

Slaves written by defoe and behn



Major Slaves Written by Defoe and Behn Introduction In Robinson Crusoe and Oroonoko; or, the Royal Slave, we are familiar with two black people, Friday and Oroonoko. They both came from undeveloped areas and became civilized in certain degree. Hence, making some comparison and contrast between the two and see narrators' different point views of colored people may give us more sense in the appreciation of these two novels. Also, we have the chance to understand the core value of that time. Chapter I

Comparison of Appearance Descriptions Both Defoe and Behn had detailed description of their slaves, and both of them were endowed with beauty.

Friday was " a comely handsome Fellow, perfectly well made; with straight strong limbs, not too large; tall and well shap'd" " He had a very good Countenance, not a fierce and surly Aspect; but seem'd to have something very manly in his Face, and yet he had all the Sweetness and Softness of an European in his Countenance too" " a great Vivacity and sparkling Sharpness in his Eyes" " The color of his Skin was not quite black, but very tawny; ... but of a bright kind of a dun olive Color, that had in it something agreeable;" " his Nose small, not flat like the Negroes, a very good Mouth, thin Lips, and his fine Teeth well set, and white as Ivory. (148-149)[i] Oroonoko was " pretty tall". " His Face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polish'd Jett. " " His Eyes were the most awful that cou'd be seen, and very piercing;" " the White of ' em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. " " His Nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. "(43-44)[ii] To compare two descriptions of appearances, we find common necessity when we can praise a black as handsome. Firstly, the

man must be tall and strong, which represents a manly beauty; however, the one has to be evenly shaped, not too large scare others.

His face has to be sweet and soft without manly elements, such as a sharp and sparkling eye. Nose must not be flat or African, but rising and Roman. Last but not least, a beautiful Negro should have a right color, bright and polished dark olive color. Even though both authors had rich experiences, Defoe was an English writer, journalist and pamphleteer while Aphra Behn worked as a spy and first women writer who earn herself a living, they had common aesthetic standard, which rooted in their shared background culture.

This shared “ beauty sense” can be explained by the term of “ imitative judgment” which is the expression, in the field of aesthetics, of what Trotter has called “ herd instinct,” the tendency on the part of the gregarious animal to make his acts and habits conform to those of another member of the same group, particularly if that member is a leader or represents the majority. [iii] In the 17th century, European culture dominated the world, so as their view to beauty. It was the cultural core that reflected in both novels. Therefore, the narrators judged the slaves by European standards of beauty.

To make the reading audience identify with them to a greater extent, the modifying of the features accredited a sense of authenticity and reality to the story. If bad things happen to a regular Negro, the feelings are not stirred nearly as much as if that particular Negro looked fairly like oneself. Although the admiration of them is still valid, it only serves to reinforce the cultural centrality of the white European being the pinnacle of human

evolution. Through "misrepresenting" the slaves as "flawed" Europeans, readers gradually discarded their discrimination and learnt to love a so-called "lower race".

Chapter II Contrast of Family/Tribe Value Friday is not only an "honest, grateful creature", but also loyal to his blood relations. When he succumbed to Crusoe, he did whatever to serve him, and would not eat his enemies and worshiped God, he was so glad to find his father though he never complaint missing him. Crusoe said that it is not easy for me to express how it mov'd me to see what Extasy and filial Affection had work'd in this poor Savage, at the sight of his Father..."(172)[iv] This joyful reunion with his father exhibited that Friday ad sincere and bursting love toward his family. It may be because that Friday was in a lower status in his tribe, and he always fight with his close relatives against those enemies and therefore built a closer relationship. In this emotion way, Friday was much more charismatic and colorful than his master. The narrator at times understated the contrast between Crusoe's and Friday's personalities, as when Friday, in his joyful reunion with his father, exhibited far more emotion toward his family than Crusoe.

Whereas Crusoe never mentioned missing his family or dreams about the happiness of seeing them again, Friday jumped and sung for joy when he meets his father, and this emotional display made us see what was missing from Crusoe's heart. Friday's expression of loyalty in asking Crusoe to kill him rather than leave him was more heartfelt than anything Crusoe ever said or did. In short, Friday's exuberance and emotional directness often pointed

out the wooden conventionality of Crusoe's personality. We can not blame Crusoe as indifference either.

He was the product of western civilization and inherited its principles of doing things. In Oroonoko, the hero showed another kind of emotion to his family. He is the prince of the tribe, who must be the leader in fighting. His father died young and his grandfather was too old to be intimate with. What's more, he was steeped in the environment where hierarchical principals were strict and so fettering. As in his position, to judge his deeds to his family was to see if it was beneficial to the tribe or if it was obedient to the king's order no matter if the order is lawful or not.

