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ÚSTAV ANGLOFONNÍCH LITERATUR A KULTUR

"Am I not a Man and a Brother?"
Representations of Slavery in the West Indies and Abolitionist Rhetoric on the Road to Emancipation

"Cožpak nejsem člověk a bratr?"
Reprezentace otroctví v Západní Indii a abolicionistická rétorika na cestě k emancipaci

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením diplomové práce ke studijním účelům.

Abstrakt

Tato práce se zabývá literaturou spojenou se zrušením otroctví v britských koloniích. Práce se zabývá tématem abolicionistického hnutí ze společenské, kulturní a literárně historické perspektivy od počátku až do zrušení otroctví v britských koloniích v Karibiku v roce 1833 *Zákonem o ukončení otroctví.* Práce je zaměřená na diskurz rasy a otroctví. Vybraní autoři reprezentují rozdílné názory a perspektivy, jelikož práce obsahuje jak představitele sentimentální poezie, tak cestopisy i autobiografie otroků. Hlavním cílem je určit a vymezit strategie abolicionistického diskurzu a rétorické postupy, které byly používány, a to zejména při utváření obrazu Afričanů a jak hegemonický diskurz sentimentalismu ovlivnil jejich psaní.

První část práce se zabývá utvořením teoretického základu a definováním literárních tradic a zvyků z osmnáctého století, definice sentimentálního diskurzu a filosofie osvícenství. To bude dáno do kontextu s definicí „orientalismu" Edwarda Saida a také teorie „černého Atlantiku" od Paula Gilroye, která umožní definovat prostor mezi Británií, Afrikou a Karibikem, kde se historie otroctví v Británii odehrála. Teoretický základ bude doplněn historickým přehledem otroctví a jeho zrušení v Británii a jejích koloniích.

Následující kapitoly se zabývají literární odpovědí na otroctví v osmnáctém a začátkem devatenáctého století. Práce se nezabývá polemickými spisy jako jsou kázání, články a pamflety, které napsali ti nejvýznamnější abolicionisté, například William Wilberforce, ale s těmi více literárními a kreativními, tedy poezií, cestopisy a autobiografiemi atd. Debata o poezii je založena na rozebrání básní od následujících básníků – Thomas Day, William Cowper, Hannah More a William Blake. Každých z těchto básníků ukazuje svůj přístup k tématu otroctví, obchodu s otroky a zrušení otroctví díky metaforám, tropám a diskurzu kterých využívali. To bude porovnáno s kapitolou o cestopisech o koloniálních střetech od Jamese Ramsayho a Johna Stedmana. Nejen že tyto texty ukazují rozdílný přístup k již zmíněným tématům, ale také různých názorů na zrušení otroctví těmi, kteří na vlastní kůži zažili situaci v Karibiku, na rozdíl od výše uvedených básníků. Poslední kapitola týkající se literatury se zabývá žánrem autobiografií otroků, které představují Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ottobah Cugoano a Olaudah Equiano stejně jako dopisy od Ignatia Sancha. Tato kapitola bude sloužit k ukázce toho, jak se tito černošští autoři stali součástí abolicionistického diskurzu, líčili sami sebe a začali tvořit černošskou britskou identitu v diaspoře Britského impéria.

Práce bude zkoumat složitý vztah mezi abolicionismem a příslušným diskurzem, přístupem a také problémy, které populární sentimentální diskurz znamenal pro vytvoření černošské identity v britské literatuře za účelem toho, aby se Afričané stali součástí tohoto diskurzu a tím pádem rovnocennými členy společnosti.

Abstract

This thesis is concerned with literature connected with the abolition of slavery in British colonies. The thesis will treat the topic of the abolitionist movement from the perspective of social, cultural and literary history from the beginnings until the abolition of slavery in British colonies in the Caribbean in 1833 with the Slavery Abolition Act. The thesis will focus on the discourse of race and slavery. The chosen authors represent different opinions and perspectives as the discussion will focus on sentimental poetry, travel writings as well as slave narratives. The chief aim is to identify and define the strategies of abolitionist discourse and the rhetorical practices which it employed especially in shaping the image of Africans and how the hegemonic discourse of sentimentalism influenced their writing.

The first part of the thesis is concerned with establishing a theoretical background and the establishing of the literary traditions and customs of the eighteenth century, definition of the sentimental discourse and philosophies of the Enlightenment. This will be framed by a definition of Edward Said's “Orientalism” as well as Paul Gilroy's theory of the “Black Atlantic,” which will enable us to define the space between Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, where the history of slavery of Britain happened. The theoretical background will be supplemented with a historical overview of slavery and its abolition in Britain and its colonies.

The following chapters deal with the literary response to slavery in the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The thesis does not deal with polemical writings such as sermons, articles and pamphlets written by the most prominent abolitionists, e.g. William Wilberforce, but with more literary and creative ones, in the sense of poetry, travel narratives and autobiographies etc. The discussion of poetry is based on examination of several poems by Thomas Day, William Cowper, Hannah More and William Blake. Each of these poets shows their approach to the topic of slavery, slave trade and abolition via the metaphors, tropes and discourse they relied on. This will be contrasted with a chapter on travel writings about colonial encounters written by James Ramsay and John Stedman. Not only will they show the difference in approach to the fore mentioned topics but also to the different opinions about the abolition of slavery by those who have experienced the situation in the West Indies, unlike the above mentioned poets. The last literary chapter is concerned with the genre of slave narratives with representatives such as Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ottobah Cugoano and Olaudah Equiano as well as letters by Ignatius Sancho. This chapter will serve to illustrate how these black authors became part of the abolitionist discourse, portrayed

themselves and how they began to establish Black British identity in the place of the diaspora of the British Empire.

The thesis will examine the difficult relationship between abolition and an adequate discourse, approach and also the problems that the popular sentimental discourse meant for the creation of the black identity in British literature in order for Africans to become part of the discourse, therefore equal members of society.

Klíčová slova

britská literatura, Západní Indie, britské impérium, orientalismu, otroctví, abolicionismus, sentimentalismus, diskurz, osvícenství, autobiografie otroků

Key Words

British Literature, the West Indies, the British Empire, Orientalism, slavery, abolitionism, sentimentalism, discourse, Enlightenment, slave narratives

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1. Introduction

12 Years a Slave was quite likely the most talked about film of 2013. It received great media and critical attention. Furthermore, it raised questions about the history of slavery, the possible arguments and counter arguments as well as the topic of correct and appropriate representation. Not everyone who awaited the film was initially aware of the literary origin of the story as the film is an adaptation of a slave narrative memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* by a former American slave Solomon Northup from 1853. The creators of the film could have opted for the largely familiar slave narrative by Frederick Douglass, called *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, which was originally published in 1845 and is generally considered to be the founding stone of the genre of slave narratives by the reading public. The truth is that years prior to Douglass´ *Narrative* the genre of a slave narrative was slowly becoming established in Britain and the account often defined as the first slave narrative in literary history is *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* by Olaudah Equiano which was published in 1789. The film led to a renewed popularity in the writings of former slaves as well as an interest in other films and forms of art that represent the difficult past of slavery.

One of these previous historical films is *Amazing Grace* which was filmed in 2006. It is a drama directed by Michael Apted and it deals with the campaign against slave trade in Britain, led by William Wilberforce, who was responsible for steering the anti-slave trade legislation through the British Empire in 1807. The title of the film is a clear reference to the hymn "Amazing Grace," and as we will see, religion played a strong part in both support and battle against slavery. The film depicts the experiences of John Newton, who was a crewmember on a slave ship and his subsequent religious conversion, which inspired his writing of the poem later used in the hymn. Despite the fact that Wilberforce is often considered to be the main force in the abolition of slave trade, the film makers decided to focus on Newton's character and show Newton as a major influence on Wilberforce and in consequence, on the entire abolition movement.

Amazing Grace is a major illustration of Britain's involvement in the slave trade and slavery. Britain's colonising success is often praised and acknowledged, however, their involvement in slavery is usually omitted in history books and the trauma the Empire has caused by the slave trade has been ignored for centuries. The Atlantic slave trade was a forced migration of West African slave captives from their homelands into slavery in the

Americas by colonisers to labour as plantation, industrial, and domestic slaves.[1] Millions of Africans were shackled and tightly packed in the bellies of slave ships, in which they had to survive in dreadful conditions as they crossed the Atlantic in what is now called "the Middle Passage." And while Britain was always known for being involved in the sugar trade, it was never as strongly accused of slave trade as other countries and colonial powers such as America. Generally speaking, Britain tends to be acquainted with the abolition of slavery in historical accounts, some even saying that the abolitionist movement in Britain is often even credited with being solely responsible for bringing the British slave system down but never accused of being one of the strongest powers in the slave trade.[2] One of the reasons for such a historical treatment of British involvement in slavery is indicated in W. Cowper's poem called "The Task," in which one of the lines reads: "We have no slaves at home: then why abroad?"[3] The British employed slaves in the Caribbean on plantations, so that the general British public was not openly aware of their involvement. In fact, the topic of slavery and slave trade were common topics in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Britain. The abolition movement produced pamphlets and there was a strong literary reaction from poets and fiction writers as well as the forming genre of slave testimonies and narratives. Even though the terminology did not exist at the time, the writings that were concerned with the topic of slavery, especially the writings of colonial encounters, such as John Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*, worked in and with diaspora.

Diaspora is a term that is connected to space, time and movement. The experience of diaspora is communal; there is a sense of collectivity, of a shared experience. Avtar Brah defines *diaspora* in her seminal work *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* as "dispersion from"; therefore the term *diaspora* embodies a notion of a centre, a locus, and certain "home" from which the dispersion begins. It is always connected with the imagery of multiple journeys.[4] The topic of journey can of course be literally connected to the slave trade which created a connection between Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, defined by Paul Gilroy as the "black Atlantic," in his theoretical book of the same name.

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[1] Peter Hinks and John R. McKivigan, *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 70.
[2] Marcel Dorigny, ed. *The Abolition of Slavery: From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schaelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848* (Paris: Editions UNESCO/Preses Universitaires de Vincennes, 2003*),* 71.
[3] William Cowper, "The Task."
[4] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 181.

The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness was published in 1993 and in the book Gilroy provides a study of African intellectual history and its cultural construction. In his definition, the concept of the Black Atlantic means a space of transnational cultural construction. Gilroy makes the people who suffered from the Atlantic slave trade the emblem of his new concept of diasporic peoples, which is based on the idea that these people are separated by a communal source of origin and it offered them an opportunity to create a hybrid identity, which accommodated their African heritage, the West Indies experience and the English language. Gilroy uses the transatlantic slave trade to highlight its influence on black identity. He often relies on the image of a ship, in order to represent how black culture and identity was composed through cultural exchanges and constant movement.[5]

The writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth century that concerned themselves with the topic of slavery and its abolition were influenced by the general discourse of the time which was sentimentalism. Of course, tackling such difficult topics such as slavery and the abolition of slavery, abolitionists had to create a discourse that would suit their purposes. However, most of the works that are examined in this study were written and published during the period of early Romanticism, a time in which the sentimental novel or the novel of sensibility were being developed and due to its popularity the concept and discourse of sentimentalism and sensibility were established and employed by the writers who protested against slavery. Sentimentalism was a fashion in both poetry and prose and it was a reaction to the rational characteristics of the Augustan Age and it also attempted to differ from the baroque style in its interest in the everyday life and problems of the public. It strongly relied on emotional response and the feelings of pity; it often featured scenes of distress and weakness. Sentimentalism and sensibility are often interchanged, however sensibility refers to an acute perception of or response toward something, it refers to a personal characteristic, openness to the feelings of others, particularly their sorrows. Sentimental discourse was exemplary of emotion and it strongly relied on empathy.[6]

It becomes evident throughout the study that the sentimental discourse proved to be quite problematic nay paradoxical for the abolitionist cause, for it can have a rather normative effect. It relies on the idea that essentially everyone's feelings are structured in a similar manner, therefore the limit of what can be understood about the sufferings of another human

[5] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 199l).
[6] Doris B. Garey, *Eighteenth Century Sentimentalism: An Essay towards Definition* (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941), 19.

being, the object of sympathy, is the limit of what the sympathetic person can feel.[7] In other words, the writers attempted to describe the sentiments of the slaves and give their feelings a voice, without actually having access to the experience and their efforts usually resulted in over-sentimentalised characters. The British reading public was then asked to sympathise with an emotion they could not convey. We also have to take into consideration that in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century most of these works (with a few exceptions, such as Hannah More) were written by male authors and they strongly relied on paternalism and notions of brethren and patriarchy. In respect to this the slavers and masters were often seen as father figures.

The sentimental conventions proved to be appealing to the Afro-Caribbean and African American writers of the time as well, as they believed that the sentimental discourse would enable them to combine realism and an emotional appeal contained within a popular genre. They also felt that the sentimental discourse could best convey to white readers the socioeconomic oppression and political restriction that enslaved and freed blacks experienced in the West Indies and in the Americas. Essentially, they imagined that if they created within the discourse of the white supremacy, if they wrote their presence into the discourse, they would lead their fellow Africans to freedom. In other words, they saw it as means of democratising the slaves or at least acknowledging the citizenship of the free blacks.[8] They might have feared that had they operated within a new literary genre, they would continue to be outside of the mainstream.

The examination of the literary response to abolition shows the great involvement of poetry. Several critics suggest that the eighteenth century was not a great age for English poetry. I would beg to differ, for the poems examined show that poetry was very much an important tool in the fight against slavery, I believe the criticism is caused by the role poetry played in the late eighteenth century. It is not merely a poetry of beauty and pure emotion, it is a poetry with a very distinct identity, there are different styles and themes and the poems are often concerned with social critique, as Monk says, "On the whole, the literature of this period is chiefly a literature of wit, concerned with civilisation and social relationships, and consequently, it is critical and in some degree moral and satiric."[9] The eighteenth century is the century in which satire flourished and such a literary development must have showed also in the poetic world. Themes such as the English life, culture and humanitarianism were often

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[7] Charlotte Sussman, *Eighteenth Century English Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 246.
[8] Carol E. Henderson, ed., *America and the Black Body: Identity Politics in Print and Visual Culture* (Cranbury: Rosemont Publishing & Printing Corp., 2009), 77 – 78.
[9] Quoted in M.H Abrams, *Norton Anthology of English Literature* (W.W.Norton: 2012), 1322.

employed. Poetry appealed to a smaller reading public than perhaps fiction, however it appealed to an educated public, consisting of the aristocracy and the upper-middle class that the abolitionist needed to target in their pleas for social ramification of slavery.[10]

Africa and the topic of slavery appeared in many of the major writings of the eighteenth century such *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Smith or *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe, not to mention Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*, indicating a change in perception, the black presence was becoming more frequent and undeniable. The eighteenth century reading public appeared to have a great interest in travel writing, beginning with make-believe stories such as *Robinson Crusoe*; however they became more intrigued in more ethnographical works later on. In fact, travel narratives became one of the most popular and respected European genres during the eighteenth century. The narratives included long descriptive passages about geography, monuments and customs of foreign lands, which served the growing appetite for knowledge about foreign places and the exotic quite well. There were several writings published by travellers, explorers and shipmen and considering the technological improvements of the time, ordinary citizens could explore some of these places themselves.[11]

Perhaps the most distinguishing quality of the eighteenth century travel narratives was their blending of facts with artistic literary content, possibly a romantic affair. More often than not, eighteenth century travel narratives attracted their readers with descriptions of the strange customs of foreigners. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Embassy Letters,* written between 1716 and 1718 and published in 1763, offered her readers views of Turkey which few European men would have been allowed to witness, namely Turkish baths and harems, it has been deemed as the "quintessential Turkish Tale." In *The Turkish Embassy Letters* Montagu shows a strong awareness of what earlier Western writers had written about Turkey and even though she attempts to describe the country justly, her Western perspective cannot be ignored. Although Montagu's impressions of Turkey were generally favourable, most accounts of foreign lands and customs emphasized European cultural superiority.[12]

The abolitionist movement often relied on travel narratives such as the aforementioned John Stedman's writing to illustrate to the British public how terrible the situation in the West Indies was. Even though these writings come from a first-hand experience, the writers are

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[10] Stewart Justman, *The Springs of Liberty: The Satiric Tradition and Freedom of Speech* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 55.
[11] Robert Mayer, *History and the Early English Novel: Matters of Fact from Bacon to Defoe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 207.
[12] Diane Long Hoeveler and Jeffrey Cass, *Interrogating Orientalism: Contextual Approaches and Pedagogical Practices* (Ohio: The Ohio State University, 2006), 139.

approaching the topic from a male, western and imperialistic point of view and therefore, their representations are appropriate to the discourse of the eighteenth century English literature. These writers employed a strategy coined as "Orientalism" by Edward Said as he defined in a book of the same name. He believes that the constructed ideas of the so called east and west and other are the real reasons for cultural clashes and misunderstandings. Said stresses that Orientalism does not refer to a place but to an idea; an idea which can be seen as a "western style for dominating, restructuring, having authority over the Orient."[13] He contends that:

> […] without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – *and even produce* – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically and imaginatively […] European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.[14]

In the second chapter of his book called "Orientalist Structures and Restructures," he pays a re-visit into the Orientalism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the methodological and scholarly traditions, with Said conveying a message of the Orientalism's tendency to generalise and the result being a portrayal of the East as naïve and weak; the people were seen as those who need to be taken care of, which can be connected to the sentimental discourse mentioned above. For colonisers, Orientalism was a way of coming to terms with the Orient. In this sense Orientalism is a discourse, a certain Western style of domination, restructure and gaining authority over the Orient. It is a domination of knowledge and power, of intellectual power to be more specific.

It also has to be taken into consideration that Britain and its writing were under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophy, especially during the beginning of the abolition movement and the qualities of the Enlightenment actually enabled abolitionists to open the debate about the immorality of slavery and the equality of the Africans. Enlightenment came into being on the back of Liberalism and it was a period that questioned old traditions and status quo, it influenced several European monarchies to be more liberal, which raised the question of morality of institutions such as slavery. In general, the Age of Enlightenment was an era in which cultural and intellectual forces in Western Europe emphasised reason and

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[13] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 3.
[14] *Orientalism*, 3.

individualism rather than traditional authority. It challenged the authority of several institutions deeply rooted in society, such as the Catholic Church. The thinkers of the time wanted to reform society with toleration. As Outram notes, the Enlightenment comprised "many different paths, varying in time and geography, to the common goals of progress, of tolerance, and the removal of abuses in Church and state."[15] Milan Zafirovski argues that the Enlightenment is the source of critical ideas, such as the centrality of freedom, democracy and reason as the primary values of society, as opposed to the divine right of kings or traditions or ruling authorities.[16] What modern society owes to this period is basic model of government, articulation of the political ideas of freedom and equality and the articulation of a list of basic individual human rights to be respected and recognised by any political system, articulation of toleration of religious diversity, conception of the basic political powers common in western democracies.

There are several representatives of Enlightenment philosophy; however, John Locke's theories are the most applicable for the purpose of this study. His *Second Treatise of Government* (1690) is a classical source of modern liberal political theory. His assertion of the natural freedom and equality of human beings is opposed to the opinion that kings have a right to exercise absolute authority over their subjects on the basis of the claim that they inherit the authority God vested in Adam at creation. According to Locke, in order to understand nature and the source of legitimate political authority, we have to understand our relations in the state of nature. Drawing upon the natural law tradition, Locke argues that it is evident to our natural reason that we are all absolutely subject to our Lord and Creator, but that, in relation to each other, we exist naturally in a state of equality "wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another."[17] Also, we exist naturally in a condition of freedom, insofar as we may do with ourselves and our possessions as we please, within the constraints of the fundamental law of nature. The law of nature "teaches all mankind […] that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions."[18] According to Locke, we rationally quit this natural condition by contracting together in order to set a political authority over ourselves and enforcing a single, clear set of laws, for the sake of guaranteeing our natural rights, liberties and possessions. The civil, political law founded ultimately upon the consent of the

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[15] Dorinda Outram, *Panorama of the Enlightenment* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2006), 29.
[16] Milan Zafirovski, *The Enlightenment and Its Effects on Modern Society* (Texas: The University Press of Texas, 2010), 144.
[17] John W. Yolton, *The Selections from the Works of John Locke with a General Introduction and Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 277.
[18] *The Selections from the Works of John Locke with a General Introduction and Commentary*, 278.

governed, does not cancel the natural law, according to Locke, but merely serves to draw that law closer: “The law of nature stands as an eternal rule to all men.”[19]

All of these aspects have shaped and formed the manner in which poets, travellers and abolitionists created their works about slavery. Despite their best efforts, it is often the ambiguity of their position of Western colonisers speaking from the position of the sentimental discourse, which leads into sometimes paradoxical and ironic results in their work. Whether or not the problematic discourse truly affected the abolitionist movement is uncertain, but it cannot be denied that they all struggled to find an answer to the question that Josiah Wedgwood used to decorate the anti-slavery medallion, “Am I not a man and a brother?”[20] (Figure 1)

The following thesis begins with a historical background in order to establish the most significant events and participants of the abolitionist movement and to be able to comprehend what the literary world was reacting to and drawing inspiration from when approaching the topic of slavery and its abolition. The historical background is followed by an analysis of poetry by Thomas Day, William Cowper, Hannah More and William Blake in order to see the different approaches and metaphors that the individual poets used and to show their efforts to further the abolitionist cause. The examination of different poems will show the influence of the sentimental discourse as defined above. The poetry discussion is followed by analysis of two writings of colonial encounters, travel narratives by James Ramsay and John Stedman. The comparison between the two narratives will serve to illustrate that the opinions of travellers who visited the West Indies differed and it will present the different arguments each of the two writers made based on the experience they had in the colonies and the effect it had on them and how such narratives were employed in the abolitionist movement.

