

PAROUSIA

IN GOD'S
DUE
TIME

"THE STORY OF MARY ROWLANDSON IN VERSE"

D O R I E L A R U E

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The Story of Mary Rowlandson in Verse

Dorie LaRue

PAROUSIA

In God's Due Time: The Story of Mary Rowlandson in Verse

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Forward

In February 1676, a company of Narragansett Indians attacked the frontier community of Lancaster, Massachusetts, and ransacked and burned the farm houses and garrison of approximately fifty families. One of the captives, Mary Rowlandson, the wife of the town's clergyman, spent eleven weeks and five days surviving the twenty removes she was subjected to until she was ransomed for twenty pounds.

The initial reservations I once had in choosing Mary Rowlandson's story for the subject of a long poem were quieted by the nature of the critical research I found. I had feared the story was too much of an adventure, that sheer incident would take precedence over the character's inner consciousness. I found, conversely, that the overtones of the narrative are numerous and complex, and that the journey may be considered a mixture of functions—historical, sociological, psychological, but above all, spiritual.

Through historians, I learned much about the various facts of Rowlandson's experience, but still my primary fascination with her story remained the same, that an archaic philosophical framework (the Puritan espousal of the five points of Calvinism) would ultimately sustain her through a deadly, harrowing experience. As I worked with the subject matter, I realized though, that I would never know, except within the context of my own speculation, exactly how Rowlandson survived mentally and physically intact. I tried, at times, to attribute her survival to the cultural mores of the era, especially the stubborn strength of the Puritans. Perhaps in such a time when peers of Rowlandson might have conceivably taken their children for an outing to a witch's execution, this had inured her with a kind of callousness. Indeed, some experts concede that Wigglesworth's "Day of Doom" was the exception rather than the rule, as the Puritan's day-to-day existence was as frightening as hell's fire, thus defeating this ploy as an effective aversive stimulus to sin. But instead of embracing this explanation, I kept seeing an image of Mary Rowlandson, more than a week without food, wounded herself, carrying her dying six-year-old daughter for nine days, then lying down by the dead body all night. Her laments, even within the unornamental Puritan style, strike similar maternal overtones I have heard in mother's recorded voices, when I once studied techniques of grief counseling. And trying to attribute her strength and survival merely to the stubbornness of the Puritan ethic was not enough. Some historians would have us believe that Mary Rowlandson moved almost serenely through her experience, suffering fiercely, but always sustained by the efficacy of the Divine Plan. This oversimplification negates the beauty and poignancy of the narrative which lies within a truthful waxing and waning of her faith. And to be sure, this exact mutability is a testament to her faith. The concept of the elected few, and the atoning by trial, as well as other Calvin premises, were always dominant constructs, yet the vitality of her faith was its constant re-examination, and her own intense introspection.

So, what to make of this extraordinary woman? A product of dogma, or pilgrim on an authentic spiritual journey? Mary Rowlandson's trait of submissiveness in her situation did parallel the Puritan ideal for the character of women. A trait of willfulness in her situation would have been deadly. Too, as the wife of a clergy,

she was a potential asset, though how valuable seemed to vary from day to day with her captors' moods. She was also mentally and physically strong. And fortitude, whatever the source, was a keen variable in a captive's survival. Most of the captives who were dispatched early on were weak—complaining and begging. The sheer number of captives worked against them too, as they were rather a cheap commodity.

Another of Rowlandson's assets was her domestic skills. It was simply pure luck that, at the time of her capture, she had her knitting needles in her pocket. Of course, her explanation was that of divine providence. She used the needles to sew for her captors in exchange for food.

A framework on which Rowlandson understood her situation was the Puritan explanation of the "heathen" malice by way of a biblical template. The Puritan's actions were aimed at advancing the Kingdom of God in a new country, much like the chosen Israelites. (This commitment also implied an endeavor to convert the "heathen.") The Indians, to the Puritan mind, represented Satan minions; indeed, it is pure racism, even as the Puritans saw themselves sole agents for God. The larger picture, the invading, the taking over of Indian territory, the squeezing of tribes of all nations further and further from their homes did not figure into the Puritan mind. Indeed, some Puritans saw the Indian wars as punishment for a falling away from God, of which they admitted guilt, and a phenomenon hardly included in the Divine Plan.

