

Nabil Matar. *British Captives from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1563-1760*. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xv + 334 pp. \$150.00. Review by ROBERT BATCHELOR, GEORGIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY.

In *British Captives from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, 1563-1760*, the esteemed scholar Nabil Matar attempts to give an account of British captives in North Africa from the Elizabethan period to the Seven Years' War. Captivity narratives have been at the center of early modern English literary studies—from Shakespeare's Caliban to Swift's Gulliver—and they have been important in the analysis of encounters in the Atlantic World ranging from Mary Rowlandson to Olaudah Equiano. Matar thinks that this large academic literature has had the effect of focusing attention on Christians as captives—as in Cotton Mather's account of Hannah Duston's capture during King William's War—thereby creating binaries between the savage and evil other and the good suffering Christian. His book tries to use the surviving archives to make a rough accounting of how many Christians were actually captured. Not only does he find that the numbers have been exaggerated, but also the English state was largely indifferent to their fate and its policies encouraged the practice.

Matar himself was a captive, abducted in 1986 from the American University of Beirut and held for five months. A professor of Christian Lebanese background, he was taken by the Islamic Independent Committee for the Liberation of the Kidnapped in an effort to arrange a prisoner exchange with Christian militias. It was clearly a transformative experience. Like his near contemporary Wadad Kadi, to whom this book is dedicated, Matar was born in cosmopolitan and independent Lebanon where the religious boundaries were fluid, a world shattered by civil war between 1975 and 1990. Like Edward Said, Matar's Palestinian Christian family and English education gave him a double outlook and a multivalent approach. In *British Captives*, he describes his own journey as one from "horror to humanity" ("Apologia"). The verse from the Qu'ran (25:63) that serves as the book's epigraph says to speak words of peace to the ignorant.

Academically, in the background of this book are not so much the various discourse analyses and new historicists anecdotes produced by English departments, but two historical works by Linda Colley,

*Captives* (2002) and *The Ordeal Elizabeth Marsh* (2007), both in part about experiences of captivity in North Africa. *Captives* became an important book for the New Imperial History, which returned to the late nineteenth-century writings of J. R. Seeley. Seeley had argued that the British Empire in India was not a product of intentional planning but the result of political collaborations that the British entered into almost accidentally. Colley similarly argued that the success of the empire in the nineteenth century has blinded scholars to weaknesses like captives in North Africa and the loss of colonies like Tangiers (1684). Matar's work is more in line with the Hobson school of strategic imperialism—the British actively searched for markets, sought to monopolize routes, were willing to use piracy as a tool of statecraft and in the process built up a powerful warfare state.

Unlike many studies that loosely employ concepts of empire and imperialism, Matar's is rich in sources and data. Even his introduction contains much new and tantalizing material about the complexities of captivity in the Mediterranean, in Northern and Western Africa, and in the Atlantic World more broadly. An early example is the largely untouched topic of British enslavement of North African Jews, who evidently worked on the fortifications at Gibraltar in 1715 (5). But for Matar, the "complexity of captivity" should not be addressed through the telling anecdotes of New Historicism and popular history but with "precise data about who and how many ... captives [there] were and why they were seized" (9). To this end, fully a third of the book (197-299) transcribes the surviving archival lists of captives from 1563 to 1760 in their totality. In this regard, it substantially compliments Daniel Vitkus's collection *Piracy, Slavery and Redemption: Barbary Captivity Narratives From Early Modern England* (Columbia University Press, 2001), for which Matar wrote the introduction.

Despite this deep research, Matar is early on hampered by a lack of sources from telling more systematically the broader and complex history of captives in the region. Instead, he chooses to break down myths—notably the absurd claim that over one million Christians were taken in captivity during this period (11). Even though the records indicate that such figures are unsubstantiated, Matar does find that in many cases no records were kept because the people captured were unimportant—indentured servants, criminals, sailors from the streets

of London, religious non-conformists, and fishermen from the margins of the "British Empire" (Ireland, Wales, Cornwall and Devon). Even the ministers seemed indifferent to those captured in North Africa, the Mediterranean and the Eastern Atlantic, unlike Cotton Mather and others in New England. If the American colonists had a sense of missionary purpose in relation to those taken captive by Native Americans, a powerful economic logic was at work on the other side of the Atlantic. North African captives were more expensive to ransom than North American ones, and in general, "impressing sailors was cheaper than ransoming captives" (50-51). Many were never actually captured but died in shipwrecks or of sickness, and in general the government had no idea which or how many Britons were in captivity. The petitions Matar collected are interesting in part for the sense of uncertainty they reveal among those hoping for their husbands, wives and relatives to return. They also reveal the broader political activity of women in this period, who as Miles Ogborn has suggested were increasingly living global lives at home as well as abroad.

