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Black Writing in Britain, 1770-1830

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Abstract

This thesis examines the lives and works of six black authors whose writings were published in Britain between 1770 and 1830: Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano, Boston King, John Jea and Robert Wedderburn. It challenges the existing paradigm of understanding these authors exclusively or primarily through the lenses of slavery and ethnicity. It demonstrates that these authors did not all share a single homogenous view of how, or even if, the slave trade and slavery should be abolished, and that they did not limit their attentions to the progress of abolitionism. Rather, they embraced a broad range of interests, from evangelical and missionary concerns to domestic political reform. These six black authors were each influenced by social, confessional and political networks, characterised by correspondence, friendship and patronage. Gronniosaw was part of an evangelical Calvinist network; Sancho corresponded with a network of libertine young men; Cugoano was a leading figure in London's black radical networks; King was deeply influenced by Thomas Coke's Methodist network based at Kingswood School, near Bristol; Jea's discourse was suited to local Wesleyan networks in Lancashire and Hampshire; and Wedderburn was a key member of London's ultra-radical underworld. An investigation into the individuals and groups comprising each of these networks of influence serves not only to establish the authors' output within a broader historical context, but also enables a fresh perspective from which to launch new critical readings. This ultimately facilitates a reevaluation of each author's individual contribution to the specific debates and discourses in which they participated, as well as their collective and several contributions to the British antislavery movements of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

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List of Abbreviations

- BL The British Library, London.
- Ch.F. Cheshunt Foundation, Westminster College, University of Cambridge.
- DMBI* John Vickers (ed.), *A Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* (London: Wesley Historical Society, 2011), [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/>
- ECCO Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Gale Cengage [Online] Available from: <http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/>
- GRO Gloucestershire Records Office, Gloucester.
- HRO Hampshire Record Office, Sussex.
- JRL John Rylands Library, University of Manchester.
- AVB* *Authorised Version Bible* (1611 translation).
- MNC Methodist New Connexion.
- ODNB* *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), [Online] Available from <http://www.oxforddnb.com> (Accessed 22/10/2014).
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary* [Online] Available from <http://www.oed.com/> (Accessed 22/10/2014).
- TNA The National Archives, London.

Introduction

The years between 1772 and 1833 saw fundamental changes in popular attitudes, discursive styles, cultural trends and public policy in Britain with regards to the question of slavery. Emerging from a niche interest in the early 1770s, occupied largely by dissenting Christian groups like the Quakers and Arminian Methodists, antislavery attitudes grew to such extents of breadth and diversity that by the third decade of the nineteenth century they had become enmeshed in British national identity. After the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, and even more so after the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833, to be British was to be against slavery.¹ It was against this backdrop that writing by black authors was first published in Britain, allowing readers to learn about slavery and racial prejudice from those who had actually experienced them. The testimonies of the enslaved and formerly-enslaved demonstrated the intellectual and spiritual capabilities of black people, radically challenging narratives that claimed the sub-humanity of Africans, the notion of ‘benevolent’ slavery, and the commensurability of colonial bonded servitude with an idealised British national identity that emphasised industry and honesty. In short, writings by black authors were among the most powerful and contested rhetorical assets in the national debates over slavery.

This thesis examines the specific circumstances in which six of the earliest black authors – Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Ignatius Sancho, Ottobah Cugoano, Boston

¹ See Richard Huzzey, *Freedom Burning: Anti-Slavery and Empire in Victorian Britain* (London: Cornell University Press, 2012), pp. 5-20; Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (London: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 357-371. Though his study is limited to English antislavery, David Turley discusses abolitionism and national identity in David Turley, *Culture of English Anti-Slavery: 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 79-103.

King, John Jea and Robert Wedderburn – were published in Britain.² It charts the development of black writing from its origins as denominational propaganda, through its permeation of polite sociability, and into the fora of domestic political radicalism and conservatism. It situates black people's contribution to British print culture in the networks responsible for helping to form and disseminate them, developing an understanding of black authors as operating within complex systems of patronage, friendship and intellectual exchange. This study contends that texts produced by black writers did not subscribe to any single homogenous view of slavery. Nor were they published in a social vacuum. Like all writers, black authors had to interact with the world around them, and not only with questions surrounding slavery. An examination of these associations and networks of influence enables a new perspective on these individuals as participants in the full gamut of British social, religious and political culture, including those well beyond (and occasionally, in conflict with) the formal abolitionist movement.

Black writing was neglected for much of the two centuries' worth of western scholarship concerned with slavery and abolition. Beginning with the publication of Thomas Clarkson's *History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament* in 1808, nineteenth-

² Unless stated otherwise, references to these sources are to the first editions. Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince, as Related by Himself* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, [1772]); Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, An African* (London: J. Nichols et al, 1782); Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (London: [n.p.], 1787); Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (London: Kirkby et. al., 1791); Boston King, 'Memoirs of the Life of Boston King' in: Anon. (ed.), *The Methodist Magazine, for the Year 1798; Being a Continuation of The Arminian Magazine* (London: G. Whitfield, [1799]), pp. 105-110, 157-161, 209-213. 261-265; John Jea, *The Life, History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, The African Preacher* (Portsea: John Williams, [1817]); John Jea (ed.), *A Collection of Hymns*, (Portsea, J. Williams, 1816); Robert Wedderburn, *The Axe Laid to the Root*, (London: A. Seale, 1816), vols. 1-6; Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery* (London: R. Wedderburn, 1824); Robert Wedderburn, *An Address to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux* (London: John Ascham, 1831).

century accounts of British abolitionism celebrated the roles played by parliamentary, aristocratic and middle-class white agents while downplaying or simply ignoring the contributions of their black contemporaries.³ With some notable exceptions (for example, Wylie Sypher's work in the 1940s), the elision of the black contribution to British abolitionism continued well into the mid-twentieth century.⁴ Most accounts from this period emphasised Britain's role in the abolition and suppression of the slave trade, reinforcing a paternalistic view of empire as an emancipatory force without necessitating critical scrutiny of its far longer history of slavery. Black people's testimonies of their own enslavement repudiated this view, complicating neat, self-congratulatory narratives of a benevolent empire which supported and defended its subjects' political and personal liberties. By and large, western academics responded to these accounts by simply ignoring them. It was not until a renewal in historiographical interest on the abolition movements in the 1960s, and in particular the pioneering work of Paul Edwards, that black authors and their work once more began to feature in discussions about the social and cultural history of the abolition of the British slave trade.⁵ Since then, scholars seeking to understand more

³ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave-Trade by the British Parliament*, 2 vols. (London: R. Taylor, 1808). See, for example, James Montgomery, *Poems on the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: R. Bowyer, 1809); Joseph Marryat, *Thoughts on the Abolition of the Slave Trade, and Civilization of Africa* (London: J. M. Richardson, 1816); George William Alexander, *Letters on the Slave-Trade, Slavery and Emancipation* (London: [n.p.], 1842); James Elmes, *Thomas Clarkson: A Contribution Towards the History of the Abolition of the Slave-Trade and Slavery* (London: Blackader, 1854); William O. Blake, *The History of Slavery and the Slave-Trade, Ancient and Modern* ([n.p.]: Columbus, 1861).

⁴ Wylie Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1942). See, for example, Central Office of Information, *Britain and the Suppression of Slavery* (London: Central Office of Information, 1953); Kathleen Harvey Simon, *Britain's Lead Against Slavery* (London: [n.p.], 1930); William Law Mathieson, *British Slavery and its Abolition, 1823-1838* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1926); Frank Klingberg, *Parliamentary History of the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the British Colonies* (New Haven, CT: [n.p.], 1911).

⁵ Paul Edwards, *Through African Eyes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966); Olaudah Equiano, *Equiano's Travels: His Autobiography: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African*, ed. Paul Edwards, (London: Heinemann, 1967).

about black people's involvement in British abolitionism and other movements have faced as much a task of recovery and reconstruction as elucidation and clarification.

This process is far from complete. While the life stories of a few early black authors are now well known, and their writings widely available, the specific circumstances surrounding the composition, production and dissemination of much of this writing remain obscure or undiscussed.⁶ Such writing is often incorporated into the later tradition of the abolitionist 'slave narrative', denoting an assumption about these texts as being wholly and unilaterally concerned with issues of slavery and race.⁷ While there is no doubt that black contributions were of central importance to these historical discussions, it should be acknowledged firstly that eighteenth-century black authors' work was produced with a much more diverse range of interests in mind, and secondly that early black writing was not always uncomplicatedly abolitionist. These two factors were often interrelated. In the first chapter of this thesis, for example, an investigation into Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's relationships with prominent slave-owning Calvinists helps to explain his autobiography's apparently ambivalent attitude towards slavery. Moreover, usually due to issues attendant on the illiteracy and poverty of their authors, these texts often underwent more direct forms of outside influence before publication – i.e. edition, transcription and censorship – than most of those written by their white contemporaries. In Gronniosaw's case, both his amanuensis and editor were followers of his slave-owning patron and held the belief that bodily freedom was not necessary to achieve salvation. This type of

⁶ Paul Edwards has called for wholesale re-reading of early black autobiography as 'freedom narratives' since they are mostly concerned with the quest for freedom, but does not suggest a paradigmatic shift away from a focus on slavery and emancipation. Paul Edwards, "'Freedom Narratives' of Transatlantic Slavery", *Slavery & Abolition*, 32:1 (2011), pp. 91-107.

⁷ For example, writers as diverse as Jupiter Hammon, John Marrant, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Phillis Wheatley and Robert Wedderburn are all incorporated into the 'slave narrative' paradigm in Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 167-271.

contextual detail enables a new perspective on these texts, rooted firmly in the historical realities in which they were produced.

Joseph Miller has called for slavery to be understood ‘through the lens of a rigorously historical epistemology’, as something influenced by – indeed, *emerging from* – contexts specific to a particular time and place.⁸ This should apply to black writing also: texts were produced in, and to some extent created by, the specific social and cultural contexts of the author’s life and experiences. This related both to the practicalities of publication and distribution (for example the radical print networks discussed in the first part of Chapter 6) and to the creative process itself (as with Sancho’s libertine correspondence, explored in Chapter 2). This view contests the notion of black writing as concerned wholly, or even mostly, with slavery and abolition, and reintroduces some of the other concerns affecting the authors and their networks while the texts were being written. This thesis therefore moves to embrace the inherent ‘messiness’ of these writings, their refusal to adhere perfectly to established explanations for the proliferation of antislavery thought, or indeed to offer a straightforwardly authentic ‘black perspective’. An investigation into *how* these complicated perspectives were forged enables a fundamental reconsideration of these texts as historical, literary, commercial and politically discursive artefacts, and incorporates black authors into mainstream British cultural and social history.

Any such revaluation must take into account the historical contexts in which black writing has traditionally been read. This study does not seek to divorce black intellectuals from the wider antislavery movements they so profoundly affected. Rather, it prompts a broader view of their personal interactions as a means of better

⁸ Joseph C. Miller, ‘A Historical Appreciation of the Biographical Turn’, in Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 26.

understanding both their work, and their roles in facilitating links between abolitionist and other contemporaneous movements. Situating them within the now familiar history of British abolitionism is therefore a prerequisite for an exploration of black authors' links to these other networks.

BRITISH ABOLITIONISM AND BLACK WRITERS

Although there was a history of antislavery publishing and activism in Britain prior to the 1760s, it was mostly confined to the Quakers, and abolitionist sentiments were considered 'eccentric'.⁹ However, after the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763, when hundreds of black soldiers and sailors came to settle in Britain, questions surrounding slavery and the humanity of Africans began to animate the popular consciousness. Planters continued to bring enslaved people over from the West Indies to work as domestic servants, leading some commentators to worry that slaves were saturating the job market and displacing white servants.¹⁰ In reality, as Gronniosaw discovered, work was difficult to come by as a black person in England during the 1760s. As Christopher Brown has demonstrated, it was, perversely, the perception that *too many* slaves were entering Britain, rather than a spontaneous sense of charity, which drove public support for clarification as to the legal status of slaves when in England.¹¹

⁹ Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 518. The most authoritative study of the formation of early antislavery sentiment in Britain is Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 33-101; for Quaker abolitionism in the 1750s, see Brychan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery* (London: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 177-219.

¹⁰ Brown, *Moral Capital*, p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-95.

Although early abolitionist pamphlets, such as Granville Sharp's *Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery*, began to appear towards the end of the 1760s, no black writing was published in Britain until December 1772.¹² The appearance of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* in Bath came a few months after the first key legal victory in the long campaign against British slavery was won in the Somerset case.¹³ The case of a slave named James Somerset, who had run away in Britain and whose former owner had attempted to forcibly deport back into bonded servitude in the Caribbean, captured the imagination of the public. Crowds of black people, among them a fifteen-year-old Ottobah Cugoano, gathered around the Court of King's Bench every day to follow the proceedings.¹⁴ After months of deliberation, Lord Chief Justice Mansfield delivered his verdict. 'No master ever was allowed here to take a slave by force to be sold abroad [...] therefore the man [Somerset] must be discharged'.¹⁵ This was an equivocal ruling: Mansfield had never suggested that Somerset was no longer a slave – only that his former owner could not compel him to leave Britain against his will. Regardless of its limited impact in legal terms, the case brought debates over slavery into the mainstream of

¹² Granville Sharp, *A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery* (London: Benjamin White, 1769), p. 42. Jacobus Capitein's proslavery Calvinist postgraduate dissertation, 'Is slavery compatible with Christian Freedom, or not?' was published in Latin and Dutch at Leiden, Netherlands, in 1742. The only two known pieces of Anglophone black writing to predate Gronniosaw's *Narrative* are a short autobiographical pamphlet by Briton Hammon and a single poem by Jupiter Hammon. Jacobus Capitein, *The Agony of Asar: A Thesis on Slavery by the Former Slave Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein, 1717-1747*, trans. and ed. Grant Parker (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2001); Briton Hammon, *Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverance of Briton Hammon* (Boston: J. Green and J. Russell, 1760); Jupiter Hammon, *An Evening Thought: Salvation by Christ, with Penitential Cries* (New York: n.p., 1760).

¹³ Most histories of abolition in Britain cover the Somerset case, but some of the most authoritative are: Brown, *Moral Capital*, pp. 90-101; Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp. 474-479; James Walvin, *Black Ivory: A History of British Slavery* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 13-17; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 99-104; Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 48-53.

¹⁴ *London Evening Post*, 23 June, 1772, p. 1

¹⁵ 'Substance of Lord Mansfield's Speech on the Cause between Mr. Stuart and Somerset the Black', *The London Magazine, or Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, 41 (1772), p. 268.

political consciousness, and generated a market for texts nominally written by black authors.

The earliest black writing was, on first reading, divorced from parliamentary politics and issues surrounding the slave trade – though as Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis argue, it was never entirely depoliticised. Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, in common with earlier black writing published in the Netherlands and the American colonies, was first and foremost a piece of devotional literature.¹⁶ When the black epistolarian Ignatius Sancho died in December 1780, his letters were collected and then published in 1782 with the view of 'shewing that an untutored African may possess abilities equal to an European.'¹⁷ Though this would prove a key issue in the abolition debates that were to follow, in 1782 it had more to do with notions of sensibility, charity, and class than slavery.

Nascent support for antislavery sentiment in Britain evolved into a formalised movement for abolition during the late 1780s. The end of the American Revolutionary War generated the conditions in which British popular abolitionism and black writing flourished.¹⁸ Not least of these conditions was a marked increase in Britain's black population. British strategies to win the war in America had included offering freedom to any slaves who would fight for them.¹⁹ Many, such as Boston

¹⁶ See n. 12, above.

¹⁷ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1 p. ii.

¹⁸ The reasons behind this transformation are contested. Christopher Brown, in agreement with earlier work by David Brion Davis, argues that the final loss of the American colonies in 1783 created a sense of shock and a period of national reflection in Britain, leading to widespread support for a number of charitable and humanitarian causes, including abolition. Conversely, Seymour Drescher suggests that British abolitionism only flourished in a moment of 'national optimism', once the uncertainties of war had been resolved. Brown, *Moral Capital*, pp. 105-153; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1975), pp. 343-468; Seymour Drescher, 'The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism', *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:4 (2012), pp. 571-593.

¹⁹ See Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 116-176; Philip Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming Slaves in the American Revolution', in Christopher Brown and Philip Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (London: Yale

King, took them up on the offer. When the Royal Navy ships returned in defeat after 1783, they brought thousands of black people with them.²⁰ These black loyalists tested prevalent notions of British liberty and charity, since there was little opportunity for them to find work. Moreover, the parish relief system did not allow charity for those born outside Britain. As discussed in Chapter 3, the loyalists, led by black intellectuals like Ottobah Cugoano, protested the discrimination they faced, linking themselves to a growing radical movement in London. Matters came to a head in January 1786, and over the next 18 months measures were put in place to relocate London's 'black poor' to the new West African settlement of Sierra Leone.²¹ After one failed attempt in which hundreds of settlers died, a second, more successful settlement named Freetown was established on the West African coast in 1792.²²

The negative representations of the black loyalists in the London press were met by an outpouring of sympathetic feeling for those who remained in slavery. The years between 1786 and 1793 set a high water mark for popular antislavery sentiment that would not be exceeded for a decade.²³ The Society for Effecting the Abolition of

University Press, 2006), pp. 180-208; Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), pp. 3-20; Simon Schama, *Rough Crossings: Britain, the Slaves and the American Revolution* (London: BBC Books, 2005), pp. 26-251.

²⁰ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, pp. 75-121; Stephen Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London's Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), pp. 63-129.

