Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos, n.º 10 (2004), pp. 95 - 109

PURITAN WOMEN FACING SUFFERING: TEXTS AS TESTS OF SURVIVAL IN BRADSTREET'S «VERSES UPON THE BURNING OF OUR HOUSE» AND ROWLANDSON'S *THE SOVEREIGNTY AND GOODNESS OF GOD*

EVA FLORES RUIZ
JESÚS LERATE DE CASTRO
Universidad de Sevilla

Anne Bradstreet (c.1612-1672) and Mary Rowlandson (c.1637-1711) arrived in the New World to be part of a religious and social «errand» which demanded, among other things, their obedience firstly to God's law and, secondly, to males as his earthly representatives. In the daily domestic context, they willingly accepted that as daughters, wives, and mothers their «mission» was to take care of their household chores, be as loving and submissive as Fray Luis de León's «perfect wife,» and nurture their many children in accordance with Calvinist dogmas. Bradstreet and Rowlandson performed as expected and met all the demands outlined by contemporary conduct books such as Edward Reyner's *Considerations Concerning Marriage* (London, 1657), wherein the woman's function is defined as «to build a godly family; not only by the procreation and religious education of childrean [sic] (which is a pillar of the house) but by a wise and godly Government and ordering of the house, in which the wife ought to act her part» (qtd. in Potter 3). Yet, both women also «stepped beyond their domestic confines by means of literature» (Martin 58) and, in so doing, they somehow challenged the strict orthodoxy of Puritan New England and helped to broaden the creative horizons of the, by then, incipient colonial literature.

Two main factors commonly account for the exceptional emergence of Bradstreet and Rowlandson as the earliest female colonial writers. On the one hand,

their prominent social status as daughters and wives of influential members of the Massachusetts community,[1] to their peers, was proof and guarantee of certain respect for mainstream conventions. On the other hand, as humble, virtuous, and devout women, they did not neglect their domestic affairs to be authors. In Bradstreet's case, this latter requirement is fully confirmed by the commendatory letter written by Reverend John Woodbridge as a preface to *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*, (London, 1650) where Bradstreet's brother-in-law introduces the poet as,

> [...] a woman, honoured, and esteemed where she lives, for her gracious demeanor, her eminent parts, her pious conversation, her courteous disposition, her exact diligence in her place, and discrete managing of her family occasions, and more so, these poems are the fruit of some few hours, curtailed from her sleep and other refreshments. (qtd. in Lauter 289)

In *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* (Boston and London, 1682) the anonymous «Ter Amicam» (American edition) or «Per Amicam» (English edition) who signs the preface –most likely Increase Mather– describes Rowlandson in similar laudatory terms. She is presented as a «modest,» «pious» and «worthy gentlewoman» who decided to publish her captivity narrative encouraged by «some friends» who judged it «worthy of public view,» and so that «God might have his due glory, and others benefit by it as well as herself» (qtd. in Sayre 135). Although in this preface we do not find any explicit comment stating that Rowlandson's writing activity was accomplished without disregarding her domestic duties, it seems obvious that Rowlandson's moral credentials and her status as the wife of Reverend Joseph Rowlandson take this matter for granted.

Be as it may, both seventeenth century women managed to write in the male-oriented Puritan culture and, besides, enjoyed a successful literary career. *The Tenth Muse Lately Sprung Up in America*,[2] printed without Bradstreet's knowledge by her well-intentioned brother-in-law, was well received by the critics and widely read on both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, this poetic collection made her «accidentally» the first colonial female poet. Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*,[3]

---

[1] Bradstreet's father, Thomas Dudley, was the second governor of the colony, one of the founders of Cambridge and signer, in 1650, of the original charter of Harvard College. The poet's husband, Simon Bradstreet, occupied different political positions, serving as secretary, deputy governor and governor of the settlement (1679-1685 and 1689-1691). As to Mary Rowlandson, she was the daughter of John White, the largest landholder in the frontier town of Lancaster, Massachusetts, and was married to Joseph Rowlandson, a Harvard graduate, and the settlement's first church minister.

[2] A revised and expanded edition with the title *Several Poems Compiled with Great Variety of Wit and Learning* was published in Boston in 1678, six years after Bradstreet's death.

[3] The title of the first edition (printed in Cambridge, Massachusetts, by Samuel Green) was *The Soveraignty* [sic] *and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed; Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restauration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*. The second edition (re-printed in London by Joseph Poole) was retitled *A True History of the Captivity & Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson, A Minister's Wife in New-England*.

an autobiographical narrative of her three months Indian captivity, was immensely popular since its publication. It was reissued twice the same year it first appeared in print, and according to Gordon Sayre «twenty-three separate editions had been published by 1828» (127). In addition, Rowlandson's account is recognized as the first product of a new genre, the American captivity narrative,[4] and the earliest prose text written by an Anglo-American woman.

