Partisan Allegories of Race and Desire
Algerian Captivity as a Musical Entertainment in Susanna Haswell Rowson's *Slaves in Algiers*

Daniela Daniele

A Singspiel on the Algerian Crisis

The withdrawal of British naval protection in response to the American Revolution made the trade of brigs and brigantines in the Mediterranean very vulnerable to pirate attacks. The kidnapping of American seamen by the so-called "Barbary states" generated a number of American captivity narratives set in North Africa, which explicitly referred to this little-discussed but significant episode in transatlantic history.[1] The story of the "nearly 500 American sailors" who, between 1784 and the early 1800s, "were seized by North African corsairs and sold in the Algerian, Tunisian, and Tripolitan slave markets" (Smith-Rosenberg 62) was successfully staged by Susanna Haswell Rowson in *Slaves in Algiers, or, A Struggle for Freedom*, first performed at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia on June 30, 1794.

As the author announces on the title page, this "play interspersed with songs" (1) was dedicated to "the citizens of the United States of North America" (3) and adapted to the Mediterranean crisis the same plot that had been set to music by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in his *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* [*The Abduction from the Seraglio*] (1782). Like Rowson's play, Mozart's famous Singspiel in three acts (based on the libretto by Johann Gottlieb Stephanie on a theme developed by Philippe Rameau) consisted of extended dialogues interspersed with musical ensembles, ballads, arias, and songs. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg acutely captures the isomorphism of the libretto set by Mozart,

1 The factual and fictional circumstances of the imprisonment of several American crews are well accounted by Andrew S. Gross and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg.

arguing in her essay that in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, the "basic plotline is much the same. British lovers are enslaved in North Africa […]. An escape is foiled until the Dey relents and releases the two couples" (88, fn. 51). Several onomastic recurrences further relate Rowson's play "interspersed with songs" to Mozart's Singspiel, starting from the Constant family, whose name matches the Spanish protagonist Konstanze in Stephanie's libretto, to the pasha Selim in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, whose name is ascribed by Rowson to the resigned concubine, Selima. As for the underlying seduction plot, while *The Abduction from the Seraglio* recounted the kidnapping of the Spanish damsel Konstanze by a Turkish Sultan who aimed to marry her, Rowson responded to the Algerian crisis by dramatizing the abduction of an American damsel by the Dey. In response to his sexual assaults, Olivia's flirting and "proffered marriage to the dey" (Rust 226) re-actualize in the context of the Algerian crisis the deception strategy previously adopted by Konstanze in Mozart's *The Abduction from the Seraglio* in her attempt to keep the Turkish pasha at bay while waiting for liberation.

In the spoken and musical structure of Mozart's Singspiel, Konstanze's heroic resistance to the tyrant's advances is expressed in an alternation of dialogues and lyrical songs set to music, and this alternation of prose and poetry is indeed reproduced by Rowson in her play. Although there is no evidence that the announced songs in Rowson's play were actually sung, Marion Rust does not hesitate to define *Slaves in Algiers* as a "musical comedy" (216) and reproduces in her book the musical scores of the songs featured in the 1795 play *The Volunteers* (Rust 235), which the playwright also defined as "a musical entertainment."

In the same way, in this chapter, I invariably tend to consider the lyrical elements of what the author announces as a "play interspersed with songs" as parts of both a poetic and musical tradition and I discuss the culturally oppositional value of the seven short lyrical asides (which, in *Slaves in Algiers*, roughly correspond to the sung parts of the Singspiel). These lyrical intervals give voice to the non-Anglo characters who critically intervene in "songs" presumably set to music to balance the enlightened discourse extensively embraced in the main dialogues in defense of the civic virtue of freedom. More analytically, all seven of the lyrical masques are, along with Mr. Ferrell's didactic prologue and the author's final conclusion, the only sections of the play uttered in verse. They provide a temporary pastoral or comic relief from the violence of the recounted historical scene, which features the insufferable condition of the enslavement of both the American crew and of the non-Anglo

characters who equally aspire to flee with the Christian captives in order to play an active role in the new republican order. The only exception to the appropriation of these lyrical intermissions by Moorish characters is Mrs. Rowson's final envoi, which draws the moral conclusions and clarifies the rationale of the play (77-78), and Mr. Farrell's prologue in couplets (7-9), uttered in the name of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* (1791), to exercise with the American hostages in Algiers the same right claimed by old Priam to recover the corpse of his son Hector in the *Iliad*. Apart from these two textual thresholds lyrically inhabited by the author and Farrell, the generic mixture of prose and poetry in the play mimics the alternation of spoken and sung dialogue in Mozart's Singspiel, designing a dual structure that semantically corresponds to the cultural divide between the Christian characters (whose hegemonic viewpoint is proclaimed on center stage) and the Moorish ones (whose sensibility is expressed in the lyrical asides).

From a literary point of view, Rowson's "comic opera" (Smith-Rosenberg 86) looks back to the broader epic tradition of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century heroic romances, being equally based on the confrontation of Christian and Muslim cultures in the Mediterranean and on the drama of interracial lovers on both sides. When Rowson composed *Slaves in Algiers*, Torquato Tasso's immensely successful epic, *Gerusalemme liberata* [*Jerusalem Delivered*] (1581), was still very influential, having inspired in Europe, especially in the baroque period, a variety of adaptations in both poetry and music. Tasso's lofty epic model was continued in John Dryden's Restoration drama and his late adaptations of sixteenth-century Italian epic drama and French baroque theater, which feebly survive in the lyrical songs embedded in Rowson's play. The Orientalist legacy of this elevated style resonates in Rowson's dramatization of the impeded interfaith relations between Christians and Moors as highly representative of their warfare. In reframing Tasso's *fabula* in the new setting of another Mediterranean crisis, Rowson revives in seven songs the private conflict of Tasso's star-crossed lovers Rinaldo and Armida, the interethnic couple severely thwarted by the force of history.

After his acclaimed adaptation of Tasso's heroic poem, *Rinaldo and Armida* (1699), in 1706, British author John Dennis wrote a treatise against the Italian "Opera's [sic] which are entirely Musical" (iii) and in support of the "*Drama* establish'd here in *England* at the same time with Reformation and Liberty" (ix, original emphasis). The latter, he argued, unlike opera's "Diversions" and sexual "Gaming" (iv), secured "a good share of Virtue as well as Understanding" (iv). His demand for a "useful Entertainment" versus the "pernicious Amuse-

ment of Opera's [sic]" led him to express a preference for "Sense" over "Sound" (13), which we find perfectly reflected in Rowson's play. Its emphasis on the educational function of dialogues is aimed to stress, as in the Singspiel, the importance of the spoken parts over the emotional paroxysms. The latter, which prevail in the integrally musical dimension of Italian opera, served to harmoniously convey, in rhymes and music, sensual and emotional contents which, according to Dennis, hampered the rational access of the spectator to any didactic contents.

