

## Chapter One

### *Introduction*

#### **Ancient Slavery and Abolition: From Hobbes to Hollywood**



William Wells Brown, the first black American novelist, was also one of the first former slaves to authorise himself as a legitimate historical subject able to comment on the history of a nation that had denied him his own history from the outset.<sup>1</sup> His view of America and its history stemmed from his personal experience and his extended visit to Britain, where he arrived in 1849. He had already spent much of his life with the status of

fugitive, after escaping as a young man from slavery on New Year's Day 1834, no doubt partly inspired by the long-awaited abolition of slavery throughout the British dominions in August of the previous year. When Brown visited Nelson's column, he was struck by the depiction of a heroic black man at the Admiral's side, since the contribution of black men to military achievements was consistently erased from monumental art in his homeland.<sup>2</sup> Thinking about the narratives encoded on ancient Roman monuments which he had seen in Britain prompted Brown to question the way that his white countrymen distorted their public history:

I once stood upon the walls of an English city, built by enslaved Britons when Julius Caesar was their master. The image of the ancestors of President Lincoln and Montgomery Blair, as represented in Britain, was carved upon monuments of Rome, where they may still be seen in their chains. Ancestry is something the white American should not speak of, unless with his lips to the dust.<sup>3</sup>

Through his reference to the Roman subjugation of Britain, Brown here subverted white North Americans' exceptionalist patriotic view of their past, a view which made extravagant claims about their country's innovative nature as a republic heralding a new era in world history. This era, it was claimed, was taking human liberty to an unprecedented new level. Yet the world history of slavery, in Brown's interpretation, made it impossible to assert that any such significant rupture had been created by the founding fathers. Within the continuity that he assumes, Brown 'uncovers a foundational history' of an older republic, Rome. This radical resituating of American history in a

longer perspective leading directly back to Roman colonisation reveals the current masters of America to be descendants of slaves themselves.<sup>4</sup>

Brown's distinctive view of American history was a challenging one in its time, but it was to have a major impact on black activists over subsequent decades. Pauline Hopkins reminded the readers of *Colored American Magazine* at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that Cicero had advised Atticus not to purchase slaves from Britain because they were unable to learn music and were also particularly ugly.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the tradition of invoking classical precedent while discussing slavery was in Brown's time, of course, not remotely new: Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of the San Domingo slave revolt, must have encountered Spartacus when he included Plutarch's *Lives* amongst his reading on the plantation in the years before the uprising.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, ever since the Portuguese initiated the second great era of slavery in Europe in the 1440s, ancient slavery had provided the material from which commentators could draw comparisons and material in defence or repudiation of the practice. Joseph Vogt identified no fewer than ninety-six major publications on the problem of ancient slavery and its moral aspects (many of them dissertations written in Latin) published between the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century and the late 18<sup>th</sup>, when Abolitionism began to make serious headway.<sup>7</sup>

The most important, at least in terms of the depth of its impact, was Thomas Clarkson's *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African*, began life rather accidentally, and in the form of a Latin prose composition, or rather 'a Latin Dissertation which was honoured with First Prize in the University of Cambridge for the year 1785'. (In fact, Clarkson had already won a BA competition, and he wanted and became the first person to win the MA competition as well.) In 1752 the

two Members of Parliament for Cambridge University had founded and funded 'Members' Prizes' for composition in Latin, to be awarded annually. The title was always to be decreed by the Vice-Chancellor, who seems to have had considerable control over the adjudication process as well.<sup>8</sup> They are unlikely to have realized that one of the prizewinning compositions was destined to prove a turning-point in the slavery debate in Britain and to play a major role in global history.<sup>9</sup>

In 1785 the new Vice-Chancellor, Peter Peckard, set the topical question 'Is it lawful to make slaves of others against their will?' (*Anne Liceat Invitos in Servitutem Dare?*). Peckard was a Latitudinarian and had become convinced of the righteousness of the Abolitionist cause in 1783 when the captain of the slave ship *Zong* had over a hundred slaves thrown overboard alive in an insurance scam. As Master of Magdalene College, Peckard decided to use his status to add weight to the antislavery movement, and early in 1784 he delivered a galvanic University Sermon denouncing the slave-trade to a congregation which included Thomas Clarkson. When Peckard, by now Vice-Chancellor, set the prize-essay competition title a few months later, Clarkson remembered the sermon and made the astute decision not to confine his prose composition entirely to antiquity. He also addressed, in contrived Golden Latin prose, the topic of the Atlantic Slave Trade.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising he won. Although Clarkson had previously known little about this subject, it engaged his curiosity and his researches paid off. After having written the essay (and collected the prize), he translated it into English so that it could gain a wider audience. This cost him some effort, since he added new information and worked from a longer Latin draft than had been submitted for the prize. Moreover, his arduous classical training made him better at writing sentences in Latin than in his native tongue, and the

published version retains some notes in Latin and Greek.<sup>11</sup> But in 1786, the essay was published.

A N  
E S S A Y  
O N T H E  
S L A V E R Y A N D C O M M E R C E  
O F T H E  
H U M A N S P E C I E S,  
P A R T I C U L A R L Y  
T H E A F R I C A N,  
T R A N S L A T E D F R O M A  
L A T I N D I S S E R T A T I O N,  
W H I C H W A S H O N O U R E D W I T H  
T H E F I R S T P R I Z E  
I N T H E  
U N I V E R S I T Y O F C A M B R I D G E,  
F O R T H E Y E A R 1 7 8 5,  
W I T H A D D I T I O N S.  
*Neque precando alium me extulisse velim.—LIVY.*  
L O N D O N:  
P R I N T E D B Y J. P H I L L I P S, G E O R G E - Y A R D, L O M B A R D -  
S T R E E T, A N D S O L D B Y T. C A D E L L, I N T H E S T R A N D,  
A N D J. P H I L L I P S.  
M. DCC. LXXXVI.