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[19] John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government* (New York: Hafner Press, 1947), 305.

[20] Josiah Wedgwood I (1730-95), a nonconformist, was keenly interested in political and social questions, like his friends Thomas Day, the social reformer, and Erasmus Darwin, inventor and poet, who both wrote in condemnation of the slave trade. Wedgwood issued this jasperware medallion in 1787. It has an applied relief of a kneeling slave and the inscription 'Am I not a man and a brother?' and was modelled after the seal for the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade founded in that year by Thomas Clarkson. Wedgwood sent medallions to Benjamin Franklin in Pennsylvania in February 1788, and they were an immediate success. Clarkson wrote: 'some had them inlaid in gold on the lid of their snuff-boxes. Of the ladies, several wore them in bracelets and others had them fitted up in an ornamental manner as pins for their hair. At length the taste for wearing them became general, and thus fashion…was seen for once in the honourable office of promoting the cause of justice and, humanity and freedom.' The design was also used in printed form on plates, enamel boxes for patches, as well as on tea caddies and for tokens.
Aileen Dawson, *Masterpieces of Wedgwood in the British Museum* (London: British Museum Publications, 1984), 63.

The discussion of the English writing will be supplemented by a chapter concentrated on the slave narratives published before the abolition of slavery in 1833. The examination will be based on four works - *Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, related by himself* (1722), *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* by Ottobah Cugoano (1787), *Letters of Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* by Ignatius Sancho (written between 1760 and 1780, published in 1782) and *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano Or Gustavus Vassa, the African* (1789). These four writings will show the development of the genre of the slave narrative, the different aspects and features that connect them and the way in which these writers, who had experienced slavery, narrated their life stories and how they affected the abolitionist movement as well as how they perceived their identity as Black English men.

I aim to prove that the writings of English writers as well as the early writings of Black literature were influenced by the sentimental discourse and the images and metaphors employed by the English poets and abolition writers were in fact paradoxical and often ended up in images of irony as their speaking from a "super position" influenced how they portrayed the slaves in the West Indies and in fact, often may have discouraged the British public in perceiving the black Africans as capable, independent and equal. With the combination of the debate about the slave narratives, I hope to prove that, as far as literary representation of abolition is concerned, the only way for the black Africans to become part of English society was to employ the discourse of the English language and essentially write their presence into being by becoming part of the sentimental discourse.

2. Historical Background

Slavery has been a part of the British history for a longer period of time than one might be inclined to initially think. As a matter of fact, the concept has entered the British Isles from prior to the time of the Roman occupation, slaves were routinely exported and it became a part of society under the Roman Empire and after. Slavery was continued in the Anglo-Saxon times, sometimes in league with Norse traders often selling slaves to the Irish. Dublin was a major slave trading centre between the 9th and 12th centuries, which led to an increase in slavery. Chattel slavery then virtually disappeared after the Norman Conquest and was replaced by feudalism.

According to the Domesday Book census over 10 % of the population in England in 1086 were slaves. In 1102, the Church Council of London summoned by Anselm of Canterbury issued a decree, “Let no one hereafter presume to engage in that nefarious trade in which hitherto in England men were usually sold like brute animals.” The council, however, had no legislative power and unless it was signed by the monarch, it would not be accepted as an act of law. The decree inspired a decline of slavery in England and according to John Gillingham by about 1200 slavery in the British Isles was non-existent.[21]

We have to take into consideration the fact that today the word “slave” is used for both time periods, the pre-mediaeval England and the latter time of slave trade and colonies, however, there are some differences between what the word entails in the respective times, not to mention that the conditions were unparalleled. The problem lies in the definition of the term. Generally speaking, it will always be used as a definitive term for a group of people who are in some way regarded as property, though not all such persons would be called “slaves” in particular. Which group in society can be called “slaves” is dependent on the terminology of status employed by society. In the Anglo-Saxon society a member of the one group that was regarded as chattel and having the fewest rights along with the heaviest obligations would be called *peow*, which translated into Roman as *seruus*, the Latin word most widely used to denote a slave. However, Modern English writers sometimes interchanged the word “slave” with “serf” who was not personally owned, as slaves were, but who owed obligations to a person in virtue of their occupancy of land.[22]

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[21] Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.
[22] David Antony Edgell Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England: From Reign of Alfred Until the Twelfth Century* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1995), 2 – 3.

Many of the slaves in early mediaeval England were captives spared in war, they might have been of any race, in process of time must have learnt to speak English and their children must have become English in all but blood. Children of mixed race, English on the father's side usually, were as common then as they were in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[23] Not only in Britain, but in Western Europe as a whole, serfs and slaves were used as agricultural labourers, since the economic system was based upon manorialism[24]. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the practice of slavery was harsher than the earlier forms in Western Europe. Several rather barbarian law codes treated the slaves on the same level as livestock, and the most basic elements of human rights were not acknowledged by these codes. One of the main differences between this and the latter form of slavery lies in the fact that while slavery had been practiced extensively in various societies and cultures, it had never been affiliated with a specific race or ethnicity, the people were usually captives in battles and wars. Enslavement was the custom that fell upon people who had been defeated in a conflict. This changed when European explorers began to navigate the coastline of West Africa and the large-scale commerce in a human commodity began to develop.[25]

If we were to search for the beginnings of the contact between Britain and Africa, the year 1555 is a strong indicator of the establishing of contact between the two countries. It also indicated the power of the English language in their colonising adventures. In that year, a group of five Africans were brought from Ghana to England in order to learn English so that they could work as interpreters for English traders who were quickly becoming aware of the wealth in gold, ivory and spices on the West Coast of Africa.[26] How, then, have the British Isles become one of the most involved countries in the slave trade? At first, the British parasitized on what the Portuguese began in early fifteenth century. Portuguese navigators began exploring the West African coastline shortly after 1415 and by the 1440s, sailors had reached as far as Senegal and began to exchange goods for several Africans who were

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[23] Grant Allen, *Anglo Saxon Britain*, (New York: E & J.B. Young & Co., 2007) 5 – 8.

[24] *Manorialism* (also called manorial system or seigniorial system) was a political, economic, and social system by which the peasants of mediaeval Europe were rendered dependent on their land and on their lord. Its basic unit was the manor, a self-sufficient landed estate, that was under the control of a lord who enjoyed a variety of rights over it and the peasants attached to it by means of serfdom (a condition in which a tenant farmer was bound to a hereditary plot of land and to the will of his landlord). The manorial system was the most convenient device for organising the estates of the aristocracy and the clergy in the Middle Ages in Europe, and it made feudalism possible.
"Manorialism," *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2015) 29 June 2015 <http://www.britannica.com/topic/manorialism>

[25] Junius P Rodriguez, *The Historical Encyclopaedia of World Slavery* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1997), xviii.

[26] C.L. Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

shipped back to Portugal and later sold into slavery. What began as one small transaction soon became a strong economic torrent, as European traders and businessmen realised the almost limitless supply of cheap labour of Africans. They justified their actions in the name of Christianity; almost all of these Africans were either pagans who practiced indigenous religions or, perhaps, Muslims.[27] The British involvement in slave trade began in 1562 with Admiral Sir John Hawkins, who was a seafarer during the Elizabethan age and who is widely known to be "the Pioneer of the English Slave Trade."

The Atlantic slave trade was a forced migration of West African slave-captives from their homelands into slavery in the Americas by colonisers to labour as plantation, industrial, and domestic slaves.[28] Hawkins sailed three ships for the Caribbean via Sierra Leone, hijacked a Portuguese slave ship and sold the 300 slaves from it in Santo Domingo. During his second voyage in 1564 his ship crew captured approximately 400 Africans and sold them in what today is Colombia, making a 60% profit for his financiers, wealthy City merchants. It was Hawkins´ second voyage where Queen Elizabeth also invested money, receiving a profit from his sales. His third voyage involved both buying slaves in Africa and capturing another Portuguese ship with its cargo. On his return, he published a book *An Alliance to Raid for Slaves*, soon after Britain became the leader in the Atlantic slave trade. After his voyage in 1564 Hawkins was given an official crest which showed "a semi-Moor proper bound with captive, with amulets on his arms and ears" combined with a coat of arms displaying three black men shackled with slave collars.[29] This image shows how economic profit was celebrated over human condition and the slave trade was fully established as means of great income for the growing Empire. The Atlantic slave trade formed an invisible but undeniable link between Britain, Africa and the Caribbean, a connection and a phenomenon entitled by Paul Gilroy as the "black Atlantic," which is also the title of his best-known theoretical book. Millions of Africans were shackled and tightly packed in the bellies of slave ships, in which they had to survive in dreadful condition as they crossed the Atlantic in what is now called "the Middle Passage."[30]

When the British defeated the Spanish Armada in 1588 they paved for themselves the way for the English colonisation of the Americas by destroying the Spanish dominance in the region. English merchants benefited from the price rises of the sixteenth century trading

[27] *The Historical Encyclopaedia of World Slavery*, xix.
[28] Peter Honos and John R. McKivigan, *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), 70.
[29] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 8.
[30] *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, 72.

companies in the hope of tapping wealth from overseas, mainly from the Atlantic world. English settlers began to appear in the West Indies, the main English settlements were Barbados and the Leeward Islands of Antigua, Nevis, and St. Kitts, and they were looking for new opportunities to make profit.[31] They needed someone to work on the plantations for as little, preferably no, money as possible; they needed a large labour force. The colonies were regarded as markets for manufactured goods and sources of raw materials for the mother country. They found the solution of cheap labour, no civil rights and resistance to the weather conditions in transatlantic slave trade. Most slaves disembarked in the British Caribbean were bought for work on sugar plantations; some were deployed in livestock pens, in retails sectors in towns and ports and later on the newly developed coffee plantations.[32]

Historian Dale H. Porter reports that by 1775 merchants from London, Liverpool and Bristol were carrying on average around 60 000 African slaves across the Atlantic each year. By mid eighteenth century, London had the largest Black population in Britain, made up of free and enslaved people, as well as runaways who have managed to make it all the way to Britain.[33] Slaves were brought to England to either serve the captain of the ship, given to their friends or they accompanied their owners and families when they visited England. The increasing presence of black people in England and Scotland is traceable through newspapers advertising sales of slaves or rewards for runaway slaves. Upper class families considered it fashionable to have a Black servant in the household and sometimes featured them in paintings, for example "The Family of Sir William Young" by Zoffany (Figure 2) and they began to appear more and more in paintings, print as well as cartoons, including many by Hogarth.[34]

Many of these black servants were former slaves, brought to England by their masters who they continued to work for. The number of these domestic slaves was growing higher and in 1772 the Somerset case in London led to Chief Justice Lord Mansfield's rule which held that no slave could be forcibly removed from Britain because slavery did not exist under the English law. In 1771, slave James Somerset was ordered to appear before Judge Mansfield at the Court of King's Bench in London. Somerset had been brought from America to Britain by his master Charles Stewart. Somerset ran away but was immediately returned to

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[31] *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*, 7 – 8.
[32] *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*, 12- 13.
[33] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 9.
[34] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 10

Stewart, who then put him on a slave ship bound for Jamaica to be sold.[35] However, slavery was not allowed on the British Isles, therefore Judge Mansfield had to be inclined in favour of Somerset, otherwise he would admit to slavery in England and Stewart therefore did not have the right to "sell" Somerset. As one of Britain's most fervent abolitionists, Granville Sharp said, "the exercise of the power of a Master over his Slave must be supported by the Law of the particular Countries; but no foreigner can *in England claim* a right *over a Man*: such a claim *is not known to the Laws of England*."[36] Stewart of course was not a foreigner in England, however, this quote exemplifies that slavery was not allowed or present in England. This emancipated around ten to fourteen thousand slaves who were brought to England by their owners, who usually became domestic servants, because even though they could not be forced to leave the country, they could not own property.

This case brought attention to the increasing number of black people in Britain, mainly in London. In the late eighteenth century the number of black people living in Britain varied between ten and twenty thousand. The overall population in Britain was approximately three million people; therefore the blacks were a visible minority.[37] In 1788, Philipp Thickness commented on the situation in London with the following words, "London abounds with an incredible number of these black men…in every country town, nay in almost every village are to be seen a little race of mullatoes, mischievous as monkies and infinitely more dangerous."[38]

There have been several slave revolts in the West Indies during the seventeenth and eighteenth century, for example in 1649 in Barbados, a major slave revolt in Jamaica in 1690 and a revolt that is rather special for its literary context, the revolt in Suriname in 1772. The revolt in Suriname, a Dutch colony, began already in 1726. It resulted in one of the most famous maroon communities in the world; escaped slaves built a number of fortified villages in the thick island forests. The revolt in 1772 began because of the cruelty of the plantation owners. In Suriname, blacks outnumbered whites by approximately 20 000 to 1. Ironically, during the fighting, the plantation owners were forced to rely on their slaves for protection and they offered as many as 400 slaves their freedom if they would fight against the maroons. They agreed and the newly freed slaves, called the Rangers, fiercely fought and

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[35] Debbie Lee, *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 11.

[36] Quoted in Slavery *and the Romantic Imagination*, 11.

[37] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 11.

[38] Quoted in David Dabydeen, *Hogarth´s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* (Kingston-upon-Thames: Dangaroo Press, 1985), 18.

managed to keep the maroons away until the army arrived from Europe. The maroons felt betrayed by the very men they were fighting for.[39]

In 1772 and 1773 John Stedman joined a military expedition to suppress a slave rebellion in Suriname and spent several years battling the slaves.[40] Nevertheless, Stedman was appalled by the cruelty he witnessed in Suriname and published *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinami* in 1796, a full account of his experiences that became a classic of abolitionist literature.

A historical event that more than greatly influenced and fuelled the abolitionist cause was the Zong tragedy of 1781. Approximately 470 Africans were forced onto the slave ship *Zong*. The conditions were so appalling that seven crew members and sixty Africans died from sickness. The decision was made by the captain Luke Collingwood that the remaining 133 sick Africans were not worth food and provisions and they were thrown overboard and left to drown. The tragedy inspired artists and the abolitionist cause. However when the case was first heard, it was addressed as an insurance dispute, not a murder trial. Had the slaves died of natural causes, the insurance could not have been claimed, the claim for the insurance trial was that water was scarce (although the ship arrived in port with 400 gallons of water to spare). Olaudah Equiano and Granville Sharp attempted to get the case be treated as mass murder against the captain and the crew of the *Zong*.[41] However the prosecution was blocked by John Lee, solicitor general, who declared that blacks were treated as property, "This is a case of chattels or goods. It is really so; it is the case of throwing over goods; for this purpose and the purpose of insurance, they are goods and property: whether right or wrong we have nothing to do with."[42] It was only in 1796 that a rule was passed by the English court that slaves could not be treated simply as chattel or merchandise in a case where a Liverpool trader wanted to recover insurance for 128 Africans who had starved to death on a long voyage.[43] Though the economic profits of slave trade were still considered worthy and the abolition of slavery was still a long fight ahead, the way in which black people were seen was slowly beginning to change.

[39] Robin Santos Doak, *Slave Rebellions* (New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2006), 29 – 30.
[40] During his time in Suriname, Stedman met Joanna, a mulatto slave and they started a relationship, they had a son named Johnny. Throughout his *Narrative*, Stedman praises Joanna's character and sweet nature; he describes her loyalty and devotion through his absence. His primary concern was to secure freedom for Joanna and their son. Their son, Johnny, was eventually freed from slavery, but not Joanna. However, when Stedman returned to the Dutch Republic in 1777, Joanna and their son stayed behind in Suriname. After Joanna's death in 1782, their son migrated to Europe to live with Stedman and later served as a midshipman in the Royal Navy.
[41] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 13 – 14.
[42] Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), 128.
[43] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 14.

The increasing visibility and voice of black people in Britain, many of whom were slaves or former slaves, brought to the table a debate about the contradictions and tensions between Britain's self-identity as the home of liberty and human rights and its role in the slave trade and the institution of slavery. As James Walwin says, "The society which established the primacy of parliamentary power, and confirmed individual liberties before the law, was equally responsible for the development of black chattel slavery."[44] As long as slavery was kept mainly in the colonies, it was easy to ignore for the general public as well as lawyers, ministers etc., however with the increasing number of court cases and simply stories being shared by the former slaves, the brutalities of slavery could no longer be ignored.[45]

The 1780s were truly the time in which attention was raised to the black poor in England and in respect to that, to the situation on the plantations. Ironically enough, this action happened when the transatlantic trade reached its peak and the British were leading all the way. One of the landmark events in the abolition movement took place in 1789, when William Wilberforce moved for twelve antislavery trade resolutions in the House of Commons. Wilberforce objected to the slave trade on the basis of British national guilt, that was the moral centre of his parliamentary speech:

> The motion he meant to offer, was perfectly reconcilable to political expediency, and at the same time national humanity. It was by no means a party question, nor would it, he hoped, be so considered; […] He came not forward to accuse the West India planter; he came not forward to accuse the Liverpool Merchants; he came forward to accuse no one; he came forward to confess himself guilty, for the purpose of shewing to the House, that if guilt any where existed, which ought to be remedied, they were all of the participators in it.[46]

With the help of Quakers, General Baptists, North American Settlers and several supportive individuals, the Abolition Committee publicised its goals in 1787. Officially known as the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the African Slave Trade*, the organisation was established in 1787, their first meeting was on 22 May in a printers and bookshop in London. Most of the 12 members were in fact Quakers.[47] Ever since the Quakers came to existence in Britain in the early eighteenth century, they gave the abolitionists an immediate national network. For example, when abolitionists travelled across the country to make

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[44] James Walwin, *England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776 – 1838*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1986), 21.
[45] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain, 1700 – 2000*, 12.
[46] Quoted in *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 18.
[47] The founding members who were Quakers were John Barton, William Dillwyn, George Harrison, Samuel Hoare Jr, Joseph Hooper, John Lloyd, Joseph Woods Sr, James Phillips, and Richard Phillips. The other three co-founders were Anglican: Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharp and Philips Sansom.

speeches and further the cause, they could more easily find local sympathisers who arranged their accommodation, organised meetings and informed the public. Simultaneously, the evangelical Protestant sects, particularly Methodists and Baptists, began enlisting black congregants and facilitating their literary production, many examples of which are contained in Vincent Carretta's collection, *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the Eighteenth Century.*[48] The mission of the *Society for Effecting the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* was to inform the public of the immoral acts committed in the act of slavery, to bring out a new law to abolish the slave trade. Hundreds of letters which described the Committee's history had been distributed along with thousands of copies of an abridged version of Thomas Clarkson's *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade*. This book provides detail of the abolition campaign and is an important record of the movement, even though the tone of the book is slightly self-congratulatory in the opinion of modern theorists and historians.[49]

Clarkson applied two major arguments in his abolitionist attempts, the first of which was that Africans in their own country "exercise the same arts, as the ancestors of those very Europeans, who boast their great superiority, are described to have done in the same uncultivated state."[50] Although we can see a certain cultural hierarchy in his statement, he stresses the linguistic abilities of Africans, arguing that their songs "afford us a high proof of their poetical powers, as the works of the most acknowledged poets."[51] Clarkson regarded certain aspects of the African manufacturing arts as surpassing those currently used in Europe and he believed that the African cultures were evolving.

His second major argument was concerning race and its relation to colour. He attacked at length the argument that Africans suffered the curse of Ham and Canaa by showing that the descendants of Ham were not known by their colour and that this colour could not be used to distinguish them. Clarkson pointed out that the descendants of Cush, however, were "of the colour" and yet no such curse was placed upon them. Clarkson's explanation of difference accepts the synthesis of Christian and Enlightenment reasoning. Either the Deity introduced and created such variation or it springs from climatic causes. In both cases differences in colour must exist for human convenience and not as a sign of moral difference. Adopting contemporary notions of race, Clarkson argues against the polygenist hypothesis of those,

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[48] *The Abolition of Slavery: From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schaelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848,* 72.
[49] *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery*, 149.
[50] Quoted in Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson, eds. *Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005) 45.
[51] Quoted in. *Romanticism and Colonialism: RAces, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800,* 45.

such as Long, who posit the existence of separate species by pointing to the fertility of the offspring of black and white.[52]

Eventually, the topic of civil rights led to campaign for abolition and after a long fight led by William Wilberforce, a member of the House of Commons as an independent, Parliament prohibited slave trade by passing the Slave Trade Act in 1807 which was enforced by the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron. Britain also used its influence to persuade other countries around the world to abolish the slave trade and sign a treatise to allow the Royal Navy to interdict their ships. Wilberforce's conversion to Evangelical Christianity in 1784 played a key role in interesting him in this social reform. It also introduces us to the religious involvement in the abolitionist movement.

Slavery was abolished throughout the British Empire in 1833 by the Slavery Abolition Act. It was in 2006 when the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair expressed his deep sorrow over the slave trade, which he describes as "profoundly shameful" and indicated that the history of slavery is still deep in the British psyche.