As a result, in the Enlightenment era, Rowson conceived her play as an alternation of poetry and dialogues which overtly leaned towards Dennis's scheme by intensifying the didactic role of the spoken parts while limiting the role of the songs to "musical entertainments" representative of the subaltern dimension of the Moorish components of the enslaving Algiers. Consequently, and unlike Italian opera and Tasso's sixteenth-century heroic drama, which became a poetic model throughout Europe, Rowson's play features a very limited number of songs in which interethnic couples and non-Anglo characters step forward. These poetic songs of the marginalized play a merely decorative role, however—being deprived, according to Dennis's codification, of any significant diegetic function (Sertoli, *Robinson* 15). In *Slaves in Algiers*, the lyrical depletion of what is left of the literary sophistication of the heroic poem testifies to the author's intention to stress the educational and didactic contents of her play.

The genealogical trajectory traced by Giuseppe Sertoli ("Racconto" 273) in his lucid investigations of Orientalism in the premodern era (a period entirely neglected in Edward Said's famous study *Orientalism*) allows us to look closer into the intercultural value of the singing interlude in the Singspiel but also into the alternation of prose and poetry in the double structure set by Rowson. The seven lyrical interludes which intersperse her play recall in their refinement the arabesque, ornamental style whose undulating opulence and flowery modulations briefly but significantly impinge upon the dramatist's enlightened discourse. The rococo curves of the epic romance, surviving in the sensual grace of lyrical intermezzos, hardly relieve the cultural tensions aroused by the North African trade wars enacted on stage. The residual elements of the heroic poem that intersperse the dual structure of the play constitute, at the turn of the nineteenth century, a mannerist entertainment whose exquisite, baroque style momentarily interferes with the enlightened rationalism of Rowson's neoclassical discourse and her efforts to contain and dismiss the residual Orientalism and encumbrance of the poetic interludes. In

a time grown more and more impermeable to the asymmetries and indulgencies typical of the baroque style, which had been rejected by Voltaire as early as 1760, the prevailing neoclassical aesthetic underlies Rowson's firm defense of American democracy and its rationally designed civic values, along with the Napoleonic imperial style and the linear façades of the early Republic. No wonder that, in her enlightened play written during the Algerian crisis, Rowson tends to confine the exquisite Oriental intricacies of the Italian epic romance to the figments of a mannerist imagination that, unlike the conflicted ethnic scenario of her patriotic dramatization, as it occurs in the enchanted garden of Tasso's epic pastorals, made binary terms like the natural and the artificial, the Christian and the Moorish, overlap in a playful *coincidentia oppositorum*.

Across three centuries of literary history, the Christian epic flourished in a composite, lyrical sphere of perfect tolerance, depicting a sort of "blessed abode" (Romero Allué 39) exemplified by the enchanted Armida's garden in Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered*, which, in Rowson's interludes, still provides a short but significant respite from the interethnic fight that originated with the corsairs' kidnapping of the American crews during the Algerian crisis. The long-lived genre established by Tasso's heroic romance provided a pastoral model of interethnic coexistence among the Mediterranean cultures, which harmoniously included the dissonant, exotic charms of mésalliance.

In my view, the songs that lyrically intersperse Rowson's dramatic action still partake of the mannerist, enchanted space that temporarily suspends the dramatized confrontation of Christians and Muslims on the Algerian coasts. Their lyrical and non-Anglo perspective also questions the ethnocentric nature of the liberal argument conveyed by the author's two spokeswomen: the captive American protagonists Olivia and Rebecca. Their hegemonic discourse of Enlightenment advocates for the rational ethos of the late eighteenth century, in defense of the American anti-slavery principles and of their firm custody of sexual chastity. Onstage, Olivia (who was portrayed by Rowson herself when the piece premiered at the Chestnut Street Theater in Philadelphia) and her wise mother Rebecca stand out as embodiments of the moral and civic American values of the newly established Republic. By contrast, the musical interludes totally escape Rowson's enlightened rhetoric and look back to the Italian poetic model of the epic romance, which preserved an Oriental, interethnic space of exotic seduction in the Mediterranean. Such an interracial ground keeps questioning, in the lyricism of its amorous yearnings, the rigid ethnic divisions between the Christian and Moorish cultures whose fierce fight is

dramatized onstage. In other words, in *Slaves in Algiers*, this interracial dialogue, which persists in the lyrical form of songs, occupies only a minor, decorative position, like a capricious oddity and a floral marvel in the normative uniformity of the neoclassical structure of the play.

The lyrical extravaganza of these musical intermezzos does not hint at the author's ideological concerns with liberties but, in accordance with the pastoral literary tradition, defends the private values of love and gallantry, countering the Christian program of republican America with the languid finesse of its skits and sketches. As a pagan counterpoint to Rowson's imperial and imperative "talent for invective" (Introduction xxv), which Cathy N. Davidson considers a prerogative of the eighteenth-century discourse, the apathetic ecstasy and the rococo style of the lyrical interludes rely on the rhythmic invention of their rhymed structures, intermittently interrogating Rowson's prescriptive patriotism. In the play, the urgency of the playwright's address in defense of civic value, mortified by the enslaved conditions in Algiers, is also temporarily diverted by the entertaining and erotic features of a marivaudage of the mismatched couples which, in Restoration comedies, encountered the popular taste in a mixture of heroic and sentimental skirmishes aptly codified in John Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesie* (1668) (Sestito 11). In a play dominated, like *Slaves in Algiers*, by the Christian and liberal rhetoric of the Enlightenment, the lyrical songs of the Moorish characters involved in the amorous intrigues reenact in an intermittent sequence the trials of their interethnic encounters.

As I here recall in a genealogical literary perspective, the drama of hampered intermarriages was central in the mythicized version of the First Crusade provided by Tasso in *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581), the epic poem in *ottava rima* that, in a time of ethnic conflict, staged the repressed affective claims of the Christian knights, led by Godfrey of Bouillon, and Muslim women charged, like Armida, with magical and seductive powers. Such an interethnic romance, which in Tasso's heroic poetry divided the Christian army, was familiar to the American readers, having been amply borrowed and incorporated in the American captivity tales of the period with the emergence of a literary model of interethnic romance which, in Rowson's anti-slavery play, is actually denied, postulating a stark division between the Christian suitors and their Moorish objects of desire. Therefore, what survives of the important baroque legacy of Tasso's epic romances is the lyrical refinement of the songs, which breaks Rowson's enlightened discourse and her republican order, shifting the vantage point of the drama from the author's proto-feminist

and liberal stance to the Moorish voices whose lures vainly revive the interfaith dialogue introduced by the sixteenth-century Christian epic.