The treatise drew on earlier discussions of slavery, above all *Some Historical Account of Guinea* (1771) by the Philadelphian Quaker Anthony Benezet, but the richness of Clarkson's repertoire of examples from ancient literature was partly a result of the form in which he was writing. Rarely has composition in the Latin language been put to such a progressive use. Clarkson's choice of examples was also often highly original. They were to prove influential, shaping and informing the ways that slavery both ancient and more recent have been presented in academic and more popular discourses virtually ever since. In his historical section in part I, Clarkson draws on Homer, Cicero and Tacitus (pp. 3-6) for categories of ancient slaves, on Thucydides to illustrate piracy (p. 9), on the

relationship between Odysseus and Eumaeus in the *Odyssey* (p. 11), and a wide range of other sources including Herodotus, Xenophon, Demosthenes, Sextus Empiricus, Aristophanes' *Plutus*, Aristotle, Plutarch, Plautus (*Stichus* and *Casina*), and Herodotus. He is also interested in the ancient authors who belonged to the slave class, creating a canonical list that still resurfaces today: the fable composers Aesop (whose choice of genre is defended pp. 27-9) and Phaedrus, the philosopher Epictetus, the poet Alcman and the comedian Terence (p. 30): all these examples, according to Clarkson (ibid.) '*afford a valuable lesson to those who have been accustomed to form too precipitate a judgment on the abilities of men*'.

The relationship between Peckard's incendiary sermon and Clarkson's prize essay illustrates well the two groups into which discussions of ancient slavery in both Europe and America were by this time tending to fall. One was highly polemical, and based on Christian scripture. Some Christian writers defended slavery by adducing evidence of its existence in the Old Testament or through Pauline and primitive Patristic theology, while Christian Abolitionists stressed the correlation between the establishment of Christianity and the historical decline of Roman slavery. Some argued that the moral stance of Christians had been the crucial factor in eradicating ancient slavery, and that Christianity had the potential to repeat this noble achievement.<sup>12</sup> But the other group of discussions, of which Clarkson's treatise is an example and which in an increasingly secular age came to overshadow the Christian controversy, placed more emphasis on pagan antiquity than on the Church Fathers. The universal assumption in those days was that ancient Greece and Rome were societies based on slavery (the still ongoing argument between Marxists, Weberians and other economic historians on this issue had not yet commenced); the

question, rather, was whether this was a model that could or should be imitated.<sup>13</sup> Amongst the earlier specialist classical scholars to write at length on ancient slavery, the Abolitionist voices were certainly in the minority. The more typical opinion was that promulgated in his 1793 neo-humanist essay on pedagogy 'Über das Studium des klassischen Altertums' by Wilhelm von Humboldt, who praised ancient Greek education and culture, and argued that the achievements of ancient civilisation were made possible by the institutionalisation of slavery.

If the achievements of ancient civilisation were made possible by the ancient availability of coerced labour, then the literary remains of ancient civilisation could be made to serve the requirements of slave-owners during the transatlantic trade and antebellum period. Indeed, the alleged inability of Africans to learn the ancient languages of Greece and Rome was used to demonstrate that they were not humans worthy of liberty. In 1833 or 1834, at a time when pro-slavery thinkers were very much on the defensive, the Senator for South Carolina, John C. Calhoun, notoriously declared at a Washington dinner party that only when he could 'find a Negro who knew the Greek syntax' could he be brought to 'believe that the Negro was a human being and should be treated as a man'.<sup>14</sup> The young black errand boy who overheard the conversation, Alexander Crummell, later said that it was this that motivated him to head for Cambridge University in England, where he indeed learned Greek as part of his studies in theology at Queen's College (1851-3).

The hero of black reconstruction W.E. Du Bois acknowledged late in life that it was only by good luck that he had a teacher liberal enough to teach him Latin and Greek 'rather than carpentry and the making of tin pans', and thus allow him to apply for a

Harvard scholarship and acquire the authority that only an elite education could confer on a black campaigner.<sup>15</sup> The fascinating history of other early black American scholars of Classics has been investigated recently by Michele Ronnick, above all in her 2004 photo-essay 'Twelve black classicists' and her editions of the writings of the scholar and race leader William Sanders Scarborough.<sup>16</sup> These supplement Keith Sandiford's research into 18<sup>th</sup>-century African writers in Britain, especially Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoana and Olaudah Equiano, who were themselves anticipated by the tradition of African literacy and learning – including classical learning -- that had already been established in the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the height of the Spanish Renaissance.<sup>17</sup>

The volume proposed here will certainly complement the type of work of which Ronnick and Sandiford represent such significant examples, but it would have a completely different focus. In some ways it has more affinities with the approach practised by Niall McKeown in his recent, lucid, and extremely thought-provoking *The Invention of Ancient Slavery?* (Duckworth 2006); we, too, stress that the shapes taken by the classical world in any historical context are conditioned by both the general ideological needs of the time and the contingent political agendas of individuals. But McKeown's fascinating discussion centres on the constructions, uses, and abuses of ancient slavery in scholarly discourse in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whereas we are looking at a more culturally diffuse range of media in which slavery was discussed, over a longer period, and in directly political ways. Of course there has always been a dialogue between the representation of ancient slavery in scholarship and in other arenas of discourse such as parliamentary speeches, poetry, fiction, film, and theatre, but it is the non-academic receptions in which we have been primarily interested.