Into this poetical version of Rowlandson's narration, I have tried to use a mixture of modern-day terms and spellings and the vernacular of the Puritan mind. The mixture served two purposes. One was to avoid obscurity that using strictly seventeenth century terms might cause, and the other, that the blending of the two might appeal more to the contemporary mind. Some college students of the Rowlandson narrative complain that her writing is too clinical, as though she were a reporter, and admittedly, her tone can be barely comprehensible to those who have been reared with a media rarely shy of overstatement. Yet the Puritan style deliberately avoided ornamentation, as their religious principles decreed. And too, poetry was scarce, and the novel, as we know it, was not existent at that time in North America. Surely no such genres existed in Rowlandson's community, even if she had cared to read them or were allowed to. Perhaps this poetical version of mine, with its blend of seventeenth century and contemporary language, can also lend itself more to the emotive element of the rhetoric that, if not explicit, is, I am sure, most assuredly there.

I know my attempts to understand the mind of Mistress Rowlandson will never answer my own question of the nature of Rowlandson's survival. I cannot help feeling that Rowlandson was not different from any sensitive human, who, experiencing the intensity of fear, starvation, and grief that she did, did so with a human-ness, rather than a superhuman-ness, and went through some of the same emotions all victims feel. Some of her post-captive experience, explained by her in Puritan constructs, is like those historically used by victims of survival guilt. Yet something in her, unknowable, unexplainable, was unique, unique perhaps as her pair of knitting needles gleaming out of the wilderness. In the end, perhaps she appeared before God, as the old song says, "just as I am."

In God's Due Time:

The Story of Mary Rowlandson in Verse

Prologue

To Mistress Rowlandson,

The minister so long gone
the wilderness looms up
in restless
proportion,
and you,
in homestead
built under
the Lord's thumb
watch your children in some
lapse of time; the boy,
Joseph-eyed; the half-
lowered head before the fire,
your own girl-fears in Sarah.
February winter outside
against the earth clods
once fraught with life
sighed over by Somerset
heart, and I, ferreting
you out between your lines,
or unhanded by historian,
feel my own cold: the tardy
heart growth measured against
your archaic constructs,
handed down like rhetoric,
still diminish me
into your world.
I follow the you to whatever
fate betides; three hundred
years between us;
warming
my soul on your
simple heirlooms,
knitting needles, prayer,
your words, some
like ice, and some,
like sun-warmed berries
in my mouth.

1

The sea launched us, ploughed us through,
the nervous tribe of Adam; brains rift
with letters, the stature, law, until
we landed, spared by fever,
picking vermin, bone-sick, depressed, all
our excesses quelled by Joseph, the sermon;
I rise, submit, arranging wisdom.

2

The strange convoluted shoreline
looses the landbreeze, tugs our ship,
lightly, unlike the sea's
strong windswells; gathers us into
a dark brown mantle of
the swaying trees; they, like mandates,
suggesting the odd, the chaste.
The City sought is manifested
in fifty pilgrim boxes shouldering
the carnal day even as we level
spiritward. My heart rises,
phrases the praise for You I have
trusted down to the last bread
crumb, and he that has charged me,
burnished bliss, vanity, takes hold
of me, vouchsafed by
God-mystery, kisses what seems my life.

3

Our own humble mansion
becomes the garrison;
my eyes unveil,
attend I things begrudged
by providence. Joseph,
giving law,
haggles in the churchyard;
my patience looses.
I am foe; my stranger's heart
makes do with scant touch, pale winter;
later summer, wild brackish heat,
the logic of insects.

4

Again the garrison wall
but this time, secular,
the uncouth tree planks;
the drilled holes rot
above the place

where firewood grows, flankers
at opposite corners, one unfinished.
Nearby the Nipmuck waste grates
minds, and the pulpit harbors,
hopefast, laborious.

Eastward, Mather's congregation,
like a coverlet, beams toward
my longings. I am not,
find not, blessing in Jael ⁽¹⁾
award me only the soft cries,
darkward; lay I debts on God;
me wicked, though loved,
so shaking.
Yet yield of the wilderness--
two, three rods up the slope,
the Cemetery,
highest ground
drencht in headstones as the meeting
house bequeaths
fear!

I am shadow of the ragged trees,
the darkness, disease, the wild cold;
buzzed heat and savage Indian forms
seething my dreams. Hold!
Keep faith. Assume the solemn voice.
Reality is the pounding, the blister,
the symbolic rite
of needle's eye.

