

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature

Tim Armstrong

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

## THE LOGIC OF SLAVERY

In American history and throughout the Western world, the subjugation perpetuated by slavery has created a unique ‘culture of slavery’. That culture exists as a metaphorical, artistic, and literary tradition attached to the enslaved – human beings whose lives are ‘owed’ to another, who are used as instruments by another, and who must endure suffering in silence. Tim Armstrong explores the metaphorical legacy of slavery in American culture by investigating debt, technology, and pain in African-American literature and a range of other writings and artworks. Armstrong’s careful analysis reveals how notions of the slave as a debtor lie hidden in our accounts of the commodified self and how writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Rebecca Harding Davis, Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, Ralph Ellison, and Toni Morrison grapple with the pervasive view that slaves are akin to machines. Finally, Armstrong examines how conceptions of the slave as a container of suppressed pain are reflected in disciplines as diverse as art, sculpture, music, and psychology.

TIM ARMSTRONG is Professor of Modern English and American Literature at Royal Holloway, University of London. He previously taught at University College London, University College Cork, and the University of Sheffield. He is the author of *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (1998), *Haunted Hardy: Poetry, History, Memory* (2000), and *Modernism: A Cultural History* (2005). He is the editor of *American Bodies* (1996) and *Thomas Hardy: Selected Poems* (1993, 2009) and the co-editor of *Beyond the Pleasure Dome: Writing and Addiction from the Romantics* (1994).

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature  
Tim Armstrong  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

---

CAMBRIDGE STUDIES IN AMERICAN  
LITERATURE AND CULTURE

*Editor*

Ross Posnock, *Columbia University*

*Founding Editor*

Albert Gelpi, *Stanford University*

*Advisory Board*

Alfred Bendixen, *Texas A&M University*

Sacvan Bercovitch, *Harvard University*

Ronald Bush, *St. John's College, University of Oxford*

Wai Chee Dimock, *Yale University*

Albert Gelpi, *Stanford University*

Gordon Hutner, *University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign*

Walter Benn Michaels, *University of Illinois, Chicago*

Kenneth Warren, *University of Chicago*

*Recent books in this series*

- 163 TIM ARMSTRONG  
The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature
- 162 JUSTINE MURISON  
The Politics of Anxiety in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
- 161 HSUAN L. HSU  
Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
- 160 DORRI BEAM  
Style, Gender, and Fantasy in Nineteenth-Century American Women's Writing
- 159 YOGITA GOYAL  
Romance, Diaspora, and Black Atlantic Literature
- 158 MICHAEL CLUNE  
American Literature and the Free Market, 1945–2000
- 157 KERRY LARSON  
Imagining Equality in Nineteenth-Century American Literature
- 156 LAWRENCE ROSENWALD  
Multilingual America
- 155 ANITA PATTERSON  
Race, American Literature and Transnational Modernism

*(continued after index)*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature

Tim Armstrong

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

---

*This book is dedicated to my three brothers, Rick, Bill, and Roger  
Armstrong, and to the memory of Harry Bruhns, 1951–2011*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature

Tim Armstrong

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

# THE LOGIC OF SLAVERY

*Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature*

TIM ARMSTRONG

*Royal Holloway, University of London*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press  
978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature  
Tim Armstrong  
Frontmatter  
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,  
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Cambridge University Press  
32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)  
Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781107607811](http://www.cambridge.org/9781107607811)

© Tim Armstrong 2012

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception  
and to the provisions of relevant collective licencing agreements,  
no reproduction of any part may take place without the written  
permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2012

Printed in the United States of America

*A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data*  
Armstrong, Tim, 1956–

The logic of slavery : debt, technology, and pain in American literature / Tim Armstrong, Royal  
Holloway, University of London.

pages cm. – (Cambridge studies in American literature and culture)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-107-02507-3 (hardback) – ISBN 978-1-107-60781-1 (paperback)

1. Slavery in literature. 2. American literature – 19th century – History and  
criticism. 3. American literature – 20th century – History and criticism. 4. American  
literature – African American authors – History and criticism 5. Slavery in art. 6. Slavery  
– United States – History. 7. Slavery – Psychological aspects. 8. Slavery – Economic  
aspects. 9. Commodification. 10. Reification. I. Title.