From the formal point of view of the dual Singspiel structure privileged by Rowson, in *Slaves in Algiers* we find a significant generic and cultural opposition at play. Like the one envisioned by Dennis between "Sense" and "Sound," this opposition confirms an unbridged gap between the moral and "reasonable Diversions" provided by the enlightened American spokeswomen of the playwright and the "monstrous" claims (Dennis 14) of the non-Anglo characters, whose songs gradually become plaintive elegies in memory of mixed-race love "Gaming" which, as Dennis warned in his codification, "removes that awe which Nature has plac'd between the Sexes as the Strongest Bulwark of Chastity" (iv). As a result, in Rowson's play, the vehemence of the writer's anti-slavery address is skillfully balanced by the increasing decline of the interracial complications of the marivaudage which, in the playful French style typical of Dryden's Restoration comedies, initially engages both Christian and Muslim characters in a dynamic of seduction mostly commented on from the minority viewpoint of the non-Anglos, whose songs disarticulate and question the vectorial trajectory of Rowson's political discourse.

The pastoral stylization of their lyrical asides,[2] therefore, recovers the residual exoticism of Tasso's sublime enclosed garden, with the reclusion of the harem girls in Algiers, along with Spanish Sebastian's comic relief, serving as the only condition generative of their lyrical diversions from the stern moralism of Rowson's institutional discourse. The author's partisan tones of civic resistance in the turbulent Mediterranean scenario of torturing measures and fierce detentions find a respite in the suave songs and the skittering divertissement that temporarily relieve this dramatic historical account of the Algerian crisis.

As mentioned above, the conflict exacerbated by what Andrew S. Gross defines as the American "commercial humanism" (12) is mostly rendered by Rowson through a vehement condemnation of the Algerian enslavement of the American crews in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the lyricism which she inherits from Tasso's complex tangle of interethnic encounters between

2 I refer to Fetnah's songs (17, 38) and to Zoriana's song (32-33). Mrs. Rowson's epilogue consists of a final song (77-78), written in a pastoral style, which identifies women with the harmonies of beauty and nature, as if to momentarily exorcise and disperse the belligerent echoes of the ethnic boundaries set by men.

Christian and Moorish characters, before their liberation, includes the romance of detention that the American male captives share with those oppressed Moorish women aptly defined by Smith-Rosenberg as "lyrical harem girls" (88, fn. 51).

Songs and Melancholia of the Harem Girls

More specifically, the Jewish Fetnah and the Muslim Princess Zoriana are forced to live in the oppressive luxuries of the harem and perform the excruciating songs of their cultural and sexual subjection in an Oriental garden, a major chronotope in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century heroic romance (Romero Allué 44) where pain and pleasures paradoxically coexist. Their gilded reclusion is sadly lamented by Fetnah, who had been brutally sold by her greedy father to the Algerian Dey: "it's all vastly pretty, the gardens, the house and these fine clothes; I like them very well, but I don't like to be confined" (13).

Despite her noble descent, the Dey's daughter, Zoriana, also seeks a way out of her hothouse of Oriental pleasures by allying with the fugitive American sailors and forging an interethnic alliance that many an American captivity narrative derives from the heroic epic tradition discussed above. The lyrical space inhabited by Fetnah is no less enslaving than the one which confines the captive American sailors: in her words, it is a "prison of golden wire" (13), traditionally associated with the enchanted *Arabian Nights*, which entered the British book market after its groundbreaking French translation (*Les Mille et Une Nuits*) between 1704 and 1712 (Conant xvii). The exquisite mannerisms and erotic licentiousness introduced by this Oriental world of mystery and wonders reinforced the influence of the generative models of Tasso's Christian epics, reconfiguring, after *Jerusalem Delivered*, the oneiric, bemusing sphere in which opposing knights in armor like the Christian Tancredi and the Muslim warrior maiden Clorinda sought an unexpected, erotic reconciliation.

The idealization of the interethnic encounters lyrically developed by Tasso as a sheltered court poet in Ferrara returns in Rowson's intermezzos in the shape of exquisite poetic interruptions and pastoral retreats in which non-Anglo and Moorish singers provide a utopian, interfaith allegorization of their severely disjointed space. Their atemporal, aesthetic refuge, independent from the patriotic and Christian moral of the play, produces poetic intervals aimed to balance Rowson's pragmatic regulation of "rude

ungoverned passion [...] and lawless love" (*Slaves* 64), which ultimately discourages all the attempted intermarriages in the play. Quite remote from the divisive, institutional codifications that enter the public discourse of the early Republic, the radical hybridity displayed by Moorish characters in the poetic intermissions revives the irreducible sentimental and cultural variety of Tasso's baroque garden. The luxurious evocation of the floral and animal life in the songs transcends the demands of the Christian liberalism that dominates the play and points to a form of poetry in which the interethnic dialectic between Christians, Jews, and Muslims can survive as a significant component of the Algerian captivity scene, which is otherwise dominated by war, tyranny and the enslavement stigmatized by the author, before the final rescue of the captive Christians.

Indeed, Rowson's patriotic and national concern privileges the reunion of the American lovers and betrothed on the grounds of their devotional and cultural affinities. But this selective move confines all the alternative flirtations and interactions previously commented upon from a non-Anglo perspective during the Moorish masques. In this respect, in *Slaves in Algiers*, the songs which intersperse the dialogues in the play constitute a sublime though ephemeral space of reflections for the non-Anglo characters where they feebly but distinctively interrogate the rigid racial and devotional distance intensified by the impending conflict. In Rowson's secularized version of the heroic romance, the Orientalist features of the poetic interlude stand out to no avail, like precious Ottoman gemstones carefully shrined and mounted on a dramatic texture aimed mainly to celebrate the rational and moral virtues of the American Republic. As a result, the Moorish plea for a possible erotic reconciliation with their Christian lovers in the Algerian state of enclosure results in a mere diversion and an exquisite though irrelevant interruption in the drama by the fugitive American hostages firmly placed by Rowson in the limelight. Thus disjointed from the main action, the rhymed songs of the non-Anglo characters feebly convey Zoriana's "pangs of disappointed love" (60) and flow like fading sirens' moans from the enclosed garden of their Moorish seclusion.

In comparison, the patriotic harangues of the American female prisoners who vehemently denounce the violation of the *Rights of Man* implicit in those segregated spaces of luxury and enslaving charms draw a clear ethnic and diegetic line between the declarative prose of their statements and the "interspersed" songs which illuminate, instead, a disenfranchised order of ethnic subalternity which aspires to obtain the same enlightened princi-

ples and the individual values of freedom claimed by the American fugitives. In other words, the idyllic space of the interlude serves to present the Mediterranean, non-Anglo characters but also to attempt an emancipation which the belligerent circumstances deny them. Among the seven Moorish songs which intersperse the play, the first composition in alternate rhymed verse allows Fetnah to sadly situate herself in the confinement of the Oriental garden as a deracinated rose which "Gather'd from its native bed / No longer charms the eye" (17). She is the most articulate among the Moorish characters and reappears in the fifth song to look toward the East, allegorically embodied by Aurorea, the goddess of dawn (38). The second interlude features her renegade father, the Jew Ben Hassan, a marginal convert to Islam and subject of the Dey, who speaks in a London vernacular (24). The third escapist song is Princess Zoriana's, which, in the typical lofty mode of these musical entertainments, invokes the transcendence of sweet cherubs to exorcise her own oppression as a Muslim woman (28). Her second song (which is the fourth in the sequence) sweetly expresses her hope to be as free as her Christian suitor, Henry, whose escape she eagerly facilitates, expecting to finally elope with him (32-33). The seventh song by Zoriana equally evokes the refined mannerism of a "rural scene" where, "[w]ith harmless nymphs and rural swains […] soft peace and pleasure reigns" (60). This semi-divine serenity clashes with the Dey's daughter's anxiety to quit the imprisonment of her Oriental garden. The sixth, unrhymed song is a funny self-portrait of Sebastian with a drinking bowl, which provides comic relief (53-54).

