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ABSTRACT

While 17th and 18th century captivity narratives depict captivity in the content they describe, several narratives exhibit a kind of narrative captivity as well. In both Mary Rowlandson's *The sovereignty and goodness of God* and Robert Adam's *The narrative of Robert Adams* the captive's ability to narrate their story is disrupted by the interests of those sponsoring the narrative - leading to dual and dueling voices throughout the text. This essay is an examination of the relationship between these conflicting voices. I argue that in both cases within the text, the sponsor's interests take precedent over the experience of the captive, evidencing a complex power relationship grounded on various social, political and economic factors. Through an analysis of the relationship between these conflicting voices, I attempt to explicate the underlying ideologies that that make such a conflict possible. Finally, by comparing the shift in these ideologies across the two texts, I argue there is a corresponding shift in geo-economic policy that demonstrates an increasingly imperialistic disposition.

http://depts.washington.edu/chid/intersections_Summer_2010/Brandon_Weaver_The_Dual_and_Dueling_Narrative_Voices.pdf

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“As he wounded me with one hand, so he healed me with the other”

The Dual and Dueling Narrative Voices in *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* and *The Narrative of Robert Adams*

By Brandon Weaver
University of Washington, Seattle

The genre of the captivity narrative, through the 17th and 18th centuries, covered an expansive geo-cultural area and throughout that time, developed several interesting conventions. One of the most intriguing of these conventions is the tendency of many narratives to exhibit multiple voices within a single work. While the specific significance of this multiplicity varies from text to text, the dual (and dueling) voices are consistently indicative of a desire to propagate “the captives’ histories for didactic purposes of their own.”¹ Though written nearly 150 years apart, this dual presence of authorship is evident in both Mary Rowlandson’s *The sovereignty and goodness of God* and Robert Adam’s *The narrative of Robert Adams*.² Both narratives were sponsored by a dominant group who then manipulated the text to serve their own interests. Ultimately, the shift in the aim of these interests signifies a shift in geo-political policy, consistently promoting increasingly imperialistic ideologies.

¹ Tara Fitzpatrick. “The Figure of Captivity: The Cultural Work of the Puritan Captivity Narrative,” *American Literary History* 4, no.1 (1991): 2.

² Mary Rowlandson, “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God,” in Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, *Puritans among the Indians: accounts of captivity and redemption, 1676-1724*, eds. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, John Harvard library (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1981), 31-78; Robert Adams, “The Narrative of Robert Adams,” in *White slaves, African masters: an anthology of American barbary captivity narratives*, ed. Paul Michel Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 205-246.

While it is unclear exactly how much authorial control Mary Rowlandson had over her narrative, it is clear that there are two main voices. The dominant voice, potentially penned by the Mathers who sponsored the narratives' publication, represented the Puritan community, utilizing scripture and giving the events of the narrative meaning in relationship to the word and will of God. The second voice is that Rowlandson herself and represents a profound "emphasis on personal agency," in both physical needs and "in the workings of salvation."³ The conflict of narrative's subtext is carefully, though not entirely subtly, situated on the fault line between these two voices, each one vying for a claim on the reader's interpretation.

Since the text was written for an entirely Puritan audience, it is not surprising that the scriptural voice would have a dominant presence in the narrative. In fact, the scripture in *The sovereignty and goodness of God* is nearly ubiquitous, highlighting the events of the narrative through reflection and instruction. Outside of the narrative, for the Puritan reader, the scripture held three functions. First, through sheer number, the scripture demonstrates that the hand of God is in everything. As Rowlandson crosses a river, she quotes, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee."⁴ Later she generalizes this sentiment, citing "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" demonstrating that God is ultimately in control, even of evil, and therefore scripture can be applied at any moment.⁵ It is important for the scriptural voice to reinforce this point, as one of the explicit purposes of the narrative as a whole is to explicate Rowlandson's captivity in terms of God's Will.

Secondly, the scripture demonstrates the healing power of the Bible and to this end Rowlandson references many Psalms, which often have to do with suffering and are meant to uplift. Thirdly and most importantly, the scripture serves to legitimize the narrative as a rebuke by giving it God's authority rather than relying on that of human's. In this way, the narrative functions as a Jeremiad which "accused New England of backsliding from the high ideals and noble achievements of the founders, of God's evident or impending wrath, and of the need for immediate and thorough reformation."⁶ To this end, Rowlandson writes "I saw how in my walk with God, I had been a careless creature," citing

³ Ibid., 3.

