Summer 7-22-2014

“Pirates on the Sea of Literature”: Uncovering the Erotic Imagination of the American Female Guardian Society

Tiffany Grace Rexroth
University of Colorado Boulder, grace.rexroth@colorado.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholar.colorado.edu/engl_gradetds

Part of the American Literature Commons, English Language and Literature Commons, and the Religion Commons

Recommended Citation

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by English at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Graduate Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
“Pirates on the Sea of Literature”: Uncovering the Erotic Imagination of the American Female Guardian Society

by

Grace Rexroth

B.A., Colorado State University

M.A. University of Colorado, Boulder

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of Colorado in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Master of English Literature

Department of English

2014
This thesis entitled:

“Pirates on the Sea of Literature”: Uncovering the Erotic Imagination of the American Female Guardian Society written by Grace Rexroth

has been approved for the Department of English

Mary K. Klages

Laura Winkiel

Nicole Wright

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we Find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards Of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
Abstract

Rexroth, Grace (M.A. English Literature)

“Pirates on the Sea of Literature”: Uncovering the Erotic Imagination of the American Female Guardian Society

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Mary Klages

The American Female Guardian Society (AFG) was a pillar for mid-19th century American moral reform movements. Beginning in 1835, the society published a bimonthly magazine, entitled The Advocate of Moral Reform, which railed against sexual immorality, the evils of “licentious” literature, and the dangers of an intemperate lifestyle. As a magazine that was both run by and published for women, their immediate aim was to help women improve and bolster family values in the midst of the dangers and temptations unique to city life – the most notable of which was the increasing visibility and acceptance of prostitution and brothels. Traditionally, critics have asserted the importance of the AFG’s periodicals, and American reform literature more generally, because the vehemence and solemnity with which reform writers addressed women constituted a break with previously established rhetorical traditions (as represented in print culture). What critics seem to have overlooked is the fact that the AFG’s writers were using very specific “oriental” tropes of piracy and capture to construct their rhetoric of moral reform. Overall, I attempt to map this project so that the rhetoric of the AFG may be considered within the larger transatlantic framework which characterized 19th century political and economic concerns so that the thematic underpinnings of the AFG’s rhetoric may be better understood.
There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism.

~Walter Benjamin

Introduction:

The American Female Guardian Society (AFG) was a pillar for mid-19th century American moral reform movements. Beginning in 1835, the society published a bimonthly magazine, entitled The Advocate of Moral Reform, which railed against sexual immorality, the evils of “licentious” literature, and the dangers of an intemperate lifestyle. Engulfed by a sea of printed material, the members of the AFG intended their magazine to be a beacon of light, an antidote to the “corrupting” publications that were flourishing around them. As a magazine that was both run by and published for women, their immediate aim was to help women improve and bolster family values in the midst of the dangers and temptations unique to city life – the most notable of which was the increasing visibility and acceptance of prostitution and brothels.

Traditionally, critics have asserted the importance of the AFG’s periodicals, and American reform literature more generally, because the vehemence and solemnity with which reform writers addressed women constituted a break with previously established rhetorical traditions (as represented in print culture). The historian Bertha-Monica Stearns claims that this “group of periodicals definitely addressed to women, and very largely edited by women, [which]…
clamored loudly for some Right, or agitated vigorously against some Abuse” was a “novelty” in the 1830s.⁴ Stearns suggests that, prior to the 1830s, women were only addressed as readers “that they might be ‘amused and instructed’ – supplied with short stories, a few pages of verse, and a generous amount of admonition on such matters of conduct as the selection of a husband.”⁵ Thus, the intentionality behind the way reformers addressed women as a readership was exceptional. Historian Patricia Cohen claims that moral reform was “one of the more controversial strains of social activism to arise in a decade suffused with radical movements”⁶ in part, because it broke from gendered rhetorical norms. Lisa Shaver, a rhetorician, contends that the AFG developed a unique “evangelical rhetoric of rage” which “forged an early feminist consciousness.”⁷ Shaver suggests that the AFG claimed “anger” as a “reasoned response” to social ills, and thus created a new platform for the female voice. Helen Horowitz, however, takes a slightly more pragmatic approach; Horowitz suggests that the AFG fit squarely within the framework of evangelical Christianity and that their moral views represented little more than a dogmatic “distrust of the flesh”⁸ in accordance with the Protestant tradition. Despite these slight variations, the overall critical discussion of the AFG has been confined to a conventional perspective; at best, the AFG has been credited with founding an early American feminist consciousness – at worst, they have been dismissed as predictable religious radicals. In either case, they are examined only within a very narrow national framework which presupposes a limited rhetorical vocabulary, as established by uniquely American conventions.

⁵ Stearns, “Reform Periodicals,” 678
What critics seem to have overlooked is the fact that – while the AFG undoubtedly harnessed “evangelical rage” in many of its issues and kept up a constant condemnation of prostitution, licentiousness, fiction, the theater, and other sites of corruption – the AFG’s writers were using very specific “oriental” tropes of piracy and capture to construct their rhetoric of moral reform. Ironically, the AFG did not approve of “oriental” fiction. While they were interested in missionary reports which portrayed heathen countries as singularly impoverished and pitiable, they overtly condemned all “pirate and robber literature,”9 (such as *The Arabian Nights*, for example) as weakening readers by instilling in them a love of adventure and romance, making them unfit for the trials of everyday life. However, I will argue that they were involved in an unlikely linguistic congress with the very fiction they sought to suppress and by the 1840’s, had begun using the same sensationalized orientalist tropes – veiled women, infidels, and “capture” by pirates – found in some of the “licentious” fiction they detested.10 The reformers used these tropes to depict and sensationalize transgressive sexuality, such that the resulting construction and endorsement of American ideals – marriage, family, temperance, and democracy – was actually facilitated by the orientalist fantasy they seemingly sought to repress.

Rather than examining the AFG’s periodicals as existing within a national domestic vacuum, this thesis investigates the productive connections that can be made when the AFG is considered as part of a transatlantic “conversation” of sexuality, interlinked with economic and political realities. To this end, I examine the AFG’s periodicals alongside Barbary captivity narratives, a British erotic novel, and Thompson’s crime fiction. Each of these genres is uniquely concerned with the process of capture and seduction, and each, in turn, is animated by a

---

10 For the AFG, “licentious” fiction covers a broad swath of printed material, including the penny press papers, romance novels, crime literature – in general, the AFG disapproved of any work of fiction that was not morally edifying and/or had a romantic component.
kind of orientalism – by the dramatized threat of a barbarous and wildly lascivious “other.” Of course, such orientalism is ostensibly used by different genres to different ends, ranging from edification to titillation to satiric critique. Yet, in each case, orientalist tropes become the imperative lynchpins for interpreting the sensationalized narrative of female seduction – a narrative that the female reformers become complicit in creating and circulating – because orientalism harnessed and sensationalized the capture and commoditization of (often female) bodies against the backdrop of mercantilist exchange. Anxieties concerning the sexual violation of female bodies and the regulation of male sexuality – both of which are filtered through the tropes of piracy and capture – mirror specific 19th century concerns about transatlantic trade (merchant ships “violated” by pirates) and the regulation of urban space (pastoral life “violated” by industrialization). Essentially, I examine each of my primary texts as revealing new ways of interpreting the AFG’s rhetoric, which, when examined in light of the whole, evince the tensions inherent in the American national fantasy of freedom, unity, and sovereignty.

Of course, the term “orientalism” demands qualification, since it overtly invokes the work of Edward Said. In his seminal work, Said constructed and utilized the term “orientalism” for three primary purposes: to consider those who study and write about the Orient (as “orientalist”); to examine and interrogate the philosophies and beliefs which differentiated the Orient and the Occident; and to expose the means by which the “West” constructed and maintained authority over the Orient. 11 For Said, the “Orient” was synonymous with the “East,” (signifying much of the colonized world) and the “Occident” was synonymous with the “West” (signifying British and European colonizers). For the purposes of this project, my use of the term “orientalism” is much narrower than Said’s. By “orientalism,” I am referring to a specific discourse about Northern Africa and the Ottoman Empire which arose in the United States as a

result of the transnational circulation of Barbary pirate captivity narratives, travel narratives, and newspaper representations of the Barbary wars (1801-1805, 1815). A more accurate way of specifying it might be say that it was “American antebellum” orientalism. I suggest that this orientalism was animated by the threat of pirate capture and “white” slavery on the Barbary coast. Building on the work of Malini Johar Schueller, I examine American orientalism as an ironic fascination with the Barbary states which, at different times, served to both construct the myth of America as a sovereign, free, imperial power and call into question the economic framework which structured its political hypocrisy. My theoretic framework hinges on Said’s second premise to the extent that I examine orientalist tropes active in captivity narratives and erotic literature, not to determine how this discourse skewed representations of the “Orient” or how it validated a colonial enterprise, but to examine how it affected a very specific discourse of transgressive sexuality in antebellum American culture. When Congress passed the Tariff of 1857, banning the importation of pornographic and obscene novels, certain orientalist tropes had already become popularized by the wide distribution of imported erotica. To this end, I examine the ways in which American Barbary captivity narratives ignited the imagination of erotic writers, spurring a literary trend that romanticized pirate captivity on the Barbary coast. *The Lustful Turk* (1828), first published anonymously in London, is a notable example of how

---


13 Congress first passed the Tariff of 1842 which banned the importation of obscene pictures and then expanded that Tariff in 1857 to include obscene literature. For a more in depth discussion of these Tariffs, see Peter Andreas, *Smuggler Nation: How Illicit Trade Made America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

14 *The Lustful Turk* was published first by John Benjamin Brookes and then reprinted by William Dugdale. I am examining it for two reasons: 1) because it was circulating during the 1830s when the AFG formed and 2) because it incorporated a distilled version of the oriental tropes – capture by pirates, interracial sex, Turkish barbarism etc. – that emerged through Barbary captivity narratives.
the tropes of the Barbary captivity narratives were appropriated for erotic fantasy – a fantasy which was then subtly inscribed in moral reform rhetoric and American crime novels.

The notion of “fantasy” is integral to my use of “orientalism”; fantasy is the link between a subject’s self-identification as a national subject and the identification of the “other.” After all, Said suggests that the “Orient” was a western invention – a fantasy – fetishized in writing as “a place of romance, exotic beings” and illicit sexuality. Reciprocally, Lauren Berlant claims that “nations provoke fantasy,” through which discursive tropological constructions of national subjectivity become reified and embodied by individuals. Thus, I also want to treat orientalism as an extension of, to use Berlant’s term, the “National Symbolic” of American national fantasy. Berlant defines the National Symbolic as “the order of discursive practices whose reign within a national space produces, and also refers to, the ‘law’ in which the accident of birth within a geographic/political boundary transforms individuals into subjects of a collectively-held history.” For the purposes of this project, I would like to suggest that orientalism – as I have defined it – both confirmed and fractured American fantasy in the antebellum era. Yet, as Berlant notes, subjects are not merely national subjects through fantasy. Rather, there is a tension between fantasy and lived constraint, the abstract and the experiential, the national and the local:

The national fantasy in whose utopian promise Americans…have invested identities and bodies, for the sake of happiness, addresses persons in their set of particular identities, and reconstrues them in two ways. Through the National Symbolic they receive the mantle of the privilege of collectively held affect, a fantasy of boundless identity. This requires each subject to shed her attachment to her other, local identities, and to enter a new synchronic political order, which has a mystical relation to everyday history. In contrast, through political parties, citizens are distributed along hierarchical lines in the

16 Ibid., 20.
political public sphere according to the value of their gender, class, ethnic, racial, and regional identities.\textsuperscript{17}

Thus the fantasy of unity, offered through the National Symbolic, is constrained by lived political experience. Similarly, I argue that the AFG’s construction of female sexuality operates as a subset of the national fantasy that is correspondingly constrained. The AFG’s anxiety about female bodies (and the regulation of male sexuality) is, at times, a unified concern; women are portrayed as the guardians of the family and thus the guardians of democracy. Protecting their virtue is akin to protecting the nation.\textsuperscript{18} Yet, in reality, the AFG decided which women to help on the basis of religion, immigrant nationality, and perceived morality (race is never overtly addressed). Thus their rhetoric did not fit perfectly with their practice. However, this too, seems in line with Berlant’s theory, for she suggests that “when the body of the woman is employed symbolically to regulate or represent the field of national fantasy, her positive “agency” lies solely in her availability to be narrativised – controlled…by her circulation within a story.”\textsuperscript{19} To explicate and interpret this tension, I examine “captured” female bodies through narratives that employ the intersection of orientalism, female sexuality, and the National Symbolic. This intersection culminates around the trope of piracy, a trope that the AFG used metaphorically but which also operated both as a real threat and as a sexual/political fantasy.