Thus specifically determined by the ethnic differences of the singers, in their apparently entertaining, parallel structure, the lyrical intervals articulate the pleas and concerns of the non-Anglo and differently enslaved characters whose requests remain neglected and have no effects on center stage. The pensive and poetic reflections of these outcasts stress the fragility of their lyrical space, the refinement and delicacy of which, though rooted in the most exquisite poetic tradition, are not sufficient to solve the ongoing conflicts. The disinterested nature of poetry in the play questions and interferes but does not regulate the war scene, and the only poem Rebecca reads aloud undoubtedly breaks her otherwise republican ratio but also comes from a book celebrating the "immortal youth" of the soul "amidst the war of elements" (18). Her own ideal appeal to a reconciliation hovers but never triumphs over the epic-heroic aspects of her inspiration, which times demand, basically confirming the clear divide between the mannerist diversions of the non-Anglo "singers" and the dramatization of the Americans' anti-slavery fight in Al-

giers. The very dual generic divide between the prosaic dialogues on the main stage and the lyrical asides formally reflects the division of two conflicting cultures which, as Mozart's Singspiel also does, reshape the Mediterranean emergency through a compelling mixture of poetry and historical drama, of epic and chronicle.

Such an uneven composition, in its "dramatic dynamics," reflects, according to Avital Ronell, Tasso's own ambivalent poetics, as they appear in the play that Goethe wrote on the life of the Italian epic poet, *Torquato Tasso* (1790). The German author semi-autobiographically depicts Tasso, no less than Rowson, torn between the lyrical ambitions of his classicism and the moral and reforming impulse which engaged him in the Romantic challenges of his Wertherian prose. These "competing aesthetic and anaesthetic theories of the artist" (Ronell 139) equally characterize Rowson's endeavor, which, as she admits in her preface to the play, is "equal in elegance and energy" as the product of her study of "the Ancients in their original purity," but which also serves "the moral and political principles of the government under which I live" and "place[s] the social virtues in the fairest point of view" (6). No less than Tasso's literary life dramatized by Goethe as a dual homage to lyrical beauty and the demands of history, *Slaves in Algiers* shows the naturalized American writer divided between her civic claims for republican justice and her preservation of a plural, lyrical space able to preserve the conflicted but authentic reasons of the star-crossed lovers who fight in the same battles on opposite sides.

However, in reducing the rococo interlude to a mere "decorative ornament" (Sertoli, "Racconto" 275) of exquisite beauty, Rowson severely limits the interethnic encounters in the poetic intervals of her play, making the voice of the non-Anglo characters only heard in the atemporal space of an entertainment anachronistically modeled on a baroque ideal of tolerance, absolutely alien from the prosaic realism of the concurrent action and of the novel to come (Sertoli, *Robinson* 171-72). In their tentative management of the Algerian crisis, which exacerbates the conflict between the Muslim and Jewish characters and the Americans, their attempted alliance is ephemeral and only effectual for the Western fugitives, like the parenthetic space of a lyrical intermezzo, which proves its maladjustment to the prose of warfare deployed on stage.

The dual generic structure of the play that has been stressed so far features the non-Anglo seducers who dominate the aesthetic and eroticized sphere of the harem in an interval of abandonment and complaint diegetically irrelevant which designs a parallel world well described by Voltaire when he

stated, in his own heroic drama in verse *Zaïre* (1732), that "indolence is sweet, but its consequence is cruel [la mollesse est douce, et sa suite est cruelle]" (73, my translation). Nevertheless, Voltaire's play adumbrated the possibility of a happy intermarriage before the attempted mésalliance of Muslims and Christians degenerates into a tragedy. In comparison, Rowson's expectations of the erotic reconciliation of those races who fight on stage are nonexistent, though it is invoked in the lyrical lament of Zoriana (28), vainly infatuated with the enslaved Christian Henry, whose escape she facilitates to no avail. By frustrating their interethnic romance, which indeed succeeded in the case of Zoriana's ancestor, Zoraida, the converted heroine in Cervantes's fable *Don Quixote* (1605/1615) explicitly credited by Rowson in her preface, in her dutiful homage to the Spanish genius who spent five long years in an Algerian jail (6), the author questions Voltaire's enlightened notion of religious tolerance based on the essential uniformity of human nature. Her anti-slavery stance postulates an ideal of freedom that applies differently to the many non-Anglos in her play, and especially to the harem girls whose vain pursuit of freedom seems to have a clear voice only in secluded rhymes.

In *Zaïre*, which circulated widely in English in Aaron Hill's popular 1735 adaptation, *Zara* (see Rust 216), Voltaire posits the alterity of an Orient that Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* (1759) did not hesitate to absorb as a component of the human variety, according to the universalist design of a single human nature being able to carry different fruits (Sertoli, Introduction 16-17). The rococo principle of *vanitas varietarum*, defended by Johnson on Biblical grounds (Sertoli, *Robinson* 174), is suspended if not totally dismissed by Rowson's neoclassical aesthetic, however, which ultimately deconstructs the constitutive Christian assumptions of American democracy. When the republican mother Rebecca Constant unfalteringly claims that "slave […] is a word so abject, that, but to speak it dyes the cheek with crimson," her main recommendation is "not [to] throw on another's neck, the chains we scorn to wear" (73). Still, her warning is essentially contradicted by the segregated structure of a play that separates the non-Christians actively engaged in a fight for freedom from the American captives who are the only ones to accomplish that goal, leaving their Moorish allies in an unaltered state of captivity.