⁴ Rowlandson, 43.

⁵ Ibid., 58.

⁶ Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark, "Cups of Common Calamity: Puritan Captivity Narratives as Literature and History," in *Puritans among the Indians: accounts of captivity and redemption, 1676-1724*, John

Image Source: Internet Archive



Mary Rowlandson being taken prisoner. From *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Removes, of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (Boston: Thomas and Fleet, 1791), 1.

the verse “Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight,” in order to draw a parallel between her plight and spiritual shortcoming, which by association, asserts her community’s spiritual shortcoming.⁷ Ultimately, the effect of all three of these functions is to demonstrate the benefit of immersing oneself in the awareness of God and thereby to warn the community of the dangers from straying from the ‘hedge’ both physically and spiritually. In this sense, the documentation of affliction was to meant to “call [the Mathers’] congregations and the entire community back to the founding covenant.”⁸ This covenant “depended on the entire company’s adherence to the community.”⁹ In this formulation, a single member’s error was cause for punishment of the entire colony. The scriptural voice of the narrative emphasizes this with the first sentence of ‘The First Remove,’ reading “now away *we* must go with those barbarous creatures.”¹⁰ Here, the ‘we’ of the sentence serves to include the Puritan reader in the sense of affliction and thereby promote and maintain the corporate covenant. Effectively, the to the Puritans, their community represented a sort of New-Israel, as God’s chosen people and underlying this

Harvard library, eds. Alden T. Vaughan and Edward W. Clark (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1981), 7.

⁷ Rowlandson, 56.

⁸ Fitzpatrick, 4.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Rowlandson, 35. Emphasis mine.

belief was the doctrine of corporate covenant, that “God... would protect and prosper His newly chosen people—if they remained true to His laws and steadfast in their faith.”¹¹ To this end, the Mathers would instruct those who left the ‘hedge’ of the “horrors they might encounter as punishment for their restlessness and inconsistency.”¹²

It is in this instruction that the duel of the voices is centered. While the most obvious ‘other’ in the narrative is the ‘heathen’ Native Americans, Fitzpatrick notes that Rowlandson “relied on two such ‘others’.”¹³ In opposition to the Mathers’ attempts to “enforce boundaries,” Rowlandson “came instead to explode them, to sanction the venture of the individual into the wilderness.”¹⁴ Ironically, the very detachment from the ‘hedge’ allowed her to be tested and reassure herself of her salvation, providing a level of experience of the ‘sovereignty and goodness of God’ that the community could not equal. Rowlandson’s depiction of the wilderness as a catalyst for individual redemption, then, embodied the heart of the narrative’s subversive implications.

It is probable that the Mathers were aware of this conflict as they attempted to address it, “at once decrying the sinfulness of the generation that had tempted God’s fury by straying from the ‘hedge’ of the covenanted community and then extolling the enlightenment accessible only to those whom God had chosen to try by fire in the wilderness.”¹⁵ The scriptural voice attempts to resolve this conflict as Rowlandson writes that, though she deserved worse punishment, “the Lord showed mercy to me and upheld me, as He wounded me with one hand, so He healed me with the other.”¹⁶ The Mathers, however, never moved any further than this vague ambivalence and any sense of resolution fades alongside Rowlandson’s sensational acts of individualism.

Rowlandson’s very survival depended in large part, on her ability to make clothes, which not only made her worth keeping to the natives, but also allowed her to barter for food. This coupled with other sensational individual acts like stealing food from a child to avoid starvation, represented a radical departure from the communal structure of the Puritan congregation. Furthermore, regardless of the degree, the fact that Rowlandson is the first person narrator the

¹¹ Vaughan and Clark, 8.

