



Article

"Though I Am a Woman, I Am Not a Defenceless One!": Women and Violence in Nineteenth-Century Pirate Stories

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Abstract: Resonating with British and American audiences and inspiring many later pirate stories, Byron's *The Corsair* (1814) participated in a transatlantic conversation about female responses to violent masculinity. In an 1869 Rhode Island newspaper article, a woman recalled reading *The Corsair* as a child and debating whether to name her favorite doll Medora, the wife of the pirate, or Gulnare, the woman who kills their captor to rescue the pirate. Within the poem, Gulnare becomes less desirable in the eyes of the pirate after her violent act, but S. H. W. decides on Gulnare and sews on a needle-like bodkin to represent her dagger, thereby providing her doll with the symbol of Gulnare's violent agency. This particular reader response suggests that Gulnare's violent and independent action, which gave her control over her situation, resonated with some female readers in America. Authors of early American pirate stories, such as James Fenimore Cooper, refused to endorse a model of womanhood that included violence. However, Ballou's extremely popular *Fanny Campbell* (1844) constructed a lady pirate who embodies a model of womanhood that incorporates some conventional feminine traits of virtue, moral influence, and redemptive womanhood, but also draws on the justified violence of the male adventure hero. As a female pirate captain, Fanny combines aspects of the honorable gentleman pirate from *The Corsair* with the active woman, not unlike Gulnare, who realizes that in certain situations redemption and rescue are not options, and she must use violence in defense of herself and others.

Keywords: pirates; American literature; British literature; women; masculinity; violence; nineteenth century; transatlantic; gender roles



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1. Introduction

In an 1869 Rhode Island newspaper article, a woman who signed her piece "S. H. W." reminisced about having read Byron's *The Corsair* (1814) as a child, recalling that she had read it "with avidity and was sadly perplexed whether to name my favorite dolly Medora or Gulnare" (S. H. W. 1869, p. 2). The remembered dilemma hinges on deciding between the two women in the poem: Medora, the domestic wife of the pirate who dies when she learns that he might have been captured or killed, and Gulnare, the woman who falls in love with the pirate and kills the man who enslaved her and captured him. Within the poem, Gulnare becomes less desirable in the eyes of the pirate after her violent act, but S. H. W. did not have the same reaction as she "eventually decided on Gulnare and sewed a 'bare bodkin' to her [doll's] girdle to represent a dagger" (S. H. W. 1869, p. 2). Not only does S. H. W. choose Gulnare over Medora, but she also provides her doll with a symbol of Gulnare's violent agency: the sharp, needle-like bodkin standing in for the dagger wielded by the woman in the poem. This particular reader response suggests that Gulnare's active and violent model of womanhood, which gave her control over her situation, resonated with some American, and in particular female, readers. Although several of the British and American stories that followed *The Corsair* did not include women who resorted to violence, many of the popular American pirate stories of the 1840s had a similar reaction to S. H. W. and embraced this idea women should be allowed to violently defend themselves. In order to craft this violent but virtuous female figure, these works built on the previously

established gentleman pirate to create lady pirate protagonists who took an active, and sometimes violent, role at the center of their stories.

Participating in a transatlantic conversation with the British authors who established the figure of the gentleman pirate, such as Byron and Walter Scott, nineteenth-century American authors considered various options for women to deal with violent men, which included redemption and rescue, but ultimately, they had to contend with the possibility of a situation like that of Gulnare in *The Corsair*, where the woman cannot convince the man of the error of his ways and no male hero is available or willing to save her. Many of the cheap popular stories of the 1840s, including Maturin Murray Ballou's *Fanny Campbell* (1844), ask when it is acceptable for a woman to use violence in her own defense as Gulnare ultimately did. While much scholarship has been devoted to exploring nineteenth-century women in domestic roles and spaces, American authors were similarly invested in a more adventurous, and sometimes violent, model of womanhood that was built upon the figure of the gentleman pirate and placed in opposition to violent men.¹ This model works toward legitimating female violence while also gesturing toward women's capacity for full citizenship and political power.

As they responded to the gentleman pirate stories by Byron and Walter Scott, American authors experimented with different solutions, including redirecting violent men toward patriotic causes while the women passively await rescue, redeeming the villain through the power of female morality, outmaneuvering antagonists, and eventually, leaving the woman with no choice but to actively offer violence in return. Increasingly within the mid-nineteenth-century American pirate story, authors answered this question of who is allowed to be violent by demonstrating that women had the capacity for violence; furthermore, they constructed scenarios illustrating that often women were the only ones in a position to forcibly oppose a violent man.

2. The Gentleman Pirate

Byron's narrative poem *The Corsair* begins with a morally ambiguous pirate as its hero whose role is soon usurped by a woman solving problems with violence. Both of these figures would carry through to later American authors' efforts to answer the question of who should be allowed to use violence, especially in defense of women. *The Corsair* intertwines the figure of the gentleman pirate and the violent woman as they trade roles and articulate the circumstances in which they are willing to use violence. Many masculine adventure stories that followed adopted Byron's version of the criminal but compassionate and self-restrained pirate, but few were willing to endorse a violent and heroic woman until the popular stories of mid-nineteenth century American authors joined the conversation.

The Corsair, with its combination of a pirate who should be more violent but is not and a woman who should not be violent but is, was extremely popular in Britain and America. According to Frederick Burwick and Manushag N. Powell in *British Pirates in Print and Performance*, when *The Corsair* was published "queues formed at the booksellers. Ten thousand copies were sold on the first day of sale, and a seventh edition was printed within the first month" (Burwick and Powell 2015, p. 62). Deborah Lutz agrees in "The Pirate Poet," arguing that "it is hard to overstate the popularity of Byron's writing throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth" (Lutz 2011, p. 36). As the newspaper article with S. H. W.'s reaction indicates, *The Corsair* was read avidly in America as well. William C. Davis explains in *The Pirates Lafitte* that after an erroneous connection in an American newspaper in 1829, American readers frequently believed that *The Corsair* was based on the life of Jean Lafitte, an actual pirate often fictionalized in American pirate stories (Davis 2005, p. 471). In *Treasure Neverland*, Neil Rennie discusses how that connection originated after Byron included a note in the eighth edition of *The Corsair* in 1815 detailing Lafitte's life from an American newspaper in an effort to "defend the credibility of his pirate hero's combination of 'virtue' and 'crimes'" (Rennie 2013, p. 128). This publication history and reader response to *The Corsair* alone demonstrates the complicated transatlantic

conversation, intertwining fiction and reality, that surrounded nineteenth-century pirate stories.