²¹ The expatriation of the 'black poor' is dealt with in detail in Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*; see also James Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

²² A classic study of the early history of Sierra Leone is Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962); for a more up-to-date study on the early years of the settlement, see Suzanne Schwarz, 'Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company', in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 252-277; see also Suzanne Schwarz, 'Reconstructing to Life Histories of Liberated Africans: Sierra Leone in the Early Nineteenth Century', *History in Africa*, 39:1 (2012), pp. 175-207; Michael Turner, 'The Limits of Abolition: Government, Saints and the "African Question", c. 1780-1820', *English Historical Review*, 112:446 (1997), pp. 319-357.

²³ See John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1995); Turley, *Culture*

the Slave Trade (SEAST) was established in 1787, led by a London committee which included Sharp, William Wilberforce, Thomas Clarkson, John Newton, and after 1788, Josiah Wedgwood, among others. Clarkson was tasked with travelling around the country, establishing provincial sub-committees and gathering evidence about the cruelties of the trade.²⁴ Together, the committees helped to organise the largest mass petition campaigns in British history, with particularly large numbers of signatures coming from northern industrial towns. In 1788, in Manchester alone, some 10,639 people signed one such petition.²⁵ This period also saw a marked increase in the use of print culture to garner support for abolitionism.²⁶ Improved printing technologies and distribution networks enabled books and pamphlets to appear near-simultaneously in numerous population centres across the country, while provincial newspapers proliferated throughout the late eighteenth-century.²⁷ Texts by black authors were among the most visible examples of abolitionist literature. As well as reprints of Gronniosaw and Sancho's works, new, more forcefully abolitionist writing by Cugoana and Olaudah Equiano began to appear in bookshops around the country. Equiano, in particular, found great success and by the time of his death in 1797 had become a reasonably well-heeled man thanks to the popularity of his book.²⁸

At the onset of the 1790s, support for abolition was extensive. The radical associations of many SEAST members like Clarkson, Thomas Walker, and even

of English Antislavery; Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (London: MacMillan, 1986), pp. 67-88.

²⁴ Keith Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment: Strategies of Protest in Eighteenth-Century Afro-English Writing* (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), p. 57.

²⁵ Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery*, p. 47.

²⁶ See Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), p. 138.

²⁷ James Bradley, 'Parliament, Print Culture and Petitioning in Late Eighteenth-Century England', *Parliamentary History*, 26:1 (2007), pp. 98-111.

²⁸ Equiano's daughter received £950 in his will. Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 366.

Sharp, proved beneficial when enthusiasm for revolutionary egalitarian ideals was widespread in Britain. The ideological relationship between radical politics and antislavery were underscored after 1792, when news began to come in from across the Atlantic of a revolution in the French colony of St. Domingue.²⁹ However, popular zeal for reform did not extend to the Houses of Parliament; when Wilberforce introduced two motions for abolishing the slave trade in 1791 and 1792, they both proved ultimately unsuccessful.³⁰ Indeed, the stalling of the formalised antislavery movement between 1794 and 1804 can in some measure be accounted for by its associations with ideas for reforming the British political system. In the context of the anti-Jacobin backlash of the French Revolutionary War years, the associations between high-profile abolitionists and domestic radicalism became toxic.³¹ After 1794, when reportage from St. Domingue began to relay stories of impaled white infants and mass acts of black-on-white violence, proslavery arguments that British abolitionism led to violent slave rebellions gained greater traction.³² During the same year, the National Convention in Paris voted to abolish slavery throughout the French

²⁹ See, for example, Anon., *A Particular Account of the Insurrection of the Negroes of St. Domingo* (London: Assemblée Générale, 1792).

³⁰ The 1791 motion was voted down (narrowly) in the Commons. The sugar boycott was significantly helped along by the success of William Fox's pamphlet, *An Address to the People of Great Britain, on the Propriety of Abstaining from West India Sugar and Rum* (London: M. Gurney, 1791). For Fox's impact on British abolitionism, see John Barrell and Timothy Whelan, 'Introduction', in William Fox, *The Complete Writings of William Fox: Abolitionist, Tory, and Friend to the French Revolution* (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2011), pp. ix-xvii. For women's roles in the boycott, see Claire Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 33-40. The 1792 motion passed in Commons was stalled in the House of Lords, and in 1793 the Commons voted not to revisit the issue. Stephen Tomkins, *William Wilberforce: A Biography* (London: Lion, 2007), pp. 86-120; William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (London: HarperCollins, 2008), pp. 169-198.

³¹ John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-Slavery, c. 1787-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 104-109; Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery*, pp. 148-161.

³² David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Emancipation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), p. 4.

Empire, underlining the perceived link between antislavery and Jacobinism.³³ In Britain, the Two Acts of 1795 made generating the type of popular support associated with abolitionism appear tantamount to an act of sedition.³⁴ The Seditious Meetings Act, limiting public assemblies to 50 people or fewer, prevented large rallies for non-religious purposes like the one Clarkson had organised in Manchester, which had galvanised the 1788 petition. Meanwhile, the Treason Act essentially rendered the language of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’, which had characterised much of both radical and abolitionist rhetoric, subversive and potentially dangerous.³⁵

As Chapter 4 shows, black writing, like most antislavery discourse during this period, by and large receded back into the pulpits of dissenting Christian groups. Methodists like Boston King recast their antislavery rhetoric as a part of a broader move towards establishment respectability by divorcing it from calls for abolition. Black writing returned to its evangelical roots, shifting away from confrontational and galvanising rhetoric and back towards notions of forbearance and post-corporeal liberation. Even though the only networks that could safely publish black writing in the paranoiac atmosphere of the late 1790s and early 1800s were religious ones, they were still under pressure from the government to ensure that their activities were depoliticised.³⁶ Writers like King could only be published in this environment when their articulations of freedom were sufficiently divorced from the ‘liberty’ of radical discourse.

³³ See, for example, Ada Ferrer, ‘Haiti, Free Soil, and Antislavery in the Revolutionary Atlantic,’ *American Historical Review*, 117:1 (2012), pp. 40-66.

³⁴ A classic essay on this subject, foregrounding Equiano’s relationship to radicalism, is James Walvin, ‘The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1838’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 292, (1977), pp. 343-355.

³⁵ See, for example, Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 32-33.

³⁶ See, for example, David Hampton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) pp. 68-69.

When abolitionism once again began to gain popular support around 1804, it was distinctly less radical in nature than it had been during the 1780s and 1790s. The re-introduction of slavery in the French colonies after a ten-year hiatus helped make abolitionism more palatable to ‘conservative’ British networks, so long as the difficult issue of St. Domingue was handled sensitively. Chapter 5 highlights how black intellectuals like John Jea followed suit, spreading antislavery sentiment on a local scale while remaining aware of how regional investments in slavery and antislavery inflected provincial attitudes. It was essential that their message not be confused with the type of ‘black violence’ arising from the revolution across the Atlantic.³⁷ Even after the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act was passed in 1807, antislavery activism remained tethered to nationalist and patriotic identity narratives, partly as a reaction to the wars with Imperial France and independent America. Abolishing slavery itself, however, was seen as potentially endangering to Britain’s economy, and as such was barely countenanced until 1823, well after the wars had ended.³⁸ Wartime antislavery rhetoric instead emphasised the Royal Navy’s role in suppressing the slave trade, contrasting Britain’s attempts to diminish the horrors of slavery with France’s active pursuance of the revenues arising from it.³⁹

This patriotic rhetoric took a heavy blow at the end of the Wars in 1815, since one of the clauses of the First Treaty of Paris allowed France to continue transporting slaves to their Caribbean colonies for five years without harassment from the Royal Navy.⁴⁰ At the same time, with the war over, domestic radicalism once more began to

³⁷ See Davis, *Age of Emancipation*, pp. 74-82.

³⁸ See Oldfield, *Transatlantic Slavery*, pp. 251-253.

³⁹ See Chapter 5; Paul Kielstra, *The Politics of Slave Trade Suppression in Britain and France, 1814-48: Diplomacy, Morality and Economics* (London: Macmillan, 2000), pp. 22-55.

⁴⁰ See David Turley, ‘Antislavery Activists and Officials: “Influence”, Lobbying and the Slave Trade, 1807-1850’, in Keith Hamilton and Patrick Salmon (eds.), *Slavery, Democracy and Empire: Britain*

gain traction. In this context, abolitionists from outside the political and social elite again came to embrace notions of political reform, and some black authors were keen to associate themselves with both of these movements. Chapter 6 of this thesis traces the career of one of the most charismatic and scandalous of these ‘radical abolitionists’. Robert Wedderburn, in stark contrast to Jea’s moderatism, took heart from slave uprisings, publishing the scurrilously radical periodical *Axe Laid to the Root* in 1817 and his violently articulate autobiography *The Horrors of Slavery* in 1824, in the wake of slave rebellions in Barbados and Demerara, respectively.⁴¹ The insurrectionary zeal of Wedderburn’s immediatism was indicative of a schism between antislavery activists in the 1820s. On one side were radicals and Unitarians like Wedderburn and Elizabeth Heyrick, while on the other, parliamentary ‘gradualists’ relied on support from the more ‘respectable’ old guard of 1790s abolitionism.⁴² The combination (though not necessarily co-operation) of parliamentary and grass-roots antislavery activism ultimately resulted in the passing of a slew of restricting and ameliorating legislation in the latter half of the 1820s.⁴³

Finally, the gap between radicals and parliamentary abolitionists closed from both sides at once, at the onset of the 1830s. Emboldened by their successes (and evidently impressed by the popularity of more sugar and cotton boycotts during the late 1820s), parliamentary activists began pushing for immediate abolition from

and the Suppression of the Slave Trade, 1807-1975 (Brighton: Sussex University Press, 2009), pp. 81-92; Kielstra, *Politics of Slave Trade Suppression*, pp. 25-26.

⁴¹ For ultra-radicalism and antislavery during this period, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Iain McCalman, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, ed. Iain McCalman (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1991), pp. 1-40.

⁴² For Elizabeth Heyrick’s radicalism, see Claire Midgley, ‘The Dissenting Voice of Elizabeth Heyrick: An Exploration of the Links Between Gender, Religious Dissent, and Anti-Slavery Radicalism’, in: Elizabeth Clapp and Julie Jeffrey (eds.), *Women, Dissent and Anti-Slavery in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 88-110.

⁴³ For example, the restrictive treaties with Brazil and Sweden in 1827, and the acts in 1824 and 1828 preventing slaves from being forcibly transported between colonies.

1829.⁴⁴ Meanwhile, as working-class radicals began to adhere in numbers to post-Enlightenment secular empiricism – what Iain McCalman has called ‘the march of mind’ – their vision for emancipation began to reconcile itself to more moderate, ‘establishment’ views.⁴⁵ This tendency was reflected in Wedderburn’s 1831 tract *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*. Just as in the early 1790s, mass petitions began to flow into parliament, this time demanding the end of slavery itself. Parliament stalled as it had before, passing yet more restrictive law in 1830. It was the slaves in the British West Indies who finally forced the issue. The Baptist War – another huge slave uprising, this time in Jamaica – and its brutal suppression stimulated massive media attention in Britain on the question of slavery.⁴⁶ The economic motivators and consequences of abolishing slavery have been at the centre of historiographical debate for decades, but in any case the social unrest caused by Britain’s continuing investment in the institution was untenable.⁴⁷ It had become clear by 1833 that, in Seymour Drescher’s words, slavery ‘could no longer be sustained without continuous agitation at home and abroad.’⁴⁸ The Slavery Abolition Act was passed that year, and on 1 August 1834, around 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies – and more elsewhere in the British Empire – were, if only nominally, freed.

⁴⁴ Drescher, *Abolition*, p. 249. For women’s leadership of the boycotts in the 1820s, see Midgley, *Women Against Slavery*, pp. 42-118.

⁴⁵ See Aruna Krishnamurthy, ‘Coffeehouse vs. Alehouse: Notes on the Making of the Eighteenth-Century Working-Class Intellectual’, in Aruna Krishnamurthy (ed.), *The Working-Class Intellectual in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 85-108; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 181-203.

⁴⁶ For the Baptist War, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (London, Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 291-322.

⁴⁷ For the famous historiographical debate over the economics of slave emancipation, see Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977). Recent work has focused on the economics of the compensation paid out to former slave owners. See Catherine Hall et al, *Legacies of British Slave-ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁴⁸ Drescher, *Abolition*, p. 263.

OLAUDAH EQUIANO, MARY PRINCE, AND OTHERS: SCHOLARLY TRENDS AND THE LIMITS OF THIS STUDY

In contrast to the rich historiography of abolition, histories of black people in Britain, and those of early black writing, are comparatively new and specialised.⁴⁹ Some of the earliest such dedicated histories, published during a period of heightened racial conflict in Britain, acknowledge the eighteenth-century ‘black experience’ as being fundamentally influenced by racial prejudice. For example, James Walvin’s *Black and White* (1973) charted both the development of an identifiable black community in Britain and ‘white reactions’ to it.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Folarin Shyllon’s *Black Slaves in Britain* (1974) and *Black People in Britain* (1977), explicitly sought to challenge a scholarly tradition in which ‘British historians (who should know better) have used too much imagination and too little sympathy when writing about [...] people of African ancestry.’⁵¹ As demonstrated by the fact that both of Shyllon’s books were published for the Institute for Race Relations, the task of writing black British history has been seen from its earliest days as a means of combating contemporary racism.

However, continuing and widespread social disunity, a rise in support for right-wing nationalism and race riots during the 1980s contributed to an increased need for black history. Meanwhile, cultural theorists such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy led a movement to reassess modern black British identity.⁵² New Marxist

⁴⁹ Wylie Sypher’s work was very much an outlier, and is usually understood as forming part of an earlier historiography on slavery, along with Marxist histories by Eric Williams and C.L.R. James. Sypher, *Guinea’s Captive Kings*; Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*; C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (London: Secker and Warberg, 1938).

⁵⁰ James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro in English Society, 1555-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973); see also Edward Scobie, *Black Britannia: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago, IL: Johnson, 1972).

⁵¹ Folarin Shyllon, *Black Slaves in Britain* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. xi; Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain, 1555-1833* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

⁵² Claire Alexander has given a concise overview of Hall’s work in Claire Alexander, ‘Stuart Hall and “Race”’, *Cultural Studies*, 23:4 (2009), pp. 457-482; some of Gilroy’s best-known works on race from

histories, reacting against a new conservative ideology Hall called ‘Thatcherism’, tended towards asserting the legitimacy of the black working class presence in Britain and the fairness of its claim to a share in British historical identity.⁵³ The best known of these studies, Peter Fryer’s *Staying Power* (1984), was written with the express purpose of demonstrating the age and diversity of the black British community, boldly stating in its opening line that ‘there were Africans in Britain before the English came here.’⁵⁴ David Dabydeen’s *Hogarth’s Blacks* (1985) reassessed familiar (and quintessentially British) visual representations of working-class life to demonstrate that black people existed in and influenced Georgian society at large, ‘English painting depicting [their] situation among the upper classes, and the English print [their] contact with the lower orders.’⁵⁵ It shared in common with Paul Edwards and James Walvin’s *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (1983) a focus on individual stories of survival and resistance.⁵⁶ Ron Ramdin’s *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (1988) set in a broader context the origins and development of a community of black working-class people in eighteenth-century Britain, foregrounding the activities of radical figures like Robert Wedderburn and William Davison.⁵⁷ While Ramdin’s work, like much Marxist historiography of the late 1980s, was especially resistant to the notion of ‘great men’, it continued the work

the period are in Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, *The Empire Strikes Back: Race and Racism in the 70s Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1982).

⁵³ For Thatcherism, see Stuart Hall and Martin Jaques, *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1983).

⁵⁴ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), p. 1.

⁵⁵ David Dabydeen, *Hogarth’s Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art* (London: Dangaroo Press, 1985), p. 21.

⁵⁶ Paul Edwards and James Walvin, *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (London: MacMillan, 1983).

⁵⁷ Ron Ramdin, *The Making of the Black Working Class in Britain* (Aldershot: Gower 1987).

of recovering individual stories of notable and well-known black people in Britain, including some black authors.

The historiography of black people in Britain has continued to diversify since the early 1990s, though the rate of production for broad-ranging social histories in the style of *Staying Power* has slowed. *Longue durée* histories have given way to more chronologically-focused investigations which dig deeper into contexts specific to black people in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. Social and cultural histories like Gretchen Gerzina's *Black England* (1995) investigated representations of individual black people, while demographic studies such as Norma Myers' *Reconstructing the Black Past* (1996) shed light on 'the numbers conundrum', asking how many black people actually lived in eighteenth-century Britain.⁵⁸ Myers' work, by definition, attempted to shift focus away from the best-known black individuals of the period, and towards a more general understanding of the experiences of the majority of black people, though she did make mention of particular archetypes (sailor, musician, beggarman, etc.) embodied in the recovered biographies of specific people.⁵⁹ Kathleen Chater's *Untold Histories* (2009) operated in a similar vein, interrogating trial records, newspaper reports and visual culture to recover the experiences of the 'average' black person in eighteenth-century Britain.⁶⁰ Chater and Myers' work differed from older studies in its acknowledgement that 'black people were rarely put into the context of their age' in older historiography.⁶¹ Their quantitative work in particular informs aspects of this thesis, especially in Chapter 3.

⁵⁸ Gretchen Gerzina, *Black England: Life before Emancipation* (London: John Murray, 1995); Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London: Routledge, 1996).

⁵⁹ Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*, pp. 56-81.

