

Synopsis

Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, first published in 1682, is an English Puritan woman's account of her captivity among Native Americans during Metacom's War (1675-76) in southeastern New England. In this volume, 17 related documents support Rowlandson's text, which is reprinted from the earliest surviving edition of the narrative.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed," by Mary Rowlandson, is a compelling piece of colonial American literature. First published in 1682, this autobiographical text represents a genre of literature known as the "captivity narrative": a first-person account of a white settler who was held as a hostage or prisoner by Native Americans. In Rowlandson's case, she was taken captive during Metacom's War (also known as King Philip's War), which took place in 1675-1676. The edition of Rowlandson's book edited by Neal Salisbury is excellent. This edition contains Rowlandson's text, together with a wealth of other materials: a thorough introduction, many maps, a chronology, a bibliography, and other historic documents from Rowlandson's era. The many illustrations include photographs of the title pages of earlier editions. Rowlandson's captivity narrative is a significant milestone in American literature; the introduction to the Salisbury edition notes that the text "has been almost continually in print since 1770." Since the text itself is relatively short, it has appeared in anthologies (see, for example, "The Harper Single Volume American Literature," third edition). But the many "extras" in the Salisbury

edition definitely make it a book worth buying, even if you have an anthology already containing the Rowlandson text. Rowlandson's memoir itself is not great literature stylistically. But it is a fascinating text with some really striking passages. Rowlandson's extreme evangelical Puritanism will likely alienate or bewilder some modern readers, but her religious attitude should be read in historic and cultural context.

An important piece of Early American literature, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God* is a true, first-person narrative account of a 17th century Puritan woman whose village was attacked by Indians in 1676. Mary Rowlandson's family was massacred, and she and three of her children were taken captive. Of the 37 in her household, 24 were captured and 12 killed, with only one escaping. Her two older children, ages 10 and 12, were separated from Mary and her six-year-old child, who died nine days later. The Introduction in this publication, written by Neil Salisbury, is very helpful in giving the background and setting of this incident. Salisbury describes the relationship between the local native Indians and the English colonists of Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay and Connecticut which existed for 30-40 years. He also explains the issues and events which contributed to the building tension and eventual conflicts that took place. The opening scene is very dramatic and graphic -- barbaric, chaotic, and hellish. Throughout the account various epithets are used to describe the Indians: hell-hounds, ravenous beasts, barbarous creatures, murderous wretches, merciless heathen, and wolves. Some people may object to this as offensive and even racist, but I believe it is ignorant of readers to say this is a racist account. The writer speaks with emotion while describing her personal feelings and actual experiences as a witness of the horrific scene that takes place before her eyes. She then spends about three months with the Indians before being returned, during which time she is in genuine fear for her life and doing what she can to survive.

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