Our enterprise was initiated partly in response to Richard Brion Davis' recent plea against over-localising and specialising tendencies in slavery studies, which have often isolated the institution from its broader cultural context.<sup>18</sup> These tendencies have also risked the displacement of slavery from the centre of the history of human civilisation to a dangerously peripheral position. The strategies that he recommends in countering these tendencies both involve – potentially or actually -- the continuing study of slavery in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The first is a comparative method, which examines two different instances of slavery to discover more about them each through the drawing of contrasts, comparisons, and parallels. An example would be the comparison of Roman latifundia with Virginia plantations, or Rosivach's comparison of agricultural slavery in the Northern colonies and in classical Attica.<sup>19</sup> The other strategy identified by Davis is the transhistorical approach, which looks for common roots and patterns to slavery, connecting its different manifestations and seeing it as part of the painful dehumanising cost of modernisation: the seminal works here are Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) and *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (1991).

There is, however, a third possible way to assist in keeping slavery in the centre of the radar through engagement specifically with the cultural presence of Greece and Rome in slavery, and that is to examine the part played by classical images, arguments, and models in later eras. This book is an attempt to explore this specific and fascinating area of cultural history. Its particular focus – Ancient slavery and *Abolition* – was partly a result of a desire to participate in the global celebration of the bicentenary of the 1807 legislation that abolished the slave trade in the British colonies, a momentous Act of Parliament the passing of which owed much to William Wilberforce. It also (eventually)

led to the Act which actually emancipated all slaves in British territories of 1833, much credit for which must go to Wilberforce's younger colleague Thomas Fowell Buxton, who was himself spurred on by his ardent Quaker mother.<sup>20</sup> The most important date in British political history in terms of Abolition is actually midnight on August 1<sup>st</sup> 1834, when the Act finally came into effect and 800,000 slaves were liberated. But just as important as the topicality of Abolition in a year that celebrated the earlier act, which prompted us to make it the subject of the inaugural conference of the Centre for the Reception of Greece & Rome at Royal Holloway and the British Library in December 2007, was our commitment to emphasising the positive and progressive role that Classics has played culturally as much as the reactionary and repressive. Classical materials are given their political agenda by those who interpret them, and the ancient Greek and Roman slave has been resuscitated quite as often by Abolitionists of slavery as by its promoters and apologists. Not for nothing was John Brown compared, after his hanging, with Spartacus.<sup>21</sup>

As the archetypal hero of the Abolitionist movement, Spartacus did indeed become much more culturally prominent towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, after Diderot and other French *philosophes* had praised the ancient gladiator; Voltaire, an inveterate pacifist, regarded Spartacus' uprising as just about the only example he would accept of a just war.<sup>22</sup> Bernard Saurin's five-act heroic tragedy *Spartacus* (1760) was not particularly focussed on the institution of slavery, but it was a local success in Paris, whereas our contributor Leanne Hunnings has shown elsewhere that the first truly British Spartacus was the hero of the short novel *Spartacus: A Roman Story* (1822), written by a young woman who was later to become an ardent Abolitionist, Susanna Strickland.<sup>23</sup>

The British interest in Spartacus actually originated as a response to a famous passage in the Abbé Guillaume Raynal's seminal 1770 *Histoire de Deux Indes*, which ran through 38 French and 18 English editions and was judged by Clarkson and several other prominent Britons to be 'one of the primordial agents in promoting antislavery ideas in England during the 1770s'.<sup>24</sup> The Abbé had faith in the capability of blacks to find their own rebel leader who could show the way to freedom,<sup>25</sup> provided only that the response of the colonial superpowers was not comparable with that of the Roman Senate in 71 BC: 'Where is this great man to be found, whom nature perhaps owes to the honour of the human species? Where is the new Spartacus who will not find Crassus?'

Abolition happened when it did in Britain (1807-1833), and subsequently in North America (1863-65), not through any lack of would-be Crassus types amongst slave-owners, but for a variety of economic and political reasons. These included industrialisation,<sup>26</sup> and the international shockwaves created by the 1789 revolution in France, where the sharp controversy over slavery in the revolutionary assemblies had pinpointed the crucial issues. It also resulted in the temporary French Abolition of 1794 that Napoleon overturned in 1802. British supporters of the French revolution, such as Tom Paine, almost inevitably supported Abolition, and there remained intimate connections between the anti-slavery movement and agitators for other forms of social emancipation, not only women's rights and the Irish question (on which see the chapter in this volume by Hodkinson), but on electoral and factory reform (a connection stressed in James Walvin's *England, Slaves and Freedom* (1986) and in Hall's chapter below). But even the most economically oriented historians have recently been re-emphasising the importance of ideological shifts – alterations in sensibility and ethical beliefs – in

creating the widely felt abhorrence necessary to passing of legislation at parliamentary level.<sup>27</sup>

There has been extensive analysis of the intellectual milieu of the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment discussants of slavery and freedom that came in the wake of Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* (1689), especially the works of Lord Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson and James Beattie.<sup>28</sup> The constant dialogue between French and British Enlightenment writers has been studied intensively.<sup>29</sup> The contribution of novels by both men and women in the decades leading up to the first legislative measures has been reassessed.<sup>30</sup> The exceptional importance of Christian conviction – especially in the case of Quakers and Methodists -- to the success of the Abolitionists' cause has been acknowledged and documented painstakingly.<sup>31</sup> There has been a re-evaluation of the success in mobilising public opinion of the (London) Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (founded in May 1787), along with the appeal of Josiah Wedgwood's popular 'Am I Not A Man And A Brother?' cameo, available in either jasper or basalt to a newly consumerist society.<sup>32</sup>