Rowlandson's narrative and much of Bradstreet's poetry is inspired by the very painful losses, illnesses, fears and family separations these women experienced through their lives. Evidently, being Puritan authors and, hence, conscious of their moral and social responsibility, they try to accommodate in their writings their personal afflictions within the accepted and orthodox Puritan ideology. However, this negotiation is not always easy because, as Patricia Cadwell has observed, for the Puritans there was a narrow line between personal expression and heretical expression (97-103). This seems to be the dilemma of Bradstreet and Rowlandson who, despite their staunch efforts to transmit the expected Puritan message, they come close to an unorthodox standpoint. To illustrate this paradoxical aspect, in this paper we will analyze Bradstreet's «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House July 10th, 1666» and some passages from Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* in which we perceive textual instances that appear to betray the intended Puritan meaning the authors attempt to provide. Our purpose in the following pages is to suggest that while Bradstreet's poem and Rowlandson's narrative are essentially dialogic –in the sense that they merge the expected tenets of Puritanism with rebellious feelings of despair and frustration– their potentially «subversive» nature and what turn these texts into tests of physical and emotional survival is the very act of writing them.

«Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» is one of Bradstreet's last poetic compositions and one of her most reprinted poems. The inspirational material of Bradstreet's verses is the real burning of her home at Andover, Massachusetts, during a fire which took place on July 10th, 1666 in which the poet lost all her household furnishings and her library of over 800 books. Structured in nine six-line stanzas and written in the characteristic Puritan «plain style,» the poem begins by recalling how her home was caught in flames in the middle of the night and her coming out to watch her house burn down. In the next four stanzas she expresses mixed feelings of Job-like acceptance («I blest His name that gave and took/That laid my goods now in the dust» or «It was His own; it was not mine»)[5] and of melancholic nostalgia for the many prized material possessions lost in the fire:

---

[4] Rowlandson is commonly identified as the founder of the American Indian captivity narrative as a literary tradition. However, there were previous historical accounts of Europeans made captives by the Indians in America such as Alvar Nuñez Cabeza de Vaca's *Naufragios* (1542) or Capt. John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles* (1624).

[5] Paul Lauter, ed., *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 3rd ed., vol. 1. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998) 311-312. Henceforth all further quotations to Bradstreet's poem will refer to this edition.

When by the ruins oft I past
My sorrowing eyes aside did cast,
And here and there the places spy
Where oft I sat, and long did lie:
Here stood that trunk, and there that chest
There lay that store I counted best.
My pleasant things in ashes lie,
And them behold no more shall I.
Under thy roof no guest shall sit,
Nor at thy table eat a bit.
No pleasant tale shall e'er be told,
Nor things recounted done of old.
No candle e'er shall shine in thee,
Nor bridegroom's voice e'er heard shall be.
In silence ever shall thou lie,
Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity.

Realizing that these implicitly rebellious thoughts could «take her in an unacceptable direction: that is, toward anger at God for her loss» (Scheick 91), the poet resorts in stanza seven to a series of self-addressed questions to dissipate her sense of anger over her earthly loss. In the last two stanzas she comes to the understanding that material goods are worthless and temporary compared to the eternal treasure of living in the permanent house «on high erect» and «[f]ramed by that mighty Architect.»

Like «Contemplations» or «As Weary Pilgrim,» «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» is a meditative poem patterned in the tradition systematized by Ignacio de Loyola in his *Ejercicios espirituales* (1548) and later adapted to forms suitable for Puritans by Richard Baxter in *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650). There is no reason to believe that Bradstreet had read Loyola or Baxter, but she was definitely familiar with the practice itself and with some of the poetry that grew out of it. The meditative method recommended the exercise in sequence of the three faculties of the soul (memory, understanding and will) as a means to reestablish communication with God.[6] Echoing this three-fold meditative process, Bradstreet starts her poem with a vivid recollection of the house-fire and her lost belongings (memory). This aching reminiscence leads to the examination and scrutiny of the significance of the scene conveyed in the self-addressed questions of stanza seven (understanding), in which she takes pains «to clarify the redemptive significance of her life» (Hammond 103). In the last two stanzas –the third stage in her meditative experience– the emphasis

[6] Because of Adam's misuse of his faculties, it was believed that God had withdrawn his blessing from man, causing a communicative disruption that prevented man from understanding God's will automatically. Both meditation and the conversion process were attempts to reconnect this link.

is put on her devout determination to disregard her material loss and to seek God's heavenly house that «[s]tands permanent though this be fled» (will).