In their brief, lyrical asides, the Jewish damsel Fetnah and the Dey's daughter Zoriana suavely lament their female reclusion, no less painful than the one suffered by their enslaved Christian suitors and, in Tasso's tradition of the Mediterranean Christian epic, they escape with them to quit the unredeemed confinement of the Dey's harem. Their brown beauties stand as

the living evidence of a divided world that the republican ethos pragmatically ratifies by discouraging the conciliatory ritual of mixed marriages in the attempt to mediate ongoing conflicts. Such marital conciliation was achieved by the Indian Pocahontas in the generative American legend, and Smith-Rosenberg detects the historical reasons for the decline of intermarriage in the critical circumstances in which "the French and Haitian Revolutions radically expanded the rights of all men" (60). The fear of disorder and of the attempted violation of property rights, along with the incarceration of American sailors by predatory North African corsairs dramatized by Rowson, urged the nation to "establish […] a military independence" against its "dangerous, racialized Others: barbaric infidels of North Africa, debased and enslaved sub-Saharan Africans, and […] white America's original defining Other, the savage Native American" (Smith-Rosenberg 61). Hence, as *Slaves in Algiers* testifies, the transatlantic re-enactment of the American values of freedom and equality sadly applied only to the U.S. citizens and excluded their non-Anglo, Southern allies, along with the Spanish character Sebastian. As a consequence, Rowson's Barbary captivity play breaks with the redeeming conventions of the epic romance lyrically established by Tasso, attempting an institutional redefinition of "savages" vs. full citizens (Smith-Rosenberg 61, fn.8) which unmasks the limits of modern democracies.

Rowson's firm defense of an American Republic that sanctioned the independence of European Americans from British imperialism did not prevent her from endorsing the first naturalization process in the United States, which excluded all citizens of African descent (Smith-Rosenberg 56, fn. 2). Put in these divisive terms, the very emergence of "American democracy" strikes Smith-Rosenberg as an empty abstraction whose liberal ideals rest "on the solid basis of racial exclusion" (59). In a play written and performed "at the height of the slave rebellion in Saint Domingue" and "the same year that the French National Assembly abolished slavery" (Smith-Rosenberg 86), the new American Republic advocated by Rowson in fact endorses a legal system that denied the very principle of equality advocated by its enlightened constitution (59). In the divided setting of Rowson's republican play, unlike the colonial "Indian" princess Pocahontas, both Fetnah and Zoriana, as North African women, aimlessly bestow their aid upon the captive Americans without being released in return. Rowson draws from the asymmetries of John Dryden's Restoration comedy the theme of the Muslim women who generously contribute to the rescue of Christian captives without the expected reward of intermarriage, which, in the epic-heroic literary tradition, honored the Voltairean principle

of religious tolerance and the peaceful coexistence of all races on earth. In not acknowledging the help provided by the infatuated Fetnah and Zoriana, Rowson does not deny their talent and sensibility, which she amply displays in the harem-like space of their "dramatic entertainment" (6). As if to confirm the euphonic but ineffectual Orientalist charms of their lyrical reclusion, their minor though refined position constitutes a stylish and racialized space of reflection on the disenfranchised within the selective republican order of the free.

In the disjointed structure of *Slaves in Algiers*, another hybrid and non-Anglo character featured in the poetic interlude is the Spanish sailor Sebastian, who also attempts, like the Jewish Fetnah and Muslim Zoriana, a mésalliance with a Moorish damsel in his desire to bridge their cultural and religious distance. Rowson ridicules his sentimental and oneiric interval of interfaith tolerance, putting on front stage the epic values of an enlightened America that progressively marginalizes (outside of the lyrical intermezzos) any significant interracial alliance. In *Slaves in Algiers*, the unprejudiced infatuation of Tancredi, who encounters the Muslim Clorinda in the Oriental garden of Tasso's mythopoetic epic *Jerusalem Delivered*, gets periodically reenacted in vaporous asides of perfect lyrical proportions and utopian desire, soon to be disciplined by the juridically codified order of the democracy of the few, which firmly intervenes to regulate and rationally control the conflicted desire of interethnic lovers, until it slowly dissolves, as a stylish incongruence in the triumphant prose of the republican style. As the linearity of this normative discourse regulates and dispels any baroque and interethnic asymmetry in the name of reason and restraint, the lyrical interlude denounces its progressive alienation from Tasso's fabula of the Christian conquest as a disempowered allegory of race and desire, which can only survive as the mannerist feature of an epic paradigm in bad decline.

As the intermezzos keep renovating their baroque cult of variety and extravaganza, the Moorish dream of mésalliance and Christian conversion shows the signs of its failed integration, eventually disappointing the Moorish Princess Zoriana, trained, like Tasso's Clorinda, by a Christian slave to the Western cult of freedom. Though ready, like Miguel de Cervantes's Zoraida, to leave her home and faith to escort a Christian hostage out of her father's jail, the merciful daughter of the Sultan offers the enslaved Henry sufficient money and jewelry to buy his ransom, but draws no material advantage out of her infatuated devotion to the American captive. Once freed, Henry does not hesitate to leave the generous Muslim princess behind and reunite with

his Christian betrothed. Even in Voltaire's *Zaïre*, the eponymous naturalized Muslim damsel, ready to marry her beloved Turkish fiancé, sees their strong bond broken by the religious intolerance of a Christian relative who warns her: "And am I informing my deceived Lusignan / That a Tartar is the God that his daughter has singled out? [Et je vais donc apprendre à Lusignan trahi, / Qu'un Tartare est le Dieu que sa fille a choisi?]" (97, my translation). Therefore, despite all her anti-slavery claims, we can conclude that Rowson's racialization of social codes puts a decided end to intermarriage as a solution to the racial and religious conflicts in the Mediterranean, since in her republican world, the reason of state prevails and courtship and marriage remain strictly associated with a shared Christian commitment (Dillon 415). As a result, all the prospective interracial couples in Rowson's play—Henry and Zoriana, Fetnah and Frederic, Ben Hassan and the cross-dressed Sebastian, whom he mistakes for a harem girl—eventually renounce each other because, as Gross observes, although the "American civil religion, if not completely secular […] separated church and state" (11), the fight against Barbary piracy was basically characterized "as a crusade against the infidels" (10). Even Rowson's liberal and feminist view that "marriage must be an egalitarian match based on mutual affection" (Davidson, *Revolution* 143) registers as an enlightened abstraction that highlights the author's proto-feminism but does not account for the substantial banning of the mésalliance from her public and private stage.

Despite the universal notion of freedom established by the author, her enlightened views exclude the power of desire, which also remains the exclusive prerogative of American citizens. Unlike Cervantes's Zoraida, in her own star-crossed love, Zoriana does not gain sentimental access to the Christian world regulated by her seventeenth-century model. Her beloved Henry finds his legitimate spouse in Olivia, the female emblem of American freedom and the one eligible to share with him the final paths of their long-cherished emancipation. She has nothing of the sweetness and charm of Zoriana but her return sanctions Henry's safe adherence to the norms that trade any previous interethnic dialogue with the triumphant, prosaic order of peers, absolutely impermeable to the aristocratic heroism of an epic in bad decline.