Although there were reactionary plays performed in the theatre that attempted to justify slavery, a notorious example being Thomas Bellamy's *The Benevolent Planters* (Theatre Royal, Haymarket 1789), the theatre was an early and important conduit for the dissemination of sentiments that built up repulsion for the inhumanity of slavery. This process began with theatrical adaptations of Aphra Behn's 1688 novel *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave*, whose author was described by Swinburne as 'the first literary abolitionist ...on record in the history of fiction.'<sup>33</sup> After it was dramatised by Thomas Southerne in 1696, *Oroonoko* became in Britain one of the most popular plays of all time, performed

at least once in every single season until 1801. Behn's picture of the long-suffering aristocrat Oroonoko, however much it has recently been criticised for its class politics and latent racist 'othering' of the heroic figure of the 'Noble Negro',<sup>34</sup> in its time made a major impact on thinking about slavery in France after it was translated by Antoine de Laplace in 1745. Although Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes* of 1721 had already established itself as the foundation text of anti-slavery opinion in France, it has been widely accepted that Behn's appealing tale did much both to inform and to popularise Montesquieu's most influential case against slavery in his *Esprit de lois* of 1748.<sup>35</sup>

Feminist scholars have stressed the contribution made by other literary women, especially Mary Wollstonecroft and Lydia Maria Child, in the Abolitionist struggle.<sup>36</sup> The poems on or relating to slavery by canonical poets such as Blake, Cowper, Coleridge and Southey have been collected and analysed.<sup>37</sup> Familiar literary texts from the period between 1807 and 1833 have been examined from perspective sensitive to Abolitionist language; an illuminating example is Mary Shelley's 'Promethean' monster in *Frankenstein*, who been read as an insurgent black Caribbean slave, his novel owing 'much of its language and power to Jamaican and Haitian slave rebellions'.<sup>38</sup> The role of painting in the making the case for Abolition as well as for defending slavery has been acknowledged, especially in Marcus Wood's brilliant *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1760-1865*: the public display of a painting of Prometheus in the 1840s could play its own part in the campaign, fomented from a now self-righteous Britain, to see slavery abolished in America.<sup>39</sup>

The mental processes by which individual earlier critics of slavery arrived at their conclusions have also begun to be re-examined, and the differences as well as the

similarities between their positions clarified. The case has recently been made, for example, that Alexander Hamilton, one of the few Founding Fathers who vigorously opposed slavery (as Abraham Lincoln insisted in his anti-slavery oratory<sup>40</sup>) had a very real concern about slavery based not on Hobbesian principles but on more traditional natural law theory. He had a deep-seated conviction that the natural rights of man imposed a corresponding duty to end slavery.<sup>41</sup> His private papers reveal how his thinking developed partly through direct comparison of what he saw around him with the effect of slavery in antiquity: in 1777 he remarks how fully contemporary experience of slavery confirmed Plutarch's view that the helots were the 'Achilles' heel' of what was widely seen as an admirable ancient republic.<sup>42</sup> He developed his theory that the practice of slavery was nothing more than war carried from the battlefield to the household from delving into Cicero's discussions of Roman law, and other passages of Roman history; he concluded that the Roman provinces were scenes of unremitting 'rapine and cruelty' owing to the doctrine that it was legitimate to enslave war captives.<sup>43</sup>

Several decades later, two Britons -- a journalist and a scholar -- made the imaginative leaps that allowed them to see that the slavery that was still legal in America was highly relevant to the manner in which gentlemen, schoolboys and university students should understand not Plutarch nor Cicero but a poet who created dramatised *fiction*s. The interesting thing is how they use publications relating to the same author, Aristophanes, as vehicles through which to express diametrically opposing viewpoints. 'Aristophanic' complaints against both Abolition and the 1832 Reform Act were expressed in the skilful, reactionary *The Possums of Aristophanes, Recently Recovered*, published in 1836 in the popular new Tory literary organ, *Fraser's Magazine for Town*

*and Country*. The unnamed author is likely to be the effective founder of the magazine William Maginn, a brilliant classicist and parodist of Greek and Latin authors.<sup>44</sup>

*The Possums* is presented as the newly rediscovered first version of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, which, it is claimed, featured a chorus of possums. This allows the author to introduce a supercilious note about what it calls a familiar North American 'negro' minstrel song, *Possum up a Gum-Tree*. The reader is informed that while Aristophanes had satirised a new school of philosophy in the revised *Clouds*, in *Possums* his target had been 'the new school of politics and legislation. He was, as every school-boy knows, an aristocrat; and the *Possums* breathe the very spirit of genuine Conservatism'. That in *The Possums* Aristophanes had prefiguratively targeted not only slaves but the classes newly franchised in 1832 is proposed when the audience is sneeringly told that the Pheidippides figure, 'Sophoswipos', spends his time at the Mechanics Institute. The equivalent of Socrates is Micromegalus, a thinly disguised Earl Grey, the Prime Minister between 1830 and 1834, who had presided over some of the most far-reaching reforms in British history. Grey/Micromegalus practises twirling in order the better to legislate:

My thoughts forsake the past, and learn to waltz

With notions yet unheard of. Then, new schemes

For public good arise. For public good

Is not like sluggish ponds, that stand all still,

And rot for want of motion: public good

Changes its aspect daily. So the laws

That guard it must change daily too.

Micromegalus requests that his chorus of Possums expound their ‘thoughts on policy’ and ‘legislative principles’, to which the Possums respond, unintelligibly, in blatant imitation of an Aristophanic animal chorus, ‘Ullaboo, ullaboo / Lillibu, lillibu, lillibulero’. (The *Lillibullero*, of course, was a popular song that since the Glorious Revolution had often been used to satirise the sentiments of Irish or other rebels against the British monarchy and government). Here the chorus of possums, identified with North American slaves (who remained unemancipated), are also fused with every group that was struggling against the might of the British ruling class abroad and at home – autodidactic British workers at the Mechanics Institute, and rebels in Ireland. The abolition of slavery in the colonies preceded by decades both the full enfranchisement of British citizens and Irish independence, but its impact through shared imagery and contested exempla was surely not only to reverberate in these later struggles, but probably to hasten their successful outcome.

For Benjamin Dann Walsh, however, Aristophanes presented a wholly different political opportunity. Born in Worcestershire in 1809, Walsh actually gave up Classics and emigrated to the USA in 1838, where he was later appointed the first state Entomologist of Illinois. But before he left England he published *The Comedies of Aristophanes, Translated into Corresponding English Metres*. 1837, which contains parallels between the slaves in Aristophanes’ Athens and those in the Deep South of America that are hardly ever found in classical literary scholarship in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In



the Preface he collects evidence for and deplores the appalling floggings and punishments in antiquity; later he compares Roman and British imperialism: 'The annals of Rome...present nothing but the spectacle of a powerful and unscrupulous tribe, gradually acquiring, by force and by fraud, the absolute dominion of the whole civilized world'.

The most telling example to be discovered in the history of classical scholarship may be the American Basil Gildersleeve's reaction to Pindar. Gildersleeve was committed to a nostalgic vision of the Old South, a vision forged before and during his service in the Confederate cavalry during the American Civil War (an experience which marked him indelibly). Yet most classical scholars have known him solely as an exceptionally important figure in the history of Pindar studies: no late 19th or 20th-century commentary or scholarly article on the epinician genre was not at some level still informed by Gildersleeve's brilliant and lucid commentary on the Olympian and Pythian odes (1885). Yet our understanding of this Confederate scholar's own subjective responses to the Theban encomiast of the aristocracy is deepened by thinking about his politics. He had personally identified himself with Pindar, and above all with the anodyne, beautiful, aristocratic, traditional, elegant world conjured in Pindaric epinicia. That idealized ancient world, existing entirely in the elite imagination, exhibits a capacity for erasing all the pain entailed by its underlying mode of production (slavery); this quality resembles the artificial prettiness and fundamental denial of the truth demonstrated throughout the genre of the Confederate Romance, where the 19th-century southern plantation is a place of conjured delicate sentiment, magnolia blossom and moonbeams, a set of images which attempts to obscure or eradicate the reality of systemic slave exploitation, rape and torture.<sup>45</sup>

The processes by which Hamilton, Maginn, Walsh and Gildersleeve arrived at their respective stances on slavery provide excellent examples of the material studied in this book. Although the class background of Abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic has attracted recent interest,<sup>46</sup> an enterprise that has included discussions of their education, the nature of the presence of the ancient world in the unmaking of modern slavery has never been the target of a sustained and focussed study. The over-riding purpose of this book is therefore to explore one significant dimension of the ideological tussle with slavery that led to its Abolition; this dimension is the way that various ancient Greek and Roman materials shaped and informed the debates about slavery conducted from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards. The authors discussed are mostly British, but the story can by no means be limited to Britain and her colonies, since the two-way flow of ideas between Europe and North America was as incessant as the transportation of goods to Africa, slaves across the middle passage, or cotton, sugar and tobacco to Bristol or Liverpool. The book's centre of gravity lies in the period of legislative change from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-19<sup>th</sup>, during which the most important British legislation was debated and eventually passed, but the last four chapters of the book address the presence of the Greek and Roman Classics in thinking about Abolition in North America and the Caribbean. It is important to remember that the process of ending slavery has proven to be protracted. The Netherlands did not abolish slavery until 1863, and Ethiopia until 1936. Indeed, although nearly one hundred countries have now signed the international Slavery Convention first formulated in 1926, which commits signatories to outlawing slavery, it has still by no means been eradicated from the planet. Scholars of Afro-American and Caribbean literature have also emphasised that it needs to be read in

diachronic perspective for the true centrality of slavery to the American and Caribbean consciousness to be appreciated: since the Civil Rights movement, and especially since the earlier works of Henry Louis Gates Jr, a very sizeable bibliography has been produced on works from the 'Founding Fathers' of the slave narrative Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington to Ralph Waldo Ellison and Toni Morrison.<sup>47</sup>

Many of these narratives and novels do not engage – at least on any explicit level – with Greek and Roman civilisation, but others do, in some cases profoundly. The hero of Ralph Waldo Ellison's *Odyssey*-based novel *Invisible Man* has his whole life informed by statements about relations between black and white made to him by his grandfather, who was born into slavery. The importance of the precedent of classical slavery to the cultural representations of slavery during the era of the transatlantic trade has had far-reaching consequences. It is demonstrated in the later chapters of this volume to extend to Caribbean historiography in C.L.R. James' *The Black Jacobins* (1938) and to Hollywood's representation, in the 1990s, of Civil War Tennessee. But the arguments which movies frame in imaginative and aestheticised terms were first articulated by political theorists reacting to the enslavement of Africans during the Renaissance, and turning as they did so to classical authors for illumination.

In Chapter Two Alston therefore establishes the broad intellectual framework within which the Abolitionists were operating, by examining what was different about their philosophical position from that of earlier political theorists, both in antiquity (for example, Aristotle and Roman jurists) and the Early Modern period (especially Hobbes). Since both defenders and opponents of slavery turned to the Greek and Roman worlds in search of their arguments, Alston argues that when faced with the difficult problem of the

epistemic shift that ushered in Abolition, we can once again turn to antiquity for illumination and to refine our understanding of the central issues at stake. The problem with slavery became apparent in the practical context of Enlightenment statecraft and commerce where laws had to be framed, and many landmark legal judgements against slavery were based on an absence of appropriate law rather than the presence of a developed juridical concern with the rights of the person. Nevertheless, it is notable that judgements went against the slave owner and for the slave: the paradigms for accepting slavery were readily available, but were not accepted. Inspired by a series of articles that appeared under the pseudonym 'Pliny' in the *Charleston Mercury* in 1833, the year that slavery was abolished in Britain, Alston argues that the adoption of the pseudonym was a deliberate attempt to associate American slave-owners with the 'cultured' Roman gentleman and the 'softer' face of slave-ownership in the Classical world that Pliny could be seen as presenting. He then shows why Abolitionist arguments inevitably won the day: Pliny's paternalist model of the benevolent slave-master were doomed to fail in the face of the capitalist theory of the person, with its attendant notion that human liberty was grounded in an inherent ontology.

In chapter 3, Hodkinson shifts the focus from the presence of Roman paternalism in political theory and argumentation to the importance of Spartan helotage in the framing of the early British parliamentary motions, between 1791 and 1796, for Abolition of the slave trade. Helotage, particularly illustrated from the evidence of Plutarch's *Lycurgus*, consistently appears as the primary ancient example of the inhumanity of servitude, cited both by some of those who wanted to argue for the legitimacy of their own (allegedly more lenient) slave-holding practices and by Abolitionists. The discussion

covers the non-parliamentary sources in which these ideas were promulgated and developed – journalism, sermons, school text-books -- and shows how the comparison of helotage and West Indian slavery was consistently intertwined with the comparison of helots and the Irish peasantry. The changes in approaches to the Spartan system over a relatively short space of time between the English Commonwealth and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century illustrate the complexity of the slavery arguments in the process of their legislative evolution.

The fourth chapter addresses more widely disseminated media through which the sensibilities were developed during the 18<sup>th</sup> century that made Abolition increasingly well supported across a broad spectrum of the British population. Abolitionists reached a wide audience through popular literature including novels, plays, songs, and particularly poems. Verses on slavery were written and published by the score in newspapers and magazines and in longer purpose-made volumes. Carey builds on the work of Willie Sypher and on his own *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (2005) in order to argue that both the form and content of classical poetry were harnessed by Abolitionists to their cause: Africa became by turns a land worthy of a tragic epic, of recasting as pastoral Arcadia, and as a point of comparison with the lands and peoples brutalised by both Spartan helotage and Roman imperialism.

Carey's discussion of broad trends within the classicism of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Abolitionist poetry provides essential context for the next chapter, Greenwood's study of Phillis (or Phyllis) Wheatley. Born in West Africa, and a slave in Boston, Massachusetts, Wheatley was destined to become the first internationally famous black poet in modern times and a minor celebrity in Britain, where she lived and worked in the early 1770s..

Introduced to a wide readership by her introduction into the argument of Clarskon's essay (see above), Wheatley had already configured *herself* as an ancient writer and also as a mythical figure from a prestigious classical text. In *To Maecenas* (1773) this black poet, whose publication of poetry was unprecedented, tried on a series of identities she had encountered in her reading of classical authors, in a transparent quest to identify or formulate a poetic persona adequate to self-description. She first adopts the voice of Horace, a freedman's son, in order to address her patron (ironically her 'Maecenas' was almost certainly another woman, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon and a prominent Methodist patron of Black Britons); she then asserts her inability to rise to Homeric or Virgilian heights, but assumes the persona of Patroclus begging to borrow Achilles' armour in the *Iliad* (16.21-45). As a black woman she is as unskilled but as well-intentioned in relation to the history of white male poets as Patroclus was as a warrior in relation to Achilles. Greenwood argues that Wheatley herself was fully aware of the cultural presumption constituted by an enslaved African reading and writing about classical themes and that she adopted classical signifiers of African-ness in order to mediate her authorial persona.

It is to the southern part of Wheatley's natal continent that the next chapter turns, with Hilton's study of the use of classical ideas and motifs in the discourse of slavery and Abolition at the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa, between the years 1795 and 1834. He draws on a rich and complex body of evidence, including accounts of travel to and in the Cape, newspaper articles in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* and *De Zuid-Afrikaan*, monographs, letters, diaries, and archival court records. The uses to which classical texts were put in testimony about slavery at the Cape reveals a very different set

of priorities from the discussions in Britain, arising from a profound clash between the Dutch view of slavery, which was influenced by Roman-Dutch law with its imperial and paternalistic bias, and the English view, inspired by the Magna Carta. The article argues that, as a result, the social and legal changes brought about by Roman jurists and emperors played a much greater role in implementing Abolition in South Africa than in other British colonial contexts.

Hilton's discussion leads up to the actual implementation of the Abolition of slavery in British territories in 1834, a year after the Act was passed. 1834 was also the year which saw one of the most resonant literary representations of slavery to circulate in the popular imagination of the Empire. This is the portrait of the blind slave-girl Nydia in the popular novel published by Edward Bulwer (later Bulwer-Lytton), *The Last Days of Pompeii*. The novel was to prove exceptionally influential over the following decades; it ran into numerous editions and was adapted into stage performances ranging from bombastic tragedies to the light entertainment provided by extravagant spectacles. Hunnings argues that Nydia's suicide, resulting from her painful position in the love-triangle between herself and two free characters, is doubly handicapped by her disability and her status. But Nydia, despite undoubtedly tugging at the heart-strings of her mid-19<sup>th</sup> century British and North American liberal readers, is doomed to emotional pain and loneliness. She sits on a difficult cusp between passivity and activity, objectivity and subjectivity, victimhood and agency. Hunnings used ideas developed in Robert Burns Stepto's study of slave narratives, *From Behind the Veil* (1979), to show how Nydia's subjectivity is threatened with erasure and severely compromised as she is inspected by her male author and his implied readership, but she appropriates, in her dying moments, a

moral agency that enabled her to upstage most of the free characters in the popular imagination.

From the 1830s onwards, the flow of arguments and images related to Abolitionism became conspicuously transatlantic, as Abolitionists in North America sought support for their cause from the example of their former colonial ruling power. But another development was the cross-fertilisation between the Abolitionists' array of arguments and images and the polemics produced by British campaigners for parliamentary reform. Here the multivalency of myth lent it a particular attraction to authors and artists who wanted to draw parallels between different arenas of struggle for freedom and equal rights, as Hall and Macintosh in *Greek Tragedy and the British Theatre* (OUP 2005) have previously argued in the case of tragic myth in performance and adaptation between the 1770s and 1860s. The fusion of antislavery sentiments with appeals for universal (male) suffrage is implicit, for example, in the speech that Atlas, the guardian spirit of Africa, delivers to America in the form of Hesper in book 8 of Joel Barlow's new 1807 edition of his epic of America *The Columbiad*; it is explored in most detail in important drama of 1838, *The Athenian Captive* by the Chartist sympathiser and MP Thomas Talfourd, which drew on ancient Greek myth and tragedy, especially *Medea*, *Ion* and *Oedipus Tyrannus*. In Chapter 8, Hall traces some significant uses of Greek mythology by Abolitionists before comparing five different but previously neglected political uses of the myth of Prometheus – in an 1807 poem to celebrate Abolition of the slave trade, in Chartist ballads, and in lyric poems and paintings by American radicals in the 1840s and 1850s. The comparison reveals how classical mythology as well as history



was adapted by campaigners for different types of freedom, whether legally, electorally (or even occasionally economically) defined.

Garry Wills has shown in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992) the importance of the Gettysburg funeral address – the founding 'charter' speech of postbellum America -- of several classical examples of classical literature: Pericles' *epitaphios* as recorded by Thucydides and the antithetical periods of Cicero and Tacitus. This provided the climax to the rhetorical framing of the arguments before and during the Civil War in the 'oratory of the Greek revival'. Malamud's chapter stays in antebellum America to ask which models from antiquity seemed most appropriate to the understanding of the momentous arguments framed and indeed contested violently there during the period from the 1830s to the Civil War. What to the ancient Greeks and Romans were ethnically other 'barbarians' rather than Titans here come to the fore, as Abolitionists found inspiration in the Carthaginian resistance to Rome, in Medea's defiance of Jason, and in the ancients' admiration for the achievements of the Egyptian and Ethiopian civilisations. Herodotus could be quarried with equal passion by polemicists on both side of the slavery debate, while other ancient authors – above all Aristotle – remained firmly Confederate. But the Peloponnesian War also provided an important paradigm for politicians in both North and South, with the perennial problem of Athens' status as a slave-holding democracy increasingly dominant in the discourse.

The first successful slave revolt, which had a major impact on the Abolition debates, is usually held to have been that on the French colony of Saint Domingue, which began in the wake of the French revolution in 1789 and culminated in the establishment of the first free black Republic in the Americas, the independent state of Haiti in 1804.

The Trinidadian radical C.L.R. James' study of the revolt in *The Black Jacobins. Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (1938) is itself now held to have been one of the foundation texts of the Civil Rights movement in the USA and subsequently of Panafricanism. But James' view of history was heavily informed by his studies of slave revolts and his love of heroic drama, and in Chapter 10 Langerwerf analyses his portrayal of Toussaint L'Ouverture from a literary perspective. She compares James' presentation of his Haitian rebel hero with the representations of two slave rebels from Antiquity: Pausanias' depiction of the mythical hero Aristomenes of Messene in the fourth book of the *Periegesis*, in which he relates the Messenian struggle against enslavement by the Spartans, and Athenaeus' use of the story, attributed to Nymphodorus of Syracuse's *Voyage to Asia*, of the rebel Drimakos, who leads the slaves on Chios in a successful revolt against the Chians and founds a maroon community after having reached agreement with the slave owners. The comparative method brings out traditional narrative tropes in James' shaping of history, a reading which is further inflected by James' stated views on the nature of the Aeschylean and Shakespearean tragic hero.

The *Odyssey* – and especially the relationship between Odysseus and Eumaeus -- was already identified by Thomas Clarkson in his Latin prose composition as a seminal text in the representation and discussion of slavery, but it remains surprising to find it playing so prominent a part in a rare Hollywood attempt to address the social crisis precipitated by the end of the Civil War in post-emancipation Tennessee. In Chapter Eleven McConnell examines a film which is set at the precise moment that slavery was abolished in the Deep South, but which is, for complicated reasons and in complex ways, based on the plot of the *Odyssey*. The tension between Odysseus and Eumaeus in

*Sommersby* (1993, directed by Jon Amiel) a (for Hollywood) unusually profound set of insights into the moral, emotional and economic ramifications of radical shifts in the relationship between newly emancipated slaves and their former masters.

In the concluding essay Ahuvia Kahane attempts to bring to the surface some general questions pertinent to the chapters of this book as a whole. This, of course, is not an attempt to place this volume's diverse range of ideas into a single relational whole, or to arrange the arguments in a sequence, or to provide overall keys for their reading. Rather, Kahane tries to highlight a few problems of the phenomenology of history, ethics, and historical contingency, which may be of importance to the study of the reception of ancient slavery in the modern era, perhaps especially so in the context of abolition. Kahane focuses on what he describes as two basic "modalities" of modernity, whose terms of engagement are notionally discontinuity (disjunction) and continuity (progression). The point, of course, is that each of these modalities contains, and requires the recognition of a dialectic of these terms. Kahane illustrates his argument by means of two examples: first some comments by Henry David Thoreau on the Abolitionist John Brown, and second, statements by Engels and Marx on the role of ancient slavery in the evolution of the modern world. Kahane tries to explore some of the limitations and prospects of these modalities and suggests their usefulness as critical accelerators and potential bases for further consideration of the arguments in this volume, and perhaps also as a lead-in to contemporary enquiries into history and ethics.

The ancient Greek and Roman worlds have been present in the struggle against slavery in multifarious ways. Aristotelian political theory and Roman law have been the source of many arguments, and of the theses against which the Abolitionists' antitheses

could be defined and refined. Studying the problem of slavery in the Athenian democracy and the Roman Republic stimulated great intellects to realize that slavery was not to be tolerated in an advanced civilization. Ancient literature in numerous different genres, from epic and biography to epistolography, has provided many of the most stirring images and heroes – Eumaeus' conversations with Odysseus, the oppression of the helots, Spartacus' uprising, Pliny's paternalist slave-owner. The continuity of history and in particular of colonialism from the ancient world to the contested present has been a valuable source of perspective. Ancient myths about captive Titans have served symbolic and allegorical uses. Ancient authors from Africa or of servile status have been adopted as cultural ancestors. The essays in the proposed volume cannot provide a comprehensive cultural history of all these phenomena, but it is hoped that they offer an illuminating variety of complementary perspectives on one of the most important arenas of struggle in which the Greek and Latin classics have ever been called to participate.

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1 Castronovo (1993) 527.

2 Brown (1854) 71.

3 Brown (1968) 34.

4 Castronovo (1993) 530.

5 Hopkins (2007) 168-9. Cicero (*Letters to Atticus* 4.17.13) does not actually say that the Britons are ugly, but that it is difficult to find one with literary or musical talent.

6 Harriet Martineau's list of Toussaint's favourite reading also includes Caesar's *Commentaries*, Herodotus, Nepos, and a biography of Alexander the Great: see Martineau (1841) vol. 3, 254-5, and the magazine article by Pauline Hopkins in *Colored American Magazine* 2.1 (for November 1900) 9-24, reproduced in Hopkins (2007) 11-22 (see especially p. 15).

7 Vogt (1973) 1-7.

8 See Clark (1904) 273-4.

9 Wilson (1989) 15.

10 Walsh and Hyam (1998) 16-17.

11 Wilson (1989) 196 n.4.

12 Engerman (1986) 328.

13 Patterson (1977) 408.

14 Crummell (1898) 10-11; see Gates (1987) 21.

15 Du Bois (1920) 17.

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- 16 Ronnick (2005) and (2006).  
17 Sandiford (1988) 17-42.  
18 Davis (2000) 452.  
19 Rosivach (1993).  
20 See Harris (1933) 10-17; Barclay (2001) 81-107.  
21 Fine (1999) 232.  
22 Voltaire (1877-1885) vol. 18, 600; see Hunting (1978).  
23 Hunnings (2007).  
24 Sandiford (1988) 51.  
25 Raynal (1780) 466.  
26 See the review of bibliography in Huston (1990).  
27 E.g. Anstey (1975); Eltis (1993); the discussion of Walvin (2001) ch. 18.  
28 See e.g. Sandiford (1988) 43-51.  
29 See e.g. Walvin (1986) 97-9.  
30 See e.g. the fascinating reassessment of Sarah Scott's novel *History of Sir George Ellison* (1766)  
by Stoddard (1995).  
31 Coupland (1933) and Mellor (1951) are the foundation texts of this approach.  
32 Oldfield (1992).  
33 Swinburne (1915) 95.  
34 See the penetrating analysis of Ferguson (1992) 27-49, aFor a discussion of feminist and, for  
postcolonial responses to Oroonoko, Fogarty (1994).  
35 This case was first made by in Jameson's *Montesquieu et l'esclavage* (1911), 82-103. See also the  
discussion in Seeber (1937) 12-34 and 59-60  
36 See e.g. Ferguson (1992), Moore (1994) on Wollstonecroft and the discussion of Child in Harrold  
(2001) and Salerno (2005).  
37 See e.g. Sandiford (1988) 61-72 and the essays in Plasa and Ring (1994).  
38 Malchow (1996) 38.  
39 Junker (2000) 50.  
40 Abraham Lincoln, 'Address at Cooper Institute', 27<sup>th</sup> February 1860, in Lincoln (1989) 117.  
41 Chan (2004).  
42 Hamilton (1961) vol. 1, 403-4; see Chan (2004) 217.  
43 Hamilton (1961) vol. 19, 332-3; see Chan (2004) 227.  
44 See further Hall (2007a), \*\*\*  
45 See the essays in Briggs and Benario (1986); Hall (2007) 130-1.  
46 On the class profile of the British abolitionists see Drescher (1994).  
47 See above all Gates (1987b), and the essays in McDowell and Rampersand (1989).