Though never explicitly stated, what seems to bring about Bradstreet's spiritual epiphany is her final recognition that the fire is both «the medium and the message.» Thus, she views the devastating flames as a symbolic instrument through which God manifests his inscrutable will in order to test her endurance and, this way, determine whether she deserves the «gift» of salvation, only reserved for the Elect. In other words, the poet endows the house-fire with emblematic significance, which comes to mean for her «both the end of [her] earthly life and the beginning of [her] spiritual one» (Rosenmeier 139).

Emblem books, such as those by Francis Quarles and George Wither, became very popular in the seventeenth century and were especially appealing to the Puritans. They consisted of pictures accompanied by a text, usually in verse but sometimes in prose. The text explained the symbols involved in the picture and drew a moral from them. Bradstreet was well acquainted with emblematic literature, since many of her *Meditations* are in the form of emblems. Besides, the three-fold structure of the emblem (picture, drawing of analogy, and moral) runs parallel to the three-part structure of meditative poems. Consequently, it is not surprising that Bradstreet decided to blend, consciously or unconsciously, both prominent seventeenth century traditions in «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House.»

Bradstreet's poem expresses poignantly the tension between her worldly concerns and her spiritual aspirations. Yet, as Wendy Martin states, «the poem leaves the reader with the painful impression of a woman in her mid-fifties, who having lost her domestic comforts is left to struggle with despair. Although her loss is mitigated by the promise of the greater rewards of heaven, the experience is deeply tragic» (75). Ann Stanford reaches a similar conclusion: «Despite the reasonable arguments that her goods belonged to God and whatever God does is just, there is in the poem an undercurrent of regret that the loss is not fully compensated for by the hope of treasure that lies above» (84). These critical opinions are validated in the textual space of the poem. Bradstreet devotes about thirty lines to review her now forever lost possessions, a number of lines much higher than those in which she accepts the fire as the will of God or expresses her faith in God's heavenly reward. To highlight her «unique» grief, she also makes a recurrent use of the personal pronoun «I» and the possessive «my.» Furthermore, her intense despair is reinforced by means of many adjectives and expressions of woe («thundering noise,» «piteous shrieks,» «dreadful voice,» «fearful sound,» «my heart did cry,» «sorrowing eyes») and images of absence,[7] notably conveyed through the four-line sequence of «not's» in stanza

[7] Affliction, loss and absence are key issues in «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House,» but it should be added that these same feelings are controlling themes in Bradstreet's so-called «family poems,» a group of compositions dealing with her husband and children. For a discussion of this subject in this set of poems, see Martín Urdiales «Anne Bradstreet's Poetry: Empowering Motherhood in Puritan Culture» (2002) 359-368.

six («No pleasant tale,» «Nor things recounted,» «No candle,» «Nor bridegroom's») and the anaphora «Adieu, Adieu.»

This textual evidence clearly indicates the importance Bradstreet grants to her loss. Though it is true that in the last twelve lines her spiritual aspirations prevail, it seems nonetheless that the poet accepts God's will more intellectually than emotionally. Proclaiming in the last couplet «The world no longer let me love/My hope and treasure lies above,» Bradstreet does not really resolve her trauma, she only attempts to convince herself of what she would hopefully like to happen in the afterlife. Therefore, this wishful thinking as well as the biblical allusions incorporated in the text, are to be interpreted more as a conventional Puritan strategy of spiritual/cultural survival to which she tries to cling, than as a heartfelt overcoming of her personal loss and a resolution of her religious doubts.[8]

«Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» is a double-voiced text in which Bradstreet's Puritan ideology competes with her bitter individual experience. Even so, the poet succeeds and survives her most difficult test by articulating her grief honestly and making public her lamentations in the act of writing. Bradstreet does not betray her subjectivity by remaining silent before her pain, but she speaks it out, and this act of self-expression is crucial for her psychological survival. Writing her emotions, Bradstreet finds a therapeutic remedy to survive in the Puritan «wilderness» of her personal sorrow. Yet, this courageous public manifestation of her individual loss jeopardizes to some extent the basis of the Puritan theocracy that John Winthrop framed in «A Model of Christian Charity.» In this well-known sermon –that Bradstreet herself might have heard as she and her family sailed on the same flagship *Arbella* where Winthrop delivered it– the future first governor of Massachusetts Bay stated the following:

> For the work we have in hand, it is by mutual consent, through a special overruling providence, and a more than ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ, to seek out a place of cohabition and consortship, under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical. In such cases as this, the care of the public must oversway all private respect by which not only conscience but mere civil policy doth bind us; for it is a true rule that particular estates cannot subsist in the ruin of the public. (qtd. in Miller 82)

Anne Bradstreet may not have endangered the foundations of the Puritan theocratic society the way the heretic Anne Hutchinson did in 1637 with her antinomian thesis, but certainly the poet's concern for her lost private «estate» in «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» somehow calls into question the public ideal of building in New England an utopian «city upon a hill.»

