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Commerce and Sentiment in Tales of Barbary Encounter: Cathcart, Barlow, Markoe, Tyler, and Rowson

Andrew S. Gross

James Leander Cathcart was one of six American sailors captured by an Algerian corsair off the coast of Portugal in 1785. He was held in servitude for 11 years, but through luck and cunning managed to rise from dangerous and demeaning labor—it was his job to feed the lions in the palace gardens—to the highest position available to a Christian slave: that of clerk to the Algerian regency or *Dey* (Cathcart 144). During his captivity Cathcart accumulated enough money to purchase the ship that would carry him back to the United States. The Dey allowed him to go—even lent him some of the money—but he had no intention of releasing the other American seamen held captive in Algiers; their number was about 100 at that time (Baepler 103-04, 144; Allison 20). Cathcart sailed home to plead for his fellow captives, which meant pressing the American government to capitulate to the Dey's ransom demands.

Whatever the episode reveals about the Dey's cunning, it is emblematic of the complexity of the American encounter with Islam at the end of the eighteenth century. Cathcart was forced into what might be called a pact with the devil: motivated out of sympathy for his fellow captives he in effect does the Dey's bidding. In his memoir, unpublished during his lifetime, Cathcart downplays the conflict by describing his decision in terms of sentimental rather than national or religious loyalty. He wants to help his fellow captives; he also believes that cooperation is possible across lines of national and religious difference (Cathcart 141,145; Field 39). The bonds of sentiment, like those of commerce, were supposed to traverse differences in creed. Indeed, the same feelings that led Cathcart to cooperate with the Dey moved him to propose a transatlantic naval alliance that would force the Barbary States to renounce piracy and accept the rules of commerce. He called this alliance the "union of sentiment" (Cathcart 141, 145, 129).ⁱ

The union of sentiment, as Cathcart conceived it, crossed national and religious boundaries. Like many of his contemporaries, Cathcart believed that fellow feeling could

go beyond the narrow limits of parochialism, opening corridors of cooperation as extensive as those of Atlantic trade. In this paper I will argue that the first American encounter with Islam, which culminated in a war waged to free the American hostages being held as slaves, was nevertheless widely seen as an opportunity to forge international bonds of commerce and common sympathy. American authors with no firsthand knowledge of the Barbary Coast represented North African pirates as possible converts: to Christianity, in some cases, but more importantly to democratic sentiments and free trade. After briefly sketching the history of the Barbary conflict at the close of the eighteenth century, I will read three fictionalized accounts of Barbary encounter as secular conversion narratives, two of the three demonstrating how even despotic slaveholders could learn to embrace commerce and sentiment. Peter Markoe's novel *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787), Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Slave* (1797), and Susanna Rowson's drama *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) suggest a certain openness to religious and national difference; however they are clearly about American concerns and, in fact, more committed to secularized Christian norms than their praise of common sentiment would suggest. In all three texts, Jews are excluded from the vision of common sentiment and made to symbolize what was cruel about commerce; it is my argument that they served as scapegoats for the American discomfort with its own failures of sentiment, evidenced most obviously by chattel slavery and the slave trade. These fictionalized tales of encounter hold up sentiment as the solution to all sorts of conflict. However, they also deploy sentiment, paradoxically, as a pre-biological marker of race, designating those beyond the union of sentiment—Jews—as somehow detached from the quality that makes people human.

Cathcart's intimate knowledge of the Barbary Coast led to a diplomatic career that spanned the presidential administrations of Adams, Jefferson, and Madison (Waller 139). One of his first official tasks as U.S. consul general was to deliver yet another ransom for other American captives held in the neighboring Tripoli (1796-7). The payment was stipulated in The Treaty of Tripoli, which was drafted in part by the Connecticut wit Joel Barlow. Barlow's early epic of America—*The Vision of Columbus* (1787)—is largely ridiculed today, but an article he included in the English version of the treaty, endorsed by John Adams and unanimously approved by the Senate, is still considered a milestone:

As the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,—as it has in itself no character of enmity against the laws, religion, or tranquility, of Mussulmen [Muslims],—and as the said States never entered into any war or act of hostility against any Mahometan [Muslim] nation, it is declared by the parties that no pretext arising from religious opinions shall ever produce an interruption of the harmony existing between the two countries. (“Barbary Treaties”)

How the article separating church from state made it into the treaty is unclear—it is not in the Arabic version. Curiously, it echoes lines that had appeared a decade earlier in Barlow's epic:

The task, for angels great, in early youth
To lead whole nations in the walks of truth,
Shed the bright beams of knowledge on the mind,
For social compact harmonize mankind. (qtd. in Field 8-9)

The treaty was designed to protect American shipping in the Mediterranean and Atlantic; but its language links commerce to an epic vision of global cooperation.ⁱⁱ

Whatever the poetic appeal of the word “harmony,” it was a choice bit of diplomatic hyperbole. Barbary piracy was arguably the most difficult foreign policy problem faced by the Early Republic (Kitzen). Corsairs had long preyed upon the Mediterranean and Atlantic shipping routes, as had European privateers. The major powers, as Cathcart complains in his memoirs, declined to mount a concerted effort against pirates because it was more convenient to use them in proxy fights against each other (Cathcart 129). New England merchants had benefited from British arrangements before the Revolutionary War and French protection during. With independence—and the growing conflict with France after the French Revolution—came vulnerability. Washington, Adams, and Jefferson were opposed to paying for protection—the saying “millions in defense but not a penny in tribute” stems from this time—but they disagreed about the desirability of maintaining a navy and lacked the revenue to build a strong one (Waller 137).

