

## 'Ev'ry Heart can Feel': Scottish Poetic Responses to Slavery in the West Indies, from Blair to Burns

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In 1788, the Scottish physician John Ferriar published an 'altered' stage version of *Oroonoko* that 'adapted' the play to the 'circumstances of the present times'.<sup>[1]</sup> In his preface to the play, Ferriar explains that 'when the attempt to abolish the African Slave Trade commenced in Manchester, some active friends of the cause imagined, that by assembling a few of the principal topics, in a dramatic form, an impression might be made, on persons negligent of simple reasoning'.<sup>[2]</sup> Replete with an epigraph from *Hamlet*, Ferriar's *Oroonoko* sought to awaken negligent audiences inured to the evils of slavery. As Ferriar remarks, 'when those who hear with Serenity, of depopulated Coasts, and exhausted Nations, are led by tales of domestic misery, to the forces of public evil, their feelings act with not less violence for being kindled by a single spark'.<sup>[3]</sup> Following Scottish predecessors such as Adam Smith, Ferriar argues that the audience's exposure to suffering would generate an empathetic response: 'nature will rise up within them, and own her relation to the sufferers'.<sup>[4]</sup> For this reason, Ferriar selected and modified the familiar stage play of *Oroonoko* (known primarily through Thomas Southerne's edition); he notes that *Oroonoko* 'appear'd particularly adapted to this purpose, by its authenticity, as well as its pathetic incidents'.<sup>[5]</sup>

Criticizing the 'old' stage version of the play, Ferriar states that its 'principal blemish [...] consists in the total cessation of the interest and anxiety, for the principal persons, before the winding up of the catastrophe'.<sup>[6]</sup> Accordingly, Ferriar invests his hero with agency, anger, and a powerful sense of his own suffering. The play's prologue describes the character Oroonoko's sentimental impact upon his audience, noting particularly how feelings could be used to connect observers with black slaves in pain:

Let Honour that dogmatic Scorn efface,  
Which sinks to Brutes the persecuted Race:  
O! spurn th'unworthy Thought with gen'rous Zeal—  
Mind has no Colour—ev'ry Heart can feel.<sup>[7]</sup>

Ferriar ends his preface confidently, stating that 'whatever may be the success of the present efforts, for terminating this disgraceful traffic, the sentiments of the People will still be inimical to the Tyranny and Oppression which it produces; they will still desire the relief of their unfortunate African brethren; and steadily desiring, they will in the end obtain it'.<sup>[8]</sup> He goes even further to elaborate the desired outcome of abolitionist plays like his version of *Oroonoko*—they will 'obliterate the disgrace of baffled armies, and [a] divided empire'.<sup>[9]</sup>

Such bold claims should be familiar to readers of works from the eighteenth century, but Ferriar's sentimental strategy speaks to a commonality of approach that can be found in the Scottish response to slavery, especially within the abolitionist poetry of the period.<sup>[10]</sup> Because Scots were intimately involved at home and abroad in the discourse and practice of the slave trade, they were well-positioned to respond to its effects. Scottish Enlightenment philosophy, derived from the works of Smith, Francis Hutcheson, and Dugald Stewart, had laid the groundwork for literary works that stressed the importance of feelings in the individual's response to the world. Observable phenomena became not just the source of sensory impressions but served to structure and relate experiences by means of empathetic sentimental responses. These responses could guide future actions by acting to promote the relief of suffering and dissipate the stimulus to the observer's own pain. Based on the central premise of this model—'ev'ry heart can feel'—much Scottish poetry from the eighteenth century sought to redress the sufferings of slaves by appealing to core emotions in its audience, producing as a result a body of political writing that powerfully imagined the painful experience of slavery.

### **Scottish Networks in the West Indies**

One of Europe's most widely travelled peoples, Scots journeyed overseas as soldiers, doctors, labourers, artisans, and the like, maintaining a marked sense of their Scottish identities despite extreme distance from their homeland.<sup>[11]</sup> Part of the reason for this tendency derived from Scots' own sense of national difference; as Douglas Hamilton explains, 'while Scots were sometimes able to get ahead, their status as foreigners, despite sharing a monarch, could be an effective barrier to them. They remained reliant on English concessions'.<sup>[12]</sup> Consequently, in the outposts of empire like the West Indies, Scots created networks based on nationality and kinship, derived largely from the model of Highland clans. Such networks could conceivably counterbalance the dependency of Scots upon English favour, creating in the process a self-contained system of

networked connections. Hamilton describes the working of such a system by highlighting the operative role of the clan in organizing Scottish emigrants; he writes that “clannishness” underpinned the networks that Scots employed to organise themselves in the islands. For Scots, the real significance of the networks lies not so much in “clannishness”, but in their relationship to clanship’.<sup>[13]</sup> As Hamilton notes, the network thus formed allowed for ‘a flexible notion of kinship’ operating under the banner of Scottish affiliation.<sup>[14]</sup>

Scottish networks were crucial for newcomers to Scottish-dominated imperial sites like the West Indies. Without access to these networks, Scottish emigrants found themselves at a loss upon arrival. Hamilton describes the importance of networks for the assimilation of emigrants to the West Indian way of life, stating that ‘in utilizing kinship and local connections, Scots on the plantations extended their links throughout the West Indies, purchasing land, engaging attorneys, managers, overseers and book-keepers, and welcoming new arrivals’.<sup>[15]</sup> Many West Indian contemporaries attested to their success in these endeavours, frequently remarking upon Scots’ perspicacity and fitness for life in the Caribbean. For example, the eighteenth-century historian of Jamaica, Edward Long, singularly praised the contributions of Scots to the West Indies:

Jamaica, indeed, is greatly indebted to North Britain, as very nearly one third of the inhabitants are either natives of that country, or descendants from those who were. Many have come from the same quarter every year, less in quest of fame, than of fortunes [...] To say the truth, they are so clever and prudent in general, as, by an obliging behaviour, good sense, and zealous services to gain esteem, and make their way through every obstacle.<sup>[16]</sup>

Hamilton estimates Scottish emigration to the West Indies at around 17,000 departures, claiming that ‘emigration there was more likely to involve an individual shot at wealth or advancement’.<sup>[17]</sup> T.M. Devine concurs, stating that most Scottish emigrants were ‘transients, hoping to make a quick fortune and return home as quickly as possible with their profits’.<sup>[18]</sup> Usually comprised of young men in their twenties, this emigrant group quickly swelled the ranks of the plantations, filling posts at every level within the work force.

