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**Easier Imagined than Described:  
Fact, Fiction and Genre in Maria Martin's Captivity Narrative**

In the narrative about her captivity in Algiers in the early nineteenth century, Maria Martin states on numerous occasions that a certain event or feeling “must be imagined, rather than described.” What she means, of course, is that she lacks the words to describe the cruelties she encountered or the feelings that these actions triggered. However, considering the fact that her narrative turns out to be completely fabricated, this expression receives an interesting second level of meaning – it describes the author's process of inventing everything that Maria Martin supposedly goes through in the course of her narrative. This is all the more fascinating, as her narrative ended up being the most successful female-authored Barbary Coast captivity narrative ever to be published in the U.S.

A closer analysis of the text reveals that a great variety of different factors led to the creation of the text. This study hopes to show how the images and ideas depicted are often subconsciously constructed but also in some cases carefully drafted. This also becomes apparent when analysing the publication history of the narrative, which not only shows how often the text had been altered and adapted to public demand throughout the editions, but also what contemporary texts were being read and thus served as model for Martin's narrative. Both the depiction of women and of the Muslim captors were strongly influenced by widespread contemporary expectations and beliefs, thus illustrating vividly the tension between genre limitations, popularity and authenticity.

**Tobias Auböck** is a PhD student at the University of Innsbruck, where he also received his Diploma in English and American Studies, specializing in American Barbary Coast captivity narratives. From October 2013 to March 2014, he worked as an assistant at the American Corner Innsbruck, an information platform that is anchored at the Department of American Studies at the University of Innsbruck and the U.S Embassy in Vienna. Since Spring 2014, he has been research assistant for the FWF-funded project European Slaves: Christians in African Pirate Encounters (ESCAPE: Barbary Coast Captivity Narratives 1550-1780).