5
Joseph to Boston
& I, in loss, am freer.
The chores are passionless,
endless & I must not revolt.
Around me beloved house,
Grey costume, their horns on neck, always
famisht as acorns roast: clam
stews Lancaster dreams
to Somerset ⁽²⁾ fare,
where hiding places, piety
pull from Joseph,
& the Word.
Even as I breathe,
easy, 1 long for you.

6
Their first coming was about sun-rising.

Indians? but the hearts of darkness,
parching the air with gun-fire.
We look out: smoke heavenward and Joseph
synoded in Boston, my deputy-brain ⁽³⁾
will not, cannot League forth.
On the south slope Richard Wheeler'
fires the dawn sky by flax
by flaming hemp.

Now this deputization rings forth:
O love, my heel drips our child's blood;
Satan's crestings rapt, the house on fire
over our heads, door barred in bullet
like stones, handfuls, scattered rattle
upon the plank.

But out we must go.
Fired & quenched & fired again
to gaping faction; I fear Hell's
ravish, we husk dolls to God's dream;
He, noting our dolefullest day, our blood
wallows, our layings hold.
Come behold the works of the Lord,
what desolations he has
made in the earth.

7

Now away we must go
with those barbarous creatures.
Me pulled one way, our children,
another; & all is gone but
one poor wounded babe.

Crucify me, Lord, to pure dissolve;
uphold me in thy terribleness
through these wicked hours,
through my own piecemeal thoughts.
Sara in my arms draining soul,
vomits. So slipshod I moan
bone-moans; Lord, some
hallowed truth easily judges
what poor condition we come to.
Sorrows of my heart attend evil,
to its bitterness.
Is this I? Upon the Indian's horse
My wound, my child. Satan's ancient precipitating:
fever, the wilderness, the snow-
crust's sick falls, riding presst;
nothing; one remove most darker stains.

Purify me, Father, lest I, fanned,
do fury sink. My pale smock is
gashed by thorn. My child, couched
on shattered bough, pleads.

8

Lamentable soul calling much
for water; night, & here I
must sit ready in the snowsog
to greet the hour of her end.

9

Delivered into Wenimesset,
thus, nine days under arched framework,
sit I, the fading face of Sarah's gaze;
pallid doll, her moans slip, are flutters,
are lively rebukes from God; I long
for the crushed heart
Save. Attend.
The hemp hammer pounds,
contemns fiber. Female.
Sarah's soul loosens
tends upward,
spinning flash, pale limbs
plain clothed, linen, and indigo;
bead of resin flares the fire,
lightly casts across
her face, her last small life second.

10

*I must and could lie
down by my dead babe side by side
all night. We, blest with tragical design;
I cannot feel Him. I am shut
and sickening. Pass? Disquiet.
I am trod in good degree. Turn,
blamable. Amazed mother fainted down,
hostile eyes amiss toward Him.
I am covered by confusion.* ⁽⁴⁾

11

Where Justice, unlodged, in Quonopin's,
I think the unutterable. My mind
sees the abhorrence of Him. Me, His wick,
dipped into the fiery tallow;
It is weighting worldlings,
& lifts; I am dropt again, waylaid
by flesh and heart and want. Past
this plane of body and blood, there is nothing

in that world we dreamed of. What terror
amazed. Shriek for the clear head of him. Joseph.
Joseph, the universe is thought.
Muffled mystery and black angels.
The crumpling plunge again, the light, and up. I can.
Trapped between dark and light.
What was the drapery of my crib
but my coffin pall?
I am masked and blinded. Never shall I.

Thus preserved. Regenerate. I am inhabited.

The candle drips excess:
child. Need. Care.
So light dowers.

12
The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. ⁽⁵⁾
The prayerless turn the ground over onto
my small mite Sarah in the wilderness.
Later, I whisper to the dead, to their enemies.
A motley comes over me. I am drunk,
A foolish oddity. The swayings. Hoverings.
I must blunder on from temporal toward
the Timelessness: ⁽⁶⁾ Christ's own filial daughter,
reeling and coming.

13
The wilderness endures us. In our savory
controversie so designed.

14
Soon newly from Medfield, burned,
The whoops, the din of the damned
their gain-cries; the earth,
the hideous insulting, triumphing;
so God-protected, they rejoice,
bloodrooters, and I, chafed and sore
by ghosts childish & dead,
& those alive, must prod
what passion I have left.