Because of its great potential for individual wealth, the West Indies became a premier destination for many Scots, provided they were literate and educated. Scotland’s strong educational system aided emigrants in training them for such positions, giving them an advantage over other newcomers. Hamilton states that ‘most Scots were essentially managers rather than labourers, and the positions they entered, whether planter, clerk, book-keeper, manager, attorney or physician, required them to have had access to at least rudimentary education’.<sup>[19]</sup> This factor may have added to many Scots’ confused reactions to life on the plantations. The most striking and controversial fact of life there was the system of slave-labour employed to harvest sugar cane. A key element in much Scottish Enlightenment thought (often presented in university

lectures) was the critique of the practice of slavery; Karina Williamson remarks that 'it is well known that the intellectual climate in eighteenth-century Scotland favoured the development of antislavery opinion among the educated classes'.<sup>[20]</sup>

This paradox was felt by many Scottish emigrants who were daily exposed to the realities of slavery on the plantations. As John Gilmore writes, the entire Caribbean society 'at the time [...] existed for the purpose of producing slave-grown sugar for export to Europe—exports which helped to create the wealth which led to the Industrial Revolution and Britain's commercial and military supremacy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries'.<sup>[21]</sup> In *Sugar and Slavery*, Sheridan describes the profound impact of sugar in Europe, noting that 'sugar altered European life in a number of ways. By the middle of the 18th century it had become a staple article of diet among large sections of European society'.<sup>[22]</sup> In his university lectures, Dugald Stewart descried the elevation of sugar at the expense of slave labour, questioning if it is "lawful that we should reduce such numbers of our fellow creatures to a state infinitely worse than that of the brutes because we must have sugar and tobacco".<sup>[23]</sup> However, Stewart's was a minority opinion as far as sugar consumption went, for the West Indies became increasingly important to the British empire over the course of the century. Devine notes that 'in the eighteenth century Britain's West Indian colonies were universally regarded as crucial to the imperial army', primarily as a ready capital supply.<sup>[24]</sup> Sheridan uses the language of piracy to illuminate this relationship between the West Indies and the British empire: 'variously described as "treasure islands" or "precious gems in the crown of trade", plantation colonies were widely regarded in the age of mercantilism as valuable adjuncts to European nations'.<sup>[25]</sup>

In order to support this lucrative yet labour-intensive industry, plantation owners had a long history of using slave labour, having imported slaves as early as the sixteenth century. Nathalie Dessens records that 'in 1540, the number of slaves imported to the Caribbean was about 10,000'.<sup>[26]</sup> By the eighteenth century, the numbers had dramatically risen, with an estimated two million slaves imported to the West Indies.<sup>[27]</sup> Sheridan suggests that the planters' rationale for using slave labour derived from a cost-benefit analysis that contrasted long-term costs of slaves versus indentured servants:

Although slaves called for a larger original outlay of capital than indentured servants, slaves were perpetual instead of temporary servants, they were usually cheaper to feed and clothe, and they replaced themselves to some extent by natural breeding. It was not that whites were incapable of hard labour on West Indian plantations, but rather that they were too few and too costly.<sup>[28]</sup>

This type of economic thinking led to the development of the West Indian 'slave society', a concept developed in the pioneering work of historian Elsa Goveia. B.W. Higman argues that the

importance of this concept can be found in its interpretive value, claiming that 'the slave society label matters because it contains a particular interpretation of the period of slavery in the Caribbean. By pointing to the centrality of slavery, it gives that institution a determining role in the whole structure'.<sup>[29]</sup>

Michael Craton explains that the concept of 'slave society' extends to all inhabitants, regardless of race or occupation: "slave society" is now taken to mean not merely that part of society composed entirely of slaves, but the whole social fabric of communities based on slavery, including masters and all freedmen as well as slaves'.<sup>[30]</sup> Such a broad definition allows for a better understanding of how slavery affected the entire community, from slaves to plantation owners. Higman claims that the 'slave society' concept suggests 'a similarity of experience wherever slavery was dominant, an experience that transcended and perhaps united the people of the West Indies in a common history'.<sup>[31]</sup> Nevertheless, it was 'the social relations associated with the institution of slavery that determined the overall character of these societies'.<sup>[32]</sup> The network of social relations that defined life on the plantations served to reify and naturalise the practice of slavery, particularly in a social space that operated on many levels. Sheridan observes that 'plantations were at once ecosystems, farming and industrial systems, economic systems, and social systems', factors which made for a claustrophobic atmosphere.<sup>[33]</sup>

In this social space, emphasis was placed above all on maximizing production. Robert Dirks states that 'even before the economies of refinement began taking full effect, the development of the plantation, a mode of agricultural production unique in its reliance on regiments of cheap, unskilled labour, was paving the way to substantial cost reductions'.<sup>[34]</sup> The obvious means of ensuring 'substantial cost reductions' was to create a captive labour force. Dirks writes that 'plantations proved far more successful in retaining a work force in frontier regions because of the use of active measures to immobilise people. One way to make sure they stayed put was enslavement'.<sup>[35]</sup> As Sheridan remarks, 'force was used to motivate the workers to work and to prevent them from leaving the plantations. Each plantation was, in effect, both an authoritarian political institution and a profit-making business'.<sup>[36]</sup> However, even during the period, economists questioned the ultimate value of an enforced system of slave labour. In 1788, agricultural reformer Arthur Young wrote that slaves "'employed on sugar plantations do not and cannot refund the capital sunk on them'", concluding that "'the culture of sugar by slaves'" was "'the dearest specie of labour in the world'".<sup>[37]</sup>

Nevertheless, slave labour was practiced on plantations throughout the eighteenth century. Because slaves outnumbered white colonists six to one by the mid-eighteenth century, a very severe method of control was enforced on the plantation grounds.<sup>[38]</sup> In order to make sure that the plantation system functioned properly, draconian measures were taken to punish offenders

and ensure the obedience of slaves. Along with ensuring slaves' obedience, overseers directed their physical labour in the fields. The harvesting of the cane was primitive and labour-intensive, a process described by Sheridan as a 'sequence of operations [that] consisted of preparing the soil, planting, weeding, harvesting, crushing, boiling, curing, and distilling. No sooner was one task completed, or partially completed, than another demanded the attention of the planter and his slaves'.<sup>[39]</sup> The manual labour required of slaves was therefore essentially non-stop, involving a variety of agricultural procedures. Planters might be involved in overseeing a measure of this work, but most of their time was spent 'securing market and exchange information, buying and selling, negotiating loans and credits, hiring shipping space and insurance, and keeping records'.<sup>[40]</sup> Most direct oversight of slave labour fell to the managerial class, who (as described by Craton) were a formidable crew:

Those whites set in immediate authority were an isolated and beleaguered minority, non-gentlemen of limited education,<sup>[41]</sup> dissolute and shiftless for the most part, outnumbered fifty to one by their charges, tied by contract and the requirement to make a profit, with only the parlous rewards of power to offset unpleasant work in a harsh climate, the ever-present threat of lethal or crippling disease, and the perils of insurrection.<sup>[42]</sup>

The extreme measures taken by this class to control slaves, demonstrates (in Dessens's words) a 'manifest intention to institutionalise the labour system by reifying slaves and subjecting them entirely to the ruling class of whites'.<sup>[43]</sup> Consequently, 'the lives of Caribbean slaves were, according to all testimony, the worst in the Western Hemisphere'.<sup>[44]</sup>

Due to their large numbers and the success of their networks, many Scottish emigrants were quickly put in control of managing the complex network of plantation operations. Such positions not only required constant slave surveillance, but also financial record-keeping and other clerical duties lumped under the category of 'bookkeeping'. Along with filling such posts, Scots also dominated the medical profession in the Caribbean; as Hamilton states, 'Scotland, with established and reputable medical schools in its universities, was especially well placed to send doctors to the islands to provide medical care to the plantations, which were increasingly being owned or managed by Scotsmen'.<sup>[45]</sup> According to Devine, by mid-century 60 per cent of the doctors in Antigua were of Scottish origin.<sup>[46]</sup> The great need for doctors resulted from the slaves' working conditions and their alarmingly high mortality rate. Dessens records that 'the death rate among the slaves ranged most of the time between 10 percent and 12 percent a year', creating a need for increased importation of slaves throughout the century.<sup>[47]</sup> Sheridan also notes the threat of disease facing Europeans in the West Indies, remarking that 'almost all newcomers came down with fevers and other ailments, with large numbers dying during the difficult periods of

acclimatization or seasoning. The health of Europeans and Africans in the New World tropics was imperiled on all sides'.<sup>[48]</sup>

Scottish doctors responded to this call, treating planters and slaves alike and writing numerous treatises about West Indian medical care. Sheridan records the efforts of James Grainger, doctor and poet:

Writing in 1764, Dr. James Grainger of the islands of St. Kitts found it astonishing that, among the many valuable medical tracts that had been published in recent years, not one had been 'purposely written on the method of seasoning new Negroes, and the treatment of Negroes when sick'. In his *Essay on West-Indian Diseases*, Grainger laid down rules for the feeding, clothing, housing, medical treatment, and labour of new slaves.<sup>[49]</sup>

Despite its attempts to regulate their treatment, Grainger's treatise did not radically improve the lives and working conditions of West Indian slaves. As Sheridan observes, although manuals were written to 'guide planters in the medical treatment of slaves, it is doubtful whether [they] made any substantial contribution to [slaves'] improved health'.<sup>[50]</sup> A movement for improved medical care for slaves came about in the last quarter of the eighteenth century as a result of political pressure from vocal abolitionists, as well as from planters' self-interested desire for profit.<sup>[51]</sup> Sugar cane required the labour of healthy slaves, yet even so, it was (in the words of planter William Beckford) "a treacherous plant [upon which] very little dependence can be placed on its returns".<sup>[52]</sup> A crop of sugar cane was subject to numerous calamities such as rats, ants, floods, and hurricanes; a single infested field could cut significantly impact proceeds from the sale of the entire harvest.<sup>[53]</sup>

Despite vagaries of production, plantations were highly profitable enterprises, enjoying considerable returns on both sugar and rum. Sheridan states that above all, 'plantations were agro-commercial and financial enterprises. They were profit-making business units commonly organised as single proprietorships and called for initiative and judgment by the owner or manager'.<sup>[54]</sup> Such owners had (in Sheridan's words) 'a complex personality [...] at once landlord, slaveowner, farmer, manufacturer, and merchant'.<sup>[55]</sup> Each of these roles was subordinated to the planter's chief objective: 'to build up an income-earning property which would enable him to achieve social and political standing in the mother country'.<sup>[56]</sup> In this respect, many planters were quite adroit, assuming greater influence and power in the burgeoning trade markets. Devine observes that 'at the end of the eighteenth century, the Caribbean colonies employed, directly or indirectly, half of the nation's long-distance shipping', an economic factor that imbued the colonies



with considerable influence.<sup>[57]</sup> Along with this, planters were able to profit from a protected home market that ensured fifty percent greater returns in Britain than in continental Europe.<sup>[58]</sup>

Yet, despite their favored economic status, West Indian planters became increasingly estranged from the British mainstream as far as slavery was concerned. By the last quarter of the century, they found that they had to defend their use of slave labour to an increasingly hostile British populace. As Steven Thomas argues, 'West Indian planters had to insist repeatedly that they shared a common heritage, a common economic future, and even a "common Nature", with England'.<sup>[59]</sup> This became more and more difficult as the abolitionist movement gained ground in the 1780s. Thomas comments that 'many of the metropolitan British were morally embarrassed that their empire was built upon the backs of such labour'.<sup>[60]</sup> Such sentiments were powerfully felt in Scotland, which supplied the empire with 'slave-drivers' and abolitionists alike. Devine claims the Scottish Enlightenment did not prove influential enough within the country to short-circuit the slave trade, arguing that 'the Scottish intellectual attack on slavery seemed [...] insulated from the actual practice of countless Scots in the sugar plantations and the African trade'.<sup>[61]</sup> In fact, concerning Scots' reaction to the slave trade, Hamilton states that

There was no single 'Scottish' response to enslavement. A strong sense of abolitionism belied a national ambivalence: although many Scots at home denounced enslavement, there were plenty more who happily profited from it in the colonies. There was no major difference between Scottish planters and those of other nationalities in their dealings with the enslaved.<sup>[62]</sup>

Although Scottish planters may not have differed from others who profited from slavery, a 'national ambivalence' can be detected in Scottish poetic responses to slavery. Indeed, the array of responses makes for a diverse, often discordant expression of strong feelings about the sufferings of slaves.

