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Abstract

Eighteenth-century Britain experienced a rapid expansion of commerce, with the growth of colonies, the spread of Empire and British domination of the trade in African slaves. 'There was never from the earliest ages,' Samuel Johnson wrote, 'a time in which trade so much engaged the attention of mankind, or commercial gain was sought with such general emulation.' One writer in the *Craftsman* of 1735 described the 'Torrent of Riches, which has been breaking in upon us, for an Age or two past'.² John Brown wrote of 'The Spirit of Commerce, now predominant', and Revd. Catcott preached breathlessly on the commercial supremacy of Britain:

Commerce and Slavery in Eighteenth Century Literature

THE RAPID INCREASE IN WEALTH

Eighteenth-century Britain experienced a rapid expansion of commerce, with the growth of colonies, the spread of Empire and British domination of the trade in African slaves. 'There was never from the earliest ages,' Samuel Johnson wrote, 'a time in which trade so much engaged the attention of mankind, or commercial gain was sought with such general emulation.' One writer in the *Craftsman* of 1735 described the 'Torrent of Riches, which has been breaking in upon us, for an Age or two past'.² John Brown wrote of 'The Spirit of Commerce, now predominant',³ and Revd. Catcott preached breathlessly on the commercial supremacy of Britain:⁴

In a word, the whole earth is the market of Britain; and while we remain at home safe and undisturbed, have all the products and commodities of the *eastern* and *western Indies* brought to us in our ships and delivered into our hands ... Our island has put on quite a different face, since the increase of commerce among us ... In a word, commerce is the first mover, the main spring in the political machine, and that which gives life and motion to the whole, and sets all the inferior wheels to work. Thus you see how greatly commerce conduces towards producing plenty, and bringing riches into a nation.

Addison some three decades earlier (*Spectator* No 69) had described London as 'a kind of *Emporium* for the whole Earth', a view echoed, on a national level, in Defoe's *A Tour Thro' the whole Island of Great Britain* (1724-6) with its sense of unbounded progress, agricultural, commercial and industrial.

The age therefore, whilst being one of 'High Culture' (the rise of British art, the establishment of tastes for Italianate music and architecture, and a general cultivation of 'civilized' values) was to a greater extent an age of commercial achievements. As J.A. Doyle puts it, 'if the

eighteenth century was the age of Addison and Horace Walpole, it was in a far more abiding sense the age of Chatham and Wolfe and Clive'.⁵ The great trading companies established in the previous century flourished and there was a general sense of the manifold possibilities of money-making, of financial development through international trade and commerce with the colonies. 'The dynamic drive of the period was grossly material', as Seymour has written.⁶ Schemes for making money, by taking out patents on new inventions, abounded, as did speculation in the stock of all kinds of Companies, the mood of financial adventurism reaching a giddy height in the South Sea period of 1720, the South Sea disaster being the first great crisis in British capitalism.

'It is money that sells all, money buys all, money pays all, money makes all, money mends all, and money mars all'; 'tis Money makes the Man'; 'All Things are to be had for Money'; 'Money, th' only Pow'r ... the last Reason of all Things'; 'Money answers all Things':⁷ these are the often repeated maxims of the Age. The greater proportion of this money was derived from the traffic in human beings, the buying and selling of African peoples and the enforced labour of these peoples. The Slave Trade was of vast economic importance to the financial existence of Britain. L'Abbé le Blanc in one of his *Letters* of 1747 declared that the overwhelming proportion of England's wealth was derived from its colonies which depended on the labour of black slaves for their production of riches.⁸ It was the revenue derived from Slavery and the Slave Trade which helped to finance the Industrial Revolution.⁹ In seventeenth and eighteenth-century opinion Blacks were 'the strength and sinews of this western world', the slave trade 'the spring and parent whence the others flow', 'the first principle and foundation of all the rest, the mainspring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion', 'the Hinge on which all the Trade of this Globe moves on' and 'the best traffick the kingdom hath'.¹⁰ Defoe in his own blunt fashion summarized the role of Blacks in the Western economy:

The case is as plain as cause and consequence: Mark the climax. No African trade, no negroes, no sugars, gingers, indigoes etc; no sugars etc no islands; no islands no continent; no continent no trade.¹¹

The profits from the slave trade were seen as benefiting the whole British nation without exception: as one writer in 1730 stated,

*there is not a Man in this Kingdom, from the highest to the lowest, who does not more or less partake of the Benefits and Advantages of the Royal African Company's FORTS and CASTLES in Africa.*¹²

Other writers told of the 'immensely great' profits made by sugar planters who have 'remitted over their Effects, and purchas'd large Estates in England', of the 'many private Persons in England [who] daily gain great Estates in every Branch of the Trade' and of investors in the African Company who have 'for Sixty Years past, got great Estates out of the Subscriptions'.¹³ West Indian merchants and planters educated their children in Britain and supported them in a state of opulence; thousands of black slaves were also brought to Britain by returning merchants and planters.¹⁴ These businessmen, and the Directors of the Royal African Company were important figures in British society, men of considerable social status ('A Society of the politest Gentlemen ... in the known World', as James Houstoun wrote in 1725)¹⁵ and political influence.

The trade in black people was at the time justified on economic and moral grounds. Slavery was right and allowable, the argument ran, because it was profitable and therefore 'necessary'. According to Defoe

[It is] an Advantage to our Manufacturers, an encreasing the Employment of the Poor, a Support to our General Commerce, and an Addition to the General Stock of the Nation.¹⁶

Defoe spoke of 'the absolute Necessity' of the Slave Trade, again of the fact that

The African trade is absolutely necessary to be supported ... *Negroes* are as essential to the Sugar Works at *Barbadoes, Jamaica* ... as Wind is to the Ships that bring it Home.¹⁷

Grosvenor in Parliament admitted euphemistically that the Slave Trade 'was an unamiable one' but added with no recognition of the callousness of his comparison that

so also were many others: the trade of a butcher was an unamiable trade, but it was a very necessary one, notwithstanding.¹⁸

The term 'necessity' appears again and again in works excusing the Slave Trade. William Bosman for instance, writing in 1705, admits that 'I doubt not but this Trade seems very barbarous to you, but since it is followed by meer necessity it must go on'. William Snelgrave some thirty years afterwards echoed Bosman's sentiments:

Tho' to traffic in human Creatures, may at first sight appear barbarous, inhuman and unnatural; yet the Traders herein have as much to plead in their own Excuse, as can be said for some other Branches of Trade, namely, the *Advantage* of it.¹⁹

Such a brutal economic rationale was indicative of the materialist mood of the Age, one which saw profit as the main criterion of behaviour, and morality only as a secondary consideration.