Piracy is a unifying thread which connects reform rhetoric to other forms of literature: the AFG used the trope of piracy to personify “licentious” fiction, the temptations of the city, and the seductive power of prostitutes; Barbary captivity narratives sensationalized “real” pirate capture; British erotic fiction romanticized and eroticized pirate capture; and American crime novels

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 216.
\textsuperscript{18} For an analysis of how the term “virtue” came to be gendered in American politics see Ruth H. Bloch, “the Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America,” Signs 13, no. 1 (Autumn 1987):37-58.
\textsuperscript{19} Berlant, Anatomy of National Fantasy, 28.
inscribed the themes of capture into the urban American landscape. In the mid-19th century, the pirate as “trope” is uniquely slippery. On the macro scale of national economy, piracy represents a crisis of national sovereignty, predatory upon and disruptive of commercial exchange. In the early 19th century it became linked to the Barbary wars and white slavery. Yet, piracy was also portrayed as positively disruptive or revolutionary. As Srinivas Aravamudan notes, piratical narratives of the 18th century often provide “textual evidence of antimerchantilist proletarian resistance”20 to the rise of capitalism and industrialized trade. At the social level, piracy offers an alternative mode of affiliation and form of life – Aravamudan suggests that it may even be construed as a “truer” form of democracy. In literature, piracy is also active as a familiar trope of violence and, especially in the mid 1830’s, a key element of orientalized erotic/romance fiction. On the level of American political discourse, which at times pervades each of the underlying layers, it is used to both cement national identity and interrogate it. The fact that the AFG utilizes the trope of piracy – an inherently layered symbol by the 1840s – suggests that their rhetoric of moral reform was circumscribed by larger nationalist concerns and entwined with economic and political pressures.

To adequately explore how the AFG’s literature was enmeshed in a larger transatlantic conversation, this thesis is broken up into four sections. The first section, titled “Scandalous Rhetoric: A Brief History of the AFG,” examines the history and philosophy of the American Female Moral Guardian Society. In this section I question how orientalism became part of the AFG’s burgeoning rhetoric and identify several key socio-historical pressures which shaped the AFG’s agenda. In particular, I examine the legacy of the AFG’s predecessor, John McDowall, who began his campaign for moral reform by targeting prostitutes as the ultimate cause of immorality. His self-righteous tenacity and insistence on broadcasting the indiscretions of other

powerful men won him many enemies, some of whom eventually responded by accusing him of illicit behavior towards the subjects of his reform efforts.\textsuperscript{21} It was in the wake of this scandal that the AFG took over McDowall’s work and were forced to shift their focus away from prostitutes. To avoid further scandal, the AFG decided that instead of reforming the fallen, they would focus their efforts on protecting the young and the innocent. Yet this shift in rhetoric required them to assert that the young could remain incorruptible if shielded from “licentiousness.” Thus, rather than originating in the “fallen” human body, licentiousness had to be refashioned as an invading “other,” a villain that attacked the soul from without. The AFG had to create the story of licentiousness and, by the early 1840’s, had adapted the tropes of orientalism to personify licentiousness as a satanic pirate infidel who sought to capture, infect, and degrade his victims.

In the second section of this thesis, titled “Pirates on the Sea of Literature” I examine how the AFG sensationalized seduction through the tropes of piracy and capture. I then consider the history of Barbary pirate captivity narratives and how the Barbary Wars changed and incited a revival in the popularity of those narratives. To explicate how transgressive sexual practices were associated with Turks and how piracy was thematized as a threat to national sovereignty, I examine an early American captivity narrative titled, \textit{The History and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin Who Was Six Years a Slave in Algiers}. The \textit{History of Maria Martin} is especially interesting because it is a fictionalized account, written by an American publisher, William Crary, in 1806 (just after the end of the first Barbary war) and therefore is uniquely poised to

\textsuperscript{21} To expand on McDowall’s influence over the AFG, I depend primarily on Helen Horowitz’s description of the AFG in her book \textit{Rereading Sex}, as well as the AFG’s autobiographical account of the first forty years of their organization, compiled by S.R.I. Bennett, in \textit{Women’s Work Among the Lowly}. See Helen Horowitz, \textit{Rereading Sex} (New York: Knopf, 2002) and S.R.I. Bennett, \textit{Women’s Work Among the Lowly} 2\textsuperscript{nd} Ed. (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1880).
exemplify American attitudes toward piracy. I end this section by returning to the AFG’s rhetoric. Using the history of the Barbary Wars and the thematic elements of Mrs. Martin’s captivity narrative as lenses through which to examine the AFG’s rhetoric, I question how the trope of piracy operates as a signifier for national crisis and how that informs the AFG’s discussion of seduction.

The third section of this thesis, titled “Sexy Pirates: Erotic Fiction and Proletarian Resistance,” examines the ways that piracy was alternately interpreted and sensationalized, especially in erotic fiction. While the discourse of piracy was undoubtedly fostered by depictions of Barbary pirates through captivity narratives, it was also expanded and fractured by the wide transnational circulation of British erotica and popular fiction in the 1830s and 40s. In this section I examine the sensationalized depictions of piracy, capture, and harems in The Lustful Turk as both paralleling and disrupting the AFG’s chief rhetorical themes. I end this section by suggesting that the AFG’s use of oriental tropes is essentially a double edged sword; their intended meaning – to inspire moral sexual practices – is undercut by the romantic and revolutionary connotations attached to “piracy” and “capture” in erotic fiction.

My last section, “Oriental Space: Navigating Urban Industrialism and Political Hypocrisy in Thompson’s Venus in Boston,” examines how, by conflating licentiousness with piracy, the AFG was able to use orientalism to posit “otherness” within American society. I question the utility of this rhetorical move and conclude that their use of “piracy” as a domesticated trope also points to the AFG’s anxieties about urban space. By positioning piracy in American cities and turning them into spaces without clear sovereign authority, the AFG symbolically pushed cities to the margins of national control, endowing their work of “rescue” with political meaning. If American society was infested with licentious infidels (who could not necessarily be distinguished by their appearance), the threat of capture was always imminent: women had to be
rescued from lecherous men, men had to be rescued from lecherous prostitutes, the family had to be rescued from the “reign” of licentiousness, and democracy as a whole had to be rescued from licentious, piratical barbarism. Part of the AFG’s practical work involved sending orphaned children in the city to moral Christian homes in the country. However, the same hypocrisy which pervades the logic of the Barbary wars infiltrates the AFG’s construction of American cities as “immoral” and beyond clear national control, for it displaces the mechanisms of national economic viability (slavery, industrialization, factories) onto a defamiliarized (foreign) landscape and suggests that they are uniquely immoral or “other.” I examine the crime novel Venus in Boston (1848) by George Thompson as a (somewhat) self-reflexive novel which sensationalizes the dangers of the urban landscape while satirizing the domestic hypocrisy implicit in this literary move. Overall, I attempt to map this project so that the rhetoric of the AFG may be considered within the larger transatlantic framework which characterized 19th century political and economic concerns.

Scandalous Rhetoric: A Brief History of the AFG

In the 1840 September edition of their bimonthly magazine, then called The Advocate of Moral Reform, The American Female Guardian Society (AFG) published a battle cry:

The object for which we labor, the extermination of impurity throughout the land, is not yet accomplished. The vice of licentiousness is still in our midst, and serpent-like is coiling itself along the paths of the young, and alluring its thousands daily down the broad road to destruction. Even, in our schools and seminaries of learning, it is found breathing its pestilential vapors, defiling all that is pure and lovely…the eradication of this vice [is] necessary to save the rising generation from the grasp of this monster.22

With this column, the moral reformers drew battle lines and their goal was clear: nothing less than the total “extermination of impurity” would suffice. Though, because “licentiousness” is

the only word used to qualify “impurity” in this passage, it becomes its totalizing definition –
personified here as a “serpent,” an “alluring” tempter, and a defiling “monster.” Thus, the
reformers rhetorically positioned “licentiousness” as a threatening invader, illuminating the
dramatic agenda of both the magazine and the society itself. Between 1840 and 1860 the AFG
used “licentiousness” and “lewdness” interchangeably, though “licentiousness” was the more
popular word. While the AFG never directly defined it, their use of “licentiousness” connoted
both private thought and public action, spanning the gambit from lust and masturbation to
infidelity and lewd sexual acts. The flexibility inherent in the use of the term stems from the
reformers’ inability to speak explicitly about sex for fear of crossing the boundaries of social
propriety. Licentiousness and lewdness thus became the proxy words for all unspeakable sexual
acts and desires.

As evidenced by this passage, the reformers often situated their discourse of sexuality as
an imperative to protect “the young.” They enforced the idea that “licentiousness” – the
invading monster – could carry off the young and innocent. It was through this rhetoric, during
the first twenty years of their publication, that the moral reformers persisted in their attempts to
frighten, shock, and provoke their readers to action in the great battle against “licentiousness.”
Depicted alternately as a “demon,” a “serpent,” a “contagious disease,” a “pollution” of the
holy body, a “poison,” a “monster,” an “odious plague,” a roving “infidel” and often

\[23\] Ibid., 9
\[24\] Rev. B.M. Hall, “Guard The Thoughts – Avoid Pernicious Books and Dissolute Companions”
\[27\] Ibid., 30
\[29\] N.W. Read, “Extracts from Correspondence.” The Advocate of Moral Reform, Vol. VII
   (1840): 9.
\[30\] “Extract from an Address Delivered at Camden ME., 1840 before the FMR Soc. of that Place”
likened to the cholera epidemic, licentiousness was the great evil, the gateway through which other forms of corruption entered the world. It was also an invading evil which threatened to colonize the mind, corrupt the body, and threaten the democratic order of society.

The AFG’s discourse of “licentiousness” emerged from and was influenced by the militant discourse about New York prostitutes conceived by the society’s predecessor, John R. McDowall. Though the AFG was officially founded in 1834, many of its members had worked with McDowall in the early 1830’s, to publish the *McDowell Journal* and open the “House of Refuge.” 

McDowall had a very specific agenda; he believed prostitution was the principal threat to the morality of young men in the city and had to be stopped. In his *Magdalen Report* he stated that, while it is true that men often seduce women, “women take their revenge an hundred fold...bad women multiply the seduction of heedless youth more rapidly than bad men seduce modest women” and he asserted that “a few...courtesans suffice to corrupt whole cities.”

