorrowful days I had in this place, often getting alone “like a crane, or a swallow, so did I chatter; I did mourn as a dove, mine eyes fail with looking upward. Oh, Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me” [Isa.38:14]. (55-56, emphasis mine)

Rowlandson shows a resentful attitude, which she expresses sarcastically in reducing the loss of her mistress’s infant to a material interest of making more room for her. Although Rowlandson does not explicitly admit it, she seems to believe in some kind of providential revenge making her mistress in turn suffer the same ordeal of a child’s loss she herself suffered. Once again, even though Rowlandson openly describes her grief as a mother and the satisfaction she felt when the “savages” who caused her suffering were eventually made to face similar ordeals, her revenge-

ful maternal narrative voice still remains within the scope of providential logic, an approach well appreciated by the prefacer who chose to foreground it in the interest of his own editorial purposes.

Although Hannah Swarton's family was destroyed and dispersed as well,<sup>5</sup> the motherly aspect is completely absent from her captivity narrative. Swarton's reaction to her son's death was totally different from Dustan's and Rowlandson's. Whereas Rowlandson described her grief and sorrow, and Dustan justified the violent attack against her captors, Swarton, for her part, remained strong, unshakable, and demonstrated that, if anything, her faith even increased in response to the tragedy. Her grief as a wife and mother turned into a holy hope for her loved ones' salvation: "I hoped, though the enemy had barbarously killed his body, yet that the Lord had pardoned his sins and that his soul was safe" (Mather, "Swarton" 151). Swarton's narrative voice completely neglects her motherly mourning and stresses instead the Puritan religious values of eternal salvation and the dangers posed by exposure to the Catholic religion. The narrative voice has been largely subordinated to the author's (Mather's) own agenda of warning his readers against the perceived papist threat.<sup>6</sup>

By controlling and manipulating Swarton's narrative voice in order to foreground the propagandistic anti-Catholic arguments, Cotton Mather, who was a fervent advocate of the Christianization of the Indians,<sup>7</sup> deplores his fellow Puritan Congregationalists' inaction or neglect in spreading the "Puritan" gospel. In confrontation with her papist captors, Swarton says about her mistress: "[My Indian mistress] would say that had the English been as careful to instruct her in our religion as the French were to instruct her in theirs, she might have been of our religion" (150).<sup>8</sup> Swarton's narrative voice does not only focus on issues of interest to the political and religious elite of the time at the expense of the moral and psychological aspects of her captivity, but also shows

---

<sup>5</sup> Swarton's husband and one of her children were killed by the Indians; two other children could never be redeemed.

<sup>6</sup> The potential spreading of French Catholicism was particularly topical at the time of King William's war, and the ministerial elite were very vocal about it.

<sup>7</sup> Cotton Mather pays tribute to John Eliot and his missions among Indians in his *Magnalia* (see vol 1 556).

<sup>8</sup> In *Bonifacius*, Mather deplores that some Indians were converted, as it were, to the "wrong" denomination (i.e. Catholicism) of the Christian faith. He suggests that "saving" these Indians is a lost cause now that the French have succeeded in indoctrinating them: "At present, we can do nothing for those bloody savages in the Eastern parts, who have been taught by the French priest, that the Virgin Mary was a French lady, and that our great saviour was a Frenchman, and that the English murdered Him, and that He rose from the dead, and is taken up to the heavens, but that all that would recommend themselves to His favor, must revenge His quarrel on the English people" (156).

great expertise in Biblical commentary. Her description of the workings of her faith in actively resisting Catholicism is so elaborate and well supported by scriptural quotations that one must assume a significant degree of ministerial tampering with the ex-captive's narration, as can be seen in the following passage concerning the respective pros and cons of Catholicism and Protestantism in a debate involving some French people and praying Indians. The argument is over whether Man's relation to God is mediated by angels (Catholic position) or by Christ alone (Protestant position):

For their praying to angels they brought the history of the angel that was sent to the Virgin Mary in the first of Luke. I answered them from Rev. 19:10 and 22:9. They brought Exod. 17:11 of Israel's prevailing while Moses held up his hands. I told them we must come to God only by Christ, John 6:37, 44. For purgatory they brought Matthew 5:25. I told them to agree with God while here on earth was to agree with our adversary in the way, and if we did not, we should be cast into hell and should not come until we paid the utmost farthing, which could never be paid. But it's bootless for me, a poor woman, to acquaint the world with what arguments I used if I could now remember them, and many of them are slipped out of my memory. (Mather, "Swarton" 154)