The moral justification of the Slave Trade ranged from the argument that the trade was 'benevolent' in that it provided poor white people with employment, to the argument that the Slave Trade saved Africans from the bloody tyranny of their own countrymen and from being eaten by their fellow cannibals. As John Dunton put it, 'they must either be *killed* or *eaten*, or both, by their barbarous conquering enemy'.²⁰ James Grainger, James Boswell, Edward Long and others were all agreed on the compassionate nature of Slavery, using exact arguments as Dunton's.²¹ One writer in 1740 spoke not of 'enslaving' blacks but of 'rather ransoming the Negroes from their national Tyrants' by transplanting them to the colonies where 'under the benign Influences of the Law, and Gospel, they are advanced to much greater Degrees of Felicity, tho' not to absolute Liberty'.²²

Viewing the African as a primitive, sub-human creature was necessary to the whole business of slavery since it avoided or made easy any problems of morality: Christians were not enslaving human beings, for blacks were not fully human. Africans embodied all the qualities that Lord Chesterfield, a self-conscious gentleman of taste and culture, abhorred. According to Chesterfield Africans were 'the most ignorant and unpolished people in the world, little better than lions, tigers, leopards, and other wild beasts, which that country produces in great numbers'. It was thus morally acceptable 'to buy a great many of them to sell again to advantage in the West Indies'.²³ An indication of the primitivism of the African was the supposed absence of manufactures, sciences, arts, and systems of commerce within African society. It was repeatedly asserted that blacks were ignorant, unskilled and undeveloped creatures, their lack of scientific, industrial and commercial knowledge accounting for their savage morality.

THE LITERARY RESPONSE: COMMERCE AND CIVILIZATION

Many eighteenth-century men of letters were directly involved in the Business world, either holding prominent Government posts, or else holding investments in financial schemes and companies, or else writing on money matters. 'Writing upon Trade was the Whore I really doted upon', Defoe confessed in a *Review* article.²⁴ Defoe's financial schemes and his publications on trade are too well known for repetition. Other literary figures, Addison, Cleland, Steele, Swift, Pope, Prior and Smollett, among others, were in one way or another connected with the world of commerce. Addison for example was a Commissioner of Trade and Plantations; Cleland, a Commissioner of land tax and house duties; Smollett was a surgeon on a slaveship, and married a colonial heiress whose family owned slaves and plantations in Jamaica.

Inevitably, perhaps, a great deal of eighteenth-century literature concerned itself with financial matters. As T.K. Meier has written,

literary men of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, including Dryden, Pope, Steele, Thomson, most of the georgic poets, and a number of lesser dramatists, essayists, and poets did heap high praise upon both the concept of capitalistic business enterprise and upon businessmen who practiced it ... Commerce and industry had caught the literary imagination of the period and represented for a time at least, the progressive hope of the future.²⁵

Bonamy Dobrée in discussing eighteenth-century poetry has described commerce as 'the great theme that calls forth the deepest notes from poets of the period'. No other theme, Dobrée writes, 'can compare in volume, in depth, in vigour of expression, in width of imagination, with the full diaspon of commerce'.²⁶

Poets like Thomson, Glover, Young, Gaugh, Cockings and Dyer celebrated commerce as the catalyst of social, cultural and economic progress. Thomson's *The Castle of Indolence* (1748) views urban development, the establishment of Empire and the expansion of markets as laudable ideals; his 'Knight of Industry' is an imperialist and property developer, creating a city out of undeveloped land, just as Defoe's Crusoe transforms his desert island into a flourishing town:

Then towns he quickened by mechanic arts,
And bade the fervent city flow with toil;
Bade social commerce raise renowned marts,
Join land to land, and marry soil to soil,
Unite the poles, and without bloody spoil
Bring home of either Ind the gorgeous stores. (Canto 2, Stanza XX)

In *The Seasons — Autumn* Thomson traces, approvingly, the long historical process whereby the city rises out of the wilderness, with the evolution of man from the horrors of a primitive existence into a blissful state of commercial and scientific activity. Glover's *London: Or, the Progress of Commerce* (4th ed., 1739) celebrates, in a similar vein, the development of nature and the growth of the city through commerce:

... She in lonely sands
Shall bid the tow'r — encircled city rise,
The barren sea shall people, and the wilds
Of dreary nature shall with plenty cloath. (l. 127 f.)

It is commerce that has awakened the whole world from its primitive slumber, bringing development, progress and civilization:

... thou beganst
Thy all-enlivening progress o'r the globe
The rude and joyless ... (l. 173 f.)

Urban development is the theme too in poems like Cockings' *Arts, Manufactures, And Commerce*, Gaugh's *Britannia* and Young's *The Merchant*.²⁷ The sense of the limitless possibilities of expansion and gain is given perfect expression by Young as he urges Englishmen to seize the present opportunities of commerce:

Rich *Commerce* ply with Warmth divine
By *Day*, by *Night*; the *Stars* are Thine
Wear out the *Stars* in *Trade*! Eternal run
From Age to Age, the noble Glow,
A Rage to gain, and to bestow,
Whilst Ages last! In Trade burn out the Sun! (*Merchant*, p. 98)

In this poem Young's model of the world is a purely economic one, the relationship between earth, sea and air seen as a series of commercial transactions:

Earth's Odours pay soft *Airs* above,
That o'er the teeming Field *prolific* range;
Planets are Merchants, take, return
Lustre and Heat; by *Traffic* burn;
The whole *Creation* is one vast *Exchange*. (*Merchant*, p. 91)

The kindling of commercial activity is compared to natural awakenings, to the rain from heaven which cheers the glebe, activates the bees and

rouses the flowers. Blake may have seen 'a Heaven in a Wild Flower' (*Auguries of Innocence*, l. 2), but Young is more down-to-earth.