Adams and Jefferson did end up paying tribute. However the Treaty of Tripoli failed because payments were slow in coming. Corsairs again started seizing American prizes. This time Jefferson declared war on Tripoli (Allison 22; Waller 138-39; Field 44). The war has been forgotten, but it was crucial for establishing American access to Atlantic shipping routes, and for testing American ideas about the relation of trade to democratic sentiment. The mission did not, however, begin well for the Americans. The *U.S.S. Philadelphia* and its 307 sailors were captured after the frigate ran aground on a sandbar off the Barbary Coast. To solve the crisis, Jefferson ordered the bombardment of the Port of Tripoli coupled with a land invasion led by the marines. The regency capitulated.

Public celebrations of the American victory were patriotic, but they were also remarkably secular—as secular as the treaty that had failed (cf. Wilson). The most significant hymn commemorating the battle is the one still sung by the Marine Corps: “From the halls of Montezuma/ To the shores of Tripoli...” Several American cities are named after the hero of the naval battle, Stephen Decatur, who set fire to the captured *Philadelphia* in a daring commando raid, and then personally avenged the death of his younger brother, who had been killed in action. Decatur’s famous toast, “our country, right or wrong,” also survives. Frances Scott Key commemorated the bombardment of Tripoli in a song which, revised a decade later, would express American defiance in the face of the British bombardment of Fort McHenry (1814). The title of the better-known version is *The Star Spangled Banner*. The prototype praises “the light of the star-spangled flag of our nation” for eclipsing “the Crescent, its splendor obscured” (Allison 205).

The Crescent was obscured, but American religiosity also seemed to be waning. Historians argue that the revolutionary period marked “a decline for American Christianity as a whole” and the rise of a “civil religion” (to use Robert Bellah’s famous phrase) based on “a shared dedication to republican government and equal liberty” (Ahlstrom 365; see also Beneke 159). The secularization thesis needs to be qualified (as Ahlstrom himself does). American religiosity would go through a number of waves and fluctuations that would continue up to the present, and at the time of the Barbary conflict Christianity was changing, but it had not disappeared. There were of course ministers who insisted on describing the conflict in religious terms (Baepler 65-9; Waller 85). An admittedly extreme example of evangelical orthodoxy was Timothy Dwight, a former classmate of Barlow’s who would become the eighth president of Yale and a leading figure in the religious revival known as the Second Great Awakening (1790-1870).ⁱⁱⁱ

Dwight characterized the fight against Barbary piracy as a crusade against the infidels (a term he also used to decry domestic opponents). Ironically, it was the man Dwight considered the most dangerous infidel of all—Pope Pius VII—who also celebrated American gains as a victory for Christendom, and the man he castigated as an atheist—Jefferson—who declared war in the first place (Allison xvi).^{iv}

Dwight had an audience but little direct political influence. The American civil religion, if not completely secular, was certainly disestablishmentarian.^v The key political actors in the Early Republic separated church and state—against Dwight’s will—in order to avoid sectarian conflicts. This harmonized with the turn towards personal belief advocated by the Evangelicals gaining prominence anyway.^{vi} Properly considered, the separation of church and state did not lead to a diminishment but a shift in religious emphasis. Faith became a matter of personal feeling; piety became more important than creed (Beneke 13, 174-75; Abzug 37; Bell 17). There were limits to pluralism; in a moment I will explore how Jews were excluded from the community of sentiment. First I want to point out that the personalization of belief as feeling led to a re-sanctification of government in another form. The state that recognized a plurality of churches could command devotion to its own political ideals: democracy, based on self-evident truths and universal principles, became more than an institution; it was a conviction.

This conviction was pursued with missionary zeal. Bring commerce to despotism, Cathcart and Barlow believed, and those who begin to acquire wealth will want to join the community of free nations. Americans, in other words, were content to let the Barbary States remain Islamic as long as they converted to commerce. Two complementary beliefs were at work in this seeming acceptance of religious difference: one is the belief that people want to be free in a particular way; the other is that commerce brings them into common accord. Terry Eagleton describes this eighteenth-century platitude as “the ideology of so-called commercial humanism, for which the proliferation of trade and the spawning of human sympathies are mutually enriching” (Eagleton 17-18, 56). The key figure often cited in commercial humanism is Adam Smith, author of both the *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759, first edition) and the more famous *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith is sometimes described as the prophet of self-interest, although his views were much more complicated than that.^{vii} As Amartya Sen points out it, Smith also believed that people are motivated by custom, reputation, and sympathy (187). Commenting on the importance Smith attached to considering moral questions from an impartial perspective, he notes that “Smithian reasoning thus not only admits but requires consideration of the views of others who are far as well as near” (126).

