

## THE CAPTIVE

### A Synopsis

*The Captive* presents the story of Weetamoe, a doomed Native American Queen in 17<sup>th</sup> century New England, who led her Pocasset braves (the ones who survived the scourge of European diseases) in battle against the invading English and their Native Allies during King Philip's War (1675-76). The colonial army was organized under the auspices of the New England Confederation, a body formed to combat Indians that evolved into an enduring institution, eventually challenging their overlord, the British Crown, a hundred years later in the American Revolution.

King Philip's War was the last concerted effort of coastal northeast Woodland Nations to expel the English, in particular the Puritans, and they nearly succeeded. This singular event ignited a firestorm that swept over the entire North American Continent, annihilating ancient cultures, entire eco systems, and the animals they supported. For eleven weeks and five days in early 1676, when a Confederation victory was not assured, Mary Rowlandson, a Puritan Preacher's wife, was Weetamoe's slave. This true encounter has been brought to life on stage in context with the events of their time. The metaphorical story of Annie and Joshua gives voice to the dispossessed. Musical instruments, period songs, and dialogue lifted from historic journals all combine with the thrill of spectacle into a dramatic play in two acts: *The Captive*.

For background links, please go here: <http://www.conradreeder.com/TheCaptive.htm>

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## Main Characters' Descriptions

**Weetamoe** (abt. 1644 -1676) is a historical Native American Queen or Sachemsqua of the Pocasset, who we mostly know about from the descriptions of her by her enemy, Mary Rowlandson. She was much loved by her people, based on the grief displayed at her death, as reported by Increase Mather, “when it [her head] was set upon a pole in Taunton, the Indians who were prisoners there, knew it presently, and made a most horrible and diabolical Lamentation, crying out that it was their Queens [sic] head” (Strong 94). Tellingly, her name translates “sweetheart.”

**Mary Rowlandson** (1637-1711) is a Puritan minister's wife captured by local Natives during a raid on Lancaster (10 Feb 1676), who wrote one of the era's best-sellers about her ordeal as a slave to Weetamoe and Quinapin, most likely edited by Increase Mather (Strong 104). Her book titled, *The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (1682) was the seminal book for the plethora of propagandized captivity books that followed, which the clergy subsequently used to demonized the Native People. She speaks as she wrote it in her book.



**Governor** is typical of the combatant Puritan leaders, in particular:

1. John Winthrop, the Younger (1606-76) Governor of Connecticut (1659-1676). Winthrop Senior coined the phrase, “City Upon a Hill” in a sermon reiterating the Pilgrims’ mission to create a holy community in the New World. Winthrop died in Boston, where he had gone to attend a meeting of the commissioners of the New England Confederation.
2. Josiah Winslow (1628-80) was the son of Mayflower pilgrim John Winslow, “I shall never see thee again, Winsnow” [sic] (Massasoit). Governor of Plymouth Colony (1673-80). Some evidence points to Weetamoe’s husband, Wamsutta (Alexander 1634-62), being poisoned at Winslow’s house after he was forcibly brought in by Winslow for questioning (Schultz 23), an event that festered and foamed, eventually leading to war.
3. Bastards were born to so-called Puritan leaders. Although John Lyford, Plymouth’s Minister circa 1624, was later banished, mostly for his lack of Puritan ethic or allegiance, he was specifically found guilty of fathering a

bastard. William Bradford wrote that Lyford's wife "could keep no maid-servant but he would be meddling with them, and sometimes she had taken him in the act" (Bradford 106). Who knows how many children Lyford fathered or who with?

Lyford's known bastard was a white child, but a woman of color in 17<sup>th</sup> century New England would have had no sympathy from anyone, and no one to hear her complaint, as long as the child was cared for, and if Puritan society was not bothered with any care-taking responsibilities, there would have been no record. A famous 17<sup>th</sup> century Broadside entitled, "The Summons to New England," attacked perceived licentiousness of Puritans. "And keep a handmaid to, if need,/ To multiply, increase, and breed" (Godbeer 20). Where's there's smoke, there's fire.

**Reverend** is a composite of Puritan ministers, in particular, Increase Mather (1639-1723) the Puritan Minister, who wrote, *The History of the War With the Indians in New England* (1676) and father to Cotton Mather (Salem Witch Trials). He is filled with the Spirit of the Lord and a vocal promoter of the war—leading the offence for Puritan "scorch and burn" tactics.

**Captain** is a composite based on the exploits of Puritan military leaders during King Philip's War, in particular, Captain Benjamin Church (1639-1718), the leader of the Rangers, who mimicked the Natives "skulking" way of warfare. This character represents the first archetypal character that became the American frontiersman who embraced the wilderness as "the intermediary between civilization and savagery" (Philbrick 357). Church was the principal aide to Governor Josiah Winslow, and at times (unlike other leaders, such as Captain Moseley: Schultz 40) displayed acts of kindness towards the Natives (Philbrick 323).

**Annie** speaks for the African slaves of Puritan New England, who historically have had no voice. Captured Native Americans, men, women, and children, were sold in Spain and some of those funds were used to buy Africans to work in New England, starting in the 1630s. The "danger of keeping revengeful warriors in the colony far outweighed the value of their labor" (McManus 6). Estimates are that at least 200 slaves were in the area in 1676. <<http://www.slavenorth.com/massachusetts.htm>>

1. "Samuel Maverick, apparently New England's first slaveholder, arrived in Massachusetts in 1624 and, according to [John Gorham] Palfrey, owned two Negroes before John Winthrop, who later became governor of the colony, arrived in 1630" (Greene 16).
2. In 1645, Emanuel Downing, brother-in-law of John Winthrop, wrote to him longing for a "juste warre" with the Pequots, so the colonists might capture enough Indian men, women, and children to exchange in Barbados for black slaves, because the colony would never thrive "untill we gett ... a stock of slaves sufficient to doe all our business" (Greene 62).

3. An observer to New England in 1687 wrote that there was “not a house in Boston” that “has not one or two” slaves (Berlin 58).
4. In 1641, a Negro maid of Israel Stoughton joined the Dorchester Church (Vaughan 271). Who is to say this woman or another like her didn’t give birth to a child fathered by a white man? To accept in the common record and even romanticize that Pocahontas (of the same era) went freely to the English, when in fact she was already married and kidnapped (Strong 47), is historical rape. When a conjecture that a slave girl may have had sexual relations with the Puritan master of the house twenty years before King Philip’s War may be called artistic license, since the conjecture can’t be proven to be false either. Human nature is what it is—sexually charged.
5. There is no evidence that Winthrop owned slaves, but “that is not conclusive. He did use Indian slaves” and his son, Deane, “used African-American slaves on his farm” (Bremer 314).

**Joshua** is a composite of the “Praying Indians” who were converted in large numbers by Reverend Eliot, and were helpful (and crucial) in helping the English fight Philip and Weetamoe, at least the Praying Indians not exiled to Deer Island (prison) to starve. Internecine tribal warfare can be thoughtfully examined through the sympathetic eyes of Joshua, a man trying to survive. He may be a “Praying Indian,” but he is first, a Native American, and proud of it.

**Quinapin** (1645-1676) is Weetamoe’s third husband and a leader in the Narragansett tribe. A Native American male in his prime, he is caught up in a war defending his way of life.

**Deer Heart** is the Spider Woman of the tribe, the Storyteller, the oral historian of Native Culture. She is the heart and soul of her people—the keeper of the sacred fire.

**Powah** is the Shaman, the spiritual leader of the tribe, and the healer in charge of physical health. Powah is an androgynous character, male or female.

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