

Race, Emotions and Rhetoric in British Anti-Slavery Literature, 1787-1833

Anger

This chapter explores portrayals of slave anger, manifested in slave revolts and acts of vengeance, as a retaliation to enslavement, although this risked depicting slaves as dangerous. John Coffey (2012) highlights that abolitionists depicted natural disasters (such as earthquakes) as signs of God's wrath to validate the slave's own anger. Such fear tactics suggest that abolishing slavery was the only way to avoid divine punishment.

Guilt

This chapter investigates the portrayal of slavery as a national sin, depicting Britain's guilt for allowing slavery to continue. It explores the shame of colonial guilt, the trope of blushing, and the sinful purchasing of slave-produced goods, for example in William Cowper's 'Pity for Poor Africans' (1788).

Sensibility

This will explore the rhetoric of sensibility identified by Brycchan Carey (2015), including the trope of weeping as an expression of slave sadness. It also examines the problem of 'false sentiment' (an insincere performance of sorrow), and the ways that antislavery literature, such as Hannah More's 'Slavery: A Poem' (1788), responded to this.

Joy

This chapter explores the depictions of slave happiness in slave narratives, such as in Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* (1789), including the happiness at learning to read, bliss following Christian conversion, and joy at gaining freedom.

References:

William Cowper, 'Pity for Poor Africans', in *Northampton Mercury*, 69.23 (9 August 1788)
Hannah More, 'Slavery: A Poem', (London: T. Cadell, 1788); William Cowper, 'The Negroe's Complaint', (1788) in *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology 1764-1865*, ed. Marcus Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003) pp. 91-2

References:

Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)
John Coffey, "'Tremble, Britannia!': Fear, Providence and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1758-1807", *The English Historical Review*, 127.527 (2012) pp. 844-881

Background: Diagram of the Brookes slave ship (1789)

Image: 'Am I Not a Man and Brother' by Josiah Wedgwood

Thesis Argument:

This thesis will explore the different emotions used in British anti-slavery literature to evoke the reader's sympathy for the enslaved protagonist, to gain support for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. It will include close readings of poetry and slave narratives, and situating texts within their historical contexts, considering biography, genre, and Romanticism. Critics such as Brycchan Carey and John Coffey have investigated the use of individual emotions [sentiment and anger respectively]. My research aims to expand upon this by establishing relationships between these emotions, examining the various emotive techniques used in an attempt to gain the reader's sympathy, demonstrating the numerous rhetorical devices used by abolitionist campaigners in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It will impact both historical studies of the anti-slavery campaign, and literary studies of emotions, as well as potentially influencing the use of persuasive techniques in future political campaigns.

Nicola Westwood

Nxw421@student.bham.ac.uk

PhD in English Literature



UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

College of Arts and Law
Supervisors: Matthew Ward,
Fariha Shaikh, Tom Lockwood