While Tasso's epic romance erotically merges but religiously divides the pagan Clorinda from the Christian Tancredi, in Rowson's historical play, no harem girl finds a mate within the ethnic *varietas* advocated by Samuel Johnson. Even from a structural point of view, the friction between the sensual pleasures of the Oriental garden where their songs are alluringly performed

and the front stage in which the Americans' anti-slavery action is carried out defines an epic field of fierce oppositions between instinct and state reason, between erotic impulse and heroic needs, between interracial desire and national concerns. If Tasso's pastoral play *Aminta* rehearsed in court theaters the unprejudiced idyll of nymphs and satyrs, Rowson's play allows such liberties only in the mannerist irresolution of the lyrical masque, which survived in parodic and degraded versions in many a popular Victorian theater.

In its dismissal of any heroic and poetic indulgence, *Slaves in Algiers* confines the utopia of the integrated world epitomized by Cervantes's fable of the converted Zoraida to well-wrought songs as a poetic, residual commitment to the interfaith alliance in the impending conflicts escalating in North Africa. Such a pastoral break constitutes only an aestheticized, hybrid note in a drama inaugurated in the name of Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*. In the play in which Rebecca warns: "never shall Olivia, a daughter of Columbia, and a Christian, tarnish her name by apostasy, or live the slave of a despotic tyrant" (72), the non-Anglo characters may claim only in rhymed songs the same liberties they see violated and ridiculed in the foreground. And since their verses smooth Rowson's didactic tones, she mitigates (in the prologue read by Mr. Fennell) the vehemence of the partisan "woman, pleading the Rights of Man" (9) by involving the Moorish singers in the skits and skirmishes of star-crossed lovers in an interfaith competition with the legitimate Christian couple, which entertains the audience along effective heroic epic patterns.

These patterns secure the success of the play making the final reunion of the American couples not as joyous as it seems, being the sad confirmation of the unbridgeable cultural differences John Dryden's Restoration plays started stressing by modifying the verse patterns and by replacing the rhyme structure of the close couplets adopted in his heroic drama, *The Conquest of Granada* (1670), with the more dynamic but less glorious blank verse to sustain the contrastive strategy of *All For Love; or, the World Well Lost* (1677). His conscious imitation of William Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* (c1607) resulted in a less elevated poetic diction to the advantage of ordinary and domestic feelings conveyed in verse.[3] What most concerns us, in Rowson's own

3 While in the rhymed play *The Conquest of Granada*, written in iambic pentameter, Dryden adopted iambic rhymes to stress the epic glory typical of the heroic drama, starting from *Aureng-Zebe* (1675), he dismissed the heroic couplets in the unrhymed *Don Sebastian* (1689) as if to hint to a depletion of the heroic values likely to be conveyed in blank verse. I thank Marisa Sestito for reminding me of the late metrical structure adopted

perilous play of mismatched couples and its own expressive alternation of poetry and dialogues is the increasing neutralization of the Voltairean plea for a religious tolerance still sustained by a fixed and rhymed verse structure. As I suggest in this chapter, in her play, a more disenchanted and prosaic realism increasingly disempowers the few unprejudiced advocates for interethnic coexistence, confining them to the *loci amoeni* of poetic tableaux as an orgiastic site of baroque and forbidden pleasures in which the Algerian beauties who still fancy a harmonious space of shared tolerance and miscegenation never gain the front stage.

And since no Christian is meant to trespass their licentious, enclosed garden, when their rigid boundaries are broken by the enslaved American sailor Frederic, the Jewish Fetnah has to rescue him from the Sultan's capital punishment by costuming him as a veiled woman. His ridiculed emasculation in his challenge of the prescribed racial and gender limits of the harem is another instance of Fetnah's and Frederic's interethnic adventure and clumsy joint escape from the Dey's palace. Once again, only Frederic is later admitted to the "enslaved Enlightenment" (Dubois 13-14) that selectively regulates the access of full American citizens to the liberties and benefits denied to their Moorish mates. Before the republican order gets re-established, the space of Oriental charms can only briefly host the gilded drama of the captive harem girls and the aggravating temporary enslavement of their Christian followers. The debt set by Fetnah's and Frederic's respective religious and cultural codes is paid by the untenable ridicule of cross-dressing, which the unsexed Jewish girl also suffers in her attempted escape in a boy's attire, along with her American ally induced to enter Fetnah's harem in female clothes in order to be spared an instant execution (Sorensen 181). The mutual exposure of their racial and gender crossing is hardly tolerated on the center stage, which is normative and alien due to the artificial nature and license of the lyrical interludes. Any interfaith alliance is therefore labeled as a form of disorderly conduct, dooming the brown girls to the undignified status of wayward women not entitled to the benefits granted to the free-born Americans (Castiglia 155).

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by Dryden in *Don Sebastian*, which is a play that Marion Rust also refers to as an influential source in Rowson's creation of *Slaves in Algiers* (216, fn. 29). This domestication of the verse structure in Dryden's heroic play inaugurated a prosaic era reflected in the unrhymed comic turns of Rowson's play, and especially in the debased travesty of the Spanish Sebastian, ridiculed and wooed by the deceived Ben Hassan, who mistakes him for a woman.

By contrast, despite their detention in Algiers, in their matronly composure, Rebecca and Olivia are spared these grotesque travesties, being impermeable to the aporetic license of poetry and fully entitled to establish the institutional protocols of their full participation in the *res publica*. The lucidity and restraint of their rational minds coincide with the sexual abstinence of these undefeated American women who stand out as unsurpassed models of female modesty in the rising democracy. In their exemplary conduct, they morally outclass the licentious harem girls culturally associated, like Armida in *Jerusalem Delivered*, with the enthralling charms of pagan seducers. In this respect, like Dryden's French domestication of the Italian heroic romance in his Restoration comedy of mismatched lovers, Rowson's play finally establishes the bourgeois moral standards of a culture of sentiment, which the freed American women end up embodying, as opposed to the Moorish harem girls who hardly fit them into the more adventurous and interracial management of their seductive powers.

An Untenable Coquetry

The presumed flirtatious attitude assumed by Fetnah and Zoriana is, in fact, an astute posture assimilating them, in their resistance to the Sultan's tyranny, to the strategic coquetry of Samuel Richardson's heroine in *Pamela; or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), a novel that the author of *Charlotte Temple* (1791)—Rowson's re-actualization of Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), written while she was still living in England—could not have possibly ignored. Seduction is indeed an important pattern in *Slaves in Algiers*, though it is culturally incompatible with her Christian ethos as well as with Islamic customs, which prevented veiled women from exerting any seductive charms, being absolutely inaccessible to men's eyes. This is exactly Royall Tyler's objection to the flirtatious nature of the erotic dynamism that, in Rowson's play, actively engages both Zoriana and Fetnah. His own fictional response to the pirates' attacks from the Barbary coasts, *The Algerine Captive; or, the Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill: Six Years Prisoner Among the Algerines* (1797), which consists of a picaresque travel narrative, overtly documents the absolute physical inaccessibility of Muslim women to the point that, as a medical doctor, the autobiographical protagonist has to introduce a thermometer through thick curtains in order to check the temperature of his invisible female

patient.[4] Compared to Tyler's factual account of the Barbary states, [5] in her Orientalist rendition of the harem as an interethnic space of poetry, Rowson unrealistically stirs it into an arena of licentious marivaudage borrowed from the Restoration comedy. In her clear manipulation of the historical facts, she enacts the failure of Zoriana's and Fetnah's seduction scheme in their efforts to win the love of the enslaved Americans and secure their way out of the harem, successfully dramatizing a racially divided world that in real life was indeed even more segregated and invisible to foreigners.