### **Scottish Poetic Responses to Slavery**

Of the British empire's chroniclers, the work of Scottish poets often provides fascinatingly ambivalent cultural perceptions of the West Indies. Several Scottish poets directly confronted the practice of slavery, assessing its use against the perceived needs and demands of the empire. According to James Basker, 'poets were the most outspoken and persistent critics of slavery, and fostered massive changes in public perception and attitudes'.<sup>[63]</sup> Canonical figures like James Thomson and James Boswell addressed the issue of slavery, as did lesser-known poets like John Marjoribanks and the Reverend John Jamieson. Examining the range of such responses provides a clearer sense of the depth and extent of the Scottish poetic discourse on slavery, a body of imaginative writing that frequently employs sentiment to state its case. Sentiment assumes a



prominent role in such poems that appealed to audiences with preconceived prejudices about the subject. Scottish poets were remarkably consistent in their use of pathos to promote political ends, coupling outrage with sorrow to forcefully assault a complacent audience.

In the work of early to mid-century Scottish poets, however, there was less reliance upon overt emotional appeals than upon naturalised perceptions of common humanity, found most typically in death. In 'The Grave' (1743), Robert Blair delivers a parenthetical aside—'(As if a Slave was not a Shred of Nature, / Of the same common Nature with his Lord:)'—before offering the generalised statement that

[...] Under Ground  
Precedency's a Jest; Vassal and Lord  
Grossly familiar, Side by Side consume....  
Here the o'er-loaded Slave flings down his Burthen  
From his gall'd Shoulders.[\[64\]](#)

Likewise, in 'The Triumph of Melancholy' (1760), James Beattie asks, 'Will ye one transient ray of gladness dart / Cross the dark cell where hopeless Slavery lies?'.[\[65\]](#) In both cases, the abstract character of slavery resembles that seen in similar poetic denunciations from the period. As Karina Williamson remarks, the notion of enslavement 'as a state of generalised "sorrows" and "pains" [...] owes as much to earlier eighteenth-century poetic imaginings as to Scottish moral philosophy or legal argument'.[\[66\]](#) In this respect, Blair and Beattie do not offer direct intervention or commentary on the subject, preferring instead to evoke a common discourse on the nature of slavery rather than its traffic.

James Thomson's description of the hurricane in 'Summer' from *The Seasons* (1744) is much more straightforward, linking the destruction wrought by the storm to the slave trade itself. The passage is defiantly precise, detailing the cosmic justice of the hurricane's aftermath upon a shipwrecked slave ship. The agent of this justice is the 'direful shark':

Increasing still the terrors of these storms,  
His jaws horrific armed with threefold fate,  
Here dwells the direful shark. Lured by the scent  
Of steaming crowds, of rank disease, and death,  
Behold he rushing cuts the briny flood  
Swift as the gale can bear the ship along,  
And from the partners of that cruel trade  
Which spoils unhappy Guinea of her sons

Demands his share of prey, demands themselves.  
The stormy fates descend: one death involves  
Tyrants and slaves; when straight, their mangled limbs  
Crashing at once, he dyes the purple seas  
With gore, and riots in the vengeful meal.[\[67\]](#)

As in Blair's poem, the shark shows no 'precedency', consuming both 'tyrants and slaves' in his 'vengeful meal'. Basker notes that in this passage, Thomson 'works impressionistically through images of a catastrophic storm and a giant killer shark destroying a slave ship', in the end revealing 'the inarticulate forces of Nature avenging themselves on the mortal deformity that was the slave trade'.[\[68\]](#)

John MacLaurin's poem 'The Walk' (1760) is even more direct, eschewing symbolism altogether. The speaker asserts that

[...] What woes  
The slave-trade, e'vn, ev'n by generous Britons driv'n!  
Ambition, avarice, and various ills  
Allow'd to rage and ravage on earth!  
*The whole creation groans.*[\[69\]](#)

MacLaurin is best remembered as Lord Dreghorn, the advocate who worked to outlaw slavery in Scotland; as Basker notes, MacLaurin successfully 'led a four-year court battle that, in January 1778, produced a Court of Session decision that officially abolished slavery in Scotland'.[\[70\]](#) His poetry is an impassioned indictment of British and American complacency, as in 'Thoughts Occasioned by Reading *L'Histoire General de Voyages*' (1772):

Hot Afric's sons, in grief and pain,  
Who toil to rear the sugar-cane;  
Th'unwarlike natives of Bengal,  
Whom London citizens inthrall;  
Th'Americans of ev'ry tribe,  
To this position all subscribe.[\[71\]](#)

For MacLaurin, 'grief' and 'pain' are intensely localised and felt by suffering bodies in the West Indies. Geographic distance does nothing to alleviate this suffering or the complicity of the British and Americans who profit from slavery. 'Address to the Powers at War' (1796) shows MacLaurin at his angriest, where (in Basker's words) the poet 'condemns all regimes, past and present, that espouse the ideal of freedom yet practice slavery'.[\[72\]](#) He saves his bitterest invective for British

consumers of sugar, exhorting them to 'forego the juice / Whose costly and too common use / Maintains the monstr'ous trade'.<sup>[73]</sup>

On the subject of sugar, the Scottish physician and poet James Grainger provided the best-known poetic treatment of its agricultural production in the West Indies. His long poem *The Sugar Cane* (1764) remains an essential point of reference for its detailed discussions of planting, West Indian topography, illnesses, weather, and slavery.<sup>[74]</sup> Upon his arrival to the West Indies in 1759, Grainger benefited greatly from Scottish networks on the islands. He married into a planter family and managed their plantation until his death in 1766; he lived on the island of St. Kitts, one of the smaller British colonies in the Caribbean that had roughly a ten to one ratio of slaves to whites by 1750.<sup>[75]</sup> Grainger had first-hand knowledge of sugar production and the practice of slave labour, for the majority of his patients were slaves at his own and others' plantations. Upon publication, *The Sugar Cane* quickly found an appreciable audience and was reprinted frequently thereafter.<sup>[76]</sup> Although the poem fell out of favor by the mid-nineteenth century, John Gilmore contends that *The Sugar Cane* should be regarded as 'both a major work in the English georgic tradition, and a major work in the early history of Caribbean literature'.<sup>[77]</sup>