⁶⁰ Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales during the Period of the British Slave Trade, c.1660-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

While scholarly interest in general social histories of this sort has waned somewhat since the 1990s, studies into the cultural productions of black people themselves, and particularly into black writing, have proliferated. The initial task was one of recovery and correlation, and much valuable scholarship is to be found in the footnotes and introductions accompanying edited collections and editions of black writing.⁶² Francis Smith Foster's *Witnessing Slavery* (1979) and William Andrews' *To Tell a Free Story* (1986) set the agenda in terms of new historicist literary analysis.⁶³ Understandably, they took as their focus the relationship between global systems of slavery and the expression of individual identity nominally demanded of an autobiography.⁶⁴ Of particular relevance to this study are the questions raised by Andrews surrounding the role of amanuenses and editors, and how these might (and should) affect our readings of these life histories. However, Andrews' investigations remained resolutely situated in the transatlantic antislavery movements, and he stopped short of a full interrogation of how amanuenses' and editors' social and professional lives beyond abolition might impact on any changes made to the final published text.

A key strand of critical interest in early black writing is how it interacted with contemporaneous notions of race. Helena Woodard's *Politics of Race and Reason* (1999) read Gronniosaw, Cugoano, Sancho and Mary Prince alongside well-known

⁶² See, for example, Henry Gates (ed.), *The Classic Slave Narratives* (New York: Signet, 2002); Henry Gates (ed.), *Pioneers of the Black Atlantic: Five Slave Narratives from the Enlightenment, 1772-1815* (New York: Civitas, 1998); Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1996); Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen (eds.), *Black Writers in Britain, 1760-1890* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991); Paul Edwards (ed.), *Through African Eyes*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966-1969).

⁶³ Francis Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁶⁴ Foster even goes as far as to say that 'even when slavery is not the direct cause' of any incident described in eighteenth-century black autobiography, 'the institution of slavery permeates the narratives.' Foster, *Witnessing Slavery*, p. 51.

white writers of the period to unpick the tightly-woven relationships between blackness, gender and theodicy in the religious and intellectual contexts of the late Enlightenment.⁶⁵ Felicity Nussbaum's *The Limits of the Human* (2003) similarly utilised black writing in her discussion of shifting British attitudes towards race, nation and gender, though she draws from a much broader sample of cultural artefacts than published autobiography.⁶⁶ Nussbaum's use of a wide range of primary sources is not unique, but this thesis is influenced by her application of close interpretive analysis to non-'literary' written materials such as newspaper reports and popular songs.

Nussbaum's work raised questions regarding the place of black people in particular aesthetic and literary movements of the long eighteenth century, situating both within the extra-parliamentary politics of popular discourse. In this respect it can be considered alongside Markman Ellis' *Politics of Sensibility* (1996), Helen Thomas' *Romanticism and Slave Narratives* (2000), and Brycchan Carey's *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (2005).⁶⁷ As the titles suggest, Ellis and Carey's work both delineated the intersections between black writing and the literary conventions of sentiment, though Ellis' work was more concerned with constructions of race and national identity while Carey focused on the applications of sensibility in abolitionist discourse. These ideas form the starting point for the discussion of Sancho's epistolary networking in the second chapter of this thesis. Thomas' work, meanwhile, surveyed the dialogic relationship between black autobiography and

⁶⁵ Helena Woodard, *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999).

⁶⁶ Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁶⁷ Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 49-128; Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives*; Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005).

romanticism in the context of political radicalism and antislavery agitation. This underscored the central role played by black intellectuals in the development not only of abolitionist discourse, but literature, culture and the politics of British identity more generally.

However, the longstanding critical tendency of reading these texts solely in relation to their interaction with slavery and abolition continued to dominate scholarship. Of course, all modern scholarly literature on early black writing is obliged to acknowledge the role played by slavery in the development of these texts. But the critical tendency to focus exclusively on this aspect of black writing can distort our understanding of it, and gives the false impression that all black writers only or mainly wrote about slavery between 1770 and 1830. Texts by Angelo Costanzo (1987), Keith Sandiford (1988), Lyn Innes (2002), George Boulukos (2008), and Sue Thomas (2014) all continued the work of uncovering, challenging and confirming the facts of authors' lives as slaves and/or abolitionists as they appear in their life writing.⁶⁸ This work is critical in developing our understanding of slave experiences and the way slavery was represented during the period. However, it only provides one part of the map of influences and contexts which led to the publication of these narratives. This thesis broadens these discussions to include political, religious and social influences, extending well beyond these issues.

Perhaps because of the critical focus on interactions with race and slavery, some black authors have garnered more critical attention than others. By far the most

⁶⁸ Angelo Costanzo, *Surprising Narrative: Olaudah Equiano and the Beginnings of Black Autobiography* (London: Greenwood, 1987); Sandiford, *Measuring the Moment*; Lyn Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 17-71; George Boulukos, *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Sue Thomas, *Telling West Indian Lives: Life Narratives and the Reform of Plantation Slavery Cultures* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014).

has been paid to Olaudah Equiano, the most successful black abolitionist writer of the period.⁶⁹ Vincent Carretta's work reconstructing the details of Equiano's life has accentuated his primacy as the best-known eighteenth-century black author.⁷⁰

Carretta's discovery of evidence suggesting that Equiano was born in South Carolina, and not what is now south-eastern Nigeria as claimed in his autobiography, provoked controversy and heightened interest still further.⁷¹ A dedicated 'Equiano Society' was established in London in 1996 to 'celebrate and publicise' his work. The centre for the study of the black presence in Britain at University College London is named the Equiano Centre.⁷² So much work has been done to recover evidence about Equiano that Carretta coined the term 'Equiana' to describe manuscript miscellanies which mention him.⁷³ More is known about Equiano than any other enslaved person living in the eighteenth century. A similar story holds true for Mary Prince, the first woman

⁶⁹ At the time of writing, the British Library holds 85 published scholarly articles with 'Equiano' in the title, and several full texts. Some key articles, chapters and monographs are listed in the following four footnotes.

⁷⁰ For earlier focus on Equiano, see, for example, Paul Edwards, 'Three West African Writers of the 1780s', in Charles Davis and Henry Gates (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 175-198; Costanzo, *Surprising Narrative*; Paul Edwards, *Unreconciled Strivings and Ironic Strategies: Three Afro-British Authors of the Georgian Era: Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, Robert Wedderburn* (Edinburgh: Centre for African Studies, 1992); James Walvin, *An African's Life: The Life and Times of Olaudah Equiano, 1745-1797* (London: Cassell, 1998).

⁷¹ Carretta first published this evidence in Vincent Carretta, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa? New Light on an Eighteenth-Century Question of Identity', *Slavery & Abolition*, 20:3 (1999), pp. 96-105; and again in Carretta, *Self-Made Man*, pp. 2-16. For the controversy, see Paul Lovejoy, 'Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African', *Slavery & Abolition*, 27:3 (2006), pp. 317-347; Vincent Carretta, 'Response to Paul Lovejoy's "Autobiography and Memory: Gustavus Vassa, alias Olaudah Equiano, the African"', *Slavery & Abolition*, 28:1 (2007); Paul Lovejoy, 'Issues of Motivation – Vassa/Equiano and Carretta's Critique of the Evidence', *Slavery & Abolition*, 28:1 (2007); Paul Lovejoy, 'Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa – What's in a Name?', *Atlantic Studies*, 9:2 (2012); Vincent Carretta, 'Methodology in the Making and Reception of *Equiano*', in Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), pp. 172-191.

⁷² Anon., 'The Equiano Society' [Online] Available from: <http://www.equiano.net/society.html> (Accessed 06/11/2014); University College London, 'About the Centre' [Online] Available from: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/equianocentre/About_the_centre.html (Accessed 06/11/2014).

⁷³ See Vincent Carretta, 'A New Letter by Gustavus Vassa/Olaudah Equiano?', *Early American Literature*, 39:2 (2004), pp. 355-361; Vincent Carretta, 'New Equiana', *Early American Literature*, 44:1 (2009), pp. 147-160; An edited collection of 'Equiana' can be found in Olaudah Equiano, *The Letters and Other Writings of Gustavus Vassa (Olaudah Equiano, the African): Documenting Abolition of the Slave Trade*, ed. Karlee Anne Sapoznik (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 2014).

to publish an autobiography in Britain, though even she is dwarfed in terms of scholarship by Equiano.⁷⁴

This thesis, therefore, broadens scholarship on some of the lesser-known black authors of the period (though Equiano is mentioned in the third chapter as a member of Cugoano's network). This is not to downplay the work of the two highest-profile black authors of the period, but rather to direct attention to the diversity and breadth of writing produced by their more obscure peers. Indeed, while extensive studies into the specific contexts surrounding the composition, edition, production and distribution of Equiano and Prince's narratives have already been undertaken elsewhere, more remains to be learned about the impact of non-abolitionist social networks on their published work.⁷⁵ While this thesis is devoted to exploring the microhistories of more neglected black writers, more comprehensive future studies might incorporate scholarship that further diversifies our understanding of these two important writers beyond their relationships to the abolition movement. New work on Equiano, for example, might consider how London's politically radical networks influenced his writing, while an investigation into the impact of Thomas Pringle's literary and classicist networks on the edition and distribution of Mary Prince's

History would doubtless prove instructive.

⁷⁴ See, for example, Sue Thomas, *Telling West-Indian Lives*, pp. 199-166; Margot Maddison-Macfayden, 'Mary Prince, Grand Turk, and Antigua', *Slavery & Abolition*, 34:4 (2013), pp. 1-10; Rachel Banner, 'Surface and Stasis: Re-reading Slave Narrative via The History of Mary Prince', *Callaloo*, 36:2 (2013), pp. 298-311; Sue Thomas, 'New Information on Mary Prince in London', *Notes and Queries*, 58:1 (2011), pp. 82-85; Sarah Salih 'Introduction', in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave*, ed. Sarah Salih (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. vii-xxxix; Moira Ferguson, 'Introduction', in Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince: A West Indian Slave*, ed. Moira Ferguson (London: Pandora, 1987), pp. ii-xvi.

⁷⁵ See Jessica Allen, 'Pringle's Pruning of Prince: The History of Mary Prince and the Question of Repetition', *Callaloo*, 35:2 (2012), pp. 509-519; Mathew Shum, 'The Prehistory of *The History of Mary Prince*: Thomas Pringle's "The Bechuana Boy"', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 64:3 (2009), pp. 291-322; Sue Thomas, 'Pringle v. Cadell and Wood v. Pringle: The Libel Cases over The History of Mary Prince', *The Journal of Commonwealth Studies*, 40:1 (2005); A. M. Rawerda, 'Naming, Agency, and "A Tissue of Falsehoods" in The History of Mary Prince', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 64:3 (2001), pp. 397-411; Carretta, 'Methodology in the Making and Reception of *Equiano*'; Carretta, *Equiano*, pp. 303-368.

This is not to say that these authors have not received significant scholarly attention. Indeed, another reason for shifting the focus away from Equiano and Prince relates to their virtual domination of the field. The title of a 2004 collection edited by Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee sums up the perspective of much modern scholarship: *Early Black British Writing: Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Others*.⁷⁶ This thesis is about the ‘Others’. Its methodology is to utilise newly-discovered biographical materials about lesser-known authors and their surrounding networks to provide original critical readings of the texts they produced as articulating a broad range of interests. The suggestion is not that there is nothing left to say about Equiano and Prince, but that a revaluation of their lesser-known contemporaries is both necessary and valuable.

BLACK WRITING IN BRITAIN, 1770-1830: TERMINOLOGY AND METHODOLOGY

Despite its brevity, the title of this thesis refers to two important methodological conundra: ‘black writing’ and ‘writing in Britain’. The first relates to the use of white amanuenses and editors in the production of texts nominally written by black authors, raising questions as to how far they can be considered ‘black writing’. These issues are discussed in detail below. The second relates to the ‘nationality’ of the writing itself, since none of the authors were born in Britain, and some (Gronniosaw, King, and Jea) only spent a relatively short proportion of their time in Great Britain. For the purposes of this thesis, black writing is considered ‘British’ if it was first published in mainland Britain and intended to be sold primarily to a British readership. For this

⁷⁶ Alan Richardson and Debbie Lee (eds.), *Early Black British Writing: Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, and Others* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004).

reason, Phillis Wheatley's work has not been discussed in detail.⁷⁷ This definition of the writing concerning this thesis as 'British', it should be stressed, does not extend to the authors themselves. As Gilroy has suggested, the very notion of applying any 'nationality' to an individual is problematic in the context of the eighteenth-century African diaspora, and this thesis attempts no such application.⁷⁸

The term 'black' is used in this work in relation to any African person or member of the African diaspora, including those of mixed or 'creole' heritage. This is less protean than the eighteenth-century use of 'black', which could be used variously to describe almost any non-white person including any South American, indigenous Australasian, or Asian person.⁷⁹ This thesis occasionally designates prejudice directed towards black people in Britain solely or primarily on the basis of their assumed ethnic or 'racial' characteristics as 'racist' either in quality or intent; resistance to such discrimination is accordingly nominated 'anti-racist'. Additionally, assumptions made about black people on the sole basis of their ethnicity are qualified by the adjective 'racialized'. While racism as a pseudoscience is commonly understood to have emerged towards the end of the period under discussion, prejudicial attitudes, *de facto* racial discrimination and hierarchical models of human classification as propounded by Voltaire, Buffon, David Hume, and Edward Long, for example, were already intellectual and political realities by 1770.⁸⁰ The definition of racism used in this thesis, therefore, is that developed by Francisco Bethencourt: 'prejudice

⁷⁷ The contexts surrounding her publication in the American colonies are explored in Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), pp. 45-147.

⁷⁸ Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 41-71; see also Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

⁷⁹ For an example of some of the methodological challenges posed by this tendency, see Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*, p. 22.

⁸⁰ See Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 252-271.

concerning ethnic descent coupled with discriminatory action'.⁸¹ This more flexible identification of racism encompasses the narrower if more familiar pseudoscientific definition, but also reflects the quotidian discrimination experienced by black people in Britain prior to the formalisation of theories of race.

'Slavery' is defined rather more narrowly. For the purposes of this thesis, this term refers to coerced unpaid labour in the Americas, usually undertaken by African peoples and/or their descendants.⁸² While this was by no means the only form of slavery in the world between 1770 and 1830, it is the one with which most directly concerns this study. Occasionally, eighteenth and nineteenth-century British people defined living under political or social oppression as 'slavery'. This thesis rejects the equivalency this was intended to imply; therefore any use of the term 'slavery' in this particular context is always rendered in quotation marks. 'Abolition' and 'abolitionism' refer to any efforts to end the transatlantic slave trade and/or chattel slavery in the Americas, depending on the context in which they are used. 'Antislavery' is a more fluid term and designates any cultural, social or rhetorical activity that was critical of slavery or the abuses inherent in it. Similarly, the adjective 'proslavery' encompasses all attempts to prolong or defend the system of slavery, whether on economic, strategic or ideological grounds.

Perhaps the most complicated specialist vocabulary used in this thesis relates to the evolving identities of evangelical Christian groups, especially the Methodist movements. The meaning of the word 'Methodist' changed in very significant ways

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 1.

⁸² James Walvin has defined slavery as a 'system of unfree labour in which human beings were claimed to be the absolute property of others, as distinct from, for example, systems of serfdom or indentureship, which theoretically involved claims to ownership of people's labour only, and not to ownership of the people themselves.' This thesis is primarily concerned with the iteration of slavery based in the Americas and supplied by the transatlantic slave trade. James Walvin, 'Slavery', in David Dabydeen, John Gilmore and Cecily Jones (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Black British History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 452.

during the period under discussion. The terms used in different parts of this thesis therefore reflect the changing nature of the movement itself. The term ‘Methodist’ was most commonly applied to any follower of John Wesley, though it was also sometimes used to designate Calvinist nonconformists. As the analysis of Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* in Chapter 1 depends on an understanding of the differences between Selina Hasting’s Calvinism (which propounded ‘an emphasis on the absolute sovereignty of God, the predestination of certain ‘elect’ people to salvation, the perseverance of the saints and an insistence on ecclesiastical discipline’) and John Wesley’s Arminianism (which focused ‘on the universality of the offer of salvation and the freedom of individuals to accept or reject it’), Wesley and his followers are there described as ‘Arminians’.⁸³ In Chapter 4, the use of the more generic term ‘Methodists’ in reference to Wesley’s successors reflects the fairly unified (if not entirely stable) nature of the movement in the years after its leaders death in 1791. By the 1800s and 1810s, however, a number of significant secessions had unsettled ‘mainstream’ British Methodism, while the Episcopal Methodist Church in America challenged its primacy. Therefore, in Chapter 5 adherents to the ‘established’ or ‘mainstream’ Methodist church are described by the movement’s new official name of ‘Wesleyan Methodists’.⁸⁴ The specific qualities of the denominational, hermeneutical and theological developments reflected by these changes in name are

⁸³ David Carter, ‘Calvinist Methodism’, in *DMBI* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=526> (Accessed 28/08/2012); David Carter, ‘Arminianism’, in *DMBI* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=68> (Accessed 14/05/2015).

⁸⁴ For a history of Methodism and its many divisions and unifications, see, for example, David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005). For a study of the impact of popular evangelicalism on the formal antislavery movements, see David Hempton, ‘Popular Evangelicalism and the Shaping of British Moral Sensibilities, 1770-1840’, in Donald Yerxa (ed.), *British Abolitionism and the Question of Moral Progress in History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 58-80.

complex and historically situated, and are therefore examined in depth in the relevant substantive chapters.