This is a heavily debated issue. Sam Fleischacker points out that while Adam Smith intended his moral philosophy to be universal, he was nevertheless hard pressed to explain how values could be grounded beyond parochial community standards; Eagleton goes so far as to describe such morality as resembling a higher form of manners (Fleischacker 273-4; Eagleton 17-18, 31; see also Mullan 9). I do not propose to take sides on the Smith debate, but I do want to point out that there is a large body of scholarship interested in tracing philosophical sentimentalism back to Smith as well as thinkers such as Hume, Shaftsbury, and Hutcheson; thinkers who countered Hobbes’ bleak view of humanity—and the political absolutism he saw as the only possible check—with an appeal to the benevolence they claimed to be instinctual. A number of contemporary scholars have contributed to the analysis of what is now variously being called “American sympathy” (Caleb Crain), “the culture of sentiment” (Shirley Samuels), “the culture of

feeling” (Michael Bell), and “sentimental democracy” (Andrew Burstein). They have done a thorough job of showing how sentiment both reinforced hierarchies of class, race, gender, and sexual orientation and “undermined the hierarchical assumptions of republican ideology [,] extend[ing] the category of the fully human to persons consigned to the margins: the poor, nonwhites, women and children” (Gilmore 608). The consensus seems to be that sentiment played a patronizing but ameliorative role from before the Revolution to after the Civil War.

The international perspective afforded by Barbary conflict complicates this picture by showing how sentimental democracy was married to sentimental notions of commerce. The picture needs to be complicated because this marriage was a difficult one. The actual practices of eighteenth-century trade, when placed under the microscope, are a far cry from the sentimental ideals used to justify them. The Early Republic wanted to bring free trade and democracy to a despotic region, but democracy was more despotic than it cared to admit. The president who waged war to free white slaves from North African masters was himself a slaveholder; and the same year that he ordered the bombardment of Tripoli (1804), he refused to recognize Haiti, a new republic established through slave rebellion. There is a rift between the language of sentimental commerce and the actual space of the transatlantic slave trade. The voices emerging from this rift—like that of the black slave Olaudah Equiano, whose servitude on English vessels carried him across the Atlantic and the Mediterranean—do not distinguish between slavery in European colonies and the Ottoman Empire, except to point out that in the latter freedom could be won through religious conversion (Equiano 124).

This disanalogy posed a challenge to the universal principles that were supposed to provide the framework for, but also be the expression of, natural sentiment. The United States might be no better than the Barbary States; in some ways it might even be worse. The nation that was pluralist in terms of religious freedom—because faith was more important than doctrine—was absolutist when it came to slavery. Slaves in America might escape or pass, but they could not win their freedom by converting to the civil religion. They were beyond the “union of sentiment”—Jefferson for instance distinguished between black and white ways of feeling (Levecq 53)—which is why Stowe’s sentimental portrayal of a slave family in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* caused such a furor in 1852. The American civil religion personalized dogma as religious sentiment, but it also personalized slavery as the lack of feeling or its inadequacy.

Not everyone bought this argument. Some eighteenth-century writers invoked the obvious parallels between white slavery in Africa and black slavery in America to make abolitionist arguments.^{viii} However, many writers were more concerned with defending the sanctity of American sentiment than with addressing the discrepancies between free trade and political freedom. Instead of arguing against the slave trade, they blamed the failure of the American vision on betrayers. The scapegoats were often renegades or converts to Islam, who in fact captained the corsairs in large numbers.^{ix} Commercial humanism was charitable enough to bring the gospel of wealth to the unconverted; it held nothing but contempt for the deniers.

The other scapegoats were those traditionally libeled as the deniers of Christ, namely Jews. The United States had no credit in Europe because it wasn’t paying off its revolutionary debt to France. It lacked the tax structure to raise revenue for ransom. When Barlow negotiated for the release of Cathcart’s 100 American companions, the only

way to pay the Dey was to borrow from what Barlow called the “Jew House” of Baccri (Todd 134; see also Baepler 100).

Ironically, the money Barlow borrowed to pay the Dey had been loaned to Baccri by the Dey himself (Todd 134). Barlow celebrated this as a minor victory, but he wasn't amused when the Dey used American tributes to outfit corsairs, or when he used American debt as a pretext to commandeer the frigate *George Washington* to carry his own tribute to Turkey (Field 41). Barlow's subordinates blamed this debacle on a Jewish conspiracy (Allison 172, 174-5, 177). The explanations were far-fetched, but given the repressed religious underpinnings of commercial humanism this was hardly a surprising surmise. Jews were somehow different even when they fit in; they engaged in commerce not to promote the general welfare but to satisfy nefarious designs.^x At least this was commonly believed (cf. Harap). In 1785, Patrick Henry expelled a group of would-be Jewish immigrants from the state of Virginia on the grounds that they might be spies for the Dey (Allison 3-4, 6-7). The Jews were not deported because of their beliefs but on suspicion of espionage—by authority of a Virginia law passed the same year that the state officially recognized religious pluralism (ibid).