[8] In her «Religious Experiences» Bradstreet overtly confesses that «many times hath Satan troubled me concerning the verity of the scriptures, many times by Atheisme, how could I know whether there was God» (qtd. in Shea 115).

Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* is no more than fifty pages long in most editions, but it has produced a vast number of critical pages over the years. Traditionally, most interpretations of Rowlandson's narrative have focused on its religious significance, and have viewed her account as «a powerful reflection of the spiritual state of a highly devout early Puritan woman» (Potter 2) or «a model of Puritan psychology and spiritual experience, as constructed by the individual captives and their ministers who often took captivity accounts as the subject of narrative sermons» (Bonn 19).

This traditional reading may be the «truest» to the nature of Rowlandson's account, however in the last twenty five years several critics have challenged this single and monological expression of the text. Thus, David Downing observes the split between the so-called «vigorous and homely style» Rowlandson uses to describe day-by-day events, and the more «elevated» rhetoric of the biblical language she employs to comment upon the meaning of events (252). Drawing upon the same division but using her own terminology, Kathryn Derounian maintains that the «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» (82). Teresa Toulouse, on her part, claims that Rowlandson uses the Scriptures not «only to prove her acceptance of her situation» but «also to express her anger about her own and her children's torment» (664) creating, what she terms, its «textual doubleness.» In the same vein, Dawn Henwood argues that «the sacred Psalms render publicly legitimate, even righteous, the captive's very human frustration and rage and thus enable her, as well as the communal vision she is a part of, to survive» (169). Mitchell Breitwieser contends that the «realistic» fracturing of Rowlandson's narration occurs when subjective suffering breaks through the social codes he sees as repressing personal mourning (10). On the other hand, several critics have pointed out the subversive counter-messages in Rowlandson's text, evidenced through her ability to survive, adapt, and even trade within the Indian community despite her stated fear and hatred for her captors.[9] Our own arguments build on these recent critical approaches which underline the double-voiced quality of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and its encoded subversive messages. However, we would like to add that the textual aspects that undermine the monological interpretation of Rowlandson's account are a manifestation of the author's hesitation between perceiving her captivity as an individual ordeal or as an expression of community experience. In her narrative, Rowlandson often uses the Bible as a source of spiritual comfort and tends to explain her personal afflictions and eventual redemption/survival as part of God's providence. This conventional strategy is clearly intended to convey the expected religious message of faith and fortitude to her Puritan community. Yet,

[9] See, for example, Tara Fitzpatrick «The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative.» *American Literary History* 3 (Spring 1991) 1-26 and Maureen L. Woodard. «Female Captivity and the Deployment of Race in Three Early American Texts.» *Papers on Language and Literature* (32:2) 1996: 115-145.

before she can think of the spiritual benefit her account may bring to herself and her contemporary audience, Rowlandson needs to ensure her physical and emotional survival. This basic need compels her to alter radically her Puritan behaviour, adapt to the erratic Indian ways, learn to trade with her captors, and make all the necessary adjustments to an unknown oral culture. In our view, Rowlandson's double strategy of survival triggers the dialogic quality of the text, and accounts for those instances in which the language and potential meanings of the text appear to escape the author's control, giving way to its subversive counter-messages.

Rowlandson's afflictions, as presented in *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, are more complex and varied than those affecting Bradstreet in «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House,» but they are also inextricably associated to a real and historical incident. During King Philip's War (1675-76) a party of about four hundred Algonquian Indians,[10] in desperate need of supplies to keep their populations alive, attacked early on the morning of February 10th, 1676 the fifty-family frontier town of Lancaster, Massachusetts, where the Rowlandsons lived. While Joseph Rowlandson was in Boston attempting to raise aid for the military defence of the settlement, the Indians burned down the garrison house which at the time sheltered thirty seven persons, including Mary Rowlandson's family; killed twelve colonists; and made twenty-four captives, among them Mary and her three children. For «eleven weeks and five days» Rowlandson travelled in the cold New England winter, first westward to the Connecticut River, then northward into Vermont and New Hampshire, and finally back eastward to Petersham and Mount Wachusett. Rowlandson's captivity ended May 2nd, 1676 when John Hoar of Concord, on behalf of her husband, ransomed her at Redemption Rock (Princeton, MA) for twenty pounds. Soon after her deliverance, she rejoined her husband in Boston, and several weeks later she could also embrace her two remaining children –Joseph (age 14) and Mary (age 10)– who had also been released by the Indians.