This study combines the reading methodologies traditionally associated with two different academic disciplines. The historicised interpretive analysis of sources favoured by new historicist literary criticism is informed by the extensive archival research traditionally associated with the disciplines of social and cultural history.⁸⁵ As with new historicist criticism, the ‘close reading’ most often reserved for imaginative writing is applied to other sources, especially those that purported to be unambiguous, such as newspaper reportage and state papers.⁸⁶ This study also takes from new historicist literary criticism a focus on intertextual, social and political influence on the production of culture and the negotiation of meaning. Like all studies on black writing, it shares with new historicism a ‘commitment to including groups conventionally excluded from literary studies, as well as to the dismantling of aesthetic hierarchies.’⁸⁷ Accordingly, documentary sources such as private correspondence are read as having been influenced by broad epistemological and cultural contexts – what Michel Foucault termed *épistèmes* – in much the same way

⁸⁵ New historicist literary criticism: ‘Relying heavily upon archival material and historical documents, new historicism can be seen as a form of textual inductivism – dealing directly with sources and particulars rather than pre-given totalities such as a “world-picture” or “ideology”.’ Claire Colbrook, *New Literary Histories: New Historicism and Contemporary Criticism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 24.

⁸⁶ For definitions and explorations of new historicist literary criticism, see, for example, Simon Malpas, ‘Historicism’, in Simon Malpas and Paul Wake (eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 55-65; Colbrook, *New Literary Histories*, pp. 1-30; H. Aram Veenser, ‘The New Historicism’, in H. Aram Veenser (ed.), *The New Historicism Reader* (London: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-32.

⁸⁷ Hunter Cazdow, Alison Conway and Bryce Traister, ‘New Historicism’, in Michael Groden, Martin Kreiswirth and Imre Szeman (eds.), *Contemporary Literary & Cultural Theory* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), p. 375.

as consciously mediated literary texts like published biographies, and are accorded similar levels of attention.⁸⁸

However, drawing from social and cultural history, greater emphasis is placed on the material processes of social change surrounding and enabling the production of each text, and indeed the impact of the sources on contemporaneous society and culture, than on the ‘literary’ qualities of the texts themselves.⁸⁹ This study is just as interested in the processes by which black writing was produced as it is in the content of the writing itself. Indeed, the very specific historical contexts surrounding the production of early black writing delimits and to some extent systematises the ‘textual inductivism’ of this study’s new historicist criticism. This approach enables a re-reading of these primary sources: one that is firmly situated in social and cultural historical contexts, but which also fully explores the nuances of perspective, prejudice and influence. It also helps to moderate the ‘anecdotalism’ that has been seen as a limitation to the new historicist approach.⁹⁰ Social influences in particular most concern this thesis, but generic, thematic and aesthetic contexts also form the basis of critical analysis where a connection to the author-network under discussion is manifested in the writing itself. For example, because Ignatius Sancho and some of his male correspondents consciously enacted a type of masculine sensibility popularised by the sentimental novel, their correspondence is read within that particular context.

⁸⁸ See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 191-195; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 19-50.

⁸⁹ For some discussions of what constitutes ‘social history’ and ‘cultural history’, see, for example, Peter Burke, ‘Strengths and Weaknesses of Cultural History’, *Cultural History*, 1:1 (2012), pp. 1-13; George Duby, ‘Ideologies in Social History’, in Jacques Le Goff and Pierre Nora (eds.), *Constructing the Past: Essays in Historical Methodology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 151-165; John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History* (London: Longman, 1984), pp. 78-92.

⁹⁰ For an overview of this criticism, see Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (London, University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 1-19.

This approach raises questions surrounding intentionality, especially when considering the mediated and in some cases explicitly collaborative nature of early black writing. Unlike earlier studies (some of which are discussed below), this thesis does not purport to disentangle the unambiguous, authentic intentions of black writers from the published texts bearing their names. While it does go some way to illuminating how the published sources came to occupy their final ideological and epistemological positions, this study does not pretend to reclaim or represent the original intentions of the authors themselves.

While it acknowledges and discusses the position of each text in the broader antislavery movements of the time, the primary focus of this thesis is on how black authors interacted with a range of political, social and doctrinal issues beyond the formal abolition movement, and how these interactions influenced the contents of their published writing. It does not seek to downplay the agency or achievements of black authors, but rather to elucidate the particular nuances of how they came to present their thoughts and experiences to the wider reading public. In terms of its research methodology, this thesis draws upon work first undertaken by Edwards and later refined by Carretta, in that it uses verifiable data presented in the narratives as a starting point for wide-ranging archival research.⁹¹ It develops this methodology by tracing the connections between individuals known to authors and those known to their associates, friends, employers, patrons and families.

A key task of this thesis, then, is to map the web-like structures of social relationships that surrounded each author. Such networks are commonly visualised as consisting of ‘nodes’ and ‘vertices’. In depictions of interpersonal networks, the

⁹¹ Edwards, ‘Three West Indian Writers of the 1780s’; Vincent Carretta, ‘Three West Indian Writers of the 1780s Revisited and Revised’, *Research in African Literatures*, 29:4 (1998), pp. 73-87.

‘nodes’ usually represent actors (people, organisations, private companies etc.), and the ‘vertices’ linking them represent various types of relationship (kinship, business ties, epistolary exchanges etc.) In their application of network visualisations, historians have traditionally focussed on the individual attributes of the actors or nodes, such as personal wealth or area of residence, as explanations for their respective levels of influence.⁹² However, social change, Latour suggests, is driven not by the individual actors themselves (even when working towards a common goal), but rather by the relationships between them. Any actor’s social influence is thus not necessarily derived from its individual attributes, but by the nature and number of the relationships linking it to other actors within a given network.⁹³ A node at the centre of a network, with many vertices linking it to other nodes, is therefore more likely to exercise influence over it than one at the periphery. However, the number of relationships alone is not sufficient to explain social influence. As Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust have demonstrated, the nature and strength of the bonds themselves is also a significant factor in determining influence.⁹⁴

In an eighteenth-century context, the study of networks has most often been applied to mercantile systems of exchange, distribution and information sharing.⁹⁵ For example, in her application of network theory to the development of eighteenth-century Liverpool business networks, Sheryllne Haggerty stresses the importance of

⁹² One of the best known examples of this type of network research is J. F. Padgett and C. K. Ansell, ‘Robust Action and the Rise of the Medici, 1400-1434’, *American Journal of Sociology*, 98 (1993) pp. 1259-1319. For an overview of this trend, see Bonnie H. Erickson, ‘Social Networks and History: A Review Essay’, *Historical Methods*, 30:3 (1997), pp. 149-157.

⁹³ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 1-18.

⁹⁴ Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 148-150.

⁹⁵ See, for example, Tijn Vanneste, *Global Trade and Commercial Networks: Eighteenth-Century Diamond Merchants* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2011); Tilottama Mukherjee, *Political Culture and Economy in Eighteenth Century Bengal: Networks of Exchange, Consumption and Communication* (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan, 2013).

influential relations as ‘the critical and defining feature of a network.’ Haggerty emphasises that ‘we cannot [...] simply say because a group of people know each other that they belong to a network. There has to be something that binds them together, that makes them instrumental.’⁹⁶ Similarly, the networks of influence concerning this thesis are only defined as such when they were instrumental in the production and distribution of early black writing. While the term ‘networks’ is used comparatively freely in studies of British abolitionism, the work of black authors in late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain has generally been read without an acknowledgement of the specific social relations driving its publication.⁹⁷ This thesis therefore uses some of the qualitative tools of network theory to understand early black writing as emerging not solely from a single unaffected actor, but from the influential relationships between several.

Sometimes, the relationships that influenced the contents of the published texts did not even involve the author directly. Chapter 4, for example, demonstrates that the affiliation between leading Methodists Thomas Coke and George Whitfield affected how Boston King’s *Memoirs* were edited and distributed, despite the fact that Whitfield and King never met. It should be noted, however, that these connections were not always social. The people affecting (and sometimes effecting) the composition and distribution of early black autobiography were bound together by a variety of different types of tie. In the first, fourth and fifth chapters of this study, the networks under discussion were confessional or denominational in character. In the

⁹⁶ Sheryllyne Haggerty, ‘Merely for Money’? *Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750-1815* (Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 163; see also John Haggerty and Sheryllyne Haggerty, ‘Visual Analytics of an Eighteenth-Century Business Network’, *Enterprise and Society*, 11:1 (2010), pp. 1-25.

⁹⁷ For abolitionist networks, see Huw David, ‘Transnational Advocacy in the Eighteenth Century: Transatlantic Activism and the Anti-Slavery Movement’, *Global Networks*, 7:3 (2007), pp. 367-382. The exception to this trend relates to the literature surrounding the role of the amanuensis in the production of African-American slave narratives, discussed below.

second, social networks were facilitated by a shared interest in the articulation of culture sometimes called ‘the cult of sensibility’.⁹⁸ In the third and sixth chapters, the networks were ostensibly political, though only a tiny minority of the peripheral ‘nodes’ in each network were directly involved in parliamentary politics. Of course, human relationships are complicated and resist static definition, and so a black author might have a patron who was also a friend, or know a fellow Unitarian who also attended the same radical political meetings. It is worth bearing in mind also, that relationships do not need to be positive or cordial to facilitate influence.

This methodology is particularly instructive when studying early black authors. Like all authors, they adjusted their writing according to the needs of patrons, publishers, editors and their likely readership. However, unlike most authors, the majority of the black writers under discussion in this thesis (Gronniosaw, Cugoano, King, Jea and Wedderburn) had limited literacy in English. This necessitated the use of an amanuensis, an editor, or both, raising questions of authority and authorial agency. The role of these figures in the composition of black writing has been discussed at length most notably by John Blassingame and William Andrews, who saw editorial interventions as unwelcome obfuscations of the ‘true meaning’ lying encoded within a compromised text. Blassingame, for example, suggested that because ‘slave narratives were frequently dictated to and written by whites, any study of such sources must begin with an assessment of the editors.’⁹⁹ Andrews went further still, insisting that if one is to ‘open such a narrative to discussion, one must recognise, in order to discount, the white influence informing

⁹⁸ For a general study of the cult of sensibility, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

⁹⁹ John Blassingame, ‘Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems’, in David and Gates (eds.), *The Slave’s Narrative*, p. 79.

and enforcing the putative meaning and purpose of that narrative.¹⁰⁰ Clearly, an understanding of the relationships between nominal author and their amanuensis/editor is essential to the process of historicising and understanding them. This thesis therefore consciously moves to uncover a number of these relationships, and considers how they may have influenced the contents of the primary texts. This prompts new reading of early black writing, situated firmly within the historical moments and contexts in which it was originally produced.

However, the notion of a representative, authentic black voice waiting to be excavated from these sources, as propounded by Andrews and Blassingame, takes for granted a static and rather monolithic ‘black perspective’, especially with regards to the issue of slavery.¹⁰¹ Perversely, these readings tend to limit both the usefulness of the texts and the agency of the author. For example, they discount the very notion of proslavery black writing from the outset. Apparently proslavery texts nominally written by black authors are read as having been hopelessly compromised by self-interested white editors who overwrote the underlying antislavery ‘black perspective’. Andrews makes this point quite explicitly about Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* when he advises readers to ‘pay special regard to the seams or cuts in these enclosed narratives when facts are revealed – made tellable – in a way subversive to the text’.¹⁰² But, as described in Chapter 1, a close examination of the networks surrounding both Gronniosaw and the production of his text indicate that he had every reason to produce an autobiographical account which appeared to support Calvinist ideas of ‘benevolent’ enslavement. Indeed, he would have actively endangered himself and

¹⁰⁰ Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, p. 35.

¹⁰¹ Laura Browder has acknowledged that, for nineteenth-century antebellum black autobiography, ‘authenticity depended on a strict adherence to a set of generic conventions.’ Laura Browder, *Slippery Characters: Ethnic Impersonators and American Identities* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), pp. 20-21.

¹⁰² Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story*, p. 36.

his family by doing otherwise, since their survival depended upon financial assistance from a slave-owning Calvinist patron.

Clearly, the networks of influence with which this thesis is concerned were not always benign, and the power dynamics between author, editor, amanuensis and patron were not often stacked in favour of the author. This thesis does not purport to recover an uncontaminated black perspective from archival sources or close interpretive reading. Rather, it is concerned with questions regarding the precise nature of the influence of outside bodies – not just on the texts, but on the authors themselves. These questions become more urgent when considering that some of these texts (Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, Sancho's *Letters*, and possibly Jea's *Life*) were published with the express purpose of raising money to alleviate the poverty of the author's family. Poverty motivated authors to pursue commercial success, perhaps at the expense of furthering ideological agendas they might believe to be unpopular among a paying readership. Contemporaneous readers would have been more sensitive to authors' pragmatic motivations in shaping texts than modern ones. As Lyn Innes perceptively notes, 'the age did not demand or expect an essential self to be revealed, nor did it use the criteria of authenticity and sincerity, and it is as post-Romantic critics that we judge by such criteria.'¹⁰³ This study therefore accepts and celebrates that early black writing never sought to reveal an 'essential self', nor a definitive expression of individual political, religious or intellectual genius. It understands the production of these texts as a consisting of pragmatic, sometimes collaborative processes with identifiable goals.

¹⁰³ Lyn Innes, 'Eighteenth-Century Men of Letters: Ignatius Sancho and Sake Dean Mahomed', in Susheila Nasta (ed.), *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (Cambridge, D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 24.

Each of the six substantive chapters that follow focuses on one individual author and the network which most directly influenced their writing. The first chapter examines the influence of prominent proslavery Calvinists (and the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion in particular) on the composition of Ukawsaw Gronniosaw's *Narrative*. The second explores how literary sensibility impacted on Ignatius Sancho's *Letters*, both in their composition and posthumous collation and edition. The third looks at the input of black radical networks on Ottobah Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* with particular reference to their role in the Sierra Leone resettlement projects of 1786/7. The fourth examines how Boston King's *Memoirs* were composed and edited in the context of his time at the Methodist School in Kingswood, Bristol, while financially and socially dependent on the evangelist Thomas Coke and his network. The fifth is concerned with regional connexional networks of Methodism, exploring how local attitudes to slavery and abolition influenced John Jea's *Life and Hymns*. The last substantive chapter of the thesis rereads the work of Robert Wedderburn in the context of the radical networks in which he operated throughout his career from the 1800s to the 1830s. Finally, a conclusion identifies key themes emerging from the study and identifies areas for future research.

The aim of this thesis is to centralise black authors in a study of British social history which moves beyond their involvement in antislavery activism. It seeks to broaden and deepen our understanding of early black writing by using a wide range of manuscript materials to inform original close readings and generate new critical perspectives. Networks of association and influence, often with only a tangential connection to slavery and/or abolition, were central to the production and dissemination of these works, and also profoundly affected their contents. This thesis

therefore shifts the emphasis towards some of the other aspects of British life upon which early black writers had an impact. Ultimately, while acknowledging the significant contributions of these individuals to the debates over abolition, it demonstrates that black writing published in Britain between 1770 and 1830 was profoundly influenced by more than slavery alone.

Chapter 1

Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Selina Hastings, and British Calvinism

INTRODUCTION

A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw begins with a religious conflict. Around 1727, in Borno, now part of Nigeria, the young prince Gronniosaw disclosed to his parents that ‘I was, at times, very unhappy in myself, it being strongly impressed on my mind that there was some GREAT MAN of power which resided above the sun, moon and stars, the objects of our worship’.¹ The implication in the *Narrative* was that Borno culture did not recognise Abrahamic religions, though as Jennifer Harris has pointed out, the area was predominately Muslim.² Supposedly, Gronniosaw’s mother ‘was apprehensive that my senses were impaired, or that I was foolish’ because of his insistence on believing in a single God.³ Like so many paragons from the canon of the Christian faith, he was persecuted for his beliefs; his siblings ‘disliked’ him and ‘supposed that I was either foolish, or insane’. His father ‘was exceedingly angry’, saying that ‘he would punish me severely if ever I was so troublesome again’.⁴

All of this led the young prince into such a state of consternation that when some traders from the Gold Coast arrived in Borno and offered to take him away with them, he accepted the offer immediately. ‘I was the more willing’, Gronniosaw stated in the *Narrative*, ‘as my brothers and sisters despised me, and looked upon me with

¹ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, [1772]), p. 1.

² Jennifer Harris, ‘Seeing the Light: Re-Reading James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’, *English Language Notes* 42:4 (2004), pp. 43-57.

³ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 2, 4.

contempt on account of my unhappy disposition; and even my servants slighted me, and disregarded all I said to them'.⁵ Gronniosaw felt that in going to the Gold Coast he was answering a spiritual call: 'I seemed sensible of a secret impulse upon my mind which I could not resist that seemed to tell me I must go'.⁶ His instinctive adherence to Christianity, the *Narrative* implied, incentivised his movement away from his family in the African interior and towards the Gold Coast, and ultimately to his enslavement and transportation to Barbados and then to New York. Importantly, Gronniosaw's prescient knowledge of a God foreshadowed his eventual conversion to Calvinism – a Christian denomination whose leadership were largely proslavery at the time of his autobiography's publication.⁷

After about 40 years working as a house-slave in influential Dutch Reformed households in New York, he gained his freedom in his purchaser's will and enlisted as a sailor.⁸ He first came to Britain in the 1760s, when he met his wife, a weaver named Betty. After a brief period working as a butler in Amsterdam for another Dutch Reformed family, Gronniosaw returned to London to marry Betty and raise a family. The Spitalfields riots of 1769 meant that Betty was no longer able to work as a weaver in London, and the family were forced to move around the country in search of work. After periods in Colchester, Norwich and Kidderminster, the family moved

⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See, for example, Boyd Schlenker, *Queen of the Methodists: The Countess of Huntingdon and the Eighteenth-Century Crisis of Faith and Society* (Bishop Auckland: Durham Academic Press, 1997), pp. 83-95; Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 204-214.