In theory the union of sentiment was capacious enough to include Muslims, who could be converted to commerce and were not immigrating to North America anyway. Jews were seen as permanent renegades to sentiment and made to personify the problem that commerce is itself renegade. Free trade did not lead to political freedom but to inequality, and in fact depended on the repression of an underclass who labored without hope of emancipation. The Africans forced into slavery were beyond the pale of common feeling; in the fictional accounts studied below, Jews are made to personify this absence of feeling or its manipulation and abuse. In what follows I will analyze *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania*, *The Algerine Captive*, and more briefly *Slaves in Algiers* as penitential texts of the American civil religion. While they are optimistic about converting Muslims to commerce, they cannot ignore, although in two out of three cases they do not mention, the chasm between American ideals and practice. That chasm is the space of the Atlantic slave trade. Their response to this credibility chasm was to symbolically sacrifice Jews to atone for slavery. The sacrificial logic reveals the religious underpinnings of American sentimentalism. It also prophesied a global economic system that has diverged in significant ways from the visionary harmony between political freedom and free trade. The Atlantic revolutions that followed the American Revolution did not lead to a global union of sentiment, but to a center-periphery geography organized around the complementary discourses of nation and race (Dillon 426-28). Whatever the universal moral intent of philosophical sentimentalism, the language of sentiment prefigured and helped provide the coordinates for this modern geography.

The Jews expelled as spies from Virginia were trying to make it to Pennsylvania, which had a reputation for being more welcoming to strangers (Allison 6). Two years after the incident Peter Markoe, a resident of that state, anonymously published his only work of prose fiction, *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787).^{xi} The slim epistolary novel claims to be a collection of secret letters written by the spy Mehemet. This is an obvious ploy; Mehemet's letters are actually catalogues of republican virtues barely draped in the customary cloak and dagger (Markoe 58). There are comic-ethnographic moments in the tradition of Swift and Voltaire and pointing towards Irving and Twain, such as when the bemused Algerian tries to make sense of a tea party and a Quaker meeting (40-46). The closest the novel comes to actual espionage is a one-paragraph plan to conquer Rhode

Island, place it in the hands of Daniel Shay—leader of Shay’s Rebellion (1786-87)—and use it as a base to cruise the New England coast for virgins to send back to the Sultan’s harem (100).

The editor of the recent edition of Markoe’s novel suggests that the digressions are so amusing one hardly notices the absence of a plot. But what the novel lacks in narrative development is made up for in polemic; the letters are actually anti-Federalist broadsides aimed at the Constitutional Convention, which also took place in Philadelphia in 1787 (xviii). The main argument is an economic one: the spy advocates maintaining a proper balance between agrarian and mercantile economies. The emphasis on agrarianism resonates with his development as a character. The supposedly secret letters end up with an American publisher because Mehemet has converted to “FREEDOM AND CHRISTIANITY,” as the final words of the novel put it in capital letters (122, 125). He purchases two farms and invites his former concubine Fatimah—who has rechristened herself Maria and married a Christian—to move in next door.

The final words of the novel establish the Christian coordinates for Mehemet’s conversion to the universal values of freedom and harmony. Mehemet’s conversion is not only religious and political but also sentimental, and it is precipitated by a betrayal and a friendship (3; 47). The spy doesn’t relay much useful information to Algiers, but his correspondence, his travels, and his finances have to be channeled through two intermediaries—a Jew in Lisbon and another in Gibraltar. The Jew in Lisbon lies to the Dey about Mehemet’s loyalties—his motives are unclear (53, 112). This makes it impossible for the spy to return—his property is handed over to a renegade—but the betrayal proves to be a blessing in disguise (116). In his heart, Mehemet always rejected tyranny, which is why he paid his debts and freed most of his slaves prior to departing Algiers (60-61, 69, 103-4). The man who counsels him to stay in Pennsylvania and aids him in recovering some of his wealth is the Jew from Gibraltar.

Mehemet’s conversion to freedom and Christianity is really a homecoming, but it is only possible when he separates the good Jew from the bad Jew. They personify different economic principles typical of the lands in which they live: the one trading information and money in the same way that Lisbon depends on trading gold; the other putting down roots in the same way Britain gets rich—at least according to Markoe’s analysis—by exporting domestic resources like tin (54-56). Too exclusive a reliance on mercantilism leaves a nation open to outside influence and corruption (109). The novel hammers this point home in a longish essay on how Jews make excellent merchants and diplomats, and most of them are loyal anyway, but they would be even more loyal and productive were they allowed to purchase real estate (14, 17-19, 55).