Due to its widespread popularity, *The Corsair* has been credited with establishing this version of the morally ambiguous gentleman pirate which would be replicated and revised throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, Lutz claims, “Practically every literary pirate of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was influenced by Byronism and the re-imagining of the pirate as a gentleman” (Lutz 2011, p. 37). More specifically in terms of how this version of the pirate affected popular conceptions of gender and gender roles, Burwick and Powell argue that “Byron’s creation signals a new era in which pirates and wives become antithetical to each other” (Burwick and Powell 2015, p. 101). Not only does *The Corsair* deny pirates wives, and the ability to settle down in domestic spaces, but it also constructs male and female violence in a way that privileges the masculine realm of battle over feminine acts of violent self-preservation.

The narrative begins with Conrad, the corsair of the title, leaving his wife, Medora, to disguise himself and infiltrate the household of the pacha, Seyd, in order to distract him while Conrad’s men prepare a surprise attack. The titles of these individuals place this narrative with a specific geographical and religious context: pachas were high-ranking Turkish officers, such as a military commander or governor, and corsair was the term for a privateer sanctioned by the Barbary States to attack any ship flying the flag of a Christian nation.² Conrad’s attack is a preemptive strike because he has learned that Seyd plans to attack him. During the fight, the house catches fire, and Conrad directs his men to save the women of Seyd’s harem who are trapped inside, urging them to “spare the weaker prey” (Byron 1814, l. 811). To this point in the poem, Conrad is constructed as very much the hero as he risks his life to save “the helpless” women, and the women are presented as damsels in need of rescue (Byron 1814, l. 813).

At the same time, this heroic decision to save the women leads to Conrad becoming a captive in need of rescue. By deviating from their attack, Conrad’s men lose their advantage in the battle, and they are killed while he is captured. Seyd plans to torture and kill Conrad, but Seyd’s favorite slave, Gulnare, who had been rescued from the fire by Conrad personally and has fallen in love with him, comes to his aid, offering to save Conrad on the condition that he kills Seyd. Even before she resorts to violence, Gulnare reverses the formula established when Conrad rescued her. She has acquired the agency that the imprisoned Conrad can no longer access. Still, Conrad refuses her offer, reasoning that his weapon is the scimitar used in open battle, “not the secret knife” of assassination (Byron 1814, l. 1531). While this reasoning further positions Conrad as a gentleman possessing honor, it contrasts with his statement that he “knew himself a villain” (Byron 1814, l. 267). Although Conrad maintains his moral high ground that privileges face to face combat, the narrative makes it clear that he will die if he does not act.

Completing the shift that began with her offer to rescue Conrad, Gulnare moves into the realm of violent hero. When Conrad refuses, she takes it upon herself to kill Seyd, announcing that she’ll “try the firmness of a female hand” (Byron 1814, l. 1548). When she returns, Conrad sees blood on her face and exclaims:

That spot of blood, that light but guilty streak,
Had banished all the beauty from her cheek!
Blood he had viewed—could view unmoved—but then
It flow’d in combat, or was shed by men!” (Byron 1814, ll. 1593–96)

For Conrad, Gulnare’s violence has caused her to cease to be attractive to him, and he constructs his rejection in gendered terms because he is horrified by the blood on her face, but he can view blood shed by men on the battlefield without being affected. Despite Conrad’s rejection, Gulnare is positioned as heroic in terms of her actions as she has orchestrated their entire escape. In an effective reversal of Conrad’s rescue of her, which still left her in the power of Seyd, she frees Conrad and reunites him with the rest of his band. When they return, Medora has died from grief and Conrad vanishes, leaving

“the Corsair’s name to other times, / Link’d with one virtue, and a thousand crimes,” but Gulnare is not mentioned again after their return (Byron 1814, ll. 1862–63).³

Whether she is read as a foil to establish Conrad’s morality or as a heroic in her own right, Gulnare—and her complex positioning at the intersections of gender, race, and religion—is one element of Byron’s poem that did not get replicated by the authors of the pirate stories that immediately followed. Walter Scott was encouraged by his editor to write “his own historical romance of piracy and adventure on the high seas” in response to Byron’s poem (Burwick and Powell 2015, p. 76). The resulting novel was *The Pirate* (1822) wherein Scott borrows from Byron’s gentleman pirate hero, making his pirate a morally ambiguous and conflicted outsider, but he writes the violent woman out of the formula. Instead, Scott models his female characters, especially Minna who is in love with the pirate, more on Medora who waits at home and dies of grief when she finds out Conrad might have been killed. Although Minna does not die like her counterpart in *The Corsair*, she is left behind at the end of the novel and is never required by the narrative to take an active role in defending herself.