⁸ For the influential nature of the families for whom Gronniosaw worked, see below, and C. S. Williams, *Cornelius Van Horne and his Descendants* (New York: C. S. Williams, 1912), pp. 7-12; Joel Beeke and Cornelis Pronk, 'Biographical Introduction', in Theodorus Frelinghuysen, *Forerunner of the Great Awakening: The Sermons of Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen*, ed. and trans. Joel Beeke (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans, 2000), pp. vii-xxxviii.

once more to Chester, where Gronniosaw died on 5 October 1775.⁹ Almost all of the events and decisions in his life had been influenced by Calvinism or individual Calvinists.

Studies into the relationship between dissenting Christian groups and the transatlantic slave trade during this period have tended to focus on the abolitionist efforts of the Quakers and Arminian Methodists, while histories of Calvinist Methodism have downplayed the scale to which key members of the organisation were involved in the transatlantic slave trade.¹⁰ Where these implications are acknowledged – such as in Boyd Schlenker's biography of Selina Hastings, the slave-owning Countess of Huntingdon, Gronniosaw's patron and central figure in mid-century Calvinism – historians have been quick to point out that Calvinist theology itself 'hindered' a move against slavery, since it required no corporeal freedom to achieve salvation. For example, Schlenker is keen to suggest that 'Lady Huntingdon cannot be singled out for special censure' on account of her 'deliberate extension of slavery'.¹¹ While such equivocations take into account the important effects of theology on slave-ownership, they also downplay the effects of slavery on the administration of Calvinist evangelism.

⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, pp. 10-39; *London Evening Post*, 10 October 1775, p. 1.

¹⁰ Quaker abolitionism is covered in Brycchan Carey, *From Peace to Freedom: Quaker Rhetoric and the Birth of American Antislavery, 1657-1761* (London: Yale University Press, 2012); Maurice Jackson, *Let This Voice be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008); Judith Jennings, *The Business of Abolishing the British Slave Trade 1783-1807* (London: Frank Cass, 1997). The most comprehensive analysis of the role of Methodism and Quakerism in mobilising popular support for the abolition of the slave trade in Britain between 1750 and 1780 is Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Williamsburg, VA: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), esp. pp. 333-450. Alan Harding's history of the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion demonstrates the tendency to minimise the denomination's involvement in slavery. The word 'slave' appears twice in the text – once in relation to nineteenth-century antislavery work, and once in a footnote which states that 'There is no evidence that LH had any serious doubts about the morality of keeping slaves'. Alan Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 14, 209 n. 219.

¹¹ Schlenker, *Queen of the Methodists*, p. 91.

This hesitance to acknowledge Calvinist support for slavery may explain the lack of historical or literary studies of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* in a Calvinist historical context. Traditionally, literary studies of the text have focused on Gronniosaw's construction of black identity. The best-known example of this tendency, from Henry Gates' *The Signifying Monkey*, examines the confluence of race and Christianity in a passage in which Gronniosaw, unable to read a Bible or hymn-book, imagined that it refused to 'talk' to him as he assumed it had to his white master.¹² Helena Woodard's discussion of the 'Theological Chain' in relation to the works of Gronniosaw and Cugoano raises similar questions about the relationship between the race, religion and identity in the text, concluding that 'Gronniosaw's inability to reconcile messages of faith with the deceitful practises of the messengers who preached it reveals to readers the very religious hypocrisy that seems to elude him'.¹³ Both Gates and Woodard's analyses stop short of acknowledging the specific social and political contexts surrounding Calvinism as a religious sect, opting instead to understand Gronniosaw as interacting with a monolithic and theologically undifferentiated 'Christianity' which acted as both synecdoche and symptom of white hegemony as a whole.¹⁴ Jennifer Harris, meanwhile, has considered the *Narrative* through the lens of Gronniosaw's likely childhood interaction with Islam, considering it as a text 'which manipulates Western suppositions and challenges Western superiority', though she understates the extent to which his authorial agency was compromised by his financial circumstances and poor literacy in English.¹⁵ Again,

¹² Henry Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 127-170.

¹³ Helena Woodard, *African-British Writings in the Eighteenth Century: The Politics of Race and Reason* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1999), p. 39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-42.

¹⁵ Harris, 'Seeing the Light', pp. 43-57.

this approach tends to homogenise many complex and often competing iterations of Christian supremacy into a singular notion of ‘Western superiority’. In general, academics have struggled to reconcile Gronniosaw’s status as a former slave with his embracing of quite a pronouncedly proslavery religious sect, drawing the focus of the secondary literature on this text away from its nominal purpose and initial reception as a Calvinist devotional.

The first part of this chapter examines how British Calvinists influenced the *Narrative*’s interactions with the issues of slavery and its moral situation, and how Gronniosaw’s authority over his own life story was compromised by a social network of individuals with interests in both the expansion of Calvinism and the continuation of the slave trade. The *Narrative* was used to posit a doctrinal agenda in response to the increasing popularity of John Wesley’s rival sect, the Arminian Methodists, whose antislavery and egalitarian hermeneutics were gaining popularity.¹⁶ Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* formed part of a pamphlet war in which the critical differences between Arminian and Calvinist Methodism, including their respective stances on the slave trade, were publically debated. It was produced in support of a view of slavery as a route to conversion for Africans. A number of leading Calvinists defended slavery on these grounds, but the key figures in the production of the *Narrative* stand out as particularly recalcitrant proslavery advocates. Taking into account Gronniosaw’s lack of literacy in English and his financial dependence on proslavery Calvinists such as George Whitefield, Selina Hastings and Benjamin Fawcett, this chapter will examine the *Narrative* itself for signs of edition and addition, with particular focus on the use of anti-Arminian doctrine to mitigate the slave-owning practises of the individuals who brought the text to the press.

¹⁶ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 11-31.

The second part of the chapter is concerned with the specific social and inter-denominational contexts which influenced how the *Narrative* was read once it had been dictated, written down, edited, printed and sold. It also charts the progression of the *Narrative* in terms of its uses and intended readership, from its first publication in 1772 to the end of the eighteenth century. Until 1786, Gronniosaw's text was printed and distributed exclusively among Calvinist networks. Thereafter, substantive changes to the content of the text reflected a broader anthropological interest in ethnic and cultural differences between African and European peoples, stimulated in part by the wave of black immigration following the American Revolution discussed in Chapter 3. During the hiatus of the abolition debates after the onset of the war with revolutionary France in 1793, it slipped into relative obscurity, marketed, like Boston King's 'Memoirs', exclusively within existing evangelical networks. These shifts in ideological focus and marketing strategy were reflected in numerous changes in the text's title as well as editions to the composition and copy of the *Narrative* itself. Taking this evidence alongside an analysis of the circumstances surrounding the *Narrative*'s composition, this chapter argues that the text must be read in the light of the ways in which it has been 'appropriated' by editors, amanuenses and other interested parties to represent the ideological interests of the British Calvinist denomination.

UKAWSAW GRONNIO SAW AND BRITISH CALVINISM

Gronniosaw's association with Calvinism and its prominent ministers, along with his introduction to several leading proslavery advocates, began long before his own emancipation from slavery. His 'master', Theodorus Frelinghuysen, an influential Dutch Reformed minister in New York, was central to the first 'Great Awakening' of

evangelical Christianity there during the 1740s and 1750s, and a supporter of slavery. Up to his death around 1757, Frelinghuysen was ‘a particular friend’ to the British Calvinist evangelical George Whitefield.¹⁷ Whitefield visited Frelinghuysen numerous times while Gronniosaw was serving as a house-slave, during both his tours of the East Coast in 1739-40 and 1744-48.¹⁸ Since Gronniosaw was not treated excessively harshly during his bondage under Frelinghuysen, Whitefield’s Calvinism did not demand that his enslavement should be terminated. On the contrary, his slavery could be viewed as a kindness, since Frelinghuysen had been at pains to ensure the boy’s conversion to a specifically Calvinistic form of Christianity.¹⁹ In fact, Frelinghuysen’s attitude towards slavery was not dissimilar to Whitefield’s own.

In 1740, Whitefield had established an orphanage at Bethesda, Georgia. To fund it, he took up shares in the neighbouring Providence Plantation, staffed by over one hundred slaves.²⁰ Whitefield lent his considerable celebrity to the proslavery cause in Georgia while its legality was being debated during the 1740s, and began purchasing slaves for his Bethesda orphanage as soon as the trustees of Georgia definitively approved slavery in 1750.²¹ ‘It is plain to a demonstration, that hot countries cannot be cultivated without negroes’, he wrote in 1751, ‘What a flourishing country might *Georgia* have been, had the use of them been permitted

¹⁷ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 20.

¹⁸ Boyd Schlenker, ‘Whitefield, George (1714–1770)’, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29281> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

¹⁹ See, for example, ‘He [Frelinghuysen] took me home with him, and made me kneel down, and put my two hands together, and pray’d for me, and every night he did the same’. Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 12.

²⁰ See George Whitefield, *An Account of the Money Received and Disbursed for the Orphan-House in Georgia* (London: W. Strahan, 1741), p. 5.

²¹ For a detailed examination of Georgian slavery legislation during the 1740s, see Betty Wood, *Slavery in Colonial Georgia, 1730-1775* (Athens, GA: Georgia University Press, 1984) pp. 74-88.

years ago?’²² He expressed his stance on the enslavement of Africans in terms of a biblical precedent: ‘As for the lawfulness of keeping slaves, I have no doubt, since I hear that some that were bought with *Abraham’s* money, and some that were born in his house’.²³ While his keenness to incorporate slavery into his Calvinist fundraising portfolio marked him out as, to borrow Schlenker’s phrase, ‘perhaps the most energetic, and conspicuous, evangelical defender and practitioner of slavery’, Whitefield did not assume any inequality between the spiritual potential of black and white people, though he did consider non-Christian Africans to be spiritually ‘wretched’.²⁴ ‘Blacks are just as much, and no more, conceived and born in sin, as white men are’, he wrote in 1740, adding that ‘[b]oth, if born and bred up here, I am persuaded, are naturally capable of the same improvement’.²⁵ Whitefield would have been pleased with the pains Frelinghuysen had taken to ensure Gronniosaw’s conversion, having preached with mixed success to a number of black slave congregations during his visits to America.²⁶

Indeed, Whitefield’s interest in the spiritual condition of slaves was one of his top priorities, to the extent that ‘this consideration, as to us, swallows up all temporal inconveniencies whatsoever’.²⁷ His defence of American slavery was predicated on the common ‘benevolist’ viewpoint favoured by religious slave-owners keen to reconcile their involvement in slavery with their Christian faith. This belief maintained that corporeal bondage was potentially beneficial to slaves, since it often

²² George Whitefield, *Works of George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771-1772), v. 2 p. 404.

²³ Whitefield, *Works*, v. 2, p. 404.

²⁴ Schlenker, ‘Whitefield, George (1714–1770)’.

²⁵ George Whitefield, *A Collection of Papers, Lately Printed in the Daily Advertiser* (London: J. Oswald et. al., 1740), p. 9.

²⁶ Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, pp. 134-168.

²⁷ Whitefield, *Works*, v. 2, p. 405.

led to their conversion.²⁸ Whitefield's apologism for slavery went a step further, prioritising the conversion of African slaves to Christianity not only over their freedom, but over every aspect of their physical well-being. While censuring the harsh treatment of slaves, Whitefield conceded that degradation, subjection and even bodily mutilation were potentially conducive to the slaves' ultimate salvation. On 23 January 1739, for example, he wrote an open letter addressed 'to the inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina', later reprinted in *The Daily Advertiser* in London, and once again in Philadelphia in 1740 as a standalone volume.²⁹ After chiding slave-owners for torturing their slaves with knives and pitch-forks, Whitefield mitigated such behaviour on the basis that it engendered dependence on God for comfort, and thus necessitated spiritual conversion:

Your present and past bad usage of them, however ill-designed, may thus far do them good, as to break their wills, increase the sense of their natural misery, and consequently better dispose their minds to accept the redemption wrought out for them, by the death and obedience of Jesus Christ.³⁰

Despite this seemingly contradictory stance on the treatment of slaves, it is clear that Whitefield maintained an interest in what he perceived as the spiritual wellbeing of both free and unfree black people in America well into the 1740s, and by the time Gronniosaw left America around 1762, he 'had heard him [Whitefield] preach often

²⁸ For a more detailed examination of Whitefield's views on slavery, see Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, pp. 205-215.

²⁹ George Whitefield, *Three Letters from the Reverend Mr. G. Whitefield* (Philadelphia: B. Franklyn, 1740); Whitefield, *A Collection of Papers*, pp. 5-11.

³⁰ Whitefield, *A Collection of Papers*, p. 9.

at New York'.³¹ This, along with his presence at Whitefield's meetings with Frelinghuysen, formed the basis of a relationship characterised by 'very friendly' but infrequent encounters between the two men until Whitefield's death in 1770.³² According to his will, Whitefield's property at Bethesda, and around fifty slaves there, passed into the hands of his friend and fellow Calvinist, and Gronniosaw's future patron, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, who was by that time already a leading figure in British Calvinism.

When he came to relate the *Narrative* in 1771 or 1772, Gronniosaw was forthcoming about his dependence on George Whitefield and other Calvinist ministers when he first arrived in London. Having been conned out of almost all of his money by an unscrupulous publican in Portsmouth, he appeared at Whitefield's Tabernacle in Moorfields, stating that the minister was 'the only living soul I knew in England'.³³ It was Whitefield, according to the *Narrative*, who 'directed me to a proper place to board and lodge in Petticoat-Lane, till he could think of some way to settle me in, and paid for my lodging, and all my expences [sic]'.³⁴ Through Whitefield, Gronniosaw met a number of prominent dissenting ministers in London, including the Baptist Dr. Andrew Gifford, whose meetings Gronniosaw attended regularly.³⁵

It is important to note here that, even though relatively minor hermeneutical disagreements became highly divisive among senior dissenting ministers during the 1760s, common parishioners such as Gronniosaw rarely became involved in interdenominational politics. Therefore Gronniosaw's attendance at a Baptist meeting

³¹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 23.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

house, or indeed his subsequent baptism by Gifford, does not necessarily imply a partisan allegiance to a Baptist ministry at the expense of Calvinism or indeed any other form of Christianity. Moreover, Baptist theology was by the 1750s so diverse that it encompassed ministers with Calvinist sympathies as well as those who identified more with Wesley's Arminianism.³⁶ An examination of Gifford's published works reveals him to fall into the former category; in 1771 he even edited a collection of Whitefield's *Eighteen Sermons*.³⁷ As Edwin Cannan and Roger Hayden suggest, his 'unusual combination of a Calvinist theology with evangelical passion', marked him out as a preacher whose discourse was certainly influenced by his friend Whitefield's 'flaming evangelicalism'.³⁸ The sermons Gronniosaw heard at Gifford's meetings in London would have been distinctly Calvinist in character.

It was through Whitefield's influence also that Gronniosaw met his wife, Betty, who worked as a weaver in the house procured for his lodgings, on Petticoat Lane and was 'a member of Mr. Allen's [Calvinist] meeting'.³⁹ His 'strict' style of preaching does not appear to have been to Gronniosaw's tastes, since he and Betty 'often went together to hear Dr. Gifford', despite Allen's meeting-house being situated on their home street.⁴⁰ Their decision to favour Gifford's Baptist meeting

³⁶ It would be reductionist to try to establish any single static doctrinal 'character' of the Baptist movement, since the term could be applied to any individual who believed in the creed of divine purification through immersion. Therefore 'Baptists' in some form were to be found in congregations of almost all formal denominations in Britain and America. In other words, Baptism and Calvinism were by no means mutually exclusive. For an introduction to this vast area of scholarship, see William Brackney, *A Genetic History of Baptist Thought* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004).

³⁷ For an example of Gifford's millenarianism, antinomianism and specifically an exploration of the concept of divine pre-ordination, all of which are core Calvinist creeds, see Andrew Gifford, *A Sermon in Commemoration of the Great Storm, Commonly Called the High Wind, in the Year 1703* (London: A. Ward, 1733). George Whitefield, *Eighteen Sermons* (London: J. Gurney, 1771).

³⁸ Edwin Cannan, 'Gifford, Andrew (1700–1784)', rev. Roger Hayden, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10657> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

³⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1996) p. 57 n. 95. A sample of Allen's style can be found in John Allen, *The Nature and Danger of Despising Repeated Reproofs*

over Allen's could also have been related to the popular misconception that baptism offered protection from re-enslavement.⁴¹

While personal incompatibility or uncertainty as to his personal security in London may account for Allen's relatively small presence in Gronniosaw's life, other factors may help to explain his minor status in the *Narrative*. After the period of his acquaintance with Gronniosaw drew to a close, John Allen became a staunch supporter of American Independence, publishing extensively on the subject under the pseudonyms 'Junius Junior' and 'British Bostonian' between 1767 and 1776.⁴² Either his acquaintance with Gronniosaw in London, his experiences of slave plantations following his relocation to America in 1770, or a combination of both, inspired Allen to write *The Watchman's Alarm* in 1774. In it, he pointed out the inconsistency of the colonists' demands for liberty while they insisted on trading in enslaved Africans. In particular, Allen rejected precisely the benevolist justification for slavery, predicated on the conversion of the African slaves, which Whitefield so energetically propounded. '[A]ny among you, professing Christianity,' he harangued slave-owning Americans, 'at the same time are guilty of so glaring a trespass on the laws of society and humanity, [and] may inconsistently gloss over [black slaves'] detestable usage with the idle pretence of christianizing them'.⁴³ The incompatibility of Allen's views on slavery with those of Whitefield and Gronniosaw's patron, Selina Hastings, may account for the scant mention of Allen's name in the *Narrative*. Allen's antislavery credentials, particularly his scoffing at the 'pretence' of converting African slaves to

(London: J. Noon & R. Hett, 1750); John Allen, *The Destruction of Sodom Improved, as a Warning to Great Britain* (London: A. Millar, 1756). Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 27.