Such a commercial response to Nature is a distinguishing feature of much of eighteenth-century literature. Defoe is notorious in this respect. As H.N. Fairchild has written,

Crusoe remains unmoved by wild scenery. For him, storms are simply wet and dangerous, hills are to be ascended in the hope of sighting a passing sail, trees are to be hacked into shelters, and animals are to be classified into edible and inedible.²⁸

Lillo's vision is decidedly unromantic — young Wilmot, landing in England after an absence in the American colonies, pauses to bestow customary praise:

O England! England!
Thou seat of plenty, liberty and health,
With transport I behold thy verdant fields,
Thy lofty mountains rich with useful ore.²⁹

Wordsworth's Solitary, in *The Excursion*, expatiating on the effects of mountains on the mind and soul of man would not have been practical enough for young Wilmot. If Wordsworth had been pained by the memory of having, as a child, broken the branches of a tree, Cockings displayed no such sensitivity: his poem *Arts, Manufactures, And Commerce* (c. 1769) described in an exuberant manner the cutting up of trees at a saw-mill, Cockings expressing great wonder at the mechanical genius of the process: the saw-mill spreads its sails to the skies to catch the winds which

... urge by Cranks, and the coercive Wheel,
Thro' Twenty Cuts, the Fang'd corrosive Steel;
By gentle Traction, ev'ry Tree to guide
Against the Saws, which shall its Trunk divide:
Whilst other Wheels, destin'd for diff'rent Use,
Perform their Work ... (p. 16)

Trees existed to be cut down and fashioned into merchant ships; when one writer described 'beautiful Forests', he meant not their aesthetic qualities but their commercial potential: 'The farther one advances into the Country, the more beautiful Forests are found, full of Gummy Trees, fit to make Pitch for Ships: as also infinite Stores of Trees fit for Masts.'³⁰

The consensus of opinion in many pieces of eighteenth-century literature is that commerce is a wonderful activity, creative of progress, culture and civilization. Glover writes of the mathematics, philosophy, poetry and laws that result from commerce:

Barbarity is polish'd, infant arts
Bloom in the desert, and benignant peace
With hospitality, begin to soothe
Unsocial rapine, and the thirst of blood.³¹

Young makes similar claims for the civilizing power of commerce:

Commerce gives Arts, as well as *Gain*;
By Commerce wafted o'er the Main,
They barbarous Climes enlighten as they run;
Arts the rich Traffic of the Soul!
May travel *thus*, from Pole to Pole,
And gild the World with Learning's brighter Sun. (*Merchant*, p. 74)

The contact between men as a result of mutual trade is seen as conducive to tolerance, morality and culture, a claim that finds concise expression in the anonymous eighteenth-century essay entitled *Thoughts On Commerce And Liberty*:

An extensive trade and flourishing manufactories, tend to soften the manners of men, to render them capable of social impressions, to extend their views over the habitable globe, and to eradicate narrow prejudices ... Hence that general improvement in the habits of life, that refinement in the public taste and sentiments; in short all those intellectual and moral acquirements which dignify mankind.³²

The merchant, the agent of commerce, was also celebrated as the agent of progress and civilization, the embodiment of civilized standards derived from his commercial experience. As Defoe puts it, the merchant is 'the most intelligent man in the world':

His learning excels the mere scholar in Greek and Latin ... He understands languages without books ... geography without maps ... he sits in his counting-house and converses with all nations, and keeps up the most exquisite and extensive part of human society in a universal correspondence.³³

No praise was great enough to lavish upon him, all poetic eulogies fell short of their mark:

Is *Merchant* an inglorious Name?
 No; fit for *Pindar* such a Theme,
 Too great for Me; I pant beneath the Weight!
 If loud, as *Ocean's* were my Voice,
 If Words and Thoughts to court my Choice
 Out-number'd *Sands*, I could not reach its Height.³⁴

The merchant was also seen as a force for liberty, 'liberty' being a key word in literature celebrating commerce. Commerce meant the rise of the middle-class which as it gained political influence sought protection from the tyranny and arbitrary laws of the aristocratic class, its main ambition being the legal protection of property. Hence Young's verse:

Trade, gives fair *Virtue* fairer still to shine;
 Enacts those Guards of Gain, the *Laws*;
Exalts even *Freedom's* glorious Cause. (*Merchant*, p. 96)

Commerce and Liberty were seen as depending upon, and reinforcing, each other, a point Voltaire made in one of his *Philosophical Letters*: 'Commerce which has enriched the citizens of England has helped to make them free, and that liberty in turn has expanded commerce. This is the foundation of the greatness of the state.'³⁵

There was, as C.A. Moore has said, 'one dark blot' in this bright picture of progress, civilization and liberty through commerce: 'There was one dark blot. The one detail out of moral keeping was the slave traffic.'³⁶ Slavery was such an undeniably crucial aspect of colonial and international commerce that the men of letters could not avoid touching on the subject. Their problem was how to reconcile their belief in the civilizing effects of commerce to the barbaric realities of the Slave Trade. Cornelius Arnold and John Dyer provided one way out of the dilemma. Arnold interrupts briefly his eulogy on commerce to express perfunctory regret at the fact of African slavery, but he blames the Africans for the existence of the Slave Trade, the argument being that Africans, in their civil wars, capture their fellow countrymen and sell them into slavery:

... Onward they [i.e. British merchants] steer their Course,
 To *Afric's* parched Clime, whose sooty Sons,
 Thro' Rage of civil Broils ... hard Destiny!
 Forc'd from their native home to *Western Ind*,
 In Slavery drag the galling Chain of Life.³⁷

Dyer's *Fleece* (1757) contains a similar perfunctory pity for the condition of the black, Dyer not wishing to appear inhumane and uncivilized; nevertheless the Black is shouldered with the blame for slavery:

On Guinea's sultry strand, the drap'ry light
 Of Manchester or Norwich is bestow'd
 For clear transparent gums, and ductile wax,
 And snow-white iv'ry; yet the valued trade,
 Along this barb'rous coast, in telling, wounds
 The gen'rous heart, the sale of wretched slaves;
 Slaves, by their tribes condemn'd, exchanging death
 For life-long servitude; severe exchange! (Book 4, l. 189 f.)