His discourse thus focused on young men living in urban cities, elevating them as a population that needed to be rescued from “bad” women. The reformation of prostitutes – women he rhetorically positioned as the primary cause of immorality – became a logical extension of his plan to save America via the preservation of the morality of young men, and the AFG initially took up his mantra. Yet, in 1835, McDowell was accused by his opponents of being a lecher whose obsession with prostitutes stemmed from his own depraved desires. Incensed by the

---

30 Ibid.
31 McDowall was an urban missionary who was brought to New York by the American Tract Society in 1831. He recognized that prostitution was a thriving business in the city and published *The Magdalen Report* to inform the public and shame prominent men for their indiscretions. In 1832, he started *McDowell’s Journal*, a regular publication fashioned on the model of the *The Magdalen Report*. Yet, his work enraged the public – especially men whom McDowall had accused of sexual indiscretions – and his enemies began suggesting that McDowall was obsessed with prostitutes because he was a lecher. The scandal caused by these accusations caused many of his supporters to desert him and, after his death in 1837, his “House of Refuge” mission was closed. See Horowitz, Rereading Sex, 146.
32 Qtd. in Horowitz, Rereading Sex, 146.
scandal, the Third Presbytery advised that the *McDowell Journal* should cease publishing. Insistent that McDowell’s work should not be abandoned, the AFG took over his operation and began publishing their own magazine, *The Advocate and Guardian*. The AFG was thus influenced by McDowell’s radical agenda, but forced to distance itself from this agenda in the wake of his scandal and rethink the problem of immorality.

The process by which the AFG was forced to rework their rhetoric of immorality is best exemplified by their attempts to account for their own history. In a book titled *Women’s Work Among the Lowly* (1880), Mrs. S.R.I. Bennett attempts to give something akin to an autobiographical account of the first forty years of the society’s work. The first thing Bennett does in her account is brush the McDowall scandal under the rug by politely but firmly distancing the society from his agenda. She suggests that McDowall was an important “antecedent link” to the society, but states “we make this allusion…both to do justice to its influence, and prevent misconstruction as to its extent and identity of character.”

She goes on to assert that, while they did take over McDowall’s subscribers, theirs was “a new paper, [established] under different auspices and in no sense, identified with any previous publication.” By denying association with McDowall, Bennett forces herself into a corner; she must explain the development of the AFG’s vision as if it never originated within McDowall’s radical framework.

Thus, rather than overtly crediting McDowall as the founder of their efforts, Bennett asserts that the formation of the AFG was prompted by a general “realization” in “the Christian community” that “there was a hidden moral leprosy, an unseen desolation, affecting the well-
being of thousands” in New York. Bennett never explains what “hidden moral leprosy” the AFG discovered and she is very careful not to mention the word “prostitute.” Yet, she cryptically suggests that there was a necessary shift in vision regarding the AFG’s work. She implies that the problem with the early goals of the society was one of conversion: “these [the reader must infer “prostitutes”] could never know his [Jesus] love without a radical change, and as they never entered the sanctuary, how should they listen to the gospel of Christ?” Thus, without ever really acknowledging that the AFG had wanted to reform prostitutes in the first place, she suggests that the AFG abandoned this course of action because prostitutes simply could not be converted by dint of their being prostitutes and refusing to enter a church. This leads to a new mission: “Remedy if practicable, prevention by every possible Christian endeavor.” Thus, the AFG began their war against licentiousness itself instead of prostitution. They shifted their vision to protecting the young and innocent, a rhetorical move which, because it required the establishment of a specific lascivious other against which to protect, opened the door to orientalist discourse. In a column published in March of 1841, the AFG asserted “[t]he object of our association is not to reclaim the vicious, but, if possible to throw a safeguard around the young.” Yet, it should be noted that, because of the AFG’s history, their war against licentiousness never quite escaped McDowall’s framework; even though they shifted their focus to “licentiousness” generally, they continued to fear “prostitution” as the ultimate “moral abyss.”

In the first decade of the Society’s work, the AFG was particularly concerned with the care of orphans, though their resources were limited. During the first few years, many of the

35 Ibid., 11.
36 Ibid., 12.
37 Ibid., 13.
members adopted the view that they could help the “few.” Every woman who had the space and means to help truly needy children opened up her home as “a temporary shelter for the homeless child or youth, till transferred to permanent protection in the country…and for several years this became a steady work, enlisting the best energies of the sundry members of the Board.”⁴⁰ Then, in 1845, the board members conceived of the idea to open an orphanage for children with a goal of helping city children “escape” to safe Christian homes in the country. The board members were relatively sure that their support network was large enough to sustain such a project. After all, by the Society’s third year, the AFG were connected to “226 Auxiliaries, and of this number 108 had been formed within the last year. About 15,000 ladies were connected with these Societies, all pledged to the great principles advocated.”⁴¹ The first advertisement for their proposed project, “The House of Industry and Home for the Friendless,” was published in January 1846. The Home itself was built in 1847.

As a means of protecting the young and innocent, the AFG also began to assert the importance of marriage and family. In some ways, their focus on marriage as a productive site for fostering their brand of national fantasy was practical. As Berlant notes, “A bond between erotic desire and the desire for collective political existence serves the nation, by connecting national identity and more local and personal forms of intimacy. The name for the ideal form of this association…is ‘utopia.’”⁴² While the AFG’s language did not engage “erotic” desire specifically, they did focus on the intimacy of marriage and the discursive space of the household as a site where democracy should be reflected and enacted. In this way, they encouraged parity and mutual affection between couples, including dual parenting responsibilities. Their belief in the fact that families were the cornerstone of democracy, was evinced by their repetitive and

⁴⁰ Bennett, Women’s Work, 119.
⁴¹ Ibid., 47.
⁴² Berlant, Anatomy of National Fantasy, 7.
prescriptive advice in *Home Whispers* (a book published by the AFG in 1857). Written by Melva for “husbands and wives,” *Home Whispers* is a collection of short stories – originally published in the *Advocate and Guardian* – intended to demonstrate how dysfunctional marriages and incorrect parenting affected children and society. One of the AFG’s chief fears was that licentiousness could corrupt the institution of marriage. The AFG claimed that “modern infidels, and modern licentiousness would fain impose upon the world, the sentiment that marriage is only a civil contract, to be dissolved at pleasure.”\(^{43}\) Behind this fear, was a growing anxiety about male sexuality. While McDowall had pointed the finger at prostitutes, rendering men the victims of corruption, the AFG had to find a rhetorical strategy for preventing “rakish” behavior. One of their early suggestions was to criminalize the seduction of young women. In a column printed by the AFG in November of 1847, the reformers encouraged “righteous laws,” to be brought “before the Legislature at its next Session, in order that a fitting punishment may be provided for the crimes of incest, seduction, and offences of a similar nature.”\(^{44}\) Following this column, the society began to write regular pleas for “consistency of law,” petitioning political leaders to criminalize licentious behavior for posing as great a threat to society as robbery and murder.\(^{45}\) One column begins “A man in this State has just been sent to State Prison, for three years, for raising from the grave the body of a harlot for dissection…but where is the man that robbed her of her purity under the promise of marriage, destroyed her worldly happiness and forced her to the den of death?”\(^{46}\) They suggested that the man who had violated her living body ought to suffer at least the same punishment as the man who violated her corpse. Their reasoning rested on the belief that, when a woman was seduced outside of marriage, she experienced an inevitable

\(^{45}\) Ibid.  
\(^{46}\) Ibid.
social death, leading her to prostitution and a downward spiral toward “the alms-house, the penitentiary, the hospital, and the grave.” Of course, the naming of these sites as the doom of sexual profligates is intriguing because they are each state controlled. The seducer thus, having robbed a woman of her virginity, is portrayed as sinning against her in two distinct ways: first, on the individual level, by violating her body and “robbing her of her purity,” and secondly, on the social level, for ostracizing her from good society, consigning her to the sphere of state correctional facilities. Helen Horowitz summarizes the former concern as a view which supported and, in turn, was bolstered by patriarchal ideology:

Patriarchal structure stood in the place of inner strength…The danger for the sexually awakened girl is the brothel. The aroused female cannot be trusted: she needs to satisfy her lusts. She looks first to a man and, if not protected by marriage, is seduced and abandoned. Pregnant, she has no recourse but the brothel for support and the continued gratification of her desires. The brothel leads her to sexual excess and death.

Thus, at the individual level, women with illicit sexual knowledge “could not be trusted” because they became intemperate slaves to their own bodies. Illicit sexual knowledge was the curse of death – completely transformative. Attached to this logic, The AFG seems to insinuate that a woman’s virginity acts as a commodity she trades for social “life” – marriage and family. Without it, she is consigned to social death – a fate almost akin to Agamben’s “bare life.” Of course, to enact Agamben here is problematic for myriad reasons, the most obvious of which being the fact that his theory of “bare life” is sex-blind. However, one of the principles of Agamben’s theory, which is potentially applicable, is that “bare life” constitutes political inclusion through exclusion – thus the exile entailed in “bare life” is a kind of inclusion by default. Agamben suggests that “Western politics first constitutes itself through an exclusion

---

48 Horowitz, Rereading Sex, 69.
(which is simultaneously an inclusion) of bare life. What is the relation of politics and life, if life presents itself as what is included by means of an exclusion?”¹ For Agamben, politics in this sense arises when life itself, bare life (zoe), as opposed to the good life characteristic of humans (bios), comes to ground political sovereignty. Yet, this can only happen by way of a double gesture that situates bare life both within and beyond politics. It is the function of the sacred, more precisely homo sacer, to enact this double gesture. Agamben defines the sacred as “Life that cannot be sacrificed and yet may be killed.”⁵⁰ Similarly, by propagating the fear of “social death” – excluding fallen women from the public spheres of respectable marriage and family – the AFG actually creates the value of public “social life,” marginalizing fallen women and relegating them to a kind of death without actually sacrificing them. This is made more significant by the fact that the AFG attempted to raise the public functions of the “wife and mother” to the level of political imperative. This was accomplished in part through their demands for “a law that shall adequately punish Seduction”⁵¹ with the ultimate purpose of protecting and fostering family life – the cornerstone of democracy.

However, the terms of female public life are not described as neutral categories in the AFG’s rhetoric. Instead, social death – leading to prostitution – is heavily nuanced by orientalism. The reformers contend: “The pathway to prostitution is made but too easy. Its avenues are beset with a thousand snares and lures; and when the unwary are once drawn into them a veil of secrecy and shame hides them, and sometimes forever, from public view.”⁵² Here, women who are lured into prostitution are hidden behind “a veil of secrecy and shame,” cloistered away from public view. The use of the word “veil” in this context is significant because it creates a visual barrier and marks a moral boundary. The veil separates righteous

---

⁵⁰ Ibid., 82.
from licentious women and demarcates the borders of their social space. Prostitutes are hidden “from public view,” akin to veiled women in harems, and are thus “othered” and excluded. A man who engages a prostitute is depicted as sacrificing his “integrity and purity upon her polluted altar.” Thus the sexual act is transformed into a pagan sacrifice. Going one step further, the moral reformers suggest that the tolerance of prostitution has consequences for national identity: “prostitution is tolerated by law in heathen nations perhaps without exception…sanctioned by ancient and venerable custom at the shrines of their religion.” Thus, the AFG seems to insinuate that if America tolerates prostitution, it may be transformed into a heathen nation. These rhetorical strategies stratify American society along moral lines that are also orientalized. The fate of the U.S. seems to waver between civility and barbarity, Christendom and heathenism. Indeed, one reformer asserted: “I have thought the contrast between the rich and the poor, less striking than the state of heart manifest between the infidel and the humble follower of Jesus.”