From the plunder, the ax-leavings
of scalp snagged with skin;
a silk-grass basket opens;
So, I took the Bible from those
unholy hands, *and in that melancholy time*
it came into my mind to read.

15

Again, we must move.
The English army, near & following.
God dangling us all, heathens and whites
alike; ⁽⁷⁾ veiled, my faith strains
against the slow hills, the trenches,
glare of sun; others stumble,
their tatteredness stirs; we all dishevel'd
& doused; in my hand I carry the Indian meal gourd,
in my pocket my knitting work.

After dense wood, like a long, chilled fever,
we stand at the river, cringe at the bray
from its nether rock. Mud, ice, leaf, mix'd water,
trembles with rhythm at our feet.

16

In condition of the current, we
sailing or sinking. Wedged as I
am, on slung timber, moving over
the face of the water, I watch
the jagged shoreline shaped itself

within a fool's errand, yet this is more—
elation in the purling deep, arising past tree,
the tower of cloud—emerging as
one construction; O invocation—
ascended from the gulf,
shadowless, imperious.
Faith bows like a willow branch.
Sarah. Skies splitting,
& oceanic terrors destroyed
by the Name.

Nothing required more of the dead now,
& such wonder in mooring, ⁽⁸⁾ the flat calm,
dry foot reaching towards solidity.

17

Morning & I am rattling around
in my own ravenous belly,
famisht, chilled, whom enduring
lessens. Tenuous. My body
so light it could be waved off
like steam by a hand.
The cold dream gives off tender
detritus, horse-broth, groundnut,
liver. *To the hungry soul every
bitter thing is sweet.*

Near the coals, I squat,
my face cracks, such fearful joy,
blood about my mouth. I squeeze
with terrible ecstasy down raw
blessing.

18

I, the mother of Joseph's son,
can hardly tell the living from the dead.
He, eyes, failed, limbs, staggered down;
cold-harried. Tentative stranger's face
offers memories: morning light gives on
my babe, milky-mouth from breast; later,
young contender, wandering hummocky sorrel,
free your ways, gall me, but please, summon.

My heart, now sees thus:
outcast. Flaming star fading.

Then Mary, ten years, taken from
the door first, sold for a gun,
in sight, she a-weeping,
provok'd, causes divers anguish.
Mary, smeared, by dark hand,
at the breach, shuddering, white
garment torn.

19

The needle against the wilderness,
slides in, in hope. I must needs own
to God, this thread, shirt. Truth
disguised in stitch. I am alive
if there is substance
to this trance. My needle
is a prayer, my fine seam.
I am a mad woman
with a trained brain.

20

Now we must pack up and be gone
from this thicket, bending our course
toward the Bay towns. In my pocket
a few crumbs of cake, hard and dry
as flints. I touch them, taste,
& thoughts are carried away
upon a wind.

O the sheer peak of the earth
I look on stared at struck

by my own soul eyes steered back.
Everything dualistic ⁽⁹⁾ plummets
to gain by: it is. It is the ends
of the earth tuck in the same
silence as a cake's poor rising,
as a door slammed shut,
as hailstones on a shingle,
the child's low death sigh.
Forgive me the wind forgive me sky
& all thought perishable as dust,
for the earth's peak splits,
as I move, as the wind moves,
bound so, the image & the eye.

21

My master, Quanopin. ⁽¹⁰⁾
The treescape is still:
perspective against perspective.
As hand closes. Marvels amass.
The is the wilderness.
The stone ax and cold,
disease, the fire. I can
fathom not what motions
are reality. And all the quaking
whites from farm and field,
their faith run out like sand,
have gasped this same air.
Beneath his rags, a posture.
In time, he lifts the ax
above a target queerly placed:
I am come into this world.
The air is cool beneath
a towering arch. Gather.
Is freedom within the shroud?
I am here. He has bought no device
for exigency. His invention
in in the life, vain-given.
My own head, a crumb of mercy,
blunders up.

22

At night he dreams of epic coup,
a century's strivings in his desire.
Thin destiny! The music of the dead
can send him stumbling to their slow
burnt-paper wails, risking all.
Waking, he finds a fingering of the dream,
effete. God's trick. Like the goodly
falling with the wicked's due.

23

In me something of a vision came. ⁽¹¹⁾
The ritual unhides, images form
from places I know not.

