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Quixotism, Federalism, and the Question of American  
National Identity in  
Royall Tyler's *The Algerine Captive*<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract**

This article places Royall Tyler's novel, *The Algerine Captive*, within the socio-political context of the early American Republic which was acutely concerned with the problem of defining its national identity. As a multi-genre text juxtaposing the picaresque format patterned after Henry Fielding's *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* with the travelogue and the Barbary captivity narrative, *The Algerine Captive* is a novel which mirrors the incoherent and disjointed character of America in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, in formal as well as generic terms. By the same token, the variegated adventures of the protagonist/ narrator Updike Underhill both at home and abroad reveal social, political, legal, religious and racial differences meant to challenge the Federal meaning of nation as an isolated and self-reliant land under the John Adams government. I examine the link between Tyler's critique of Federalism taken as national insularity and the status of Updike Underhill as a quixotic character. His return to America as a patriotic citizen after escaping from slavery in Algiers is not a traditional quixotic "cure," i.e. a return to the Federalist *status quo*. Underhill's return to his native country enables him to make American society better, not by simply parroting federalist principles, but by upholding and testing cross-cultural differences and global experiences on native soil as a *cosmopolitan* citizen.

**Keywords:** quixotism, Federalism, captivity, trans-nationalism, trans-culturalism

Published by David Carlisle in Walpole, New Hampshire, in 1797, Royall Tyler's two-volume novel entitled *The Algerine Captive or, The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill: Six Years a Prisoner Among the Algerines* encapsulates, like many other early American texts written

between 1780 and 1800, a period fraught with social and political tension, during which Americans were deeply concerned with the problem of national identity. Party strife fueled by the worsening of the relations between the US and France, heated debates over the Constitution, the Whiskey Rebellion, Shays's Rebellion, the Alien and Sedition Acts, or the international crisis sparked by the captivity of Americans on the Barbary Coast are telling instances of national turmoil scrutinized in the early American republic by politicians and social theoreticians such as Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, and depicted by novelists of this period that have hardly, or insufficiently, been analysed in the aforementioned context. Interested in (re)defining the social, political, and moral character of the nation, some writers extolled America in blatant jingoistic terms, whereas "the best thinkers and artists among them – Charles Brockden Brown, Hugh Henry Brackenridge, and Royall Tyler, to name three – studied American character without the blinders of national pride, without self-congratulation or inflated rhetoric" (Engell 19). In their 1979 monograph on Royall Tyler, Ada Lou Carson and Herbert L. Carson contend that *The Algerine Captive* is "the first novel about life in New England" and "the second American novel about American life. It was preceded and possibly influenced by Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry*" (59) published in four parts (1792, 1793, 1797, 1815). Writing about the history of Tyler's novel's publication and reception, Eve Tavor Bannet claims that Tyler "was not as widely read in America as he deserved to be," not only because his book contains a great deal of remarks on pressing issues of the time, but also because,

after his abortive courtship of John Adams' daughter, he had been marginalized and cold shouldered by those descendants of the Puritans allied with John Adams, who described him to their friends as a loose cannon and an immoral man. *The Algerine Captive* ultimately reached Boston in 1804, after Adams' fall, via imports of the London reprint. (Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories* 107-108)

Indeed, the London reprints of the novel in 1802 and 1804 by G. and J. Robinson promoted Tyler as a radical writer who stood side by side with radical *qua* Jacobin English novelists, such as William Godwin, Thomas

Holcroft, and Elisabeth Inchbald. According to Bannet, “*The Monthly Review* of 1803 certainly read *The Algerine Captive* as a radical novel” that supported freedom and reinforced the principles of the American Revolution, “which had faded in the minds of Tyler’s countrymen,” as “an abolitionist text, and as a critique of short-sighted European policies towards North Africa” (Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories* 108). Radical as it may have appeared to English reviewers, Tyler’s novel draws attention to the social, political, moral, and spiritual perils intrinsic not only to the Islamic world, but also to the motley American nation satirically presented in Volume 1. In doing so, Tyler employs “English and European forms of fiction for new purposes” (Engell 19). As a multi-genre text juxtaposing the picaresque format à la Henry Fielding in *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones* with the travelogue and the Barbary Coast captivity narrative, *The Algerine Captive* has been described by early critics as a loosely structured and utterly disconnected novel.