It should also be noted that the ways in which the AFG connoted these messages changed slightly throughout the 1840s and 50s. In the beginning, the AFG chanted a general polemic: “eradicate licentiousness.” It was as if the repetition itself could free the prisoners of lust, detoxify the body, and call the citizens to arms. Indeed, on March 1, 1841, one reformer wrote “I am conscious, that it only needs information on the subject of licentiousness, especially as it exists in our large towns and cities, to awaken and enlist the energies of the Christian community.

for the suppression of its ruthless ravages. Yet, the moral reformers were doing more than simply providing “information on the subject of licentiousness”; they were telling its story - the myth of its origin – and developing its villains and heroes. In this way, the AFG was influenced by the New York Tract Society which was founded in 1827. The Tract Society was one of the first organizations to harness the newly developed steam printing press to produce and distribute vast quantities of printed material. They learned early that their tracts were better received when in the form of a story – complete with a protagonist, an antagonist, and a narrative climax – and so many of the tracts spread their evangelical messages through moralistic parables. While the AFG’s writers seemed to be preoccupied – especially in the early issues of the magazine – with dry sermons and missionary reports, eventually the reformers began to intersperse moralistic stories throughout their magazine. By the 1850’s, half of the Advocate’s columns in a given issue were stylized as fictional short stories (though the Society was careful to assert their factual basis) meant to convey a moral message. It was through the story of licentiousness, a story meant to incite parental vigilance and prevent the young from erring, that the reformers’ use of oriental language – revealing their concerns about the relationship between sexuality and national sovereignty – came to the fore.

_Pirates on the Sea of Literature:_

Early in their campaign, the AFG began to assert that, while licentiousness was assuredly being spread by various bad habits and behaviors, it was “corrupting” fiction that was the

---

57 At first they blamed several things: public dance halls, lack of parental supervision over children, intemperate diet, and indulgent fashion obsessions (Vol.7 36, 37). While the AFG continued to be concerned with correct parenting and the importance of a “temperate” lifestyle, by 1840 it began to overtly vilify “licentious” or “pernicious” fiction as a primary cause of sexual immorality.
principle culprit. Yet, even while identifying fiction as the means by which licentiousness was spread, they began to appropriate the tools and tropes of the very thing they sought to condemn. This is exemplified as early as 1841, when the AFG published a column condemning fiction in a March issue of the Advocate. The reformers asserted:

Now, a book, a newspaper, a magazine, that we read habitually, is like a person with whom we are intimate...for whom we entertain a high respect. There is a magic in print, which gives its words a high authority...[but] a class of cheap papers have started up in the country...they are looked upon as pirates on the sea of literature, robbing whomsoever they can master.

Even in this short moralistic sketch, the AFG tells a story about the effects of fiction which, ironically, mimics that fiction itself. The reformers suggest that a reader is “intimate,” with print, evoking a romance or a friendship. They even assert that there is a “magic” in print, which romanticizes the relationship further. The story then becomes one of “capture,” for the heroic reader must escape from the “cheap” (licentious) literature – the pirate villains. The language used here evokes the tropes of The Arabian Knights – romance, magic, and piracy – to warn their readers against licentiousness. The parallel to The Arabian Knights, specifically, is significant because Malini Schueller suggests that the initial publication of The Arabian Knights by H. and P. Rice of Philadelphia in 1794 was “a major event in the circulation of Orientalist literature,” selling over forty thousand copies in the first ten years of its publication. It also exemplifies

58 One of the reasons that the AFG targeted fiction was because, by the late 1830’s, they were inundated with it. With the advent of the steam printing press came the penny press papers and a slew of popular novels that could all be printed quickly and cheaply. While local American courts followed precedents set by English common law regarding “obscenity,” the Comstock Laws, which solidified and expanded obscenity law, were not passed until 1873. For a more profound discussion regarding obscenity law and its interaction with print culture, see Horowitz, Rereading Sex, 358-386.
the kind of “abhorrent pirate and robber literature” of which the AFG disapproved. The AFG claimed that such fiction instilled children with “a love of romance and adventure” which then corrupted their “taste for solid reading and useful studies,” making them more apt to be weak-willed and sensual. However, the AFG never seemed to realize the irony of appropriating the tropes and strategies of the very thing they condemned.

In fact, the main “story” of licentiousness, as narrated by the American Female Guardian Society, becomes a story of pirate capture. In a column titled “Temptations of City Life,” the AFG depicts the city as a stormy sea; those who become “tired with the monotony of country life” inevitably “drift upon the current that always sets towards our great commercial cities” to “swell the tide of city life.” In the city, the young “are caught up in the whirling eddies,” the “streams of corruption,” and the “seething pools of moral pollution.” Sojourners to the city are thus likened to helpless ships in a tempest, caught in whirlpools. The AFG asserts that “but a few years suffice to accomplish a complete wreck of character and prospects” of the young man who enters the city; once “evil companions have got their arms about him,” there is no escape. Thus, the final outcome of city life is shipwreck and capture by “evil companions.” The landscape of the city is then transformed into an oriental market where “pleasure in a thousand forms beckons him to her temples.” The strategy of likening the temptations of city life – namely, prostitution and licentiousness – to shipwreck and capture on an oriental shore is fairly common throughout the AFG’s periodicals. Stories of men and women who become morally “shipwrecked” abound. In 1859, several of these stories – most of which appeared as individual

62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
65 Ibid., 215.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid., 217
columns in the AFG’s magazine – were collected into a book titled *Wrecks and Rescues*. However, one of the problems with using the trope of “piracy” as a stand-in for illicit sexual knowledge is that it implies that temperate bodies, protected from that knowledge, are part of a network of exchange (upon which pirates prey). Marriage and family life are therefore posited as the sovereign vessel of democracy, making bodies – and correct sexual practices – a national commodity.

Thus, in addition to evoking orientalist fiction, the AFG’s allusion to pirates, shipwrecks, and rescues is important because it has a sociocultural component: in the 1840’s, a New York reader would most likely have associated pirates with “Turks” and the Ottoman Empire. There are several reasons for this association. First, America’s participation in the Barbary wars and the War of 1812 generated a stereotype of Turkish pirates in the American cultural imagination through newspaper accounts and captivity narratives. Barbary captivity narratives seem to have been especially influential for 19th century perceptions of pirates, in part, because their history reached back to early colonial culture. Paul Baepler suggests that Barbary captivity narratives were usually written to “vilify the [Turkish] ‘infidel’” and were “widely disseminated” in both Britain and America. The earliest surviving narrative, written by the British sailor Abraham Browne about his capture in 1655, was published twenty-seven years before Mary Rowlandson’s narrative. Of course, one of the reasons Barbary pirates maintained such a longstanding reputation, was due to the fact that they were a danger on the high seas beyond the Barbary coast. As Paul Baepler asserts, “just five years after William Bradford landed in Plymouth, Moroccan

68 See *Wrecks and Rescues* (New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1859).
70 Ibid., 115.
corsairs ranged as near as Newfoundland, where they hijacked 40 ships.” In 1631, the village of Baltimore in Ireland was attacked by two Algerian ships. The pirates sacked the village and abducted all of its inhabitants. Throughout the 18th Century, Barbary pirates ruled the Mediterranean and plagued Europe and America with ransom demands for captured sailors. In fact, these demands were so common that Cotton Mather, the minister of Boston’s North Church, wrote several sermons about the horrors of Barbary captivity and referred to pirates as “the Monsters of Africa,” insinuating that they exemplified Satan’s dark force in the world. The prevalence of piracy and ransom demands in early 18th century America inspired entrepreneurial charlatans to develop what came to be known as the “Algerian Prisoner Fraud,” by which they would pretend to deliver ransom demands to cheat sailors’ families out of money.

Yet, it wasn’t until the onset of the “Barbary Wars” in 1801 that Turkish pirates became central to American conceptions of national sovereignty. After the victory of the Revolutionary War and the subsequent loss of British naval support, the U.S. struggled to implement its own trading routes and gain national recognition from other countries. When Thomas Jefferson became president in 1801, he declared war against the Barbary pirates who, under the de jure rule of the Ottoman Empire, had plagued American ships entering the Mediterranean. By the time he came to office, pirates were demanding ever-increasing forms of tribute to allow ships safe passage and, if refused, would raid American vessels and enslave the sailors or hold them for ransom. Though Jefferson’s opponents accused him of being rash for declaring war so soon after his inauguration, the war of 1801 was a long time in the making. In 1785 Algerian pirates

---

72 Ibid., 218.
73 Ibid., 228.
74 Ibid., 220.
75 Ibid., 218.
had captured the *Maria*, a Boston Schooner. 

Even though this event provoked public outrage, negotiations stalemated; the American prisoners from the *Maria* were not returned to the United States until 1797. Those who survived had been enslaved for thirteen years, and Algiers became a symbol for “lawlessness, piracy and plunder.” Thus, by the time Jefferson declared war, resentment towards the Barbary coast had been building for more than a decade.

On May 13, 1801 Jefferson sent a fleet of ships to attack the pirate cities of Tripoli and Algiers. The first Barbary war lasted from 1801 to 1805, ending when William Eaton conquered the city of Derna, east of Tripoli. A treaty with the dey was signed in 1805, but ransom continued to be paid until 1815. Under James Madison, Algiers (incited by the British) declared war in 1814, but it was brief. Within a month, Commodore Steven Dacatur overtook the prize ship of the Algerian fleet, the *Meshuda*, forcing Algeria to make peace with the U.S.

As Malini Schueller notes, what is most significant about the Barbary wars is how they affected conceptions of national sovereignty: “What had paradoxically begun as a threat to sovereignty was transformed in the cultural imaginary to a narrative of imperial might. The North African war helped glorify the vision of a powerful, imperial nation.” Thus, by the mid 19th century, the trope of “piracy” was firmly connected to the Barbary coast and had come to symbolize the cohesion of American sovereignty.

As might be expected, the Barbary wars incited a fresh flurry of interest in captivity narratives that described the Barbary coast. Yet, as Schueller notes, “the North African Orient (as despotic) evoked the very anxiety it signified…thus the oppositional rhetoric of liberty and

---

77 Schueller, *U.S. Orientalisms*, 47.
78 See prefatory material to “History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, Who was Six years a Slave in Algiers.” *Liberty’s Captives*, Ed. Daniel E. Williams (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006):105-106.
79 Ibid.
slavery [in narrative], for instance, is often constructed by a conscious exclusion of the facts of slavery and racial difference in the New World.”82 As Baepler asserts, because of the persistent prevalence of British Barbary captivity narratives throughout the 18th century, America was primed to turn a blind eye to the hypocrisy of its narrative critique of “white slavery” on the Barbary coast. Rather than grappling with its own position as a slave-holding nation, the U.S. inherited Europe’s “centuries-old ideological schism” between Islam and Christianity.83 At the close of the Barbary wars, the Vatican declared that American forces had “done more for the cause of Christianity than the most powerful nations of Christendom have done for ages!”84 Hence, by containing the Muslim states, Americans had stepped into the shoes of the crusaders. The nature of this schism became especially apparent during the Barbary wars when captivity narratives helped to reinvigorate and popularize ancient tropes of chivalric Christian heroes battling Islamic infidels, a phenomenon which both veiled and justified America’s burgeoning economic struggle over trade and shipping rights.