Even though it was already established that the beginning of slavery in Europe was not racially motivated and the reasons for the slave trade were mostly economic, the topic of race cannot be completely omitted when discussing slavery and its abolition. In an essay *"Candid Reflections": The Idea of Race in the Debate over the Slave Trade and Slavery in the Late Eighteenth and Early nineteenth Century* Peter Kitson states that:

> Historians of race and slavery have noted that there is congruence between the development of a systematised sense of human difference in the natural sciences and the period of the most sustained debate about the validity and morality of the Atlantic slave trade.[53]

George Mosse went as far as declaring eighteenth century Europe as "the cradle of modern racism."[54] Kitson also uses theory by Roxann Wheeler who drew attention to the fact that "the anti-slave trade position relied more heavily on appeals to racial similarity than slavery advocates relied on appeals to racial difference."[55] As a matter of fact, several historians, according to Kitson at least, believe that the primary arguments for the slave trade and slavery were economic, not racial. Although one cannot deny or ignore the racial motifs that accompanied the trade. In respect to this paradox and anomaly, historians of slavery have accepted and accounted for the presence and importance of racial ideas in the debate about

[52] *Romanticism and Colonialism: RAces, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800,* 46 – 47.
[53] *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 11.
[54] Quoted in *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 11.
[55] Quoted in *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 11.

slavery and the slave trade and they have also began a discussion on the nature of the relationship between capitalism and the development of racial and racist ideologies.[56]

Such theories were often combined and founded upon religion. Both Catholics and Protestants were to find in the Bible and in traditions of biblical interpretation ideas which to them justified enslavement; ideas which could reassure the slaveholders or traders that they were pious and in the right. *Genesis* dramatically asserts the common descent of humanity from Adam and Eve, which is undeniable. But the universalist implications of this belief were undermined when non-European people were blamed for having rejected the principles of their forefathers. In *Genesis*, there is a story in which Noah, the primordial so called good man, condemns one of his grandchildren to slavery. After the Flood, Noah fell asleep after drinking wine. Ham saw his father naked and mocked him. He invited his two brothers. Shem and Japheth, to join him, but they refused. When Noah woke up and discovered what has happened, he cursed Ham and his descendents to have black skins. Noah's son Ham committed an offence against his father's manhood and according to patriarchal logic, was to be punished by the servile degradation, to forever be servant of his brothers.[57] Each of Noah's sons was then assigned a continent of the world: Shem got Asia, Japheth got Europe and Ham got Africa and this was used as an argument or justification for why inhabitants of Africa have been cursed to eternal servitude and slavery.

Latin Christians often connected the colour black with the Devil, sin and sexuality, and they subscribed to the notion that the heat of the tropics degraded the inhabitants to be a metaphor of these qualities and therefore, they were to be punished. Subsequently, stereotypes about the blacks were established and they were employed to depict them as dangerous if not under control, wayward, childlike even, irrational, and unholy and so forth. When the Spanish and the Portuguese began to make a stronger link between slavery and black Africans, they felt that it could be explained by reference to *Genesis*.[58] Upon close examination, we see that such a reading is an example of people reading into the past what they wish to find there. It also has to be taken into consideration, that in the mediaeval world, the Bible was available only to a selected number of people and even in later centuries, interpretations of the Bible were supplied by the Church and were taken for granted at times by the public.

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[56] *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 12.

[57] Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From Baroque to the Modern, 1492 – 1800* (London: Verso, 1997), 64 – 65.
John P. Jackson, Jr., and Nadine M. Weidman, *Race, Racism, And Science: Social Impact and Interaction* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc, 2004), 4.

[58] *The Making of New World Slavery: From Baroque to the Modern, 1492 – 1800*, 70 – 71.

Most generally speaking, proponents of notions of racial inferiority seldom supported the slave trade; abolition included those supportive of human equality. Both, however, were clearly infiltrated by racial thinking. One central question was the debate whether or not humanity was one species with a common origin or not. Theorists of human difference in the period generally had two opposing views. The first was that humanity was one family, and that variety occurred from an originary race. This is the so called monogenist hypothesis. They believed that the process of variety occurred through environmental and climatic pressure and was the result of "degeneration" in which races or varieties degenerated from an originary, European ancestor. Monogenists, nevertheless, dispensed with the principle of racial hierarchy itself.[59] If they held the belief that the European race was the original, the primary one, the one from which others degenerated; they implied a clear racial hierarchy. The alternative theory offered a theory of human difference, of separate origins or creations, which was known as the polygenist hypothesis.[60]

Combination of this theory with the mediaeval reading of Noah's curse resulted in the new form of slavery that arose in the sixteenth century to generate wealth. Europeans systematically enslaved African people. The so called Black Atlantic was established by people of one continent, Europe, taking people from another continent, Africa, and placing them in a third continent, the Americas, to serve the first continent.[61] Despite the economic justifications of slavery, by making Africa the chief source of labour, the system became racial and consequently, in the New World blackness and slavery became interchangeable. To be black was to be a slave and to be a slave was to be black. Race came to mean ever-growing large groups of people and even though initially, the English recognised different African nationalities and different nationalities among the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas, over time, these distinctions between ethnicities of different peoples were erased and they began seeing race in the terms of white, black, yellow and red.

The sixteenth and seventeenth century English (and other European settlers in the Americas) still believed that the Bible explained many things about the natural world and therefore, when it came to explaining the differences between Europeans and Africans, scholars felt that their explanations had to be consistent with monogenetic interpretations of the Bible. They combined their readings with theories of organic growth as taught by natural

[59] *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 12 – 13.
[60] *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition, Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838*, 13.
[61] *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 7.

philosophy.[62] According to natural philosophy, people had different skin colour and physical appearance because they originated in different climates. A connection was made between the qualities of an organism based on which climate they were appropriate for. This had an implication: travel to and residence in a different climate and the form of the organism would change. When the colonisation of the New World began, it was not clear whether Europeans could survive in the strange new hot climate. People came to the conclusion, that if they resided in the Americas, their children would soon come to resemble the American Indian, natural philosophy did not allow the English to continue to look as they did once they would relocate. In other words, natural philosophy acted as a barrier to the development of racial ideology.[63] The notion that if people resident elsewhere they would eventually come to resemble the indigenous people is incorrect, of course.

These changes in Western Europe did not cause racism as such; however, they provided the ground on which racism grew. These were the seeds of racism: slavery and colonialism, high level of brutality and exploitation and the racial line. Racism emerged with the brutal and dehumanising treatment of people of colour and it emerged with the African slave trade.[64] We however have to differentiate between the brutalities of slavery and racism of the time, for it is not merely interchangeable.

The eighteenth century was a time in which science began to develop a systematic taxonomy of human diversity and it also was a time in which racism began to really take form. Prior to the eighteenth century, humans were generally sorted into 3 broad groups: white Europeans, brown Asians and black Africans, as was already discussed. All were regarded as human beings descended from the original human pair placed in the Garden of Eden. White Europeans considered themselves to be superior and the other racial groups were regarded as uncivilised, barbarian and savage. They were regarded as such for their non-European way of living, political and social system and religion.[65]

It was the time after 1700 that racial categorisation began to truly develop, with enunciation by people like Carolus Lenneaus, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach or Georges Buffon. Their theories differed in several aspects, one feature that they all had in common was their linkage of particular physical characteristics with allegedly corresponding traits of intellect, mentality and/or character. Human diversity was no longer solely based on

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[62] *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction*, 7- 8.
[63] *Race, Racism, and Science: Social Impact and Interaction,* 9-10.
[64] Carter A. Wilson*, Racism: From Slavery to Advanced Capitalism* (London: SAGE Publications, Inc. 1996), 46.
[65] Berel Land, ed. *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice* (Maryland: Rowman&Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), 28.

physical differences, but on what these differences conveyed and the inner attributes linked to these differences. In other words, to correctly understand outer features was to correctly read what inner qualities were linked to such features. The notion of race, then, was never founded on the supposition that physical difference is significant in its own right. Rather, physical difference was understood in the terms of difference with meaning, difference that signified the inner nature of the person.[66] Such a theoretical notion led to slavers and defenders of slavery being able to assign qualities to the African blacks and justify their actions in terms of science in the eyes of the public.

During the late nineteenth century and the period of New Imperialism, that is, after the age of slavery, as a means to justify colonial expansion and especially political, economic and cultural domination, there arose a specific type of racism, the so called *scientific racism*. Generally, scientific racism is defined as use of scientific techniques and hypotheses to either support or justify (or both) the belief in racism, racial superiority and inferiority and the practices of classifying individuals into discrete races, such as slavery or White European imperialism. For the intents and purposes of this thesis, the predecessor of scientific racism that needs to be mentioned is Georges Cuvier, who was a French naturalist and zoologists; he was influenced by scientific polygenism. Cuvier linked race with hierarchies of inferiority and superiority, he believed that there were three distinct types of races – the Caucasian (meaning white race), Mongolian (yellow) and the Ethiopian (black). Each one of these was rated for the beauty or ugliness of the skull and the quality of their respective civilisations.[67] He regarded Caucasians to be "the white race, with oval face, straight hair and nose, to which civilised people of Europe belong and which appear to us the most beautiful of all, is also superior to others by its genius, courage and activity."[68] Cuvier believed that Adam and Eve were Caucasian and hence the original race of mankind, the other two races arose by survivors´ escaping in different directions after a major catastrophe hit the Earth 5000 years ago. In his theory, the survivors lived in a complete isolation from one another and therefore developed separately. Cuvier described the Negro race as "marked by black complexion, crisped or woolly hair, compressed cranium and a flat nose. The projection of the lower parts of the face, and the thick lips, evidently approximate it to the monkey tribe: the hordes of which it consists have always remained in the most

[66] *Race and Racism in Theory and Practice*, 29.
[67] Ian Law, *Racism and Ethnicity: Global Debates, Dilemmas, Directions* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 29.
[68] Georges Cuvier, *Tableau elementaire de l´hisotrie anturelle des animaux* (Paris, 1798), 71.

complete state of barbarism."[69] In other words, Cuvier presented a description of a world where three major races developed separately, resulting in hierarchy in culture and mental abilities produced by natural physical characteristics, therefore for Cuvier it was clear why the Negroes were "sunken in slavery and the pleasures of the senses."[70] As we can see, Cuvier believed that Africans were predestined or presupposed for slavery and his notion of the supremacy of the white race legitimised the treatment of Africans during slavery and the slave trade.

[69] Georges Cuvier, *The Animal Kingdom: Arranged in Conformity with its Organisation*, Translated from the French by H.M.Murtrie, 50.
[70] Quoted in *Racism and Ethnicity: Global Debates, Dilemmas, Directions*, 31.

3. The Literary Response to the Abolitionist Movement

From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century British society was engaged in the debate about slavery, slave trade and the subsequent abolition. Slavery was the most profitable enterprise known to British commerce at the time. However, as profitable as it was, critics and thinkers had questioned its morality as well as its legality. Slavery was something of a paradox in the eighteenth century British society and its Enlightenment philosophy, it was a profitable business with a deeply problematic moral status; it was not easily combined with notions of British liberty or Christianity.[71] The debates about slavery and abolition were radical and the essays, pamphlets and other abolitionist writing had to establish a new discourse that would not jeopardise the cause. The discourse of the texts is well intended, however, slightly ambivalent as shall be examined.

The Enlightenment discourse undeniably must have influenced the abolitionist writings. The discourse combined with the Enlightenment ideals fancied itself as an innovator of freedom, democracy and liberty. The irony of such ideals is the fact that Britain's economic prosperity was largely based on an institution with principles that deny such ideals.[72] In other words, the beginning of the ambivalence of the abolitionist discourse can be found in the problem of the Enlightenment discourse and ideology.

The Enlightenment employed a discourse of progress, of homogeneity, however, as Junker Carsten discusses in his paper "Writing Anti-Slavery: Abolition as Boundary Object in Transatlantic Enlightenment," this articulation of a hegemonic regime was based on knowledge from a particular location, with a particular set of tropes and metaphors, so even though the discourse advocates freedom, progress and liberty, it can also be identified as guilty of pursuing particular and exclusionary interests. Furthermore, we have to take into consideration the fact that the constellation of power and knowledge produced by the Enlightenment was mainly styled by white male authors. Therefore, it establishes a notion that a subject can only imagine itself being free, equal and independent as a white man.

In respect to these qualities, the Enlightenment discourse came to imagine and therefore constitute black and indigenous people in general, as well as white women, as *the other*, based on anthropological claims of alterity and, as legitimising grounds for enslavement and colonising practises, on Christian paternalisms and the emergence of scientific racism in the

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[71] Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis and Sara Salih, eds. *Discourse of Slavery and Abolitions*, *Britain and its Colonies, 1760 – 1838* (London: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd,2004), 14.
[72] Junker Carsten, "Writing Anti-Slavery: Abolition as Boundary Object in Transatlantic Enlightenment," (University of Bremen, 2013), 34 – 35.

wake of the eighteenth century. In combination with the notion of the civilised mind, a differential notion of an uncivilised body, meaning a body which was reduced to what could be called subhumanity and was imagined outside the bounds of subjectivity.[73]

The white supremacy and male supremacy of the Enlightenment discourse led to slavery being used as trope, it served white men as an anachronism to concepts such as freedom and self-possession, concepts that became meaningful only in relation to feeling “unfreedom.” The metaphor of slavery was often used in novels written by female authors who used it to claim that the feeling of enslavement they felt because of their gender was similar to what slaves in the West Indies experienced. Such metaphorisation, though, distracted from literal practices of slavery, it became an abstract term of a situation that was already very far away from the general public, therefore, the topic and illusion than did not seem as an issue for most. On the other hand, as a trope, the threat of slavery made possible the establishment of an ideology of freedom for all. However, it became questionable whose freedom was being negotiated for. The concept of freedom as self-possession became thinkable for white men in the context of colonisation and it became closely connected with investments in the enslavement and commodification of Africans. If we connect this with the earlier notions of hegemonic order of progress, those identified as “the other” were denied the recognition of their voices. [74] Therefore, until the publications of slave narratives, these people were spoken for, they were assigned voices and opinions by white men who were speaking for them and even though their intentions were admirable, it is questionable whether the discourse of their works truly resembles the nature of the slaves or whether they too were partly responsible for the incorrect representation and in fact employed a discourse of alterity. In other words, blacks and women were being represented by the mainstream discourse, their experiences were recorded by people who did not have direct access to them and they were being written into the discourse of the time.

What greatly empowered the abolition movement and also enabled texts to be available to wider audiences was the invention of print and furthermore, newspapers began to have a significant impact after 1750; not only in the possibility of court cases and events being reported on properly, but also in the growth of the provincial book trade. Print enabled travellers to share their stories; however, it also introduced entirely new groups of readers and writers, who were kept on the margins of British society; those who never gained classical education or those who did not have social status. The power of words and print in

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[73] “Writing Anti-Slavery: Abolition as Boundary Object in Transatlantic Enlightenment,” 36.
[74] “Writing Anti-Slavery: Abolition as Boundary Object in Transatlantic Enlightenment,” 37 – 38.

the abolitionist cause is undeniable. The most prominent abolitionists, notably Thomas Clarkson and William Wilberforce, were great publicists, for themselves as well as their campaigns and throughout their public life. They understood the power of the written word.[75]

One of the earliest appearances of the topic of slavery in the British press, long before Wilberforce or Clarkson, appeared in *The Spectator* in 1711 with the story of *Inkle and Yarico*.[76] Inkle is an English merchant who shipwrecked in America and who is saved from death by an Indian princess, who takes him to her secret cave. He promises her that if he survives, he will take her back to England with him. One day, an English ship bound for Barbados appears and the two leave. By the time Inkle reaches the Caribbean, he has thought over his promises to Yarico who is pregnant. Upon arriving in Barbados, he sells both her and the child into bondage. The frequent requisitions of the story of Inkle and Yarico illustrate the uneasiness of the English public about the moral impact of colonial culture on the home country and draw the sympathies of middle-class readership encouraged by *The Spectator* and other popular publications to think that an emotional response to suffering, not aristocratic birth is the measure of true nobility.[77]

The literary response in a way mirrored the historical evolution of the abolitionist movement, as current events served as inspiration. The role of poetry was acknowledged by Thomas Clarkson when he composed the first chronicle of British abolitionism in which he emphasises the role played by poets as “coadjutors” in the campaign to turn national sentiment against human commerce.[78] For example, as we established through the historical background, one of the first and most prominent cases that fuelled the abolitionist cause was the Somerset case in 1772. In 1773, Thomas Day enjoyed an overnight success with his poem “The Dying Negro,” the poem thrived on the enormous publicity that the Somerset case achieved. The poem depicts a man who killed himself rather than facing the return to West Indian slavery. In the poem, Day warned the public about the lack of reciprocation that slaves face: “his avenging rage/ No tears can soften, and no blood assuage.”[79] As Moira Fergusson says, Day underscored the generally ignored limitations of Lord Mansfield’s decision and its negligible effect on slave owners by versifying a true published report in

[75] *The Abolition of Slavery: From Léger Félicité Sonthonax to Victor Schaelcher, 1793, 1794, 1848*, 71.
J.R. Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade, 1787 - 1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 11.
[76] *Black British Writing*, 13.
[77] *Black British Writing*, 13.
[78] Stephen Ahern, ed. *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2013), 47.
[79] Thomas Day, *The Dying Negro, a Poem* (London: 1775), 23.

1773 about an escaped black slave in Britain.[80] In "The Advertisement" to the poem, Day states: "Having agreed to marry a white woman, his fellow servant […] and having produced himself to be baptised; he was detected and taken."[81] What Day attempts to do in his poem is plead with the public in order for them to justly listen to the tragic hero by recording the slave's grief over the unjust conditions he endured:

> O God of Nature! Art thou call´d in vain!
> Did´st thou for this sustain a mortal wound,
> While Heav´n, and Earth, and Hell, jung trembling
>   Round?
> That these vile fetter might my body bind,
> And agony like this distract my mind?[82]

Even with this poem that is clearly inspired by the struggles of slaves being forced to return to the West Indies, the portrait of slaves as victims is slightly worrying, for Day depicts the slave in such emotional terms and state of mind, the poem might not serve the abolitionist cause as well as the poet imagines it too. That is to say that by casting black people as victims, white people had difficulty of imagining them in other roles other than passive victims or revenge seekers. Day's poetry is of course influenced by the discourse of sensibility, as it was defined in the introduction, he purposefully depict the blacks as weak and passive as to appeal to the tastes of the white reading public. Abolitionists directed sensibility and empathy towards the weak, the poor and children. Slaves were identified as recipients of charity, as those who suffer and therefore Day and other poets directed their poems at the rich, powerful and white men, who through empathy and acts of benevolence are meant to remedy the situation.

The Mansfield decision inspired more poets than Thomas Day, for it was a monumental step in the abolitionist movement. One of the other poets inspired by the case was William Cowper, namely his poem "The Task," which shall be analysed later. The themes of slavery and its abolition found their way into Cowper's earlier writing, such as the poem "Charity" from 1782 and the themes were frequent in his work until his last work "To William Wilberforce, Esq." (1792). Despite the fact that Cowper is considered one of the main

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[80] Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834*, (New York: Routledge, 2014) 150.
[81] *The Dying Negro, A Poem*, iii.
[82] *The Dying Negro*, *A Poem*, 21.

abolitionist poets, initially he was unsure whether the topic of slavery would suit his poetic ambitions, whether he could make poetry out of slavery at all:

> The more I have consider´d it [the slave trade] the more I have convinced myself that it is not a promising theme for verse. General censure on the iniquity of the practise will avail nothing, the world has been overwhelm´d with such remarks already, and to particularise all the horrors of it were an employment for the mind both of the poet and his readers of which they would necessarily soon grow weary. For my own part I cannot contemplate the subject very nearly without a degree of abhorrence that affects my spirits and sinks them below the pitch requisite for success in verse.[83]

The difficulties described in the letter are multi-fold; beginning with the difficulty of describing and portraying the slave trade and struggles of slavery accordingly; whether the public will show interest in such a poetry, or whether they will look away from the poetry in order to protect themselves form the truth and cruelty of the practice. He addressed the difficulty again in another letter, where he made his feelings about the practice clear; however, he yet again addressed the complexity of the poetic struggle to address such an issue:

> Slavery and especially Negro Slavery, because the cruellest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme; but… I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I enter´d on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror on which my imagination can dwell not without some complaisance, but then they are such scenes as God not man produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb there is such meanness in the design and cruelty in the execution that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it.[84]

Cowper's struggle also indicates difficulty of proper discourse, viewpoint and correct manner in which to address the issues of slavery and immorality of the slave trade. His initial discouragement and artistic struggle can be identified as reasons for why the tone of his earlier poems is different from other abolitionist poetry, which strongly relied on sentimentalism and

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[83] James King and Charles Ryscamp, eds. *The Letters and Prose Writing of William Cowper* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 172.

[84] *The Letters and Prose Writing of William Cowper*, 177 – 8.

the poets of abolition took it upon themselves to describe the inner struggles of slaves, even though they could very hardly identify with them. Cowper's approach is different, he used his initial poetic struggle as an inspiration and addressed the immorality he found Britain guilty of in his poems.

Cowper's poem “Charity” addresses slavery and its approach is highly religious and philosophical, it stands out when compared to poems such as “The Dying Negro” for it is not spoken from the point of view of a slave, it is a philosophical thought and debate about the logicality of slavery and slave trade and the actual impossibility of any arguments for such a practice, his poems are of highly meditative nature, understandably so since his apprehension and depression about slavery were clearly addressed in his letters. There is a strong moral vision that governs Cowper’s analysis and counterarguments about the supposed economic rightness to such an action:

> Again—the band of commerce was design’d
> To associate all the branches of mankind;
> And if a boundless plenty be the robe,
> Trade is the golden girdle of the globe. [85]

He also addresses the parasite behaviour of the British society:

> Where Commerce has enrich’d the busy coast;
> He catches all improvements in his flight,
> Spreads foreign wonders in his country’s sight,
> Imports what others have invented well,
> And stirs his own to match them, or excel.[86]

In this poem, Cowper is concerned with developing an account of the divine social plan for the human race informed by the Enlightenment natural rights theory.[87] In the poem we learn that “He made at first, though free and unconfin´d, / One man the common father of the kind,” but all tribes “Diff′ring in language, manners, or in face, / Might feel themselves allied to all the race.”[88] Cowper then copies history and turns to a topical account of the voyages of Captain James Cook to the Pacific, he constructs Cook as a rather heroic inheritor of the Adamic legacy who respected “savage” lives that he encountered:

> Wherever he found man, to nature true,
> The rights of man were sacred in his view:

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[85] William Cowper, *Charity* (London: Richard Cruttwell, 1782), lines 83 – 86.
[86] *Charity*, lines 115 – 118.
[87] *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* 132.
[88] William Cowper, *Charity*, lines 17 – 18, 21 – 22.

