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British Abolition Song Exported

Sounding Sentiment in Early America

[two intro slides]

On 1 July 2022 [slide], the ‘Stop W.O.K.E. Act’ came into effect in Florida, banning lessons about systemic racism from grade school classrooms. The law deploys sentimentality about the vulnerability of children – protecting them, according to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, from a “woke class” that “wants to teach kids to hate each other” – in order to keep them from learning about the legacies of slavery.¹ Abolition song, conceived in opposition to slavery in the 18th century when oratory was swollen by affect, confronts us with a similar use of sentimentalism to deny the reality of lived experience. In Abolition song this process was regulated by polite music, a ‘sounded’ sentimentality whose appeal was in seeming to absolve White Anglo-Americans of the crimes of slavery.

I will today discuss the emergence, workings, and types of Abolition song in Britain between 1799 and 1806, its export to the United States and local manifestations there, its use of sentimentality as a palliative to empire, and the possibilities of resistance to the worldview it promulgates, in four sections [slide]. *First*, I will introduce Anglo-American Abolition song as a discourse – that is, a performed sentimental lyric to which music was fitted. *Second*, I will distinguish between *activist* Abolition song, which took the form either of a contrafactum – a verse set to a familiar tune chosen by the poet – or of a tune newly composed for instructive uplift, and *commercial* Abolition song, which followed London concert fashion. Both activist and commercial Abolition song perpetuated stereotypes of the African that aided imperial interests, but this was particularly the case with commercial song, the smooth sonic material of which could more glibly bring across White fantasies about Black anguish. *Third*, I will examine how the performance of commercial Abolition song, in particular, papered over the core philosophical dilemma posed by the slave trade: that it was abhorrent and that

so-called ‘Enlightened’ societies were enriching themselves through it. My theorizing around this dilemma is indebted to Joseph Roach’s notion of ‘surrogation’, by which the original teller of a story is replaced by another in performance; I argue that Abolition song extended such surrogation through an embodied, sounded sentiment which expunged African-ness while pretending to vivify a Black subject’s experience.

Finally, I will consider two instances, one past and one present, in which this repertoire was engaged in a more direct and unsentimental fashion. In 1799, Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, created a popular Abolition song which inverted the standard tropes of the genre, to striking effect; in 2023, a concert in New York led by Yale scholar and soprano Awet Andemicael gave us an alternative performance model for Abolition song generally. The 2023 event showed me how critical performance can alter the meaning of songs that are mostly dismissive of actual Black experience, and help us to see behind the blandishments of sentimental address.

[slide] Part 1. Abolition Song: First Words, then Music

In his anthology *Anglo-American Slave-Themed Poetry 1660–1810*, James Basker emphasises how, after 1750, the authors of slave-theme poetry tended to turn away from ‘reason, principle, and moral codes’ to embrace ‘emotion, empathy and intuition’.² One means by which poets courted empathy was to expand on press reports of the maltreatment of individual Africans.

The 1773 poem ‘The Dying Negro’ **[slide]** by Thomas Day and John Bicknell was an early model; in a preface, the authors said they had written in reaction to ‘a fact which had recently happened’,³ and been written up in the press. British news reports about Africans were typically ‘hue and cry’ advertisements promising a reward for help in recovering an escaped domestic slave,⁴ but the May 1773 story which attracted Day and Bicknell had an

added twist [slide]: the runaway had been caught and then shot himself while being transported back to plantation slavery in Jamaica.

The authors imagined this subject's last thoughts, aiding the reader of later editions with illustrations [slide]:

Did not my pray'rs, my groans, my tears invoke

Your slumb'ring justice to direct the stroke?

[...] From lord to lord my wretched carcase sold,

In Christian traffic, for their sordid gold...

'The Dying Negro' was to become a paradigm for later Abolition poetry, a corpus which literary scholars have explored in detail. Abolition song, which grew out of Abolition poetry, has so far been investigated only by Julia Hamilton and myself.

It began in 1788, when William Cowper wrote the first-ever Abolition contrafactum at the request of Jane Thornton, the wife of Alexander Leslie, Lord Balgonie.⁵ Jane was daughter of a Clapham-born merchant, John Thornton [slide], who at that time was said to be Europe's second-wealthiest man. The Thorntons owed their fortune partly to sugar, owning refineries in Hull and investments in Antiguan plantations.⁶ A devout Anglican, John Thornton supported the Abolitionist circle called the 'Clapham Sect'⁷ and sponsored John Newton, the slave-ship-captain-turned-cleric, known for his poem 'Amazing Grace' narrating his Damascene conversion to Abolitionism while onboard a slave vessel. Jane Thornton wrote to Newton to have Cowper supply some 'good Ballads' about abolition 'to be sung about streets'. Being 'printed and distributed' by 'Gentlemen', these ballads might be 'of use to the cause'.

What constituted a 'good' ballad? In a letter to Newton,⁸ Cowper explained that the words and associations of the 'old tune' must enrich the new text, a technique used in Early Modern broadside ballads and in ballad opera and later musical theatre genres. This was

certainly the case with Cowper's most celebrated contrafactum, 'The Negro's Complaint'. Like Day and Bicknell, in this work Cowper [slide] imagined an African describing his suffering, and exhorting White readers to question the godliness of their perversely violent ways:

Is there, as ye sometimes tell us,
 Is there One who reigns on high?
 Has He bid you buy and sell us,
 Speaking from his throne, the sky?
 Ask him, if your knotted scourges,
 Matches, blood-extorting screws,
 Are the means that duty urges
 Agents of his will to use?