Recent scholarship, however, has deemed the inarticulate form of the novel as a reflection of the incoherent and disjointed character of the early republic, a stance which I would like to consider in this study. In the words of Cathy Davidson, Tyler’s “broken-backed” novel is a “mirror version of America” that “extend[s] and exaggerate[s] the same hierarchies dividing the American political and social scene” (207, 320). The adventures of the protagonist/ narrator Updike Underhill both at home and abroad reveal not only socio-political, but also religious and racial differences meant to challenge the Federal meaning of nation understood as an autonomous union of citizens governed by mutual interests. As Keri Holt has aptly noted, “*The Algerine Captive* likewise promotes a distinctly federal conception of national unity by showing how the United States could be imagined through narratives emphasizing differences” (484). In what follows I pursue this line of argument by connecting Tyler’s critique of Federalism taken as national insularity with the status of Updike Underhill as a quixotic character. According to Sarah Wood, Tyler’s quixotic fiction “has, perversely, been enshrined by critical consensus as . . . a textbook lesson in American patriotism” (137). In contrast to Wood’s argument, I claim that Underhill’s “cure,” i.e. his return to America after escaping from slavery in Algiers, is not understood as an ardent wish to

better American society as a patriotic American citizen who imitates federalist principles, but as a *cosmopolitan* citizen eager to uphold and test cross-cultural differences and global experiences on native soil. I contend that, by taking Cervantes's *Don Quixote* as a "generative literary source, a significant (though not necessarily a sole) literary model" (Wood vi), *The Algerine Captive* portrays a Yankee engaged in a melioristic and civically virtuous project to be fulfilled by probing "the cultural fit of common transnational models" advocated by quixotic figures "whose conduct, values, and expectations were fashioned by transnational codes" (Bannet, "Quixotes" 553). Such an approach, which runs counter to Wood's idea that "Quixotic fiction can be read as a formative genre of the early republic" (viii), enables us to place Tyler's representation of quixotism in a different light and, consequently, to interpret Underhill as a character who "circumnavigates the Atlantic" (Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories* 98). Underhill leaves America, travels to London, and then to Africa, and returns to America after seven years as a slave in Algiers. This circular route recommends Underhill as an adventurer who defies the isolationist policy of Federalism.

Underhill's comparative view developed as a result of his travels within America and his enslavement in Algiers fails to find a correspondent in his actions undertaken as a reintegrated citizen of the republic. However, his experiences obliterate nationalist feelings inherited from a mythical American past and allow him to envisage the American nation as a union of different parts held together by national consensus best illustrated by the national creed, *e pluribus unum*. By foregrounding Underhill as a quixotic character, Tyler, whose Federalism "was temperate" (Davidson 196), demystifies American nationalism and isolationism, which spawns chauvinism, Alien and Sedition Acts, and xenophobia, all of them precluding cross-cultural exchange. Contrary to Aaron Hanlon's argument, which insists on Underhill's "unreflective (and unreflexive) nationalism" (127), I argue that Underhill successfully puts to test America's mythical past inherited from his ancestor in a sensible manner throughout Volume 2. Ironically enough, Updike becomes a "worthy citizen" only if he shares with his readers the multifarious cultural experiences lived outside the borders of America. Holt has

convincingly demonstrated that the conflation of “federal” and “citizen” is extremely problematic when dealt with in the 1790s, an idea supported by James Madison’s discussion of differences between “national” and “federal” in “The Federalist No. 39”:

If we try the Constitution by its last relation to the authority by which amendments are to be made, we find it neither wholly *national* nor wholly *federal*. Were it wholly national, the supreme and ultimate authority would reside in the *majority* of the people of the Union .... Were it wholly federal, on the other hand, the concurrence of each State in the Union would be essential to every alteration that would be binding on all. (emphasis in the original)

The “alteration that would be binding on all” is thus conjoined with a kind of nationalism that ought to be open to differences. Able to accurately interpret the differences he encounters, Underhill defines himself comparatively and offers his American fellows a model for reading these differences in a cosmopolitan manner.