The debate is worthy of a minister in that it consists in defending one's arguments by putting to the fore scriptural references as evidence to show which of the two religious paths is more adequate. Although we may assume that Swarton perfectly mastered the Scripture, we would expect her, in her role as an implied narrator who underwent the ordeal of captivity, to connect her scriptural argument to her personal experience as a captive relying on Providence to secure her release from her Indian abductors. Instead she uses the Bible as a weapon against another target (French Catholics). The logical purpose, which is expected to express itself through the narrative voice, is blurred by a superimposed message stemming from the author/publisher Cotton Mather.

Although Increase Mather's voice and message can be easily spotted in Rowlandson's narrative, she, as a narrator, often uses the Bible in a more personal fashion. Contrary to narrator Swarton, she uses the Bible not only as a theological weapon but also as a source of comfort and consolation to deal with her ordeal of captivity: the Bible provides her with a more reassuring interpretation of her condition. As Andrew Newman writes: "The relationship between Rowlandson's literate knowledge and her experience, however, was not simply one-way: if she viewed her experience through Scripture, she also read Scripture in light of her experience" (34). Thus her prose shifts from testimonies and ob-

servations to her own psychological condition, and then to spiritual reassurance and comfort. Kathryn Zabelle refers to Rowlandson's use of Scripture as follows:

To use my own terms, empirical narration (the "colloquial" style) defines the author's role as participant, while rhetorical narration (the "biblical" style) defines her role as interpreter and commentator. The split in Rowlandson's narrative between the participant and the commentator voices is very clear. I believe, however, that the narrative's duality arises not merely from this contrast between participant and observer, but additionally from a clash of codes between Rowlandson's psychological and religious interpretations of her experience. (83)

Rowlandson's use of Scripture is logical in this respect. Any regular Puritan believer would seek God's help and spiritual comfort during difficult times and hardships. The voice duality to which Zabelle refers is mediated by a third party, Mather's voice, which claims that physical and moral ordeals of captivity belong to God's "plan" as shown earlier in this paper. Mather's clerical voice does not conceal or silence Rowlandson's narrative voice as it does in Swarton's captivity narrative but only uses it for his own agenda in accordance with the religious standards he believes in and which any good Puritan believer would support. Therefore, we may suggest the existence of a triad instead of a duality of the narrative voice. In this case, the function of the said narrative voice would be that of holder and transmitter of the Puritan mindset and doctrine.

Although some captivity narratives such as Dustan's, and to some extent Rowlandson's, do portray situations involving physical or psychological aspects in contravention of the traditional Puritan view of women, I have shown that, in both of these texts, motherhood – as a factor and argument – alleviated the controversial attitude of the female captives and generated a rhetoric in their favor. Moreover, when comparing the three narratives, we notice a clear evolution in the depiction of the female role. How accurate is the narrative voice in representing the women's social role during captivity? Do the descriptions provided by the former captives reflect these women's real roles and status in the patriarchal Puritan society?

Rowlandson, Dustan, and Swarton all belonged to patriarchal Puritan society before they were kidnapped and subjected to the "savage" way of life of their abductors, a situation each one of them dealt with in her own different way. While she passively awaited her release at God's earliest convenience and trusted the patriarchal government to eventually deign to intervene in her favor, Rowlandson exhibited an active con-

tribution to her captors' domestic life. She traded her domestic skills for food and even derived some personal satisfaction from doing little favors for her kidnappers, like giving her Master a knife she had acquired from an Indian in a barter deal in exchange for some clothes she had made: "I carried the knife in, and my master asked me to give it him, and I was not a little glad that I had anything that they would accept of, and be pleased with" (48). This scene is in stark contrast to Dustan's attitude and her own radical way of using a sharp tool in her possession. Although both were Puritan women, Rowlandson used a knife as a gift to please her captors while Dustan used a hatchet to "butcher" some of her captors in the same way they had butchered her child. Although the Puritan standards favored Rowlandson's submission to her faith, Mather's narrative voice foregrounds the captive's legitimate motivations as demonstrated earlier in this paper.