There is no evidence that Markoe knew about the Jews deported from Virginia, but his long digression on Jewish property suggests that their story would have paralleled Mehemet’s, had he been allowed to write it. The moral seems to be that most people just want to settle down on farms and cultivate good republican virtues. Christianity is the umbrella term for those virtues, although the novel also endorses religious tolerance (14). Certainly doctrine is less important than the religious sentiment that is roughly equivalent to loving one’s neighbors. We know little about Markoe’s own background. His family, probably French in origin, immigrated to Pennsylvania from the Caribbean. He clearly identifies with Jews as merchants and travelers but sees the potential for betrayal in a mobile, commercial life. Sentiment grows up inside an international economy, embracing the universal principles that allow it to operate, but it must be

allowed to take root in a community. Markoe's protagonist articulates a version of Hume's argument that neighborliness is a much stronger sentiment than "global fellow feeling" (Eagleton 55). The novel takes up the international theme of the Barbary conflict to offer a parochial alternative. "A philosophical history of commerce," says the protagonist, would be an invaluable present to mankind." It is not as useful as cultivating your own garden, however, because "The ambition of princes and the avarice of merchants will never be restrained or regulated by systems" (55).

Markoe's parochialism makes it unnecessary for him to confront cultural difference or the problem of American slavery directly. This is a Pennsylvania novel written by an anti-Federalist; the wholly imaginary Algiers serves as a projection screen for problems—like slavery and despotism—that Markoe simply refuses to admit have anything to do with his state. Nevertheless the repentant spy articulates an argument often employed against Southern slaveholders. They don't work the land themselves, and so reap none of its personal benefits, instead developing into a class of lazy aristocrats.

This argument is a fair summary of the first half of Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive* (1797), which capitalized on the recent liberation of American hostages by purporting to be an actual account of captivity.^{xii} The novel takes a clear stand on slavery by sending its northern protagonist south in search of work, first as a teacher and then as a doctor. Updike Underhill is an educated fool who can't understand why a Southern belle might take offense at an ode comparing her to "the ox eyed Juno," and the first half of the novel is a series of picaresque misadventures generally poking fun at northern pedantry and southern pretense (Tyler 46, 47-51). The tone only becomes serious when Underhill assists a doctor in performing a successful cornea surgery. The blind man restored to sight continues to believe in the superiority of the tactile senses, however, insisting that a sensitive touch proves there is more difference between any two men's fingernails than between white and black men generally (39-42). The purpose of the medical interlude, like the parody framing it, is to ascribe any differences between the North and the South, or between whites and blacks, to misperception. Sentiment, like touch, is a common feeling that goes beyond mere appearances (cf. Pangborn).

The conclusion of the first half of the book is put to the test when Underhill, incapable of holding down a job, signs on as a ship's surgeon on the merchant vessel *Freedom* and then a slaver named *Sympathy*. It is on the second ship that he witnesses the horrors of the middle passage including torture, rape, and the sailors' cynical manipulation of the power of sympathy to dominate the captives. When the men go on a hunger strike, the sailors force them to eat by beating their wives and children in their presence: "though the *man* dared to die, the *father* relented, and in a few hours they all eat their provisions, *mingled with their tears*" (99). Underhill does his best to ameliorate the suffering, but only succeeds in earning the scorn of his shipmates (99). They abandon him to a corsair, and he experiences slavery himself—as well as the sympathy of some of the black captives liberated in the raid, who care for him because he has a good black soul in a white body (101).

This turnabout clearly informs an abolitionist project, although most scholars agree that the second half of the novel radically diverges from the first. I want to suggest, however, that the exploration of sentiment provides a common theme that goes beyond the critique of slavery. Tyler is most interested in describing what makes a community a home even when it does not live up to its sentimental ideals (because of the slave trade), and therefore can hardly hope to export them. He goes to great lengths to corroborate its

descriptions of the Barbary Coast with the up-to-date information then available in English. However, the geographical exploration is really a pretext for Tyler's philosophical exploration of the negative side of sentiment. The preface mocks the growing interest in gothic fiction by eroticizing its effects: "Dolly, the dairy maid, and Jonathan, the hired man...amused themselves into so agreeable a terror, with the haunted houses and hobgoblins [sic] of Mrs. Ratcliffe [sic], that they both were afraid to sleep alone" (6). Feelings, as the blind man affirms, are more powerful than appearances, but this is precisely what makes them so useful in manipulating captives and readers.

There are two crises of feeling in the second half of the novel. The first occurs when Updike is almost converted by a kind Mollah, himself a convert to Islam, who "disdained the use of other powers than rational argument" to convince the protagonist to convert (130). Although Underhill "trembled for [his] faith, and burst into tears," it is the tears that save him from "sophistry" (*ibid.*, 136). Religious sentiment is a guide to belief where religious reason fails. Feeling preserves Underhill's faith, but feeling alone cannot save his self-respect or his sense of community. As in the case with the African captives who are forced to eat on board the slave ship, it can be used to manipulate the powerless—even to sever them from social bonds.