In *The Pirate*, Scott draws on Byron’s model to create an ambiguous and potentially violent pirate figure in the form of Clement Cleveland. Cleveland is found washed ashore on the Scottish island of Shetland following a shipwreck and spends the majority of the novel among the community there, rather than pirating on the sea. The novel defines “pirate” in legal terms because Cleveland is not labeled as such until it is discovered that he was pirating English and Dutch ships in addition to the Spanish (Scott [1822] 1996, p. 192). By pirating the Spanish, he was a legal government-sanctioned privateer; by pirating the English, a criminal pirate.⁴ Eventually, Cleveland’s crew returns, and the other characters learn that he is a feared pirate from the Caribbean. As Burwick and Powell trace, Cleveland was based on the ruthless historical pirate John Gow, but Scott does not adhere to the historical example because he gives his pirate a redemption arc (Burwick and Powell 2015, p. 77). In a pivot that echoes Conrad’s description of legitimate forms violence in *The Corsair*, *The Pirate* redeems its gentleman pirate by aligning him with a more acceptable form of violence, which once again takes of the form of defending women. The novel undermines Cleveland’s fearsome reputation by explaining that he was actually working to restrain his more vicious crew. The narrative presents Cleveland’s backstory as sympathetic, saying that he was “involved in evil rather by the concurrence of external circumstances than by natural inclination, being, indeed, one in whom his first engaging in this lawless mode of life, as the follower of his father, nay, perhaps, even his pursuing it as his father’s avenger, carried with it something of mitigation and apology” (Scott [1822] 1996, p. 318). This characterization gains him the trust of the other characters and the love of Minna, but it does not prevent him from being held accountable for his actions when he is captured at the end of the novel. At the same time, these noble impulses of gentlemanliness save Cleveland’s life. While the rest of his crew (with the exception of one loyal follower) are convicted and hanged, Cleveland is pardoned for an earlier act of “protecting, at the hazard of [his] own life, the honour of two Spanish ladies against the brutality of [his] followers” (Scott [1822] 1996, p. 339). Not only is Cleveland’s violence presented as more legitimate and acceptable than that of his crew, but it is his gentlemanly qualities that allow him to be redeemed. In this manner, the gentleman pirate character was often constructed with some element of nobility, which makes him the perfect model for the lady pirate later in the nineteenth century because women were often attributed with noble qualities as well.

Despite his legal pardon, the novel is not entirely confident of Cleveland’s ability to be redeemed. At the end of the narrative, Cleveland joins a ship sailing for the Spanish Main in order to serve his country, and when Minna hears of his death, she is grateful that “he had been snatched from a situation of temptation ere circumstances had overcome his new-born virtue” (Scott [1822] 1996, p. 344). Thus, Minna’s belief that Cleveland could easily be tempted back into his old ways raises the question of whether or not he has changed. This places Cleveland in a liminal space between the gentleman and the pirate because he dies before he could illustrate whether or not he was reformed, which potentially undercuts his

representation as civilized and redeemable and demonstrates that convincing violent men to change their ways might not be a permanent solution.

Many of the American adventure novels that followed, including James Fenimore Cooper's *The Red Rover* (1827) and J. H. Ingraham's *Lafitte* (1836), exhibit similar anxieties about the safety of women, their virtue, and who will protect them (Cooper [1827] 1850; Ingraham [1836] 1970). This concern works toward constructing masculine roles of hero and protector, but even so, it also defines what women were not expected to do, such as protect themselves or act heroically on behalf of others. These British and American authors participated in a transatlantic conversation about men, women, and violence by adopting the figure of the gentleman pirate, but refusing to consider scenarios in which violence on the part of women like Gulnare might be an acceptable option to gain agency in certain situations.

3. The Lady Pirate

Building on the figure of the gentleman pirate established by Byron and Scott and shifted to an American context by Cooper and Ingraham, Maturin Murray Ballou, using the pen name "Lieutenant Murray", wrote the first extremely popular American story focusing on an entirely fictional female pirate.⁵ After its first appearance in 1844, *Fanny Campbell, the Female Pirate Captain* sold 100,000 copies in the first few months and stayed in print for several decades (Anderson 2011, p. 97). By designing a female hero who embodies attributes usually associated with the male hero, including violent patriotism, but without abandoning many of her conventionally feminine roles, Ballou is able to create a protagonist that can be interpreted as either enforcing or opposing the status quo, which likely aided her appeal to a broad audience. Perhaps inadvertently, Ballou formulated a model of womanhood that suggests what many of the previous stories were willing to gesture toward without committing to—that in certain scenarios, women must be allowed to be violent in defense of themselves.

When these lady pirates, including but not limited to Fanny Campbell herself, find themselves threatened by violent men, they respond much like Gulnare or the white male adventure hero, meeting violence with violence in displays of martial masculinity. However, because they also maintain elements of conventional femininity, including romantic desire, marriage, family, and redemptive womanhood, it is possible for anyone who did not approve of this unconventional model of womanhood to dismiss them as actually aspiring to domesticity and femininity. While this interpretation remains possible, these lady pirates are displaying a different model of womanhood, a model that incorporates some conventional feminine traits of virtue, moral influence, and redemptive womanhood, but also draws on the masculine, and sometimes violent, attributes that are usually ascribed to the white male hero. Lady pirates found in the popular American stories of the 1840s collapsed the division between masculine and feminine traits, creating instead a model of womanhood that draws upon both in order to legitimize the heroic potential, which did not remain limited to nonviolence, of women.

3.1. Master and Commander: Fanny Campbell as the Gentleman Pirate Leader

Written on the eve of the Mexican–American War in 1844, but set during the American Revolution, *Fanny Campbell* tells the story of a woman who disguises herself as a man in order to become a sailor on a privateer ship and rescue her fiancé from a Cuban prison. Her actions mirror the American Revolution as she, masquerading as a sailor named Channing, single-handedly carries out a mutiny against a corrupt British captain, who plans to press his crew into the British Navy, and then she proceeds to take prize ships on her way to and from Cuba.⁶ In many ways, Fanny is building on previous male pirates, especially those written by earlier American authors and closely associated with patriotic rhetoric and motivations. In *Revolutionary Backlash*, Rosemarie Zagari discusses women during the American Revolution and the War of 1812 who threatened to fight on behalf of their country if men were too timid, indicating that "The prospect of women in arms would

shame the men into defending their country” (Zagarri 2007, pp. 109–10). This discussion demonstrates that the idea of martial womanhood, if not the practice, was present in the early American imagination. This new version of womanhood suggests that American women should not be limited to raising sons for the nation, as republican motherhood requires, but instead, they should play an active role in the formation of the nation.