¹² Fitzpatrick, 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶ Rowlandson, 38.

story challenges the “traditionally masculine authority and authorship central to Puritan sexual order.”¹⁷ Rowlandson’s womanhood was a threat to both the gendered hierarchy of the Puritan society and the gendered rhetoric of a ‘virgin’ forest; “the atomizing tendencies of the women’s narratives had challenged the theological unity of the community.”¹⁸ In danger of losing control as the rudder of Puritan theology, Cotton Mather responded to these threats by revising “the national covenant so as to de-emphasize the collective meaning of personal affliction and to stress instead its importance in the individual drama of redemption or in the national drama of self preservation.”¹⁹

Thus, the dual voices of Mathers and Rowlandson represent a conflict of dueling soteriological philosophies. On one hand, the Mathers’ dominant and explicit ideology of corporate covenant, as symbolized by the ‘hedge’ of the church, was challenged on the other hand, by a subversive and implicit ideology of individual, unmediated salvation found in the wilderness. In order to maintain control of the Puritan community, the Mathers reconfigured the role of the wilderness and expanded the scope of the dominant voice in the narratives, ultimately prefiguring the trend of national discourse about international conflict that pervaded future captivity narratives.

This international discourse is evidenced by the fact that “at the time of the war for independence,” obviously a time of international conflict, “colonists increasingly viewed themselves as captives to a tyrannical king...and Indian captivity narratives...enjoyed a renewed readership.”²⁰ Alongside this new reading of the narrative, the Barbary captivity displayed international tension and “invoked public subscriptions for ransom funds, forced the government to pay humiliating tributes in cash and military arms to African rulers...and brought about the first postrevolutionary [U.S.] war.”²¹ In this sense, they were truly international accounts and *The narrative of Robert Adams* is no exception. While within the plot of the narrative Adams was neither “held hostage by a nation seeking tribute,” nor concerned with national profit himself, the national interest disseminated from the sponsors of the narrative, the London

¹⁷ Fitzpatrick, 5.

¹⁸ Ibid., 19.

¹⁹ Ibid., 18.

²⁰ Paul Michel Baepler, “Introduction,” in *White slaves, African masters: an anthology of American barbary captivity narratives*, ed. Paul Michel Baepler (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 24.

²¹ Ibid., 2.

based African Company²² who wished to gather information about the fabled city of wealth, ‘Tombuctoo,’ to which Adams had traveled.²³

Image Source: Google Books



“Adams is discovered in the Tent with Isha,” from Charles Ellms, *Robinson Crusoe's own book; or, The voice of adventure, from the civilized man cut off from his fellows, by force, accident, or inclination, and from the wanderer in strange seas and lands* (Boston: J.V. Pierce, 1843), 425.

It is to this economic end that narrative is directed, rather than spiritual, as the complete absence of scripture highlights the largest difference between the later Barbary narrative and the earlier captivity narratives. Although Adams refuses to renounce his religion for that of the ‘Mahometan’, unlike the other ‘white’ captives, Williams and Davidson, this decision is more akin to individualism and aversion to the ‘other’ rather than devout faith.²⁴ Joseph Dupuis, the author of footnotes of the narrative, admits that he “had difficulty at first believing [Adams] a Christian.”²⁵ In fact, Adams hardly practices his religion, described as “a Christian, who never prayed,” and much more than that, one who had affairs

²² Also called the African Association. See Baepler, 20.

²³ *Ibid.*, 20

²⁴ Adams, 241.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 211, *fn.*

with married women as the “narrative strongly implies that he seduced his master’s wife.”²⁶ Instead of relying on scripture as a justification for the text, “the message of this Barbary captivity story is subsumed by the recorder’s devotion not to Adams’ personal experience as a captive but to the recorder’s concern for accurate information about Timbuktu.”²⁷ In this way, without a scriptural backbone driving the dominant voice of the text, Robert Adams’ narrative becomes a piece of imperial propaganda promoting the search, and presumably occupation, of African countries for wealth.

Though Adams’ narrative was the only Barbary captivity narrated by an African-American, this is only barely true, as the story is heavily mediated and told in the third person through a white member of the African Company. It is in this narrative conquest that the dual and dueling voices become apparent. Baepler summarizes the conflict of the two narrative implications, writing, “while eventually presented as the ostensible memoir of an American in Africa, the narrative actually stages a larger drama about racial struggle.”²⁸ In this sense, replacing the scriptural dominant voice is an imperial dominant voice with the events of Adams’ actual captivity assuming the role of the subversive implicit narrative. The subversive content is held in the fact that Adams’ narrative ultimately confounds any assumption about race. His mother was ‘mulatto,’ so Adams’ skin was certainly darker than most Americans, and he was indeed labeled African-American and yet when Joseph Dupuis first saw Adams he noted “the appearance, features and dress of this man upon his arrival at Mogadore, so perfectly resembled those of an Arab.”²⁹ Furthermore, when the people of Timbuktu take Adams captive, he notes that he “could not hear that any white man *but themselves* had ever been seen in the place.”³⁰