The second crisis of feeling occurs when Underhill is forced to witness the public impaling of a Christian caught trying to escape. The terror he experiences convinces him at last that he is a slave. The passage is often, but erroneously, cited because the definitive Modern Language edition inadvertently drops a line, which I here add in brackets: "I will not wound the sensibility of my [humane fellow citizens, by a minute de-] tail of this fiend like punishment" (143; for the dropped line cf. the edition edited by Don Lewis Cook, 75-76). Contemporary critics, influenced by the modern philosophy of sentiment called trauma theory, often dwell on how the pun on tale/tail shows that pain is contagious or transferable to the body of spectators/ the body of the text. Their ideal is the negative union of sentiment called "bearing witness" (Felman and Laub). The sense of the restored passage, however, runs in the opposite direction. Pain can be inflicted or displayed to cause fear but this does not necessarily lead to sympathy. Underhill refrains from detailing the torture for his readers because the torture isolated him; his body is penetrated not with fellow feeling but with fear that does indeed succeed in destroying his "innate" love of liberty and his sense of solidarity with the other captives. Slavery, in other words, manipulates feelings to isolate the slaves from common sentiment.

I have suggested that Markoe sees sentiment, in the form of neighborliness, as a compensation for the tyranny of global commerce; the good Jew can be separated from the bad. Tyler, more skeptical, shows how sentiment can actually be the instrument of tyranny and sympathy can be withheld or manipulated for personal or economic advantage. His symbols, once again, are Jews, who are described in keeping with the tradition of gothic villains. A Jewish father and son are the most consistently evil characters in the novel. They are always in disguise; even their palace is hidden behind a beggar's façade. They at first seem to evince sympathy for Underhill, but this too is a deception. They aim to use him in a scheme to immigrate to America, but once this proves futile, they use his services as a doctor, steal his money, and sell him into slavery—not once but twice. In the end he is saved only by accident (220-224).

This is an unsatisfying resolution in a novel with many formal problems. The biggest problem is that the two halves—picaresque and gothic—threaten to come apart at the seams. The genre trouble mirrors the political trouble that Tyler cannot solve by

putting his faith in sentiment. He believes in the importance of sentiment, but he also sees that it can be abused. His ambivalence makes him more attentive than many to the parallels between Barbary captivity and American slavery. He does not believe that American commerce will spread fellow feeling because he knows commerce depends on the brutal exploitation of feeling. Nevertheless, for want of a better alternative, he has his protagonist return home to his parents and his country. Underhill's closing words are the Federalist motto—BY UNITING WE STAND, BY DIVIDING WE FALL (226). This is sentimental, but defensive rather than missionary.^{xiii} Tyler seems to advocate pledging allegiance to a flawed system rather than working to spread sympathy throughout the world. He worked closely with other Federalists supporting the Alien and Sedition Act (1798), passed a year after the publication of his novel. He did not see any contradiction between isolationism, expressed in the novel as anti-Semitism, and abolitionism. A few years later he moved to Vermont, where he became a State Supreme Court Justice, and where, according to his biographer G. Thomas Tanselle, "His Federalism seems to have become so mild that he could take office amidst a general Republican victory, but for the same reason could not survive the Federalist victory of 1813" (Tanselle 34). He remains, like his protagonist, an ambiguous figure, pulled in contradictory directions by the ships named *Freedom* and *Sympathy*, and settling at home for lack of any better alternatives.

I now turn briefly to Susanna Rowson's drama *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), slightly breaking with chronology in order to draw attention to what might be described as the sliding scale of sentiment within the universal framework of commercial humanism. Markoe is parochial, equating sentiment with neighborliness; Tyler is an isolationist who sees sentiment as a necessary but inadequate line of defense against the depredations of a commercial system that sanctions slavery. Rowson is a missionary who believes that sentiment can democratize foreign despotisms (Dillon 409-10). Her universalism serves the drama's overtly feminist purpose of representing women as agents—not merely symbols—of political freedom. To do so she adapts the then pervasive fantasy of white Christian women kidnapped into harems.^{xiv}

The premise of the play is farcical, perhaps even pornographic, but Rowson's purpose is avowedly feminist. As Rowson's biographer Patricia L. Parker puts it,

Rowson set her scenes in palace gardens and hid her characters behind fig trees, but she...seemed only slightly acquainted or little concerned with specific facts about the nation. She did know that olives and figs grew there and that Jews lived among the Moors without discrimination. Rowson's interest, however, lay not in Algeria itself but in the subject of tyranny in general and of tyranny of men over women in particular. She used this popular topic to make her first feminist statement on stage. (Parker 68)

The heroine of *Slaves in Algiers*, Rebecca, is an American mother, who through a comic-opera plot involving cross-dressing, disguises, and chance encounters, is reunited with her long-lost husband and daughter. Her perseverance teaches Algerians the importance of liberty, and sets up dramatic moments and an epilogue where strong female characters are able to express their commitment to liberty and convincingly decry the tyranny of men over women (Rowson 18, 72, 78). A slave revolt that makes the happy ending possible is ultimately welcomed by the Dey because he has learned the importance of liberty from the woman he wanted to make his concubine (74). Algiers is liberated according to the American plan, but ultimately it must consolidate its victory without American help. As Elizabeth Dillon points out, all of the interracial and interfaith marriages are avoided at the end. America and Algiers are analogous, but they remain

distinct in terms of race and religion (Dillon 415). The most threatening figure of all, an English Jew who pretended to convert to Islam in Algeria, is exiled from both lands. His daughter, whom he sold to the Sultan because he believed money to be more important than any sentimental bonds to family, nevertheless rejects marriage with a Christian to care for him (74). Sentiment wins out in the end, but it defines itself in terms of family and tribe. Rowson's women, who feel the need for freedom as strongly as men do, are qualified to be active political agents; nevertheless, the differences between races and religions establish themselves as boundaries to the more personal forms of affection. Rowson's powerful vindication of women's rights is also a plea for strictly delineated geography of national and racial boundaries which leaves Jews nowhere to go.