⁴¹ See Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 98.

⁴² See, for example, John Allen, *The American Alarm, or The Bostonian Plea, for the Rights, and Liberties, of the People* (Boston: D. Kneeland, 1773).

⁴³ John Allen, *The Watchman's Alarm to Lord N---h* (Salem, MA: E. Russell, 1774), pp. 25-26.

Christianity, would have alienated him from the two individuals key to bringing Gronniosaw's *Narrative* to press, both of whom attempted to use conversion to justify increasing their ownership of slaves at Bethesda. By the time the biography was published in 1772, Allen's well-known criticisms of George III and the North administration, along with allegations of banknote forgery in 1768, had hardly made his name an asset to a respectable 'old Whig' aristocrat like Hastings.⁴⁴

In any case, Gronniosaw's *Narrative* did not share with *The Watchman's Alarm* the sentiment that Christianising slaves was a mere 'pretence'. Rather, it explicitly propounded 'predestination', a tenet of Calvinist hermeneutics which had long been used to support Calvinist proslavery discourse. The question of predestination (that is, the pre-ordination of a spiritual 'elect' to divine grace) also formed a major bone of contention between the Countess of Huntingdon's connexion and their main rivals outside of the established Church, the Arminians. Predestination held that divine grace, for some, was irresistible, thereby circumscribing the question of free will, and by extension, bodily enslavement. In other words, a person's corporeal freedom in life had no bearing on their ability to enter God's kingdom upon death.⁴⁵ Applied to the question of American slavery, this doctrine demanded precisely the type of missionary work being carried out by Whitefield and later Hastings among the slaves at Bethesda, without requiring their emancipation.

The view expressed in the *Narrative* attempted to balance the doctrine of predestination with the author's suffering under chattel slavery.

⁴⁴ Jim Benedict, 'Allen, John (d. 1783x8)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/380> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

⁴⁵ David Carter, 'Calvinist Methodism', in *DMBI* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=526> (Accessed 28/08/2012).

Though the Grandson of a King, I have wanted bread, and should have been glad of the hardest crust I ever saw. I who, at home, was surrounded by slaves, so that no indifferent person might approach me, and clothed with gold, have been inhumanly threatened with death; and frequently wanted clothing to defend me from the inclemency of the weather; yet I never murmured, nor was I discontented. – I am willing, and even desirous to be counted as nothing, a stranger in the world, and a pilgrim here, for “I know that my REDEEMER liveth,” and I’m thankful for every trial and trouble that I’ve met with, as I am not without hope that they have all been sanctified to me.⁴⁶

This passage began with what appeared to be an appeal to tragic pathos by highlighting the depth of Gronniosaw’s fall in social status; that is, the irony of his once having been waited upon by slaves before becoming one himself. However, to realise this appeal to sentiment, the corporeal and emotional suffering inherent in the condition of slavery had to be highlighted. To do so would have been severely at odds with the crucial tenet of predestination, and so a description of American slavery was supplanted by a nonspecific threat of death and an opaque metaphor for suffering in general (the inclement weather). The evasion of Gronniosaw’s own suffering under slavery in this passage resulted in a transplant of responsibility from the individuals involved in the buying of slaves such as Hastings to the will of God. Simultaneously, this metaphor legitimised enslavement by likening it to something as inevitable and blameless as the vagaries of the weather. Moreover, Gronniosaw was represented as being actively grateful for his own political and social nullification through

⁴⁶ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 28.

enslavement: he was ‘desirous to be counted as nothing, a stranger in the world’, since ‘every trial and trouble’, just like his own pre-ordination to divine grace, were all ‘sanctified’ in advance.

The biblical quotations in the *Narrative* were also carefully selected to reinforce a Calvinist view on predestination. For example, when Gronniosaw found comfort in prayer, the sentiment was supplemented by a quote from Hebrews, chapter 10:

The Lord was pleas’d to comfort me by the application of many gracious promises at times when I was ready to sink under my trouble. “*Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.* Hebrews x. ver. 14. *For by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*”⁴⁷

In this passage, it was unclear as to whose voice was quoting the scripture, though the quote was embedded into the text in such a way that it seemed to be Gronniosaw speaking directly to the reader. The choice of quotation was particularly important, as it was actually a composite of two separate verses from separate chapters of Hebrews. The last part, from Hebrews 10:14, is cited in the text, unlike many of the other biblical quotations that litter the *Narrative*. This citation emphasised the authority of the succeeding copy as unanswerable, acting as a kind of semiotic ‘nod’ to the informed Calvinist reader. Read in conjunction with the un-cited quotation from Hebrews 7:25 immediately preceding it, the passage seems to specifically refute the Arminian doctrine of perfection through the imitation of Christ as redundant, since

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 19.

‘by one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified’ already.

Moreover, little interpretation is needed to understand that ‘He is able also to save them to the uttermost who come unto God’ in this context referred to the conversion of slaves as practised by Whitefield, Frelinghuysen and Hastings. These two passages, when placed together as though they represented a single lesson from a Biblical source, underscored the broad theological position of the *Narrative* and its patrons.

While the circumstances related to the production of the *Narrative* cast serious doubts over Gronniosaw’s authority over the published text, many of the individuals upon whom he relied for money and sustenance espoused precisely this Calvinistic view of slavery. As such he was likely to have been influenced towards such an outlook. This was not limited to the friends and acquaintances he made through Whitefield and Hastings. For example, he worked for some time in Amsterdam as a butler in the household of a Dutch Reformed family, having been recommended by ‘some of my late Master Freelandhouse’s [Frelinghuysen’s] acquaintance, who had heard him speak frequently of me’.⁴⁸ To all intents and purposes, Dutch Calvinism held the same beliefs on predestination and slavery to the British Calvinism practised by Selina Hastings and her circle, which was precisely why Gronniosaw could be purchased by Frelinghuysen as a child.⁴⁹

After his return to Britain in the late 1760s, Gronniosaw sought out Benjamin Fawcett, whose edition of John Baxter’s *Saints Everlasting Rest* had helped to spark Gronniosaw’s own religious awakening.⁵⁰ This puritan text influenced Calvinist

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁹ See Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, “‘Dutch’ Religious Tolerance: Celebration and Revision”, in Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia and Henk van Nierop (eds.), *Calvinism and Religious Toleration in the Dutch Golden Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 8-26.

⁵⁰ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 38.

theology at large, and Gronniosaw would have likely first read it while still living with Frelinghuysen. But this was not the only influence Fawcett had on Gronniosaw's life. It was through Fawcett, then ministering from Kidderminster, that he was able to find a job in the area and support his family. They settled for three or four years in Kidderminster, owing Fawcett their livelihood and only source of income.⁵¹

Fawcett had taken a personal interest in the spiritual lives of the enslaved since at least 1756, when he wrote *A Compassionate Address to the Christian Negroes in Virginia*.⁵² This text explicitly exhorted black slaves to reconcile themselves to their enslavement on the grounds that it had no bearing on their spiritual freedom. 'Blessed be *God*,' he wrote, 'your slavery is, I hope, by no means so dangerous to your immortal souls. And the freedom of the soul for eternity is infinitely preferable to the greatest freedom of the body in its outward condition upon Earth'.⁵³ Fawcett consistently encouraged black slaves to remain passive victims of their mistreatment at the hands of slave-owners and overseers, 'to submit, yea conscientiously and cheerfully to submit', to 'be always faithful and obedient to your earthly masters', to 'be patient, be submissive and obedient, be faithful and true, even when some of your masters are most unkind'.⁵⁴ This anti-insurrectionary tract shared much in common with Whitefield's contemporaneous works on the subject, in that it attempted to justify the abuse of slaves on the grounds that it made them more inclined to seek solace in Christian faith. This ideology necessarily invoked

⁵¹ Brian Kirk, 'Fawcett, Benjamin (1715–1780)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9217> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

⁵² Benjamin Fawcett, *A Compassionate Address to the Christian Negroes in Virginia* (London: J. Eddowes and J. Cotton, 1756).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 16, 15, 18.

hierarchical, racialized discourse in an attempt to justify itself. For example, in an appendix apparently not intended for ‘Christian Negroes’, Fawcett explained that

The Inhabitants of *Negroland* are, either devoted to the delusions of *Mahomet*, or to the grossest *Pagan idolatry*. And therefore we cannot but consider them, both in their *civil* and *religious* capacity, as unspeakably wretched, even while they are at Liberty in their own native huts: this not a little softens the dreadful idea which we are ready to form of their *Slavery* in *America*, where the real interest for their present life (if they fall into the hands of humane masters) is much promoted by inuring them to wholesome labour, and their best interest for the life to come may be secured by the glorious light of the Gospel, which, it is hoped, is shining around them.⁵⁵

For Fawcett, the enslavement and exploitation of Africans’ labour was a benevolent activity, since it ultimately led to their salvation.

While it is clear that Fawcett was by no means opposed to slavery, his desire to support black slaves and former slaves in turning to Christian faith, like Whitefield’s, manifested itself in the use of social influence to help Gronniosaw improve his financial situation. In 1771, Fawcett recommended him to ‘Mr. Watson’, who employed him ‘in twisting silk and worsted together’.⁵⁶ Considering that Fawcett ‘invited the Countess of Huntingdon to establish the chapel she opened in Kidderminster in 1774’, he may have also introduced Gronniosaw to the local

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁵⁶ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 38. ‘Mr. Watson’ was possibly Brook Watson, a merchant who presented Phillis Wheatley – another black author patronised by Selina Hastings – with a folio edition of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* while she was on a visit to London in 1773. E. M. Lloyd, ‘Watson, Sir Brook, first baronet (1735–1807)’, rev. John C. Shields, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28829> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

Calvinists who became instrumental in the production of the text of his life story.⁵⁷ In any case, it is clear from the *Narrative* that Fawcett stood alongside George Whitefield as a primary influence in Gronniosaw's spiritual and social life. Both Calvinists had published on the topic of slavery, and both had supported it as a means of bringing Africans to Christian salvation. More importantly for Gronniosaw, both were operating under the same Calvinist ideology when they assisted him in Britain. It was ultimately through the interventions of Whitefield and Fawcett that Gronniosaw was in a position to relate his experiences in the *Narrative*.

While these influences suggest a partial explanation for the *Narrative*'s apparent proslavery stance, a more significant factor was Gronniosaw's limited literacy in English. Indeed, Helena Woodard attributes his repeatedly falling prey to British con-artists, in part, to his inability to read the language.⁵⁸ His second language at Frelinghuysen's house would have been Dutch, and his understanding of spoken English would have been picked up from visitors and during his time as a free man in New York. By around 1770, while he was working in Norwich, Gronniosaw was still unable to read English, and 'was obliged to appeal to some one to read the letter [he] received' when news of his wife's condition arrived from London.⁵⁹ Certainly, when the *Narrative* was written in 1772, he was still too unfamiliar with written English to compose a publishable autobiography. Instead, the story was 'taken from his own mouth and committed to paper by the elegant pen of a young lady of the town of Leominster'.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p. 58, n. 129.

⁵⁸ Woodard, *African-British Writings*, pp. 33-42.

⁵⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 32.

⁶⁰ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. iv.

The question of Gronniosaw's amanuensis deserves further attention, since it profoundly influences how the *Narrative* can be read, particularly in the context of Calvinist social networks of the period. As Carretta points out, the 'young lady' was identified, 'probably inaccurately', in the 1809 Salem, New York edition of the *Narrative* as Hannah More.⁶¹ More harboured a lifelong 'hostility towards Calvinists', and as such would have been unlikely to enter Gronniosaw's social circle.⁶² The publisher of the Salem edition probably intended to boost sales by associating the *Narrative* with a well-known abolitionist writer, recognising the currency of stories of emancipation in the climate following the abolition of the slave trade. Again, Gronniosaw's relationship to Calvinist networks suggests a more plausible scenario. In a letter to Selina Hastings in January 1772, he mentioned that he had been visiting Leominster, 'to Mrs. Marlowe's, were [sic] I was shewed kindness to from my Christian friends'.⁶³ Mary Marlow was a fellow correspondent of Hastings', and was probably introduced to Gronniosaw by Fawcett. The 'young lady' amanuensis, who wrote the story down 'for her own satisfaction, without any intention at first that it should be made public' was therefore most likely a daughter or family friend of hers at Leominster.⁶⁴ It was almost certainly through either Fawcett or Marlow that Gronniosaw was brought to the attention of Selina Hastings, and it is clear from Gronniosaw's exclamation that 'I Dear Maddam I hope Shall have Happiness to see you and Convers With you before I go Home [to heaven]' that they

⁶¹ Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p. 54, n. 4; Vincent Carretta, 'Gronniosaw, Ukawsaw (*b.* 1710x14, *d.* after 1772)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/71634> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

⁶² S. J. Skedd, 'More, Hannah (1745–1833)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19179> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

⁶³ Ch.F., F/1:1574, 'James Albate to Selina Hastings, 3 January 1772'. This is the only known surviving manuscript letter written by Gronniosaw.

⁶⁴ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. iii.

had not yet held a conversation in person prior to 1772.⁶⁵ Hastings sent Gronniosaw a ‘favour’, probably a letter and a charitable donation, over the Christmas period of 1771, ‘a time of necessity’ for Gronniosaw and his family, via Mr. Newben, one of the students at Hastings’ training college at Trevecca in Brecknockshire, South Wales. Hastings was staying at Trevecca at the time, preparing her students for an ill-fated mission to convert Whitefield’s old orphanage at Bethesda into a training college and base of operations for expanding the connexion in the Americas. During her stay at Trevecca, much to the dismay of the tutor, Walter Churchy, Hastings regularly sent the students out on such errands across the country.⁶⁶ For example, Newben was still attending to connectional business in January 1773, when Hastings unceremoniously interrupted his studies with an order scrawled on the back of a used letter-wrapper: ‘I must request you to go to London as a student is there’.⁶⁷ With a missionary enterprise underway in America, as well as the continuing expansion of her connexion, it does not appear that Hastings had time to personally attend to Gronniosaw’s situation.

However, her associates in Kidderminster and Leominster were able to recommend Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* to Walter Shirley, her cousin and lieutenant in the connexion. Shirley wrote a preface to the text and recommended it to print, ‘with a view to serve ALBERT and his distressed family, who have the sole profits arising from the sale of it’.⁶⁸ The income Gronniosaw received from the publication of the *Narrative* after 1772 enabled him and his family to remain in Kidderminster for at

⁶⁵ Ch.F., F/1:1574, ‘James Albate to Selina Hastings, 3 January 1772’. There is no evidence to suggest that they ever met in person.

⁶⁶ JRL, Methodist Collections, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon Papers, 1977/504 ‘Selina Hastings to Walter Churchy, n.d. 1772’.

⁶⁷ JRL, Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon Papers, 1977/504, ‘Selina Hastings to Mr. Newben, 3 January 1773’.

⁶⁸ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. iv.

least another two years. During their time there, Gronniosaw and his wife Betty attended the Old Independent Meeting House, continuing their lifelong association with dissenting worship.⁶⁹

They had been confirmed in their distaste for other denominations during their time in Norwich during the late 1760s. When their infant daughter died, Gronniosaw, detached from Calvinist organisations, was unable to convince the local Baptist church to bury her, ‘because we were not members’.⁷⁰ Similarly, the local parson of the Anglican Church refused to bury her because she had never been baptised. Even the Quakers, with whom Gronniosaw had associated in the past, would not bury his daughter. Eventually, when Gronniosaw was at the point of digging a grave in his own garden, the local Anglican parson agreed to bury the child, but not to read a funeral sermon.⁷¹ Woodard, reasonably, attributes this remarkably un-Christian behaviour to racist disapproval of Gronniosaw and his children.⁷² It is also important to recognise that such a traumatic event, ‘one of the greatest trials I ever met with’, would have likely prejudiced Gronniosaw against Baptist and Established Churches, and further strengthened his affinity for (and dependence upon) the Calvinist connexion.

Another consequence of this traumatic episode was that Gronniosaw became very conscientious in having his remaining children baptised. Very shortly after arriving in Kidderminster in 1771, Gronniosaw’s children, Mary, Edward, and

⁶⁹ TNA, Parish Records, RG 4/3374, ‘Worcestershire: Kidderminster, Old Meeting House (Independent): Births & Baptisms’.

⁷⁰ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 37.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38

⁷² Woodard, *African-British Writings*, pp. 39-40.

Samuel, were all baptised together.⁷³ However, when his youngest child, James, was born in 1774, Gronniosaw appears to have been unable to support the family, even with the money from the second edition of the *Narrative*, published by Samuel Hazard in Bath during the same year, beginning to come in. At some point after this the family moved to Chester. The Countess' connexion was expanding there, and Gronniosaw may have been offered work or invited by a Calvinist friend.⁷⁴ The exact nature of the family's circumstances between 1774 and 1775 remain unclear, but he was well-regarded enough by his death on 5 October 1775 for an obituary to appear in the *London Evening Post*: 'Died, This Thursday se'nnight, at Chester, aged 70, James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosa, [sic] an African Prince of Zaara'.⁷⁵ After that, Gronniosaw's legacy developed through posthumous changes to his autobiography.