Fanny’s positioning is intertwined with her patriotic motives as an American; however, contemporaries and modern critics alike have a tendency to focus solely on the fact that Fanny’s stated goal is invested in romantic love. Even though she celebrated the liberating nature of the story, one contemporary reader, Sarah Emma Edmonds, was concerned about why Fanny did what she did. As a teenager in the 1850s, Edmonds read *Fanny Campbell*, and in 1884, she reflected on that childhood experience in a newspaper interview. Edmonds explains:

The only drawback in my mind in regard to the book, was this: The heroine went to rescue an imprisoned lover, and I pitied her that she was only a poor love-sick girl, after all, like so many I had known, and I regretted that she had no higher ambition than running after a man. Perhaps later on in life, I had more charity, and gave her a credit mark, for rescuing anybody—even a lover. (*A Remarkable Career* 1884, p. 6)

Edmonds wants her heroine to have a higher ambition than love, but she fails to take into account Fanny’s secondary motivations and adventures. Likewise, Katherine Anderson in “Female Pirates” and Holly M. Kent in “Our Good Angel” dismiss Fanny as reinforcing gender stereotypes because of her romantic objective. To accept this argument made by both contemporary readers and modern critics would be to ignore significant moments in the narrative where Fanny blends aspects of conventional femininity with heroic masculinity in order to rescue William and accomplish tasks that have nothing to do with him.

Dismissing the rescue because of the heroine’s romantic motivations overlooks several significant aspects of that portion of the story. A woman going out of her way to disguise herself as a man, rather than out of necessity, and setting out to rescue someone from prison is a unique plot arc for nineteenth-century America. Edmonds appreciates this uniqueness when she explains: “When I read where ‘Fanny’ cut off her brown curls, and donned the blue jacket, and stepped into the freedom and glorious independence of masculinity, I threw up my old straw hat and shouted” (*A Remarkable Career* 1884, p. 6).⁷ As with Conrad and Gulnare, the story reverses the genders of the typical damsel and hero roles. The narrative makes it clear that had Fanny not rescued William, he would not have been freed by other means when William’s friend tells him: “To be sure you are, you may give him [Fanny-as-Channing] all the thanks that you are not rotting in that cursed prison yonder at Havana, this very hour” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 51). William fulfills the role of the captive lady who waits for a hero to rescue her while Fanny plays the role of the hero, transferring the masculine characteristics associated with that role to her, which gives her a very different positioning than the role of the love-sick girl that Edmonds ascribes to her.

While Fanny does set out to rescue William as soon as she learns that he is being held in a Cuban prison, she chooses to go about her rescue in a way that indicates she has additional motivations. Fanny could have shipped out on a vessel sailing directly for Cuba or even commissioned a ship and crew in order to accomplish her objective as quickly as possible. Instead, she deliberately selects a ship whose captain has a bad reputation and intends to press its sailors into the British Navy, and she plans to save the crew from the fate of impressment with the hopes that they will aid her in her rescue of William. Although rescuing the crew ultimately helps her to rescue William, Fanny clearly does not have the single-minded desire to reach and free William as quickly as possible.

This multifaceted goal and desire to be heroic is further emphasized by how Fanny chooses to rescue the crew. As the narrator explains, Fanny acts alone in her mutiny because “it would be far more noble in him [Channing-as-Fanny] to accomplish that which was to be done with his own hands” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, pp. 32–33). Fanny does not carry out

the mutiny on her own because it was safer, easier, or more likely to succeed, but because it was “more noble”. Fanny’s reasoning behind her actions points toward a noble heroic ideal similar to the gentleman pirates’, rather than exclusively limiting her to a romantic one. In addition to carrying out the mutiny against the British captain, Fanny also takes prize ships on behalf of the colonies, demonstrating that she does not lose her patriotic motivations once she has obtained assistance for her rescue plans. This positions her as an unofficial privateer on behalf of the American colonies, rather than an individual with an exclusively personal romantic motivation.

Ballou removes any possibility that Fanny could be read as only taking on these more masculine characteristics when capable men are absent because Fanny retains command even after William, who is also an able sailor and officer, is rescued. At first, William does not know that Channing is Fanny, but even after she reveals her disguise, Fanny remains in command of the *Constance*, appointing William to be her first mate and putting him in charge of one of the prize ships. The fact that Fanny is truly in command, and not simply maintaining the appearance of it for the sake of her disguise is illustrated when she and William are alone in her cabin and William tells her, “You have done nobly, my dear girl”. Fanny responds, “What, sir?” to which he apologizes: “I beg pardon—*sir*, I mean your conduct is deserving of all praise, Captain Channing” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 69; emphasis in the original). The narrator explains that William’s apology is given with “a mock show of respect”, indicating that perhaps he does not take her seriously at that moment. William’s remark highlights the complications of embodying masculine and feminine characteristics at the same time—Fanny’s crew, who believes her to be a man, does not question her leadership, but William, who knows her to be a woman, must be reminded of her capabilities. Ultimately, he is convinced, which reinforces the idea that women are capable of fulfilling such roles. Even during this private interaction, Fanny ensures that she remains in command, and that she is addressed in a befitting manner. While this insistence does work to maintain her disguise, she could have easily transferred command to William without exposing her identity. Instead, William tells her that she is “still master and commander here, and will, I hope, continue so” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 54).

Even though much of Fanny’s focus remains on William, the narrative does not in any way indicate that she is anything but a competent commander. In addition to reinforcing her American patriotism, Fanny’s taking of prize ships demonstrates her capability as a seaman and a captain, even in the masculine space of the sea, and illustrates that she is not in need of protection from a man. By engaging in the already acceptable masculine violence of battle as established by Conrad in *The Corsair*, Fanny legitimizes the violence of the lady pirate. When William tries to get Fanny to go below deck during a battle, she responds: “What! skulk below?...No no, I have seen this game before” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 56). If she were embodying a conventional model of womanhood or if her command was simply a ruse to aid her disguise, one would expect Fanny to follow William’s suggestion. Instead, Fanny not only remains above deck but also indicates that she is used to this sort of danger. In this instance, Fanny is displaying the daring and disregard for physical danger commonly found in the male adventure hero and the gentleman pirate.

3.2. *For I Am Able, and Will Defend Myself: Violence and Redemption*

Edmonds’s interpretation of Fanny as both a love-sick girl and an individual who dons independent masculinity draws attention to the fact that Fanny is not constructed as completely masculine or feminine in the narrative. Action heroines, in a broader sense than lady pirates, are often criticized for simply embodying the same characteristics of action heroes. Rather than trading one conventional gender role for the other, Fanny challenges this connection by blending elements of both roles. Despite the many parallels between Fanny and the earlier gentleman pirates, she does not completely abandon the characteristics exhibited by many of the women in earlier pirate stories. Those women functioned as objects to be captured, potential redeemers, and occasionally illustrated the

potential of violent womanhood without completely endorsing it as in the case of Gulnare. For the first half of *Fanny Campbell*, William fulfills the role of captured object. But Fanny takes on and complicates a different feminine role, that of redemptive womanhood, even as she fully commits to a model that allows the woman to be violent in defense of herself.