The result is no Whiggish history of British progress but a largely revisionist and at times even Namierite assessment of captivity. Initially, no particular logic emerges from the comprehensive survey of captivity documents. The very long central second chapter is divided into historical categories based on the monarchy (Elizabethan, Jacobean, Caroline, Interregnum, Restoration, William and Mary to Anne, George I and II). There seems little justification for this given that the only ruler who appears to have been interested in coherent policy in terms of captives was Oliver Cromwell. The approach makes it difficult to track changes over time. The problem of captives seems to have arisen in Matar's account largely as a response to the practice of English and Dutch piracy and privateering. The role of individuals and diplomacy—like James Frizell, the first English consul in Algiers in the 1620s—or the complex politics of Algeria, Morocco, Tunis and Salé all take place in the background of such acts of war (80). This rather suddenly changes, however, on page 152. There the Seven Years' War looms large as an endpoint, and the capture of Elizabeth Marsh and others by Sidi Muhammed of Morocco seems far more geopolitically connected. What follows (153-9) is a kind of revision of the earlier parts of the chapter into a much more coherent narrative, a narrative

that indicates more of a progression of policy connected with both domestic pressures and international affairs.

The third chapter entitled “The Northern Invasion” (a phrase borrowed from Braudel) then takes this further, so much that it seems in sharp contrast with what has come before in the book. Here Matar borrows an argument that Gillian Weiss (*Captives and Corsairs*, Stanford, 2011) has made about France, that from the late seventeenth century Britain pursued a deliberate “strategy aimed at disabling North African seafaring in order to monopolize Mediterranean and Atlantic trade” (162). The 1678 treaty with Salé becomes a watershed in the sense that Charles II wanted to use it to establish a ‘thousand year’ empire (160). Surely this was a fantasy, however, one buttressed by those wishing to portray the king as more absolute than he was. Salé itself, like Morocco, receives scant attention, despite the fact that the chronological argument hangs on both polities. Instead, this chapter includes interesting case studies of Tripoli (165-172) and Algiers (172-189) because these cities were bombarded in 1675 and 1664/1669 respectively. Bombardment of civilian populations becomes a key theme in this chapter. In the British case, the idea that it was “strategic” seems a stretch, given that the decisions were largely made by merchants and naval commanders in the field with, as Sir John Narbrough said, “Gods permission” (167). It was the French who were shockingly strategic—in 1685 a continuous bombardment leveled Tripoli (170) and in 1688 a second bombardment of Algiers using new long range cannons left 800 houses habitable out of 10,000 (184). This attack most certainly shattered the commercial power of these North African ports and, as Matar argues, opened the way for more direct French colonialism and more indirect British commercial power. It also, as the conclusion argues, encouraged an attitude of Orientalist fantasy towards the Islamic world, an attitude born out of warfare.

In some ways, tensions over agency and the complex spatial dimensions of captivity remain unresolved in this book. Matar is right to hint at the problem of twenty-first century scholars who remain unaware of their own imperialist assumptions—Linda Colley’s references to North Africans as “stinging insects” (161, from *Captives*, 67) and “terrorists” (2, from *Captives*, 50). He also recognizes that the “Barbary Coast” is a kind of fantasy term (3) that was not used by North Africans and is

still regretfully employed in scholarship about the region. The book highlights the need for a broader reassessment of the nature of captivity, war, state formation, imperial politics and commerce in the early modern western Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic. Matar himself could have gone further along those lines, even in terms of visualizing the data. The images and maps are limited and not tightly related to the research so the graphic of the population of cities of Great Britain (43) could have been replaced by one indicating home towns of captives from a 1647 petition on the facing page (42) to give a sense of what “Britain” means here. Likewise maps of the various actors and trade routes in the Mediterranean and Western Atlantic would have been helpful. Matar has written numerous books and articles on the broader topic of Britain and the Islamic World, and some of his best stories like that of Ahmad al-Mansur and Queen Elizabeth I negotiating for the release of British, Dutch and French captives are told elsewhere. This book is probably not the place to start in order to get a broad sense of the important work he has done. However, there is something poignant about Matar’s “last foray into the area of captivity studies,” as he is a true master of the field.

Ryan Netzley. *Lyric Apocalypse: Milton, Marvell, and the Nature of Events*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2015. x + 269 pp. \$45.00. Review by JOHN MULRYAN, ST. BONAVENTURE UNIVERSITY.

This rather difficult book seems to claim that, for both Milton and Marvell, the apocalypse is not a past or future event, but, unbeknownst to the practitioners themselves, a dynamic creation of seventeenth-century Protestantism, happening in their own times, a dynamic agent of positive change. In his “presentist,” ahistorical approach to the text, Netzley swims against the stream of Renaissance apocalyptic thought. As stated by C. A. Patrides, “Yet the difficulties stalking all [Renaissance] explicators of the Book of Revelation did not prevent their unanimous conclusion that it appertains, after one fashion or another, to ‘history’ past and ‘history’ future ....[It] had to be firmly connected to the historical process, not severed from it as a mere ‘prophecy’ of the obscure future” (“Something like Prophetic