As regards exactly when Mary Rowlandson wrote her account, Kathryn Derounian believes that probably shortly after her release in 1675, and before the death of her husband on November 24th, 1678 (83). Rebecca Faery also supports this hypothesis, since «neither the narrative itself nor the preface says anything about his death» (51). However, Faery goes further and narrows down the composition date to «sometime within ten months of her release,» since Rowlandson «does not mention the family's relocation to Connecticut,» and «the closing passage of the narrative suggests that the family was still in Boston at the time of her writing» (51).

[10] The Algonquian tribes of New England were led by Metacom, (known to settlers as King Philip), sachem of the Wampanoags, and Weetamoo, squaw-sachem of the Pocassets (a title equated to Queen by most colonists, as sachem was to King). Weetamoo was married to Quinnapin, the sachem of the Narragansetts, and her sister was married to Metacom. These marriages solidified alliances and united the power of three tribes into a single extended family. Weetamoo gained further status among the Wampanoags by virtue of having been the Wampanoag queen as the wife of the sachem Wamsutta (known to colonists as Alexander). At Wamsutta's death, the title of Wampanoag sachem moved to his brother Metacom, but Weetamoo seems to have retained the respect and confidence of the Wampanoag people (qtd. in Potter 2).

The violent Lancaster attack represents Rowlandson's first encounter with suffering, as she witnessed how the Indians besieged the settlement and butchered, among other colonists, her brother-in-law, nephew, and eldest sister. The brutal and harrowing scene depicted in the opening section of her account resembles that of a «sacrificial ritual, and one with cannibalistic undertones» (Buonomo 10), and this idea is fittingly highlighted by means of animal imagery:

> It is a solemn sight to see so many Christians lying in their blood, some here and some there, like a company of sheep torn by wolves. All of them stripped naked by a company of hell-hounds, roaring, singing, ranting and insulting, as if they would have torn our very hearts out.[11]

In this gruesome and sudden raid, we are also told, an Indian bullet entered Rowlandson's side and tore through her youngest daughter, whom she carried in her arms. As a result of this injury, six-year-old Sarah will die after nine agonizing days, and her heartbroken mother is forced to bury her in an unmarked grave in the wilderness. Rowlandson expresses her grief as follows:

> Thus nine days I sat upon my knees with my babe in my lap till my flesh was raw again; my child being even ready to depart this sorrowful world, they bade me carry it out to another wigwam... whither I went with a heavy heart, and down I sat with the picture of death in my lap. About two hours in the night my sweet babe like a lamb departed this life on Feb. 18, 1675, it being about six years and five months old. (142)

Apart from the deaths of her relatives and her beloved Sarah, Rowlandson has to cope, from the beginning of her captivity, with the feeling of loneliness, anguish and desolation provoked by the physical absence of her husband and her two other children, from whom she was separated shortly after their capture. The physical and cultural displacement from all she knows makes her utter these words in the first remove:

> All was gone, my husband gone (at least separated from me, he being in the Bay; and to add to my grief, the Indians told me they would kill him as he came homeward), my children gone, my relations and friends gone, our house and home and all our comforts within door, and without, all was gone (except my life) and I knew not but the next moment that might go too. (140)

---

[11] Gordon M. Sayre, ed. *Olaudah Equiano, Mary Rowlandson, and Others: American Captivity Narratives* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000) 139. Henceforth all further quotations to Rowlandson's text are taken from this edition.

The harsh life as a prisoner in the «vast and desolate» wilderness also contributes to her increasing despair from the start. The cold, the hunger, the exhaustion motivated by the Indians' frequent displacements, the lack of sleep and appropriate shelter, or the unnecessary acts of violence she receives from time to time, bring Rowlandson close to total collapse. In fact, at one point, she even considers the possibility of committing suicide.

Emotionally and physically disoriented, Rowlandson often turns to the Bible –both the physical book she is given by an Indian in the third remove and her vast mental storehouse of biblical knowledge– to reassure herself that her suffering has meaning.[12] But despite her unbreakable faith, even the Scriptures seem to lose momentarily their healing power in the thirteenth remove: «Then also I took my Bible to read, but I found no comfort here either, which many times I was wont to find» (155). Anyhow, Rowlandson takes pains to conceal her despair in front of the Indians and does not succumb to weeping until the eighth remove, more than a quarter into her narrative. She describes the scene in these terms:

> Then my heart began to fail: and I fell a-weeping which was the first time to my rememberance, that I wept before them. Although I had met with so much affliction, and my heart was many times ready to break, yet could I not shed one tear in their sight. (150)