Utilizing Andrew Wheatcroft’s conception of “Turkishness” as an evolving political signifier, one may conclude that the perceived schism between America and the Barbary coast included two stereotypical visions of Barbary men: the “lustful” Turk and the “terrible” Turk. Wheatcroft suggests that the “lustful” Turk stereotype initially surfaced in France during the first half of the eighteenth century, with the arrival of Turkish political emissaries – beginning with Mehmed Efendi in 1720 – to the French court. He suggests that these emissaries excited the French cultural imagination with their “thrilling exoticism,” a theme which materialized throughout the 18th century in travel and captivity narratives, and, eventually, erotic literature. In

82 Ibid., 47.
83 Ibid., 219.
the ensuing “Turcomania” the French “shifted from seeing the Turks predominately as figures of terror to seeing them as a focus of exotic pleasure, lust, and duplicity…and where France led, Europe followed.”85 While the “terrible” Turk stereotype still pandered to older notions of Turkish military barbarism, the “lustful” Turk emerged during an era of political cooperation between France and Turkey. Over time, it became a stereotype that was pasted over the “terrible” Turk, so that American captivity narratives reflected the tensions of both.

The “lustful” Turk stereotype thus engendered its own connotations of violence, especially apparent in Barbary captivity narratives written by or about female captives. Baepler asserts that “[p]rojections of outlawed sexuality – sodomy, rape, white-African sex – pervade many narratives to define barbarous behavior,”86 which helps account for the AFG’s casual allusion to piracy in connection with licentiousness. In many Barbary captivity narratives piracy gets linked with the enslavement of white captives, and is animated by a “lustful Turk” figure. One of the best examples of the way capture and enslavement on the Barbary coast were sexualized can be found in the History and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin Who Was Six Years a Slave in Algiers. It is also an example of how captivity narratives, though circulated as “factual” accounts, were not always strictly non-fiction. The captivity narrative of Mrs. Maria Martin was initially published in Boston in 1806, by William Crary.87 The first edition seems to have been loosely based on an earlier narrative, published in 1804, about Mrs. Mary Velnet, an Italian lady. It is unclear how much of Velnet’s narrative, also published by Crary, was based on fact. Regardless, in 1807, Crary published a second edition of the History of Mrs. Maria Martin,

86 Ibid., 111.
87 See the prefatory material to “History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, Who was Six years a Slave in Algiers.” Liberty’s Captives, Ed. Daniel E. Williams (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006):105-106.
but completely sensationalized and elaborated the narrative so that it barely resembled the first edition. Between 1807 and 1818, Crary published twelve more editions of Mrs. Maria’s narrative, all closely resembling the 1807 version. Perhaps to make the narrative more marketable, Crary changed the initial setting of the narrative from Tripoli to Algiers, a city which would have been more recognizable to an American audience. He also changed Mrs. Martin’s nationality from Italian to English (though, in later editions, Mrs. Martin’s nationality would be obscured all together). In the 1807 edition, Mrs. Martin is portrayed as a Captain’s wife who is captured and separated from her husband when their ship is wrecked off the Algerian coast. In its fictionalized state, Mrs. Martin’s narrative utilizes many of the well known stereotypes of the Barbary coast. Halfway through the narrative, Mrs. Martin pauses and states “a very great portion of the inhabitants of Tenis are Moors, a description of the manners and customs of which, may be entertaining to my readers.” What follows is a four page account - roughly a fourth of the narrative itself – describing the appearance, habits, and lifestyle of the Turkish moors. Thus a quarter of the fictionalized narrative is essentially devoted to a sensationalized catalogue of tropes and stereotypes.

Among the many odd behaviors and customs catalogued, Mrs. Martin repeatedly focuses on the squalor of the people generally and the wickedness of their sexual practices. She begins by stating, “there are but few Turks in Tenis, they are a wretched crew of indigent, ragged, thievish fellows.” When sold at the slave market, she describes her “Cadi” or “principal governor” as “a little, ugly, old looking man, besmeared with dirt, barefoot and barelegged.”

---

88 Ibid., 117.
89 Ibid., 121
90 Ibid., 117.
Of course, such disparaging descriptions allow the writer to create a stark contrast between Christians and Turks, as exemplified in an early passage of Mrs. Martin’s narration:

They [the Turkish Moors] are of tawny complexion, of a lazy, idle, disposition, and cursed with all the vices of mankind; distrustful to the last degree, false, jealous, and the very picture of ignorance. (...) They abominate the Christians, for the very word in their language signifies dog…they are strictly forbidden marrying or having intercourse with a Christian woman, those who break this law are immediately punished with death.  

Though Mrs. Martin does not state that Christians behave and act in complete opposition to the Turks through industry and education, she implies this binary and strives to enact it. The Christians and Turks are portrayed as forbidden from “marrying or having intercourse,” positioning them within a structured binary divide. Of the utmost importance is the licentious nature of the “Moors.” Mrs. Martin states “the Cadi is…much addicted to women, having no less than 400 concubines.” The figure of Cadi operates as a foil for Mrs. Martin’s sexuality, a phenomenon which Estelle Freedman and John D’Emilio suggest was common in nineteenth century literature: “Throughout much of the nineteenth century, the meaning of sexuality for white, middle-class Americans balanced uncomfortably between the reproductive moorings of the past and the romantic and erotic leanings of the present, between female control and male license, between private passion and public reticence. No wonder that the sexuality of minority races became a foil against which whites redefined themselves. Alternative sexual systems threatened the precarious balance of white sexuality.” However, Mrs. Martin’s account of Muslim law, regarding intermarriage and intercourse between Muslims and Christians, creates a contradiction in the text, which may reveal the fictional additions of the 1807 version. Mrs. Martin asserts that Turks are forbidden from “marrying” or “having intercourse” with Christian

91 Ibid., 117-18
92 Ibid., 119.
women. In this passage there is no discussion of variables which stipulate that a Turk may take a Christian concubine if certain conditions are met. Instead, she defines a strict law. Yet, later in the passage, the “Cadi” uses Mrs. Martin’s English friend, Malcome, to convey his licentious desire for her:

He [Malcome] informed me that his master pretended to harbour an unusual degree of love for me, and through fear of being betrayed and punished agreeable to the laws of the country, should he attempt by forcible means to gratify a lustful passion, he had commanded him to solicit my compliance and to inform me that if I would willingly consent to indulge him in what he should request, he would extend to me the same liberty which his wives (or concubines) enjoyed!94

This passage is problematic because it may be interpreted several ways. On the one hand, it could suggest that the Cadi was afraid of his desired affair being discovered and that, if he used force against Mrs. Martin, he would be more vulnerable to exposure. On the other hand, Mrs. Martin seems to suggest that the law prohibits sexual congress by “forcible means” rather than just sexual congress (this is a theme that is picked up in *The Lustful Turk*). In either case, Mrs. Martin, determined to protect her virtue, refuses. The terms of her refusal are particularly significant: “I would never consent to gratify him in this unlawful request as it would be in direct violation of the laws of my God and my country.”95 By invoking the “laws of her God and her country,” Mrs. Martin invokes the National Symbolic – the utopian fantasy of “collectively held affect” and “boundless identity.”96 Thus the American reader is also enticed to affectively identify with Mrs. Martin and to join in the national fantasy. Yet it also becomes a gendered fantasy, for, at the prospect of being tortured for her refusal, she states: “I glowed with the desire of convincing the world I was capable of suffering what man had never suffered before.”97 This

94 Ibid., 126.
95 Ibid., 126.
97 “Maria Martin” *Liberties Captives*, 127.
statement operates on both the individual and the national level – especially if it is placed within an American context. At the individual level, it serves to exalt Mrs. Martin’s purity and her piety – both of which are possible, the text suggests, because of her sex. Her virtue is maintained by her willingness to, literally, prefer death to sexual violation. Her sex distinguishes her suffering as exceptional. At the level of national fantasy, her exceptionalism stems from how her body is subtly transformed into a sovereign territory which defies violation. Her resistance reflects America’s singular resistance to pirates – sovereignty enacted through a defense of mercantilist autonomy – which started the Barbary wars. As historian Robert J. Allison asserts: “This war proved to Americans their real status as a nation and affirmed that theirs was to be a different kind of nation – different both from the nations of Europe, which were content to pay tribute to the Barbary states, and from the Muslim states, ravaged by their rulers and torn apart by their impoverished and savage people.” Mrs. Martin’s suffering thus seems to support two forms of national fantasy – female purity and national economic sovereignty. The severity of her suffering only serves to heighten the effect of her symbolism. She states “an enormous collar was put round my neck, and another still larger round my waist, to both of which was attached a large iron chain, the end of which was secured by a ring in the wall.” She is left in these circumstances – in a state of infection and malnourishment – for three years, at which point, she is rescued by the consul, returned to her home, and reunited with her husband.

The “rescue” of Mrs. Martin and her reunion with her husband seem perfunctory. Mrs. Martin suffers for three years – a symbol of religious piety and national allegiance – and is then rightfully restored. Her rescue operates as an affirmation of national sovereignty and benevolence. In her narrative, rescue is a mechanism by which a national representative (the

99 “Maria Martin” *Liberties Captives*, 127.
claims the unjustly enslaved (Mrs. Martin) and restores her agency as a national subject. The Barbary pirates and Turkish moors who perpetrated Mrs. Martin’s suffering are invalidated as a threat to her body and her symbolic nationality because she is reclaimed by a national representative with political authority. Importantly, Mrs. Martin’s freedom is not “bought” with sanctions, but mandated by the consulate.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this project, piracy is a fraught term. Because of the Barbary wars, piracy carries the economic connotation of a crisis of national sovereignty. Mrs. Martin’s narrative exemplifies how the trope of “rescue” can provide an antidote to this threat, reaffirming national sovereignty and restoring the agency of national subjects. The way in which piracy and Turkish captivity operate in Mrs. Martin’s captivity narratives may shed light on the way they rhetorically operate in the AFG’s publications. By framing concerns of female sexuality through the trope of capture and piracy, the moral reformers invoke the layered political discourse of the Barbary coast. Whether intentional or not, by setting up “seduction” as a kind of “piracy,” the AFG aligns rakish behavior with pirates and thus suggests that rakes are a threat to national sovereignty. Likewise, sexual practices are symbolically constructed as a national commodity – correct sexual exchange (within marriage and family) reifies national sovereignty. In this way, sexuality and commercial mercantilism work as a reflexive loop, mutually informing a national fantasy of sovereignty. Thus the AFG’s concerns about sexuality seem to be haunted by overarching anxieties about nationhood and economic stability. This language also seems to elevate their interventions in society to the level of political (rather than just moral/social) acts.
Sexy Pirates: Erotic Fiction and Proletarian Resistance

However, the pirate trope is not only a “negative” trope. In contrast to Mrs. Martin’s captivity narrative, piracy was sometimes romanticized in other forms of fiction and/or portrayed as an alternative social order. For example, *The Florida Pirate*, an American novel published in 1821, portrays the journey of a slave who “escapes to the sea.” First printed in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, it became so popular that within ten years it was published nine times, by four different publishers on both sides of the Atlantic. Daniel Williams states that the novel portrays piracy as uniquely liberatory, for, it is about a runaway slave who, “after suffering extreme abuse and even mutilation on land…escaped into piracy, where – according to his narrative – he discovered an alternative social order that allowed him to exist as a free, rational creature.” Williams suggests that the novel exemplifies how “on an imaginative level…the microcosmic world of a pirate ship was perceived as being a revolutionary and antithetical counterculture, where even the dregs of society had equal rights.” Williams is not alone in this assertion; in *Tropicopolitans*, Srinivas Aravamudan reads Defoe’s “piratical texts” and suggests that “the pirate ship was the inverted response to the merchant ship, which, as some historians have remarked, along with the plantation was the closest precapitalist workplace that approximated a factory.” Aravamudan thus acknowledges the revolutionary aspects of piracy as a system, stating “as liminal, criminal, and even subliminal democrats, pirates strongly

---


102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 75.

