Tales Of Two Colonial Women Essay, Research Paper

Exceptional and strong women of their time period, Mary Rowlandson and Sarah Kemble Knight have many similarities and differences. Religion and life style are both strongly reflected in their writings, and at the same time cause them to have distinctly different reactions to a variety of situations. Although Rowlandson and Knight encounter different experiences, they show remarkable characteristics that are essential in transcending their difficulties.

Mary Rowlandson was a devout person and an exceptional woman of her time period. She was born in 1636 and died in 1678. On a February morning, an Indian raiding party carried her and her three children away. She wrote a book describing her captivity, and it became one of the most widely read books of the seventeenth century. The writings have both spiritual and physical significance. Her style of factual captivity narrative became one of the most imitated during her time, and remained popular for close to 200 years. Mary Rowlandson made insightful observations into the lifestyle of the Puritans, which in turn causes her to be an exceptional woman of her time.

In contrast, Sarah Kemble Knight was a secular woman; consequently, she still appeals to people today. She was born in 1669 and died in 1727. During her husband’s time abroad, Knight ran a boarding house, taught school, and assisted with some legal matters, proving herself an independent and self-reliant woman. In the fall of 1704 she set out on a journey to settle a family estate in New York. In that era, travel for a woman was rare because of the unsafe and uncomfortable conditions. She wrote a diary of her journey, which was worldly in contrast with most of the writing of the time period. Subsequent to her journey her husband died, and she moved to New London, Connecticut with her daughter. There, she ran a shop and an inn that were successful. Sarah Kemble Knight was an independent and successful woman.

Mary Rowlandson and Sarah Kemble Knight have contrasting beliefs in God; therefore, the way religion is reflected in their writing is different. Mary Rowlandson, a strict Puritan whose world revolves around God, has a theological approach to her writing, and it is more of a religious account. On the other hand, Sarah Kemble Knight did have religious convictions; however, they are not as pervasive as those of a Puritan. Rather, she has a practical approach to her writing and gives a more worldly account with secular views about life. For example, while Rowlandson persistently alludes to the Bible, Knight tends to utalize classical literature, such as when she refers to the Greek God Apollo, the sun God, who pulled the sun across the sky in a chariot drawn by horses. “Now was the glorious luminary with his swift coursers arrived at his stage, leaving poor me with the rest of this part of the lower world in darkness, with which we were soon surrounded.” (33) In contrast, Rowlandson directly quotes Jacob’s lament in Genesis: “I had one child dead, another in the wilderness the third they would not let me come near to: ‘Me (as he said) have ye bereaved my Children, Joseph is not, and Simon is not, and all these things are against me.’” (27) It is the nature of the Puritans to believe that every event that occurs has significance relating to God or to the Bible. As these examples demonstrate, Mary Rowlandson’s and Sarah Kemble Knight’s varying degrees of devotion affect their writing in a significant way.

Like their religious convictions, the upbringing of Rowlandson and Knight also greatly affects their writing. Mary Rowlandson is raised at an earlier time and in a strict Puritan atmosphere. Moreover, her husband is the congregational minister of Lancaster. Conversely, Knight is born at a later time when Puritanism has begun to fade, and she has fewer religious ties. Her husband wasn’t associated with the church in any way, and she lives as an independent, self-reliant woman who doesn’t base her life on religion. This, in turn, has multiple effects on her writing. Knight has a decorative and more personal style of writing. She uses figures of speech frequently and has a humorous tone. Her writing offers a secular contrast to the religious tenor of most colonial writing. Mary Rowlandson follows the style of writing more common to the Puritan era. Her style is plain and free from adornments. The only time she is found using figures of speech is during her frequent allusions to God or the Bible. She has a serious tone consistently throughout her narrative. Her purpose of writing is not only to record her horrifying experience, but she also hopes to demonstrate how it reveals God’s purpose. The complete title of her narrative is: “The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson.” The strong religious beliefs with which she is brought up are only clarified through her willingness to believe in God’s purpose. On the other hand, Sarah Kemble Knight’s purpose for writing is to entertain herself on her journey from Boston to New York. Her journal is not published until the eighteen hundreds, nearly and century after it was written. In summary, their writing is greatly affected by the way Sarah Kemble Knight and Mary Rowlandson are brought up.

Both the way they were brought up and their religious convictions play a large role in the way in which Mary Rowlandson and Sarah Kemble Knight react to danger and discomfort. Rowlandson always looks to God in times of danger and pain; she believes that all the unfavorable conditions that she has endured have a purpose. “I have thought since of the wonderful goodness of God to me in preserving me in the use of my reason and senses in that distressed time, that I did not use wicked and violent means to end my own miserable life.” (26) This illustrates her ability to not only surmount her difficulties, but also to thank God for giving her reason to refrain from killing herself under such adverse circumstances. By contrast, Sarah Kemble Knight, who also experienced difficult and uncomfortable conditions, battled danger and fright with her own bravery. She was well aware of her fears but had the audacity to overcome them. Another weapon in Knight’s battle against fear is humor, which is hidden throughout her journal and is a way for her to almost mock the unfavorable situation she is in. ” she has some mutton which she would broil but I suppose [she] forgot to wash her scratches and my guide said it smelled strong of head sauce [cheese sauce], we left it, and paid sixpence apiece for our dinners, which was only smell ” (35) She twisted this disgusting situation into one of humor, which not only makes it more bearable for her, but also for the reader. Both Mary Rowlandson and Sarah Kemble Knight are two remarkable women who lived in Colonial America. Although their experiences are different, they both show remarkable characteristics that are essential in surmounting their individual difficulties. Their writing is affected by many things, only contributing to its diversity and making it as enduring as it is today.