Fanny occupies the role of redeemer multiple times over the course of the narrative, using different methods to deal with violent men. In the first instance, she redeems a violent Englishman who has been captured by her crew and has attempted to burn the ship in retaliation. Fanny is able to reason with him and convince him the error of his ways by making a case for why Americans were justified in rebelling against the British, further reinforcing her positioning as a patriotic American, and the Englishman agrees, telling her, “I feel that I have erred!” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 68). Additionally, this event is presented as being parallel with the actions of John Paul Jones, which were recounted in *Fanny Campbell*—he too redeemed a man that he intended to hang—further emphasizing the complicated blending of gender roles because while women are the usual redeemers in pirate stories, in this particular story, Fanny’s ability to redeem others aligns her with a male American hero.

Unlike the women in other pirate stories, who only temporarily redeemed or made unsuccessful appeals to their pirate captors, Fanny is successful in convincing the Englishman of the error of his ways. The narrator explains: “A stubborn spirit was conquered by kindness and reason, the only weapons that one responsible being should use with another” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 68). This passage indicates that kindness and reason, which could be read as a combination of feminine and masculine traits, should be used by any “responsible being” when dealing with another. The gender-neutral language of this statement does not limit this strategy to men or women. Fanny, as a woman acting the part of a man while fulfilling the typical role of fictional women using a method that is usually reserved for men, would seem to be the perfect individual to embody this blending of gendered approaches.

A second scenario in which Fanny is placed in the role of redeemer illustrates the problematic nature of many of the more passive solutions to masculine violence by demonstrating that sometimes the woman cannot rely on the goodness of men—either as rescuers or reformed attackers—to save her from violence. After Fanny sends William home in a prize ship, her ship is attacked by a British Navy vessel. Following some heavy fighting, Fanny surrenders her ship, not because she is losing the fight, but because she and the other ship’s captain recognize each other, and she does not want him to give away her disguise (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 90). The other captain, Burnet, had briefly been presented as a potential love interest for Fanny early in the story, but she turned him down, and they remained friends, although with loyalties on opposite sides of the American Revolution.

Initially, their interaction after Fanny’s capture mirrors the redemption arc of earlier pirate stories where the pirate, a role fulfilled by Burnet in this scenario, is chastised for his actions and repents. Burnet asks Fanny to marry him, and she reprimands him, pointing out, “Am I not your prisoner?” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 98). Despite Fanny being below his station in terms of social class, he finds her heroism, character, and beauty attractive and insists that he loves her by arguing: “Nay, Fanny, I am *thy* prisoner, for in thy keeping rests my future happiness” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 98; emphasis in the original). As with the Englishman earlier, Fanny attempts to reason with him on the basis of the class divide, explaining: “You are high born, hold a captain’s commission from the King and are rich, honored and honorable; such a man deserves to be united to a woman who shall be entirely devoted to him, who can give him her undivided and whole love. Mr. Burnet, I am not that woman!” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 98). Implied in her reasoning is that he is a gentleman and should behave as such.

In a further effort to appeal to his nobility, Fanny follows this with a speech where she tells him she cannot marry him, but she would think more highly of him if he behaved better. Fanny reasons: “the path of fame and glory are open before you. You have rank, opportunity, every necessary possession whereby to lead thee on to honor and distinction.

Fanny's prayers shall ever be raised for thee" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 99). Burnet seems to respond to this appeal, and he tells her: "Oh! each word you utter but shows me the more clearly what I have lost. Yes, you speak truly . . . fame must be my future mistress; I can love no other" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 99). This interaction appears to make a similar argument to many other stories during this time period, that women could use their moral superiority in order to influence men in a positive manner. As a result, the blame for the potentially violent man's behavior is shifted to his potential victim because she has the responsibility of redeeming him; however, *Fanny Campbell* ultimately denies this solution and this responsibility by showing that Fanny's moral influence is insufficient to counteract Burnet's violence.

While the beginning of this interaction shares many parallels with earlier pirate stories in which the pirate's own nobility and gentlemanliness restrains him in his interactions with women, Burnet's attitude shifts when he learns how badly Fanny beat him in the battle. Burnet leaves Fanny to check on those of his crew who were wounded in the battle with her ship. The narrator explains his reaction to the surgeon's report: "He was prepared for a great loss as to the number of his crew, but not for so large a sacrifice as he now saw had been made; he looked into the matter personally and was exercised with not a little fear for his own reputation in being thus severely handled by a half-dozen men, commanded by a female" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 99). This passage indicates that Burnet is most concerned for his reputation if others were to find out that his crew had lost so many to a female captain, and after he dwells on his losses for a while, "Everything seemed to perplex and annoy him, and he was, indeed, hardly himself" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 100). It should be noted that as far as Burnet knows no one will ever find out that he lost so many men in a battle with a woman. Unless he gives away her secret, no one will know that Channing is actually Fanny.

The narrator describes Burnet a second time as unlike himself, saying that "He looked like another being from him who had left [Fanny] but a short time before" and reiterates that his recent losses and disappointments were the primary cause of his "morose and hardened state of feelings that showed themselves at once in his countenance and manner" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 100). In the span of just a few pages, Burnet shifts from being attracted to Fanny but willing to respect her wishes to being morose and hardened about how badly she has beaten him and anxious about how his reputation might suffer. In addition to his own character arc, Burnet's transition echoes earlier fictional pirates, similarly to Scott's Cleveland, who seems to reform, but even the narrative is concerned that he would return to his old ways given the chance. However, in the case of Burnet, the change is a direct result of a woman being competent at activities, in this case warfare, that are usually reserved for men. As a result, some of Burnet's anger could be the result of Fanny challenging and undermining his masculinity through martial activities that are commonly reserved for men.