Dedicated to David Humphreys, an eminent figure belonging to the late eighteenth-century literary group of the Connecticut Wits and former minister for the United States in Lisbon, the Preface to the novel is a plea for a genuine American literature that must be attuned to the federal principles of patriotism and nationalism. Written by the protagonist Updike Underhill after his six-year enslavement in Algiers came to an end, the Preface praises the growth of literacy among all walks of life, but, more significantly, deplors “the change in public taste,” which was conducive to the circulation of books “meant to amuse, rather than instruct” (Tyler vii). This demotic dimension of reading, says Underhill, has the potential to counteract the rigid, class-based system of reading on the old continent: “The diffusion of a taste for any species of writing through all ranks, in so short a time, would appear as impracticable to an European” (Tyler vii). Nevertheless, the “books” Underhill refers to are novels, romances and travel stories, all of them enticing yet dangerous genres that made the countrymen “forsake the sober sermons and practical pieties of their fathers, for gay stories and splendid impieties” whose baleful influence is also visible on the young female mind (Tyler vii, ix). Insisting on innovation in the Republic, the Underhill persona attacks

particularly the noxious influence of the imported English novel on the American readers, warning that “while so many books are vended, they are not of our own manufacture” and that “novels, being the picture of the times, the New England reader is insensibly taught to admire the levity, and often the vices, of the parent country” (Tyler ix). The narrator’s statements implicitly point to a donquixotesque pattern of behaviour, in that the “so many books” coming from abroad are tantamount to the chivalry romances that warp the mind of Cervantes’s hero.

Yet Tyler is ironical enough to argue in favour of a reworking of novels, romances and travel narratives so as to write a book apt to be read both as American and transnational literature. Thus, “the first part of it [history], if not highly interesting, would at least display a portrait of New England manners, HITHERTO UNATTEMPTED” whereas the second volume presents Updike’s “captivity among the Algerines, with some notices of the manners of that ferocious race, so dreaded by commercial powers, and so little known in our country” (Tyler xii, original capitals). Echoing Fielding’s paternity of the “hitherto unattempted” species of writing in the Preface to *Joseph Andrews*, on the one hand, and portraying the exoticism of the second part of the novel that is entirely “based on fact” (Tyler xii), Tyler actually supplements domestic literature by providing readers with a global perspective that is endorsed by “continual references to the world beyond America and ample narrations of international travel” (Hanlon 125). This transnational and, concurrently, cosmopolitan approach to American literature and national identity has also been underlined by Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, who have focused on differences between English, American, and Algerian cultures, customs, manners, and religions. As regards Barbary captivity, many books on Algeria were published in the 1790s. Susanna Rowson published a play called *Slaves in Algiers* (1794), which focuses on the ever-growing public concern with Americans held hostages by Algerian pirates. According to Carson and Carson, Tyler may have had recourse to these books and may have been influenced by popular captivity narratives and “stories about prisoners of the Indians” (58-59). While William C. Spengemann suggests that Tyler’s knowledge about

Algiers has been “gleaned from guidebooks” (135), Davidson has labelled Updike Underhill’s experience in Algiers as

a travelogue that seems far more conventional than was the account of Underhill’s early excursions through America, perhaps because Tyler himself had never seen Algiers and had, in effect, plagiarized his captivity tale from popular Algerine captivity narratives of the day. Obviously, he hoped to exploit the then-current national preoccupation with the outrages perpetrated on Americans by Barbary pirates to expose worse outrages perpetrated by Americans on Africans. (207)

Although he insists on the pressing need of a domestic literature “wrought in our own looms” (Tyler vi), Underhill realizes that his “excursions through America” and the encounter with the Algerian world prevent him from reading diversity through a unique, American-gearred grid. In addition, he can become a “worthy Federal citizen” (Tyler 228) only if he reads cultural differences appropriately, and it is through the lens of this desideratum that “the novel is able to exhibit the distinguishing characteristics of the United States” (Holt 487). Therefore, national literature, which should not be adulterated by imports, along with the isolationist policy imposed by Federalism, would only seem quixotic in this case.

