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ENG 334

8 November 2013

Analysis #1

The Power of Will in Mary Rowlandson’s “Captivity and Restoration”

In Mary Rowlandson’s “A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson,” she depicts the strange, cruel, and merciful experiences that are put upon her as she is forced to live among the Native Americans in the late 17th century. She lived in a settlement town called Lancaster in Massachusetts, which was attacked on the first of February, 1675. She was taken captive with her three children, the youngest of which was able to stay with her until she (the child) died a few weeks in to the captivity. Through the weary journeying, cruel treatment, and lack of food and comfort, Mary somehow found the power to keep going—the power of a will that withstood, with the help of God, even the darkest moments of her imprisonment.

Mary has a strong sense of will even at the very beginning of her time with the Native Americans. On the second Remove, she states “It is not my tongue, or pen can express the sorrows of my heart, and bitterness of my spirit,” she’s been away from her loved ones and all of civilization for days, and is about to be taken out of sight of her home and far away, farther than she even knows. Even when she seems to be at her lowest here, she recalls “But God was with me, in a wonderful manner, carrying me along, and bearing up my Spirit, that it did not quite fail” (101).

Nine days into her captivity, Mary is faced with one of the greatest afflictions of all: the loss of a child to an early death. Her youngest child, little six year old Sarah, was wounded at the onset of their capture and never recovered. Her injuries soon led to her death. Mary recalls that while before she could not bear to be in the same room as a deceased person, she now “could lye down by [her] dead Babe” and did not resort to self-harm or suicide by strength of will to live on to find her other children and return home to her husband (103).

Another instance where Mary exhibits strength of will is when she reveals the little cake she had in her pocket, a cake that was given to her daughter by a Native American woman when she was dying. She describes the cake as “mouldy,” “dry and hard,” and crumbed into pieces like “little flints.” The crumbs last her a long time, leading her to thank God when she says “[…] what a blessing the Lord gave to me such mean food” (120). Her will is exposed in her humility in her situation. That she can thank God for a meager, and rather disgusting, source of sustenance proves that she places certain aspects of life above her own comfort, and is able to transcend the discomfort to live another day.

Finally, during the sixteenth Remove, Mary and the company of Native Americans she’s traveling with are forced to cross the *Baquaug* River, Mary begins to feel that she has reached the end of her life, that there isn’t any possible way that she can go any farther. It is here that she learns she is being offered for ransom and her husband has accepted. She writes “My heart was so heavy before that I could scarce speak, or go in the path; and yet now so light, that I could run” and knows that her temerity to live has paid off. She can go home.

When I had no choice but to make the trip to Ireland by myself, I was more afraid than I’ve ever been in my life. I was alone in a foreign country with no one to help me but myself. Like Mary, I forced myself to adapt. I learned how the money worked, figured out the geography of Ireland, and made my way to the group.