Kent argues that Fanny exercises "her powerful moral influence" over Burnet, which confines Fanny to the role of moral exemplar commonly found within redemptive womanhood and ignores the fact that ultimately Fanny uses violence to stop Burnet (Kent 2008, p. 53). When Burnet returns, asks Fanny for "some token of [her] kindness", and grabs her, she tries once again to reason with him: "remember, I am your prisoner—completely in your power" but without pause she adds a warning: "Nay, then . . . though I am a woman, I am not a defenceless one!" before escaping from his grasp and retreating to the other side of the room (Murray [pseud.] 1844, pp. 100–1; emphasis in the original). Although this interaction includes a brief hint of the previous reason-oriented Fanny, the warning indicates that reason is not her only resource, which is supported by her next words: "I bid thee fairly to keep thy distance . . . For I am able, and will defend myself!" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 101). In this scene, Fanny is limited by the fact that she does not want to call for help or make too much noise and risk exposing her identity to the crew.

Fanny quickly abandons the idea of convincing Burnet with words as she did with the Englishman earlier: "Burnet again seized her, and endeavored to confine her hands.

In the same instant her right arm was raised above her head, and descended quickly to the breast of Burnet, who immediately staggered back and fell upon the couch" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 101). Through this violent action, Fanny takes on a role similar to Gulnare by fighting back against the man who has captured and threatened her. However, unlike Gulnare, Fanny's violence is presented as self-defense and built on a foundation of martial violence throughout the narrative, giving her an element of legitimacy and support in her story that Gulnare lacked. After stabbing and nearly killing Burnet, "for Fanny's dagger was sharp and pierced deep" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 101), Fanny climbs out through one of the windows, drops into a boat, and sails for the shore, which she reaches safely (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 100). In this situation, it is not only Fanny's violence that saves her, but also her sailing skills that allow her to completely escape the ship.

Fanny's reaction to Burnet's unwanted advances suggests a very different method for how women should deal with violent men than many of the earlier pirate stories, even *The Corsair*, which includes a violent woman but does not endorse her actions. Fanny first attempts a combination of reason and honorable appeals, but when those do not work, she resorts to violence. Throughout Fanny's efforts at fulfilling the role of redemptive womanhood, the narrative presents a range of options, including compassion and reason, for women dealing with violent men; however, ultimately, it concludes that in some scenarios women are left with no choice but to respond to violence with violence of their own. This response is tempered by the fact that the constructed scenario clearly leaves Fanny with no other choice, positioning violence as a last resort, rather than encouraging women to use violence as a problem-solving technique in all scenarios.

Like the Englishman, Burnet is ultimately redeemed by Fanny's actions as he recovers from his wound and devotes himself to his occupation, and unlike Scott's Cleveland who dies before his redemption can be demonstrated, Burnet "was true to his promise to Fanny Campbell, and was wedded to fame only, but therein he chose a distinguished mistress, and one that did him full honor" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 119). Although her interaction with Burnet could be read as an isolated incident, Fanny's actions throughout the narrative demonstrate that she used violence when necessary. Furthermore, taken along with her defense against Burnet, these scenarios demonstrate that both Fanny as herself and Fanny in her Channing persona are willing to use violence; and therefore, violence is not only the result of her performing a male identity.

Prior to either of her other reform efforts, Fanny was forced to use captured crew members to man her prize ships. One of these men attempts to incite a mutiny, and when confronted by Fanny, he threatens to cut part of the ship's rigging. Fanny warns him that she will kill him if he does. Although the narrative explains that this prompts the man to pause and consider, he then "cut the rope, which caused the ship to broach to at once; but it was the death signal of the mutineer. Channing, taking a step or two towards him, sent a ball direct to his heart, the man gave a terrific scream of agony and pain, and leaped into the sea a corpse" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, pp. 43–44). The narrative gives no indication that this man was armed, and although he was threatening the ship, Fanny and her loyal crew probably could have overpowered him without killing him. According to the narrator, the crew supports Fanny's decisive action, claiming: "It was a critical moment, a single mis-step would have lost all and perhaps have been the signal for [Channing's] own death. It was no time for blustering, but for cool and decided action, which re-established his authority and showed the men that he was one not to be trifled with" (Murray [pseud.] 1844, pp. 44–45). In this scenario, it is Fanny's violent solution that allows her to cement her authority and control of her crew and the ship as well as her position in the masculine role of the captain, but it is not the only tool that she uses. Taken together with her decision to pardon the Englishman, who posed an equal and possibly greater threat to the ship in his attempt to burn it, this instance demonstrates that Fanny's successful leadership is grounded in her ability to decide when to use words and when to use violence.

Furthermore, this scenario illustrates that Fanny is not simply an aloof captain, giving orders from a distance and letting her crew fight on her behalf. Anderson argues that the

crew seldom sees its captain, but they hear him, which allows Fanny to use the influence of her voice without displaying her physical body (Anderson 2011, p. 109). Although the reader does not see detailed interactions between Fanny and her crew, passages describing her active involvement in the fighting indicate she does not hesitate to physically participate in the running of her ship. During battle when her crew is shorthanded, Fanny oversees the management of one of the guns herself, where she displays a “noble scorn of danger beaming from her face as she watched the rise and swell of the sea to get an aim at the Dolphin, and applying the match with her own hands” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 86). And when her ship is boarded by Burnet’s crew, she participates in the hand-to-hand fighting: “Fanny’s pistol had taken the life of one of the enemy, and the other was presented to the breast of the Captain of the Dolphin, whose sword was also upraised to strike her” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 90).

Even at the beginning of the story, shortly after her mutiny on the *Constance*, she is prepared to defend herself during an attempt to overthrow her by the British captain and his mate. The captain and the cook, who is acting on behalf of the mate, sneak into Fanny’s cabin in the middle of the night with the intention of killing her. Instead, they kill one another, but when lights are brought on the scene, “Channing stood with a pistol cocked in either hand ready to defend himself if necessary, but now seeing the true state of the case he coolly remembered that there were two the less of them, and ordered the bodies removed” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 36). Despite not having to use her weapons, Fanny is prepared to defend herself—even from a nighttime attack on her person—in this passage. Together, this evidence creates a pattern by which Fanny does not use violence as a last resort or only in certain circumstances. Consistently throughout the story, she exhibits the key characteristic of a lady pirate modeled on the gentleman pirate by risking physical danger to defend herself, her ship, and her crew.