The poem generated much debate about its treatment of slavery, for which Grainger was censured by contemporaries like Samuel Johnson. As Gordon Goodwin records, 'Johnson in the *Critical Review* [...] censured Grainger for not denouncing the slave trade, even though Grainger recommended throughout a humane treatment of slaves'.<sup>[78]</sup> For current readers, Grainger's text has also garnered many negative, often hostile responses.<sup>[79]</sup> For example, Caribbean poet and critic Derek Walcott delivered a scathing assessment of Grainger and other non-indigenous Anglophone Caribbean writers in a recent article. Therein he writes that 'not one of these pieces can claim to be art [...] but they are certainly history, and if they are virtually worthless as art, as literature, our instinct to preserve them simply because they exist is the wrong instinct'.<sup>[80]</sup> Others have regarded *The Sugar-Cane* as an important literary text that foregrounds and explores cultural and national difference. In this respect, Grainger's status as a Scot is of utmost importance; John Gilmore writes that

Although Grainger's Scottishness generally goes unmentioned by modern commentators, it was of real significance. It meant that he belonged to a nation which was—particularly in the aftermath of the 1745 Jacobite rebellion—to some extent a victim of an English cultural imperialism in the same way as the sugar colonies in the Caribbean.<sup>[81]</sup>

Grainger's own felt sense of estrangement as a Scot influenced his representation of life in the West Indian plantations. Throughout *The Sugar Cane*, Grainger argues for the value of West Indian life as a fit subject for poetry, asserting its importance to the empire and its radical

difference from the British homeland. As Gilmore states, '*The Sugar Cane* can be seen as a far-reaching attempt to rewrite the prevailing cultural discourse which, just as it relegated Scotland and Scottish concerns to a secondary position, in effect dismissed Caribbean society as unfit for literature' [\[82\]](#)

Grainger's most difficult task in this regard was dealing with slavery on the plantations. In Book 4 of *The Sugar Cane*, he confronted the issue head on. He claims that slavery distresses his muse, who 'pities thy distressful state; / Who sees, with grief, thy sons in fetters bound; / Who wishes freedom to the race of man' [\[83\]](#) As in other poems about slavery by Scots, the sight of suffering slaves afflicts Grainger as a fellow human being, causing feelings of empathetic distress. Later in Book 4, however, the plight of slaves also affects Grainger as a Scot, for he makes a striking comparison between slaves and Scots that serves as an important point of cultural contact. He directly connects and contrasts the plight of slave labourers in the West Indies to poor labourers in Scotland [\[84\]](#) The passage reads,

How far more pleasant is thy rural task,  
Than theirs who sweat, sequester'd from the day,  
In dark tartarean caves, sunk far beneath  
The earth's dark surface; where sulphureous flames,  
Oft from their vapoury prisons bursting wild,  
To dire explosion give the cavern'd deep,  
And in dread ruin all its inmates whelm?—  
Nor fateful only is the bursting flame;  
The exhalations of the deep-dug mine,  
Tho' slow, shake from their wings as sure a death  
With what intense severity of pain  
Hath the afflicted muse, in Scotia, seen  
The miners rack'd, who toil for fatal lead?  
What cramps, what palsies shake their feeble limbs,  
Who, on the margin of the rock Drave,  
Trace silver's fluent ore? Yet white men these! [\[85\]](#)

Grainger's empathy in this passage is double-edged; white Scottish miners suffer more than slaves, which can be interpreted as both a point of cultural contact and an apologia for slavery. Nevertheless, such moments as these lead Gilmore to suggest that 'Grainger is sincerely convinced of the slave's humanity, and considers that freedom for the slave is perhaps desirable in the abstract, but is something unlikely to happen for a very long time' [\[86\]](#) Significantly, *The Sugar Cane* records and evaluates the ties that linked, literally and figuratively, the Briton, West

Indian, and the Scot in a chain of interdependence. As Grainger observes at the end of the poem, 'These Cane ocean-isles, / [are] Isles which on Britain for their all depend, / And must for ever; still indulgent share / Her fostering smile'.<sup>[87]</sup>

A boldly contrasting Scottish voice can be heard in James Boswell's 'No Abolition of Slavery' (1791), one of few Scottish pro-slavery poems. Boswell's blatant racism appears early in the work, where the speaker sarcastically opines that

He shall in sentimental strain,  
That negroes are oppress'd, complain.  
What mutters the decrepit creature?  
THE DIGNITY OF HUMAN NATURE!<sup>[88]</sup>

Boswell's mockery of sentiment in this passage indicates not only his disagreement with the abolitionist position, but it also signals his awareness that the appeal to common emotions was a powerful tool of their verse. His disdain for such strategies intensify in a later passage that attempts to portray slave labour as a pleasant, pastoral occasion: 'Ev'n at their labour hear them sing, / While time flies quick on a downy wing; / Finish'd the bus'ness of the day, / No human beings are more gay'.<sup>[89]</sup> The tonal irony of the last line above signals Boswell's reluctance to confer human identity upon West Indian slaves, relegating them instead to an idealised pastoral world without ties to geography, landscape, or (for that matter) reality.

Much different sentiments animate the verse of Captain John Marjoribanks, a Scottish soldier who travelled to Jamaica to join his regiment in Kingston.<sup>[90]</sup> His experiences there led him to become an abolitionist, and as Williamson states, 'he is known today (where known at all) as author of a ferocious antislavery work, *Slavery; An Essay in Verse* (1786), which would assuredly have outraged his Jamaican admirers if they ever saw it'.<sup>[91]</sup> Basker highlights the 'shock value' of the poem's imagery, a feature that differentiates Marjoribanks's poetry from many of his abolitionist contemporaries.<sup>[92]</sup> The graphic nature of *Slavery; An Essay in Verse* testifies to Marjoribanks's experiences in the West Indies, where he daily witnessed slavery on the plantations. Williamson observes that many 'Scots who went out to the West Indies with humanitarian scruples about the slave system rapidly became hardened to the customs of the country'.<sup>[93]</sup> This was not the case with Marjoribanks, who wrote *Slavery; An Essay in Verse* upon his return to Scotland; like MacLaurin, his abiding sentiment was righteous anger. For instance, about the notion that British peasants suffered more than West Indian slaves, Marjoribanks writes that