The first volume, a foray into “the interior of New England” (“Retrospective Review” 344), is a biting satire of American customs, manners, and habits. More of a comic character whose adventures at home portend all sorts of failures, the quixotic Underhill acts as a participant observer of the foibles of American society, since in the Preface he advises that “we write our own books of amusement and that they exhibit our own manners” (Tyler xi). The first chapters of the volume are devoted to the genealogy of Updike Underhill, born from one of the first emigrants to New England, Captain John Underhill, who came into Massachusetts in 1630, honourably mentioned by Jeremy Belknap in the *History of New Hampshire* (23). The episode is highly relevant for the future romantic idealization of his ancestor and, implicitly, of the American past. As Hanlon has cogently argued, “Tyler uses lineage and influence in *The Algerine Captive* to provide a narrative history of quixotic delusion and revisionism against which Updike’s final quixotic conversion can be read”

(121). Playing the role of Amadís de Gaula, the famous knight who stands for Don Quixote's iconic source of imitation and action, Captain Underhill was a soldier in the Dutch army that defeated Philip II of Spain with the help of Elisabeth II. By adopting the role of a historian, Underhill brings to light the trials and tribulations endured by the Captain banished from Massachusetts when the Puritan governor John Winthrop was in office. Accused of religious intolerance and "adultery of the heart" (Tyler 14) because he stared at a sleeveless woman, the Captain moves to New Hampshire, where his career as a governor was short-lived, since the state was soon to be under the jurisdiction of Massachusetts. He was then compelled to settle in Albany, the capital city of the state of New York founded by the Dutch, where he was granted fifty thousand acres of land in reward for his active participation in the Indian Wars. With the title to the land denied when the English vanquished the Dutch, Captain Hans van Vanderhill, as the latter called him, died a poor man in Albany, with two sons. The second was called Benoni, "from whom I am descended" (Tyler 24). By his claim to historicity, Underhill brings evidence, that is, a discovered manuscript, in order to blame the Massachusetts judges for the harshness of their sentence, which mirrors "the repressive politics of the times in which Captain Underhill lived and the equally constrained contemporary world of 1797 in which Tyler's readers first perused *The Algerine Captive*" (Davidson 201).

I argue that it is precisely in the context of this parallelism that Underhill's quixotism will unfold throughout the novel. Like his ancestor, and like Don Quixote, Updike Underhill is a picaro who drifts from one place to another in his native country, finding it difficult to put his noble ideals into practice. As a slave in Algiers, his credulousness starkly opposes the sophistry of the Mollah, who tries to persuade Underhill to convert to Mahometanism, and the chicanery of the young Jew who sells him into slavery again. In this respect, John Engell explains that

the two great tests of Updike's captivity, his debate with the Mollah and his dealings with the son of Abonah Ben Benjamin, parallel the adventures of his ancestor, Captain John Underhill. The Mollah, like Winthrop and his followers, tries to enslave a man to a sectarian religious hypocrisy. The young Jew, like the English Land-Speculators of the frontier, promulgates slavery for the sake of greed. (28)

Not only does Underhill inveigh against the flawed education system, the whipping of African slaves, and quackery, he also condemns imprisonment and other punishments enforced by the 1797 Alien and Sedition Acts, which were inflicted upon anyone who contested government authority. However, this dismal view is neutralized by the romanticized account of Captain Underhill, who, as “a fictive model of America and American identity” (Hanlon 127), accounts for Updike Underhill’s quixotic conduct.