Nevertheless, in *Slaves in Algiers*, the struggle of the two Moorish girls to enfranchise themselves is determined by even more divisive moral standards. While the captives Olivia and Rebecca, who can proudly claim American citizenship, resist the sexual advances of the Sultan and the renegade Ben Hassan (15-16), as a harem girl, Fetnah cannot equal their perfect chastity. According to the rigid moral standards codified by the two white heroines, she remains confined, in her sensual, Moorish appeal, to the closeted space of the lyrical interlude. Quite spectacularly, her sweet poetry is absolutely absent from the public, institutional speech of the American Olivia who celebrates, as the playwright's alter ego, her nation with the neoclassical geometries and the rational rhetoric of legislation specifically designed to regulate the controversies of human passions. And since the legal codification of all democracies relies on this paradox of the repression of natural instincts, in its underlying Christian ethos, the enlightened motto of the republican mother Rebecca ("By the Christian law, no man should be a slave" [73]) registers as an empty and unadorned public speech in comparison to the private, eroticized hankering unraveled by Fetnah's and Zoriana's address.

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4 "I had never yet seen the face of a woman; even the female children being carefully concealed […] a large veil was then thrown over my head, I was led toward the couch, and was presented with a pulse glass, being a long glass tube graduated […]. This instrument was inserted through the curtains, and the bulb applied to the pulse of my patient, and the other extremity put under my veil" (Tyler 150, 152-53).

5 Tyler's prose, equally inspired by the Algerian crisis, provides a reliable account of the Barbary states, filled with a Voltairean open-mindedness that the narrator's torturing imprisonment does not hamper. Compared to Rowson's, Tyler's analytical tone is equally addressed to the "Liberal Public" (6) of American citizens, but his narrator manages to distance himself from the fanaticism encountered in those states while preserving the innocent curiosity of a Candide eager to study his Muslim captors with no prejudice.

The lyrical sophistication of their interludes speaks for the spiritual vagaries of the Moorish characters and their confinement in a cloistered but highly stylized dimension that, in its literary sophistication, outclasses the pragmatic philistinism of the public sphere. And since their atemporal moments of lyrical bliss inevitably contrast with the factual realities enacted on stage, it can be well argued that the dual nature of Rowson's dramatic discourse keeps hinting to the reclusive domain of poetry as one of the few utopian receptacles of cultural *varietas*, which feebly resists the increasingly "conservative and restrictive context" (Bartolomeo 30) that relegates the Voltairean principle of cultural variety and (religious) tolerance to an exquisite but inconsequent aside. The civic republican values Olivia unpoetically utters reduce characters to national and religious labels, which are indeed quite at odds even with the personal history of Rowson, whose claims to American citizenship were doubtful at best, having been born in England from a British loyalist father.

Never for a moment does Olivia sympathize with the non-Christian beauties who question the rigid cultural categories erected to separate the imprisoner from the imprisoned. Compared to their rococo resistance to the unaffected rhetoric of their American rivals, Olivia is a dispassionate, republican advocate, who appears as the legitimate American spouse, the racialized dream of her betrothed mate, Henry. In the same way, the love affair between the Jewish Fetnah and the American Frederic gets irremediably poisoned and complicated by the many travesties and charms aroused by the interracial nature of their bond, which finally registers as a short-termed, alien fantasy compared to the hegemonic power of the American couples.

It is worth noting that the guilty pleasures of interfaith desire are reserved to the reclusive, lyrical sphere of the infidels, the miscreants, and the "inconstant" (174), as Lise Sorensen wittily defines them, whose distinctive voice prevails in the mannerism of their exquisite intermissions, countering the normativity of the Constant families on both Mozart's and Rowson's frontstage. They are the outcast poets that the legislative determinations of the *Rights of Man* hardly tolerate, along with the erotic conflation of opposites constitutive of all baroque constructs. As Ronell concludes in her study of Goethe's dual strategy of "knowing and imagining:" "the theoretician and the poet were often at war with one another" (129). And *Slaves in Algiers* reveals a similar ambivalence regarding the "implications of competing aesthetic and anaesthetic theories of the artist" (Ronell 134). Although the lyrical serenity of the poetic intervals does not substantially impinge upon Rowson's enlightened fascina-

Figure 1. Hiram Powers, The Greek Slave (1846).

Courtesy National Gallery of Art, Washington.

tion with the "desire for knowledge" (Ronell 130), it urges her instead toward an educational and institutional approach to the public scene, since the structural partition of her play between prose and poetry compellingly divides the dynamic resistance of the American freedom fighters on the run from the sublime meditations of the differently enslaved Moorish who dwell on at the indigenous, segregated margins of the unfettered, Western world. Nevertheless, in their racial and aesthetic difference, they offer a pensive counterpoint to the many turbulences of the dramatic action which, in patriotic defense of the enslaved Americans, vilifies the cultural inhomogeneity of the Moorish scene. By putting on center stage the trauma of the enslaved Americans, later

epitomized by Hiram Powers in his sublime, Hellenist sculpture, *The Greek Slave* (1846; fig. 1), Rowson enacts the horror of enchained women as white as marble and auctioned off like Augustus in a play whose claim for civil liberties applies strictly to the Western world.

Toward an "Enslaved Enlightenment"

It could be argued that, despite Rowson's proto-feminist take, in *Slaves in Algiers*, the Moorish and American women do not share a comparable "female" condition of captivity, because even though they all fight for the same freedom, the latter secure it while the disenfranchised non-Anglo outcasts vainly try to achieve that liberty by seducing their enslaved American partners. The chaste American heroines are impermeable to that rescuing conversion and even when, like Konstanze in Mozart's Singspiel, they promise to marry the Muslim tyrant, unlike the "harem girls," they are never sexually exploited, remaining the perfect incarnations of a Puritan modesty fully eligible for all democratic privileges. In the play, Olivia neither trades her sober independence for the "Oriental" luxuries of Fetnah's "splendid house of bondage" (13) nor is she exposed to the alluring corruption of the harem's gilded segregation. In the shrewd management of her sexual restraint, which Rowson was well acquainted with as the skilled author of *Charlotte Temple*, Olivia resists her captor's advances and successfully recovers her monogamous bond with Henry in the name of a liberty in love sanctioned by her American birthright. Therefore, as it occurs to Konstanze in Mozart's generative Singspiel, her strategic flirting with the Sultan never jeopardizes her unfaltering chastity, which becomes the bodily correlative of her patriotic defense of the American nation and the liberal values that bless her and her fellow countrymen.