Every slave must yield a master food,

Who slowly fattens on his vital blood  
 Blest, if at once his cruel tortures ceas'd,  
 And gave white cannibals a short liv'd feast!  
 [...] The British peasant! healthy, bold and free!  
 Nor wealth, nor grandeur, half so blest as he!  
 The state of life, for happiness the first,  
 Dare you compare with this the *most accurs'd*.  
*You found them slaves...*but who that title gavel!  
 The God of Nature never form'd a slave![\[94\]](#)

The cannibalistic imagery of the passage's beginning deepens the contrast between 'healthy' British peasants who enjoy freedom and West Indian slaves. Marjoribanks depicts slavery as an imposed condition of being that defies the natural order of things, an artificial 'title' conferred by white cannibal masters. Later in the poem, Marjoribanks exposes and further denaturalises the origins of the slave trade, finding the genealogy of the masters to be a decidedly bad strain:

Wretches by want expell'd from foreign climes;  
 Escap'd from debts, or justice due their crimes;  
 The base, the ignorant, the ruffian steer,  
 And find a desperate asylum here...  
 By such caprice, are negroes doom'd to bleed,  
 The Slaves of Slavery...They are low indeed![\[95\]](#)

Marjoribanks's anger in this passage combines knowledge of European transportation with an appeal to the humanity of slaves, here portrayed (as throughout the poem) as 'doom'd' victims of white avarice. When he published the poem to support abolitionist efforts, Marjoribanks explained his decision to offer his feelings about slavery in verse. Having written the poem during his stay in the West Indies, Marjoribanks had decided to publish it because "these artless effusions, meant only at the time to give vent to the painful feelings of my heart, excited by the distressful scenes which surrounded me [...] might perhaps even carry with them stronger conviction than evidence drawn forth on distant recollection, through the force of interrogation"[\[96\]](#) As witnessed in other Scottish poetic responses to slavery, the presentation of 'painful feelings' in verse was considered a more potent tool for shaping public opinion than 'distant recollection' of such emotions in prose.

Such a strategy is apparent in Reverend John Jamieson's *The Sorrows of Slavery* (1789), a long abolitionist poem in which the details of the slave trade are no less angrily recorded. In his preface, Jamieson also explains his preference for verse over prose, writing that 'the principal design of the Author hath been to represent simple historical facts in the language of poetry; as

this might attract the attention of some who would not otherwise give themselves the trouble of looking into the subject'.<sup>[97]</sup> Jamieson assures the reader, however, that 'through the whole of the poem he hath carefully avoided exaggeration', citing his use of contemporary historical accounts as the basis for his poetic description.<sup>[98]</sup> Like other Scottish poets on slavery, Jamieson appeals to shared sensations of pain that unite Europeans and slaves. He employs the vehicle of tragedy, sardonically asking audiences why they prefer the cathartic release of theater when they can witness 'real tragedy' enacted by the slave trade:

Why purchase sorrow in the tragic scene,  
Or court it in the fancy-labour'd tale...  
While Afric forces on your sight averse;  
A real tragedy, unmatch'd in song,  
Where every village opes a dismal scene,  
Where acts of death unnumber'd chill the soul,  
And freeborn Britons act the bloodiest parts?<sup>[99]</sup>

Jamieson confronts readers who would deny slaves common human feelings, stating that although 'they are not fair like you', they suffer from the same causes: 'Does Grief ne'er wring their heart-strings? Or can Pain / Make no nerve thrill?'.<sup>[100]</sup> Focusing on key tenets of sensibility (e.g., the 'thrill' of 'nerves') allows Jamieson to establish and strengthen points of contact between slaves and Europeans, further stressing the bonds of sentiment and sensation that unite the two.

In the poetry of Robert Burns, the issue of slavery has fostered a hotly-contested debate. There has been much speculation about what Robert Burns would have 'really' thought of the West Indian slave trade. Aside from his discussion of Helen Maria Williams's 'A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave-Trade' (1788) in a single letter, Burns did not offer an extended commentary on the subject. Williams's poem contains powerful abolitionist rhetoric, such as in the lines:

Alas! to AFRIC's fetter'd race  
Creation wears no form of grace!  
To them earth's pleasant values are found  
A blasted waste, a sterile bound;  
Where the poor wand'rer must sustain  
The load of unremitted pain.<sup>[101]</sup>



Although he singles out the last line above for praise, Burns's criticism of Williams's poem focuses largely on issues of prosody and diction, with little direct commentary on her views of slavery.<sup>[102]</sup> Because little prose commentary on slavery exists in Burns's writing, many people have turned to his poetry to suggest that he would have been a thoroughgoing critic of the practice. Notably, in the Inaugural Burns Lecture of 14 January 2004, former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan stated that 'Burns has been described as a poet of the poor, an advocate of social and political change, and an opponent of slavery, pomposity, and greed'.<sup>[103]</sup> Annan's endorsement of Burns suggests the magnitude of the poet's international esteem and influence, particularly as it extends to human rights.

Other critics, however, have found Burns's silence on the slave trade to be damning; Gerard Carruthers states that 'Robert Burns's rather insipid "The Slave's Lament" (1792) has provided an otherwise disappointed politically correct readership for the Scottish Bard with a slender thread with which to tie him to the Abolitionist cause'.<sup>[104]</sup> Basker contends that 'the famous Scottish poet's response to slavery was muted and contradictory', finding that 'Burns was not consistent or extensive in his expression of sympathy for African slaves'.<sup>[105]</sup> The single work in Burns's oeuvre with an overt reference to slavery, 'The Slave's Lament', is a generalised account of a slave's departure from his home country; as Basker notes, the poem was 'based not on African sources (as was long rumored) but on an old English ballad'.<sup>[106]</sup> The poem offers no explicit denunciations of slavery, instead focusing on the sorrows of departure felt by the slave:

It was in sweet Senegal that my foes did me enthrall  
For the lands of Virginia, --ginia, O!  
Torn from that lovely shore, and must never see it more,  
And alas! I am weary, weary, O!<sup>[107]</sup>

These sorrows multiply in the poem's last stanza, where the speaker imagines the life he will lead as a slave: 'The burden I must bear, while the cruel scourge I fear'.<sup>[108]</sup> The penultimate line is of considerable interest, for it reveals a common emotion that links Burns's experiences directly with the plight of the slave. The line reads, 'I think on friends most dear with the bitter, bitter tear', an expression of sorrow and kinship that Burns frequently employed to describe his own feelings about leaving his native Scotland for the West Indies.<sup>[109]</sup>