Born on July 16, 1762, Updike Underhill begins his own history in Chapter 4. His mother’s premonitory dream in which “Indians will break into the house, taking him with them, and playing football with his head” will, of course, come true in the second volume, since, according to the mother’s interpretation, “she was sure Updike was born to be the sport of fortune, and that he would one day suffer among savages” (Tyler 26). A man of misfortune posing as the Knight of the Sad Countenance, rather than “a sport of fortune,” the young Underhill is a man with great financial and professional hopes that are shattered at the close of Volume 1. He addresses the “learned reader” who “will smile contemptuously, perhaps, upon my mentioning dreams in this enlightened age” (Tyler 44). Davidson is right in claiming that the “learned reader ... might do well to question the questioning prompted by learning” (203), which, in the America of 1797, proves to be anachronistic and, therefore inefficient and useless. Regarded by his mother as a genius with a penchant for learning and reading, Underhill starts his quixotic journey through life with the study of Greek and Latin, in spite of the futility of Greek in modern times, as emphasized by a Boston minister: “Poring so intensely on Homer and Virgil had so completely filled my brain with heathen mythology, that I imagined a hamadryad in every sapling, a naiad in every puddle” (Tyler 41). Failing, as a youngster, to understand the verity of the clergyman’s statement, namely that learning is a matter of fashion and, “like other fashions of this world, they pass away” (Tyler 48), the retrospective narrator is aware of “the misspense of time in acquiring it” (Tyler 50). Prone to absurd behaviour, the young Updike continues to waste time on Virgil’s *Georgics* and apply them in the domestic milieu, killing “a fat

heifer of my father's, upon which the family depended for their winter's beef, covered it with green boughs, and laid it in the shade to putrify, in order to raise a swarm of bees" (Tyler 50). With his father utterly dismayed because learning fails to make his son a good farmer, Updike decides to become more practical and serves as a schoolteacher in a neighbouring village.

Vainglorious and despotic, he educates "my scholars seated in silence in awful silence around me, my arm chair, and my birchen sceptre of authority" (Tyler 51), a pedagogical approach which turns against himself when the father of a bad-tempered pupil who seated himself in the master's chair threatens him with a whipping and, ultimately, when the students set the school on fire after they blame him for "want of proper government" (Tyler 54). Disgusted with the students' impoliteness and rebellion and mistreated by parents, Updike not only shows no remorse when the school is burnt down, but even experiences a feeling of supreme freedom like the joy of being free from slavery: "I am sometimes led to believe that my emancipation from real slavery in Algiers did not afford me sincerer joy than I experienced at that moment" (Tyler 55). As he is seeking fortune elsewhere, the plot progresses from one fiasco to another. The satire of the education system targets Updike's classical language used at a tavern where his ludicrousness is immediately observed by his companions engaged in a talk about racehorses: "Their conversation I could not relish; mine they could not comprehend. The subject of racehorses being introduced, I ventured to descant upon Xanthus, the immoral courses of Achilles" (Tyler 48). Underhill's ignorance of actual reality befuddles the whole audience who is at a loss "until I mentioned the long time the queen of Ulysses was weaving" (Tyler 53). In the context of mutual incomprehension and inadequate education as "another form of imprisonment" (Dennis 77), Updike's discourse actually ridicules classical education, for America encouraged a type of democratic *qua* demotic education meant to disseminate universal knowledge within "a republican form of government" (Rush 25).

Resisting social and intellectual change, Underhill tries his hand at medicine, a field which puts the quixotic protagonist's educational background to test. Trained by the reputed Dr. Moyes, and Dr. Kittredge,

respectively, he is surprised to see that the former “should not sometimes quote Greek” (Tyler 65) and that the latter never uses “a technical term” (Tyler 76). Underhill comes across a world of quacks and incompetent doctors who fight for supremacy by theorising and bickering over as many medical practices and treatments as possible. Incapable of doing his job properly, Underhill has recourse to Virgil, Tully, and Lilly in order to be appreciated as “the most learned because the most unintelligible” (Tyler 85). At the other extreme, he encounters the “cheap” doctor, the “safe” doctor, the “popular” doctor, the “musical” doctor, and an impostor, all making every effort to cure a drunken jockey who hits his head after falling off his horse. The apparent care provided to the patient slides into a brawl, with the jockey looked after by a veterinary surgeon who heals his wounds with “a dose of urine and molasses” (Tyler 126). Sadly enough, Underhill ends yet another unlucky picaresque chapter of his professional life by noticing that “to obtain medical practice, it was expedient to sport, bet, drink, swear, &c. with my patients” (Tyler 143).