It is in this a deciding:
inside the barren circle they make
an edge with blazoned arms, leaning
themselves into uncertainty.
They sit and watch
advance on deerskin
the trial of word.

So, this sameness grows in me,
screws into my mind, outward,
inward, crushed down to thought
surrendered: Light to dark
and it is our weaknesses they choose;
some centre found, noisy
and joyous round which they dance,
sending tremors through us all.

24

Last night they came over
the river into this village.
Women greeted them with food
& torch, asking not by what spoils
they took, nor why they came
diminished through the dark.

Now everything in morning
knows their coup, their quick
and black invasions. Yet
everywhere is haunt & panderings,
of stillness, and slow illusion.

25

We came to Baquag River.
Swim; fearfully fathomed
I fasten eyes on crags
and hills, me concealed
in tide trailing steps
landward; by my reckoning
a rod or more would knock
me down, though God undrown
upwards by His grace. Gladly,
the strand, & over;
I have thrown in what
wild waters atone.

26

I am dying then; I lie & feel
the pain so rough it changes air.

Behind me the river; ahead,
curious Indian wall allowing
no shadow cast—then this is death?
Surrender, dull brainwords—
but still the loss insufficient
to feel? I see them stoop & lift
me up. Slightest ideas do deep
so run at last, are considered never
from the rest.

Once I sent an image scurrying out
of doors (in this hand a child's hand,
a certain, solid thing). So, God in me
continues, retreated inward as I
was, in mind & everything unto itself.

Should I move and draw the veil before
my eyes? I feel the swerves
of laughter but inside my head
I see a room, a table laid, five chairs,
a swath of light across a ladder.

I must go deeper still
to know to move to love
where memory is freed. Sustain.
The idea is sufficient
that joins me to this world.
Came not from warm,
& noisy space to this,
there'd be no world to know
it by. I cannot speak.
God knowing the end of parable
holds delicate plot in me;
so connived, bereft.

27

King Phillip: ⁽¹²⁾

It is the look of death
upon his face that speaks
his power. And not
his first mute gaze,
showing no hint he knows
the object from the space;
but exactly: that he substantiates
reality with this staring.

Odd I want to touch,
to feel a palpable arm,
a flesh more human.
What indwelling permits intrusion,
yields an order, a stone appeasing
thirst? O find some space
and name it, as if those eyes
declare ourselves invent
the wilderness.

26

Dearest Joseph, last evening
when the stars set out against
the sky, the world was quiet.
Dreamed I the barbarous use
had ceased & a great Judge
bid sowre choice was through
that kept our souls so far apart;
& in your arms repined I where
all divisions die, as we lie, God-soaked.

But it shook the world so strong, so full,
calling us & daylight to the dead, the only
sleep was lasting, the only joy was haply,
& damnation rumbled to His cry.

27

And your cracked arc I, now drew you nigh,
remembering golden forms of other dreams,
while names were penned across the sky:
those shown grace to no avail & masks
in truth soon dropt, to show thy tattered face.

28

*Hearing that my son was come unto this place,
I went to see him...He, once borne withouten
pain, lies flat, prays, in divers bed of grisly
weed from heathen's black annoy.
How lie you so? I pray God he may remember...*

Unthriftyhed ⁽¹³⁾ at this place, I am weary;
my heart, wish-soaked, hopes well to be quit,
gotten from this gate.

But instead, unsuccored on we go
five miles up the river. *Here we abode
for awhile.* My desires ill-faste;
bemoaning us, mother and son, to one
another. He, unsatisfied, lamenting.
His mournful looks deplored; inclines

his thought homeward; mourns
his father's grief. *I wonder at his speech.*
Mindless of others' woe, kept fast
among their friends.

29

John Gilbert, ⁽¹⁴⁾ sick with flux.
Turned out sorely into fierce outdoor.
Nighting fast. With him, Indian papoose
(*whose parents had been killed.*) Where
he lies, chooseth he unfrenzied ground,
quivering, wrapped round like dog
to pup, groans he ghastly. Stand,
lest you lie there, die, unlast sore Plan.

Shortly, I unto the wigwam, lurking in.
They began to rant. Fear the loss of powder
apayd, ⁽¹⁵⁾ me, the moveable, ultimate stock.
So, inside, now, to die of hunger.
Then the Lord remembered me,
whose mercies are great.