Young and Glover deal with the problem of slavery in different ways. There is in Young's poem a brief, scornful reference to Blacks, describing, of all things, their laziness: '...*Afric's* black, lascivious, slothful Breed,/ To clasp their *Ruin*, fly from *Toil*...' (*Merchant*, p. 106). Africa is attacked because it does not practise the principles of capitalist development which Young celebrates, the African being seen as ignorant of the principles of science and commerce:

Of Nature's Wealth from Commerce rent,
Afric's a glaring Monument:
 Mid Citron Forests and Pomgranate Groves
 (Curs'd in a Paradise!) she pines;
 O'er generous Glebe, o'er golden Mines
 Her begger'd, famish'd, Tradeless Natives roves. (*Merchant*, p. 107)

Young, in an indirect way, is saying that slavery is a benevolent institution, since it teaches the African the virtues of labour. Glover, though equally deceitful, is not so breathtakingly perverse; his poem³⁸ attacks the Spanish for enslaving and destroying the Indian natives but he makes no reference to the British participation in slavery and British treatment of the Africans — his poem was written in 1739 when anti-Spanish sentiment was running high in Britain, British traders angry at the liberties taken by Spanish merchants and jealous of Spanish commercial rivalry, a rivalry that erupted into war in 1739 (the 'War of Jenkins' Ear'). Glover's reference to slavery, and Indian slavery at that, is merely political therefore.

Another way of reckoning with slavery whilst being faithful to the ethic of commerce was to minimize the brutality of the trade through careful choice of diction. James Grainger for example, in his poem *The Sugar-Cane* (1764) strives to reduce the horror of slavery by 'wrapping it up in a napkin of poetic diction'.³⁹ *The Sugar-Cane* is as good an example as any of the way in which 'the raw materials of human experience were habitually transmuted in eighteenth-century poetry'.⁴⁰ Instead of 'slave-owner', Grainger prefers to use the term 'Master-Swain'; he prefers 'Assistant Planter' to the term 'slave'. The use of poetical phrases such as

'Afric's sable progeny' to describe the Black slaves further softens the stark realities of their actual condition. It is such callous abstractions that provoked Samuel Johnson's attack on Grainger's acceptance of slavery.

Picturesque descriptions of slave labour and the slave environment was another feature of pro-commerce literature. Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* contained idyllic descriptions of the golden cane-fields with their contentedly laborious black swains, 'Well-fed, well-cloath'd, all emulous to gain/ Their master's smile, who treated them like men'. The author of *The Pleasures of Jamaica* written some three decades before, presented a view of slave plantations that was similarly picturesque:

Hither retiring, to avoid the heat,
We find refreshment in a cool retreat;
Each rural object gratifies the sight,
And yields the mind an innocent delight;
Greens of all shades the different plants adorn,
Here the young cane, and there the growing corn;
In verdant pastures interspers'd between,
The lowing herds, and bleating flocks are seen:
With joy his lord the faithful Negro sees,
And in his way endeavours how to please;
Greets his return with his best country song,
The lively dance, and tuneful merry-wong.
When nature by the cane has done her part,
Which ripen'd now demands the help of art,
How pleasant are the labours of the mill,
While the rich streams the boiling coppers fill.⁴¹

As one of the characters in La Valée's anti-slavery novel explains to the African, avarice 'borrows the voice and colours of fiction. Fiction gilds your chains...'⁴²

The fact is that many of the pro-commerce writers who either justified slavery or minimized its inhumanity were in one way or another involved in the profits to be made from slavery. Glover, for instance, was the son of a merchant, and also a Member of Parliament. Glover was noted for his defence of West India merchants before Parliament. In 1742 a petition drawn up by Glover and signed by 300 merchants complaining of the inadequate protection of English trade, was presented to Parliament. Glover afterwards attended to sum up their evidence before the House of Commons. In 1775 he received a plate worth £300 from West India merchants in acknowledgement of his services to them. His will mentions property in the City of London and in South Carolina. Cornelius Arnold was in later life beadle to the Distillers Company with its interests in West India sugar. Grainger, who died in St Christopher in

1766 was married to the daughter of a Nevis planter, and took charge of his wife's uncle's plantations; he invested his savings in the purchase of negroes.⁴³

The involvement in the economic benefits of slavery meant a warped ethical response to it. We catch the sense of, to use Dr Johnson's phrase, 'a wealth beyond the dreams of avarice', in William Goldwin's poem *Great Britain: Or, The Happy Isle* (1705), specifically in the compounded descriptive phrases like 'Massy heaps of shining Treasure':

See! How the Busie Merchant Ploughs the Main
In Vessels big with weighty Heaps of Gain; ...
Huge Loads of Wealth, the distant World's Encrease

The feeling of great wealth is carried over in Goldwin's poem on Bristol⁴⁴ in which the sole reference to slavery is an indirect one — 'Jamaica's Growth, or Guinea's Golden-dust'; also in R.J. Thorn's *Bristolia* (1794): 'Around the quays, in countless heaps appear, / Bales pil'd on bales, and loads of foreign ware.' As C.A. Moore says, 'the conscience of the public was so blinded to the moral issue by the widespread participation in dividends that it was very difficult to bring independent judgment or sentiment to bear upon the subject'.⁴⁵

THE ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE TO COMMERCE

The alternative response to the wealth pouring into society took many forms. To begin with there was a sense of the physical ugliness and the despoilation of the landscape resulting from commercial and industrial activity. Goldwin's response to the growing signs of industrialization, for example, is more ambivalent than Dyer's or Thorne's. In Dyer's *Fleece*, the smoke rising over Leeds was described as 'incense' and praised as signs of industrial activity. Thorn's *Bristolia* (*op. cit.*) was also optimistic about industrial fumes — standing upon Brandon Hill like a latterday Moses upon Pisgah, he surveyed the promised land of money and machinery: 'Here, whilst I stand, what clouds of smoke appear / From different work-shops, and dissolve in air!'

Goldwin, in his *A Poetical Description of Bristol* (*op. cit.*), whilst celebrating the city's commercial and manufacturing wealth, rejects the accompanying destruction of nature. The primitive, natural beauty of Kingswood Forest,

... a cluster'd Wood of bushy Trees,
Whose hamper'd Boughs, an artless Straggling show,
And, like the savage Natives, shaggy grow (p. 4)

is seen as being threatened with destruction by coalmining activity. The miners, 'a tatter'd Brood of rough laborious Souls', who burrow through subterranean holes like earthworms, forsaking the 'Blessing of the purer Air', are pictured tearing 'Magazines of Coals from Nature's Bowel'. The mine and miners present a 'horrid' sight to the eye. Towards the end of the poem Goldwin launches an attack on the ugliness and pollution of a glass manufacturing works —

Thick dark'ning Clouds in curling smoky Wreaths,
Whose sooty Stench the Earth and Sky annoys,
And Nature's blooming Verdure half destroys. (p. 19)

The sulphur emitted from the factory's chimney 'blasts the Fruit of fair Sicilia's Fields'. Goldwin's poem ends with a paean on natural beauty, the 'Grotesque' rocks and cliffs along the river which 'afright the climbing Eye' in a different way from the 'horrid' sight of the coalmine. Goldwin's anxieties about progress accumulate throughout the eighteenth century, culminating in the next in Mrs Gaskell's polluted Milton in *North and South* and Dickens' Coketown in *Hard Times*, a pessimism about progress perfectly expressed in Hopkins' *God's Grandeur*:

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge, and shares man's smell ...