Going to the South in hopes of making a good fortune, Underhill fails again, as “I found the southern states not more engaging to a young practitioner than the northern” (Tyler 141). Here he is shocked to see a dissembling minister who whips his North African slave and preaches in great haste before rushing to horse races, where “the sleeve of his cassock was heavily laden with the principal bets” (Tyler 138). Once again, Underhill’s untutored ignorance makes him an uncomfortable witness to the wrongdoings committed in the South, where he wishes that his dream of making a renowned and well-paid medical career came true. Impossible to be fulfilled “in the interior of New England,” his financial and professional expectations, as well as his social integration into Algiers will come to fruition in Volume 2. He decides to leave New England in order to gain freedom along the Barbary Coast, yet not before stopping briefly in Philadelphia, where he makes acquaintance with Benjamin Franklin, who, “from an humble printer’s boy, has elevated himself to be the desirable companion of the great ones of the earth” (Tyler 130). However, the “most celebrated self-made man is most pointedly all that Updike tries and fails to be” (Wood 116). Though he recognizes the intellectual excellence and generosity of a model that ought to be

emulated, Underhill is never able to understand human nature. Whereas immigrants of all sorts have always perceived the United States as a *locus amoenus* where equality is the order of the day, Underhill experiences America as a *locus terribilis* where poverty and unemployment prevail.

Disillusioned yet animated by the prospect of making money across national borders and unable to solve the differences he observes throughout the nation, Underhill takes up the job of a surgeon on a slave ship bound for Africa. On a ship ironically called "Freedom," he sails to London, where he observes the British and meets Thomas Paine, whom he characterizes as a conceited and gluttonous man, whose "bodily presence was both mean and contemptible" (Tyler 102). Apart from lambasting Paine's *Age of Reason*, his Republican beliefs, and pleasure for paradox, Underhill describes the English from a vile imagological perspective: "A motley race in whose mongrel veins runs the blood of all nations; ... languishing wretched lives in fetid jails; and boasting of the GLORIOUS FREEDOM OF THE ENGLISHMEN" (Tyler 99, original italics). Updike leaves England in 1788, on board of another ship misnamed "Sympathy," travelling through Madeira and the Canary Isles, past the Cape Verde Islands and to the Congo. The horror of this voyage starts when he understands that the slaves are treated as mere commodities: "To hear these men converse upon the purchase of human beings, with the same indifference, and nearly in the same language, as if they were contracting for so many head of cattle or swine, shocked me exceedingly .... I thought of my native land, and blushed" (Tyler 166). Updike's feelings of national pride and satirical tone are weakening at this point, being replaced by sympathy for "my brethren of the human race" (Tyler 170). The name of the ship squares with Underhill's compassion, alluding, at the same time, to the captors' wretchedness and hypocrisy, the more so when the protagonist finds out that he has become deeply involved in slave trade. Asked by the captain of the ship how many slaves he wants to buy, Updike "rejected [his] privilege with horror, and declared [he] would sooner suffer servitude than purchase a slave" (Tyler 109). The time has come for his mother's premonition to come true.

Attacked by an Algerian ship, "The Rover," whose name denotes the very picaresque nature of Updike, the "Freedom" is captured, and

Updike becomes a slave, thus experiencing for the first time, and firsthand, what being deprived of freedom means. Importantly enough, the picaresque blends, and overlaps, with a captivity tale with “a powerful political message, not simply a sensationalized account of a white adventurer living among exotic captors” (Davidson 206). In Federalist terms, the international crisis caused by the seizure of Americans by both British and Barbary ships “raised further doubts as to whether the United States was united enough to command international respect” (Holt 487). Expressing his own doubts about the form of the Constitution implemented in 1787, George Washington posed the following rhetorical question: “Is there a doubt whether a common government can embrace so large a sphere?” (Washington, “Farewell Address”). As Wood explains, the end of the Revolution “marked the start of a series of US-Barbary conflicts, unresolved until 1815, the year of Stephen Decatur’s definitive US victory in Algiers” (118).