3.3. *We’ll Be Our Own Masters: Fanny Campbell’s Legacy*

Unlike *The Corsair*, which allows its violent woman to quietly disappear from its pages, *Fanny Campbell* addresses what happens with its lady pirate heroine after the war has ended. Because Fanny marries William at the end of the story, scholars tend to read the ending of *Fanny Campbell* as a relinquishing of her active womanhood. It could be argued that the narrative is primarily concerned with domestic goals since the main rescue plot ultimately moves Fanny toward marriage to William. Indeed, Anderson claims that “Their marriage marks Fanny’s entrance into domestic life” while Kent interprets this ending as Fanny realizing “that the life of a captain could never make her happy, and that what she truly desires are ‘the calm and peaceful joys of a quiet and retired life’” (Anderson 2011, p. 110; Kent 2008, p. 53). The narrative itself, however, does not present this sharp of a divide, nor does it indicate that Fanny’s more masculine activities are temporary while her more feminine roles are longer lasting.

Immediately after their return to Boston, the narrative briefly offers the possibility of containing Fanny to domestic life. It is William, not Fanny, who outfits the *Constance*, renamed the *Fanny*, for the purpose of privateering (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 102). This renaming would seem to erase Fanny as the active sea captain and reduce her to being the inspiration for the name of a man’s ship. Furthermore, after the war, “Fanny and her husband were settled in domestic enjoyment, and thrice happy were they in the love of each other, a love which had been proved in storms and in calms, in peace and in strife” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 104). If the story ended there, this passage might suggest that any woman—even the adventurous ones—could only find true fulfillment in marriage and the home. However, the narrative itself is less than willing to negate all of Fanny’s adventures in favor of a conventional marriage and a domestic life.

While William is the one who obtains the letters of marque necessary for privateering, “Fanny, by her own solicitations, was permitted to accompany him, and she was not only his companion, but counsellor also, in many a hard-fought contest” before “[William] and his noble wife retired for a while to enjoy the sweets of domestic happiness” (Murray [pseud.]

1844, pp. 103–4). This passage indicates that Fanny did not remain home while William was off privateering, but instead, she accompanied him, and it would be hard to believe that the woman described throughout this story would sit idly by while her husband was involved in “many a hard-fought contest”. Additionally, after the war, both Fanny and William retire, which indicates that they both had occupations in the first place. After Fanny rescues William, they model a romantic relationship that involves the man and the woman being equal partners, regardless of which is officially named the captain. Even though Fanny’s activity is no longer presented in detail, enough of the narrative has established her active independence that one cannot assume that she has simply abandoned it. Because it is not explicit, this omission allows the reader to interpret Fanny as either reinforcing the status quo by choosing marriage and relinquishing activity on the sea to men, or pushing against it in that she accompanies her husband and continues to participate in masculine activities.

The suggestion that Fanny did not drastically change her ways is further supported by her response to retired life. After Fanny and William settle into “domestic enjoyment”, Fanny informs her husband that she misses the sea, explaining: “I think we might love each other just as well were we to be on the element we have both proved so successful upon” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 105). When William suggests that they buy a yacht, Fanny agrees, adding, “Let it be a small one, such as can be worked by a few hands, William; we’ll be our own masters” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 105). Not only is Fanny the one to initiate transferring their domestic happiness to the sea, but she is also emphatic that they are able to “be our own masters”. Fanny does not dramatically change her character after her marriage. In *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis argues that in nineteenth-century fiction, female quest narratives are set aside or repressed in favor of an ending that forecloses those possibilities with marriage or death (DuPlessis 1985, pp. 3–4). However, I contend that *Fanny Campbell*’s ending leaves open the option of a quest within a marriage plot. Even as a married woman, Fanny values independence and wants to continue some of the activities that she has come to love, including sailing with her husband on the sea. They name their yacht the *Vision*, which seems optimistic and progressive (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 106). This name can be interpreted as referencing the patriotic America message or the re-envisioning of gender roles found within the narrative. In a similar manner to her activities throughout the story, Fanny’s retirement models a version of womanhood that blends masculine and feminine desires.

The narrative also implies that Fanny and William will serve as role models for the next generation through their children. The narrator explains: “It was while on an excursion with her husband, and far out of sight of land, that Fanny gave birth to her first child, a noble and robust boy” (Murray [pseud.] 1844, p. 118). Although it could be argued that Fanny is simply fulfilling conventional roles of becoming a wife and mother, she does so in an unconventional manner by giving birth on the sea. Furthermore, Ballou wrote a sequel to *Fanny Campbell*, entitled *The Naval Officer; or, the Pirate’s Cave, A Tale of the Last War* (1845), which focuses on Fanny’s son and clearly states that Fanny did not change her independent ways after becoming a wife and mother. One of her son’s crew members tells another: “I have seen Mrs. Lovell [Fanny] handle [the yacht] like a toy in a gale of wind” (Murray [pseud.] 1845, p. 12). In a note, Margaret Cohen argues that Fanny Campbell solves the problem of women and shipboard labor “by allowing women into the community of craft when they cross-dress” (Cohen 2010, p. 258, n59). However, with the additional evidence from *The Naval Officer*, it is clear that Fanny’s skills and sea craft were not abandoned with her disguise.

Several of the events in *The Naval Officer* are parallel to the events in *Fanny Campbell*, but at the end of the story, the narrator declares:

How similar had Lovell’s life been to that of his mother, The Female Pirate Captain, yet perhaps less daring, like his father’s too—more particularly, for like him, he lay for a considerable period in a damp and dreary dungeon or prison—his father at Havana, as the reader of the Female Pirate will remember, and himself in the prison at Bristol, England. His own escape was through cunning

and ingenuity, while his father was liberated by force and surprise, and that too by his own mother, then scarcely more than a mere girl, and yet in command of a crew of as daring and desperate men as ever handled a boarding pike. (Murray [pseud.] 1845, p. 93)

On the one hand, this passage operates as a sort of advertisement for *Fanny Campbell* by trying to convince the reader of *The Naval Officer* that this character's mother is impressive enough that one should buy her story too. At the same time, Ballou did not need to downplay the adventures of William and their son in order to elevate Fanny's—he could have claimed that they were all equally heroic and adventurous, but that would not have been true to *Fanny Campbell* because if their actions are weighed against one another, Fanny is clearly the most active and heroic of the three. These stories refuse the sharp divide, often reinforced by critics, between woman and hero—Fanny is both. By the end of her story, Fanny is able to embody the gendered dualism of both masculine and feminine roles. On the whole, the story presents a model of womanhood that is invested in both marriage and independence, a model which emphasized action and assertiveness, and sometimes violence, in addition to domesticity and family.