Another psychological torment Rowlandson has to endure is the cruel teasing of her captors. In the thirteenth remove she is told, for example, that they have «roasted» her son Joseph and that «he was very good meat» (155). As regards her husband:

> Some of them told me, he was dead, and they had killed him: some said he was married again, and that the governor wished him to marry; and told him he should have his choice, and that all persuaded I was dead. So like were these barbarous creatures to him who was a liar from the beginning. (156)

Rowlandson can never appreciate the macabre Indian sense of humor (for which we can hardly blame her) and will attribute these comments to the Indians' «horrible addictness to lying, and that there is not one of them that makes the least conscience of speaking of truth» (155). However, this mean hoax will somehow help her «to apprehend that the Indians have a different sense of truth than do the Puritans» and «that the nature of communication differs between the two communities» (Bonn 21). This cruel but insightful linguistic experience will represent a significant

[12] Rowlandson scholars differ on the count, but according to Maria S. Bonn «the author of *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* reads and quotes the Bible, cites a Biblical passage, or uses a Biblical allusion approximately eighty times» (23). David Downing estimates that approximately one-third of those biblical references come from the Psalms (255).

step toward Rowlandson's better «understanding» of the Indian oral culture and her ensuing «Indianness» as a survival strategy.

In accordance with conventional Puritan beliefs, Rowlandson tends to identify the Indians with Satan or the forces of chaos and evil. On the night of her first remove, she consciously describes them as devils: «Oh the roaring, and singing and dancing, and yelling of those black creatures in the night, which made the place a lively resemblance of hell» (140). The «diabolical» nature of these «black creatures in the night» is noticeable as well in her description of the torture they inflict on Mrs. Joslin, a pregnant Puritan woman who is burned at the stake with her two-year-old child:

> [They] stripped her naked, and set her in the midst of them; and when they had sung and danced about her (in their hellish manner) as long as they pleased, they knocked her on the head, and the child in her arms with her: when they had done that, they made a fire and put them both into it. (145)

Rowlandson also conveys a negative vision of the Indians through the wide range of racist epithets she uses to refer to them, which include «infidels,» «bloody heathen,» «murderous wretches,» «ravenous beasts,» «hell-hounds,» «barbarous creatures» or «roaring lions and savages bears,» to cite just a few examples. Describing the Indians in these derogatory terms, Rowlandson reinforces by opposition her civilized Puritan self-representation, strengthens the orthodox message she tries to provide, and additionally justifies «the zealous attempts to eradicate Native Americans and their cultures from the region» (Faery 26).

But interestingly enough, as the story advances and Rowlandson moves further away from her community into the world of the Indian, certain aspects of her narrative seem to challenge this compact Puritan worldview of the Indians, producing ideological «short-circuits» or unorthodox counter-messages which evidence Rowlandson's gradual «sympathy» for her captors and her Indian acculturation. For example, if early in her narrative she described the Indians as faceless and undistinguishable «creatures,» now she is willing to see some of them as individuals with names and distinguishing features. Similarly, her master Quinnapin becomes «the best friend that I had of an Indian» (154), and she admits that when he left the group for a period of time she was «quite ready to sink» (155), and when he returns, «glad I was to see him» (162). According to Rebecca Faery, these «friendly» feelings are «erotically charged» (70) –despite Rowlandson's claim that «not one of them offered me the least abuse of unchastity to me in word and action» (172)– and, if so, they clearly defy the «satanic» nature of the Indians. Rowlandson's «colloquial» voice also undermines the monolithic Puritan image of the Indians in her overt acknowledge of the kindness she received from some Indian squaws, Philip or Quinnapin who, at one point, «fetched me some water himself, and bid me wash, and gave me the glass to see how I looked» (163). On the other hand, Rowlandson's own behaviour reflects

her cultural adaptation and identification with the Indian world as time goes by. Early in her account she reports, for instance, that she finds the Indian food (consisting mostly of horse feet, liver, ground nuts, entrails or bear meat) repulsive, but after the second week –what she calls «filthy trash»– turns out to be «sweet and savory to my taste» (147). Her acculturation is also revealed in the good number of Indian words she uses in her narrative (*wigwam, papoose, squaw, sachem, nux, wampom, powaw, sannup,* among others) suggesting that she is capable of understanding and also communicating at some level with her captors in their own language. Furthermore, her social accommodation to the Indian community is signalled in her occasional reference to herself and her captors as «we» and to the Indian encampment as «home» (Faery 70).