The Americans’ interest in, and fascination with, Barbary captivity tales were nourished by Cervantes’s biographies, particularly his enslavement in Algiers. Clark Colahan, for instance, has analysed the influence of “The Captive’s Tale” in *Don Quixote* on Tyler’s novel, arguing that, though covert at first sight, it exists in “Tyler’s explicit rejection of the exotic, naughty-but-nice-but-dangerous characterization of Algiers that in the adaptations of the theme uniformly links a guilty pleasure to an anxious urge to escape” (902). Entirely devoted to Updike’s captivity, Volume 2 continues, however, to scrutinize differences in a transnational context in which he “he revises federalism as a viable political model” (Holt 502). Updike remains the same innocent fool who has not learnt anything from his experiences in the United States, but, by deciding to leave his native country, he dismisses the American *status quo* and, with it, John Adams’s Federalist regime. Although many critics have pointed out the lack of connection between the two sections of the novel, my belief is that Volume 2 marks a reversal of circumstances. Americans’ captivity along the Barbary Coast is analogous to the hypocritical minister who flogs a slave in the South. I agree, with Paul Baepler, that the Barbary Coast slave narratives represented a means of unraveling “the hypocrisy of the American slave system,” reversing the traditional racial

roles of (white) master and (black) slave (30). Updike is now a “degraded” slave (Tyler 126) who excoriates the barbarities of African slavery, which steals people’s freedom, “the unalienable birth right of man” (Tyler 106). The “Retrospective Review” of 1810 argues that the second volume, “which describes his [Underhill’s] adventures among the Algerines, is much inferior to the first. It is a collection of common-place remarks upon the Barbary powers, and a relation of common incidents, accompanied with many trite reflections” (346). Far from this being the case, Volume 2 criticizes *à rebours* John Adams’s flawed Federalist system disguised as jingoism, confined nationalism and sheer patriotism. Also, the “Review” echoes the novel’s Preface, in that its anonymous author is concerned with what happens, or should happen, in America, rather than with the “trite reflections” on other geographical spaces and cultures. In the Muslim world, the quixotic Underhill shifts from cultural superiority to cultural and religious tolerance, and gratitude for a slave who surreptitiously brings him food in the hold of the “Sympathy.” Until he becomes a slave, he imagines that men in Algiers are polygamous and ignorant of their families. As a slave, Underhill gets familiar with the manners, customs, values, language, and history of Algiers, which he likens to his Christian beliefs, thus becoming an “etic,” i.e. impartial, observer (Kottak 47).

According to Baepler, “with chapters on language, government, marriage, religion, and more, the novel, which began by describing the sufferings of the innocent captive, ends with a detailed account of Algiers and an exploration of Islam” (46–47). The civilized and lively dialogue with the Mollah, the Moslem priest, is a revealing case of forbearance. Underhill initially resists the Mollah’s attempts to convert him to Mahometanism, staunchly clinging to his Christian beliefs: “I had ever viewed the character of an apostate as odious and detestable” (Tyler 134). However, Updike finally accepts to speak to the Mollah, a former Christian well-versed in Latin, in order to be exempted from hard work. The Quixote can, at last, use a deceased language, that is, Latin, as a natural means of exchanging opinions about the two religions. Retaining “his quixotic religious idealism” (Hanlon 124), even if he fails to provide strong arguments in order to defend the Christian faith, Underhill learns

that comparing is the most fruitful way. Despite being bewildered by the Mollah's "sophistry," he puts on "his slave's attire" and seeks "safety in my former servitude" (Tyler 143). Filtered through the open-minded Updike's narrative, the episode clearly shows that the enslaved Updike is not only tolerant of Islam, but also enthralled by cultural novelty: "I have interspersed reflections which I hope will be received by the learned with candour" (Tyler 194).