THE PUBLICATION AND SALE OF GRONNIOSAW'S *NARRATIVE*

By the time Hastings came into contact with Gronniosaw, her connexion was in the midst of an acrimonious pamphlet war with the Wesley brothers' Arminian Methodists. Gronniosaw's *Narrative* represented a textual response to Wesley's public censure of Hastings' trading in slaves. The rift between Wesley's Arminian followers and Hastings' circle ostensibly originated over a question of doctrine. On one hand, Calvinist predestination held the notion of irresistible grace, while on the other, Wesley's Arminian doctrine held the notion of 'Christian perfection', by which any individual could achieve grace through perfecting their moral behaviour in

⁷³ TNA, Parish Records, RG 4/3374, 'Worcestershire: Kidderminster, Old Meeting House (Independent): Births & Baptisms'.

⁷⁴ The head of the Countess of Huntingdon's college at Trevecca, for example, was the former curate of Coddington, near Chester. Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*, p. 230.

⁷⁵ *London Evening Post*, 10 October 1775, p. 1.

imitation of Christ.⁷⁶ As has already been discussed, this influenced each denomination's official stance on the question of slavery. During the 1760s and early 1770s, the disagreement between Hastings and Wesley became personal, and the rivalry between the two denominations developed in animosity, particularly with regards to the issue of slavery.

It was John Wesley who first converted Hastings from Anglicanism to Methodism in the late 1730s, making an exception to his egalitarian religious principles and affording her a private pew in his chapel at Donnington, near Shrewsbury.⁷⁷ Through Wesley's evangelical connections, Hastings met George Whitefield, who introduced her to older Calvinistic notions of predestination. The hierarchical implications of predestination chimed with her old Whig politics and social experiences as an aristocrat. By late 1744, the Countess' interest in predestination had overtaken her enthusiasm for Wesley's notion of Christian perfection, and over the course of the following twenty years, correspondence between Hastings and Wesley became infrequent and stilted.

A letter from John Wesley on 8 January 1764 signalled the start of a period of mutual hostility between them. He was incensed that she had invited Whitefield and others to preach at her Brighthempston chapel, '& as much notice taken of my Brother [Charles] & me, as of a couple of Postillians'. He jealously attacked what he saw as snobbery on her part. 'It only confirmed to me in the judgement I had formed for many years, I am too rough a preacher for tender ears'. Clearly, Wesley saw Hastings' slight as a personal attack, and emphatically rejected the possibility that he was left uninvited because of a disagreement over doctrine:

⁷⁶ David Carter, 'Christian Perfection', in *DMBI* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=611> (Accessed 28/08/2012).

⁷⁷ Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists*, p. 86.

“No, that is not it; but you preach perfection” What: without why or wherefore? Among the unawaken’d? Among Babes in Christ? No. To these I say not a word about it. I have two or three grains of common sense. If I do not know how to suit my Discourse to my audience at these years, I ought never to preach more.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, Hastings’ relationship with George Whitefield grew stronger, and he bequeathed the orphanage at Bethesda to her in 1770, along with around fifty slaves.⁷⁹ Even while she and her cousin Walter Shirley were arranging for the publication of Gronniosaw’s *Narrative*, and a year later, of Phillis Wheatley’s *Poems on Various Subjects*, Hastings increased the number of slaves at Bethesda. By 1780 she owned over a hundred.⁸⁰ This drew censure from early abolitionists including the Quaker Anthony Benezet, who wrote to her in 1774, describing the slave trade as an ‘Iniquitous Traffick’.⁸¹ Even before this, Wesley had taken exception to Hastings’ dealings in the slave trade, and he made his opinions on the matter public in early 1774 with the publication of his *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, in which he declared ‘I absolutely deny all Slaveholding to be consistent with any degree of even natural justice’.⁸² Given the nature of the rivalry between Wesley and Hastings, such public censure helped set her in her course of extending her investments, both ideological and financial, in slavery.

⁷⁸ JRL, John Wesley, Copy Letters, 1977/607, ‘John Wesley to Selina Hastings, 8 January 1764’.

⁷⁹ Schlenther, *Queen of the Methodists*, p. 91.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94, n. 46, 48.

⁸¹ Ch.F., A3/1/33, ‘Anthony Benezet to Selina Hastings, 25 May 1774’.

⁸² John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (London: R. Hawes, 1774), p. 31.

Hastings was not the only individual involved in the *Narrative*'s publication who took a personal interest in refuting John Wesley. Walter Shirley, who wrote the preface to the text, held a particular grudge against Wesley's connexion. Under orders from Hastings, Shirley had organised a mass protest against the Arminian conference in Bristol in 1771, to 'insist on the recantation' of the resolutions made during the previous year's conference in London.⁸³ The protest turned out to be a disaster, and Shirley and Hastings were humiliated while Wesley celebrated his conference with record attendance, and again resolved upon the doctrines of Christian perfection and antinomianism which the Calvinists found so obnoxious.⁸⁴ This hardened Shirley's opinion of the Arminians, and his correspondence with Hastings over the following four years revealed a determination to check its success. He suggested a number of times, for example, that Calvinist churches be built in areas where Wesley's preaching-houses appeared to be popular.⁸⁵ Shirley even wrote to Hastings in February 1772 to suggest that she expel all with Arminian sympathies from her college at Trevecca, warning her that she 'must never expect peace there unless the College consists wholly of Arminians or wholly of Calvinists'.⁸⁶

Shirley's hard-line anti-Arminianism was manifested also in his preface to Gronniosaw's *Narrative*. The short preface firmly established the *Narrative* as proof of the doctrine of predestination:

⁸³ Walter Shirley, *A Narrative of the Principal Circumstances Relative to the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Late Conference* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, 1771), p. 7. Note that this pamphlet refuting Wesley's doctrine was printed by the same publishers as Gronniosaw's *Narrative*.

⁸⁴ For a detailed examination of the Bristol Conference affair, see Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*, pp. 266-278.

⁸⁵ For example: 'There seems to me a very fair prospect of an extensive work here [Dublin] & I am persuaded, if your Ladyship had once a chappel [sic] built, you would have an immense society built & Mr. Wesley's would most probably be entirely broke up'. Ch.F., E4/1/12, 'Walter Shirley to Selina Hastings, 14 May 1772'.

⁸⁶ Ch.F., E4/1/8, 'Walter Shirley to Selina Hastings, 17 February 1772'.

Now it appears from the experience of this remarkable person, that God does not save without knowledge of the truth; but, with respect to those whom He hath fore-known, though born under every outward disadvantage, and in regions of the grossest darkness and ignorance, he most amazingly acts upon their minds.⁸⁷

Like Fawcett, Shirley took the spiritual (and by extension moral) deprivation of non-Christian Africans for granted. However, he was explicit in positing Gronniosaw's early awareness of monotheism as proof that he was one of God's predestined individuals, one of 'those whom He hath fore-known'. Shirley used the 'Preface' as an opportunity to specifically refute Arminian doctrine, arguing that 'Whatever *Infidels* and *Deists* may think; I trust the Christian Reader will easily discern an All-wise and omnipotent Appointment and Direction in these movements'.⁸⁸ The reference here to 'deists' (one who believes in divine creationism but not in God's direct intervention in earthly matters) was intended to be read as meaning those who held the Arminian doctrine of perfection, since they emphasised the need for human action in attaining a state of grace.

Shirley's gibe at Wesley and the Arminians may seem a rather opaque reference to be made in a general preface, but Gronniosaw's *Narrative* was never intended for a general readership. An examination of the publishing patterns of the various editions of the text show that it was primarily marketed towards, printed for and distributed amongst an informed Calvinist readership who would have been acutely aware of the political tensions between Hastings' and Wesley's social circles.

⁸⁷ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. iv.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Eve Tavor Bannet has suggested that ‘Gronniosaw’s narrative was certainly more widely available and widely read than either Equiano’s or Cugoano’s texts’ on the basis that Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* went through three editions in New York to Equiano’s one, with almost as many editions of Gronniosaw’s text as Equiano’s published in Great Britain before 1810.⁸⁹ However, unlike Equiano and Cugoano’s texts, both of which were marketed towards a mass audience with the intention to engender popular support for a proposed change in the law (i.e. the abolition of the slave trade), Gronniosaw’s text was published in the tradition of the spiritual conversion narrative. This complicates a like-for-like comparison of publishing trends, since spiritual conversion narratives, Gronniosaw’s included, were traditionally published by printers attached to a denomination-specific core readership, and unlike political tracts were rarely if ever reprinted without permission or sold on the black market. Moreover, measuring breadth of readership or availability of a text by the number of editions is always problematic without evidence of the size of each print run, or an analysis of how the text was distributed and to whom.

The three editions of the *Narrative* that were published during Gronniosaw’s lifetime were printed and sold in areas where the social influence of Selina Hastings and her circle was enhanced by the presence of large Calvinist congregations, operating from one or more of the chapels she personally had financed. Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr have rightly pointed out that ‘[t]he printing history of Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* is extremely complicated and made even more difficult by inconsistent

⁸⁹ Eve Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720-1810* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 140.

records in key references'.⁹⁰ Indeed, until Carretta established the 1772 William Gye and Thomas Mills edition as the earliest, historians and literary critics have tended to favour the 1774 Samuel Hazard edition.⁹¹ This edition in fact corrected a number of syntactical errors from the Gye and Mills version, but made scriptural referencing errors, probably as a result of the transcription process.⁹² A closer inspection of Gye and Mills' publishing output lends weight to Carretta's suggestion that their edition was the first.

Mills ran a bookshop and circulating library from Kingsmead Square, 'where may be had BIBLES, PRAYER-BOOKS, &c.', but catering specifically for the Hastings' very large congregations at Bath and two miles away at Weston. Mills even sold *The Collection of Hymns, Sung in the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel* in numerous editions throughout the 1770s and 1780s, serving the expanding Bath and Weston congregations.⁹³ Both of these preaching-houses, according to a letter written by Anne Erskine in September 1769, were 'as full as they can hold', and as such the hymn books quickly went through several editions.⁹⁴ Mills had also produced *Pietas Oxoniensis* in 1768, a vindication of the behaviour of the Calvinist students expelled from St Edmund's Hall, Oxford for dissention, who became the first cohort of

⁹⁰ Adam Potkay and Sandra Burr, *Black Writers of the 18th Century: Living the New Exodus in England and America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), p. 24.

⁹¹ Carretta cites an advertisement for the *Narrative* from *Boddely's Bath Journal*, 21 December 1772: 'This Day is Published, Price Six-Pence, A NARRATIVE of the most Remarkable PARTICULARS in the LIFE of JAMES ALBERT UKAWSAU GRONNIOU [sic] [...] Printed by W[illiam] Gye, in Westgate-Street; and sold by T[homas] Mills, Bookseller in Kingsmead-square'. Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, pp. 54-55 n. 1.

⁹² For example, contracted negatives ('didn't', 'wouldn't' etc.) are expanded in the Hazard version, which, as Carretta points out, is more formal in tone and less reflective of an oral account than the Gye and Mills edition. Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p. 56 n. 72.

⁹³ Anon, *The Collection of Hymns, Sung in the Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel* (Bath: S. Hazard and T. Mills, 1770).

⁹⁴ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1997/013, 'Anne Agnes Erskine to Howell Harris, 29 September, 1769'.

students at Trevecca College.⁹⁵ Similarly, Gye frequently turned his press to suit Hastings' purposes. He became particularly embroiled in the political spat between Hastings and Wesley, and published *Doctor Crisp's Ghost, or, a Check upon Checks: Being a Bridle for Antinomians, and a Whip for Pelagian and Arminian-Methodists* in 1773, which described Arminian Methodists as 'being up in arms against Free Grace', complaining that 'they pretend that predestination and its consequences make them start back with horror'.⁹⁶

Gye and Mills' partisan stance on this doctrinal divide was financially rewarded by Hastings' loyalty to them as printers of Calvinist pamphlets and conversion narratives. They even supplied the College and its large congregation at Trevecca. Indeed, in 1771, Shirley wrote to Hastings in their favour, following a delay in the delivery of some texts: 'I believe the delay in sending the *Narrative* into Wales was not the fault of poor Mills, but was wholly owing to the neglect of the Brecknock stage-coachman'.⁹⁷ Mills and Gye were also involved in distributing Calvinist pamphlets of a more political nature, printing and selling all three editions of Shirley's opposition to Wesley's 1771 conference. Indeed, the vast majority of their joint publishing output from the period 1765-1775 was specifically commissioned by Selina Hastings or her circle, including a number of conversion narratives.⁹⁸ In 1773 for example, they produced the Calvinist text *Contemplations of*

⁹⁵ Richard Hill, *Pietas Oxoniensis: or, a Full and Impartial Account of the Expulsion of Six Students from St Edmund Hall, Oxford* (Bath: Thomas Mills, 1768).

⁹⁶ Tobias Crisp, *Doctor Crisp's Ghost, or, a Check upon Checks* (Bath: W. Gye, 1773), p. 2.

⁹⁷ Ch.F., F2/1570, 'Walter Shirley to Selina Hastings, 21 October 1771'.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Anon., *An Account of the Surprising Deliverance of the Rev. Mr. John Rogers* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, 1770); Anon., *A Narrative of the Conversion and Last Illness of W. F. Esq. late of B[athfor]d* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, 1768).

Mr. Richard Dorney, the preface for which was written by Hastings' chaplain in Bath, William Romaine.⁹⁹

These tracts, particularly the conversion narratives such as Gronniosaw's, were distributed widely along the interpersonal connections making up the Calvinist social network. Gye and Mills would sell the texts in bulk (for example, *Extract from a Narrative of the Conversion and Last Illness of W. F. Esq. Late of B[athfor]d* cost '1d. or 6s. per hundred') which would then be distributed and sold throughout the churches in the area.¹⁰⁰ This system of distribution not only helped to advertise Gye and Mills' publishing-houses, it also ensured that tales of conversion and redemption through faith and adherence to Calvinist principles were as widely available to local Calvinists as possible. Therefore, by sheer virtue of its print and distribution networks, the first edition of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* was most likely only available to individuals socially or ecclesiastically connected to Hastings or her chapels, living in areas in the south-west where Calvinism was, comparatively, a very popular form of dissenting Christian worship.¹⁰¹

However, the *Narrative*'s reach expanded, at least geographically, with each successive edition. The second edition to be printed in Britain came about in 1774, published by the Calvinist printer Samuel Hazard, again in Bath. Hazard had recently acquired William Gye's printing house in Kingsmead Square, moving on from his highly successful printing business in Bristol, where the increasing popularity of Arminianism was diminishing sales of the Calvinist tracts which made up almost half of his printed output.¹⁰² When he published the second edition of Gronniosaw's

⁹⁹ Richard Dorney, *Contemplations of Mr. Richard Dorney* (Bath: W. Gye and T. Mills, 1772).

¹⁰⁰ Anon., *Conversion and Last Illness of W. F.*

¹⁰¹ Harding, *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion*, pp. 88-117.

¹⁰² Carretta, *Unchained Voices*, p. 54 n. 1.

Narrative, Hazard made use of his professional connections within Calvinist networks across the country to maximise its market visibility. Thomas Mills sold the second edition in his new shop in Bristol, and in London, Gronniosaw's text was available at the bookshop of 'S. Chirm'.¹⁰³ Hazard was selective in his choice of business partners; the selection in most London book shops was more denominationally diverse than in Bath, but Chirm was one of the comparatively few booksellers there whose stock was limited solely to Baptist and Calvinist devotionals.¹⁰⁴ Through Hazard's connections, the *Narrative* made it as far north as Derbyshire, where it was sold by another staunch Calvinist bookseller 'W. Walker' in the town of Ashburn, alongside other Calvinist conversion narratives and anti-Arminian tracts with subtitles like *The Great Danger of Trusting to our Works for Justification*.¹⁰⁵

What becomes clear from an examination of the various destinations of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* during his lifetime is that its increasingly broad geographical distribution was not matched by diversification in its readership. Before the author's death in 1775, in Britain at least, the *Narrative* was a Calvinist text for Calvinist readers. This may have something to do with the nominally charitable motive behind its publication: it would after all have been impossible to ensure that the proceeds from the sale of the text found their way back to 'serve Albert and his distressed family' if distribution moved outside of the control of Calvinist social and professional networks. This would account for the first American edition of the text

¹⁰³ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African prince, as Related by Himself*, (second edition) (Bath: S. Hazard, [1774]).

¹⁰⁴ For example, Chirm sold many more of Hazard's Calvinist tracts, including Anon., *An elegy: Occasioned by the Sudden and Justly Lamented Death of Thomas Powys* (Bath: S. Hazard, [1774]). Thomas Powys was a personal friend of Hastings and a prominent Bath Calvinist.

¹⁰⁵ Eloquentiae Candidatus, *A Discourse [...] on the Experimental Part of Religion* (Birmingham: S. Aris, 1772).

appearing in 1774 at the Rhode Island printing house of ‘S. Southwick’, the Baptist-Calvinist publisher who first printed Phillis Wheatley’s elegiac poem *On the Death of [...] George Whitefield* in 1771.¹⁰⁶ But the practical difficulties inherent in all transatlantic financial proceedings (exacerbated in the mid-1770s by the increasingly turbulent Anglo-American political atmosphere) rendered the type of direct charity ‘arising from the sale’ of the *Narrative* as advertised in Shirley’s preface virtually impracticable. The title page of the Southwick 1774 edition proclaimed the *Narrative* to have originated in Bath, but to have been ‘reprinted and sold’ in Newport, Rhode Island. This indicates that the interpersonal printing and distribution network of the *Narrative* as established by Hazard, Gye and Mills had not been entirely circumvented by Southwick’s reproduction, though precisely what this meant for Gronniosaw’s financial situation is impossible to tell. In any case, it seems unlikely that he benefitted directly from the sale of the Rhode Island reprint.