4. Conclusions

As with S. H. W.'s response to the women in *The Corsair*, Fanny Campbell also resonated with at least one female reader, who celebrated the heroine's active independence and perhaps used it as a model in her own life. Mentioned previously, Sarah Emma Edmonds used Fanny as a role model when she dressed as a man in order to work as a traveling agent selling Bibles, rather than allowing her father to “marry [her] off” (A Remarkable Career 1884, p. 6). However, Edmonds is most famous for her next adventure. When the Civil War broke out, she wanted to aid the Union and reasoned that she “could best serve the interest of the Union cause in male attire—could better perform the necessary duties for sick and wounded men, and with less embarrassment to them and to myself as a man than as a woman” (A Remarkable Career 1884, p. 6).⁸ As a result of this realization, she maintained her male disguise and enlisted as Frank Thompson in the Union army, where she not only served as a nurse but also a soldier and a spy. She describes her reaction to reading *Fanny Campbell* in an interview later in her life:

That was the most wonderful day in all my life. The battle of Bull Run was a circumstance to it. Surely I must have been inspired! I felt as if an angel had touched me with a live coal from off the altar. All the latent energy of my nature was aroused, and each exploit of the heroine thrilled me to my finger tips. I went home that night with the problem of my life solved. I felt equal to any emergency. (A Remarkable Career 1884, p. 6)

Although she did not go to sea, the story clearly resonated with her and might have influenced her choices. Edmonds's reaction to *Fanny Campbell* is certainly intense and the story's impact on her life might be unusual, but the fact that it stuck with her for decades after she read it indicates the powerful possibility of such stories to resonate with their readers. Taken along with S. H. W.'s choosing Gulnare over Medora, these responses illustrate an endorsement of active, and sometimes violent, female characters among female readers in America.

While it is difficult to speculate on the popularity of any one story, the stories that followed *Fanny Campbell* indicate that the lady pirate maintained a prominent position in the American imagination throughout the 1840s. Furthermore, the lady pirate stories that followed Fanny Campbell, including Ned Buntline's *The Queen of the Sea, or, Our Lady of the Ocean: A Tale of Love, Strife, and Chivalry* (1848), Lorry Luff's *Antonita: The Female Contrabandista, A Mexican Tale of Land and Water* (1848), and numerous stories by Benjamin Barker, did not simply replicate Fanny Campbell's character and plot, they continued to push boundaries by offering additional examples of unconventional womanhood (Buntline 1848; Luff 1848; Barker 1846, 1847, 1855). Although the stories all take different paths in the end, narratives that feature lady pirates as protagonists draw on the ideals of the

male adventure hero in general and the gentleman pirate specifically in order to construct alternate models of womanhood, which blend together masculine and feminine traits and legitimize violent female heroism. None of these lady pirates were virtuous heroines transplanted to the sea, nor cross-dressing women acting as placeholders in male roles. Even though several of the women end their stories in domestic settings of sorts, each is different and emphasizes the unconventional potential of the lady pirate.

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Notes

- ¹ For studies of women in domestic roles and spaces, see *The Origins of Women's Activism; Private Woman, Public Stage; Learning to Stand and Speak, and The Empire of the Mother* (Boylan 2002; Kelley [1984] 2002, 2006; Ryan [1982] 1985).
- ² Due to the religious difference, fictional corsairs are often accompanied by a different set of negative connotations than other pirates. The Oxford English Dictionary notes that "In English [corsairs were] often treated as identical with pirate, though the Saracen and Turkish corsairs were authorized and recognized by their own government as part of its settled policy towards Christendom". For a more detailed discussion of how the English viewed corsairs in relation to other types of piracy, see "Faithless Empires" (Fuchs 2000).
- ³ Although the narrative does not give any explicit evidence to support this conclusion, several scholars, including Gloria T. Hull, read the ending as an indication that Conrad and Gulnare ran away together (Hull 1978, p. 74). While scholars consider Byron's *Lara* (1814), with its English nobleman returned from the East accompanied by a cross-dressed page, to be a continuation of these characters' journey, Gregory Olsen argues that "the characters are represented quite differently", and the page, who would be a disguised Gulnare, is not heroic (Olsen 2014, p. 475, n23).
- ⁴ For more details on the distinctions between illegal piracy and legal privateering, and when a pirate is considered a pirate, see *British Pirates in Print and Performance* and "Faithless Empires" (Burwick and Powell 2015; Fuchs 2000).
- ⁵ As Katherine Anderson explains in a footnote in "Female Pirates", a scholar misidentified Fanny as a historical figure and as a result, several scholarly pieces have replicated the mistake, but she was not, in fact, a real person (Anderson 2011, p. 98).
- ⁶ Impressment was a practice prior to the War of 1812, and in *Villains of All Nations*, Marcus Rediker identifies it as one of the practices that drove sailors to become pirates or join pirate crews (Rediker 2004). However, for Americans, the problem of impressment is primarily connected to the tensions leading up to the War of 1812 when the British Navy would press into service any sailor who seemed British, including many Americans.
- ⁷ It should be noted that what Edmonds describes never actually happens in the story. Fanny disappears from the narrative and reappears as Channing. There is no explicit scene of Fanny cutting her hair and putting on man's clothing. However, Edmonds's misremembering indicates that she took an unclear aspect of the narrative and filled it in with an even more transgressive scenario.
- ⁸ Edmonds was from New Brunswick, Canada; however, she moved to Connecticut when she became a traveling agent and she was a strong supporter of the Union cause, despite not being born in the United States. At the same time, based on this interview, it seems as though the primary appeal of *Fanny Campbell* was one of freedom of gender roles, rather than patriotic rhetoric.

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