He sooth'd with gifts and greeted with a smile

The simple native of the new-found isle,

He spurn'd the wretch that slighted or withstood

The tender argument of kindred blood,

Nor would endure that any should controul

His free-born brethren of the southern pole.[89]

It is somewhat questionable whether Cook was the most appropriate example of a white noble hero for Cowper to pick, because he too is guilty of their subjugation in his treatment of the native folk as children. He gives the natives gifts in order to soothe them, just like little kids; in a metaphorical sense Cook becomes a father figure who protects his children. Therefore, Cowper's debate about rights and equality are coloured by strong paternalism, which is typical for sentimental and especially abolitionist discourse, in which women were not necessarily considered to be part of the abolitionist discourse either.

I presume it must have been quite a novelty to link the notion of “rights of man” only and explicitly with the issue of slavery. In this passage he also performs a rhetorical sleight of hand by depicting such human bondage as the violation of “kindred blood,” thereby recording social ties as a metaphor for the human family, which in his opinion is the expression of divine order.[90] He summons those caught in the snare of the institution of slavery in a later passage:

But slav'ry!—virtue dreads it as her grave,

Patience itself is meanness in a slave:

Or if the will and sovereignty of God

Bid suffer it awhile, and kiss the rod,

Wait for the dawning of a brighter day,

And snap the chain the moment when you may.

Nature imprints upon whate'er we see

That has a heart and life in it, be free;

The beasts are chartered—neither age nor force

Can quell the love of freedom in a horse[91]

[89] *Charity*, lines 27 – 34.
[90] *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* 132.
[91] *Charity*, lines 163 – 172.

Overall, in "Charity" Cowper establishes that in the state of nature, all God's creatures that have "a heart," meaning are capable of love, compassion and understanding, share a yearning for freedom.

In "The Task" Cowper comments on the bitter irony that while slavery is not allowed in Britain, the same freedom is not spread to the colonies, again commenting on the fact that for a long period of time British public were blind to the fact, because slavery was an aspect of the monarchy that was very far away. In the poem, Cowper writes:

> We have no slaves at home—then why abroad?
> And they themselves, once ferried o'er the wave
> That parts us, are emancipate and loosed.
> Slaves cannot breathe in England; if their lungs
> Receive our air, that moment they are free,
> They touch our country and their shackles fall.
> That's noble, and bespeaks a nation proud
> And jealous of the blessing. Spread it then,
> And let it circulate through every vein
> Of all your empire; that where Britain's power
> Is felt, mankind may feel her mercy too.[92]

It is quite paradoxical how Cowper juxtaposes his praising of Britain as a place of pride and nobility with its involvement in the horrific institution of slavery.

Cowper's efforts were recognised by Thomas Clarkson as well, he highly appreciated Cowper's influence on the public through "The Task" as well as his other popular antislavery ballads from 1788. Clarkson rendered Cowper "The last of the necessary forerunners and coadjutors of this class, who I am to mention, was out much admired poet Cowper; and a great coadjutor he was, when we consider what value was put upon his sentiments, and the extraordinary circulation of his works."[93] Cowper fancied himself to be the frontrunner of the poets involved in the abolitionist cause. He wrote to his cousin Harriot Cowper, Lady Hesketh, in reference to his long poem from 1782 poem "Charity,"

> It occurred to me likewise that I have already borne my testimony in favour of our Black Brethren, and that I was one of the earliest, if not the first of those who

[92] William Cowper, *The Task, A Poem* (London: James Nisbet and Co, 1855), 49.
[93] Quoted in *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* 47.

> have in the present day, expressed their detestation of the diabolical traffic in question.[94]

Even though Cowper’s contribution cannot be ignored, this statement in a way ignores Day’s “The Dying Negro” and the contribution the said poem made to the genre as well as the cause. Cowper strongly believed in the power of the written word and in the power of poetry especially, he supposed that poetry had a faculty to change the heart even more than the preached word, as can been seen in the following passage from one of his letters:

> It is a noble thing to be a poet; it makes all the words so lively. I might have preached more sermons than ever Tillotson did, and better, and the world would have been still fast asleep; but a volume of verse is a fiddle that the universe in motion.[95]

Even though “Charity” and “The Task” have a rather meditative and philosophical tone, even Cowper did not shy away from sentimental sympathising with the victims of slavery in his later poems. Cowper's different approaches to abolitionist poetry led to a variety of perspectives – moral, theological, historical as well as emotional.[96] His later poems indicate even more the strong and keen sympathy he felt for the enslaved Africans which was based on a comparison between their suffering and also his own sense of spiritual desolation, his own guilt of being a member of a society that allows such a practice.

Both “Charity” and “The Task” are examples of Cowper's philosophical approach to the problem of slavery and to the immorality of the slave trade. His poems, though, greatly vary in style and approach and his abolitionist poetry is no exception. After several appeals of his friends, Cowper also completed several poems with very a different tone, his *Slave Ballads*. He completed perhaps six in all, five are existing to this day – “The Negro´s Complaint,” “Pity for the Poor Africans,” “Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce,” “The Morning Dream” and an untitled epigram. In Cowper's earlier letters it was evident that he was very apprehensive about incorporating the topic of slavery into his poetry and in the midst of his composition that is concerned with the theme, Cowper pronounced himself happy with only one of the six poems mentioned above, as he confessed in a letter to lady Hesketh:

> There is but one of the three with which I am myself satisfied, though I have hearth them all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own

[94] *The Letter and Prose Writing of William Cowper*, 103.

[95] William Halley, *The Life and Letters of William Cowper, New Edition, Complete in One* (London: Longman, Rees and Co., 1835), 280.

[96] Marcus Wood, ed., *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1794 – 1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 81.

composing that I can endure to read when they have been written a month, though at fist they seem to me to be all perfection. [97]

"The Negro´s Complaint" is the first of his *Slave Ballads* poems in which Cowper uses a different tone to prove the inhumanity of slavery. The biggest difference lies in the speaker's voice as this poem is told by a slave. As was stated earlier, the difficulty of such a strategy lies in the fact that in such case, black experience is being re-told by the white culture and the voices are appropriated to fit the discourse of the form set by the main culture. As literary critic Ulrich Paulla deems abolitionist poetry to expose the humanities of slavery, he believes that their argument relied on such rhetorical devices which did not necessarily question the discourse of rights and only made assumptions about the person as existing outside of power. He claims that, "William Cowper prompts the reader to consider slaves as equal,"[98] for Paulla the problem lies in the lack of the definition of who they were to be considered equal to.

"The Negro´s Complaint" was a singular success for Cowper among his slave ballads, which may be attributed to the specific musical setting Cowper chose for this poem, the form and diction are simple, approachable. Some critics see such use of tempo and style as a deliberate indication of the enslaved African victim not losing his innocence despite all the brutality he has been exposed to.[99] It is questionable whether that is possible, first of all, because the brutality slaves faced during the Middle Passage as well as on the plantations was and is unimaginable for the public, therefore to assume such an experience would have no impact on person's character and the way in which they see the world is unlikely and perhaps naïve. Second of all, it is difficult to judge, whether the public saw them as innocent creatures or as victims who were not capable of living on their own, a problem already addressed in connection to "The Dying Negro" by Day. In "The Negro´s Complaint" the target of blame for the perpetuation of slavery and the slave traders were the traders and masters. The slave questions the colonialist's hypocrisy in the poem without alienating the reader in the colonising nation:

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
Is there one who reigns on high?
Has he bid you buy and sell us,
Speaking from his throne the sky?
Ask him, if your knotted scourges,

[97] *The Letter and Prose Writing of William Cowper*, 189.
[98] Amar Wahab and Cecily Jones, eds., *Free at Last? Reflections on Freedom and the Abolition of the British Slave Trade* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 11.
[99] *Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800* , 26 – 27.

Matches, blood-extorting screws,

Are the means which duty urges
Agents of his will to use?[100]

Having gained the readers' compassion, he appealed to their religious conscience, Cowper's Negro is able to overturn their racist assumption of moral superiority:

Deem our nation brutes no longer
Till some reason ye shall find
Worthier of regard and stronger
Than the colour of our kind.
Slaves of gold, whose sordid dealings
Tarnish all your boasted pow'rs,
Prove that you have human feelings,
Ere you proudly question ours![101]

The Negro's complaint becomes an inquisition, the slave, first victim and then an interrogator. Cowper's attribution of powers of rational enquiry to the Negro is exceptional. Of course, Cowper's Negro is characterized in terms of the debate of the time. “Fleecy locks and black complexion/ Cannot forfeit nature's claim”[102] defensively concedes the point made by racists such as Edward Long that the African's physical features should be read as animalistic.

It is undeniable that Cowper had severe willingness to treat the issues of slavery rightly and accurately, and yet some modern critics feel that despite his intentions, his opinion of the role of poetry in the abolitionist movement was to a degree misled and his portrayals of the topic of slavery were not as acute as he might have imagined them to be.[103] Such a criticism is closely connected with the topic of ambivalence of the abolitionist discourse, the tropes, metaphors and themes used to describe the state of slavery were often well meant, blacks were often describes as “brethren” and yet we have to take into consideration that these poems are written by members of the white male public and qualities in the poems are being assigned to the slaves. Even Cowper’s logical arguments such as if slavery is forbidden in Britain, how can it be tolerated in the colonies, are sometimes lost in sentimental tone. His poem also put most of the blame on slavers outside of Britain, on traders and planters, as we saw in “The Task,” he was enraged by the existence of slavery, yet he seems somewhat blind to how much

[100] William Cowper, *Negro´s Complaint* (London: Order of Society, 1793), lines 25 – 31.
[101] *Negro´s Complaint*, lines 50 – 57.
[102] *Negro´s Complaint*, lines 13 – 14.
[103] *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* 129.

the slave trade and slavery are integrated in British economy. He omits how much Britain relies and thrives on the slave trade. He does briefly comment on the "advantages" that slavery brings to Britain, such as sugar and rum, in "Pity for the Africans," however he offers no resolution to the situation, as shows the following analysis.

Interestingly, Cowper was critical of poets over-sentimentalising slaves and slavery, he felt as if poets composed solely poetics of pity. He addresses this territory in "Pity for the Poor Africans," in which he critiques abolitionist poetry of the very sort he himself composed in his slave ballads.[104] In "Pity for the Africans" Cowper insinuates that responsibility for the slave trade is shared by all who benefit from it, including the consumers and customers who partake in the market economy that delivers rum and sugar to the British shores. The speaker of the poem is not innocent or speaking from a privileged position of someone who is not involved at all, he is a typical citizen, who is personally moved by accounts of the pains experienced by enslaved Africans provided by poems such as "The Negro's Complaint" and he acknowledges the injustice of slavery, but however he refuses to effect any change:

I own I am shock´d at this Traffic of Slaves,
And fear those who buy them, and sell them, are Kanves.
What I hear of their Hardships, their Tortures and Groans,
Is almost enough to draw Pity from Stones.[105]

The argument could easily be made that the speaker could be a slave owner who at the same time confesses a deep dismay at the treatment of slaves or he is someone who sells the products of slavery such as sugar. Regardless of how he is involved, he is part of the slave trade economical system so he has to learn to live with the pity and guilt he feels, the same way majority of the British public have, because everyone who is making prosperity or consuming goods form the West Indies is in a way involved in the slave trade:

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum;
For how could we do without Sugar and Rum?
Especially Sugar so needful we see;
What, give up our Desserts, our Coffee, and Tea?

Besides, if we do, the French, Dutch and Danes
Will heartily thank us, no Doubt, for our Pains:
If WE do not buy the poor Creatures THEY will,

[104] *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770 – 1830,* 138 – 139.
[105] William Cowper, *Pity for the Poor Africans* (London: Thomas Dicesy, 1788), lines 1 – 4.

And Tortures and Groans will be multiply´d still.[106]

The speaker is trying to justify his lack of involvement in the abolition despite his personal feelings of pity, however, what Cowper might not have considered is his as well as other poets´ involvement and also profiting on the topic of slavery. Yes, we have to take into consideration that for poets, there were not outlets other than poetry to convey their beliefs and further the abolitionist cause. Nevertheless, they too were then making profit and gained fame through the institution of slavery.

With that being said, not all of his poems were as meditative or as sentimental as "The Task" or as "The Negro´s Complaint." Cowper attempted a bold and dramatic approach in the poem "Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce" in which Cowper takes the step of speaking out ironically in the assumed voice of a slave captain. The poem itself is a description of white depravity and manufacture to possess an ironic freedom that not only enables, but actually demands, the most brutal and objectified descriptions of the black slave.[107] What Cowper provides us within this particular poem is the way in which the abolitionists preferred to see the slave trader seeing his slaves. The poem is extreme in its cruelty and vulgarity. Despite the agenda of portraying the slave traders as cruel and the blacks as victims, the question remains what perception of black slaves or black Africans the society got from this poem because the slaves are excluded and animalised in a sense, as if they had to be portrayed as absolutely harmless and in this poem, we get blacks as passive victims, there ready for the public's pity. What such a portrayal does though is making it difficult for the public to imagine the blacks as independent and providing for themselves. However, Cowper's range proved to be a great impact for the abolitionist cause. He attempts several angles and tries different approaches in order to portray the slave suffering as well as he could.

A poem by Hannah More called "Slavery: A Poem" is an undeniable part of the abolitionist cannon. She hurriedly wrote the poem in 1787, so that it coincided with the parliamentary debate, saying that "if it does not come out at the particular moment when the discussion comes on in parliament, it will not be worthy a straw."[108] A second edition called "The Black Slave Trade" appeared in 1816, it is two hundred and ninety four lines long and the poem incorporates motifs popularised in poems about slavery prior to its publishing: human bondage, split families, atrocities, un-Christian traders, the demeaning of Britain's "name,"

[106] *Pity for the Poor Africans*, lines 5 – 12.
[107] *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1794 – 1865*, 83.
[108] Quoted in *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery*, 150.

tributes to parliamentarians and it appeals to philanthropy.[109] In other words, the poem depicted the horrors of the Middle Passage, the intolerable conditions and it addressed the disease that Africans had to endure during the transportation from Africa to the West Indies and to the required disposal of corpses on almost daily basis, reacting to the tragedy of the *Zong*. In "Slavery: A Poem," More illustrates that not only the spiritual and psychological but also economic cost of Britain's involvement with the slave trade. She deeply relied on sentimentalism and often employed literary allusions.[110] More imagines the feelings of enslaved Africans and pleads Britain to abolish the trade. Noble as her attempts are at plea for Britain to abolish slavery and slave trade, the ambivalence of discourse is obvious in her poem as well as other abolitionist poetry. The feelings and thoughts described by More are what she envisions, what she presumes the public should hear. We have to take into consideration that the experience of the horrors of Middle Passage was simply unavailable to More. Yes, she spoke enthusiastically and passionately on behalf of the enslaved Africans, however, it seems as if she felt connected to them on the basis of the position of women in British society, she felt as if they were "enslaved" by their gender and shared a common ground, common battle to fight. She was not alone in such an attitude, as the time of abolition was also a time of struggle for gender equality and several female authors used the topic of slavery as a medium for articulating other power structures and relating the problem of slavery to female oppression and the struggle for political ascendency in eighteenth century England, they employed the notion of being enslaved as similar for both of the groups.[111] This notion was far fetched for mainly two reasons. Firstly, the position of women was very different from being a slave and therefore they could not really grasp the feelings and attitudes of slaves. Secondly, many of them depicted foreign lands, without considering the fact that they are speaking from the colonial position, from the privileged point of view.

The influence of sentimentalism is very much present in "Slavery: A Poem," however, the descriptions of a slave raid that More uses in the poem are almost uncomfortably vivid, she does not shy away from the horrors with descriptions such as "the burning village, and the blazing town," and "the shrieking babe, the agonizing wife," when she talks about generational gaps when parents and children are forced to separate, addressing the problem of certain discontinuity of the race, a theme not present in Day, Cowper or Blake. She feels empathy towards the children being torn away from their mothers, regardless of race, and used

[109] *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery*, 150.
[110] *Encyclopaedia of Antislavery and Abolition*, 480.
[111] Carl, Plasa and Betty J. Ring, *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison* (Routledge: London, 1994),xvi.

it as a metaphor for Africans being torn from their culture and home, from their mother country,

By felon hands, by one relentless stroke,
See the fond links of feeling Nature broke!
The fibres twisting round a parent´s heart,
Torn from their grasp, and bleeding as they part.[112]

More´s strategy was to depend on the ability of the white reader to identify with the suffering of Africans if they were likened to something imaginable for them. She attempted to indicate that both races shared the same needs and emotions, that the Blacks were their brethren, that they were equal in the eyes of God: "In every nature every climate the same, / In all, these feelings equal sway maintain."[113] Unfortunately, More´s belief in essential unity of human race was contradicted by her employment of the romantic concept of the noble savage.[114]

Similarly to Cowper, More addresses the bitter irony of Britain prying itself of being a pioneer of democracy and freedom, and yet the country was highly economically dependent upon enslaving Africans:

Shall Britain, where the soul of Freedom reigns
Forge chains for others she herself disdains?
Forbid it, Heaven! O let the nations know
The liberty she loves she will bestow;
Not to herself the glorious gift confin´d,
She spreads the blessing wide as humankind.[115]

Such statements can easily be read as a critique of British hypocrisy. Several critics also argue that patriotic language that More chose made the anti-slavery discourse very safe, with the slaves conveniently distanced from the British poor, whose miseries were ignored, abolitionist discourse relied strongly on moral superiority, patriotism was used as a strong argument to remedy the situation in the West Indies.[116] Even with the best of intensions, Moira Ferguson designates More´s attempt to reform society as a "decisive though atypical female

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[112] Hannah More, *Slavery: A Poem*, (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2010) lines 107 – 110.
[113] *Slavery: A Poem*, lines 118 – 19.
[114] *Noble Savage* – an idealised concept of uncivilised man, who symbolizes the innate goodness of one not exposed to the corrupting influences of civilisation. The glorification of the noble savage is a dominant theme in the Romantic writing of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.
"Noble Savage," *Encyclopaedia Britannica. Encyclopaedia Britannica Online* (Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 2015) 10 July 2015. < http://www.britannica.com/art/noble-savage>
[115] *Slavery: A Poem,* lines 251 – 56.
[116] Anne Stott, *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 94.

intervention," but she also reads the text as emanating from an authorised European position, and therefore casting slaves "into a mode of alterity."[117]

William Blake commented on the ugly and horrifying aspects of British life in poems such as "The Chimney Sweeper," in which he criticised child labour. It is therefore no surprise that he commented on the issue of slavery and got involved in the abolitionist movement. He became friends with John Stedman and despite Stedman's personal feelings about the abolition of slavery, as shall be examined in the following chapter, Blake created several engravings for Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America; From the Year 1772, to 1777*. He also wrote a poem that refigures Stedman and the engravings are used to expose Stedman's collusive and duplicitous relation to colonialism.[118] Blake's own position in the abolitionist and sentimental discourse is complex as well because he often employs irony at the expense of his readers.