How starvation colours faith. I am uncouched
inside; my needle lifull ⁽¹⁶⁾ gainsay approvance.

30

A wearisome day, though revived, diminished again.
Along the way my heart howls like beast's song;
feet stumble some naked body lying dead;
an Englishman, knowing not who it was.

I see the snatches of promise; yet boiling corn
and beans, me no taste thereof. Another wigwam
I smell boiling meat; no taste thereof, nay,
my own self filches slobbered horse's foot, and savory, ⁽¹⁷⁾
from a toothless English babe.
The things my soul refused to touch, are as
my sorrowful meat. ⁽¹⁸⁾ My abominations
are pleasure, so disgraced.

31

Thus, the Lord carried me along from one
time to another... For a small moment ⁽¹⁹⁾
He forsaketh me, but with great mercies
regather. Then my son, bested by lice.
Hungry. I am press't for succor.
He, forewearied, tarries. Then beaten,
sold in anger. I fear in God's good time.
My notions are middling. Unworthy
this sacred ground. Dreadfull. Where

all our woes do grow. A black fowle
flutters above my head. Wings
wicked crashes flight into my breast.
But he, appeased from danger, runs
to me. His new master, from God.
Stranged, disordered. I reel from You.
Miscalled and dropt I back to joy. God
from evil. (Joseph...Sarah...*My straits
are sufferable.*)

32

To Wachuset, ⁽²⁰⁾ three days, & I
in covert of swamp, spent,
thither in the mud, so webbed,
unhold.

Under the stuttering branches,
am dizzy, wandering. God is
that which brims these pits
with pure water, & the claps
& cries which dries them out.

Phillip, man of secret doors,
revisits. O but my homing spirit
flies. Is glared at by heathen.
Destiny's large shoe on spine:
I am mad to have me gone.
Overreached. But soon from slave
to mistress pluckt. ⁽²¹⁾
In a final toting up, I know
our grooves, delusive,
are rooted in despair.
Can the worm that cuts the stem
know agony below?

But—*glad I was to see him.*
He to me stalls, flashes mirror.
Exact and shining. Consumed
truth, the eye of God, perhaps:
wretched image bearing toward me,
& I am frightened, shaped so like
my face, but stranger, and wild.
Soil and brambled hair. Unholy
gaper, stunned. He fetches water.
Bids me wash, his squaw to give
me food. *I...wonderfully revived
with this favor. He made them also
to be pitied, of all those
that carried them captives.* ⁽²²⁾

33

Quanopin's squaws. ⁽²³⁾

Wettimore, with whom I live & serve,
severe, proud dame. Every day
bestowed in dress as neat as gentry.
Hair powder'd, face painted.
Reading my Bible, I am punisht for it.

The second with two papooses.
Am I thus stirred by babe cries?
I am drawn in. Lulled by milksmelles,
memory.

The third, old squaw. Lodged I there,
rug endowed, upon a mat of kindness.
My hope rises that in God's due time
comes end to sorrow'd hour.
My needles buying time. Hooking
thread to thread. Food-drunk. Victuals
of the dark. I must needs swallow all.

34

On a Sabbath day, brood I on freedom;
an hour high at noon, they bid me sign.
On the horizon, Englishmen. Like light-
ness ripening against the dark. The door
unstopped. My own foot in.

Directly, guns go off apace.
I manifest great trouble, but nay,
they show what they could do;
would I fain to sit their pleasure.

Now that: fears and troubles; for three
nights restless. *God many times leaving
us most in...dark when deliverance
is nearest.*

35

The passages of Providence:
*God seem[s] to leave His People
to themselves and order all things
for his holy ends.*

36

Twenty pounds, so redeemed,
cease You my testing. Conspicuous,
in after hell. Boston. This is the city
where I may mend. Joseph.
Wearied. Me, recruited with food

and raiment. Thoughts of our children
make dull our touch.

Sore trial and secretest hopes.
Those alive lay heavier than those dead.

37

Heaven unshifted. Impassive.
My son, ill-served. Mary lays
unmothered head somewhere among
the stones, and somewhere they both
have breath. Twice descend I straight
to Hell now, by God's bitter
reckoning repaid.

38

Blest our latitude. *Now we were
between them, the one on the east
and the other on the west.*
They have come home.
A covenant kept.
The voice of demon diminished.
Exiles now undispossessed. Joseph,
our two worlds when we first loved.