If the Kilmarnock edition of 1786 had not met with such instant success, it is very likely that Burns would have emigrated to Jamaica. In fact, repeatedly through his life, he seriously considered emigrating to the West Indies, either as a way of finding employment or escaping his troubles in Scotland. As a bookkeeper, Burns would have had the kind of direct contact with slaves that Grainger had experienced, dealing on a daily basis with the purchase, punishment, and death of

slaves. The only existing works we have on Burns's views of the West Indies, however, are a series of farewells to his native Scotland. In these poems, Burns rarely give hints about what he expects to find in the West Indies and instead focuses on what he is leaving behind. In this way, his technique is no different than in 'The Slave's Lament', where he assumed the character and emotions of a slave leaving his native ground. In 'The Farewell' (1786), for instance, Burns writes, 'Farewell, old Scotia's bleak domains, / Far dearer than the torrid plains, / Where rich ananas blow!' [\[110\]](#) In 'The Farewell. To the Brethren of St. James Lodge, Tarbolton' (1786), Burns bids his Masonic brothers 'Adieu, a heart-warm, fond adieu; / Dear Brothers of the Mystic Tie! / Ye favoured, ye enlighten'd few, / Companions of my social joy!' before announcing that

[...] I to foreign lands must hie,  
Pursuing Fortune's slidd'ry ba';  
With melting heart and brimful eye,  
I'll mind you still, tho' far awa. [\[111\]](#)

The sentiment is extreme but sincere; at this point, wishing to flee from the forces of the law and the kirk, Burns must have conceived the West Indies, with its 'torrid plains' and 'rich ananas', to be quite remote, somewhat threatening, yet alluring. Similarly ambivalent imagery appears in a poem that offers another imagined glimpse of the West Indies, aptly entitled 'On a Scotch Bard, Gone to the West Indies' (1786). The second stanza reads,

Jamaica bodies, use him weel,  
An' hap him in a cozie biel:  
Ye'll find him ay a dainty chiel,  
An' fou o' glee:  
He wad na wrang'd the vera Deil,  
That's owre the sea! [\[112\]](#)

Burns's wry joking inhabits this poem, replacing the adieus of his other farewells with a glimpse of the 'Jamaica bodies' he will encounter. While what Burns 'really' thought of the West Indies and the slave trade remains a source of speculation, it is clear that he adopted similar poetic strategies as his contemporaries. Like other Scottish poets responding to slavery, Burns used the common approach of pathos, appealing both to slaves and Scots that 'ev'ry heart can feel' the various pains of slavery.

## CONCLUSION

Scottish poets in the eighteenth century were particularly well-positioned to write about the issue of slavery, largely due to the extensive Scottish networks in the West Indies and the role of Scots in the British empire. Scots worked on all levels of the plantations and intimately understood the economic and human costs of slave labour. Many Scots were also aware of the Enlightenment denunciation of slavery, as well as key elements that focused on common human emotions excited by the sight of suffering in others. For these reasons, Scottish poetic responses to slavery offer a unique vantage point for analysing rhetorical engagement with multiple audiences. Although there was no unanimous Scottish response to slavery, it is safe to say that many Scottish poets felt compelled to write about the issue, both at home and abroad. This compulsion resulted in many powerfully-imagined poetic responses that helped to signal the end of the slave trade in the Atlantic world.

## NOTES

[1] John Ferriar, *The Prince of Angola, A Tragedy Altered from the Play of Oroonoko*, Manchester, 1788, i. For more information on adaptations of *Oroonoko* in the eighteenth century, see Iwanisziw, Susan. *Oroonoko: Adaptations and Offshoots* (Aldersgate: Ashgate, 2006).

[2] Ferriar, 1788, p. i.

[3] Ferriar, 1788, p. i.

[4] Ferriar, 1788, p. 1.

[5] Ferriar, 1788, p. i.

[6] Ferriar, 1788, p. iii.

[7] Ferriar, 1788, p. 1.

[8] Ferriar, 1788, p. viii.

[9] Ferriar, 1788, p. viii.

[10] On the use of sentiment in abolitionist works, see Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[11] For more on the role of Scots in the Atlantic slave trade see Iain Whyte, *Scotland and the Abolition of Black Slavery, 1756-1838* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and Richard Sheridan, 'The Role of Scots in the Economy and Society of the West Indies', in *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantations*, eds. Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1977). An extensive survey of European slave trading can be found in Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From Baroque to Modern, 1492-1800* (London: Verso, 1997).

- [12] Douglas Hamilton, *Scotland, The Caribbean, and the Atlantic World, 1750-1820* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 3.
- [13] Hamilton, 2005, p. 5.
- [14] Hamilton, 2005, p. 5.
- [15] Hamilton, 2005, p. 78.
- [16] Quoted in T.M. Devine, *Scotland's Empire, 1600-1815* (London: Allen Lane, 2003), p. 231.
- [17] Hamilton, 2005, p. 24.
- [18] Devine, 2003, p. 224.
- [19] Hamilton, 2005, p. 18.
- [20] Karina Williamson, 'The Antislavery Poems of John Marjoribanks', *EnterText* 7.1 (2007), 60-79 (p. 63).
- [21] John Gilmore, 'The British Empire and the Neo-Latin Tradition: The Case of Francis Williams', in *Classics and Colonialism*, ed. Barbara Goff (London: Duckworth, 2005), 92-106 (p. 93).
- [22] Richard Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), p. 21. See also Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar, and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War against Revolutionary France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) and Keith Sandiford, *The Cultural Politics of Sugar: Caribbean Slavery and Narratives of Colonialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) for information on the global impact of sugar.
- [23] Quoted in Williamson, 2007, 63. See Gordon Macintyre, *Dugald Stewart: The Pride and Ornament of Scotland* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2003) for more on Stewart's lectures.
- [24] Devine, 2003, p. 221.
- [25] Richard Sheridan, *The Development of Plantations to 1750: An Era of West Indian Prosperity, 1750-1775* (Barbados, Caribbean University Press, 1970), p. 9.
- [26] Nathalie Dessens, *Myths of Plantation Society: Slavery in the American South and the West Indies* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), p. 56.
- [27] See Dessens, 2003, p. 57.
- [28] See Sheridan, 1973, p. 238.
- [29] B.W. Higman, *The Invention of Slave Society, Slavery, Freedom and Gender: The Dynamics of Caribbean Society*, ed. Brian Moore et. al. (Barbados: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 57-75 (p. 60).
- [30] Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), p. 157.
- [31] Higman, 2001, p. 60.
- [32] Higman, 2001, p. 59.