104 Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 86.
challenged the legitimation of trade, and with it the ideology of possessive individualism, not out of any high flown ethics of passion and interests, but at the violent level of practice.”

Of course, Aravamudan is careful to qualify this assertion by recognizing that “much of Defoe’s fascination with pirate fraternities is tempered by an indirect acknowledgment of the anarchic possibilities of too much democracy.” Thus, while American captivity narratives tended to reify piracy as a negative threat to national sovereignty (from which, subjects needed to be rescued), other kinds of fiction pointed to the positive aspects of piracy’s alternate social structure.

_The Lustful Turk_, an erotic novel published in 1828, went even further and portrayed Barbary pirates and Turkish moors as erotically appealing. Further, it insinuated that the pirate’s revolutionary ideals were contagious, extending even to the female subjects captured and enslaved by an Algerian Dey. Like most erotic novels meant to induce masturbatory pleasure, _The Lustful Turk_ is repetitive and episodic. Framed as an epistolary novel written in 1814, it begins with a letter from the ostensible protagonist, Emily Barlow, to her friend Silvia Carey. Emily is a young English woman traveling around the Mediterranean until her ship is unexpectedly captured by Moorish pirates. The pirates convey Emily and her maid, Eliza, to Ali, the Dey of Algiers, as a present. The Dey, in turn, makes Eliza a present to Murza, the Bey of Tunis, but keeps Emily for himself. The majority of the novel is comprised of one long letter that Emily writes to Silvia, in which she details her seduction at the hands of the Dey. Unlike, Mrs. Maria Martin, the Dey’s women cannot or do not refuse the Dey’s advances. Emily’s

---

105 Ibid., 88.
106 Ibid.
107 The fact that the novel is set in 1814 suggests that the author is referencing the pirates of the Barbary wars. It is also significant that the “Turkish” characters are rulers of “Algiers” and “Tunis,” Barbary pirate cities which the U.S. attacked during the first Barbary war between 1801 and 1805, and then again in 1815.
narrative sets the main themes – capture, sexual awakening, and debasement – around which the other episodic iterations improvise. Emily’s seduction narrative is spliced together with her accounts of the seduction narratives of three other women abducted into Ali’s harem, Murza’s depiction of his sadomasochistic rape of Eliza, the Dey’s lengthy plot to kidnap and ravage Silvia, and even letters exchanged between two “Romish” priests depicting the rape of a condemned nun (whom they later sell to the Dey). It is a conglomeration that serves to give a varied glimpse of the way in which piracy was articulated in erotic literature.

The Lustful Turk is an important text because it sensationalizes two of the AFG’s chief fears – namely that (1) the seduction of innocent women transformed and debased them, and (2) that the space of the harem (conflated with the brothel and other spaces of female collectivity) was dangerous because it is a space which propagated male fantasy – revealing how those fears are rooted in an orientalist framework. Yet the end of the novel challenges the AFG’s rhetoric, positioning the women as agents who may “free themselves,” and return to their respective nations to defy (however modestly) patriarchal mandates.

In this way, The Lustful Turk episodes set two important precedents for sensationalized (seductive) orientalism. First, it structures the seduction narrative as a process of transformation and debasement. It is founded on the trope of capture, whereby “seduction” is conflated with rape and robbery; in The Lustful Turk all of the Dey’s wives are captured by pirates or infidels and are either given or sold to the Dey. The circulation of women underpinning the “plot” of the The Lustful Turk also asserts the Dey’s authority in the world at large. He is depicted as having many allegiant pirates who are actively acquiring women for his harem, and the novel asserts the authority of his ownership of the women themselves. Thus, the construction of infidel authority is one of both ownership and societal influence. This is bound up in the progression of the
seduction narrative and creates a complex relationship between the women in the harem and the Dey.

The five episodes depicting the experiences of each of the Dey’s wives repeat the same “transformative” pattern: a young European woman is subjected to the Dey’s insatiable sexual desire and soon realizes her own sexual enjoyment. Thus, while Emily begins her account by asserting that she was “unfeelingly deprived of her virtue” and that Silvia should “pity” her, Emily recounts her sexual experience as being singularly transformative. When describing the loss of her virginity, she asserts “my trembling it [Ali’s “member”] quickly banished...my confusion became breathless astonishment, which with the rapidity of lightning changed to a respect for my enjoyer, so submissive in its nature that I already looked upon him as the disposer of my future destiny, and my soul became completely resigned to him.” She even expresses a “tender” attachment to the Dey, though she later resents and contests the Dey’s more “savage” desires. Emily is shocked, for example, when the Dey demands to be allowed to take her “second virginity” via anal penetration. After the experience, she asserts “with mingled emotions of disgust and pain, I sensibly felt the debasement of being the slave of a luxurious Turk.” The other women assure Emily that she will eventually begin to enjoy the Dey’s deviance. Such assurances hint at a kind of perverted sexual “conversion,” different from the simple transformation of sexual “awakening” from virginity; eventually Emily will “turn Turk” and like it. So the orientalist seduction narrative positions the “lustful Turk” as a licentious savage and suggests that capture and confinement by such Turk are wholly transformative.

---

109 Ibid., 35.
110 Ibid., 37.
111 Ibid. 48.
At first glance, *The Lustful Turk* seems to exemplify the AFG’s chief fears, evoking the connotations of piracy as a distinctly negative threat to female purity and national sovereignty. As previously alluded to, the moral reformers correspondingly utilize orientalist tropes of capture to construct their rhetoric of licentiousness. They depict licentious novels as “capturing” their readers in the same way the Turkish pirates – and the Dey himself – captured Emily Barlow. The AFG personifies “cheap” fiction as “pirates on the sea of literature, robbing whomsoever they can master.” The innocent are thus depicted as being “carried off” by literature - seduced by it and captured. The AFG also becomes complicit with the erotic writers in conflating “seduction” with rape and robbery. In an unguarded moment of easy reading, young men and women may be symbolically “robbed” of their innocence by the “alluring” tales. Licentious thoughts, evoked by “pernicious literature” are portrayed by the AFG as “murderers of the soul” that “gain an entrance and refuse to leave at your bidding” causing the reader to “fear…a long captivity and torturing death.” Similarly, Emily Barlow initially describes her captivity as an “eternal martyrdom” and depicts her ravishment as causing “her soul” to become “completely resigned” to the Dey. The AFG also asserts that pernicious books are transformative, debasing, and infectious, which mirrors how the Dey transforms, debases, and infects his western captives with his licentiousness desires. The reformers claim “licentious books…weaken virtuous principles; destroy purity of thought, and modesty of language; corrupt the imagination; vitiate the taste; break down the barriers to crime; open the avenues of vice; and involve their

---

113 Ibid., 101.
115 *Lustful Turk*, 29.
116 Ibid., 35.
devotees in temporal and eternal ruin.”

117 The process of reading is compared to “taking poison” in which the readers “first feel a secret disgust at the draught, which, however, they still put to their lips” until they “become infected with the unwholesome contagion.”

118 Of course, this language of “contagion” as a willful ingestion of poison evokes the AFG’s temperance rhetoric, suggesting that reading a novel is akin to imbibing alcohol. Yet, even though the act of reading is willful, their rhetoric positions licentious literature as performing the ultimate invasion of the body and the mind. It is portrayed as an invasion which renders its victims, especially women, helpless. Referring specifically to women, the AFG suggests that “pernicious” novels turn girls into “weak, ill-judging, and romantic women.”

119 Thus both the authors of erotic fantasy and the members of the AFG seem to suggest that capture at the hands of Turkish pirates – both the literal Barbary pirates and the figurative licentious pirates of “literature” – leads to forced captivity, physical degradation, and threatens to infect one’s body and “soul.”

The Lustful Turk sets a second precedent by constructing the harem as an inescapable and ever-expanding space of male erotic desire. The harem is constructed as a labyrinthine space of sexual fantasy, and each woman is “ravished” in a different room which can only be accessed by traversing long hallways and high staircases. Emily is led into a room with a bed “made of large velvet cushions…after the Eastern fashion.”

120 The Dey’s Italian “slave” Honoria Grimaldi, recounts being led “into a small room, every side of which was covered with glass; even the door at which I entered I could not discover when shut…at the center of which was a low…velvet

---

120 Ibid., 25.
couch...[covered by] a white damask cloth.”

The Bey of Tunis has a harem which includes a dungeon with chains hanging from the ceiling, a space crafted to fit his sadomasochistic desires. In each instance, the harem represents the captivity itself; the space circumscribed by the confines of the harem is a fetishized space of male conquest and indulgence which is both alluring as well as threatening. The white cloth reveals the virgin blood of the Dey’s victim and the repeated use of “mirrors” signifies an egocentric voyeurism, creating a space of sexual narcissism. For the women, it is also a space fortified by locked doors, high walls, and, thus, utterly inescapable. The Romish priest utilizes a similar space to ravish the condemned nun; he steals her from the tomb of her death sentence by way of a “subterraneous passage” and closets her away in his “private apartments” beneath the church. Thus the novel also conflates the harem with the convent, utilizing the tropes of “veiled” women and secret spaces to create the erotic experience. In addition to the harem and the convent, The Lustful Turk also connotes a third space: the brothel. What is interesting about the Dey’s harem is that each of the women mentioned in the novel are of European decent: English, Greek, Italian, and French respectively. They speak to each other about their sexual encounters with the Dey and joke about some of his peculiar desires. Thus the Dey’s harem is comprised of “western” rather than “oriental” women, and these women have each been awakened to sexual desire in a way that makes their speech “bawdy.” This bears an obvious similarity to London or New York brothels, which were often

121 Ibid., 49.
122 For a discussion of how pain came to inform pornographic literature, see Karen Halttunen Murder Most Foul (Boston: Harvard University Press, 2000). Essentially, Halttenen suggests that sadomasochism entered pornographic literature because of changing conceptions of pain: “The key to the advent of sadomasochistic pornography is the changing attitudes towards pain in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. If pornography is best defined as the representation of sexual behavior with a deliberate violation of moral and social taboos, then the growing violence of it in this period is attributable to the new shock value of pain within a culture redefining it as forbidden and therefore obscene” (69).
123 Ibid., 106.
portrayed by erotic novels, such as *Fanny Hill*, as containing immigrant women with bawdy sexual knowledge.

The space of the harem is therefore carefully constructed and styled to evoke the space of the brothel and the convent. Thus, while the harem is, in some ways, orientalised with “eastern” specificity, it is also generalized as a space of female collectivity. In this way, *The Lustful Turk* pastes the trope of the harem over other spaces where women gather, suggesting that these are also spaces that invite male authority and orientalist fantasy. This image also seems to work reciprocally – especially when considering the Romish priest who conducts the nun to his private apartments – suggesting that any space where one or more women may be kept in secret evokes the erotic space of the harem, privileging male authority and desire. This trope of the harem as a space of captivity and male authority is directly paralleled by the AFG.