Before the engravings Blake created for John Stedman's *Narrative* he wrote a poem entitled "The Little Black Boy" which was included in his *Song of Innocence* in 1789. In the poem Blake questions the conventions of the time and contrasts them with basic Christian ideals. Blake focuses the poem on a little black child and his struggle with the Christian doctrine which teaches him that supposedly skin colour is irrelevant. The poem also depicts the boy's relationship with the white world and the contrast between dark and light, between the boys physical (black) and spiritual (white) identities, "And I am black, but O! my soul is white."[119]

While the poem is clearly about slavery and has an anti-slavery agenda, its implications and imagery are not as clearly identifiable and defined. Even with obvious focus on racial identity, S. Forster Damon in 1924 stated that "The Little Black Boy" in fact "reflects the racist assumptions underlying much antislavery writing."[120] The early work concludes with the notion that Blake does not believe in equality. The scene at the end of the poem reflects a rather negative image of Africans, because the black boy is still submissive to the white child, no matter the colour of his soul. For Damon, Blake's poem is a typical example of what some antislavery literature does, which is attacking slavery whilst being condescending at the

[117] Patricia Demers, *The World of Hannah More* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 58.
[118] Michael Davis, *William Blake: A New Kind of Man* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 51 – 52.
[119] William Blake, *Poems of William Blake*, (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2014), 11.
[120] S. Forster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols,* (Whitefish: Literary Licensing, 2013) 233.

same time.[121] Possibly, Blake attacks slavery as an institution which he sees unfit to be condoned by a country such as Britain and feels that the British public should be inclined to refuse it. However, this does not mean that cultural arguments of racial inferiority and superiority are overthrown. Other critics argue that Damon's reading omits Blake's usage of irony in the poem. David Simpson suggests that the poem is an ironic exposure of the effects of Christianity on slaves, he question the Christian antislavery tradition and furthermore it invites the reader's own morality into question.[122]

Nicholas Marsh's understanding of Blake's social and political thinking leads to a better understanding of this poem. The poem is a critique of the "established Church," says Marsh, for holding a "corrupt and unjust status quo."[123] In other words, Blake exposes the system that the Church has established, of the mind and the body being separate and therefore, Blake would not agree with oppression on the basis of skin colour. The slave trade and slavery were a social obscenity for a society that projected sentiment and moral superiority. Marsh furthers his argument by saying that "by setting the soul against the body, the teaching of the Church was responsible for creating painful division within people."[124]

One of the possible explanations for the difficulty of clearly defining and establishing Blake's poem is that his approach is different from the long narration of African protests made in more popular antislavery literature where the points of discussion appear more obvious. Moira Ferguson identified six main issues that appear and re-appear in the narrative bodies of antislavery literature: Africans being ambushed and taken from their homes; Africans crossing the Atlantic Ocean, also known as the Middle Passage; Africans being sold; torture devices and cruel treatment of Africans (to include relationships, sometimes sexual, between planters and slaves); influence of missionaries on Africans; and the encouragement of abolition.[125] However, Blake's poem captures the result of these six experiences usually addressed in antislavery literature. In other words, while other poems, novels etc. list the inhumanities of slavery and imply the effect, Black creates the effect and assumes that the readers are familiar with the components of the story. It is questionable whether such an assumption was in fact correct. Was the public familiar with what could be called the previous chapters of the slaves´ stories? As was already established, slavery was kept far away from general British public for as long as possible, the institution was a certain

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[121] *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, 233 – 4.
[122] David Simpson, "Teaching Ideology in Songs." *Approaches to Teaching Blake: Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Eds. Robert F. Gleckner and Mark L Greenberg (New York: MLAP, 1989) 51.
[123] Nicholas, Marsh, *William Blake: The Poems* (New York: Macmillan, 2001), 274.
[124] *William Blake: The Poems*, 240.
[125] *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670 – 1834*, 150.

ghost of the empire, such stories may not have been as easily accessible as Blake might have imagined. Though his approach is artistically innovative, it is unclear whether such a strategy was effective for the abolitionist movement; for the white readers were not able to identify with the struggle the young child suffers with in the poem.

As if William Blake's position in the abolitionist discourse was not complicated enough, he also joined the debate of female oppression and his work *Visions of the Daughter of Albion* from 1793 is often contrasted with Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. It has been argued that Blake elaborated Mary Wollstonecraft's questioning conflation of the issue of race and slavery in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).[126] Wollstonecraft, commenting on the racial and gender exclusions of 'Reason' had asked:

> Is sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subjected to prejudices that brutalize them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man? Is not this indirectly to deny woman reason?[127]

Blake elaborates on the psychology of the colonialist Theotormon's own mental oppression and on his oppression of both women and Africans in the person of Oothoon who is the victim of colonial and sexual violence. Erdman argued that Blake's Theotormon functioned as a critique of John Gabriel Stedman's *Narrative*.[128] Furthermore, Blake employs similar metaphor to the female authors of the time, in which they saw slaves and females as being oppressed in the same way. Blake sees the female body not only as "enslaving" for simple physical, social and biological reasons, but furthermore as a site of political conflict.[129] Combined with the engravings and *Visions* Blake illuminates the contradictions between the political situation in England and the ideology of the Enlightenment.

Through the above analysis of different poets and their works it has been established that despite their negative feelings towards the institution of slavery, their strong reliance on the sentimental discourse led to sustainable ambivalence in their works, they often contradicted their notions of freedom and equality by the imagery they employed and the traditional tropes and repeated rhetorical practice they were used to when writing poetry about the British life

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[126] *Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800*, 55.
[127] Mary Wollstonecraft, *The Vindications: The Rights of Men and the Rights of Woman* (New York: Broadview Press, 1997), 282.
[128] *Romanticism and Colonialism: Races, Places, Peoples, 1785 – 1800*, 56.
[129] *The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison*, xvi.

proved to be lead to paradoxical implications when applied to the life in the West Indies and their depictions of the institution of slavery or the experiences of slavery which they had no direct access to and therefore could not identify with.

4. Travel Narratives of Colonial Encounters

Poets, novelists and essayists based in Britain had no access of their own to the situation in the West Indies and to the horrors of the slave trade; therefore they needed to rely on accounts that described the situation from personal experience. Travel narratives of these colonial encounters were popular in the eighteenth century for they appealed to the public's interests in foreign lands and its people as well as they enabled the abolitionist debate to be informed and articulated through a different source other than a slave narrative and/or fiction, poetry etc.

4.1 James Ramsay and his *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies. Published in 1784.*

James Ramsay was a ship's surgeon. He was an Anglican priest and a prominent abolitionist. Having entered the Navy in 1757, Ramsay served as surgeon aboard the Arundel in the West Indies, under the command of Sir Charles Middleton. In November 1759, the Arundel intercepted a British slave ship, the *Swift* and, on boarding the vessel, Ramsay found over 100 slaves living in the most inhumane conditions. His biographer James Watt writes of the incident:

> On boarding her, Ramsay found over 100 slaves wallowing in blood and excreta, a scene of human degradation which remained for ever in his memory and so distracted his attention that, on returning to his ship, he fell and fractured his thigh bone. It was the more serious of two such accidents and he remained lame for life. With an end to his naval service in prospect, Ramsay sought ordination in the Anglican Church to enable him to work among slaves.[130]

Such was the scene of filth and degradation he witnessed, that this incident was to have a lasting effect on Ramsay and he decided that his career would have to follow a different path.

In July 1761 Ramsay left the navy to take holy orders. He was ordained into the Anglican Church in November 1761 by the Bishop of London. Having chosen to work amongst slaves in the Caribbean he travelled to the island of Saint Christopher (now Saint Kitts), where he was appointed to St. John's, Capisterre in 1762, and to Christ Church Nichola Town, the

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[130] James Watt, "James Ramsay, 1733 – 1789: Naval Surgeon, Naval Chaplain, and Morning Star of the Anti-Slavery Movement" *Mariner´s Mirror*, LXXXI (1995), 157.

following year.[131] Ramsay was appointed surgeon to several sugar plantations and was shocked by the way the slaves were treated by the overseers. Ramsay later recalled:

> At four o'clock in the morning the plantation bell rings to call the slaves into the field.... About nine o'clock they have half an hour for breakfast, which they take into the field. Again they fall to work... until eleven o'clock or noon; the bell rings and the slaves are dispersed in the neighbourhood to pick up natural grass and weeds for the horses and cattle (and to prepare and eat their own lunch)... At two o'clock, the bell summons them to deliver in their grass and to work in the fields... About half an hour before sunset they are again required to collect grass - about seven o'clock in the evening or later according to season - deliver grass as before. The slaves are then dismissed to return to their huts, picking up brushwood or dry cow dung to prepare supper and tomorrow's breakfast. They go to sleep at about midnight.[132]

Ramsay believed that the way to remedy the situation and for the slaves to be recognised as equals was by welcoming both black and white worshippers into his church, with the aim of converting the slaves to Christianity. Such a goal was not as easy nor as appreciated as Ramsay might have hoped, as Richard Reddie, the author of *Abolition! The Struggle to Abolish Slavery in the British Colonies* has pointed out:

> Ramsay's evangelical brand of Christianity brought him immediately into conflict with West Indian planters who were appalled that he insisted on racially integrating his religious services. He also carried out missionary activities among enslaved Africans, which brought him into further conflict with the white West Indian authorities. The planters were always suspicious of any social action amongst Africans and they quickly turned against Ramsay, accusing him of everything from seditious preaching to serial philandering.[133]

As well as pastoring the members of his church he practised medicine and surgery, providing a free service to the poor of the community. He strongly criticised the cruel treatment and punishment acted out to the slaves, and became more convinced of the need to improve their conditions. The punishments that slaves had to endure were possibly the harshest aspects of slavery that Ramsay had witnessed and ones he advocated the most against.

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[131] F.O. Shyllon, *James Ramsay: The Unknown Abolitionist* (London: Canongate, 1977), 3.

[132] James Ramsay, "Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies," *The Monthly Review; or, Literary Journal*, Vol. 70, (London: R. Griffiths, 1784), 412.

[133] Richard S. Reddie, *Abolition!: The Struggles to Abolish Slavery in the British Colonies* (Oxford: Lion, 2007), 68.

In 1784 he published his most significant text *An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies.* Ramsay´s account of his time in the West Indies contains a story about a slave named Quashi, the narrative was used for moral persuasion for slave owners and people involved in the slave trade. It appears in section V, "African Capacity Vindicated from Experience," and it was intended to provide examples from real life as examples of the intellectual and moral capacities of African slaves in the British colonies.[134] The narrative of Quashi reproduced in the essay is an actual historical account of an individual whose story he was told by someone who has heard directly from Quashi´s master. Although the narrative rather represented other West Indian slaves whose stories might have been similar; it can be understood or interpreted as a collage of portraits about other Quashis, a collage of all the horrors that Ramsay witnessed himself or heard of.[135]

Throughout his childhood, Quashi was loyal to his master and eventually was awarded the position of an overseer. However, his fortunes changed when he was accused of wrong doing and in order to avoid punishment he fled the plantation. He was caught, but avoided the whip and having to be tortured and possibly killed by his master whom he loved by cutting his own throat. According to Ramsay´s version of events, Quashi defines his final moments by melodramatically declaring:

> "Master, I was bred up with you from a child; I was your play-mate when a boy; I have loved you as myself; your interest has been my study; I am innocent of the cause of your suspicion; had I been guilty, my attachment to you might have pleaded for me. Yet you have condemned me to a punishment, of which I must ever have borne the disgraceful mark; thus only can I avoid them."
>
> With these words he drew the knife with all his strength across his own throat, and fell down dead without a groan, on his master, bathing him in his blood.[136]

Quashi´s story was used as an example by abolitionists of the nobility that slaves entailed and the loyalty and sensibility that they were capable of and used such imagery to draw sympathy from the public.

Although Quashi had been enslaved and oppressed, he has a certain amount of respect from his owner. Thus he straddles between embodying the noble savage and the man of reason and respect. On the one hand, Quashi is noble for his willingness to die for his beliefs.

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[134] Nicole N. Aljoe, *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709 – 1838* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31.
[135] *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709 – 1838*. 30.
[136] Ramsay, 253.

On the other hand, he is a man of feeling due to his love for his oppressor. Granted the revenge is within his grasp, Quashi conforms to modes of civility by refusing to harm another human being. In other words, Quashi becomes the exceptional figure to convince slave traders to end their heinous transactions and to persuade readers of the urgent need for legislative intervention. Brycchan Carey claims that "Quashi is held up as a model of the ideal eighteenth century man of sensibility – a sentimental hero – who merely missed out on polite education."[137] Although Ramsay (as well as Stedman and others) had a great advantage over the poets, which is having experienced the situation in the West Indies themselves, that does not necessarily mean that they were completely void of sentiment and even they are not completely innocent as far as the ambivalence of the abolitionist discourse is concerned.

I have already touched upon the possibility that Quashi´s narrative may be more of a collage than a story of one single slave. This notion is supported by critics for a number of reasons, first of which is the fact that Ramsay was told the story by a mediator, not by the master himself, therefore the circumstances might have been changed through each re-telling of the story, despite Ramsay feeling that "As I had my information from a friend of the master's in the master's presence, who acknowledged it to be genuine, the truth of it is indisputable."[138] Another factor leading critics to believe that Quashi is a symbol, a totem rather than one singular person is the fact that the name "Quashi" was quite popular among slave owners. Last but not least is the very fact that the basic story line – a slave raised alongside his master, acting loyally putting his master's concerns before his own, wrongly accused of a crime he did not commit which led to him being publicly whipped – could be applied to a number of second-generation slaves in the West Indies.[139] Ramsay was moved by the sentiment of the story, as he stated "the only liberty I have taken with it, has been to give words to the sentiment that inspired it."[140] Is the sentiment conveyed in the story truly part of the narrative or is it Ramsay´s addition so that the reading public feels more compelled to sympathise with Quashi and then, are we again facing an overly sentimental description of a West Indian slave? It is quite likely that Ramsay attempted to juxtapose the sentiment of Quashi with the brutality of the slave system.

Quashi´s story is carried out entirely in the English language, slightly removed from vernacular directness of what one would presume to be a slave dialect. Literary critic Philip

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[137] Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 185.
[138] Ramsay, 248.
[139] *Creole Testimonies: Slave Narratives from the British West Indies, 1709 – 1838*. 32 – 34.
[140] Ramsay, 248.

Gould sees such a strategy as a manoeuvre to imply the dissonance between the refinement of African feeling and the capacity of African-American language to convey that feeling.[141] In Quashi´s last speech he truly gains a voice, he uses the language of his oppressor, linguistically he becomes his equal. Immediately after he embodies the English language, he kills himself and loses his voice again. What Ramsay might be addressing with this strategy is the very difficulty of language representation of Africans and their speech in poetry as well as the problem of poetry and/or testimonies written by the Africans themselves.[142] That is to say that searching for the true and unmediated feelings and opinions of the African slave is immensely difficult. As we saw in poetry, poets refine the feeling through the English language, anglicising the speech of the slaves, relying on sentiment and metaphors that the English public were familiar with. Furthermore, this problem of appropriate language representation is evident in the slave narratives themselves, for the slaves convey their stories in language that was not their mother tongue, relying on discourse and imagery of the language of their oppressors.

4.2 John Gabriel Stedman and his *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America; From the Year 1772, to 1777. Published in 1796.*

Stedman and his trip to Suriname in order to stop the revolts have already been discussed in a previous chapter. The literary outcome of his trip is the previously mentioned *The Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname*, which was published in its entirety in 1796. The first hand encounter was a depiction of slavery and aspects of colonisation that the general British public was not faced with. As such, it became an important tool in the abolitionist cause.

Stedman's *Narrative* is an account of his experiences while he lived in Suriname between the years 1772 – 1777; he describes the landscape with great detail and his observations in the book include descriptions of all the different cultures that constituted the melting pot that the country of Suriname was at the time, such as the Dutch, Scottish, African, Spanish as well as the native people of Suriname and other cultures. Stedman describes ordinary life of Suriname along with the violence that was present in the colony at the time.

[141] Philip Gould, *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (Harvard: The University Press of Harvard, 2003) 68.
[142] *Barbaric Traffic: Commerce and Antislavery in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World*, 69 – 70.

The first pages of the narrative are concerned with Stedman's voyage to Suriname and he describes the sweet, perfumed smells and beautiful landscape of the country he witnessed upon arrival. Stedman juxtaposes the beautiful landscape with the violence and cruelty present in the Caribbean. His first taste of the cruelty that slavery entails is when he sees a nearly naked slave woman on shore, she was chained to an iron weight and received 200 lashes and carried the weight for a month because she was unable to fulfil a task she was assigned. Such an act of pure violence was both fascinating and revolting for Stedman, who as the rest of the British public was not aware of the cruelties that slavery encompassed. Over the course of his *Narrative* Stedman presents the readers with the terrible health state that slaves were in and the horrors they were subjected to on daily basis.

Stedman's *Narrative* is an important text in the abolitionist discourse; however, its position is more complicated than for example Ramsay's text. Because even though the depiction of the horrors of slavery undeniably must have helped to establish a moral resistance to slavery, the text itself cannot be simply identified as abolitionist.[143] The reason for the problematic classification of the text lies in the multiplicity of images and arguments the book provides. On the one hand, it gives several accounts of torture by masters and drivers etc. On the other hand, though, Stedman offers several arguments pro-slavery in the text. For example, even though the book criticises European barbarism, he simultaneously praises the development that the Europeans have brought. When he praises the richness and beauty of Suriname soil, he adds that he admires "particularly in those parts which are cultivated by European industry,"[144] therefore praising advantages brought to Suriname by the oppressing cultures. Such a juxtaposition of the critique of the institution of slavery and praising of the European culture and its civilisation is one of the founding stones of the ambivalence of the abolitionist discourse.

Whether Stedman was aware of the dissonance in his narrative is questionable, he however seems to resolve the contradictory message of his book by defending slavery, but only when practised by the most enlightened and human owners, for he is aware of the benefits the practice brings to Britain (mainly sugar and rum) and to those, who considered all artefacts for which Britain relied on the West Indies unworthy, he replied:

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143 Wayne Glausser, *Locke and Blake: A Conversation Cross the Eighteenth Century,* (Florida: The University Press of Florida, 1998), 76 – 77.

144 John Gabriel Stedman, *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam in Guiana, on the Wild Coast of South America; From the Year 1772, to 1777*., (London: Forgotten Books, 2013.) 23.

> Take care, lest, under the enthusiasm of humanity, you do not, at the expence of your neighbour, and perhaps your country, inconsiderately give up your advantages, without the least chance of benefiting or improving the conditions of those, whom I most heartily join with you in calling our brethren.[145]

He of course understands that the advantages of sugar and rum are not the only artefacts and arguments for slavery, therefore he offers much heavier and more typical arguments. The first of which links to what was discussed in the historical introduction, in which was established that in medieval times slaves were captives of war. Stedman believes that a legal justification for slavery lies in the strategy for slavers to trade for prisoners of African wars. He did not condemn the continuance of the Atlantic slave trade; he thought that ending the commerce in slave trafficking would have been unfair to plantation owners who had invested their lives and capital in the colonies.[146] The next of his arguments relies on sociology. He has observed that several slaves were treated differently, some were treated dreadfully and others with certain kindness. He believes such treatment to be based on the nationality of the masters; the English masters were, of course, likely to treat the slaves better than other nationalities. Such an opinion is beautiful in its patriotic character, however, such a designation among slave owners is very unlikely and it very well might be Stedman's altering the facts of his visit so he does not cross the English slave owners and traders. His ethical conclusion is that if the English emancipated their slaves, they would inevitably end up under crueller masters, serving other nations.

Stedman also relies on biological arguments, again tying with the historical and theoretical background discussed at the beginning of this thesis. He states that "the quantum of sugar, &c. will be had, and must be provided by Negroes, natives of Africa, who alone are born to endure labour under a vertical sun."[147] Why he does not believe that the native people of Suriname would be an adequate labour force remains unanswered. What is striking is that this *Narrative* is such an important piece of work of the abolitionist cause, even though in a passage towards the end, Stedman takes his racial theories even further and implies a theory of white skin as primary and in respect to that superior:

> The epidermis or cuticle of the negroes I have dissected more than once; it is clear and transparent, but between this and the real skin lies a thin follicle, which is

[145] Stedman, 112.
[146] Stedman, 171, 173.
[147] Stedman, 112.

> perfectly black, which being removed by severe flagellation, or by scalding, exposes a complexion not inferior to that of a European.[148]

In order to support his biological argument, he turns to an analysis of "national character." He declares that free Africans have shown him no "marks of civilisation, order, or government…but, on the contrary, many examples of ungovernable passion, debauchery, and indolence," finishing his description by saying that they are "perfectly savage."[149] Stedman is primarily concerned with their capacity for violence and resistance to work, which he sees as racial characteristics, although such qualities of their character were more likely due to their situation and they were results of political effects.

Stedman also sees the blacks in a different light, one which was already seen in Hannah More´s poem *Slavery: A Poem*, that of a noble savage, or as Stedman says "noble negro." These were creatures of such naivety and vulnerable innocence that were unable to function on their own before being taken by the Europeans. They made perfect victims and in Stedman's opinion based on his description were deemed to never be anything else but victims.[150] The character of a noble Negro made several appearances in Stedman's *Narratives*, but the most prominent is Joanna, the slave who became Stedman's lover and wife and their relationship is a big part of the narrative. She is "by birth a gentleman's daughter from Holland; and her mother's family were most distinguished people on the coasts of Africa."[151] He felt that her virtue was "singular among her caste" and that she suffered unfairly.

Stedman's rather contradictory statements in his *Narrative* are not as surprising once we learn that he was not part of the abolitionist cause, he refused to put his name on an abolitionist petition by Lloyd Sampson. In all probability, Stedman was not against slavery as such, however he was opposed to the conditions to which slaves were exposed, he wanted them to be treated without violence, but he did not wish them to be free. Stedman writes, "I love the African negroes. […] I wish from the bottom of my heart […] to prevent the fatal decision of a total abolition of slavery ´till 1800, or the beginning of the next century."[152] His reasoning behind such claims was that "Liberty, nay even too much lenity, when suddenly granted to illiterate and unprincipled men, must be to all parties dangerous, if not pernicious."[153] His opinion might be linked to his notion of the noble savages, for he feared that if the slaves were set free all at once, they would not know how to take care of themselves

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[148] Stedman, 358.
[149] Stedman, 112 – 113.
[150] *Locke and Blake: A Conversation Cross the Eighteenth Century,* 78 – 79.
[151] Stedman, 267.
[152] Stedman, 212.
[153] Stedman, 340,

for the lack of education. However, he does not seem to see who is responsible for the reason that these Africans were taken from their homes and treated as chattel. As was discussed in the historical background, he was sent to Suriname to stop the maroon rebellions which greatly threatened the economy of the slave plantations, which might be a reason for his hesitance and the ambivalence of his narrative. He himself was a slave owner when he stayed in Suriname. He had bought a young black boy called Quaco, who reportedly carried his umbrella and returned to England with him, he continued to be Stedman's slave for a further year and six weeks until he was given his freedom.[154] How, then, is this book such an important publication for the abolitionist discourse? Even though Stedman did not support abolition, the scenes depicted in his book provided abolitionists with examples of violence and terror that the slaves had to endure. Furthermore, they could argue against his reasoning, therefore the public would have access to both opinions. Not to mention that even though Stedman sees some of the slaves as victims, he cannot be accused of over-sentimentalising the blacks as much as the abolitionists and poets did, for he did not mean to seek sympathy from the public.