- [33] Richard Sheridan, *Doctors and Slaves: A Medical and Demographic History of Slavery in the British West Indies, 1680-1834* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 128.
- [34] Robert Dirks, *The Black Saturnalia: Conflict and its Ritual Expression on British West Indian Slave Plantations* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1987), p. 10.
- [35] Dirks, 1987, p. 11.
- [36] Sheridan, 1985, p. 130.
- [37] Quoted in Selwyn Carrington, *The Sugar Industry and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1775-1810* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), p. 218.
- [38] See Devine, 2003, p. 224.
- [39] Sheridan, 1970, p. 57.
- [40] Sheridan, 1970, p. 57.
- [41] Craton differs from most historians on this point. Hamilton, Sheridan, and Devine concur that most Scottish overseers were well-educated by eighteenth-century standards.
- [42] Michael Craton, *Empire, Enslavement and Freedom in the Caribbean* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1997), p. 153.
- [43] Dessens, 2003, p. 79.
- [44] Dessens, 2003, p. 89.
- [45] Hamilton, 2005, p. 112.
- [46] Devine, 2003, p. 233.
- [47] Dessens, 2003, p. 61.
- [48] Sheridan, 1985, p. 42.
- [49] Sheridan, 1985, p. 133.
- [50] Sheridan, 1985, p. 71.
- [51] See Devine, 2003, p. 233.
- [52] Quoted in Dirks, 1987, p. 28.
- [53] See Dirks, 1987, p. 28.
- [54] Sheridan, 1970, p. 57.
- [55] Sheridan, 1973, p. 360.
- [56] Sheridan, 1973, p. 360.
- [57] Devine, 2003, p. 221.
- [58] See Devine, 2003, p. 222.
- [59] Steven Thomas, 'Doctoring Ideology: James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane* and the Bodies of Empire', *Early American Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 4.1 (2006), 78-111 (p. 85).
- [60] Thomas, 2006, p. 80.
- [61] Devine, 2003, p. 247.
- [62] Hamilton, 2005, p. 76.

[63] James Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. xlvi. Another recent collection of abolitionist verse from a little later in the period is *The Poetry of Slavery: An Anglo-American Anthology, 1764-1865*, ed. Marcus Wood (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). A more general anthology of contemporary writings about the West Indies is *Caribbeana: An Anthology of English Literature of the West Indies, 1657-1777*, ed. Thomas Krise (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

[64] Basker, 2002, pp. 87-88.

[65] Basker, 2002, p. 124.

[66] Williamson, 2007, p. 64.

[67] Basker, 2002, pp. 95-96.

[68] Basker, 2002, p. xli.

[69] Basker, 2002, p. 125.

[70] Basker, 2002, pp. xlvi-xlvii.

[71] Basker, 2002, p. 126.

[72] Basker, 2002, p. 128.

[73] Basker, 2002, pp. 129-30.

[74] Grainger's poem has received much recent attention. See for example Jim Egan, 'The "Long'd-for Area" of an "Other Race": Climate, Identity and James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane*', *Early American Literature* 38.2 (2003), 189-212; David Fairer, 'A Caribbean Georgic: James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane*', *Kunapipi* 25.1 (2003), 21-28; Shaun Irlam, "'Wish you were here": Exporting England in James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane*', *ELH* 68 (2001), 377-96; and David S. Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 56-92.

[75] John Gilmore, *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger's Sugar Cane* (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 14.

[76] See Gilmore, 2000, p. 1.

[77] Gilmore, 2000, p. 1.

[78] Gordon Goodwin, 'Grainger, James', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[79] See Tobias Döring, *Caribbean-English Passages: Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 64.

[80] Quoted in David Fairer, 'A Caribbean Georgic: James Grainger's *The Sugar Cane*', *Kunapipi* 25:1 (2003), 21-28 (p. 23).

[81] Gilmore, 2000, p. 33.

[82] Gilmore, 2000, p. 35.

[83] Grainger, 1764, p. 126.

[84] See Thomas, 2006, p. 93.

- [85] Grainger, 1764, p. 134.
- [86] Gilmore, 2000, p. 71.
- [87] Grainger, 1764, pp. 161-62.
- [88] James Boswell, 'No Abolition of Slavery; or the Universal Empire of Love: A Poem', *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation*, ed. Alan Richardson (London: Pickering Chatto, 1999), Vol. 4, pp. 170-191 (p. 178).
- [89] Richardson, 1999, p. 188.
- [90] For biographical details, see Williamson, 2007, p. 62.
- [91] Williamson, 2007, p. 61.
- [92] Basker, 2002, p. 319.
- [93] Williamson, 2007, p. 65.
- [94] Basker, 2002, pp. 319-20.
- [95] Basker, 2002, p. 322.
- [96] Quoted in Williamson, 2007, p. 67.
- [97] Basker, 2002, p. 396.
- [98] Basker, 2002, p. 396.
- [99] Basker, 2002, p. 397.
- [100] Basker, 2002, p. 397.
- [101] Helen Maria Williams, 'A Poem on the Bill Lately Passed for Regulating the Slave-Trade', in Richardson, 1999, 83-98 (p. 88).
- [102] See Corey E. Andrews's forthcoming chapter, 'Robert Burns, Critic', *The Edinburgh Companion to Robert Burns*, ed. Gerard Carruthers (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), for an extended discussion of this letter.
- [103] Taken from Annan's Robert Burns Memorial Lecture, available at [www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/sgsm9112.html](http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2004/sgsm9112.html)
- [104] Gerard Carruthers, 'Robert Burns and Slavery', *Drouth* 26 (2008): 21-26 (pp. 22-23).
- [105] Basker, 2002, p. 445.
- [106] Basker, 2002, p. 445.
- [107] Basker, 2002, p. 445.
- [108] Basker, 2002, p. 445.
- [109] Basker, 2002, p. 445.
- [110] Robert Burns, *The Poems and Songs of Robert Burns*, ed. James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), vol. 1, p. 272. The poem was composed during the summer of 1786, but it was not published until 1819.
- [111] Burns, 1968, vol 1, p. 271.
- [112] Burns, 1968, vol. 1, p. 239.