As noted by other critics124 moral reformers worried about female vulnerability in the shifting landscape of the city – especially with regard to industrialization. While the AFG supported women wage earners, they contested jobs that they viewed as posing a threat to female chastity. Hobson notes that these were often jobs that also offered the greatest financial reward to women: “jobs that forced women to work and live away from home, sometimes alongside men…women working in the growing textile factories in town throughout New England or in the male-dominated trades, such as printing, received high wages than most other women workers, who did piece-work in home industries.”125 The AFG idealized “domestic service” as “the most useful and the safest employment for women,”126 because it centered women in the context of a family. Yet many women were forced to find other work either because they lacked the skills, the references, or the opportunity to engage domestic positions. Thus the “capture” of women,

---

124 See especially, Helen Horowitz and Patricia Cohen and Barbara Meil Hobson.
125 Hobson, *Uneasy Virtue*, 64.
126 Ibid., 65.
either by a literal seducer or by some form of illicit sexual knowledge, was a prominent trope which stemmed from real concerns about the changing cityscape. The AFG’s sensationalized depictions of capture also tended to defamiliarize and orientalize the complexity of the city, including the secret nooks and crannies where a man might stake claim to “secret space of sin.” The AFG, decried the seduced woman who, once captured, was doomed to become “a wanton in the streets of the great Sodom of our land.”

An example of the sensational, orientalized rhetoric used to describe the captured woman (mirroring the themes of The Lustful Turk) can be found, in Women’s Work Among the Lowly. Bennett republishes a column from the Advocate which tells the story of a kidnapped orphan. It depicts the “fall” of Minnie, a thirteen year-old girl who is placed with a seemingly respectable family in New York. Yet, just months after being relocated, Minnie disappears. The police discover that the father of the family, a man named Deson, had seduced and kidnapped Minnie, secluding her in one of the worst sections of the city. Deson seems constructed to mirror a brutish Dey; he is described as “angry,” “indignant,” “intimidating,” and “threatening.” In fact, it is because of his defensive and authoritarian behavior that the authorities come to believe Deson must be the culprit responsible for Minnie’s disappearance. They arrest him in order to “compel disclosure,” imprisoning him until he relents. Once Deson admits to the crime, he reveals the sordid space of Minnie’s captivity. It is a space that is in the heart of urban obscurity, past “forbidding portions of the city, and in a distant, unfrequented section.” In order to retrieve Minnie, the officers “ascended dark rear stairways to a lonely attic, aroused the timid victim of

---

128 Bennett, Women’s Work Among the Lowly, 66-67.
129 Ibid., 67.
Deson’s fatal wiles, and placed her in the carriage.” The “space” in which Minnie is cloistered is thus described as “forbidding,” “distant,” “unfrequented,” “dark,” and “lonely.” It is a secret space, housed in the bowels of the city and, though the AFG refuses to romanticize it by describing it as “luxurious” or oriental, they nevertheless sensationalize it as a space of secret captivity. It is a space that Deson owns, a space that he selected for its obscurity. It is also a space from which Minnie must be rescued, suggesting that she could not escape from it of her own volition. The AFG depicts Deson’s hold over Minnie as psychological as well as physical, suggesting that “by consummate, long continued artifice, he had fully won her affections.” It is an assertion that mirrors the “transformative” rhetoric of erotic fiction, suggesting that Minnie’s seduction resulted in her being resigned to Deson, reminiscent of Emily’s resignation of her will to the Dey. They name Minnie the victim of Deson’s “fatal wiles,” reiterating the physical and spiritual degradation of her captivity, and assert that Deson’s behavior is that of an “infidel.” Thus the story mirrors orientalist erotica: the lecherous infidel (Deson) seduces the young maid (Minnie), debasing her and concealing her within a space of his ownership and authority.

In a similar column published by the AFG in January of 1841, the reformers reported: “Some four or five years since, a being in the form of man, kept an intelligence office, into which he enticed a young girl whose mother lived in this city, and kept her there concealed for the vilest purposes until life was almost extinct.” The AFG’s reticence to even recognize this villain as a “man” situates him as perhaps worse than a heathen infidel. His capture and concealment of the woman in question is akin to the Turks’ capture and concealment of women

130 Ibid., 68.
131 Ibid., 69.
in secret harems. The AFG ends the story by decrying the fact that he still lives in the city and “has kept houses of infamy in different parts of the city.”133 Like The Lustful Turk, both stories sensationalize the capture and imprisonment of women who become sexual slaves to “infidels.” Yet, rather than constructing licentious barbarism as a uniquely “oriental” sin, they position it within their own society. American infidels roam locally, women are trapped in harem-like spaces in the bowels of the city, and the young may be captured at any moment.

However, unlike the AFG’s dreary vision of women ending their lives in a diseased harem/brothel, The Lustful Turk does not condemn his women to the harem forever; at the conclusion of the story, the women are transformed into entrepreneurial agents who return to England armed with the knowledge to acquire rich husbands. The story’s end is instigated by the downfall of the Turk; when a newly acquired harem girl, a Greek, becomes so horrified at the prospect of being ravished by the Dey, she castrates him with a hidden knife and then commits suicide.134 The Dey is saved, but, without his manhood, decides he has “no further use”135 for the girls. Emily and Sylvia are thus sent back to English society and Emily states “our friends hushed up matters and reported that we had been at a boarding school in France, instead of the boarding school of the Dey of Algiers.”136 Safely back in England, their sexual knowledge now arms them to make favorable marital choices. Emily is determined to find a wealthy suitor who also possesses “charms and weight not only to erase the Dey’s impression from my heart, but also in a more sensitive part.”137 She thus scours the market for wealthy earls and hires a “young

133 Ibid., 63.
134 This is a particularly fitting end to a pornographic novel circulated in England and the United States, for it legitimates the sexual virility of the western male reader while emasculating the potentially threatening body of the Turk.
135 The Lustful Turk, 153.
136 Ibid. This ending also highlights another dubious space of female collectivity: the boarding school.
137 Ibid.
waiting maid who possesses charms enough to catch any man,” to measure their sexual appeal. The book ends with Sylvia married to a baronet and Emily’s hopeful expectations concerning an Irish Earl.

Paired with female reform rhetoric and pirate captivity narratives, *The Lustful Turk* provides a unique lens through which to understand the tropes of piracy and capture. As stated in the previous section, the AFG used the trope of piracy to instill fear in their readers and inspire moral sexual practices within marriage. Because the trope of piracy is tainted by America’s history with the Barbary corsairs and the proliferation of captivity narratives (in which those who have been captured are routinely enslaved), the AFG’s use of the term is colored by concerns of national sovereignty and mercantilist trade. In many ways this just serves to heighten the perceived importance of the AFG’s subject matter. *The Lustful Turk*, however, shows how the AFG’s use of the trope can be undercut by popular/romantic notions of piratical behavior as romanticized and revolutionary. In *The Lustful Turk* women are empowered by sexual knowledge, transformed into entrepreneurial maids who, though still restricted by the patriarchal dictates of marriage, are able to maneuver the system to their own ends. Thus “capture by pirates” seems to be liberatory and revolutionary experience. While this does not translate into a realistic ideal, *The Lustful Turk* provides an alternate imaginary framework to examine sexual knowledge and the trope of piracy.

It should also be noted that the sociopolitical sentiments alluded to in *The Lustful Turk* – namely that sexual knowledge is liberatory – reflect a countercultural view of sexuality which arose in New York during the early 1840s. Specifically, with the rise of the “flash press” papers, including the *Whip*, the *Flash*, and the *Rake*, came the ideology of “libertine republicanism.” In many ways libertine republicanism was a paradox; flash press writers promoted sex as “a natural,
positive, and central part of human life"\textsuperscript{138} while also espousing “radical democratic critique of privilege and hierarchy.”\textsuperscript{139} Ironically, this left them unable to qualify prostitution in just one manner, since corruption and luxury were frequently associated with upscale brothels and high class courtesans. Thus the sporting weeklies tended to both (paradoxically) vilify and laud prostitution. Regardless, the themes of \textit{The Lustful Turk} pandered to the growing sentiment that sex could be construed as a politically defiant act, recasting the normal “captivity narrative” themes, by suggesting that captivity led to rebellion against national sovereignty.

\textit{Oriental Space: Navigating Urban Industrialism and Political Hypocrisy in Thompson’s Venus in Boston}

In her book \textit{Uneasy Virtue}, Barbara Meil Hobson asks the question: “why did vice in the city [especially prostitution] suddenly come to be seen as a threat to the social order,”\textsuperscript{140} such that it warranted the immediate attention of moral reform groups? Her answer: the changing face of the city. Hobson suggests that the 1820s and 30s were hectic periods of rapid urban and industrial growth for east coast cities. Hobson notes that “in 1790 Boston had 18,000 inhabitants; the 1820 census listed 43,000; and by 1825 the population had reached 57,000.”\textsuperscript{141} Meanwhile, cities like New York and Philadelphia were growing at even faster rates. The structure of urban space was also being affected by the market revolution, factory development, and changes in neighborhood structure. By 1828, all of the northern states had abolished the practice of slavery, which contributed to changes in class structure and the demographic diversity of cities as well. As Hobson notes “a constant flow of persons moved in and out [of the city]

\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
daily…this transient population probably did increase petty crime and public prostitution, but a sea of anonymous faces also made the city *appear* less safe and less manageable. So, why did moral reformers perceive vice in the city as a crucial problem? Because, Hobson suggests, the city *itself* was becoming uncontrollable and unfamiliar.

As I conclude this thesis, I am faced with a similar question, to which Hobson’s conclusions may prove useful: why did the AFG use the tropes of piracy and captivity to narrate their story of the dangers of licentiousness? Like Hobson, I believe the answer may also be found by turning one’s attention to the city landscape. As stated in the first section of this thesis, one of the AFG’s chief projects was the “Home for the Friendless,” which temporarily housed orphaned children until they could be provided with stable Christian homes in the country. Embedded in both their practical work and their published rhetoric was a clear divide between the “country” and the “city” – a divide which privileged the country as safe and moral space and denigrate the city as unsafe and immoral. According to Robert Tally Jr., “literature functions as a form of mapping, offering its readers descriptions of places, situating them in a kind of imaginary space, and providing points of reference by which they can orient themselves and understand the world in which they live.”\textsuperscript{142} By comparing seduction to piracy, the AFG effectively “othered” the city, mapping it as a foreign space of, at best, dubious national sovereignty. In their national fantasy, cities were pushed to the margins of “America,” which is perhaps why the metaphor of the sea worked so well. Water was not sovereign territory; subjects in the open sea had to defend the discrete spaces (ships) of national sovereignty by force. This construction also helped the AFG to justify their own “righteous” actions in society which included taking children from the city and placing them in more protective and morally fit situations in the country. By mapping the cities as ambiguous foreign spaces, the AFG

represented their work of “rescuing” children as a process aligned with the “rescue” of enslaved subjects in Barbary captivity narratives; rescue thus becomes a process of reaffirming national sovereignty and restoring the agency of national subjects. However, this is problematic because it disregards problems embedded in the captivity narrative paradigm (from which it borrows)–mainly, that the trope of “rescue,” as enacted to reclaim enslaved American citizens from Turkish barbarians and thus assert national sovereignty is ironically disingenuous, since national sovereignty is also facilitated (at least economically) by the very thing whose negation it ideologically affirms: slavery. Likewise, cities, factories, and industrial growth were not set “apart” from American society but integral to it. Thus rescuing children from the city (to save American democracy) seems to mirror the very hypocrisy embedded in the framework of the Barbary wars (though, it eerily anticipates the practice of outsourcing).