Starting from the prologue, Olivia is referred to as the legitimate daughter of Columbia, whose sexual integrity has both public and private implications.[6] In the play, the modesty of Rebecca and Olivia and their private protest against all forms of sexual slavery prove quite influential in liberating her captive companions. In both *The Abduction from the Seraglio* and *Slaves in Algiers*, Konstanze's and Olivia's anti-slavery stance diegetically matches the vindication of their right to marry the partner of their choice, long before the

6 "The reigning *virtues* she has dar'd to scan, / And tho' a woman / plead the Rights of Man" (Rowson, *Slaves* 9, original emphasis).

final release of their enslaved lovers. In *Slaves in Algiers*, as they hold on to an ideal of sexual abstinence deeply rooted in Puritan self-restraint, such a persuasive power of fidelity coincides with sentimental freedom that constitutes another prerogative of the American heroines who rise in monogamous defense of their relations with their Christian partners. With that enduring chastity, Olivia incarnates the paradox of an enlightened epoch that saw the proliferation of anti-slavery tracts and public declarations of the *Rights of Man* while leading women toward an asexual model of female emancipation never to be mistaken for the licentiousness that remained associated with prostitution, as the only public sphere inhabited by women until modern times. As a result, *Slaves in Algiers* postulates a public scene that empowers American women as marble-like emblems of moral virtues. Their hampered love lives, therefore, assume an exemplary allegorical meaning in the dire and frigid circumstances dramatized by the playwright.

As a shrewd administrator of her own body, the enslaved Olivia makes of her sexual abstinence a private mutiny symbolically addressed to her fellow countrymen enslaved in Algiers, as if to share the patient, mutual expectation to recover their violated rights. In this respect, her resistance to the Dey's advances is a passive-aggressive maneuver defensively enacted in her patriotic rejection of the unwanted intermarriage urged by the Dey and of her related conversion. Like Konstanze in *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Olivia's chaste resistance to the Sultan's assaults has the effect of procrastinating her simulated marriage vow, making the time for her kidnapped companion (and for the American army at large) to reach the Barbary state, release the American hostages, and reunite the legitimate spouses, as any comedy requires. Sorensen astutely points out that Olivia's monogamous commitment to her Christian object of desire is pivotal in the transformation of this Barbary captivity play into a captivity romance (71), which perfectly fits Fredric Jameson's historicist notion of the "allegory of desire" (17-22). Accordingly, Rowson's comedy of manners maintains a strong political overtone, filling the historical drama with a chronicle of amorous incidents attributed to her female preoccupation with chastity as the sentimental key for the preservation of her countrymen's integrity. In this respect, as Gross rightly argues, *Slaves in Algiers* actively engages faithful spouses as representatives of "the sanctity of the American sentiment" (6) opposed, in their sexual mutiny against the Sultan's hideous advances, to the fallen Jewish and Moorish renegades in the play. No wonder that the announced intermarriage between the Algerians and the Americans never occurs (Dillon 415) and that Olivia's detour of the Sultan's as-

pirations to forcefully win her love stands out as an astute filibustering tactic of the war strategist who keeps the Dey at bay while waiting for her countrymen's military reprisal.

As a matter of fact, while Rowson was rehearsing her 1794 play, the peace negotiations with the Barbary states were still ongoing. They were concluded with the 1796 Treaty of Tripoli drafted by Joel Barlow, which negotiated the financial protection of America's commercial shipping rights in the Mediterranean against piracy. Before that treaty, the private vicissitudes of Rowson's American heroines enslaved in Algiers maintained a strategic, allegorical value, making their abstinence symbolic of the national defense of a violated democratic order. In this respect, Rowson's use of the female body as a sexualized bulwark against the oppressive Muslim tyrant becomes a distinctive, sentimental feature of her republican style, which drew a clear, normative line between the American patriots and their non-Anglo allies, gloomily restrained in the harem of their sexual oppression. Even in this respect, the mythopoetic force of their rococo intermissions is not without iconic resonance, since Olivia's female defense of her chastity is not a mere, private act of successful resistance to the Dey's abuse of power, but finds its most poignant allegorical representation in Gian Lorenzo Bernini's rococo sculpture, *Apollo e Dafne* (Galleria Borghese, 1622-25; fig. 2), in which the innocent nymph who escapes the assaults of her divine suitor finally turns into a tree, in a sublime anamorphosis that speaks for Olivia's unguarded exposure to the Sultan's violence and her transformation into the desexualized emblem of her vulnerable but enduring nation.

Along with freedom, fidelity is the main republican American value that establishes the racialized hierarchy of the "fully human" (Gross 13) in the play, concurrently stigmatizing the unbridled lust of non-Anglo infidels inclusive of the aforementioned harem girls but also the Jewish renegade Hassan and the lustful Dey himself who, as Henry remarks in the play, is capable of a loveless and "lawless love" (64). As the main emblem of this monogamous ethos, the virginal American spouse ends up embodying the Christian *res publica*, contributing, with her flawless modesty, to the codification of the republican notions of race, power, and desire. Along these normative and institutional lines, in Rowson's historical comedy, the rococo taste for variety and extravaganza, which looks back to the long-lived literary tradition of the epic romance, gets increasingly dispelled and replaced with the sentimental rhetoric of the rectitude of the American heroine, who ultimately marries not only into her class (Davidson, *Revolution* 145) but also into her race and religion.

Figure 2. Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Apollo e Dafne (1622-25).

Photograph by Joaquim Alves Gaspar (CC BY-SA 4.0)

As I argued throughout this chapter on the generic and racial partitions that, in *Slaves in Algiers*, negotiate the great divide between prose from poetry and Christians and Muslims, the aftermath of the Algerian crisis imposed an exacerbation of the cultural and religious distinctions and the concurrent suspension of intermarriage as a colonial strategy to mediate new forms of the American presence in the Mediterranean. As a result, the new Republic seemed to require American-born partners like Henry for the American Olivia, despite his flirtatious intermezzo with Princess Zoriana. Olivia's recovery of her legitimate spouse is a conservative, conventional conclusion

that celebrates the bourgeois values sanctioned by the rise of the novel, in line with the selective Puritan project of the enfranchisement of the few. Meanwhile, the double standard emphasized by Rowson's dual dramatic structure confined the presumed licentiousness of interracial encounters with the non-Anglos to the ephemeral escapist diversion of a musical interlude. This enclosed, lyrical sphere keeps challenging, in the name of the reconciliation of opposites inaugurated by the sixteenth-century epic poem, the unheroic, domestic ethos of the rising middle class, its prose of life, and the related sentimental values of chastity and propriety, originating from the decline of the aristocratic values of honor and beauty and the castigation of racial difference on the slippery grounds of sexual (mis)conduct.

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