The set of cultural codes and customs that Rowlandson learns to understand and control most successfully are economic, as she often exchanges her sewing skills for food or small favors. Rowlandson also exhibits her business competence when she sells a pound of tobacco her husband has sent her for nine shillings «for many of the Indians for want of tobacco, smoked hemlock, and ground ivy» (167), or when she bargains for her own freedom setting down the price of her ransom in twenty pounds (164). Nonetheless, the ability to trade within the Indian culture alone does not indicate a true transformation on her part. As we see it, the most vivid and shocking evidence of her changed nature occurs during the eighteenth remove, where she writes:

> Then I went to another wigwam, where there were two English children; the squaw was boiling horses feet; then she cut me off a little piece, and gave one of the English children a piece also. Being very hungry I had quickly eat up mine but the child could not bite it, it was so tough and sinewy, but lay sucking, gnawing, chewing and slobbering of it in the mouth and hand. Then I took it of the child, and eat it myself, and savory it was to my taste. (162)

Taking the food from this English child, Rowlandson discovers «the Indian at the heart of herself» (Breitwieser 141) and truly mirrors the behaviour of her Indian captors. This wild transformation exemplifies the extent to which she has adopted the Indian identity as a part of her own, but it is precisely this behavioural adjustment what allows her physical survival and assures her coming out of the wilderness alive. Significantly, the Indians seem to undergo a similar tranformation in the sixteenth remove, when Rowlandson mistakes a band of Indians for Englishmen:

> In that time came a company of Indians to us, near thirty, all on horseback. My heart skipped within me, thinking they had been Englishmen at the first sight of them, for they were dressed in English apparel, with hats, white neckcloths, and sashes about their waists, and ribbons upon their shoulders. (161)

Although Rowlandson quickly realizes that there is «a vast difference between the lovely faces of Christians, and the foul looks of these heathens» (161), her initial confusion provides a moment of cultural and racial identification which blurs the stable divide between Puritans and Indians or between civilization and savagery.

Rowlandson's narrative is a mesmerizing record of cultural and individual conflict. But it should not be forgotten that *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* is above all a literary construct, and that Rowlandson is not only a white female Puritan captive but a conscious writer too, who «chooses to become an author upon her return to the Puritan world and this choice is a continuation of her process of cultural adaptation» (Bonn 24). During her three-months' captivity Rowlandson-the reader interprets what was happening to her through the medium of the written word of God. When she is ransomed and returns from her captivity, she again chooses to interpret her experience through the written word, but this time as writer instead of reader. This process of cultural re-adaptation is not as easy as she might expect. The conclusion of her narrative shows that despite her strong reliance upon the Bible as her spiritual guide, Rowlandson-the author is having some trouble coming to terms with her ordeal, since after her release she often suffers from insomnia and weeps inconsolably:

> I can remember the time, when I used to sleep quietly without workings in my thoughts, whole nights together, but now it is other ways with me. When all are fast about me, and no eye open, but His who ever waketh, my thoughts are upon things past, upon the awful dispensation of the Lord toward us; upon His wonderful power and might, in carrying of us through so many difficulties, in returning us in safety, and suffering none to hurt us. I remember in the night season, how the other day I was in the midst of thousands of enemies, and nothing but death before me: it is then hard work to persuade myself, that ever I should be satisfied with bread again... Oh! the wonderful power of God that mine eyes have seen, affording matter enough for my thoughts to run in, that when others are sleeping mine are weeping. (175)

The very act of writing about her Indian experience is a deliberate choice to bring order into chaos, to go back into print culture and re-establish herself in the Puritan world. But even if Rowlandson herself and her community choose to explain her survival as a gesture of God's benevolence, there is a latent «subversiveness» expressed in her mixed feelings that fluctuate «between a desire to affirm her belief in God's plan and the pain of her emotional wounds... [and] between the spiritual benefits of suffering and its emotional and psychological consequences» (Bonn 25).

To sum up, it could be concluded that the reaction of Anne Bradstreet and Mary Rowlandson towards their physical and emotional suffering is basically similar, though the sources of their despair and the genres used to convey it are different. While in Rowlandson's account the house-fire is provoked by the Indians and in Bradstreet's poem it is a «natural» accident, the effects are akin: the destroying flames

burn to ashes both women's secure lives and prompt their ensuing distress. In the case of the Puritan poet, as we have seen, her material loss will lead her through a three-part meditative journey (memory, understanding and will). For Rowlandson, the fire and her subsequent captivity will mean a long trial patterned on a four-fold narrative rite of passage (separation, initiation, transformation, and return). In both instances, though, the fire is the initial spark that will let them discover the vanity of worldly concerns. «Adieu, Adieu, all's vanity» proclaims Bradstreet in line 36 of her poem. Rowlandson's account ends with the same biblical allusion taken from *Ecclesiastes* 1.14: «The Lord hath showed me the vanity of these outward things. That they are the vanity of vanities, and vexation of spirit, that they are but a shadow, a blast, a bubble, and things of no continuance» (176).