Contrary to Rowlandson, who spent a lot of time in traditional female tasks such as sewing, knitting, and cooking, Swarton's contribution to her Indian captor's food-seeking rather consists in gender-neutral or even masculine activities. She seems to have suffered from a lack of women's articles. She complains of the cold and the lack of clothes to keep her warm. She lacks Rowlandson's ability to provide clothes for herself. To survive in the wilderness, Swarton tends to keep herself busy, contributing to her captors' life organization by engaging in more masculine tasks such as hunting and carrying heavy burdens on the move. The almost complete absence of clear female references means that if the narrator of Swarton's text had been anonymous, the reader might not have known that the captive was female and that the narrative voice belonged to a woman. Unlike the narrative voice in Rowlandson's text, Swarton's does not dwell on the female elements or insist on the importance of motherhood, of being a reputable Puritan lady or introducing the manners and domestic skills of a "goodwife" into Indian life.

Instead, Swarton's narrative describes Indian Women as autonomous and resourceful squaws able to secure food by their own means when their male partners are away. In fact, there is none of the kind of hostility towards Indian women that can be seen in Rowlandson's account of her experiences in captivity. Rowlandson describes an antagonistic relationship with her mistress and with other Indian women. She draws a very negative picture, writing that her mistress would not even give her food on some occasions and, worst of all, that she had snatched her Bible away from her and thrown it out. The animosity between the two women escalates into an episode where the white woman stubbornly refuses to obey her Indian mistress who nearly beats her (54). All acts of disobedience or rebelliousness that Rowlandson ever shows in the narrative are targeted against Indian women, particularly her mistress,

whom she introduces as King Philip's wife's sister. Rowlandson also attempts to draw an inside picture of the relationship between her mistress and her male partner: "I boiled my peas and bear together, and invited my master and mistress to dinner but the proud gossip, because I served them both in one dish, would eat nothing, except one bit that he gave her upon the point of his knife" (47-48). In her own interpretation of the scene, Rowlandson shows the male Indian's inherent superiority over his squaw and his contempt of her to the point of refusing to eat from the same dish and preventing her from eating anything at all herself. Could one see this scene through the prism of Puritan male domination in which husbands were entitled to punish their wives? By exclusively stressing this female submissiveness element in her interpretation of the above scene, Rowlandson leaves the reader unaware of her mistress's true role as a "squaw-sachem" or Indian war chieftain:

Rowlandson describes herself as a slave to Weetamoo, known to Mather if not to Rowlandson herself as one of the most powerful North American Indian woman of the colonial era. Rowlandson's occasional depictions of this relationship establish one of the earliest sites of textual contention for the true role of women in colonial America. (154)<sup>9</sup>

Tiffany Potter suggests that by denigrating the Indian woman, Rowlandson effectively lends more value to her own traditional positive role as a mother engaging in gender activities appropriate to the Puritan standards of her time.

As far as Indian males are concerned, Rowlandson tries to be as gentle and as obedient as possible, especially when her master is concerned, about whom she writes: "But a sore time of trial, I concluded, I had to go through, my master being gone, who seemed to me the best friend that I had of an Indian, both in cold and hunger, and quickly so it proved" (51). Rowlandson also describes a very cordial meeting and exchange that she has with King Philip, who offers her some tobacco, pays her for the shirt and the cap she has made for his papoose, lets her have a wash, and finally tells her that she will soon be a "mistress" again, promising her redemption (60). To avoid innuendoes arising from repeated scenes likewise suggestive of a close and warm relationship, Rowlandson's narrative resorts to some rhetorical adjustments to preserve her reputation: "Not one of [the Indians] ever offered the least

---

<sup>9</sup> Pamela Lougheed writes about Increase Mather's description of Weetamoo in *A Brief History of the Warr with the Indians in New-England* (1676) the following: "Mather summarily describes Weetamoo as 'next unto Philip in respect of the mischief that hath been done, and the blood that hath been shed in this Warr'" (299).