The AFG’s rhetorical map of the city/country divide provokes the same problems inherent in their use of the trope of piracy. To examine the domestication of the trope of piracy – the ways in which it is used to map local space – shows what is at stake in their rhetoric overall. These dilemmas are uniquely satirized in George Thompson’s novel, *Venus in Boston*, where orientalist tropes are combined with the alarmist rhetoric of the AFG to mock national hypocrisy. Like *The Lustful Turk*, Thompson’s *Venus in Boston* is a sensationalized episodic saga of male desire. Yet unlike its infamous predecessor, *Venus in Boston* does not explicitly narrate sex acts between characters. Instead, it depicts a series of “close encounters,” moments in which a virgin is about to be ravished but is then rescued at the very last minute.

Essentially, Thompson’s novel appropriates the tropes of *The Lustful Turk* and contextualizes them within an American framework, retelling the orientalist seduction narrative in a world where absurd, self-righteous characters (suggestive of the AFG) barge into each others’ houses to check for immorality. The overarching story in Thompson’s novel is about the
attempted seductions of a young girl named Fanny. Fanny is one of the “virtuous poor,” a class of people routinely lauded by the AFG. Though Fanny is impoverished, she works hard as a fruit seller to help support her grandfather, a blind basket weaver, and her younger brother. The inept seducer of Fanny is a man named Timothy Tickles. Mr. Tickles is a U.S. senator who, akin to the Dey in *The Lustful Turk*, has a propensity for ravishing young virgins. In fact, his character seems almost perfectly crafted to mirror and satirize the Dey. Like the Dey, he is a man of wealth and political influence. Both men are involved in a social network of crime which gives them access to acquiring young female virgins; the Dey has his pirates and Tickles employs lower class prostitutes and thieves to procure young girls from the streets. However, unlike the Dey, Timothy Tickles is portrayed as fat and awkwardly lecherous – partially signified by his amusingly alliterative name. Like the Dey, Tickles threatens to “debase” his victims and tells Fanny that he will conquer her “by the powers of darkness.”\(^\text{143}\) Fanny is kidnapped twice by Tickles. During the first encounter, she is taken from the street at the behest of a prostitute in Tickles’ employ and trapped in a room in his vast mansion. Mr. Tickles, feigning civility, initially desires Fanny to willingly consent to his advances, and leaves her alone during her first night in his house. Yet, the next day, his sexual appetite overpowers his attempted civility and he decides to ravish her regardless. But then, just as he’s about to overcome her, he is thwarted by Corporal Grimsby who swoops into the mansion and rescues Fanny. In Thompson’s hands, orientalist stereotypes are exaggerated to the point of absurdity; Fanny is ridiculously young, virtuous, and pitiful, while Mr. Tickles is a fat “pirate-like” congressman, to the AFG’s fear that the licentiousness could corrupt American democracy. Thompson also adds a third character, Corporal Grimsby, who may be read as a representation of the self-righteous AFG – almost making this episode a parody of the AFG’s column about Minnie. Corporal Grimsby is a

character with a shady past and ambivalent authority. He knows the “back alleys” intimately which, at times, seems to cast his impeachable moral character in doubt – a fact which also makes him reminiscent of McDowall. Alternatively, read in terms of the Barbary wars, Thompson’s narrative can also be examined (loosely) as a political satire. By framing the senator, Mr. Tickles, as a licentious “Dey” figure who captures Fanny, and creating a “corporal” to save her, Thompson subtly reconfigures “rescue” as a trope by which a member of the U.S. military invades a political space to save the domestically enslaved. Rescue thus reveals domestic hypocrisy – instead of affirming national sovereignty, it seems to challenge and satirize it (prefiguring the civil war).

In addition to using familiar characters – such as the virtuous virgin and the pagan seducer – and an overarching patterned plot structure, Thompson also uses male erotic “space” in ways that mimic both erotic orientalism and the AFG’s discourse. This is exemplified at the end of Venus in Boston, when Tickles arranges to take Fanny to the underground “Chambers of Love,” a special underground brothel meant to evoke the harem. The entrance to the Chamber is in a seedy section of the city, beneath a cheap brothel house and down a “dark passage.”

Once there, one must enter the “Madame’s” personal chambers, find the door that is activated by a “secret spring,” “descend a long flight of steps…steep and narrow…into the bowels of the earth,” and unlock the “stout oaken door” at the end of another dark passage. This arduous journey mimics the “forbidding” excursion that the AFG narrates in the story of Minnie. Both factions of writers adopt the orientalist language of the locked harem and portray it as “inescapable” by placing it in the “bowels” of the city. Once inside the Chambers of Love, the reader enters into an orientalist paradise – a room with a “superb chandelier,” “gilded

\[144\] Ibid., 98.  
\[145\] Ibid., 99.
ornaments” and “a table, laden with fruits and wines,” around which sit “half a dozen young females…several of them nearly half naked.”¹⁴⁶ The Chamber is portrayed as a place of oriental fantasy where wealthy men “conceal” girls and reserve them for their own particular use. It is a secret harem in the heart of the city. Yet, even in this oriental dungeon, Tickles is thwarted a second time by Corporal Grimsby who dashes in, just before Tickles can complete his seduction, and rescues Fanny. The novel ends with “Jew Mike” (a low class thief whom Tickle hired to abduct Fanny) capturing Tickles and confining him in the “coal hole” of his underground bar. Tickles, upon waking in such a “loathsome” place, soon gave way to “the combined effects of despair, starvation, and the foetid atmosphere, and miserably perished.”¹⁴⁷ Thus, Thompson seems to satirically interweave the themes of Barbary captivity narratives with overt erotic allure.

The paradoxical nature of Thompson’s novel (which seems to sensationalize seduction and oriental themes while undermining them) is also in line with the libertine republicanism of the flash press, which “gave voice to both bawdy satire and moral indignation; combined trenchant critiques of class privilege with endorsements of heterosexual indulgence; and supported male social prerogative while defending and admiring individuals of the “frail” sisterhood of prostitutes.”¹⁴⁸ Though paradoxical, is serves to both reveal and critique the AFG’s main tropological themes. Thompson does not map space in the novel in terms of a traditionally “knowable community,”¹⁴⁹ to use Raymond Williams’ term. The space of the city is chaotic and disorienting. The trek to the “Chambers of Love” alone should prove how difficult it can be to navigate the city. The novel also flits from one story to the next, interspersing characters in myriad spaces and social contexts. However, while Thompson utilizes the chaos of the city to

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 99.
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 103.
¹⁴⁸ Cohen et al, Flash Press, 54.
shock and amuse the reader, he ultimately entices them to claim it as a distinctly American (rather than an orientalized of unfamiliar) space. Justice in the novel is propagated by the “underclass” rather than citizens with political authority. Like the pirate ship, the city is constructed as a potentially positive space of alternate social democracy. At the very least, Thompson’s novel maps the city differently, calling into question the AFG’s sensationalized rhetoric of “capture” in the city and the ways that their rhetoric clashed with alternate national fantasies.

Speculative Conclusions:

I began this project with the desire to put the American Female Guardian Society into conversation with other transatlantic textual landscapes and concerns. In many ways, the moral reformers get pigeon-holed in very narrow critical discussions of the city. Yet their very rhetoric implies that they were influenced by the erotic culture they were fighting against, that they were involved in the imaginative construction of national fantasy. Their anxieties about the sexual violation of female bodies and the regulation of male sexuality – both of which are filtered through the tropes of piracy and capture – mirror specific 19th century concerns about transatlantic trade (merchant ships “violated” by pirates) and the regulation of urban space (pastoral life “violated” by industrialization). Thus, I have tried to reclaim their work as literature, placing it on the larger map of the “imagined political community”\(^\text{150}\) of the nation. However, at the end of the day, I have organized this work around a series of speculations about a common trope harnessed in the discourse of moral reform: capture by pirates. This method has proved both beneficial and limiting. As Marta Dvorka and W.H. New suggest, it can be uniquely productive to examine tropes as “privileged sites of discursive displacement, rhetorical figures

that slide and turn...investigating the deviant torsion of irony and the simultaneous yoking and
deferral of metaphor and metonymy, grounded in the apperception of the same and the
different.”

In many ways, I have tried to use these constructive possibilities by questioning the way “pirates” are conceived in different literary genres – grounding this speculation in a narrow historical framework. By tracing a through-line from a historical foundation (the Barbary Wars), to literary representations (Mrs. Martin’s captivity narrative) and refutations (popular and erotic fiction) of historical themes, I have tried to show that there is indeed irony in the way piracy can be seen as both the site of national crisis (Barbary pirates), the site of the cohesion of national sovereignty (America’s victory in the Barbary wars), a site of proletarian resistance (popular and erotic fiction), and, finally, the site of moral reform. The layers of this trope uniquely inform the AFG’s rhetoric, connecting it to a multilayered conversation about sexuality which, I argue, was nuanced by transatlantic economic and political concerns. However, Dvork and New also note that within literary examinations of tropes “territories prove to be landscapes of the mind, and tropes entail interstitial spaces where cultures and discourses interact.”

Of concern in this thesis was the way in which the AFG was rhetorically linked to its antithesis: erotic literature and libertine republicanism. Yet, the challenge implicit in this methodology is to find where imaginary landscapes meet history, where the ideological meets the real, and how the multiple frameworks – generated from the comparative work tropes inspire – may actually become realistically productive for generating new sites of inquiry. I have suggested that significant places of intersection may be found by examining where orientalism, sexuality, and national fantasy intertwine in the AFG’s rhetoric. By way of conclusion I will also try to outline a “next step” which this project might prompt.


152 Ibid.
In his book *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*, David Kazanijan suggests that, during the peak of the moral reform movements, the U.S. was entrenched in other international conflicts, like the Yucatan Caste War (1847) which “transformed U.S. imperialism from white settler colonialism to neocolonialism, and it produced white, Indian, Mexican, and, eventually, Chicano racial formations that blended the assimilative mode of civilization policy with the eradicative mode of removal policy.” Kazanijan asserts that “if, as Jenny Sharpe suggests, “the postcolonial” in the United States is to “be theorized as the point at which internal social relations intersect with global capitalism and the international division of labor…the neocolonial relations into which the United States entered with decolonized nations,” then we might displace 1898 as a defining year for American postcoloniality, proposing instead 1847. How would such a revision change the conversation about constructions of sexuality and moral reform? I have suggested that the “fantasy” of the AFG was deeply tied to a kind of orientalism that was useful for constructing national fantasy. Going forward, we might also ask: how does mapping neocolonialism onto the U.S. in 1847 change the conversation about moral reform? For example, the AFG strived to be somewhat race blind – they kept discussions of slavery and questions of ethnic diversity out of their magazines (though they were willing to chastise “foreign shores”). Could we then perhaps, examine their tropological constructions of national fantasy (like piracy) as sites of displacement for that conversation? The work I have done, attempting to link the AFG to a larger transatlantic conversation about sexuality, crosscut by economic and political concerns, could also inspire new ways of examining the AFG’s rhetoric as a part of an essential moment in history. There are certainly more questions to be asked.

154 Ibid., 106.
Bibliography


“An Address, Delivered on behalf of the Hamilton F.M.R. Society, by Rev. Mr. Sheldon.”


Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen


Allison, Robert J. *The Crescent Obscured: the United States and the Muslim World, 1775-1815*


“Consistency of Law.” *The Advocate of Moral Reform* Volume XII (1847):10

“Extract from an Address Delivered at Camden ME., 1840 before the FMR Soc. of that Place” *The Advocate of Moral Reform*, Vol. VII (1841): 15


“History of the Captivity and Sufferings of Mrs. Maria Martin, Who was Six years a Slave in Algiers.” *Liberty’s Captives*, Ed. Daniel E. Williams, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.


Wrecks and Rescues, New York: American Female Guardian Society, 1859.