Bound up with the disgust at the physical pollution created by 'progress' was a sense of the city as a hideous, dirty, chaotic phenomenon. The pro-commerce writers may have celebrated the evolution of the city from the barren wilderness as a sign of civilization, but others — Pope, Swift, Gay, Smollett — depicted the city as corrupt, putrid and anarchic to the point of insanity. London is depicted as a gigantic Bedlam riddled with crime and disease, as Max Byrd in his recent study of the image of the city in eighteenth-century Literature has shown.⁴⁶ A prose essay of the 1750s, inspired by Hogarth's prints and addressed to Hogarth, entitled *Low-Life; or, One Half of the World, knows not how the Other Half Lives*⁴⁷ presented more powerfully and memorably than any other piece of eighteenth-century Literature, a picture of the city as a hive of criminal activity. The energy of the city is in the scramble for money and the uncontrollable kleptomania — pickpockets, prostitutes, pimps, coin-

clippers, forgers, gamblers, smugglers, pawnbrokers and the rest are united in a frenzied pursuit of money. They 'cannibalize' each other, and even the dying or the dead are not exempted from the process of exploitation — nurses keeping vigil by the bedside of the dying take advantage of the situation by rifling through their pockets; sextons of parish-churches dig up the corpses buried the previous day to sell to anatomists.

If the spirit of commerce was seen as having stimulated crime it was also seen as having created inhumane attitudes in people, a selfishness and hardness of heart. Lovell described the soullessness of Bristolians who are motivated only by 'sordid wealth': 'Foul as their streets, triumphant meanness sways,/ And groveling as their mud-compelling drays.'⁴⁸ Bristolians have become mere emblems of money, devoid of 'the nobler cares of mind', 'soft humanities', 'mild urbanity' and 'sympathetic feeling': 'In all his sons the mystic signs we trace;/ Pounds, shillings, pence, appear in every face.'⁴⁹ Another eighteenth-century observer of Bristolians described how 'their Souls are engrossed by lucre', with the more gentle qualities of mind 'banished from their republic as a contagious disease'.⁵⁰

Both Dyer and Thomson in their eulogies on commerce had asserted its benevolent effect upon the labouring classes in raising their standard of living to glorious levels. According to Thomson, commerce fuelled by the spirit of liberty has enriched the whole nation — 'The poor man's lot with milk and honey flows'.⁵¹ Although the principle of subordination still holds sway in society, the wealth derived from commerce is equally enjoyed, Thomson claimed:

... And though to different ranks
Responsive place belongs, yet equal spreads
The sheltering roof o'er all; and plenty flows,
And glad contentment echoes round the whole.⁵²

Dyer's *Fleece* similarly described the national benefits of industry which 'lifts the swain,/ And the straw cottage to a palace turns' (Book 3, l. 332). Other writers were more realistic than Thomson and Dyer, recognising an unequal distribution of wealth and a stark division in society between the have and have-nots. 'Under the present Stage of Trade', John Brown wrote,

the Increase of Wealth is by no means equally or proportionally diffused: The Trader reaps the main Profit: after him, the Landlord, in a lower Degree: But the common Artificer, and still more the common Labourer, gain little by the exorbitant Advance of Trade.⁵³

Another writer, in *The Gentleman's Magazine* of 1735, told of the way wealth is concentrated in a few hands:

The Complaint of our Day is, that the Body of the People is growing poor, and obliged to undergo the greatest Hardships, whilst a few Upstarts in Office are accumulating immense Riches, and rioting in all the Excesses of Luxury. (p. 717)

Thomas Bedford in a sermon bitterly attacking commerce, colonialization and slavery observed that because trade and commerce had introduced inflation in Britain and a more expensive manner of living, 'the bulk of its people may still continue poor, in the midst of a thousand like advantages'.⁵⁴

Those who attacked commerce as a force for squalor and degradation focussed increasingly on slavery for the substance of their views. The bulk of British anti-slavery literature was written in the latter part of the century, spurred on by the propaganda of the Abolition Movement, but by 1750 there was already considerable public awareness of the brutality of the Slave Trade. Hence Postlewayt in 1746 produced a tract in defence of slavery, to counter the

Many [who] are prepossessed against this Trade,
thinking it a *barbarous, inhuman, and unlawful*
*Traffic for a Christian Country to Trade in Blacks.*⁵⁵

The 'many' included the Quakers, John Dunton, Ralph Sandiford, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson, Charles Gildon, Joseph Warton, Richard Savage, and others. Even Defoe had at one time written anti-slavery verse, denouncing the slavetraders and their brand of Christianity:

Others seek out to *Africk's* Torrid Zone,
And search the burning Shores of *Serralone*;
There in unsufferable Heats *they fry*,
And run vast Risques to see the Gold, and die:
The harmless Natives basely they trepan,
And barter Baubles for the *Souls of Men*:
The Wretches they to Christian Climes bring o'er,
To serve worse Heathens than they did before.
The Cruelties they suffer there are such,
Amboyne's nothing, they've out-done the *Dutch*.⁵⁶

Later in the century Thomas Bradshaw was to describe slave merchants and their apologists as 'monsters assuming the human shape';⁵⁷ the anonymous author of the poem of 1765 entitled *Patriotism* was to use

images of cannibalism in describing the merchant as he worshipped and sacrificed before the altar of Commerce:

The victims dire Religion bade him call,
All without blemish, all of blackest wool,
All newly bought, all newly flay'd alive,
A hecatomb, of Negro slaves twice five.
He on their reeking muscles, red and blue
Sharp vinegar, with salt and pepper threw;
They writhe with pain convolv'd. As when to cram
Some citizen's unfathomable wem,
The Turtle, riven with his mail, poor fish!
Perceives himself to grow a dish;
Convuls'd, each undulating fibre plays
In waves of agony a thousand ways.⁵⁸