As a prince, he must abide by the Divine Glory and duty to protect his tribe and fight bravely against their enemies. In this way, Oroonoko is more civilized and therefore more sophisticated than Friday. It can be reflected in family structures. The household is the basic elementary social-cultural unit at all levels of early - late social complexity. Household itself is an extremely complex entity and completely a human product. [v] With increasing of complexity of the society, the difference within the households depended strongly on whether the certain ouseholds reproduced or were at different levels of accumulation of wealth. What's more, the political systems may increase the difficulties in accumulation of wealth and reproduction that resulted in increasing of complexity, such as the case of Oroonoko who was deprived of his lawful wife and could do nothing about it. Chapter III
Narrators and Their " Slave Friends" Coming from British society and experienced various walks of life, both writers Defoe and Behn had rooted

concepts of western civilization and consider which the most advanced culture.

When they encountered with other races, especially with “ savages” or “ slaves” as they called, they had their superiority over others. Throughout the two novels, we can see the comparison between European and African/American culture occurring in many places. In a majority of the imagery, narrators’ attitudes can be seen behind the text weighing heavily toward portraying European characteristics as socially more admirable. In Robinson Crusoe, at the sight of savages, Crusoe was in hope of “ making them slaves to me, to do whatever I should direct them, and to prevent their being able at any time to do me any hurt. (145)[vi] As a civilized man, Crusoe was self-centered when facing those savages. He regarded them as objects and considered how to utilize them to the most extent. After Friday signed to submit himself to Crusoe, the latter did not trust the former, and “ carry’d him not to his Castle, but quite away to his Cave, and the farther Part of the Island. ”(148). [vii] Even they were both in the Castle, Crusoe did every possible defense to protect from Friday, who actually was just “ a more faithful, loving, sincere Servant”. 151)[viii] Only Crusoe's " civilized" and therefore evil thoughts on humanity could cause him to distrust such an honest servant. Crusoe spent time in " civilization" and thinks about things in an experienced and rather pessimistic way. Friday, on the other hand, is innocent of society and hasn't been taught anyway to think. We can almost confirm that Crusoe, though sometimes considered Friday as assist or companion, never trusted him in the bottom of his heart. This may be

explained in an old Chinese saying, “ not my rave, were aliens”. As in Oroonoko, things seemed to be better.

The prince slave was described as a God-like man. However, this kind beauty was admired by European ladies, not necessarily adored by girls in their own tribe. Besides, when the white “ friend” cheated those people to Boats, the narrator wrote that “ Some have commended this Act, as brave, in the Captain...”(64)[ix] No matter what opinion the author holds, not regarding black people as advance human was the common sense in the society at that time. And I highly doubt that if the Prince was not this handsome and brave, whether the author would pay for equal attention of the same sympathy.

Actually, in colonial literature, all the devil practices of those colonists have been erased, instead, we can easily find the messages conveyed from the text that the whites are spreading “ civilization” to non-westerners for they justifies that they are under the call of the God to “ deliver the inferior races” and “ civilize the savages”. This dominate viewpoint over other races was much rooted in Colonialism, which is the consequence of western capital accumulation. It originates from the periods of Discovery and Exploration since 15th century.

Some critics think that it breaks the separation of the Old World and the New World and also encourages the exchange of both cultures. [x] During this period, European countries get handsome profits and become great empires. Especially for Britain, till the reign of Queen Victoria, she becomes “ the Empire on Which the Sun Never Sets” and “ the Mistress of the Seas”. [xi] On

the contrary, what they bring to the people in the colonies is ravaging their land, mocking their gods, banishing their languages, decimating their population through disease, and subjugating their children to a subservient and dependent status. xii] Conclusion By comparison and contrast of several aspects of these two slaves, we can find several conclusions that firstly, the same society built the same aesthetic standard of beauty and dominate culture will influence the beauty standard of other races; Secondly, the more complex society people in, the less chance for them to be innocent and direct; Finally, no matter how open-minded the person is, as long as he is from a superior culture, his point of view is self-esteemed and dominate, and often, colonial.

The authors of two novels lived in the same period in British history and they create a new arena for novel writing. Under their pens, we find Friday and Oroonoko, both as slaves, share the inner spirit of black people, and yet enjoy different characteristic by different viewing angle. ----- [i]

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