4.2.1 Blake's Engravings in *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Suriname*

The now infamous engravings by William Blake were not part of the original publication. The *Narrative* originally contained 81 images which were based on approximately 106 watercolours painted by Stedman himself when he was in Suriname. It was Stedman's publisher, Joseph Johnson who arranged a meeting between the two and commissioned Blake (as well as Francesco Bartolozzi) to create illustrations for the narrative. Blake engraved 16 images for the book (overall the publication has 80 engravings) and presented them in December of 1792 and 1793. Also, he created a single plate in 1794. The images depict some of the horrific scenes described in the narrative, including hanging, whipping and other forms of torture. Unfortunately, we cannot compare Stedman's sketches with Blake's illustrations because none of Stedman's sketches have survived. Through their collaboration, the two

[154] David Richards, *Masks of Difference: Cultural Representations in Literature, Anthropology and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 106.

became close friends, despite the different opinions on the matter of slavery, for Blake was, despite the difficult classification of his poems, strongly against the institution of slavery.[155]

According to literary critic Klancher, Blake's radical opinions about slavery were employed in his engravings for Stedman's *Narrative* in order for the reader to be confronted with the slave body and witness the representations of slave punishment, pained faces and suffering bodies of slaves who previously, at least in visual culture, had been considered unworthy of attention.[156] The figures in his engravings are all essentially taken out of context; they are depicted almost as martyrs, on blank space. The figures were taken out of context and presented as they were. However, such de-contextualisation of the primary object of attention from its surroundings led to closer scrutiny of those pictured, for the public was not familiar with neither the surroundings, neither with the figures that were depicted in the illustrations. One of the reasons for this strategy is that the sense and visual of the bodies becomes heightened. Another factor making Blake apply this technique is the fact that despite the fauna and flora of Surinam being depicted in Stedman's narrative, Blake himself was not familiar with the surroundings. He, however, encountered many Negroes in the streets of London, be it runaway slaves, whose flesh was still branded with their owners´ marks, or paid servants, apprentices or beggars.[157]

Blake's engravings depicting the horrors of slavery include – *Group of Negros, as imported to be sold for Slaves* (Figure 3); *A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows* (Figure 4); *The Execution of Breaking on the Rack* (Figure 5); *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* (Figure 6) as well as the slightly more subtle yet infamous *Europe supported by Africa and America* (Figure 7). What sets *Europe supported by Africa and America* is the nature of the picture, for it symbolises a concept rather than an actual event. It links together with the end of Stedman's *Narrative* in which he makes a plea for a harmonious relationship among the races of the world, stating "we all only differ in the colour but we are certainly created by the same and after the same mould."[158] In the representation of the piece, the three female forms represent three continents, excluding Asia, for it was not included in Stedman's writing. The figures conform to the convention of the female nude in which the naked female figures function as allegories or emblems simultaneously serving as an object of male desire,

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[155] Jon P. Klancher, *The Making of English Reading Audience, 1790 – 1832* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 78.
[156] *The Making of English Reading Audience, 1790 – 1832*, 28.
[157] Michael Davis, *William Blake: A New Kind of Man* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 52.
[158] Stedman, 618.

and by extension male possession.[159] The faces conform to Stedman's expressed racial stereotypes. Africa is wearing slave bands and is holding Europe’s hand in gesture of a handshake while supporting Europe’s back with her other arm. The bracelets or manacles point at the slave status of this figure, which signals that Blake might have sensed hypocrisy in Stedman's *Narrative*. Significantly, Africa’s face is similar to the face of the figure in *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave* and *Negro hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*. In the narrative, Stedman uses the description of victims of slave punishment or execution to point to the nobility of African slaves in the face of horrendous mistreatment.[160] Therefore, it may be argued that Blake sought to underline the existing situation belying the image of mutual support, by manipulating Africa’s expression.[161] America is also wearing a slave’s bracelet and supports Europe’s body, this time from behind and from around her waist. She is in mid-step, as if moving towards Europe. America's eyes are open like those of Africa and both gaze straight at the viewer of the picture. This is contrasted by the downcast gaze of Europe, who is wearing a string of pearls and whose demure expression and blush to her cheeks, as if she was still keeping the definition of a European woman of the time.

What the figures in the engravings have in common as already mentioned above is that they are highlighted by primarily blank backgrounds that were a novelty and were an aspect which draw attention of the public. Blake used his engravings as a critique to the practices the text depicted, despite Stedman's personal feelings about abolition. Particularly his illustrations of punishment and execution were the figures are pained and faces expressive, Blake placed them in a Christian context, as martyrs, which was supposed to humanise them and make the public identify with the figures in the pictures. Creating portraits of medieval martyrs Blake also wishes for the engravings to create a response to the depictions of torture and suffering. Such objectifying of suffering creates a tantalising image of a voyeuristic nature. Blake's engravings are probably more appreciated in the abolitionist discourse than his poetry, which we saw was problematic to decipher and qualify. George M. Gugelberger applauded Blake's plates for the *Narrative* for their revolutionary message, saying:

> Blake chose to illustrate exclusively scenes of torture and oppression. These choices signal Blake's class affiliation perhaps more than many of his literary works. There is no doubt about interpreting these etchings. Multiple interpretation has no place. The other illustrators opted for maps, pictures of flora and fauna, in

[159] Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992), 20 - 22.
[160] Stedman, 103.
[161] *Slavery and the Romantic Imagination*, 99.

> short: exoticism. Blake subverts this exoticism by what the eye really sees if it is not closed by the tactics of an exploiting system.[162]

Upon close inspection, we learn that this is not necessarily true, for only half of Blake's plates can be characterised in this manner, for among the scenes of torture he depicted a happy Loango family thriving in slavery (*Family of Negro Slaves from Loango*, Figure 8), two versions of monkeys, an aboma snake, and a group of fruits of Surinam. In other words, he does not completely shy away from exoticism. However, exoticism is not part of the engravings that do depict the tortures and horrors of slavery.

In conclusion, Blake's engravings for Stedman's *Narrative* depicted colonial authorities and depicted the ruins that were a result of the institution of slavery. His strategy of focusing on the figures in his engravings rather than the scenery aims to bring the attention of the readers of Stedman's *Narrative* solely on the personal turmoil and terrors that the slaves had to face. *Europe Supported by Africa and America* reminds the readers that even though slavery is an institution removed from Britain and moved to the colonies, it was part of British history and society, just as was examined in the poetry discussion. Furthermore, such focus on figures and their personal tragedies precedes a rhetorical strategy called reversed perspective, which will prove to be one of the key rhetorical devices in slave narratives by Cugoano and Equiano whose works will be discussed among others in the following chapter, which deals with the genre of slave narratives and the discourse and rhetorical devices these black authors employed and created so that they would become a part of the abolitionist movement alongside the poets and travellers discussed above and in the previous chapter.

[162] Quoted in *Locke and Blake: A Conversation Cross the Eighteenth Century*, 81.

5. Slave Narratives and Letters

As we have seen, travellers, theorists, poets and fiction writers all contributed to the consolidation of the literary canon of the abolitionist movement. They had to provide counter arguments to what the supporters of the slave trade and the institution of slavery preached, most significantly they had to argue against the notion that Africans were subhuman, that they were an inferior race incapable of building a civilised society. Abolitionists set out to prove that Africans were indeed capable and they also appealed to the readers´ sense of common humanity. One of the proofs that the eighteenth century society desired was a proof of literacy.[163] In the Enlightenment period, people often made an equation between writing and humanity, therefore the question was raised, whether the Africans were capable of producing a literary creation.

Slave narratives, first-person autobiographies, written by slaves or ex-slaves were established during this period. They described their lives under slavery, often with the horrors of the Middle Passage and also their efforts to become free. Through this process, the speaker in the story managed to establish an identity as well as create collective history. Many slave narratives were written versions of speeches given at abolition meetings by escaped or freed slaves, and they often retained an oral quality. The narratives proved to be a counter argument to the already mentioned argument of the subhumanity of the slaves. Slave narratives were written to refute the notion that Africans were incapable of reason, socialisation and moral improvement.[164]

Slave narratives first emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century, between the 1770s and 1780s. The genre was established in the context of transatlantic and religious movements which shaped the eighteenth century – sentimentalism, Enlightenment and Locke's theory of natural rights. These late eighteenth century works reveal what Paul Gilroy calls the "transcultural international formation" of the Black Atlantic – the fluid geographical area encompassing the West African littoral, Britain, British America, eastern Canada and the Caribbean – through which black subjects travelled as slaves and later as free persons.[165] The early slave narratives were read as many different types of writings at once; the genre description included spiritual autobiography, the conversion narrative, the providential tale, sea adventure stories and the picaresque novel among others. Some slave narratives paid

[163]A *History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain,* 17.
[164] *The Historical Encyclopaedia of World Slavery*, 457.
[165] Audrey Fish, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 11.

great attention to economics as well. The combination of strong religious and spiritual feel and economic arguments proved to raise an interest in black autobiographies because of the spiritual value disseminating religious ideas and thereby converting souls and the groups that this purpose served often assumed the role of publishers and acted as financing agents.[166]

Rhetorically speaking, slave narratives operated with several basic lines of argument. The first line was to appeal to the notion of "natural rights." This argument is connected to John Locke and his idea of natural law and natural rights which was mentioned in the introduction. Essentially, Locke preached that everyone is equal before the Lord and nature. To expand, Locke believed that every man had a natural right to life, everyone is entitled to live once they are born; liberty, everyone is entitled to do anything they want to so long as it does not conflict with the first right and property, everyone is entitled to own all they create or gain through gift or trade so long as it does not conflict with the first two rights.[167] Locke believed in private property, but his views on natural rights and natural law mean that he did not believe that anyone had a right to buy and own another human being, "Everyman has a property in his own person. This no body has any right to but himself. The labour of his body, and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his."[168] Locke believed in the institution of government so that it can protect private property, but he saw people of government as those who serve the public and did not support the idea of slavery being practised by the ruling power:

> Whenever the legislators endeavour to take away, and destroy the property of the people, or to reduce them to slavery under arbitrary power, they put themselves into a state of war with the people, who are thereupon absolved from any farther obedience, and are left to the common refuge, which hath provided for all men, against force, and violence. Whensoever therefore the legislative shall transgress this fundamental rule of society; and either by ambition, fear, folly or corruption, endeavour to grasp themselves, or put into the hands of any other absolute power over the lives, liberties, and estates of the people; by this breach of trust they forfeit the power, the people had put into their hands, for quite contrary ends, and it devolves to the people who have a right to resume their original liberty.[169]

[166] *The Cambridge Companion to the African American Slave Narrative*, 14 – 15.
[167] Ellen Frankel Paul and Howard Dickman, eds., *Liberty, Property, and the Foundations of the American Constitution* (Albany: University of New York Press, 1989), 50.
[168] Quoted in Leo Strauss, Joseph Cropsey eds., *History of Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 486.
[169] *Two Treatises of Government*, 233.

Such opinions and statements influenced the thinking of seventeenth and eighteenth century Britain and of course underlined the Abolition movement and writings and consequently became a device of argument in slave narratives.

The second argument that underlined the narratives was sentimentalism and stress on the disgrace of such practices which publicly beat women, separated families and were full of sexual violence and raised religious concerns about the Africans´ potential Christian salvation.[170] Consequently, the speakers also commented on the hypocrisy of the Enlightenment society and its ideals since it was capable of tolerating such a practice. The writers of slave narratives relied on dominant discourse of the time and had to create a literary form in which they could establish ideas of self and identity while retaining elements of orality. The emphasis on orality was used as a reaction to the texts of colonial encounters discussed in a previous chapter. The narratives of colonial encounters engaged in western discourse of identity and otherness and they presupposed certain subordination and resistance. Dynamics of the narratives from the West Indies penned by western writers were transcultural and the transcultural character translated in the genre of slave narratives in the combination of autobiography with testimony and oral history.[171]

The question of literacy and capability is the reason why most of the slave narratives and early writings by Africans put strong emphasis on the originality and authenticity of their works, often stated they were "written by themselves," despite the fact that they were written down by someone else (e.g. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw´s *Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, related by himself* was retold by a woman, later identified as Hannah More). They, however, needed for the stories not to be questioned even if they were recorded by someone else. This tactic could have even worked in their favour, for they could say that the reason for their illiteracy is the non-existent education in the West Indies, for Africans were regarded as unworthy of it. Education was forbidden in the West Indies and although it was not forbidden in England, it was often denied. This happened to Ignatius Sancho, whose first owners refused to let him access the books in their property, for they thought it would make him unfit to carry out his duties as a slave and a servant.[172]

As was already mentioned in the introduction, Olaudah Equiano is regarded as the first writer of a proper slave narrative; he is sometimes seen as the founding father of Black

[170] *The Historical Encyclopaedia of World Slavery*, 457.
[171] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 102.
[172] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 18.

writing in Britain. Even though Equiano´s narrative set the form for slave narratives, the writing was preceded by several others African writers, such as Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and his *Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, related by himself* published in 1772 as well as *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* by Ottobah Cugoano. The following chapter examines the works by Gronniosaw, Cugoano, Equiano and letters by Ignatius Sancho in order to establish the ways in which they represented themselves, the strategies they employed to address slavery and how they appropriated the English language in their respective narratives and letters.

These eighteenth century pamphlets by Afro-British writers define them as participants in the media, they give them power of language, of speech, by being printed, therefore undermining the idea of racial difference upon which the institution of slavery depended. Throughout these texts exhibitions of intelligence and wit, domestic feeling, religious aspirations and desire for liberty and freedom testified to the writer's humanity and equality, they were used as a proof of intellectual equality. These texts were written in English and learning and writing in English also meant working with available genres, plot types and metaphors of the language, trying to accommodate and transform them as necessary, this resulted in number of autobiographies and religious tales.[173] Understandably, the early Black writers were not as concerned with reshaping the canon and applying new literary forms as they were with the content of their works. They presented the English reading public with Black models and first person narratives of the lives on the plantations and the terrors of slavery, militating against the stereotypes that emanated from slavery ant attempted to claim recognition and empathy.[174]

5.1 Ukawsaw Gronniosaw´s *Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, related by himself. Published in 1772.*

Gronniosaw is considered one of the pioneers of the genre of slave narratives. The *Narrative* records his turbulent life, including his birth, childhood and youth, the enslavement and most importantly, his spiritual growth. Through the narrative we learn that he was born

[173] Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee, eds. *Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Other: Early Black British Writing* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2004), 12 – 13.
[174] *Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Other: Early Black British Writing*, 18.

in the city of Baurnou in Nigeria as a grandson of the current king. He was sold to a Dutch Captain in Guinea when he was 15 years old, who later transported him to Barbados. Afterwards, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw lived in New York as a slave; he was freed upon his master's death. He decided to go to England, preached in several Methodist chapels and he married an English woman. He supposed all that happened in his life were signs of God's Providence.[175]

Generally speaking, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw´s *Narrative* is an account of his spiritual journey and his subsequent conversion to evangelical Christianity, retold on his behalf by a lady. The preface of the narrative states:

> This account of the life and spiritual experience of JAMES ALBERT was taken from his own mouth, and committed to paper by the elegant pen of a young LADY of the town of LEOMINSTER, for her own private satisfaction, and without any intention at first that it should be made public. But now she had been prevail´d on to commit it to the press, as it is apprehended, this little history contains matter well worthy the notice and attention of every Christian reader.[176]

We can see the stress on the evidence of origin in the preface. In the narrative, Gronniosaw portrays himself as a young boy with a strong emphasis on his royal origins. Gronniosaw was sceptical of his native religion when he was a child and became convinced that the visible world is due to an existence of a sole creator. The *Narrative* is an account of how God led him to Christianity through enslavement. Biblical imagery is often used throughout the narrative. The epigraph of the writing is a biblical citation, Isaiah 42:16, it summarises the ongoing theme of his narrative, which is God's deliverance from darkness into light and His divine protection of the faithful.[177]

Gronniosaw´s narrative can be identified as a spiritual autobiography, framing his life as a quest for Christ. Spiritual autobiography is a non-fictional form which became popular in seventeenth century England; its root can be traced as far back as early Christian writings, such as *Confessions* by St. Augustine. The basic concern of such a narrative is to document a progress of an individual believer from a state of sin to a state of grace, where he finds salvation. The form most appealed to Protestants and was pioneered by Quakers, whose contribution to the abolition cause has been established in the chapter concerning historical

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[175] R. Victoria Arana, Laura Remey, eds., Black *British Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 14.
[176] Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *Narrative of the Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, An African Prince, related by himself*, 1772, p. iv.
[177] Richard M. Juand and Nelle Morrissette, eds., *Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2008)*532*.

background of abolition and slavery.[178] Gronniosaw employed such literary form to use the protestant notions of providence and deliverance as allegorical patters for the possible salvation of slaves and his decision to use the form of a spiritual autobiography undoubtedly influenced and inspired the consequent writers of slave narratives.

C.L. Innes identified several descriptions and incidents that occur in Gronniosaw´s *Narrative* that became often used tropes by other black writers (Cugoano and Equiano included), such as the description of seeing ships as beholding "houses with wings to them … walk upon the water,"[179] the abnormality and wonder of people with white skins, although in Gronniosaw´s case, the reader is told that the one member of his family, his sister Logwy, "was quite white and fair, though my father and mother were black."[180] Whether his sister was a mixed race child or not is not addressed again in the narrative. Gronniosaw saw his master as a father whom he eventually grows to love, similarly to other slave stories. Again, we can see the topic of paternalism similarly to the poetry discussion. The narrators of the story do not rely to the wives of their masters, they do not see them as maternal figures, and the topic of motherhood does not appear. Yet again, there is a strong emphasis on the institution of slavery and its possible abolition being in the hands of men. Gronniosaw also presents that delusion of the so called talking book, which shows the importance of the link between literacy and humanity, equality and culture supremacy, which recurs in the narratives of John Marrant as well as Cugoano and Equiano, Gronniosaw writes:

> And when I first saw him read, I was never so surprised in my life, as when I saw the book talk to my master, for I though it did, as I observed him to look upon it, and move his lips… I opened the book and put my ear down close upon it, in great hopes that it would say something to me; but was very sorry, and greatly disappointed when I found it would not speak, this thought immediately presented itself, that every body and every thing despised me because I was black.[181]

Even though Gronniosaw set examples for tropes does not mean that the topics were always treated and presented in similar matter. For example, Gronniosaw and Equiano differ in their response to the contrast between black and white-skinned people, for Equiano finds white-skinned people ugly and frightening, but commenting on the beauty of black women, Equiano does follow Gronniosaw´s example of presenting himself as a rather foolish man, whose

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[178] Richard Peace, *Spiritual Storytelling* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 9 – 10.
Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759 – 1815* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), 114.

[179] Gronniosaw, 26.

[180] Gronniosaw, 8.

[181] Gronniosaw, 16 – 17.

response to the "civilisation" they see whether in the West Indies or England are often laughable. Nevertheless, Gronniosaw´s experience with the book show how he was not inclined to think that the book does not speak to him because he does not understand the language, but because of his race.

The story of the "talking book" is often discussed in the tradition of European writing and several critics interpret is as a metaphor of absence, the blackness of Gronniosaw and other slaves is written out of the literary tradition. In other words, in respect to the Western discourse of "civilisation," the illiterate African Gronniosaw does not exist. Since the language of the book is not the language of the slave, the white master's text does not and as a matter of fact cannot acknowledge the black man's presence. This leads Gronniosaw to discover that he needs to be integrated into European modes of thinking and the discourse of European thinking, in order to be accepted as a human being in the white man's world.[182] That is to say, Gronniosaw establishes a human presence as defined by white culture, the text he writes creates his new persona, however, through this process he becomes part of the discourse of the European culture.

The topic and power of language is dealt with in an unusual way in Gronniosaw´s narrative, through the topic of swearing. Gronniosaw first learns to curse in the language of his oppressors but generally contains his swearing because an old black slave warns him not to swear or he will be taken by the devil to burn in hell. Gronniosaw retells this lesson to his swearing mistress, expressing concern for her well being. When he sees the old slave being punished and excluded from the company of the domestic slaves, he refrains from swearing altogether, because he fears punishment both in this and next life. If we put aside the fear of God's punishment, this story conveys the power that language, in this case the English language has and how conveying it incorrectly or inappropriately can harm a person. The fact that the old slave is punished for warning Gronniosaw also shows how even appropriating the language of the slavers was dangerous. In other words, the black slave did not have the authority to employ the discourse of the English language in any way as well as he is not entitled to God's discourse and Christianity, because it gives him moral superiority over his master.[183] Gronniosaw sees this is as one way to antagonise his master and therefore refrains from commenting on his behaviour, he leaves it up to his readers to find the implied judgement on his masters.

[182] Michael Paul Spikes, *Understanding Contemporary American Literary Theory* (Columbia: University of South Karolina, 2003), 56 – 57.
[183] Christian Mair, *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizon in Postcolonial Cultural Studies* (Amsterdam: Apel Pápera, 2003) 211.

What is quite shocking about his *Narrative* is that he does not wish to return to his family so much in order to be reacquainted with them, more so it seems he wishes to impress them as he believes that due to his experience he "should be wiser than all my country-folks, my grandfather, or father, or mother, or any of them."[184] There is a sense that he qualifies as a member of the elect, but he feels that spiritual elevation of the African as a whole must be authorised by the worldly masters.[185] Despite his credit as a Christian man, Gronniosaw is not considered to be the proper worldly master.