The dilemma over the slave trade mentioned earlier, that is, a recognition of its immorality and yet at the same time its profitability, was one aspect of the general dilemma of the age in its attempt to reconcile the moral with the economic. 'Religion is one thing, trade is another'⁵⁹ — it is this separation between the two, or, as Andersen puts it, 'the withdrawal of economic affairs from the jurisdiction of morality'⁶⁰ which posed crucial, central problems at the time to many writers on economic matters. Davenant for instance recognised the evils resulting from trade but also its 'necessity' in terms of Britain's continued supremacy over its rivals and competitors:

Trade, without doubt, is in its nature a pernicious thing; it brings in that Wealth which introduces Luxury; it gives a rise to Fraud and Avarice, and extinguishes Virtue and Simplicity of Manners; it depraves a People and makes for that Corruption which never fails to end in Slavery, Foreign or Domestick. *Licurgus*, in the most perfect Model of Government that was ever fram'd, did banish it from his Commonwealth. But, the Posture and Condition of other Countries consider'd, 'tis become with us a necessary Evil.⁶¹

Some fifty years later John Brown came up against the same hurdle — he rails against the luxury and immorality created by the wealth from commerce, but realizes that to discourage or curtail such commerce would lead to national decline with rival countries overtaking Britain in economic and military might. 'Thus are we fallen into a kind of Dilemma',⁶² Brown muses, uncertain of the solution. The dilemma was also faced by some pro-slavery writers, particularly on the issue of baptising and Christianising Blacks. Slaveowners, one apologist pointed out in 1730,⁶³ were reluctant to educate their slaves to the Christian Gospel

because of the economic costs. The slaves would have to be given time off work to attend Bible classes which would mean a loss in production. This would be 'too great an Invasion on the Property of the Masters'. If for instance, the writer calculates, a planter were to allow one-fifth of his total collection of one hundred slaves to be educated once a fortnight in the Gospel, and estimating that each slave made six pence profit per day for his owner, then the owner would lose a whole £13 per annum, and £65 per annum if he let all his blacks be educated; to educate all the hundred thousand blacks in the West Indies would cost a massive sum of £65,000. As to the morality of the Slave Trade itself the writer does not deny that 'Millions of Lives it destroys', but stresses that it is still 'absolutely necessary' for reasons of national supremacy — Britain, France, Spain, Holland and Portugal are all involved in the Slave Trade and

were any of them to break it off on the Topick of Unlawfulness, they would soon lose their Share in the Profits arising from it, which is hardly to be expected from them unless their Neighbours could be prevail'd to drop theirs too. (p. 15)

Because of this international competition, the writer concludes, it is unlikely that the Slave Trade will decline, unless God personally intervened!

Finally there was in the eighteenth century a recoil from the materialism of the Age which manifested itself in an embracing of notions about the benefits of a simple, non-commercial existence. There were those who reacted against the progress, development, commercialism and industrialization celebrated by Dyer, Young, Glover *et al.*, by asserting the virtuousness of a primitive, natural lifestyle. The African's and the Indian's ignorance of the arts, the sciences and the principles of trade, far from being indicative of his sub-human status as asserted by some, were viewed as positive qualities in his favour. John Winstanley's paean on the natural life, entitled *The Happy Savage*,⁶⁴ reacts against the materialist civilization of the European and praises the simplicity of the savage's lifestyle. 'Happy the lonely Savage', Winstanley exclaims, who has not been 'taught by Wisdom/ Numberless Woes, nor polish'd into Torment', and who is 'of all human Arts/ Happily ignorant'. His 'rude artless Mind' is as 'Uncultivated as the Soil'. Winstanley's poem appeared in 1732; such primitivist notions must have been rife in the 1730s for in 1736 Bishop Berkeley (who owned slaves) dismissed them as 'among the

many wild Notions broached in these giddy times'.⁶⁵ There was a substantial amount of literature throughout the century on the 'noble savage'. John Gay's *Polly*, written in 1729 as the sequel to *The Beggar's Opera*, and set in the West Indies, contrasts the noble, non-commercial and honest Indians against the vicious, sexually impure and avaricious Englishmen. Joseph Warton's *The Enthusiast*, a poem written in 1740, celebrates the 'genial untill'd earth' and the happy innocence of the American Indian in opposition to the corrupt materialist commercial and industrial environment of England, its 'smoky cities' and the rest:

Oh who will bear me then to western climes,
 (Since Virtue leaves our wretched land) to fields
 Yet unpolluted with Iberian swords:
 The Isles of Innocence, from mortal view.
 Deeply retir'd, beneath a plantane's shade,
 Where Happiness and Quiet sit enthron'd
 With simple Indian swains, that I may hunt
 The boar and tiger through savannahs wild,
 Through fragrant deserts, and through citron-groves?
 There fed on dates and herbs, would I despise
 The far-fetch'd cates of Luxury, and hoards
 Of narrow-hearted Avarice; nor heed
 The distant din of the tumultuous world.

Charles Churchill in his poem *Gotham* of 1764 praises the 'artless' savage and satirises the greed of Christian colonialists and slavetraders. Gerald Fitzgerald in a later poem, *The Injured Islanders* (1779) attacks the white man's commercial and industrial 'progress' which is blamed for destroying the purity and innocence of primitive societies in the process of colonialization. The savages were 'fortunate in the Ignorance and Simplicity', and Fitzgerald's savage hero Obera longs for

Some placid Corner of the boundless Main
 Unmark'd by Science, unexplor'd by Gain,
 Where Nature still her Empire safe may hold
 From foreign Commerce, Confidence, and Gold,
 From foreign Arts — from all that's foreign free.

Expressed in such literature on the 'noble savage' is the belief that the innocent savage, whether Indian or African, has been corrupted by contact with the European whose civilization amounts to nothing but financial greed, sexual disease and blood-letting conflicts. Civilizing the savage has meant introducing him or her to the commercial and sexual vices of European society. Far from being a peripheral aspect of

eighteenth-century literature, the 'noble savage' convention represented the deepest reaction against the materialism of the age, a convention that has endured, albeit with modifications, by way of the Romantics into the twentieth century, with the 'savage pilgrimage' of D.H. Lawrence.

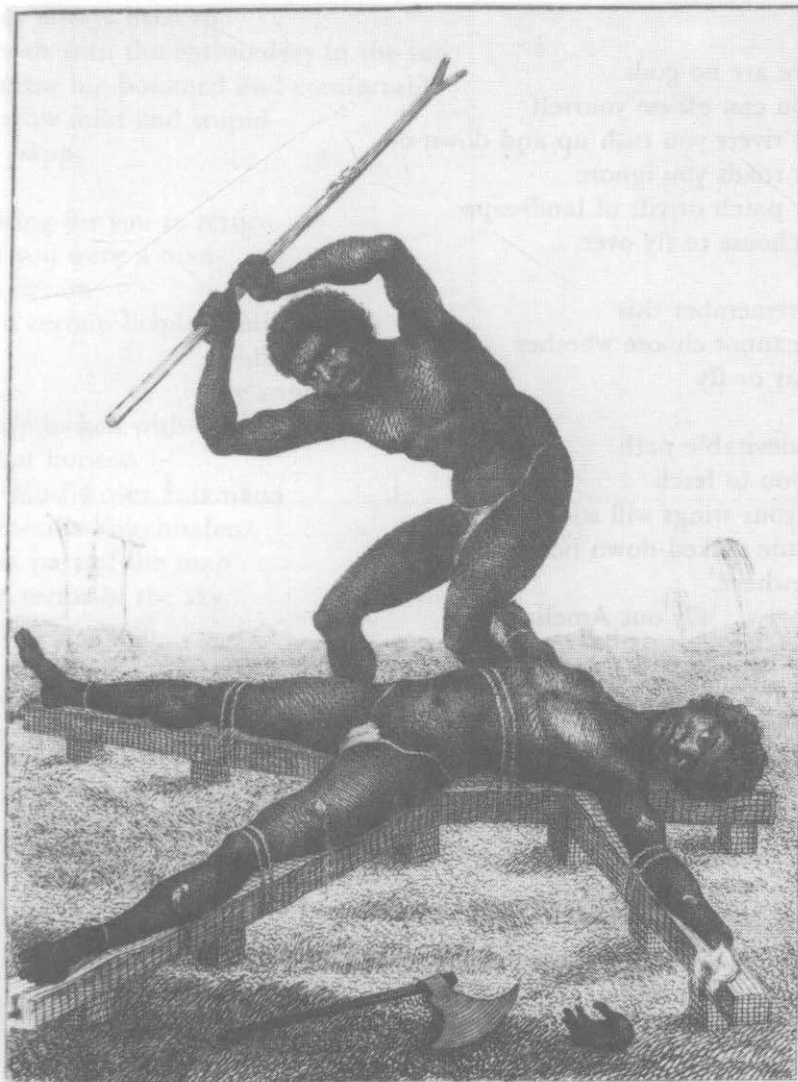
NOTES

1. Quoted by Lois Whitney in her book *Primitivism and the Idea of Progress* (Baltimore, 1934), p. XVIII.
2. Reprinted in *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 5, 1735, pp. 717-18.
3. John Brown, *An Estimate Of The Manners And Principles Of The Times* (2nd Edition, London, 1757), p. 22.
4. Revd A.S. Catcott, *The Antiquity and Honourableness Of the Practice of Merchandize. A Sermon* (Bristol, 1744), pp. 13, 14, 15.
5. Cited in A.A. Ettinger's *James Edward Oglethorpe. Imperial Idealist* (Oxford, 1936), p. 110.
6. Thaddeus Seymour, *Literature and the South Sea Bubble* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Chapel Hill, 1955), p. 12.
7. *Maxims of Wisdom for Gaining Wealth* (London, 1788), p. 20; *Put Money in your Purse* (London, 1754), l. 321; *The Universal Merchant* (London, 1753), p. 6; *A Trip To Liverpoole ... In Search of Fortunatus's Purse* (London, 1706), title-page quoting Butler's *Hudibras*; Jacob Vanderlint, *Money answers all Things* (London, 1734).
8. Cited in E.J. Hobsbawm's *Industry and Empire* (Penguin Books, 1969), pp. 25-6.
9. Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (Chapel Hill, 1944), p. 52; James Walvin, *The Black Presence* (London, 1971), p. 8.
10. Eric Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 30, 51; James Houston, *Some New and Accurate Observations ... Of the Coast of Guinea* (London, 1725), p. 43; Peter Hogg, *Slavery. The Afro-American Experience* (BL Publication, London, 1979), p. 3.
11. Cited in Jack Lindsay's *The Monster City. Defoe's London, 1688-1730* (London, 1978), p. 189.
12. *The Case Of The Royal African Company Of England* (London, 1730), p. 31.
13. *The Dispute between the Northern Colonies and the Sugar Islands...* (1731 broadside, in Goldsmiths Library, London Univ.); *A Letter To The Right Reverend The Lord Bishop Of London From An Inhabitant Of His Majesty's Leeward-Caribbee-Islands* (London, 1730), p. 14; *Some Matters of Fact relating to the Present State of the African Trade* (n.p., 1720), p. 1.
14. F. Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (OUP, 1977), p. 101.
15. James Houston, *op. cit.*, p. 41.
16. Daniel Defoe, *A Brief Account Of The Present State Of The African Trade* (London, 1713), p. 55.
17. Daniel Defoe, *Review* (edited by A.W. Second, Columbia Univ. Press, 1938), Vol. IX, p. 82.

18. *Report of the Debate on a Motion For the Abolition of the Slave Trade in the House of Commons on Monday and Tuesday, April 18th and 19th, 1791* (London, 1791), p. 47.
19. Cited by M. Craton, J. Walvin, D. Wright, *Slavery, Abolition and Emancipation* (London, 1976), p. 220; W. Snelgrave, *A New Account Of some Parts of Guinea, And the Slave Trade* (London, 1734), p. 160.
20. *The Athenian Mercury*, Vol. VIII, No 30 (1691). See C.A. Moore's *Backgrounds of English Literature 1700-1760* (Minneapolis, 1953), p. 135.
21. Edward Long's views are cited in O. Wali's *The Negro in English Literature* (unpublished PhD dissertation, NorthWestern Univ., 1967), pp. 391-2. For Grainger and Boswell's views see Wylie Sypher's *Guinea's Captive Kings* (Chapel Hill, 1942), pp. 169f; p. 59.
22. 'The African Slave Trade defended', in *The London Magazine* IX, 1740, pp. 493-4; cited in E. Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (4 Vols, Washington, 1930-35), Vol. 2, p. 470.
23. *The Letters of the Earl of Chesterfield to his Son* (edited by C. Strachey, with notes by A. Calthrop, 3rd ed., London, 1932), p. 116.
24. T. Seymour, *op. cit.*, p. 65.
25. Tom K. Meier, *Defoe and the Defense of Commerce* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Columbia Univ., 1971), pp. 1, 18.
26. B. Dobrée, 'The Theme of Patriotism in the Poetry of the Early Eighteenth Century', in *Proceedings of the British Academy*, Vol. 35, 1949, p. 60.
27. George Cockings, *Arts, Manufactures, And Commerce: A Poem* (London, c. 1769); James Gaugh, *Britannia: A Poem with Historical Notes* (London, 1767); Edward Young, *The Merchant. An Ode On the British Trade and Navigation*, in *The Poetical Works of the Reverend Edward Young* (2 Vols., London, 1741), Vol. 2, p. 59f.
28. H.N. Fairchild, *The Noble Savage* (New York, 1928), p. 56.
29. George Lillo, *Fatal Curiosity* (1737), Act I, Scene 3: in *The Works Of the Late Mr George Lillo* (London, 1740), p. 19.
30. *The Four Kings of Canada. Being a Succinct Account of The Four Indian Princes lately arriv'd from North America* (London, 1710), p. 46.
31. R. Glover, *London: Or, The Progress of Commerce*, *op. cit.*, lines 209-12.
32. *Thoughts On Commerce And Liberty* (n.p., n.d.), p. 14. (British Library Classmark 1029.e.18/3). John Dyer in *The Fleece*, Bk 2, line 516 speaks of 'civilizing trade'. Trueman in George Lillo's *The London Merchant*, Act 3, Scene 1, proclaims that the effects of commerce are to 'improve mankind by love and friendship, to tame the fierce, and polish the most savage'. Revd A.S. Catcott in his sermon on *The Antiquity and Honourableness Of the Practice of Merchandize*, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 16, declares that commerce 'renders a people polished in their manners ... Cities owe their numbers and opulence to commerce; and cities are as well the nurseries of learning, and schools of politeness, as the centres of trade, and seats of magnificence'.
33. Cited by Tom K. Meier, *op. cit.*, p. 92.
34. Young's *The Merchant*, *op. cit.*, Strain III, Stanza XXIV, p. 90. For more details on the way poets sung the praises of the merchant as the agent of progress and civilization see H.S. Hughes' 'The Middle-Class Reader and the English Novel', in *The Journal of English and German Philology*, Vol. 25, 1926, pp. 362f; also O.H.K. Spate's 'The Muse of Mercantilism: Jago, Grainger, And Dyer', in *Studies in the Eighteenth Century* (edited by R.F. Brissenden. Canberra, 1968), pp. 119f.

35. Cited by Hobsbawm, *op. cit.*, p. 26.
36. C.A. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
37. Cornelius Arnold's *Commerce* (London, 1757). The truth was that the European actively encouraged the African to fight against and enslave his fellow, by the bribery of tribal leaders — see Walter Rodney's *A History of the Upper Guinea Coast 1545-1800* (Oxford, 1970), pp. 102-6, 113, etc.
38. Richard Glover, *London: Or, The Progress Of Commerce*, *op. cit.*, lines 293f.
39. To borrow James Sutherland's words. See Sutherland's *A Preface to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Oxford, 1948), p. 89.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
41. In *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 8, 1738, p. 158.
42. Joseph La Vallée, *The Negro Equalled By Few Europeans* (Dublin, 1791), Vol. 1, pp. 81-2.
43. Details of the lives of Glover, Arnold and Grainger are to be found in *The Dictionary of National Biography*.
44. William Goldwin, *A Poetical Description Of Bristol* (London, 1712), p. 21.
45. C.A. Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 133.
46. *London Transformed. Images of the City in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1978).
47. First published in May, 1752; 2nd edition in 1754 and 3rd edition in 1764. This work was highly esteemed by Dickens and Thackeray — see Austin Dobson, *William Hogarth* (London, 1907), p. 159.
48. R. Lovell, *Bristol. A Satire* (1794); in *The Works of The British Poets* (ed. Thomas Park, London, 1808), Vol. XLI, p. 22.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 18, 21. Cf. Samuel Johnson's explanation of Richard Savage's rejection at Bristol — Savage's wit, culture and conversation were not valued in this 'place of commerce', the traders more conscious of 'solid gain' (*Lives of the Poets*, 2 vols., OUP reprint 1975, Vol. 2, p. 168).
50. Cited in Peter T. Marcy's *Eighteenth Century Views of Bristol and Bristolians* (Bristol, 1966), p. 13.
51. James Thomson, *Liberty* (1735/6), Part V, line 6, in *James Thomson Poetical Works* (ed. J.L. Robertson, Oxford University Press, 1971 reprint), p. 392.
52. *Ibid.*, Part IV, lines 1183-6.
53. John Brown, *Estimate*, *op. cit.*, p. 192.
54. Thomas Bedford, *The Origin Of our Grievances: A sermon* (London, 1770), p. 14.
55. M. Postlethwayt, *The National and Private Advantages Of The African Trade Considered* (London, 1746), p. 4.
56. Daniel Defoe, *Reformation of Manners, A Satyr* (n.p. 1702), p. 17.
57. Thomas Bradshaw, *The Slave Trade Inconsistent With Reason And Religion. A Sermon* (London, 1788), p. 7.
58. *Patriotism, A Mock-Heroic Poem* (1765), in *The School for Satire* (London, 1802).
59. Hobbes' statement is cited by James Noxon in his essay 'Dr Mandeville: «A Thinking Man»', in *The Varied Pattern: Studies in the 18th Century* (edited by P. Hughes and D. Williams, Toronto, 1971), p. 233.
60. Hans H. Andersen, *Daniel Defoe: A Study in the Conflict between Commercialism and Morality in the Early Eighteenth Century* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Univ. of Chicago, 1930), p. 107.
61. Charles Davenant, *An Essay Upon The Probable Methods Of making a People Gainers In The Ballance of Trade* (London, 1699), pp. 154-5.

62. John Brown's *Estimate*, *op. cit.*, p. 217.
63. *A Letter To The Right Reverend The Lord Bishop Of London From An Inhabitant Of His Majesty's Leeward — Caribbee — Islands* (London, 1730).
64. *The Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 2, 1732, p. 718. Benjamin Bissell in *The American Indian in English Literature of the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven, 1925), p. 204, identifies the poet as John Winstanley.
65. *A Discourse Addressed To Magistrates And Men in Authority Occasioned By the enormous License, and Irreligion of the Times* (London, 1736), in *A Miscellany Containing Several Tracts On Various Subjects* (London, 1752), p. 63.



'The Execution and Breaking on the Rack', anonymous engraving, 1793.