

Captivating and popular in literature essay sample

[Literature](#)



Why were captivity narratives so “captivating” and popular in literature?

Many authors and writers throughout literature have demonstrated these stories of unfortunate people being captured and murdered for various reasons. Captivity narratives are stories usually written of human beings captured because they are not civilized. Most of the time these abductions happened due to seeking revenge, ransom, or replacing people due to decimating of war and diseases. Captivity Narratives dates to the 17th century, and first were written about women’s experiences.

Authors including Cotton Mather, John Williams, Robert Knox, and Mary Rowlandson presented thoughts, personal experiences, and written visuals of captive narratives. These authors wanted readers to open their eyes about the cruelty and injustices of being held in captivity. The most popular, and the earliest literacy of captivity narratives was by the middle-aged Puritan, Mary Rowlandson. Mary Rowlandson was born the year 1637, in Somersetshire, England. Mary White was the sixth child of ten children. Mary was one of the first authors of the 17th century who wrote on captivity narratives.

Her parents immigrated to New England when she was a very young girl. They first settled in Salem, and later in Lancaster in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Mary’s father John White, became a wealthy landowner and settled in 1653. About three years later Mary would married Joseph Rowlandson. The next twelve years of her life, Mary Rowlandson would be busy as Puritan Mother, tending to her home and three children. “ In 1682, Mary Rowlandson published what would become known as the first ‘ Indian captivity narrative’.

Her work entitled *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, tells of her capture by Wampanoag Indians in 1676, the eighty-two days of her captivity, and her eventual release" (Cloyd). " In the introductory segment of her captivity narrative, before the story becomes structured into a series of ' removes', Mary Rowlandson succinctly states her purpose: " that I may the better declare what happened to me during that grievous Captivity" (Burnham). Rowlandson's narrative begins on February 10th, 1675. The British settlement of Massachusetts Bay Colony was attacked by Native Americans.

Mary describes the first encountered by saying " On the tenth of February 1675, came the Indians with great numbers upon Lancaster. Their first coming was about sun rising; hearing the noise of some guns, we looked out; several houses were burning, and the smoke ascending to heaven" (257). In this moment, Mary's life changed her forever. The attackers burn down houses and open fire on the settlers, wounding and killing several of them, and taking people captive. Most of Mary's family are killed and the Indians start picking their captives. Mary is one of them, along with her younger child Sarah, both wounded.

Rowlandson's other two children are taken from her, separating them from Sarah and Mary. Upon the first remove, Mary and the Wampanoag Indians travel to an abandoned town nearby and spend the night. " Now away we must go with those barbarous creatures, with our bodies wounded and bleeding, and our hearts not less than our bodies" (259). The captors and captives leave and head westward, deeper into the woods. The journey becomes very painful, and more difficult for Rowlandson and Sarah. After

another day goes by, they reach Wenimesset. Here, Mary Rowlandson meets Robert Pepper, who wants to comfort new captives.

The Indians and the captives stay in Wenimesset for over a week before they are on the next remove. Unfortunately, during this time Mary's child becomes very ill and passes away. "About two hours in the night, my sweet babe like a lamb departs this life on Feb. 18, 1675" (261). The child was six years, and five months old. After the traumatic event of Mary's child, Rowlandson's original captor sold her to a Saggamore Indian name Quamopin. Quamopin is related to King Philp. The King decides to let Mary's son to visit her. The Indians continue their raids and tyranny, killing and looting towns like in Medfield.

The captors give Mary Rowlandson a bible. The bible symbolized hope and comfort for Mary. Mary being a Puritan and believing in the word of God, gives her new life in surviving through her captivity. In *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, Mary quotes many bible verses throughout her narrative. As a Puritan, modest, and pure woman, Rowlandson believes God's grace molds all the events in the world. Mary believes everything happens for a reason in the word of God. After the captors take a detour, the Indians cross the Baquaug River to meet with King Philp. Mary stays in the settlement sewing clothes for the Indians in exchange for food.

Normally for most captives, they would be brutally murdered long ago. However, the Indians seen Mary in a different way. She proved herself to be an asset among the tribe. Later in the captivity narrative, the Indians sends a letter to Boston, stating that Rowlandson can be brought for twenty pounds,

according to King Philp. After experiencing “ forests, swamps, steep hills, and flat country” (Cloyd), Mary is finally allowed to travel back to Lancaster, then Boston. After twelve weeks away from her husband, Rowlandson is finally reunited with her husband and her two surviving children.

The two stays with a friend in Concord for 11 weeks. Mr. Rowlandson died in Wethersfield, Connecticut. Later in her life, Mary Rowlandson would remarry Captain Samuel Talcott in Wethersfield on August 6, 1679. Mary Rowlandson dies in the same town on January 5, 1711. After eleven weeks of being held captive by Indians and being freed, Mrs. Rowlandson returns to Lancaster. This is when Mary writes and records her life in captivity. *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God... Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, was published in 1682.

Ironically before Mary Rowlandson was captured, she never wrote anything at all in her lifetime. “ The account of her captivity became one of the most popular prose works of the seventeenth century, both in this country and in England” (257). Michelle Burnham explains, “ the extraordinary popularity of Mary Rowlandson’s narrative, and the fact that no first edition survives simply because it was literally read into decay and oblivion, points to a link between her experience and a cultural fascination with it that is made concrete in the etymological link between captivity and captivation.

” Mary Rowlandson wanted readers to understand what she went through, and by believing in the world of God, you can make through anything and prevail. For example, towards the end of the narrative Mary writes, “ That we must rely on God Himself, and our whole dependence must be upon Him. I

have learned to look beyond present and smaller trouble, and to be quieted under them" (288). Mary Rowlandson created the "Indian captivities" genre, paving the way for writers like James Fenimore Cooper, and William Faulkner to pursue writings on it.

Although Mary stretch the story to an extent, her narrative became one of the best writings in the seventeenth century and became the first form of escapism literature in America. After reading Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God... Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, all the reasons captivity narratives were so, and remains a popular literature genre is because of several key elements in writing. One of the aspects of the narrative is the inclusion of adventure Rowlandson portrays throughout the story.

At the very beginning, Mary Rowlandson describes this vial scenery as the houses being burned, people dying left and right, and guns being fired. Mary was in a series of twenty removes in eleven weeks. On one hand, the removes were "a type of spiritual pilgrimage which this good Puritan unwittingly but dutifully undergoes, an experience of affliction and conversion designed to tempt the captive and to test her sanity and election" (Burnham). The journey was also a very physical one, testing Rowlandson's sanity, religion, and hope.

Mary crosses different geographies including rivers, forests, open land, and swamps. These types of events will always grasp readers attention and never fail to capture the audiences' imagination. Another element that made captivity narratives popular and appealing is foreign cultures and civilization.

Most people are interested in “ the other”. In this case in time, Mary Rowlandson talks about Native American culture and their lifestyle. Throughout the narrative, Mary uses words like “ barbarous”, “ heavens”, and “ black creatures” to portray the Indians based on their actions.

Her attitude towards Indians changed dramatically during her captivity. Mary lives with them, sewed them cloths in exchange for food, and her captivity brings her closer to God more than ever. These elements explain how captivity narratives were so capitating throughout literature and how Mary Rowlandson’s story marked an impact on writing in the seventeenth century. Mary Rowlandson started a new genre in literature that has influences others to write about captivity narratives. Mary Rowlandson never questions her position on God and played a biblical hero. Rowlandson’s faith and humanity cannot be hidden.