An episode in which Gronniosaw sheds his African identity in the narrative occurs when he exchanges his golden rings and chains for western clothes. Michael Meyer identifies that via this exchange Gronniosaw symbolically exchanges the gold, which was useless to him at that specific point, for his life. By expressing his disregard for the gold, which made the slaver richer, he wishes to point out the difference between the real and heathen Christians, who profited from the slave trade.[186] This episode also indicates a certain irony connecting the countries. Africa was considered spiritually poor and it had economic welfare, while North America and England are spiritually rich but driven rather by warfare and economic greed.

I have stated in the beginning of this discussion that Gronniosaw´s *Narrative* can be characterised as a spiritual journey. He became a non-person as a slave and was regarded as nobody due to his race and poverty. Regardless, he appears to be content with such a role, "I am willing, and even desirous to be counted as nothing, a stranger in the world, and a pilgrim here."[187] Gronniosaw hopes, that his worldly troubles and losses will be made up by God, "I am not without hope that they have been all sanctified to me."[188] His hopes for freedom are not set in England or America, he hopes for eternal salvation, a release from the Anglo-Caribbean diaspora:

> As Pilgrims, and very poor Pilgrims, we are travelling through many difficulties toward our HEAVENLY HOME, and waiting patiently for his gracious call, when the Lord shall deliver us out of the evils of this present world and bring us to the EVERLASTING GLORIES of the world to come.[189]

[184] Gronniosaw, 20.
[185] *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizon in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, 213.
[186] *The Politics of English as a World Language: New Horizon in Postcolonial Cultural Studies*, 214 – 215.
[187] Gronniosaw, 25- 26.
[188] Gronniosaw, 26.
[189] Gronniosaw, 33 – 34.

5.2 Ottobah Cugoano´s *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species. Published in 1787.*

Quobna Ottobah Cugoano, also known as John Stuart, approached his writing slightly differently; his writing reminds the reader of a spiritual testament, it is more of a debate over the institution of slavery and the practices of the slave trade rather than a personal account of the experience. He shows very little interest in autobiography and construction and re-construction of his social status. Cugoano assumed a rather radical position and constructed an anti-slavery polemic that sought to reveal the hypocrisy of proslavery Christian supporters. The writing is regarded as one of the earliest examples of protest literature.[190] The writing in question was his first book and it was published in 1787 and we can see that the title resonates Thomas Clarkson's *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, particularly the African*, which was published a year before.[191] In his *Thoughts and Sentiments* Cugoano dismantles the racist taxonomies which were promoted by the Enlightenment society. The writing is a rather exhaustive negation of all possible arguments for slavery.

At the request of some of his supporters, Cugoano first wrote a short autobiographical sketch, to appeal to the tastes of the reading public of the time. He was born circa 1757 on the coast of Fantyn, today's Ghana. Reared among the children and relatives of the king of Fate, he lived in relative peace. While visiting an uncle who lived far away, he ventured into the woods on a dare from a friend and within a couple of hours, he was captured.[192] When Cugoano later encountered white people for the first time, he was afraid that they would eat him, similar sentiment which we will later see in Equiano. He spent a year as a slave in Grenada working on an island plantation. He was brought to England in 1772 by Alexander Campbell where he obtained the surname Stuart. Later on, he received spiritual instruction from a certain Dr. Skinner, who also baptised him.

Cugoano opens his essay with an apology to the readers for his harsh words and pays tribute to those who have written articles against the slave trade, namely Thomas Clarkson and Granville Sharp, as well as writers such as Thomas Day and others. He states the basic argument of his *Essay* that "the robbers of men, the kidnappers, ensnarers and slave-holders"

[190] Helena Woodard, *African-British Writing in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1999), 45.
[191] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 22.
[192] *African-British Writing in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason*, 45.

behave contrarily to "every precept and injunction of the Divine Law."[193] In other words, he claims that anyone who titles themselves as Christian would have to agree that the trafficking of African slaves must end because of its immorality. Such strategy is also a clever way to include the readers in the involvement of the traffic, for even though they might pride themselves on their religious and philosophical sentiment, they are part of the process, because they too make profit or enjoy the products.

Even though Cugoano employed a slightly different and more theoretical and argumentative aspect to his writing, as it is a writing of philosophical nature, he is not completely void of certain sentimentalism and romanticism. For example, Cugoano also uses the trope of the noble Negro, or noble African, to his rhetoric. He utilises the trope by firstly depicting himself as the image of the spiritually refined African and secondly, by revealing how the Christian faith allowed him to undermine the essentialist views of blacks evident in both anti-slavery literature and the arguments of slavery apologists. By depicting himself as noble Negro (Cugoano was not the only one to employ such a technique, Equiano proceeded similarly in his narrative) he hopes to engage in an ironic deployment of a stereotype of Africans in order to subvert colonialist ideologies.[194] It, however, remains questionable whether such a strategy counterparts the colonialist discourse, or makes them part of the colonialist discourse, for they do write in the tradition of the English language and such tropes are not appropriated to the Africa and Africans they intend to portray.

Since Cugoano was an extremely religious man, he was aware of the religious arguments made pro slavery, namely the story of Ham, as was discussed. He quickly cites the concept which identifies blacks as accursed descendants of Ham. He says that the story of Ham, "affords a grand pretence for the supporters of the African slavery to build a false notion upon, as it is found by history that Africa, in general, was peopled by the descendants of Ham."[195] Apart from criticising the wrongful argument made to support slavery, he also criticises the entire institution of colonisation and the way in which the Europeans settle in different parts of the world:

> None but men of the most brutish and depraved nature, led on by the invidious influence of internal wickedness, could have made their settlements in the

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[193] Ottobah Cugoano, Thoughts *and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species,* 1787, 22.
[194] Camille Stone Stanton and Julie A. Chappell, eds., *Transatlantic Literature of Long Eighteenth Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 52.
[195] Cugoano, 34.

> different parts of the world discovered by them, and have treated the various Indian nations, in the manner that the barbarous inhuman Europeans have done.[196]

Cugoano sees the possible salvation to the situation and acceptance of blacks into the Western society in a valid religious doctrine that would accept blacks as equal partners in faith with white people. He wrote, "It is my highest wish and earnest prayer to God, that some encouragement could be given to send able school masters, and intelligent ministers, who would be faithful and able to teach the Christian religion."[197] He envisioned a certain partnership between well-educated English missionaries who would go to Africa to teach the gospel and undertake an alternative system of religious instruction for Africans through which they would be accepted as equals.

Cugoano also proposed several practical proposals towards the abolition of slavery. Firstly, he called for compensation, "days of mourning and fasting appointed," in which people would study the formation of such an evil practice. Secondly, slavery should be totally abolished through a proclamation issued by the British legislature and it would be "published throughout all the British empire, to hinder and prohibit all men under their government to traffic either in buying or selling men,"[198] he wanted to prevent it via a threat of monetary penalty. Finally, Cugoano proposed that warships should be sent to Africa, along the trading coast:

> with faithful men to direct that none should be brought from the African coast without their own consent and the approbation of their friends, and to intercept all merchant ships that were bringing them away, until such a scrutiny was made, whatever nation they belong to.[199]

Cugoano´s writing is an angry polemic which bases its rhetorical appeal on philosophical, religious, economic and rational, logical arguments rather than relying on feelings of humanity expected of personal testimony and feelings of sentiment. Overall, Cugoano argues that the slave trade must increase the national debt, corrupt the British constitution and the propaganda of liberty and freedom, and also bring down the wrath of the Heavens on the British unless they mend their ways. Religion plays a strong part in his narrative, he often quotes part of the Bible and reckons that under religion, people do not differ in race and nation, he deems himself a Biblical prophet and states that, "Christianity does not require that we should be deprived of our own personal name, or the name of our ancestors, but it may very fitly add

[196] Cugoano, 77.
[197] Cugoano, 126.
[198] Cugoano, 130.
[199] Cugoano, 132.

another name unto us, Christian, or one anointed."[200] Cugoano shows how the Africans live in between two worlds, how they needed to establish a hybrid between their African heritage and their new established English identity through the usage of the English language and therefore Cugoano´s writing strongly relates on duality, he sees himself as African and British, as Old Testament prophet and as a Christina preacher, as drawing out the language of the Bible and the oral sermon.[201] Cugoano anticipates the persona of a prophet later used by for example Equiano. This prophet persona ironically positions himself as the true Christian whose mission is to convert the unbelieving, or rather, mis-believing supporters of slavery.

Cugoano´s narrative contains only a small section of autobiography and is better understood as an economic and moral treatise on the slave trade. The morality of the text and the humanising arguments made by Cugoano are often intensified by using animalising metaphors to describe the conditions faced by black slaves (similarly to other writings). The slaves are treated like animals although their inclusion in Christianity reveals they are human. The physical abuse that slaves were faced with is concluded by Cugoano that:

> Slaves, like animals, are bought and sold, and dealt with as their capricious owners may think fit, even in torturing and tearing them to pieces, and wearing them out with hard labour, hunger and oppression.[202]

Cugoano often uses the terminology of beasts, dens and prey to intensify the argument of his writing.

Cugoano uses reversed perspective as a literary technique in his *Essay*, he appropriates the model of the slave trade, reverses the players, and uses this reversal to win the sympathy of his readers who are asked to imagine their reaction if similar events were to befall upon them. Such strategy can be seen in the following passage:

> […] suppose that some of the African pirates had been as dextrous as the Europeans, and that they had made excursions on the coast of Great Britain […] and though even assisted by some of your insidious neighbours, for there may be some men even among you vile enough to do such a thing if they could get money by it; and that they should carry off your sons and your daughters, and your wives and friends, to a perpetual and barbarous slavery, you would certainly think that those African pirates were justly deserving of any punishment that could be put

[200] Cugoano, 35.
[201] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 22.
[202] Cugoano, 17.

> upon them. But the European pirate merchandisers of the human species, let them belong to what nation they will, are equally bad.[203]

This technique takes the sentimental emphasis on pity further, for it does not only ask for empathy on the basis of human rights, it puts the British public in the position of the weak and oppressed and enables them what the experience of slave trade and slavery entails. Cugoano develops a discourse of supernatural Chaos through this rhetoric in order to warn against the consequences of slavery and imperialism on humanity, all humanity. The metaphors of pain and disorder are employed to show what the European oppression brought to Africa and what can happen to Western civilisation as well. He invokes supernatural upheavals in a poetic and dramatic manner that reminds the readers of oral stories and strategies that diviners used in Africa to warn the community against potential harm or evil.[204]

Even though Cugoano uses some strategies of the sentimental discourse, he does it almost ironically. Cugoano intends to appeal to the reader's sensibility as well as to their Christian beliefs and their abilities of reasoning. These flashes of tearful sentimental rhetoric are often followed by a passage which contradicts the sentimental discourse.[205] For example he claims that slavery can only be justified by those “who must eventually resign their own claim to any degree of sensibility and humanity,”[206] even though in a previous passage he conveyed the idea that the ability to weep for others and to show sympathy towards the distress of others is one of the key aspects of sentimental argument of abolition. Combining these two opinions, Cugoano might have been aware of the possible damage of the sentimental discourse. The strategy also indicates the type of reader Cugoano hopes to attract. The autobiographical passages use a tactical sentimental rhetoric to appeal to common taste, but in the main body of the text he chooses discourse that is familiar to readers of Evangelical and Methodists meetings, rather than those in the sentimental drawing rooms of rich people.[207]

As a rhetorician, Cugoano anticipates several of Equiano´s major strategies, such as the trope of humility even though he claims a high status birth in Africa. Furthermore, he portrays his physical enslavement as paradoxically a fortunate fall that has led to spiritual emancipation, religion is used as the ultimate salvation, and he uses references to Old Testament Jews to make arguments by analogy. He also assumes authority from the combination of his African birth or complexion and his conversion to Christianity. He

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[203] Cugoano, 62 – 63.
[204] Babacar M´Baye, *The Trickster Comes West: Pan-African Influence in Early Black Diasporan Narratives* (Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 93.
[205] *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760 – 1807*, 138.
[206] Cugoano, 2.
[207] *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760 – 1807*, 139.

establishes his identity by revealing all the pieces that constitute different memberships – ethnic (Fantee), national (African), political (British, species (human) and religious (Christian).

5.3 Ignatius Sancho´s *Letters of Ignatius Sancho*

The Letters of Ignatius Sancho were published in 1782 and present a series of letters written between 1766 and 1780 to family, friends, writers, poets, artists as well as newspapers. The collection was published posthumously and it proved to be very popular among readers and proved crucial for the abolitionist movement, for they enabled the readers to witness a certain debate, to see the arguments for and against abolition. Interestingly, the first edition (and several subsequent editions) also included a brief biography of Sancho by Joseph Jekyll, who was a friend of Sancho's and a member of parliament.[208]

In the narrative of Sancho´s life began with his birth on a slave-ship, followed by the death of his mother and the suicide of his father. This means that Sancho had no recollection of life in Africa or Africa at all. At the age of two, Sancho was given to "three maiden sisters" in Greenwich who refused to educate him and used an argument often repeated by supporters of slavery that "African ignorance was the only security for his obedience, and that to enlarge the mind of their slave would go near to emancipate his person."[209] This shows the prejudice that was present in England at the time as well as the fear that people felt as far as the Blacks and their capabilities were concerned. It also illustrates that they did not necessarily see them as inferior, rather as less educated and therefore less worldly and easy to manipulate. Sancho was rescued from these women by the Duke and Duchess of Montagu who encouraged his reading and frequently gave him books and when his owners threatened to send him back to the West Indies, they took him to their house in which he eventually became a butler. In 1773, because of his great services, he was given money to open a small grocery shop. He married a freed West Indian woman called Anne Osborne. Sancho´s life is a series of complex identities, simultaneously being British and African, Sancho´s identity resists easy national and racial identifications and he incorporates the complex and multiple personas into his cultural critique.[210]

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[208] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 23.
[209] Vincent Carretta, ed., *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in The English Speaking World of the eighteenth Century* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 2004), 100.
[210] Vincent Carretta and Philips Gould, eds., *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the early Black Atlantic* (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), 1.

Despite all his personal emancipation and success, his *Letters* are of bigger importance for the purposes of this study and they offer us one extremely unique link between a black writer and a mainstream writer of the sentimental discourse for he in fact kept a correspondence with Laurence Sterne. Sancho wrote a letter to Sterne in appreciation of his writing and in reaction to one of Sterne's Sermons, specifically "Sermon X" in which Sterne writes:

> Consider the dreadful succession of wars in one part or other of the earth, perpetuated from one century to another with so little intermission, that mankind have scarce had time to breather from them, since ambition first came into the world! Consider the horrid effects of them in all those barbarous devastations we read of, where whole nations have been put to the sword, or have been drive out to nakedness and famine, to make room for newcomers! – Consider how great a part of our species, in all ages down to this, have been trod under the feet of cruel and capricious tyrants who would neither bear their cries nor pity their distresses! – Consider slavery, - what it is, - how bitter a draught, and how many millions have been made to drink of it! – which if it can poison all earthly happiness, when exercised barely upon our bodies, what must it be when it comprehends both the slavery of body and mind![211]

When Sterne wrote back to Sancho, he made his antislavery sentiments quite clear, stating:

> I never look *Westward* (when I am in a pensive mood at least, but I think of the burdens which our Brothers and Sisters are *there* carrying – and I could ease their shoulders from one ounce of ´em, I declare I would set out this hour upon a pilgrimage to Mecca for their sakes.[212]

His usage of Mecca and the parenthetical quality of his mood reveal a certain casual understanding of the issue, as if it were a universal problem. Sterne still feels a need to write his sentimental scene with the African when he employed a figure of an "oppressed" African in a short passage in *Tristram Shandy*. In the scene, a young Negro girl uses feathers tied to a cane as a fan to flap away the flies rather than killing them. Uncle Toby upon seeing this remarks, "She had suffered persecution, Trim, and had learnt mercy."[213] The slaver shows no mercy in Sterne's novel. Sterne could not deny his sentimentalist and human approach to the issue of slavery in his writing and regardless of his motive, the image he produced for wide

[211] Laurence Sterne, *The Works Of Laurence Sterne: Sermons (I-XXXII)* (1819), 137 – 138.
[212] Lewis Perry Curtis, ed. *The Letters of Laurence Sterne* (Oxford: Caledon Press, 1935), 285 – 286.
[213] Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 470.

public appeal and therefore helped to ingrain specific views on the sensibility of Africans that directly contradicted proslavery claims about their nature. [214]

The response letter by Sancho is often deemed by critics as an imitation of Sterne's style. Latest consensus deems Sancho and his intervention as original and radical and deems Sterne as an outspoken opponent of slavery. One of the compelling strategies of Sancho´s letter to Sterne is that he does not ask him to condemn slavery outright, he praises Sterne's capabilities as a sentimental author to bring forth tears on the behalf of slaves and Sancho hopes that his addressing the topic of slavery will bring empathy from his readers, again relying on strong imagery of distress and tears that the sentimental discourse relied upon in order to create empathy.[215]

The letter form of his book enables to address different topics and interests as well as get opinions and responses from different sources. As much the reader is a witness of a certain dialogue between Sancho and his correspondents, the reader also becomes involved in the conversation. Through his letters, Sancho offers labels and stereotypes for his readers to refuse and he wishes to engage with them. We could almost say that he is writing to the readers more than anybody else.[216] The topic of equality sows together his writing, for he writes letters to writers as well as fellow servants, to booksellers, friends as well as their children. Of course, the letters considered most valid today are those which address political matters, he describes the riots and expresses disgust and despair over the British defeats during the American War of Independence. There are also several letters which address the topic of national debt, which indicate that Sancho was concerned with the well being of the entire British society, he wanted the Empire to be stronger.

The epistolary format of Sancho´s work is not without a reason for the epistolary form was popular among the English reading public ever since Samuel Richardson published his epistolary novel *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded.* Letters published usually covered the pleasurable life of the London metropolitan culture in the middle of the eighteenth century or they were employed to tell a love story. Sancho employs the popular form to appeal to the taste of the culture whose discourse he uses and whose attention he seeks. It is a gesture of affiliation; a former slave is re-imagining himself as a human subject. He uses the letters as a form of self-representation and articulation, through the writing he became a modern

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[214] *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity, 1759 – 1815*, 103.
[215] *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760 – 1807*, 58.
[216] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 33.

subject.[217] In other words, through the means of his correspondence and discussion with other British subjects, the former slave could reflect on his human identity, place himself in the discourse of the modern taste and become a member of the public.

Sancho´s identity as a black African writer is most evident in his letters to the press, which are signed "Africanus." He also published several music collections under "an African."[218] He juxtaposes his black identity be degrading names with the high formal standard of his letters; he refers to himself as "thick-lipped son of Afric":

> As to our politics – now don't laugh at me – for everyone has a right to be a politician; so have I; and though only a poor thick-lipped son of Afric! May be as notable a Negro state-botcher as *****, and so on for five hundred –.[219]

The topic of Sancho´s identity did not go unnoticed by critics and literary theorists. For example, Nigerian critic S.E. Ogude comments on Sancho´s assimilation and he sees Sancho as a man between two worlds, someone who suffers from the inability to be both black and English:

> The letters show that Sancho was emotionally attached to Tory ideals although he was always conscious of his African origin. His is the sad case of what we now call the divided-self – for he was that uncomfortable phenomenon – the black Englishman. One does not realise how much the racial problem plagued a very sensitive nature like Sancho until one has read these letters.[220]

This multitude of identities probably enabled him to have more perspectives and address variety of audiences, for he understood the complexity of identities on the British Isles. His multiple identities or the hybridity of identities he became are exploited via discontinuity of the letter form, he presents to his readers with different versions of himself, and he shows different characters. Each voice or combination of voice he assumed was specific to the correspondent to whom the letter was addressed. The problematic aspect to this multiplicity is that Sancho´s position does not seem stable to the reader, it is as if he does not necessarily know the appropriate discourse to narrate himself and his opinions.

Just as Cowper commented on British hypocrisy in "The Task," Sancho also addresses the way in which the English behave outside of England; he observes that "your country's practice

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[217] Simon Gikandi, *Slavery and the Culture of Taste* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 14.
Raphael Horman and Gesa Mackenthum, eds., *Human Bondage in the Cultural Contact Zone: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Slavery and Its Discourses* (Monster: Axman Verlag GmbH, 2010), 110.

[218] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 26.

[219] Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African* (New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005), Letter 133, 227.

[220] Quoted in Susheila Nasta, *Reading the "New" Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Inc., 2000), 21.

has been uniformly wicked in the East-West-Indies – and even on the coast of Guinea."[221] Sancho covered all grounds in which the British society was connected and guilty of slavery, and though his writing was influenced by the sense and sensibility of the time, his attempts to create an identity through the journey of writing seem to enable him to become part of the literary history, at the same time creating a certain form of hybrid because he writes both from the position of an African man as well as free British citizen.

Sancho´s *Letters* strongly relied on the mainstream sentimental discourse of antislavery writings and became an integral part of the abolition campaign. Through the published letters he becomes essentially a sentimental hero, who would be recognisable to the readers of Sterne, Richardson or Scott; his sentimental qualities would make him approachable and familiar in the eyes of the public. His heroism is demonstrated through a series of sentimental parables that show an uneducated African man can have the same literary abilities as a European if allowed to learn.[222] In respect to this we can say that the *Letters* encompass all that the sentimental rhetoric can offer and its reliance on the popular discourse with the combination of resistance about the topic of abolition indicate a new rhetorical strategy.