The boundaries that reveal themselves in Rowson's comic resolution map on to the racial and national boundaries of a global system of trade, which spread across the Atlantic under the banner of universal liberty, but distributed wealth in terms of core nations and their colonies (cf. Wallerstein). Jews seemed to have no place of their own in this emerging economic and geographical system. This is part of the reason why in these two novels and a play, they serve as figures for that other diaspora of enslaved Africans who were treated, in the name of profit, as if they were beyond the boundaries of human feeling.

Cathcart and Barlow dreamed of international harmony. However, they wound up martyrs to sentiment that also seemed to have no place of its own. Cathcart ended his career (1818-1820) by surveying the newly acquired Louisiana territory and complaining about slavery to his superiors. Nobody listened, and his letters were not published (Waller 177). Barlow, who had helped free him, already lay buried in Żarnowiec, Poland, where he died of the pneumonia he caught while chasing Napoleon during his disastrous Russian retreat in 1812. Barlow had been dispatched (by James Madison) to negotiate yet another treaty, but what he saw convinced him that the international "harmony" achieved by revolution didn't rhyme commerce with sentiment, but slaughter with slaughter. Barlow's last poem, "Advice to A Raven in Russia," is a catastrophic description of the final equality of "every nation's gore" (rpt. in Woodress 338-39). His vision of global harmony turned out not to have a jurisdiction; his grave is its cenotaph.

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NOTES

- i. In the penultimate paragraph of his Second Inaugural Address (1805), Jefferson employs the same phrase—"union of sentiment"—to argue that the nation had overcome bitter factionalism to unify itself through his election (Jefferson). He is referring to Federalists who, led by ministers including Timothy Dwight, referenced later in this essay, accused him of atheism. Jefferson does not claim that he has won the Federalists over—the Inaugural is surprisingly specific about the vitriol of the attacks—but he does think that the two parties can agree to disagree, this time within the framework of free speech. It is unclear who borrowed the phrase from whom—Cathcart wrote his memoirs years after his captivity, but he was sending official dispatches to Jefferson during his first term of office. Neither of them invented it, however. The first usage I have found is in Thomas Paine's *American Crisis*, no. 3, which describes how British oppression forged a "sentimental union" in the colonies reaching its fruition in the Declaration of Independence (Paine 116-18). Paine saw himself as a rationalist who lived according to universal principles rather than a sentimentalist with attachments to the particular. In *American Crisis*, no. 7, he argued, "my principles are universal. My attachment is to all the world, and not any particular part" (197). Whigs, on the other hand, would argue that this kind of abstract universalism sacrificed the concrete bonds of local human affection. However, Paine was more than willing to admit the importance of particular communities of sentiment within a framework of universal principles, as in the following excerpt from *American Crisis*, no. 9: "America ever is what she *thinks* herself to be. Governed by sentiment, and acting her own mind, she becomes as she pleases the victor or the victim" (231). In Cathcart, Jefferson, and Paine the union of sentiment is a way of imagining community as common feeling within a framework of universal laws.
- ii. In the revised version of Barlow's epic, *The Columbiad* (1809), Columbus is granted a vision of a future world encircled by a commercial armada: "by fraternal hands their sails unfurl'd/ Have waved at last in unison o'er the world" (Barlow 193).
- iii. Dwight preached a sermon in Connecticut on July 4, 1798, "The Duty of Americans at the Present Crisis," where he talked about the Christian victory against Islam ("Duty of Americans").
- iv. "Dwight, a stalwart Federalist among the stalwarts, was inclined to place Jeffersonians in the same category as infidels" (Cunningham 220).
- v. "Eventually Dwight grew disillusioned about his country's peculiar role in world redemption, as disestablishmentarians and democrats gained power, but he did not despair of his faith's ultimate success. Always the evangelical activist, he merely reconceived his millennial army in less nationalistic formation. He and his associates looked to a worldwide union of evangelical Calvinists to propagate the Gospel and subdue Infidel conspirators in every locality" (Berk 116).
- vi. What I am offering here is a version of the familiar, and to some degree no longer fashionable, argument that Protestantism led to secularization. Here it is in Peter Berger's version: "[Protestantism] only denuded the world of divinity in order to emphasize the terrible majesty of the transcendent God and it only threw man into total 'fallenness' in order to make him open to the intervention of God's sovereign grace, the only true miracle in the Protestant universe. In doing this, however, it narrowed man's relationship to the sacred to the one exceedingly narrow channel that it called God's word (not to be identified with a fundamentalist conception of the Bible, but rather with the uniquely redemptive action of God's grace—the *sola gratia* of the Lutheran confessions). As long as the plausibility of this conception was maintained, of course, secularization was effectively arrested, even though all its ingredients were already present in the Protestant universe. It needed only the cutting of this one narrow channel of

mediation, though, to open the floodgates of secularization” (118). It is the argument of this essay that secularism was more religious than it admitted.

