# *Rhetorical Drag: Gender Impersonation, Captivity, and the Writing of History* (review)


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thereby linking the colony's "afflictions" to the abrogation of New England's charter rights, and asserting a particularly New English (i.e. Congregationalist) political and social vision without appearing disloyal to English imperial authority. Reading Williams's captivity narrative in the context of his other published works, such as the sermons *God in the Camp* and *Warnings to the Unclean,* Toulouse argues that it articulates more emphatically than the other captivity narratives preceding it the theme of "seduction"—physical as well as spiritual—hereby foregrounding a new dimension in third-generation "sons'" ambivalence to the "fathers'" authority that realizes that "only the continuing seduction of the 'father' by 'sons' . . . can keep the 'father' authoritative and legitimate" (143).

More than any other treatment of the colonial captivity narrative of which I am aware, Toulouse's book takes a thoroughly historicized approach in her textual analyses. Her point in favor of the dense rhetorical signification and conservative political ideology of these captivity narratives is carefully argued and seems to me to be thoroughly persuasive. By drawing heavily on the work of social and political historians of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America and England, she is able to tease out the metaphorical and rhetorical subtleties of these narratives better than any comprehensive study to date. Combining astute rhetorical analysis with thorough immersion in historical scholarship, her book exemplifies at its best the interdisciplinary cooperation that has increasingly characterized early American studies in recent years.

*Ralph Bauer*

Lorrayne Carroll. *Rhetorical Drag: Gender Impersonation, Captivity, and the Writing of History.* Kent, OH: Kent State UP, 2007. 251 pp. ISBN 0-87338-882-8, $28.95.

Scholars have often noted either the reality or the probability of editorial emendation in early captivity narratives written by or about women in North America. They have revealed how male editors not only sandwiched these texts between prefaces or concluding comments, but also actively and intrusively meddled *within* them. Lorrayne Carroll's new study takes this meddling to another level, arguing that we have neither looked deeply enough at what is signified by the recurrence of this practice over time, nor have we adequately examined its effects. For Carroll, what she variously calls the "impersonation," "imposture," "identification," and most pointedly, the "rhetorical drag" practiced by male appropriators of largely first-person female texts intentionally *shapes* the ways in which "we interpret representations of gender, subjectivity, experience and authorship" in early captivity narratives. Analysis

of the "rhetorical drag" used in these narratives—a practice defined by Carroll as the "ascription of gendered language and diverse rhetorical practices" to captivities—offers insights more profound than simple acknowledgments of male appropriation; it reveals important aspects of the relationship between "the writing of history and the regimentation of gender."

In contrast to those who read the captivity narratives as unproblematic personal accounts of implicit or explicit female agency or resistance to male norms, Carroll asks us to contextualize what seems like every aspect of their production in the light of certain men's desires at once to construct and to verify their readings of "American" history through the representation of the "authentic experience" of an embodied female narrator/protagonist. Curiously analogous to Puritan uses of scriptural types, what often looks like first and sometimes third person female auto/biographical "experience" is made to be exemplary of editorial desire and editorial anxiety about how to justify and authenticate particular readings of colonial and revolutionary history. Anxiety is a function of highlighting and/or empowering what should be private-"embodied female experience" by granting it a modicum of public authority. Desire, in contrast, is a function of certain men's need to represent and use such experience for their own historicizing purposes. Anxiety and desire drive the decision to construct, deploy, and attempt to control the various performances of "rhetorical drag" in which male editor/authors engage.

To make these claims Carroll looks at well-known and not so well-known captivities such as those of "Puritans" Mary Rowlandson, Hannah Duston, and Hannah Swarton, and Quaker Elizabeth Hanson, and late eighteenth century "sentimental/ized" figures like Susannah Johnson and Jemima Howe. She sets each captivity in its relation not only to particular features of the historical context in which it is written or published (more on this in a moment), but also in its relation to the context provided by other texts. Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion,* for example, is brought to bear positively on his first-person drag representation of Hannah Swarton, and negatively on the third-person case of Hannah Duston. Likewise, both captivities are also structurally or imagistically connected to the sermon Mather was delivering when Hannah Duston purportedly showed up in his congregation. Finally, both "Hannahs" are considered in terms of their absence or presence in later texts like *Decennium Luctuosum* and the *Magnalia.*

Similarly, Jonathan Dickinson's narrative, representing the activity of a male Quaker, is contrasted to the passivity of Hannah Swarton's text, while Revolutionary war hero Israel Putnam's biography provides a context for its author, David Humphreys, to mark the difference between "heroic" male biography and the sentimental narrative of the "Fair Captive," Susannah Howe.