5.4 Olaudah Equaino´s *Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, Or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Published in 1789.*

C.L. Innes identifies the combination Gronniosaw´s personal narrative and Cugoano´s rational text as leading to an establishing of the formula for slave narratives, a tale which combines personal autobiography with anti-slave trade polemic.[223] Equiano is often compared with Sancho, but even though Equiano also writes as a man of many different positions and identities –servant, friend, musician, father, and husband – his identity as an African and ex-slave are central to the story and they are never questioned.[224] Sancho presented a journey through his letters; Equiano presents a narrative in which the identity of the protagonist is already constructed and which cannot and will not be constrained by slavery. The writing shows personal achievement which is supposed to reflect well on his fellow Africans and enable them to be considered as equals and in respect to that be free of slavery.

In his *Narrative* Equiano tells his readers how he was kidnapped from his Ibo family in Nigeria and sold into slavery in 1775. He was transported to the Caribbean and later to

[221] Sancho, *Letters*, Letter 68, 149.
[222] *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760 – 1807*, 63.
[223] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 23.
[224] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 36.

Virginia. Equiano talks about the various sailors and merchants that owned him, one of which renamed him Gustavus Vassa. Equiano got engaged in trade and through this action was able to secure enough money to purchase his freedom in 1766. Equiano travelled through the Arctic, the Middle East and the Mediterranean, all of these travels are documented in his narrative alongside his search for salvation. As previous writers, Equiano offers his readers a representation of black subjectivity and engagement with the Bible that aims to show the incompatibility of Christianity with the institution of slavery and point at the hypocrisy of Christians who agree with the practice. In Equiano´s *Narrative*, his conversion validates his authority as an African, but also as a Christian subject with right to freedom. The narrator moves from a storyteller to an abolitionist via his developing Christian worldview.[225] Equiano appeals to his countrymen to recognise the power of Christianity as much as he wants the white Englishmen to acknowledge the hypocrisy in their involvement in slavery. He wishes for his writing to raise sentiment and bring an end to the institution of slave trade and slavery, he claims that its "chief design […] is to excite in Britain's august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave-Trade has entailed on his unfortunate countrymen."[226] In his own definition, Equiano is "an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument towards the relief of his suffering countrymen."[227] Declaring himself "unlettered" does not seem appropriate, since he is a part of the canon due to his literacy, however, he might be attempting to create an individual who is one of the black men he wishes to be free. The trope of salvation that can be seen in his reliance on Christianity can be connected to two different aspects. Salvation in this narrative symbolizes new found freedom. However, it can also symbolize a deliverance from a negative situation. Both of these are evident in that Equiano bought his freedom from his master and was indeed delivered from the negative situation of slavery. Equiano's deliverance from his sins and the deliverance from bondage from his master are parallels. Ide Corley examines this in *The Subject of Abolitionist Rhetoric*, "Abolitionist rhetoric often equates deliverance from sin with deliverance from slavery or Christian salvation with the slave's acquisition of freedom."[228] He

[225] Carol P. Marsh-Lockett and Elizabeth West, eds., *Literary Expressions of African Spirituality* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013), 147.
[226] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the Africa*, 1789, iii.
[227] Equiano, iv.
[228] Ide Corley, "The Subject of Abolitionist Rhetoric: Freedom and Trauma in 'The Life of Olaudah Equiano,'" *Modern Languages Studies, Vol. 32, No. 2,* (2002), 152.

also makes the point that Equiano's conversion to Christianity "replaces the burden of obligation to his former master with a burden of obligation to God."[229]

In the 1780s Equiano became active in the antislavery movement in England and he was a prominent persona in a group of black men, the Sons of Africa.[230] *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African* was first published in 1789 and became an important asset in the abolitionist camp. As a matter of fact, it was submitted to the Parliament as documentary evidence when the bill for the abolition of the slave trade was discussed in 1792 and the submission was subscribed even by the Prince of Wales. The 1792 edition of Equiano´s *Narrative* included series of letters and testimonies which countered the proposition that Equiano did not write the narrative himself. Regardless of such accusations, the narrative was used as a testimony of the brutality and immorality as well as economical disadvantages of the slave trade. In the work Equiano documented his involvement in a number of enterprises as well as his plan to colonise Sierra Leone with repatriated Africans.[231]

Quite often, Equiano´s *Narrative* is regarded as providing a blueprint for a genre which dominated writing by black Americans during the nineteenth century and which continue to inform autobiographical and fictional narratives in the twentieth century, also known as slave narratives, such as those of Frederick Douglass or a later representative Ralph Ellison, even though his book is an autobiography. Through Equiano´s work became established certain contents that cannot be omitted in this type of writing. C.L. Innes identifies the following: the loss or absence of an ancestral history and family; the discovery of what it means to be a slave; the discovery of book learning and the struggle to achieve it; description of scenes of brutality and degradation in the treatment of slaves; the importance of Christianity and the difference between true Christianity and the hypocritical Christianity of slave-traders and slave-owners; the escape to freedom in the north of America or in England. Many of the slave narratives are also preceded by letters and/or testimonials regarding the origin and authenticity of the account. Equiano also relies on the ethos of Romanticism and its stress on individualism, he appeals to his audience via individual experience and sentiment, the desire for self-autonomy.[232]

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[229] „The Subject of Abolitionist Rhetoric: Freedom and Trauma in 'The Life of Olaudah Equiano,'" 147.
[230] *Sons of Africa* was a late eighteenth century group in Britain which campaigned to abolish slavery. Its members were educated Africans in London, most commonly freed slaves, including Cugoano and Equiano et. al. of London's black community. It was closely connected to the Society for the Abolition of the Slave trade.
[231] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 36.
Africa and the Americas: Culture, Politics, and History, 424.
[232] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 37.

Equiano was not only the first writer to take such an approach, he was also the first to be strongly concerned with authentic representation of African traditions and culture, unlike Gronniosaw or Cugoano, who both mentioned they were born in Africa and describe the circumstances before they were kidnapped, however they do not go into great detail when describing Africa. Via this strategy, Equiano not only relates to Africa, he also relates to the people of Africa. Throughout the *Narrative*, he refers to "his countrymen," signifying either all Africans or those who experienced slavery. At the same time, the letters and the writing express his claim to his right as a British subject and his rightful membership of a nation which is in its ideal form Christian, liberal, humane and, most importantly, free. His attempts at establishing a correct representation of Africa are difficult to judge, since he did not grow up in Africa and is rather relating to what he might remember and what he wishes for Africa to be.

The Africa Equiano constructs is what slaves dream of returning to, a concept called "Mother Africa," which serves as a certain memorial and goal in the minds of black writers.[233] This concept is problematic for different reasons. Firstly, the Africa that the slaves were taken from does not exist anymore, it has changed, evolved and it had a history of its own. Fred D´Aguiar touches upon this problem in his novel *Feeding the Ghosts* which deals with the *Zong* tragedy. In the novel a character called Mintah comments, ""But even Africa is not Africa anymore."[234] Equiano wishes to return this Africa that he has no access to and which does not exist anymore. Theorist Dionne Brand addressed this issue of impossibility to return to the homeland as the "Door of No Return":

> There are no maps to the Door of No Return. […] But to the Door of No Return which is illuminated in the consciousness of black in the diaspora there are no maps. This door is not mere physicality. It is a spiritual location. It is perhaps a psychic destination- since leaving was never voluntary, return was, and still may be, an intention, however deeply buried. There is as it says no way in; no return.[235]

When writers imagine Africa, it seems as a mythical place and occasionally it can lead to it being perceived as slightly one-dimensional.

The tension between the two identities and the two homelands fills much of the narrative. Equiano begins by establishing the authenticity of his homeland from an anthropological point

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[233] Alan Rice, *Creating Memorials Building Identities, The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 5.
[234] Fred D´Aguiar, *Feeding the Ghosts* (London: Vintage, 1998), 207.
[235] *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 2.

of view, with an account of its customs, rituals and economy. Equiano attempts to use the portrayal of his community to be a representative of a larger African society: "The manners and government of a people who have little commerce with other countries are generally very simple; and the history of what passes in one family or village may serve as specimen of the whole nation."[236] He attempts to portray a society that is harmonious, virtuous and free of evil. In other words, a society which is superior to the one involved in slavery.

Equiano´s account also sets itself apart by revisiting previous European narratives of encounters with Africa through his strategy of telling the story of his kidnapping from the perspective of a child. His own journey from the interior to the coast reverses the Western paradigm of the explorer's journey from civilisation to savagery, as he leaves behind the language and virtues of his own community to discover African peoples living near the coast.[237] Unfortunately, he finds a westernised culture and yet one lacking in the signs of civilisation:

> All the nations and peoples I had hitherto passed through resembled our own in their manners, customs and language: but I came at length to a country the inhabitants of which differed from us in all those particulars. I was very much struck with this difference, especially when I came upon a people who did not circumcise, and eat without washing their hands. They cooked also in iron pots, and had European cutlasses and cross bows, which were unknown to us, and fought with their fists among themselves. Their women were not so modest as ours, for they eat, and drank, and slept with their men. But above all, I was amazed to see no sacrifices or offerings among them. In some of those places the people ornamented themselves with scars, and likewise filed their teeth very sharp. They wanted sometimes to ornament me in the same manner, but I would not suffer them; hoping that I might sometimes be among a people who did no thus disfigure themselves.[238]

The corrupted and disfigured coasts of Africa are not the most terrifying descriptions in the narrative. Equiano also describes the first time he saw the ocean and a slave ship, waiting for its cargo:

> These filled me with astonishment, which was son converted into terror, which I am yet at a loss to describe, not the then feelings of my mind. When I was carried

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[236] Equiano, 32.
[237] *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain*, 40.
[238] Equiano, 53 – 54.

> on board I was immediately handled and tossed up, to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, united to confirm in me this belief… I asked the black people who had brought me on board if we were not to be eaten by those white men with horrible looks, red faces, and long hair.[239]

We can see Equiano establishing physical features of the white people he sees and how he reverses the norms of colour and appearance, which were often assumed by Europeans when discussing the Africans. The topic of cannibalism is also reversed and appointed to the white men on the ship, signalising the un-Christian character of these men and their savage behaviour towards the Africans. In this instance Equiano uses a literary technique of reversal of perspective (a technique identified in Cugoano´s text above), he provides a variation of the first encounter with a foreign land other than the one the reading public knew from travel narratives and writings of colonial encounters, one which assign Europeans as having "savage" qualities.

Equiano does not only address the topic of religion on the basis of hypocrisy of the shipmen and slave traders, he also challenges his readership to imagine the Christian potential of the African slave beyond the confines of the slave trade. It was commonly believed that by abolishing the slave trade and ending the constant supply of slaves, planters would be forced to exhibit better treatment towards their slaves. Equiano is clear about the slave trade's damaging effect on African slaves:

> You stupefy them with stripes, and then think it necessary to keep them in a state of ignorance; and yet you assert that they are incapable of learning; that their minds are such a barren soil.[240]

Through this statement Equiano positions literacy as the bridge to Christianity.

The writing also includes the topic of language and Equiano´s quest to be able to speak the language of his captors, fellow slaves or shipmates. He sees language as means of emancipation, Equiano chooses on his way to becoming a free individual as an indirect tactic of adaptation to a new culture via language.[241] Equiano realises that in order to be considered an equal he had to adapt the language of "the other," of his oppressors. Throughout the

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[239] Equiano, 55.
[240] Equiano, 111 – 112.
[241] Meike Kohl, *Strategies of Emancipation in Olaudah Equiano´s "The Interesting Narrative" and Mary Prince's "The History of Mary Prince*," (Munster, 2006) 3.

narrative we see Equiano break the barrier between himself and the English culture by absorbing the language of the enslavers and describe himself in terms set by the English. Unfortunately, through this action he becomes more distant from his fellow slaves, as if he has gained a superior status.[242] It seems as if when Equiano accepted the language of the Western "civilised" culture he also adopted the roles that that entails and therefore he frequently runs the risk of adopting the distorting stereotypes inherent in that language.

In the above discussion of Cugoano´s text was mentioned that Cugoano in fact pioneered several strategies later used by Equiano. One of the most important anticipation of rhetoric devices was the persona of the prophet, which is also profound in Equiano´s *Narrative*. Equiano comments on the hypocrisy of Christians who were involved in the slave trade. He closes his autobiography with a prophetic call for a union between Britain and Africa to be brought about through "economic intercourse" and conversion of both Africans and Britons to the true faith. His rhetorical ethos depended upon his credibility as having both African and British identity, on the establishment of his Afro-British status, because then he could speak for both and such a concept was the beginning of hybrid identities in the place of the diaspora.[243]

[242] Maria Diedrich et al., eds., *Black Imagination and the Middle Passage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 52.
[243] *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment and Slavery, 1760 – 1807*, 261.

6. Conclusion

I could not have foreseen the vast difficulty and complexity of the relationship between abolition and its discourse. The history of slavery in Britain is difficult in itself, for it contradicts all that Britain and in fact the British Empire appeared to have stood for and to have preached. And even though slavery was abolished in 1833, it is hardly merely a historical chapter; we still have the legacy of slavery present in our lives today in racism. As Fred D´Aguiar says in his poem "Bloodlines," "Slavery may be buried, / but it's not dead, its offspring, Racism, still breeds."[244] His historical narratives of slavery such as *Feeding the Ghosts* and others, which deal with the middle passage and the complicated issue of slavery are difficult to define simply as slave narratives for mainly one reason and that is the fact the D´Aguiar did not experience slavery or the slave trade, he relies on literary memories and testimonies from which he draws inspiration and conveys emotions: works such as the poems, colonial encounters and slave narratives examined in this thesis.

These works collectively created a memory of slavery, they recorded the horrors and emotions and opinions of and for the slaves themselves, in order to set them free or to help the black brethren to be free. Memorialising such a traumatic past adequately is a difficult task, for the writers, especially the slave narrative writers, attempted to describe all they experienced and had to endure during slavery, however, they relied on the hegemonic sentimental discourse so that the topic was coated in a familiar and popular form and the content was conveyed in a manner that would not disgust the readers, but make them empathise with the struggles of slaves and former slaves. The problematic topic of memory of the past of slavery has often been a feature of novels concerning slavery in later decades as this quote from Toni Morrison shows, "There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there's a necessity for remembering it in a manner that can be digested, in a manner in which memory is not destructive."[245] The works creating this thesis are strong links between history and memory, even though the two need to be separated. Theorist Petchovsky highlights their interface by saying: "Memory is an essential attribute of the human psyche and is therefore more personal than historical or material knowledge. History alone cannot enrich memory, because it is systematic."[246] In other words, memory is essential to make history more human, to enable history to become part of the discourse and to be recorded and

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[244] Fred D´Aguiar, *Bloodlines* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2000), p. 150.
[245] Quoted *Creating Memorials Building Identities, The Politics of Memory in the Black Atlantic*, 1.
[246] Quoted in *Creating Memorials Building Identities*, 13.

to reflect it more accurately. However, history is set, history is facts and dates and figures, and memory is not, memory is in a sense a collective representation of history.

All the works that the thesis consists of represent how the memory of slavery and its abolition was created through literary creations. The different writings all represent different places of the Black Atlantic. The sentimental poetry indicates the way in which slaves were narrated in English literature and how the popular sentimental discourse invited paradox and problems to the debate, which abolitionists may not have been aware of, yet the appeal they attempted to make on British society was difficult to achieve because instead of empathy sometimes the abolitionist discourse invoked pity. In other words, even though writers and poets meant their works to elevate the black slaves into an equal position, their usage of sentimental discourse often led to reaffirmation of the hierarchy from which they approached the issue of slavery.

The travellers had access to the experience of the West Indies, they knew the situation in the Caribbean and they could relate to the arguments made by abolitionists and they combined the popular genre of travel writing with philosophical and religious thoughts and arguments. These writings were first examples of diasporic writings even though the terminology did not exist at the time. These writers wrote within the limits set by the travel writing genre and the sentimental discourse despite the fact that what they were attempting to describe what was outside the discourse of English literature of the time, meaning that the metaphors and tropes these writers employed were being applied out of context and even though the benefits the writings brought to abolition are undeniable, their strong reliance on transculturalism was problematic, because the English public were asked for an emotional response to an experience they did not understand. In other words, the sentimentalised description of the "black brethren" was used as means of creating a sense of family in which certain members were treated unfairly.

It was inevitable that the abolitionist movement would employ stories from runaway or freed slaves in Britain to further their cause. The claim was often made that Africans were in the position of oppressed slaves due to their lack of knowledge and literacy. The first problem with literacy lies in the language barrier, they slaves had to learn and define themselves in a new language. The second one is of course the fact that slaves were not educated at all, because as Frederick Douglass says, "knowledge makes a man unfit to be a slave."[247] Because knowledge and literacy leads to enabling the slaves to defend themselves

[247] Quoted in F.J.Rocca, "An Ordinary American on the Culture of Today's America" (Candid Bookpress: 2015), 78.

in a manner equal to arguments made by the so called superior culture of Britain. Most slaves found literacy through Christianity and religion and spiritual writings proved to be their greatest assets in their literary fight for equality and acknowledgement of human rights. Their testimonies gave William Wilberforce's statement, "You may choose to look the other way but you can never say again that you did not know."[248] The slave narratives enabled the English reading public to experience a first person account of the horrors of slavery and they enabled the black authors to create their own hybrid identity, for they were the ones who have experienced all three points of the triangle that is the Black Atlantic and in the space they created their identity.

Overall, we can see that the literary tradition is as complicated as the past of history itself. The ambivalence of the sentimental discourse is probably caused by the fact that slavery did not fit into all that Britain attempted to represent and therefore there was not a specific rhetoric to apply. I was slightly surprised at the long tradition of slavery in Britain and Europe as well, because I think society tends to connect slavery with the eighteenth or nineteenth century, but in fact, certain definition or type of slavery has always been part of our history and it still resonates with us today, mainly because of the guilt of the enslavers as well as its unfortunate legacy of racism:

> At first, man was enslaved by the gods. But he broke their chains. Then he was enslaved by the kings. But he broke their chains. He was enslaved by his birth, by his kin, by his race. But he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which neither god nor king nor other men can take away from him, no matter what their number, for his is the right of man, and there is no right on earth above this right. And he stood on the threshold of freedom for which the blood of the centuries behind him had been spilled.[249]

[248] John W. Cowart, *Changing Lives: A History of Christ Church Jacksonville Anglican* (Jacksonville, Bluefish Books, 2014), 81.
[249] Ayn Rand, *Anthem* (Claremont: Coyote Canyon Press, 1966), 104.

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Appendices

Figure 1

Josiah Wedgwood, the abolitionist medallion

Figure 2

Johan Zoffany, *The Family of Sir William Young*

Figure 3

William Blake, *Group of Negros, as imported to be sold for Slaves*

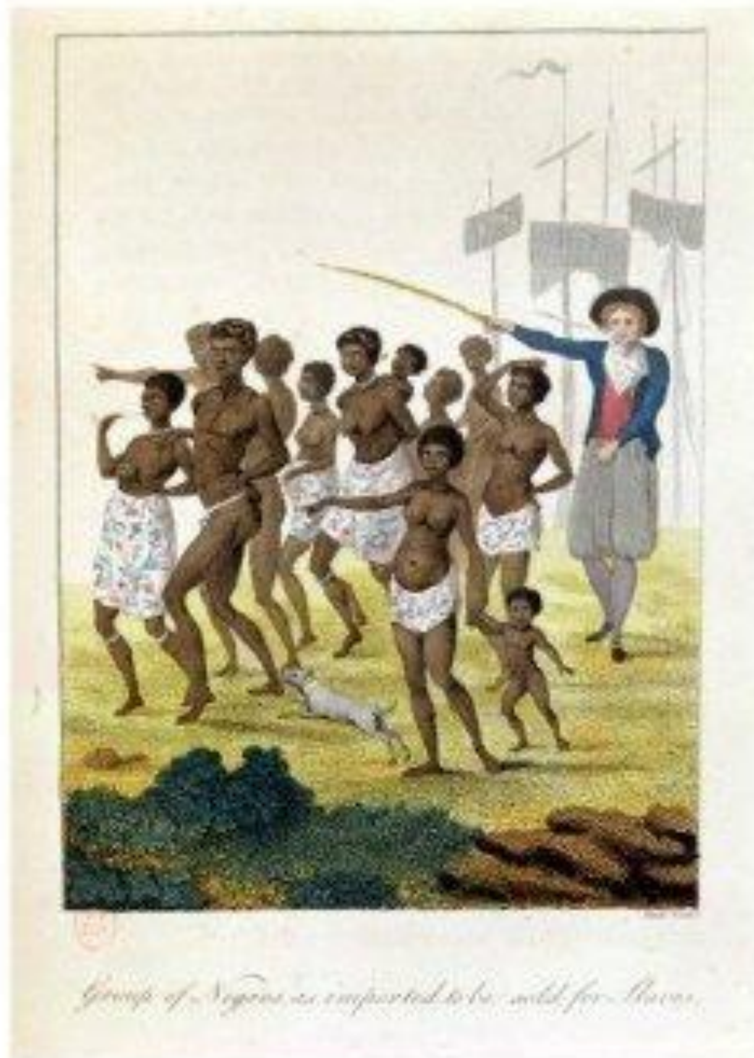

Figure 4

William Blake, *A Negro hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows*

Figure 5

William Blake, *The Execution of Breaking on the Rack*

Figure 6

William Blake, *Flagellation of a Female Samboe Slave*

Figure 7

William Blake, *Europe supported by Africa and America*

Figure 8

William Blake, *Family of Negro Slaves from Loango*