39

Home, remembrance becomes
a fever. Know I of spectres that visit
the heart's estate; love exiled, lamenting
within the breast.

Day by day despair, that fragile voice
deplinishes. Custom, constraint repairs.
I am a sparrow that feeds my young
& feathers my nest with scraps of joy,
blows in the air, single afraid,
sometimes of place.

God ties the invisible thread
even as it stretches. Nay,
the wilderness no sign,
immense, complex, this ritual-journey
is the season unmapped,
which mocks my highest craft
with boundless, stranged scheme.

40

The worm's tomb is shut;
a single afterglow, &

full well know I darkness
may wear a flesh and blood.

41

Everything within ourselves create
the wilderness of wants deploy,
until such grace is strained
around & back onto ourselves
to end where we began.

Outward signs? a shadow,
a blast, a bubble & things
of no continuance.

I, being bled to white,
my mind quenched down
to last spark, hold.
Every day thenceforth:
preserved body never more reprieved.
Now in the bright September air,
what epiphany of flight, what
staved dying walks among the world.

Epilogue

Mary. For you alone. Your pulse
under my finger and I am not
certain if you will stay.

In my noisy, narrow space,
lie gently. Demure. I am
saying something about
galaxies and stones.

Mary. When you are with me
the world keeps its voices low.

Finis

Notes

1. Jael. Jael, the wife of Heber, the Kemite, tricked the enemy Sisera by feeding him, seducing him, then murdering him, thus becoming a heroine. Judges, chapter 4, and retold in chapter 5.
2. Somerset. Mary Rowlandson, born in Somerset, England, moved to Salem during her childhood, and later to Lancaster. She was the daughter of one of the founders of Lancaster.
3. deputy. Deputy husbands were wives who were able to take on certain responsibilities. For a thorough discussion of the role, see Ulrich's treatment of the topic in *Good Wives*...
4. "I am covered by confusion." Jeremiah chapter 3, verse 25.
5. "The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel." Proverbs chapter 2, verse 10.
6. timelessness. The Puritan mind saw the visible, temporal world as a medium to reach the timelessness of God.
7. heathens and whites. An enigma frequently confronted by the Puritan was that of the strange Providence of God in preserving the "heathen."
8. such wonder in mooring. The crossing of the river was highly symbolic to Rowlandson. The danger and travail itself represented deep humiliation, a powerlessness before God. Her foot reaching land dry represented the grace and favor of God.
9. dualistic. Rowlandson demonstrated that she believed in a dualistic world of matter and spirit.
10. my master. Quanopin, her second master.
11. ceremony. Rowlandson was one of the few whites who witnessed the Indian's pre-war ritual. Experts consider her thorough description invaluable.
12. King Phillip. Phillip, or Metacom was the leader of the entire rebellion, and the brother-in-law of Rowlandson's master, Quanopin. The Indians sometimes adopted English names they admired.
13. unthriftighed. heedlessness
14. John Gilbert. Gilbert was a captive seventeen-year-old English boy.
15. appayd. reward
16. litfull. lifegiving
17. horse's foot. According *The Narrative*..., Rowlandson took a piece of boiled horse's foot from a child who was unable to bite it. She mentions this from a practical point of view, as though she had no compunction about doing so. Her point was mainly that the food was tasty, and fortunate.
18. "The things that my soul refused to touch, are as my sorrowful meat." Job chapter 6, verse 7.
19. "For a small moment..." Isaiah, chapter two, verse 7.
20. Wachuset. Rowlandson was at the same place as the third remove.
21. slave to mistress. Rowlandson's fall from mistress to slave was a symbolic point to her, paralleling as it did the Puritan belief that the Christian must endure humiliation.
22. "He made them also..." Psalms, chapter 6, vers3 46.
23. Quanopin's squaws. Rowlandson's master had three squaws. One of them, Wettimore, haughty and mercenary, feared losing Rowlandson to an older squaw's kindness, and thus the ransom, which was becoming important to the Indians at this point.

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Biography

Dorie LaRue is the author of two novels, three chapbooks of poetry, a full-length collection of poetry, and a forthcoming full-length collection of poems. She has attended Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley, Indiana University's Conference of Writers, and Martha's Vineyard Summer Writing Conference. Her fiction, poetry, articles, and book reviews have appeared in a variety of journals, such as The American Poetry Review, The Southern Review, and The Maryland Review. She teaches writing at LSUS.