Only in one interesting but distracting instance does Carroll depart from this practice, setting Hannah Duston's narrative in the context not only of the late seventeenth century texts, but also, in the same chapter, offering a lengthy consideration of how later nineteenth century writers Hawthorne, Whittier, and Thoreau made her historical tale subservient to their own social desires. The chronological claims Carroll wishes to make about transformations as well as continuities in the practice of rhetorical drag might have been far stronger had these readings followed, rather than preceded, those of the early republic.

The book's most suggestive claims often involve its historical digging into issues of "real" authorship and publication. For example, Carroll reads the submissiveness represented in Elizabeth Hanson's Quaker narrative in the context of transatlantic Quaker men's desires to suppress an earlier gendered radicalism (which allowed women to preach and prophesy) in favor of more conventional (private, domestic) female behaviors. Carroll maps Quaker desires to move from being a "sect" to a "religion" onto representations of male/female relationships used in this and other Quaker texts. Similarly striking is Carroll's brief placement of the narrative of Susannah Johnson in the context of the historical ambitions of a group of Federalist writers (including Royall Tyler) who were neighbors and friends of its editor, New Hampshire lawyer John C. Chamberlain, and who possibly participated in the act of "rhetorical drag" that transformed a tale some forty years old into a text supporting their reading of the French and Indian wars as a warning against current French American Republicans!

This insightful study falters in two areas—the first structural and the other, possibly relatedly, theoretical. As noted earlier, the book seems to start out as a chronological examination of changes in representations of the drag performance of "female" captivity as it is related to specific and changing historical/political aims. But then it shifts to considerations of transformations in Quaker polity and to diverse romantic male writers' interests in using past New England history (Duston) as a means of promoting or transcending period *social* models of domesticity and separate spheres. This slightly confused structure suggests an indecision about whether the book as a whole was to use captivity's practice of "rhetorical drag" as a means of representing/revealing recognizably *historical/political* goals and their changes and/or contradictions over a specified time, or whether history was instead to provide *socially* variable and unlinked temporal sites with which to engage the theory of rhetorical drag and its regimentation of gender. At the level of individual chapters, Carroll proves herself to be an extraordinary and usually persuasive close reader, but as the book progresses, her close readings and particularly her engagements with the readings of other critics become so extended that the

larger issue of what's at stake in the "rhetorical drag" practiced by male editors can become attenuated or obscured. This lack of clarity may, of course, be intentional, but toward the end, it seems as if every contradictory detail in the Johnson or Howe texts must correspond to something historical/political/social, but just *what* that something might more concretely be seems continually deferred, not only by the impersonators, but by Carroll.

This quibble may simply be an issue of better editing, but it may, I suspect, also have something to do with the theory of "rhetorical drag" itself. When his historical desire becomes not only rhetorically unreachable, but more significantly, unstable to the gender impersonator, it seems that "s/he" falls into a circular game in which the rhetoric of the drag becomes its own unsolvable end. Rather than the critic's seeking out some fixed historical or social interpretation of the drag revealed in a given captivity narrative—that is, its success or even its failure as "drag"—the theoretical question now becomes how to analyze the desire at stake in the attempt to keep the drag's disparate meanings in play. At this point, Lorrayne Carroll's interesting book points us away from Judith Butler's early performative theory as such and towards a quite different theory, a theory that it engages in its discussion of identification in Thoreau but elsewhere does not develop—the psychoanalytic.

*Teresa A. Toulouse*

Howard D. Weinbrot. *Aspects of Samuel Johnson: Essays on His Arts, Mind, Afterlife, and Politics.* Newark: U of Delaware P, 2005. 417 pp. ISBN 0-87413-874-4, $40.00.

Howard Weinbrot is among our most eminent eighteenth-century scholars. He has published several important studies since the 1960s, but *Aspects of Samuel Johnson* is his first book on Johnson. It collects sixteen essays written over four decades covering various aspects of Johnson's writing—poetry, metaphor, narrative style, and the idea of language in the dictionary (in a section on Arts); generality, genre, and skepticism (in a section on Mind); Percival Stockdale and the French response to Johnson's writings (in a section on Afterlife); and Jacobitism, politics, and the nature of scholarly and historical evidence (in a section on Politics). All but one of the essays has appeared elsewhere. Some of them—for example, "The Reader, the General, and the Particular: Johnson and Imlac in Chapter Ten of *Rasselas,*" "Johnson and Genre," and the essays on Johnson's politics—are classics of their kind. The book exceeds the sum of its parts, for the contiguity of the essays allows the reader to appreciate the sustained consideration of the topics, and to acquire a general sense of the author's critical procedures.