abuse of unchastity to me, in word or action" (70). For all insistence on chastity in the narrative voice, some apparent omissions in the narrator's account of some episodes are liable to raise the reader's suspicions, as in the following passage: "About that time there came an Indian to me and bid me come to his wigwam at night, and he would give me some pork and ground nuts, which I did" (64). Rowlandson fails to give further details on this nocturnal episode. One could indeed be led to believe that the omission of details in the above description was meant to conceal a reality too crude for the Puritan standards of the time. The possible leaving out by the narrator of disturbing and unwanted elements, due to social pressure and the fear of jeopardizing one's reputation, does not pass unnoticed and may even stimulate the reader's creative imagination. This gap may, however, be filled by the authorial voice coming out of the preface and vouching for the reputation of the implied narrator and author in the following words: "worthy and precious gentlewoman" (Mather, "Preface" 134).

\*\*\*

This paper has shown three different approaches of captivity in three different portrayals by three different former captives, all of whom were Puritan women. The differences as such may in part be explained by objective reasons. One such reason has to do with the different times at which the three narratives came into being (we have a time gap of fifteen years between the publication of Rowlandson's narrative prefaced by Increase Mather and Swarton's and Dustan's narratives published by Cotton Mather). Another objective factor is quite simply that these are three different women from three different backgrounds. Still, it is interesting to note that in all three cases, the Mathers indirectly lent their authority to the depiction of three different and at times even contradictory female perspectives. The noticeable shift in the tenets of the three narratives at hand suggests differences in the political context and priorities at the respective times of publications. The captives' roles in the narratives, along with the exclusively traditional values attributed to them (such as motherhood, femininity, submissiveness, and reputation) are only a convenient pretext/subtext serving the purpose of representing the political positions of the respective publishers. While the motherly voice clearly rings true and does probably reflect the core of the captives' own conviction, we should not automatically assume that a shift in female attitudes did indeed take place somewhere between Rowlandson and Dustan and that at least two of our captives effectively began to challenge Puritan patriarchal standards. Rather than assume that

there was indeed a shift away from total submissiveness and dependence on men towards partial self-determination or even violent rebellion, I believe that the editorial policy of the Puritans essentially sought to keep alive the image of women as mothers and their predestined role of procreation in accordance with God's command to "increase and multiply."

## References

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.
- Kusener Nelsen, Anne. "King Philip's War and the Hubbard-Mather Rivalry." *William and Mary Quarterly* 27.4 (1970): 615-629.
- Lanser, Susan Sniader. *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992.
- Lougheed, Pamela. "'Then Began He to Rant and Threaten': Indian Malice and Individual Liberty in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative." *American Literature* 74.2 (2002): 287-313.
- Mather, Cotton. "A Narrative of Hannah Dustan's Notable Deliverance from Captivity (1702)." *Puritans among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724*. Ed. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981. 159-164.
- . "A Narrative of Hannah Swarton Containing Wonderful Passages relating to Her Captivity and Deliverance (1697)." *Puritans among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724*. Ed. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981. 145-157.
- . *Bonifacius: An Essay Upon the Good* (1705). Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 1966.
- . *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1705). New York: Russell and Russell, 1967.
- Mather, Increase. *Remarkable providences: Illustrative of the Earlier Days of American Colonisation* (1684). London: Reeves and Turner, 1890.
- . "The Preface to the Reader." *American Captivity Narratives*. Ed. Gordon M. Sayre. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000. 132-137.
- Newman, Andrew. "Captive on the Literacy Frontier" *Early American Literature* 38.1 (2003): 31-65.
- Potter, Tiffany. "Writing Indigenous Femininity: Mary Rowlandson's Narrative of Captivity." *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 36.4 (2003): 153-167.
- Rowlandson, Mary. "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promise Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, Commended by her to all that Desire to Know the Lord's Doings to, and Dealings with Her. Especially to her Children and Relations (1682)." *Puritans among the Indians: Accounts of Captivity and Redemption 1676-1724*. Ed. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1981. 27-75.

- Toulouse, Teresa. "The Sovereignty and Goodness of God in 1682: Royal Authority, Female Captivity, and 'Creole' Male Identity." *English Literary History* 67.4 (2000): 925-949.
- Zabelle, Kathryn. "Puritan Orthodoxy and the 'Survivor Syndrome' in Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative." *Early American Literature* 22 (1987): 82-93.