In the mid-nineteenth century, while the United States was in a bitter debate about the question of black slavery, “white intellectuals also battled over the concept of ‘race’ as a significant category.”³¹ Adams’ narrative then, in which he is at once represented as Black, White and Arab, presented a problematic situation for those who held that “race was a biological determinant,” and instead strongly suggests that race is “a rhetorical ordering principle imposed on people to make sense on the economic and political hierarchies.”³² It is out of an

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 237. See also Baepler, 17.

²⁷ Baepler, 21.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁹ Adams, 213, 211.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 229. Emphasis mine.

³¹ Baepler, 26.

³² *Ibid.*

ideology derived from these hierarchies that the African Company's economic desires, as many imperial projects, were instigated. The problem is that the representation of the Africans as barbarous assumes that they are biologically inferior to the English. To admit, as Adams' shifting racial identity seems to suggest, that race is an imposed category is to admit that England is the imposer, destroying the possibility for their imperial pursuits to be in any way just.

In order to avoid this conflict, the imperial narrative subjects Adams' to a sort of narrative captivity in order to disregard the contradictions implicit in England's ideology. Commonly, in order to justify imperial acts, the assailing nation will depict the opposite people as subhuman or barbarous. For this reason, "Adams' editor writes the account in the third person" so that "his thoughts and feelings are absent" thereby dehumanizing him and disallowing the typical narrative "plea for empathetic readerly response."³³ His dehumanization takes on racial connotations in light of the fact that, though Adams notes that he "never saw the Negroes find any gold," and that the city was not the glistening capital of riches as was commonly held, this fact was not accepted until a white explorer confirmed it years later.³⁴

Once he no longer held authorial status, "Adams' account was carefully sandwiched between the editor's justificatory preface and an overwhelming sheaf of endnotes" because "white authentication was more important than black story telling, so that the 'black message was sealed within a white envelope'."³⁵ Effectively captured, the preface justifies the narrative by appealing to the "hope that, the man [Adams] might be rendered useful to the government in the exploratory expedition then on its way to Africa."³⁶ Though England had already outlawed *de facto* slavery, there is a no apparent aversion to use Adams for its own profit. Despite the fact that Adams desperately wanted to return to America from England, as the two were about to go to war, the African Company "recommended [the editor] to omit no practicable means of securing the residence of Adams" in England.³⁷ The term "practicable" here is hazy at best as it assumes a certain morality, which implodes through the immorality of the act of narration. According to Edward Said, "the power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to the culture of

³³ Ibid., 21.

³⁴ Adams, 229. See also Baepler, 20.

³⁵ Baepler, 20.

³⁶ Adams, 208.

³⁷ Ibid.

imperialism.”³⁸ Thus, by subjugating Adams’ to narrative slavery, blocking the narrative of race as a construction as opposed to biological inferiority from forming or emerging, England instigated and reinforced their imperial assumption of dominance through narrative.

It to this end, the movement toward the construction of imperial justifications that the captivity narratives progressed. Interestingly, the dual voices of the narratives document, not only a physical captivity, but also a socio-political or socio-cultural captivity as well. In this sense, the narratives become vessels of the ideologies of their time, enacting rigorous and profound, though subtle, cultural work on the society in which it was disseminated and thereby reinforcing the dominant ideology. Although Rowlandson initially attempted to subvert the dueling master/slave duality implicit in the narrative by praising an individualism set apart from the constraints of the dominant ideology, her narrative ultimately failed to dissemble the gender based power hierarchy. Instead, the captivity narrative alternately challenged and reinforced the dominant ideologies, leading to the explicitly imperial narrative of Robert Adams, causing socio-political actors to consistently expand their sphere of influence in order to maintain power, thereby leading toward a culture of imperialism.

Brandon Weaver is a senior at the University of Washington in the English and Comparative History of Ideas departments. He broadly interested in the social function of narrative and is currently working on his undergraduate thesis concerning literature of the Roma. He was recently awarded the Eilert Anderson Scholarship by the English Department.

³⁸ Baepler, 32.