Relying upon the above biblical citation and other scriptural references, Bradstreet and Rowlandson try to transform their autobiographical woeful experiences into moral lessons for their Puritan community. At this level, it can be said that their grief is instrumental, since it aims at reinforcing their own and their readers' faith in God by means of the usual conversion process in which moments of anger and frustration were followed by instances of spiritual awareness. However, out of this same grief, the true «colloquial» voices of both authors occasionally emerge and, with them, the rebellious and unorthodox messages embedded in their texts, which distort the intended Puritan meaning they attempt to impart.

As we have tried to prove «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» and *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* are dialogic, hybrid and liminal texts in which Bradstreet and Rowlandson desperately try to negotiate and accommodate their private suffering with the public and spiritual demands of the community. This ideological and aesthetic synthesis does not always work as it seems artificial, forced, if not unconvincing, at least, for contemporary readers. Nevertheless, in our opinion, one of the reasons why these female authors and texts are still appealing to present-day readers is precisely for the outspokenness with which they express their personal losses, afflictions or «savage» selves. It is this frankness, in part, what has outlived both seventeenth-century female writers, and has turned «Verses Upon the Burning of Our House» and *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* in genuine texts and tests of personal and cultural survival.

WORKS CITED

Bonn, Maria S. «Reading and Writing the Codes of Exchange: Mary Rowlandson and Cultural Translation.» *Massachusetts Studies in English* 11 (Summer 1992): 18-27.

Breitwieser, Mitchell Robert. *American Puritanism and the Defence of Mourning: Religion, Grief, and Ethnology in Mary White Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990.

Buonomo, Leonardo. «A Victim of King Philip's War (1675-76): Mary Rowlandson and the Account of Her Captivity.» *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* 1 (1991): 9-21.

Cadwell, Patricia. *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Derounian, Kathryn Zabelle. «Puritan Orthodoxy and the 'Survivor Syndrome' in Mary Rowlandson's Indian Captivity Narrative.» *Early American Literature* 22 (Spring 1987): 82-93.

Downing, David. «'Streams of Scripture Comfort': Mary Rowlandson's Typological Use of the Bible.» *Early American Literature* 15 (1980-81): 252-259.

Faery, Rebecca Blevins. *Cartographies of Desire: Captivity, Race, and Sex in the Shaping of an American Nation*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Fitzpatrick, Tara. «The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative.» *American Literary History* 3 (1991): 1-26.

Hammond, Jeffrey. *Sinful Self, Saintly Self: The Puritan Experience of Poetry*. Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1993.

Henwood, Dawn. «Mary Rowlandson and the Psalms: The Textuality of Survival.» *Early American Literature* 32.2 (1997): 169-186.

Lauter, Paul, ed. *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Third edition, Vol. 1. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

Martin, Wendy. *An American Triptych: Anne Bradstreet, Emily Dickinson, Adrianne Rich*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984.

Miller, Perry, ed. *The American Puritans: Their Prose and Poetry*. New York: Anchor, 1956.

Potter, Tiffany. «Writing Indigenous Feminity: Mary Rowlandson's Narrative of Captivity.» In *Literature Online*. Winter 2003. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 12 Dec. 2003. <http://papi42.us.es/lion_ref_abell/full_rec?ACTION=byid&ID=R01664793>.

Rosenmeier, Rosamond. *Anne Bradstreet Revisited*. Boston: Twayne, 1991.

Sayre, Gordon M., ed. *Olaudah Equiano, Mary Rowlandson, and Others: American Captivity Narratives*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

Scheick, William J. «The Poetry of Colonial America.» *Columbia Literary History of the United States*. Ed. Emory Elliot. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. 83-97.

Shea, Daniel B. *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America*. Masison: Wisconsin University Press, 1988.

Stanford, Ann. «Anne Bradstreet: Dogmatist and Rebel.» *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*. Ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1983. 76-88.

Toulouse, Teresa A. «'My Own Credit': Strategies of (E)valuation in Mary Rowlandson's Captivity Narrative.» *American Literature* 64 (1992): 655-676.

Urdiales Shaw, Martín. «Anne Bradstreet's Poetry: Empowering Motherhood in Puritan Culture.» *Actas del V Congreso SAAS: Power and Culture in America: Forms of Interaction and Renewal*. Salamanca, 4-6 April, 2001. Ed. Antonio R. Celada *et al.* Salamanca: Almar, 2002. 359-368.

Woodard, Maureen L. «Female Captivity and the Deployment of Race in Three Early American Texts.» *Papers on Language and Literature* (32:2) 1996: 115-145.