

In The Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson (1682), Mary Rowlandson describes the Indian attack in 1676 on Lancaster, a small settlement in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and her subsequent travels in the company of a large group including her Indian master, Quanopin, and his wife, Weetamoo. After the English captured and killed Canonchet, the king of the Narragansets, the confederation of tribes fighting in King Philip's War began to fall apart. Mary Rowlandson was eventually released to her husband, through the help of Indians who had converted to Christianity. The following poem and "A Sweeping Rain" are excerpted from a thirty-poem sequence.

Hunger Moon

While the Sagamores watch the embers cool, the Moon
swallows the filmy sustenance of souls on the move.

Soon enough, Canonchet's spirit will seep into the sky
and all the tribes will lose their eye and wind.

Bargains will be struck through the work of Praying Indians.
Mary Rowlandson will be priced at 20 pounds, plus whiskey.

For now, starvation is all that they see and hear.
Even the Moon is an open mouth, a gold cry for grain.

Who can fault the warriors, who shot their stallion
and left him in the field for the women to boil?

Who can blame Weetamoo, who stole the last ear of corn?
And what of Mary, who now eats bark?

Tonight they are down to sticks and snow,
the salt of their own fingers and tears.

If the Praying Indians came right now, they would
find their heathen kin ready to sing a hymn with Mary

if that would calm this Moon that will neither
warm them nor leave them to starve alone.

—Hilary Holladay