Ultimately, Underhill's experience is "a provocative call for the questioning of American ideals and the initiation of transcultural dialogue" (Wood 131). Outside America, Underhill is a respected doctor and earns the respect both of his captors and his fellow slaves, thus gaining his personal freedom. Updike is fully aware of the importance of becoming conversant with indigenous socio-political matters, such as the legal system. He remarks that "in the Algerine mode of distributive justice, instant decision relieved the anxiety and saved the purses of the parties," a view which is radically opposed to the American legal system where "the lengthy bill of cost and the law's delay" have determined Underhill to regard "the judicial proceedings of our country with a jaundiced eye" (Tyler 189). But, above all, he is willing to share the Algerine legal system and, implicitly, his ethnographic exploration of Algiers with his readers, with the purpose of piquing their interest in cross-cultural encounters and cultural negotiations, on the one hand, and of encouraging them to abandon their attitude of insular superiority: "I present it to my fellow citizens, [that], if it is generally pleasing, it may be easily introduced among us" (Tyler 190).

Personally and professionally accomplished, notwithstanding the atrocious treatment he is subjected to by the slave traders on the two ships, Underhill returns home after six years of enslavement. Tyler's poetic justice brings Underhill back to America. A Portuguese frigate takes over the ship on which he is a slave again because of a Jew's son's false promises to help him escape. After sailing through Gibraltar, Updike goes aboard another ship bound for Bristol, and thence to the United States. This way, writes Bannet, Underhill "circumnavigates the Atlantic, a point which Tyler emphasized by doubling the circularity of the voyage with the circularity of the narration" (*Transatlantic Stories* 98). Updike's

homecoming accounts for a process of intellectual maturity, as long as he has learned to discriminate between local and global differences and to give credit to “pluralism in society and even in religion” (Davidson 209). Inflamed with the desire to settle down with a future wife and carry on his career as a physician, Underhill apparently rehearses the poignant Federalist and jingoistic creed: “To contribute cheerfully to the support of our excellent government, which I have learnt to adore in schools of despotism; and thus secure to myself the enviable character of an useful physician, a good father, and worthy FEDERAL citizen” (Tyler 228, original italics). If taken as such, Updike’s statement, allegedly uttered in good faith, simply strengthens a theoretically charming nationalist viewpoint. As Steven Shapiro has shown, Updike proposes a “nationalist imaginary” reading (7) that preserves differences between “us,” or “the US” and “them,” and restores the quixotic Underhill to “a worthy FEDERAL citizen.” Davidson sustains this view, arguing that “the ‘federalism’ here recommended is open-minded, pluralistic, democratic, and utterly opposed to oligarchy or autocracy, to one’s people dominating over another” (209). As a “worthy FEDERAL citizen,” Underhill urges his readers to become engaged in a common civic action to support the government, which can only be achieved through individual responsibility: “Our first object is union among ourselves. For to no nation besides the United States can that ancient saying be more emphatically applied – BY UNITING WE STAND, BY DIVIDING WE FALL” (Tyler 228, original italics).

Updike, therefore, adopts a nationalist view predicated on differences shared by collaborative citizens. Haunted by the figure of his ancestor Captain Underhill and, by extension, by the archetypal image of America as a Promised Land which banishes him at the end of Volume 1, Underhill employs these national romanticized representations as a yardstick whereby he assesses other cultures against his quixotic vision of America. Hanlon propounds that “each of Updike’s criticisms,” and I would add praises as well, “of societies and practices that are foreign to him is born of an American-styled ethos of freedom, justice, and humanity that both Updike and his ancestor fail to find on American soil” (128). By turning his idealized view of American national identity into a standard

employed to scrutinize the disappointing or traumatic realities he encounters in America and abroad, Underhill remains a traditional quixotic character converted to American isolationist patriotism. But by applying the comparative approach back home, which heavily relies on his empirical and thoughtful experience lived along the Barbary Coast, he embarks on a successful – because reformatory – quixotic project able to bring about change in his readers and fellow citizens. Read in this way, *The Algerine Captive* is, as I hope to have shown, not an early American text gravitating around a knee-jerk Federalist ideology, but a fine piece of early American writing which subtly shows us that American identity is made of both transnational and transcultural parts.

#### Notes:

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