PS217.S55A76 2012  
810.9'355–dc23 2012012609

ISBN 978-1-107-02507-3 Hardback  
ISBN 978-1-107-60781-1 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or  
accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in  
this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is,  
or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
Introduction	i
1 Slavery, Insurance, and Sacrifice: The Embodiment of Capital	13
2 Debt, Self-Redemption, and Foreclosure	37
3 Machines inside the Machine: Slavery and Technology	70
4 The Hands of Others: Sculpture and Pain	100
5 The Sonic Veil	141
6 Slavery in the Mind: Trauma and the Weather	173
<i>Notes</i>	205
<i>Index</i>	245

Figures

1 John Raphael Smith, after George Morland, <i>African Hospitality</i> [1791]. Mezzotint (1814), © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London	page 24
2 John Cleveley, <i>Escape from the Luxborough Galley</i> (1760); © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London	32
3 ‘Copulation Fetich by Impotent Negro Paranoic’, from Edward Kempf, <i>Psychopathology</i> (1921)	89
4 Hiram Powers, <i>The Greek Slave</i> (modelled 1841–43, carved 1846); Marble, 66 × 19 × 17 inches. Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.	101
5 Edmonia Lewis, <i>Cleopatra</i> (1875–76). Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.	119
6 <i>Blind Tom</i> [Thomas Wiggins]. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.	167
7 Adolf Völlmy, <i>Leonid Shower</i> , 1833. Engraving based on a painting by Karl Jauslin, from <i>Bible Readings for the Home Circle</i> (1889)	188



Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature

Tim Armstrong

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgements*

Any work in this field is indebted to a range of recent research on the cultural ramifications and inheritance of slavery and race, and alongside historians of slavery like Ira Berlin, Eric Foner, Eugene G. Genovese, Thomas D. Morris, and Judith Kelleher Schafer, I would like to acknowledge a community of critics, among them Ian Baucomb, Stephen Best, Malcolm Bull, Hazel Carby, Henry Louis Gates, Paul Gilroy, Saidiya Hartman, Sharon Patricia Holland, Walter Benn Michaels, Toni Morrison, Orlando Patterson, Ross Posnock, Eric Sundquist, and Marcus Wood. In different ways these scholars ask how the category of ‘race’ has been constructed historically, and trace its legacy of violence and troubling residue within the Atlantic world.

Portions of the work published here have appeared in other contexts. An early draft of Chapter 1 appeared as ‘Slavery, Insurance and Sacrifice in the Black Atlantic’, in *Sea Changes: Historicizing the Ocean*, ed. Bernhard Klein and Gesa Mackenthun (New York: Routledge, 2004); and a small section of the same chapter appeared as ‘Catastrophe and Trauma: A Response to Anita Rupprecht’, *Journal of Legal History*, special issue on the *Zong* case, 28:3 (2007). An early version of some of the material in Chapter 3 appeared as ‘The Delay of the Machine Age’, in *Homo Orthopedicus: Le corps et ses prothèses à l’époque (post)moderniste*, ed. Nathalie Roelens and Wanda Strauven (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001). My thanks to the editors and publishers involved for permissions. For permissions to reproduce pictures, I am grateful to the institutions and rights holders listed in the legends.

I would like to thank respondents to this work at the various seminars where I have delivered papers over more than a decade: at the ‘Homo Orthopedicus’ conference, University of Antwerp, 1999; the Collegium for African-American Research conference, Winchester, 2003; the ‘Legitimacy and Illegitimacy’ symposium on law and literature at the Huntington Library, Los Angeles, 2005; the ‘Bodily Extensions’ conference, University

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-02507-3 - The Logic of Slavery: Debt, Technology, and Pain in American Literature

Tim Armstrong

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

of Nottingham, 2005; the ‘*Zong* Case and the Law’ conference, London Metropolitan University, 2006; the ‘Pathologies’ conference, University of Glamorgan, 2007; the ‘Sculpture and Literature in the Nineteenth Century’ conference, Royal Holloway, 2009; and research seminars at the Universities of Sussex, Durham, Cambridge, Oxford, and Exeter, as well as Kings, Royal Holloway, and Birkbeck Colleges and SOAS, University of London. A draft of Chapter 4 was delivered as the 2009 Kate Fullbrook Memorial Lecture at the University of the West of England.

Work on the first chapter was begun during a period of leave funded by the Leverhulme Foundation in 2000, and I am extremely grateful for the Foundation’s support and its patience as the shape of this work changed and other projects displaced it for considerable periods. I am also grateful to Royal Holloway for research leave.

I would also like to express gratitude to the students in my African-American literature class over the past two decades at Sheffield and Royal Holloway for their enthusiasm and insight. It was the challenge of that teaching which drew me to this book. Finally, my thanks to Cambridge University Press’s two readers for their responsive and helpful reports; and to friends and colleagues who have discussed work over the years and offered comments and encouragement: among many others Oli Belas, Bob Eaglestone, Sophie Gilmartin, John Gomez, Vicky Greenaway, Sam Halliday, Laura Marcus, Erica Sheen, Mike Wainwright, and, as always, Sue and Nicholas Wiseman.