vii. Christine Levecq in *Slavery and Sentiment*: “The fact that Smith...authored both a moral study of sentiment and a book of liberal, free-market economics...suggests that his theory of individually negotiated emotional exchange is ideally suited to naturalize the individualism at the heart of his political philosophy” (21).

viii. What qualifies as the first American anti-slavery tract, *The Selling of Joseph* (1700) by Samuel Sewall, who was one of the judges at the Salem Witch Trials, invokes the Barbary comparison: “I am sure, if some Gentlemen should go down to the *Brewsters* to take the Air, and Fish: And a stronger party from *Hull* should Surprise them, and Sell them for Slaves to a Ship outward bound: they would think themselves unjustly dealt with; both by Sellers and Buyers. And yet ‘tis to be feared, we have no other kind of Title to our *Niggers* (Sewall 15). Benjamin Franklin wrote an ironic letter to the editor from the perspective of a Barbary ruler to lampoon the position of Southern slaveholders (Baepler 8).

ix. Barlow tried to blame delays in American payments on a renegade captain—Peter Lyle—who had originally shipped out with Cathcart; his letters of the period express remorse for spreading a rumor that could have cost the renegade his head (it did not) (Barlow 142). Lyle’s defection seemed to place him beyond the pale of sentiment. The new millennium would be characterized by free trade and political freedom, and those who “turned Turk”—as the saying had it—were worse than unenlightened. They were deniers.

x. Curiously, Timothy Dwight played a role here as well. His *Conquest of Canaan*, which preceded Barlow’s attempt to write the epic of America by a decade, was a religious allegory of American independence, but it also served as a blueprint for American missionary projects in Jerusalem, some of which advocated both the conversion and the emigration of Jews (Field 274).

xi. Markoe’s biographer (Sister Mary Chrysostom Diebels) claims that *The Algerine Spy* was the first American novel (William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy* and Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* both appeared in 1791, the latter published in England). This may be true, although it should be pointed out that Markoe did not invent the premise of an “oriental” spy who decides to settle in the west. *The Algerine Spy* was clearly modeled on Montesquieu’s *Persian Letters* (1721), which describes a Persian spy who never makes it back to his homeland.

xii. *The Algerine Captive* is dedicated to David Humphreys, who was the American envoy to the region, stationed in Lisbon, and like Barlow known as one of the Connecticut Wits.

xiii. Gilmore: “*The Algerine Captive*, like Tyler’s comedy *The Contrast*, integrates sentiment into the world of men. The novel politicizes affectivity so that it becomes an instrument of public virtue rather than the invitation to feminine self-indulgence deplored by critics” (637).

xiv. Historians agree that European women were rarely taken captive by Barbary pirates, and probably never an American, for the simple reason that women were seldom on ships. However, spurious captivity narratives such as those purporting to be by one Maria Martin and a Mary Velnet were extremely popular around 1800 (Baepler 147). The virtue that Velnet managed to preserve could be seen in all its naked glory on the frontispiece, which depicted her at the low point of her captivity, bare-breasted and chained in a dungeon (Baepler 148).

ABSTRACTS

A number of American sailors were taken hostage by Barbary Corsairs and held as slaves in North Africa in the years following the Revolutionary War. The crisis would ultimately lead to open warfare, but many Americans were optimistic that international commerce and common sympathy might overcome religious differences. This essay sketches the history of the Barbary conflict and considers three fictionalized accounts of Barbary encounter as secular conversion narratives, two of the three demonstrating how even despotic slaveholders could learn to embrace commerce and sentiment. Peter Markoe's novel *The Algerine Spy in Pennsylvania* (1787), Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Slave* (1797), and Susanna Rowson's drama *Slaves in Algiers* (1794) suggest a certain openness to religious and national difference; however they are clearly about American concerns and, in fact, more committed to secularized Christian norms than their praise of common sentiment would suggest. In all three texts, Jews are excluded from the vision of common sentiment and made to symbolize what was cruel about commerce; it is my argument that they served as scapegoats for the American discomfort with its own failures of sentiment, evidenced most obviously by chattel slavery and the slave trade. These fictionalized tales of encounter hold up sentiment as the solution to all sorts of conflict. However, they also deploy sentiment, paradoxically, as a pre-biological marker of race, designating those beyond the union of sentiment—Jews—as somehow detached from the quality that makes people human.

INDEX

Keywords: Barbary captivity, James Cathcart, Joel Barlow, Peter Markoe, Royall Tyler, sentiment, Susanna Rowson, Tripolitan War

AUTHOR

ANDREW S. GROSS

Friedrich Alexander Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg