Introduction

This is the first of our two special issues commemorating the bicentenary of the legislation to abolish the transatlantic trade in Africans. Its theme, "The Black Atlantic Then and Now," relates to the term Paul Gilroy founded for the political and cultural world which has emerged, in three continents, as a result of that history. The Black Atlantic can be defined, he says, through a "desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity."[1] We should, he suggests, "take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis … and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective."[2] This issue of *EnterText* we hope can take its place in that ongoing project

The items in this collection fall into two groups: the first is specifically concerned with commemoration, while the second addresses a range of topics from all dimensions of the subsequent Black Atlantic, though many engage directly with the consequences of slavery. We begin with a focus on the creative engagement by Caribbean artists with the traumatic subject of slavery. The group includes the work of Jamaican painter Christopher Clare, Jamaican sculptor Laura Facey, and Rachel Manley writing about her grandmother, the sculptor Edna Manley, wife of one Jamaican prime minister and mother of another. We also have images of a little copy book created by children in Jamaica in 1826, powerful witness to those times between abolition and emancipation. On the other side of the Atlantic were powerful families such as the Pennants of Penrhyn in Wales who made much of their money from Jamaican sugar: an account of an exhibition about

their role in slavery is included here. The story of the abolitionists is represented by an essay on John Marjoribanks, a Scot who used his experience of Jamaica in the eighteenth century to write abolitionist verse. Movements from a new commemorative cantata first performed in Jamaica in October 2007 are also included. Together these form a group of items all with a Jamaican connection—a chance outcome rather than anything produced intentionally. However, because of the key role of the history of Jamaica in the wider history of the British empire in the region, and in the history of slavery and resistance to it in particular, such a focus for the way the creative human spirit engages elegiacally with slavery in order to combat and transcend its horrors seems appropriate. The items forming the second part open up to the wider Black Atlantic, with essays on and from Africa (West, East, and South), other parts of the Americas, Europe, and the Middle East. Topics include the histories of Sierra Leone and Liberia, the West African Students' Union, representation of the Haiti/Santo Domingo revolution in nineteenth-century French literature, and of slavery in recent British Caribbean literature, as well as a critique of an African American text representing slavery. In addition we include creative work and translation. These are all introduced in more detail below. The overall range of the issue is thus very much in keeping with Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic, in which "ethnicities and political cultures have been made anew in ways that are significant not simply for the peoples of the Caribbean but for Europe, for Africa, especially Liberia and Sierra Leone, and of course, for Black America."[3]

In noting how central the transatlantic trade has become for artists of the Black Atlantic, Gilroy asks an open-ended question: "How do black expressive cultures practice remembrance?"[4] Commemorating a terrible history is a sobering task. There are those

would force plantation owners in the Americas to regard their workers as not expendable and replaceable, as before, and therefore to abuse them less and, it was hoped, ensure their welfare. It was also a sop to those plantation owners who had prophesied not only the collapse of their own incomes but the collapse of the production of commodities on which the empire had come to depend, in particular the sugar craved by a sweet-toothed nation. The (largely shameful) double promise of the legislation, then, was that production would continue (winners: plantation owners and whites generally) and that slave conditions would improve (winners: slaves). In Britain, doubters of an antislavery persuasion might have had misgivings about the latter, doubters of an imperialist hue about the former, but the position had the merit of proposing something which a broad sector of the populace, and of parliament, could support, if only because of what it was not.

The event we are commemorating with this special issue of *EnterText* does represent an historical turning-point or tipping-point, therefore, but it is a tiny moment in the terrible ocean of events taking place over five hundred years which constituted transatlantic slavery, with its infamous triangular trade. This issue, though published in

history is not remote or irrelevant. He

potency—it is part of the meaning of their emancipation: their rebirth into freedom. They stand there as a symbol of the naked truth of the argument of emancipation: the truth that we are all equal in the eyes of God." Around the base is the inscription, "none but ourselves can free our mind"—Marcus Garvey's words made famous by Bob Marley in his "Redemption Song" which inspired the sculpture.

The significance of this pair of figures is also at the heart of Laura Facey's subsequent installation (2006), which engages with the infamous iconography of the slave ship *Brookes* showing how Africans were stowed for the long transatlantic voyages. Used by abolitionist campaigners then and by historians and educators today, the notorious image of the ship crammed with human beings shackled in appalling conditions has been transformed in Laura Facey's recreation. A cottonwood canoe replaces the European sailing ship, on a sea where the waves are represented by sugarcane, and the

reminds us of a number of theuses around the heritage industry

frightening in its arrogance, but the difficult case of the two nation-states created as a direct result of the abolitionist movement is something we hear little about. Cent-

bringing out a range of landmark reprints. But above all what is needed is for the talented young artists of the Black Atlantic, like Christopher Clare and Chantal Amo and so many others, to engage with that testing and continuous process of self-creation through their work which can bring the past, however painful, to bear constructively on the future.

Paula Burnett

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[1] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness,* London and New York: Verso, 1993, 19.
[2] Ibid., 15.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid., 212.
[5] The edict was issued in the name of his father King Christian VII by Frederik VI (who was then Regent because of his father's mental illness), though it did not come into effect until 1803. See www.anti slaverysociety.addr.com
[6] Gilroy, 213-217.
[7] Theodor W. Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society" from *Prisms,* trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 34.
[8] Verene A. Shepherd, "Monuments, Memorialisation and Decolonisation in Jamaica" (*Jamaica Journal* 29.3, Dec. 2005-April 2006), 41, 38.
[9] Gilroy, 4, 16-17.
[10] The exhibition "Materialising Slavery: Art, Artefact, Memory and Identity" opened in September 2007 at the National Gallery and at the Institute of Jamaica. Laura Facey's "Their Spirits Gone Before Them" was also part of this exhibition.
[11] Gilroy, 223.
[12] It is in my view as absurd as to argue that, for instance, only women should be allowed to portray women in art, or that only Jewish artists have the right to engage with the holocaust, which would mean that a writer such as Thomas Keneally, an Australian of Irish Catholic descent, should not have written the novel *Schindler's Ark* (1982) which led to Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993). Surely that way lies fascism.
[13] Gilroy, 7.
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