To set these words Cowper chose a tune that, to his mind, deepened his moral argument: a gavotte [slide] printed in 1737 and later ascribed to Handel.⁹ As an educated man, Cowper will have registered the gavotte's gentility and rhythmic qualities, inherited from 16th-century French court dance. These imposed a symmetrical duple-meter 'frame', with mid-bar upbeat, and regular diminished note values ending in a sustained downbeat. This frame fit the stresses of Cowper's disyllabic verse of pyrrhic with trochee meter ('forced from **home** and' 'all its **pleasures**' – **let's hear this** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uudj1au2H9M>). Although this gavotte was versified many times, for instance in the similarly titled 'Sailor's Complaint' Cowper named Richard Glover's 'Admiral Hosier's Ghost' as his source. Glover's 1740 verses had warned of British deaths and naval failures at the Caribbean port of Portobello – a location, and a gravity of purpose, that suited Cowper's purposes.

Also in 1788, James Currie and William Roscoe [slide] of Liverpool set Abolition verses to playhouse airs, leaning into celebrity culture; this was to become the dominant practice in Abolition song, particularly in Early America. For the song later known as 'The African', they commissioned new music from Charles Dibden, Britain's most celebrated

blackface entertainer. Dibdin's career break-through had come 20 years earlier with *The Padlock* [slide], a comic opera he had composed and led as the Black comic servant 'Mungo'. Over time, the ancient Scots name 'Mungo' came to stand for any Black man. 'Mungo' could connote positively: Dibdin named his eldest son 'Charles Mungo', and on stage, Dibdin's Mungo could be seen as a sympathetic figure. As Roxann Wheeler has noted, the West Indian pidgin of Dibdin's Mungo was co-extensive with other dialects – those of Ireland or Yorkshire, for example – that, in deviating from proper English, charmed audiences with their cheekiness.¹⁰ It's striking that Currie and Roscoe conscripted the originator of stage song in West Indian pidgin to compose music intended for Vauxhall Pleasure Garden concerts, the home of slickly fashionable airs. To perform it, they chose not an established singer but the newly debuted, highly talented tenor Charles Incedon [slide].

For the verses of 'The African', Curry and Roscoe extended the topos of 'The Dying Negro', drawing on reports of Africans who, having been boarded onto a slave trade vessel, sought to drown themselves. To dramatize the captive's emotional situation, Curry and Roscoe drew on the same conceits as did other Abolition poets, such as a seascape that exteriorizes the subject's inner state:

Wide o'er the tremulous sea
 The moon spread her mantle of light,
 And the gale gently dying away,
 Breath'd fort on the bosom of night.
 On the forecastle Maraton stood,
 And pour'd forth his sorrowful tale:
 His tears fell, unseen, in the flood,
 His sighs past unheard in the gale.

Dibdin's score cooled these hot tears with English air writing, in a setting that was as up-to-date as Cowper's contrafactum had been old-fashioned: Dibdin's idiom is Classical, not Baroque; his techniques are those of the British musical stage, not the French court dance; his sophisticated score consists of multiple parts smoothly dovetailed, not melody over a bass [slide]. Dibdin's instrumental writing dramatized, and contained, Maraton's exclamations, repetitions, groans, and intakes of breath. Listen to the panting, heartbeats and sighs embedded in the score, and how a key modulation both registers and softens the outbreak of Maraton's tears [audio, SONG SCORE NO. 1].

[slide] Part 2: Activism versus Spectatorship

The vast majority of Anglo-American Abolition songs were like *The African* in being empathy-seeking concert airs rather than moralising contrafacta. Table 1 [slides AND TABLE 1 HANDOUT] shows the chronology, by title and year, of serious British Abolition song production in the years 1799 to 1806; of 46 airs, only six were contrafacta. Table 2 [slides AND TABLE 2 HANDOUT] shows which of these British Abolition songs came to Early America, and in which years. Notice the gap from 1788 to 1792, during which there was no uptake of British Abolition songs in America at all. This appears to be because the only Abolition song produced in Britain in these years was what I call 'activist', with music newly composed, usually by provincial organists, and conceived for the moral uplift of amateurs rather than for public entertainment. As a local product with high communal engagement built on grassroots musical skills, this *activist* song was definitionally non-commercial, and seems not to have travelled to Early America.

[slide] This activist corpus is the focus of Julia Hamilton's research; Hamilton shows how female amateurs shaped its dissemination and production within the guardrails of polite sociability. For instance, organist John Danby set Cowper's 'Negro's Complaint' verse as a

type of vocal ensemble called a ‘glee’, dramatising the three subject positions of Cowper’s verse: the evangelist, the observer, and the enslaved African, multiple viewpoints which allowed Cowper’s appeal to straddle both pathos and *logos*. Danby composed-out the debate between the evangelist, the observer, and the enslaved African as what Hamilton calls a ‘sociable’ exchange, in which varying views are given equal voice in a polite discourse. In general, the more than half-dozen settings of Cowper’s ‘Negro’s Complaint’ have burnished its reputation as a model Abolition verse.

The music of activist Abolition songs trended learned and sombre, and was composed by amateurs and organists [slide] across Britain: in London, besides Danby, John Wall Callcott, Richard John Samuel Stevens, and Thomas Greatorex; in Doncaster, Edward Miller; in Bury St Edmunds, George Guest; in Scarborough, Thomas Beilby; in Edinburgh, Thomas Butler [slide].

Of this group, Miller [slide] was the outlier in that he belonged to the circles both of devout provincial amateurs and of London public concerts. As well as an organist, he was a transverse flute prodigy who had performed under Handel's directorship. Although living in Doncaster since 1756, Miller was known to principal London musicians. As a concert series director and visitor, he had engaged and worked with leading London instrumentalists in projects such as the New Musical Fund.¹¹ Miller’s metropolitan associations led him to compose dramatically suasive settings, suited to the concert stage as well as to his home audience of Yorkshire amateurs. His 1794 setting of ‘The Negro Boy’ [slide] was performed in London before becoming widespread in the United States.

The verses of ‘The Negro Boy’ were by David Samwell, a former surgeon for Captain Cook, who printed them in 1788 in *The County Magazine*¹² and in 1791 [slide] in the *Star and Evening Advertiser*. Samwell hid his authorship behind provocative pseudonyms, in 1788 calling himself ‘Homo’ and in 1791 ‘Meddyg Du’, or ‘Black Doctor’ in Welsh (Samwell

resided in Wales) [slide]. Like Currie and Roscoe's 'The African', also published anonymously, Samwell's 'Negro Boy' dramatized information already in the public domain, in this case regarding Ghanaian royal William Ansa Sessarakoo [slide]. In 1744, Sessarakoo's father had sent him to be educated in England, entrusting his son's passage to a ship captain who then sold the boy into slavery. After Sessarakoo was rescued from Barbados and in 1749 brought to England, he became celebrated thanks to pamphlets and a mezzotint portrait by John Faber.¹³ In writing 'The Negro Boy' decades later, Samwell altered details of Sessarakoo's story, turning the White English captain into an African prince who weeps as he confesses to having sold an African boy into slavery for a metal watch. This may have been a criticism of Sessarakoo himself, whose formal title was 'The Royal African', and who by 1780 was not only famous but himself involved in the slave trade. Apart from mapping White guilt onto an African, Samwell blamed not the slaver himself, but the greed that drove him to it [slide]:

When thirst of Gold enslaves the mind
 And selfish views alone bear sway
 Man turns a savage to his kind
 And blood and rapine mark his way.
 Alas, alas for this poor simple Toy
 I sold a guiltless NEGRO BOY.

Samwell's mix of sermon, celebrity culture, blame-sharing, and first-person, racialized sentiment served *activist* and *commercial* Abolition song alike. As well as being the first Abolition song engraved in Early America, Miller's was the first of several British settings of Samwell's 'Negro Boy';¹⁴ it is the only Abolition song classifiable as both 'activist' (for its complexity and seriousness of purpose) and commercial (for its playhouse-air style). Miller's setting was sung by tenor James Burrows in public, likely at the Freemason's Lodge [slide],

which was often rented for concerts, which Burrows led in the early 1790s.¹⁵ As the head of the Doncaster Freemason's Lodge,¹⁶ Miller may have used his connections to get his song on the concert programme.

Miller's music soon reached Boston, though not as originally composed: it was silently plagiarized by Drury Lane and Ranelagh Gardens composer John Moulds,¹⁷ whose version – to this day mis-catalogued as by Moulds rather than by Miller – was sold in *Boston's Musical Magazine* of 1802 as 'a Sentimental Ballad. Composed by Mr. Moulds'.¹⁸ A comparison between the Miller and Moulds scores [slide] shows the former's debt to the latter: Moulds only slightly altered the content, resetting it in a new key, tinkering with the melodic line, and simplifying the accompaniment. Let's hear the difference [audio, SONG SCORE NO. 2 (Miller) AND SONG SCORE NO. 3 (Moulds)]. In later American song prints, and in a copybook, the music was reduced to two notated lines [slide]. Such mediation suggests a transatlantic difference in the usages of Abolition song: in Britain, Abolition song was the object of networks of refined sociability; in Early America, it was the object of either domestic consumption or public concertizing.

Our earliest record of Abolition song in Early America is Joseph Tyler's concert performance of 'The Negro Boy' at Boston's Federal Street Theatre on 6 January 1796 [slide].¹⁹ The reportedly self-taught singer-actor Tyler had debuted at Federal Street that same season, on 5 November 1795. According to a songsheet published by Benjamin Carr, 'The Negro Boy' was then 'Sung by Mr Tyler in *Inkle and Yarico*'. This must have been after February 1796, by which time Tyler had joined the Old American Company in New York.²⁰ Possessing a 'voice of rare excellence' Tyler likely added this song, as lead singer-actors of the period often did, to his title role part of *Yarico*. 'The Negro Boy' was also added to conclude Act 2 of the slave-themed tragedy *Oroonoko* at Boston's Federal Street Theatre, according to a notice of 30 December 1799 [slide]. This was done by Catherine Graupner

(née Hillyer), the wife of oboist and music seller Gottlieb Graupner – who then published the songsheet.^{21 22 23} By 1830, the Moulds-Miller ‘Negro Boy’ had cascaded tremendously: we find it in one copybook, two notated song collections, and multiple songsters (see Table 2).²⁴

Within eight years of its invention, then, Abolition song had seeped into drawing rooms, music-sellers’ stock, leading London concerts, and the theatres of Boston and New York. But what did this repertory *do*, in practice?

[slide] Part 3: Circum-Atlantic Apparitions

What did Abolition song ask of its performers and audiences? My model for thinking about this is the phenomenological analyses in Joseph Roach’s 1996 book, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* [slide]. In this ground-breaking work, Roach explores how the transoceanic economic machinery of enslavement across and around what Paul Gilroy famously called ‘The Black Atlantic’ has generated, *inter alia*, a dizzying array of cultural performances: from Anne Bracegirdle’s final act in Aphra Behn’s 1689 tragedy, *The Widow Ranter* and Restoration stage star Thomas Betterton’s funeral, to Jelly Roll Morton’s stomp variation of Scott Joplin’s rag and the Mardi Gras as celebrated in New Orleans in the 1990s.

According to Gilroy’s conception [slide], the Black Atlantic is a space in which the trade in Africans altered cultures irrevocably. On board ships, at trading posts (called ‘factories’), and within plantocracies and urban centres, peoples formally separate were jostled together amidst often extreme disparities of wealth, agency, and dignity, one consequence of which was the ever-present threat that the boundaries of rank and provenance could dissolve. This febrile situation drove individuals and groups to continually re-define their identities. But because the triangular trade itself was predicated on master-slave relations, on the liquidation of cultures, and on the de-humanization of labour, redefinition

often depended on lying. Defence of the indefensible required denials of origin, of culpability, and of human rights.

[slide] Roach considers performance to be an engine of both re-definition and denial. For Roach, a 'performance' is any representational act, be it social, artistic, or political. In Roach's writings, what he calls the 'circum-Atlantic' is the imaginative locus within which the slave trade and all the consequences that have flowed from it are variously 'memorialized' by the performative acts of individuals. The circum-Atlantic is where 'the Dead', victims of the triangle trade, are resurrected through performance: in orature, effigies, fetish objects, and collective acts. Performance 'makes real' origins and circumstances that have been re-imagined by the performer. Roach calls such an act 'surrogation', and sees it as the playing out of a 'three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution'.²⁵ Physical location, the distribution of individuals within that location, and the politics that these perpetuate; knowledge embodied and passed on, say in dance or gesture: these are among the 'hidden transcripts' from which surrogation proceeds, as one memorializing act is substituted for another.²⁶

The creators of Abolition song clearly shared Roach's preoccupation with performance as memory. The specific form of surrogation that Abolition song offered I would characterise more as 'exorcism': Abolition song *cast out* any notion of actual Africans and their practices – language, music, story-telling – while parasitically boring into African personal tragedy to assuage White guilt. For the Christian who believed in God's wrath, for the Enlightened thinker who believed in universal principles, for the patriotic Briton who believed in national destiny, African-ness needed to be about *them*: beyond the horizon of White expectation, Africa did not exist. The African suicide in Curry and Roscoe's guilt-driven verses was a zombie of imaginative displacement, engorged with sentiment and embodied through music-making. The affect of performed Abolition song left no imaginative

space for an African-ness whose sounding, orating, emoting, or perceiving lay outside the White poet's experience.

However well-intentioned, Abolition song was therefore a Narcissus pool. Its poetry reflected the anguish not of Africans, but of Whites aware of their complicity in a monstrous trade. Abolition song's exorcism of the African dwelt side by side with the era's fashion excesses, often made possible by the wealth and commodities of the triangular trade. The fetish objects of what Roach calls a 'performance of waste' were displayed by the wealthy at spas, pleasure gardens, and concert halls [slide] where Abolition song was programmed.²⁷ Because the guilt being exorcised by Abolition song was collective, the enactment of anguish had to be public, and as such was necessarily decorous. Public-facing grief – sighs, tears, and self-reproaches – was an act, reciprocally perfected in stage drama and by the public at funerals and assemblies, in correspondence and domestic entertainments. The African subject was grist for this mill of convention, crushed by Abolition song lyrics into one or more of three stereotypes: the dying African, the boy African, and the lamenting African. The dying African commits suicide, attesting to his helplessness; the boy African shows the need for Christian values towards children; the lamenting African reinscribes the propriety of mourning separation from one's homeland or from one's heterosexual beloved.

[slide] I do not mean to deny that an enslaved person might have experienced the feelings that Abolition song verse assigned to its African subjects. Rather, my point is that by essentializing Africans, Abolition song denied the *possibility* of their individual experience. Such essentializing grew apace after 1792, as the production of 'commercial' Abolition song in Britain eclipsed that of 'activist' Abolition song, and the commercial variant was exported to Early America. This process can be seen in how new musical composition for Cowper's 'Negro's Complaint' ground to a halt. Hamilton traces how Cowper's 1788 ballad morphed at once into domestic song, in 1790 into a serious 'glee' for amateurs, and in 1793 into a female

amateur composition. And then nothing, thought the verses themselves continued to be disseminated, particularly in America. That there was never a *commercial* setting of ‘The Negro’s Complaint’ I read as a rejection of the *logos* of Cowper’s ‘activist’ verse by the empathy-seeking composers for public concerts.

The audiences for Abolition song at commercial concerts were part of these songs’ memorializing, surrogating, and exorcising functions. These audiences registered, and watched others registering, the songs’ affective impact. Concert venues – the drawing room, the Freemason’s Hall, the Vauxhall Garden ‘orchestra’ – constrained violent reactions: the movements of audience members were restrained, and those of vocalists and instrumentalists were directed at the proper execution of the music. Spectators and musicians alike bore witness, by watching or doing, to skills that spoke of privilege, education, and hours of repetition; this will have heightened the incantatory effect of commercial Abolition song’s predictable poetic-musical structures. The joint experience of familiar narrative tropes and standard musical material provided opportunities for public agreement on how the African protagonist had behaved, how African grief was felt, how a score ought to register this grief, and how musicians ought to express it. Released from mimesis, commercial Abolition song didn’t just re-inscribe, but *made audiences feel* commonly held convictions. The score choreographed and contained effusions into gestures – groans, beating pulses, exclamations – which rose and then fell away under smooth harmonic progressions. Commercial Abolition song accommodated sentiment while caging it within polite music. This entire set of practices was then exported to Early America, where titles and notices indicate Abolition Song’s deployment for public concerts and singing ‘academies’ (that is, concert series) in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York.

In singing ‘The Negro Boy’ in New York in 1796, however, Joseph Tyler did something unprecedented: he performed an Abolition song while ‘in character’ in an opera.

Tyler's operatic part in *Inkle and Yarico* [slide] was that of Inkle, the white English trader who shamefully sells his pregnant Black lover Yarico into slavery. Though Tyler's decision to add 'The Negro Boy' was likely practical – why not expand your part by inserting music you know? – inserting a pre-existing Abolition song into a drama went against British practice. A barber by training, Tyler may have been unaware of two risks he took in doing this: first, that of creating a musical miscegenation by mixing the music of the 'Inkle' with that of the 'African prince'; second, that of undermining Abolition song's effectiveness as fiction. Because concert and playhouse airs were stylistically indistinguishable, Abolition song needed to be kept separate from playhouse drama to maintain its suasive power. The mini-drama of an Abolition song depended on it being purely aural, and on its remoteness to any context that could cast doubt on its White counterfeiting of Blackness.

The oddness of Tyler introducing 'The Negro Boy' to *Inkle and Yarico* was surely less noticeable at New York's John Street Theatre [slide] than it would have been in London's grand venues. Early American stages like the John Street Theatre were playhouses which doubled as concert halls, allowing them to function as a circum-Atlantic 'performative commons', to use Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's term. For Dillon, such playhouses made possible exchanges between 'participants' (authors, staff, performers, paying audiences) and the 'invisible' – that is, the enslaved, who were banned from playhouse boards and box offices. Unlike Roach's 'Dead', Dillon's 'invisible' were alive, and the pressure they exerted was mediated by attitudes political, economic and social. By singing 'The Negro Boy' in character during a playhouse performance, Tyler will have brought the real pressures of the 'invisible' into the fictions of the playhouse.

This is even more true of Christine Graupner's 1799 addition of this same song to the tragedy *Oroonko* [slide], Thomas Southerne's radical reworking of Aphra Behn's novella. Graupner's character in the stagework, Imoinda, is a pregnant White Englishwoman married

to an African prince who, facing enslavement, kills both himself and her. Graupner's bid for pity for a different African prince through the verses of 'The Negro Boy' was not only dramatically risky but politically adventurous at a time when former slave General Toussaint Louverture was providing an international example of effective Black governance in Haiti. Notably, Tyler's and Graupner's interpolations of Abolition song into dramas are the only ones I've found.

Apart from playhouse performance, Early American Abolition Song distinguished itself from British repertory in the form of six new songs published in the United States [Table 3; slide], two which are contrafacta. In Britain, the production of contrafacta Abolition song had ceased by 1795, but in the US it lasted until 1819. Indeed the British contrafactum *The Sorrows of Yamba, or the Negro Woman's Lamentation* [slide] by Hannah More – a member of the Clapham Sect who chose for her music the same gavotte as Cowper had for his *Negro's Complaint* – was reprinted more, and later, in the US than in Britain. This greater taste for contrafacta in early America was likely due to their central role in political discourse there. As Laura Lohman and Glenda Goodman have separately established, contrafacta writing established itself during the American Revolution as a central means of declaring one's political allegiance. In Britain, meanwhile, commercial Abolition songs continued to be composed, printed, and performed.

Ironically, it was the British Abolition song that most directly repudiated the genre's conventions and its commerciality that was the most impactful: 'The Loud Wind roar'd', whose poem was written by Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire.

[slide] Resisting Sentimentalism: The Duchess of Devonshire and Awet Andemicael

A host of impulses coalesced in settings of 'The Loud Wind roar'd': fashion, exoticism, Abolitionist guilt, celebrity draw, and the seeming ethnographic authority of

research expeditions to Africa. Each setting of this piece has its own history; here, I will focus on its first setting, engineered by the Duchess who provided verses which championed the voices of ‘real’ women, and whose shared perspective she submitted for consideration.

Georgiana Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire [slide], was the most glamorous and divisive aristocrat of her day. Her biography was to be strikingly paralleled by that of her five-times great niece, Princess Diana. As a naïve young woman, Cavendish consensually married into an important dynastic family, but her husband’s reserve, extramarital affairs, and incompatibility with her led her to addictions, eating disorders, and a search for other partners. Craving assurance, Cavendish courted the press and public opinion [slide]; obsessed with fashion, she set trends that were immediately taken up by those who could afford them [slide]. She embraced motherhood in unconventional ways [slide]. She dedicated herself to political causes, breaking rank to canvas in the streets [slide]. The press followed her constantly, alternately worshiping and excoriating her in the customary rhythms of celebrity production [slide]. She died young, having overtaxed her body in part by seeking, and then seeking to evade, the public eye [slide].

In 1792 the Duchess of Devonshire was in Naples, the Duke having banished her because she was pregnant with another man’s child. While socializing among expatriates at the court the King and Queen of Naples, she invited herself to science presentations about Vesuvius led by Sir Joseph Banks [slide], president of the Royal Society. Allowed back to England by her husband, she pursued her new passion for mineralogy by attending more science lectures and cultivating contacts with members of the Royal Society. So in early 1795, when Banks recommended to the ‘Nobles and Gentlemen’ of the ‘Association ... for the Discovery ... of Africa’ that the Scottish botanist Mungo Park be sponsored to explore the Niger river, Cavendish likely knew about it.²⁸ When Park re-appeared in Britain on Christmas Day 1797, Cavendish surely knew: Park had been given up for dead, and his return sent

shock-waves through polite society and the press [slide].²⁹ Even more sensational were Park's travel notes, which the Association sponsored, and for which booksellers advanced the unheard-of sum of £1,000 to Park. The 1,500 costly quarto volumes of the first run of Parks' *Travels in the Interior Districts of Africa*, available by May 1799,³⁰ sold out in a week.³¹

As Kate Marster has pointed out, Park's *Travels* [slide] is unique in that both Abolitionist and pro-slavery campaigners used it to justify their opposed causes.³² The empiricism of Park's account enabled such double usage: he wasn't arguing a case, or trying to make Africans seem just like White people. Park saw himself as what we would call an ethnographer, one who masters local languages and customs to act as an informed observer. According to Park, he reported 'the *truth* ... without pretensions', which necessarily included accounts of intra-African slavery and other forms of interpersonal brutality.³³

In the midst of Park's dispassionate prose, his rare expressions of feelings stand out. In a passage in Chapter 15, Park tells how the king of the Bambara, wanting to know Park's purpose before admitting him to his territory, ordered Park to shelter in a village. Its residents, fearful of Park, refused to host him. As night fell, a Bambara woman found the hungry and distraught Park under a tree, which he intended to climb to be safe from lions. She took him home, cooked him fish, and gave him a mat to sleep on. She then [slide]:

called to the female part of her family, who had stood gazing on me all the while in fixed astonishment, to resume their task of spinning cotton; in which they continued to employ themselves great part of the night. They lightened their labour by songs, one of which was composed extempore; for I was myself the subject of it. It was sung by one of the young women, the rest joining in a sort of chorus. The air was sweet and plaintive, and the words, literally translated, were these: 'The winds roared, and the rains fell. / The poor white man, faint and weary, came and sat under our tree. / He has no mother to bring him milk; no wife to grind his corn.' /Chorus: 'Let us pity the

white man; no mother has he, &c.’ Trifling as this recital may appear to the reader, to a person in my situation, the circumstance was affecting in the highest degree.

The Duchess of Devonshire turned Park’s translated Bambara Manding song text into verses [slide] which were eventually set by no fewer than fourteen composers, eleven in Britain and three in America. To consider the gulf between Park’s musical experience and the Abolition songs which were based on it, I will play a 1989 field recording of a Bambara spinning song, ‘Seko, minaa bè ne la’ (‘Seko, I am thirsty’) sung by Daatinba Jabaté and a women’s chorus [blank slide, audio].^{34 35}

Most of ‘the Town’ had subscribed to Park’s *Travels* – but not Georgiana Cavendish: she contributed to it, having her song verses and its score [slide] appended to the first and second editions of the *Travels*. And she commissioned Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari, singing master of her daughters [slide],³⁶ to set her words, creating thereby a new kind of Abolition song.

Cavendish’s verses [slide] invert the genre’s most inevitable tropes: the voice is collective (not solo), and female (not male); the African (not the White) states the moral, and the hero is a woman (not a man). The object of pity is White (not African), and this helpless White man’s salvation depends on African female charity. Ferrari’s music likewise upends conventions. Rather than being a solo or a glee, the music is structured as solo call punctuated by a two-line female choral response, an alto voice running in parallel motion to the soprano. Instead of being laden with affect, the music’s syllabic homophony and tonic-dominant motion drain it of affect. No playhouse confection, Ferrari’s composition sounds more like a church hymn in which singers are cued by the first four chords. [audio; SONG SCORE NO. 4, (Ferrari, ‘African Song’)].

The production of more than one engraving of the song broadened its reach. In its original version it was an appendix to Mungo Park’s *Travels* that could also be purchased

separately, as a songsheet – but an alternative, deluxe engraving of the song [slide] was sold from the composer’s London residence at 34 Great Marlborough Street. This deluxe version cost two-and-half times more, thanks to its cover illustration, etched by Cavendish’s intimate friend Lady Elizabeth Forster, whose daughter had drawn the scene. It depicts the moment of the Bambara women’s discovery of Mungo Park, a scene omitted from the several illustrations to Park’s *Travels*.³⁷

The combined celebrity of the Duchess of Devonshire and of Mungo Park’s *Travels* made ‘The Loud Wind Roar’d’ an instant hit, but only as a private delectation for the fair sex: of its ten British settings, none were commercial songs for public concert. Accompaniment for most of the songs was piano and harp, implying a female drawing room as the target venue. This gender branding crystallized in the title of one of the settings, issued by music publisher Preston & Son: ‘A Celebrated African Song ... versified by a Lady of Fashion, adapted for one or two Voices with an Accompaniment for the Harp or Piano Forte’.³⁸

In the United States, the Cavendish/Ferrari song circulated in a music magazine and in handwritten copies, before composers Benjamin Carr, Francis Mallet and Victor Pelissier separately wrote new music to Cavendish’s verse. Carr’s song, printed in 1801 in a music journal for amateurs, consisted of syllabic chords redolent of the Ferrari setting. Only with Pelissier’s 1810 music did the song finally enter concert repertory. Pelissier’s air is demandingly dramatic [slide], with many vocals leaps, the highest to a high B flat; it was sung by Mrs. Wilmot in the Philadelphia Amateur's Concerts [audio; SONG SCORE NO. 5, Pellissier ‘Loud winds roar’d’]. Whereas in 1799 Cavendish had created an Abolition song which seems pointedly removed from the sentimentality of concert commerce, in 1810 Pelissier nonetheless brought it to the concert stage in Philadelphia.

Was the Cavendish-Ferrari song in fact heard as defying the artifice of other Abolition songs? Did the Duchess of Devonshire consciously aim to rebut the genre’s negation of the

African? We know from the Cavendish's letters that she often felt trapped – one reason, perhaps, that her protégée Mary Robinson dedicated her first poem 'The Captive' to her patron. There is also a cruel 1784 caricature of Cavendish [slide] that depicts her consorting with Black Britons of a lower sort, represented here as 'Mungo'. My own belief is that Cavendish genuinely aimed to restore dignity to White song about Africans.

[slide, blank] Is there any way that people today can bring dignity to Abolition song? Should we even try? Abolition song didn't just misrepresent its subjects, it relied on rhetorical and musical practices, including contrafacta associations, which are unknown to today's audiences. Insofar as the music of Abolition song was newly composed by amateurs, organists, and music masters, it was meant for a select company; its apprehension was proper to the drawing room, where participants could trust in shared aims and shared ideas about African-ness. Particularly in its commercial variants, Abolition song traded in lies, exorcizing both White guilt and the very possibility of an African selfhood outside of White imagination, its stereotypes hung on compositional procedures that created complacent musical pleasures.

In 1799 the Duchess of Devonshire could deploy her privilege, and her female network, to create a song whose alterity laid bare the falsehoods of sentiment. This is not a route open to us in 2023, but we can use our critical thinking, our understanding of racism, and the artistry of our performers in conjunction with recording and digital technologies to hear this music differently and show up its sentimentality.

Those at least were my thoughts when chairing a roundtable discussion following a lecture/concert of Abolition song two months ago [slide]. In the conversation following this performance, which ended a cross-disciplinary conference on Abolitionism and the Arts that Julia Hamilton and I co-organised, I saw how contextualization, heterodox programming, exchange among participants, and above all great artistry could give us new ways of hearing this music. Let me share with you a video of the incomparable Awet Andemicael singing John

Wall Callcott's c1797 setting of Cowper's 'Negro's Complaint'. [\[12:02-15:23 vimeo link\]](#)

SONG SCORE NO. 6 + HANDOUT LYRICS

Note how the simplicity of the music gives space to the poem, and how Awet's artistry makes her utterance compelling, regardless of the text's sentimental misrepresentations. Awet taps into the aims latent in Abolition song, some of whose creators wished fervently for the end of racism and the slave trade. Abolitionists' tools for making this argument were blunt. Sentiment might be used so that empathy could get beyond *logos* – logic having been weaponized by pro-slavery advocates – yet the clichés of sentiment entrapped both the poetic subject and anyone attempting to imagine that subject. Awet's performance shows how direct address can produce meaning even in the face of such rhetorical limitations.

[\[slide 'the end'\]](#) How do we stop those who, like Ron DeSantis, would twist the public's complacent sentimentality to deny the history and legacy of racism? One way is for all of us to stop thinking that meaning is something imposed from above – the assumption underlying sentimental Abolition song – and realize that we must make our own meaning out of others' assertion of values. Music doesn't just enable sentiment; it can also aid a truer understanding.

¹ *Ron DeSantis: 46th Governor of Florida* 'Governor DeSantis Emphasizes Importance of Keeping Critical Race Theory Out of Schools at State Board of Education Meeting'. In *News Releases, by Staff* 10 June 2021 <https://www.flgov.com/2021/06/10/governor-desantis-emphasizes-importance-of-keeping-critical-race-theory-out-of-schools-at-state-board-of-education-meeting/> Accessed 16 June 2023.

² Basker, introduction

³ The newspaper report that prompted Day and Bicknell to write *The Dying Negro*. The report appeared in at least three newspapers: *The Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 253 (28 May 1773), *The General Evening Post*, 6181 (25-27 May 1773), and *Lloyd's Evening Post* (26-28 May 1773); cited in Brycchan Carey, 'Thomas Day (1748-1789)', <https://brycchancarey.com/abolition/day.htm>. Accessed 21 June 2023.

⁴ Peter Fryer devotes a section to 'hue and cry' notices in his ground-breaking *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (1984); studies since then

⁵ Jane Thornton (1757-1818) was married to Alexander Leslie, Lord Balgonie, 9th Earl of Leven, 6th Earl Melville (1749-1820). Their genealogy was drawn; see Neil Jeffares with an introduction Pierre Rosenberg, *Dictionary of Pastellists Before 1800* (London: Unicorn, 2006); repr. <http://www.pastellists.com/Genealogies/Thornton.pdf>, p. 1. Accessed 17 June 2023.

⁶ ODNB

⁷ The Thornton family were Evangelical Anglicans and friend of Rev Henry Venn, whose Clapham Sect members spearheaded British Abolitionism.

⁸ Letter from William Cowper to John Newton, Monday, 17 March 1788, in *The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, Vol. 3, 128; cited in Hamilton (2021), p. 93.

⁹ HWV 228 [superscript] 6. Before the 1740 title cited by Cowper's the most common tune titles were either *The Sailor's Complaint* or *Hosier's Ghosts* or *Porto Bello*. Handel scholars title after the incipit of its earliest known setting: 'Come and listen my ditty'. See the *Handel Collected Documents*, vol. 3, pp. 282, 538, 711, 848.

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¹¹ Add MGG

¹² Salisbury, England (II, xxix, 74),

¹³ *The royal African: or, memoirs of the young prince of Annamaboe*. London : printed for W. Reeve, at Shakespear's Head, Fleetstreet; G. Woodfall, and J. Barnes, at Charing-Cross; and at the Court of Requests, [1749]. As noted in the ESTC entry, the 59-page account was reviewed *Gentleman's Magazine* for February 1749 and listed in the *London Magazine's* monthly catalogue for March 1749. "Sessarakoo was sent on a grand tour of Europe by his father but was betrayed by the Captain of the ship when he was instead sold into slavery in Barbados. When his father, a wealthy gold and slave-trader, learned of this betrayal he refused to continue trading with any English merchants. The Royal African Company intervened, promising to find Sessarakoo, release him from slavery and to arrange safe passage home for him via London in exchange for trade to continue. In London, Sessarakoo and his African companion who he journeyed with were entrusted to the president of the Board of Trade and Plantations, George Montagu Dunk. A London journal published an article entitled 'A Young African Prince, Sold for a Slave', which romanticised Sessarakoo's heritage and gave him

celebrity status. Sessarakoo was amongst a handful of black foreign visitors to London in the eighteenth century who were welcomed into London drawing rooms because of the intriguing stories they bought with them." - NPG <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/person/mp12340/william-ansah-sessarakoo?search=sas&sText=William+Ansah+Sessarakoo> William Ansah Sessarakoo by John Faber Jr, after Gabriel Mathias mezzotint, mid 18th century

¹⁴ Thomas Hamly Butler, "The Hapless Negro Boy: A new Song set to Music by T. H. Butler, **Author of Lewie Gordon, &c. &c**" [Edinburgh]: for the Author [after 1792]. 'Bow the head thou lily fair. A Dirge or Pathetic Rondo dedicated to the Memory of Mrs. Sheridan, [words by J. Aikin, adapted to the scotch air "Lewie Gordon,"] by T. H. Butler is assigned the publication date of 1792. Edinburgh : The Author [1792]

¹⁵ Burrows' Freemason's Lodge concertizing is known from song titles only [add titles]. Simon McVeigh has indexed the Freemason's Lodge concerts on **** in his online calendar [add dates and]. The London Stage show Burrows was paid for occasional singing for three evenings at the Haymarket and Covent

¹⁶ Christopher Robinson, 'Music and Society in Eighteenth-Century Yorkshire' (Phd D. diss, Univ of Leeds, 2014); see esp fourth chapter 'well known in the Musical and Literary Circles as a man of genius and integrity': Edward Miller of Doncaster and 'Table 4.1 Important events in the life of Edward Miller and his musical public', p. 139

¹⁷ According to printed music titles, John Moulds composed chiefly sentimental operatic numbers for Drury Lane, airs for Ranelagh Garden concerts and the Nobility's Concerts at **Hanover Square**. Gillen D'Arcy Wood observes that Moulds was 'operating within a sophisticated commercial network by which popular songs debuted on the stage, were revived at the pleasure gardens and, if successful, found their way into the music collections of thousands of young female pianists for rendition in the home.' Gillen D'Arcy Wood *Romanticism and Music Culture in Britain, 1770-1840: Virtue and Virtuosity*, page 217. Thomas Busby in 1788, reviewing Moulds' second music publication, excoriated the quality of Moulds' output. See Grabo, Carrol. "The Practical Aesthetics of Thomas Busby's Music Reviews." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 25, no. 1 (1966): 37–45, esp. pp. 39-40.

¹⁸ Wolfe no. 6156, p. 601.

¹⁹ Harvard Library Notes, 2 (October 1920) pp. 39-41

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.fl488t&view=1up&seq=49>

²⁰ William Dunlap, *A History of the American Theatre* (J. & J. Harper, 1832), pp. 144-45

²¹ Add Wolfe entry

²² COLUMBIAN CENTINEL, Boston, December 21, 1799 On page three under "Federal-Street Theatre" is a notice for a presentation of the "Tragedy of Oroonoko, Or, the Royal Slave ... "End of act 2d. the Song of The Negro Boy, by Mrs. Graupner." **[procure]**

²³ THE NEGRO IN EARLY AMERICAN SONGSTERS Author(s): S. Foster Damon Source: *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 1934, Vol. 28 (1934), pp. 132-163

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ Roach esp p. 2, in pp. 1

²⁶ Ibid p. 24 for quote;

²⁷ p. 123

²⁸ Parks left 22 May 1795 [banks' request was likely made in February] Marster, no pp

²⁹ "News." *Morning Post*, 29 Jan. 1798. Issue: 9066; "News." *Sun*, 29 Jan. 1798. Issue 1669. "News." *Morning Herald*, 30 Jan. 1798. Issue 5417. "News." *Craftsman or Say's Weekly Journal*, 3 Feb. 1798. Issue 3177.

³⁰ "Advertisements and Notices." *Oracle*, 8 June 1798. Issue: 19 947

³¹ Marster, no pp; https://www.amazon.com/Travels-Interior-Districts-Africa-Mungo-ebook/dp/B00I3YO5LA/ref=pd_vtp_h_pd_vtp_h_scl_1/146-8072449-5280927?pd_rd_w=u8H08&content-id=amzn1.sym.a5610dee-0db9-4ad9-a7a9-14285a430f83&pf_rd_p=a5610dee-0db9-4ad9-a7a9-14285a430f83&pf_rd_r=14HWYGARAQ3Z2GQARYB2&pd_rd_wg=nnZlg&pd_rd_r=43d2671c-fd6e-4a63-9981-ab86c753aca5&pd_rd_i=B00I3YO5LA&psc=1&asin=B00I3YO5LA&revisionId=4ecdb587&format=1&depth=1

³² Marster ibid

³³ Preface, [p. vii].

³⁴ Source of info transliteration: Vincent Zanetti, « Mali. Musique bambara du Baninko », *Cahiers d'ethnomusicologie* [En ligne], 12 | 1999, p. 1. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/ethnomusicologie/879>. Track descriptions here: https://www.ressources-mcm.com/s/lbn_Battuta/item/1791. Track 13: 13. Seko, minaa bè ne la "Seko, j'ai soif", chant de filage du coton. Daatinba Jabaté and chorus, FOR TRANSLATION AND FURTHER RESEARCH CONTACT Frederike Käte Evelyn Marie-Luise Lüpke <https://researchportal.helsinki.fi/en/persons/friederike-k%C3%A4te-evelyn-ma-l%C3%BCpke>

³⁵ https://sonichits.com/video/Bambara_Musicians/Seko%2C_minaa_be_ne_la?track=1 .

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3p3ejV_IWSo

³⁶ In April 1792 Ferrari moved to London, where he met Haydn and Clementi and quickly became a leading singing teacher, with the Princess of Wales among his pupils. On 14 May 1799 his one-act opera *I due svizzeri* was successfully performed; this was followed by *Il Rinaldo d'Asti* (1801), *L'eroina di Raab* (1814), a vehicle for Catalani, and *Lo sbaglio fortunato* (1817). – NGD; see also G. de Saint-Foix: 'A Musical Traveler: Giacomo Gotifredo Ferrari (1759–1842)', *MQ*, 25 (1939), 455–65. He mentions his introduction in 1798 to the Georgina Cavendish in his memoirs, and teaching her sister p. 263-64

<https://archive.org/details/aneddotipiacevol00ferr/page/272/mode/2up?view=theater>

³⁷ Song sheet BL

³⁸ JISC add shelfmark