After Gronniosaw’s death, the notion of charity no longer bound publishers to strictly Calvinist distribution networks. Neither did it morally obligate Calvinist publishers to sell the text, though Hazard for example was still selling off back issues of his edition of the *Narrative* as late as 1800.¹⁰⁷ During the decade following Gronniosaw’s death, only one new edition of the *Narrative* was printed. This was a translation of the text into Welsh, appearing in 1779. Here the influence of Hastings’ circle was obvious: her college at Trevecca was in Brecknockshire, only a few miles

¹⁰⁶ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* (Newport, R. I.: S. Southwick, [1774]). Phillis Wheatley, *An Elegiac Poem. On the Death of [...] George Whitefield* (Newport, RI: S. Southwick, [1771]). Wheatley included a conciliatory postscript in verse addressed to Hastings.

¹⁰⁷ Samuel Hazard, ‘Advertisement’, in Henry Venn, *The Complete Duty of Man: or, a System of Doctrinal and Practical Christianity* (Bath: S. Hazard, 1800), p. 393.

from Aberhonddu (Brecon), where the *Narrative* was reprinted.¹⁰⁸ As one English observer discovered in 1772, most of the parishioners and many of the students at Trevecca only spoke Welsh.¹⁰⁹ Hastings was not unaware of this, nor of the potential problems it could pose to the expansion of her church in Britain and Anglophone America. While in Bath in August 1772, she began personally teaching one of her Welsh-speaking students English, and wrote to one of the Masters at Trevecca to express her intentions to teach others:

Roberts quickly improves in his English he will in another month quite master all difficulty and be as well understood as any minister of this nation. If I succeed with him I intend to have one of the Welsh students in their turn with me for this purpose till they all are masters & have it made easy to them in both languages.¹¹⁰

The translation of the *Narrative* itself was undertaken by William Williams Pantycelyn, the eminent Welsh Calvinist hymn-writer, described by Derec Llwyd Morgan as ‘an author of great vision, brilliance, and pertinence’, and one of the most famous and influential hymn-writers in the history of Welsh Calvinism.¹¹¹ Pantycelyn was a member of Huntingdon’s circle, and often visited Trevecca College, regularly

¹⁰⁸ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *Berr Hanes o'r pethau mwyaf hynod ym mywyd James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, tywysog o Affrica: fel yr adroddwyd ganddo ef ei hun* (Aberhonddu: W. Williams and E. Evans, 1779).

¹⁰⁹ ‘I never so much wished to understand *Welsh* as then, particularly in a prayer of Mr. Richards (the student) [...] I hoped to get an interpreter among them, but failed in my attempt, on account of the great eagerness each had to attend for his own profit’. Anon., *Some Account of the Proceedings at the College of the Right hon. the Countess of Huntingdon, in Wales, Relative to Those Students called to go to her Ladyship’s College in Georgia* (London: [n.p.]: 1772), p. 17.

¹¹⁰ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/504, Box 2, ‘Selina Hastings to Thomas Jones, 3 August 1772’.

¹¹¹ Derec Llwyd Morgan, ‘Williams, William (1717–1791)’, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29556> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

working with senior students and masters there. The publication of Pantycelyn's translation indicates that there was a predominately Welsh-speaking market for the text, most likely among the parishioners of the well-established Welsh Calvinist churches, fostered by the palpable presence of Trevecca nearby. Moreover, the fact that an individual of Pantycelyn's popularity translated the text indicates how important it was perceived to be by those primarily concerned with Calvinist preaching.

By the end of the 1770s then, Gronniosaw's *Narrative* had been exclusively printed by publishers with Calvinist sympathies, and predominately marketed towards and read by practising Calvinists. However, subsequent publication patterns for the text demonstrate a move away from a Calvinist readership and towards one more concerned with the growing debate surrounding the abolition of the slave trade. In 1786, the year before the inauguration of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade, a heavily edited version of Gronniosaw's text was issued, probably without permission, in Clonmel, Ireland.¹¹² The publisher, Thomas Lord, had no pre-existing connections with Hastings or her Calvinist social or professional network. Prior to Lord's version of the text, editions had only varied from Gye and Mills' first in as far as they corrected spelling errors and updated archaic language choices – i.e. 'display'd' in the first edition became 'displayed' in the second – and similar minor alterations. The relative care with which the text was preserved prior to Lord's edition reflects the desire as much to preserve the Calvinist moral of the story as to faithfully recount the principal events of Gronniosaw's life.

¹¹² Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *The Life and Conversion of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince. Giving an Account of the Religion, Customs, Manners, &c. of the Natives of Zaara, in Africa* (Clonmel: Thomas Lord, 1786).

However, the Clonmel edition of the text contained substantive changes, essentially submerging the Calvinist devotional message beneath a veneer of exotic sensationalism. Particularly important was the complete removal of Shirley's 'Preface', which had in previous editions acted as a codex for deciphering the Calvinist 'lesson' from the *Narrative* itself. Lord's decision to remove Shirley's preface simultaneously divested Hastings and her network of their ownership of the *Narrative* and asserted Gronniosaw's putative authority over the text and thus its authenticity. Intending to appeal to increased popular interest in Africa and the transatlantic slave trade, Lord added a subtitle to the *Narrative*, calling it *The Life and Conversion of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African Prince. Giving an Account of the Religion, Customs, Manners, &c. of the Natives of Zaara, in Africa.*¹¹³ This shifted the emphasis of the text, from the very title onwards, away from the (essentially proslavery) nature of divine predestination and towards the humanity of the African author and, by extension, the inhumanity of the slave trade into which he was sold.

In place of Shirley's preface, Lord added some paratext of his own to the *Narrative*, ventriloquizing Gronniosaw's narrative voice to add several footnotes and an addendum which never appeared in the earlier editions. The footnotes added some anthropological and anecdotal material which again placed an increased emphasis on the spiritual and moral capacity of African peoples and added a touch of exoticism to the story. For example, one footnote inverts the racial prejudice under which Gronniosaw would suffer while trying to bury his daughter:

¹¹³ Gronniosaw, *The Life and Conversion* (1786).

Although in our country, people be generally black, yet there be some all white, and others part black and part white. My mother was a black, but her breast was white: it is a disgrace to a black to have any white colour on his body; and that person is treated with scorn and reproach whenever they disagree.¹¹⁴

This footnote, written when popular support for the abolition of the slave trade, predicated on the equal humanity of white and black people, was on the rise, is factually and ideologically at odds with the main text first published fourteen years earlier, in which a young Gronniosaw lamented that ‘every body and every thing despis’d me, because I was black’.¹¹⁵

Another note in the Clonmel edition highlighted an example of African culture adhering to Christian standards of morality: ‘Also covetousness is not much practised with us, for every day what remain [*sic*] after a meal, they give to their neighbours each one in his turn’.¹¹⁶ The veracity of these footnotes is highly dubious – not least of all because Gronniosaw had been dead for ten years prior to their first appearance in print. It seems that Lord added these touches to appeal to a readership for whom an anthropological interest in Africa had been sparked by the publicity surrounding debates over slavery. Some footnotes appear to have been added simply to burnish Gronniosaw’s story with a sense of exotic adventure:

Among wild beasts the Tyger is most voracious and fierce; one I remember devoured a whole family, getting into the house which was covered with

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 8-9, n. 2.

¹¹⁵ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ Gronniosaw, *The Life and Conversion* (1786), p. 35, n. 1.

flags, but could not get back the same way he went, so was forced to remain therein; the neighbours wondered that none stirred out or appeared about the house, nor could they hear any noise; at last they ventured to peep in, and there they espied a large Tyger, which had devoured all the family; they first shot it with a poisoned arrow, then dragged it along the way, as a spectacle for all to behold.¹¹⁷

Perhaps the most obvious case of Lord's embellishing the *Narrative* is the two-page addendum entitled 'A Few Providential Deliverances in America', a miscellany in which Gronniosaw is depicted as having escaped the 'voracious jaws' of a crocodile, survived being bitten by a rattlesnake, and is saved from an attacking bear because 'a squirrel happened to be on a bough over the bear, which just then broke, wherewith the bear was so affrighted, he run quite away'.¹¹⁸ Yet even with the addition of this miscellany, the text did not explicitly condone or condemn the transatlantic slave trade, and Gronniosaw's character remained uncomplaining about the discrimination and suffering he faced in Britain. Accordingly, the only direct change made to the main body of the *Narrative* by Lord was in the very final paragraph. The conventions of the Calvinist spiritual conversion narrative required the first few editions to end with a view to Heaven, and thus necessarily towards corporeal death:

As pilgrims, and very poor pilgrims, we are travelling through many difficulties towards our HEAVENLY HOME, and waiting patiently for his gracious call, when the Lord shall deliver us out of the evils of this present

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p. 10, n. 1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 49-50.

world and bring us to the EVERLASTING GLORIES of the world to come.¹¹⁹

In Lord's Clonmel edition, a hint of religiosity remained in the final paragraph, but the celebratory embracing of human mortality and spiritual transcendence – the 'happy death' that had been a mainstay of the Calvinist conversion narrative – was completely inverted to suit a more general readership who might not have as closely linked death with happiness. Lord replaced the view towards Gronniosaw's 'HEAVENLY HOME' with thanks for the prolonging of his corporeal life: 'Thus far the Lord has brought me on; thus far his power preserves my days. May each succeeding day make known some fresh memorial of his praise'.¹²⁰

These editions to the text fundamentally altered readings of it in the context of the political climate of the late 1780s. Indeed, one early twentieth-century reader of Lord's edition of the *Narrative* saw this 'very wonderful pamphlet' first and foremost as an 'anthropological study', rather than an autobiography.¹²¹ Lord's intention in editing and reprinting Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, it seems, was motivated by the commercial opportunities presented by the rising debate around the slave trade, as opposed to any kind of ethical conviction either in either direction. The reprint certainly was not intended to further the primary purpose of the *Narrative* in promoting a Calvinist theology over an Arminian one, as reflected in the deletion of Shirley's preface and the altered ending. As indicated by the new subtitle, Lord's edition emphasised the provenance and authenticity of the text in order to promote

¹¹⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 39.

¹²⁰ Gronniosaw, *The Life and Conversion* (1786), p. 48.

¹²¹ William Burke, *History of Clonmel* (Waterford: N. Harvey and Co., 1907), p. 358.

sales among a readership newly interested in the ethnographic status of African people.

The popular interest in abolition and African society, along with the success of Sancho's *Letters*, and later Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, may account for the resurgence in republications of both the original and Lord's embellished editions of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* in the 1790s. During this period the two keys factors in driving sales of the *Narrative* – strong Calvinist support and an increased interest in life histories and anthropological studies of African people – converged. Simultaneously, the existing individual sales portfolios of the publishers influenced which version they printed. For example, 'B. Dugdale' the Dublin printer who published the 1790 edition of the text, largely sold Methodist tracts, and accordingly printed the original Gye and Mills edition of the text with Shirley's preface.¹²² But it is difficult to ignore the fact that Dugdale decided to reprint this particular conversion narrative, as well as reissuing *The Lord's Most Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* during the run-up to Equiano's highly publicised visit to Dublin in May 1791, when the local market for black autobiography was already stimulated.¹²³ These publications also coincided with political developments in mainland Britain, where Wilberforce was for the second time pushing for the abolition of the slave trade in the House of Commons. Put simply, the level of public interest in both black literature and slavery, combined with his existing Methodist clientele, made republishing Gronniosaw's *Narrative* an attractive investment for a printer such as Dugdale.

¹²² Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, an African prince, as Related by Himself* (Dublin: B. Dugdale, 1790).

¹²³ John Marrant, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (Dublin: B. Dugdale, 1790); Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), pp. 244-245.

At around the same time, a reprint of Thomas Lord's embellished version of the *Narrative* was put on sale across Wilberforce's home county of Yorkshire, in Leeds, Shore, Halifax and Bradford.¹²⁴ These were not areas of particularly concentrated Methodist support, accounting for the choice of Lord's version of the text as opposed to the Gye and Mills version. However, each of the booksellers where this edition of Gronniosaw's text was published also sold either abolitionist literature, other black autobiography, (though usually Marrant's low-cost tract as opposed to the more substantial and expensive *Interesting Narrative*) or both. Despite the renaming of the *Narrative* to the more bombastic *Wonderous Grace Display'd in the Life and Conversion [...]* seeming to signify a more evangelical focus in the text, the content itself, as previously discussed, tended to emphasise the African origins of the author. This was representative of new trends in the publishing and distribution patterns of Gronniosaw's *Narrative*. Printers and booksellers with largely religious print portfolios turned to Gronniosaw as an inexpensive and politically anodyne alternative to Equiano in the newly-fashionable black literature market, while printers who catered for a clientele primarily interested in the abolition debate, keen not to narrow their potential market along denominational boundaries, reproduced Lord's version.

Gronniosaw's *Narrative* was reprinted only once more in Britain and Ireland before the end of the century. The 1791 Cork edition was produced by James Haly to commemorate the death of Walter Shirley five years earlier, and yet another change of the *Narrative*'s title reflected the continuing shift in focus; this time the subtitle reinforced Shirley's presence in the paratext while downplaying Gronniosaw's Africanity and aristocratic background. This edition of the text was called *A*

¹²⁴ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *Wonderous Grace Display'd in the Life and Conversion of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw* (Leeds: J. Binns, [1790?]).

Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, a Black, with an Introduction by the Late Honourable and Reverend Walter Shirly [sic].¹²⁵ This text was cheap to buy – at 3d., it was even cheaper than the first edition published twenty years earlier. Judging by the numerous typesetting and transcription errors (including the misspelling of Shirley’s surname on the title page) and the comparative slimness of the volume (29 pages compared 49 in the Clonmel and Dublin editions), it was also cheap to produce. It is likely that this text came about, like the 1790 Dublin edition, to tie in with the rise in interest in black writing following Equiano’s tour of Ireland.¹²⁶

As popular support for the abolition of the slave trade began to wane at the end of the century, so too did the popularity of black autobiography, and Gronniosaw’s text did not see a British or Irish reprint before 1802, when it appeared as a sponsored publication produced by The Society in Edinburgh for Producing Religious Tracts.¹²⁷ As indicated by the sponsors of this text, Gronniosaw’s text had regained some of its original purpose – as an instructive narrative primarily dealing with the issue of conversion and salvation. It had also faded back into relative obscurity, once again marketed as a special-interest item; a Calvinist devotional to be sold to already-devoted Calvinists. This restoration of purpose was reflected, predictably, by another change in name. It was now, almost as it was upon its first

¹²⁵ Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Particulars in the Life of James Albert, a Black: With a Preface by the Late Honourable and Reverend, Walter Shirly* (Cork: James Haly, 1791).

¹²⁶ Equiano’s tour of Ireland is discussed in Nini Rodgers, *Equiano and Anti-Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Belfast* (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 2000), pp. 1 – 27. See also Nini Rodgers, *Ireland, Slavery and Anti-Slavery: 1612-1865* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 193.

¹²⁷ ‘We are happy to hear, that new editions of the following useful tracts are just published, and may be had of H. INGLIS, Printer, West Port; and of Ogle & Aikman, Parliament Square; M. OGLE, Glasgow; and R. OGLE, London’. *The Missionary Magazine*, 7 (1802) p. 87.

publication, *A Narrative of the Most Remarkable Passages in the Life of James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, and African Prince, as Related by Himself*.

CONCLUSION

There is a dearth of historical and literary studies of Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, but those that exist tend to emphasise the intelligence and agency of the author.¹²⁸ There can be no doubting Gronniosaw's intelligence; his text was littered with more scriptural references than his amanuensis and various editors combined could identify, he was conversant in at least three languages, and he was sufficiently impressive to 'stand before 38 ministers' of the Dutch Reformed Church 'for seven weeks together' discussing theology during his time in Amsterdam.¹²⁹ However, an examination of his personal circumstances at the time of the *Narrative*'s composition, taken alongside a close reading of the text in the light of the proslavery oeuvre of those individuals most intimately involved in its publication, reveals that his authorial agency was severely compromised. This accounts for the passages in the text which seem to be intended to directly refute the theology of Hastings' Arminian rivals, and may well account for what Woodard describes as Gronniosaw's 'subdued treatment of incidents which can be attributed to racial prejudice', as well as his apparent hesitance to condemn the slave trade.¹³⁰

This is not to depict the *Narrative* as a fabrication of a group of proslavery Calvinists, nor Gronniosaw as a passive victim of misrepresentation: he managed, without precedent, to authentically depict his life in Africa from an African perspective. In so doing, he refuted many long-held British suppositions about the

¹²⁸ See, for example, Harris, 'Seeing the Light', pp. 43-57.

¹²⁹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 28.

¹³⁰ Woodard, *African-British Writings*, p. 35.

lack of civilisation in traditional African life. ‘It is a generally received opinion, in *England*, that the natives of *Africa* go entirely uncloth’d’, the *Narrative* noted with indignation, ‘but this supposition is very unjust: they have a kind of dress to appear decent’.¹³¹ However, the impact of such a depiction was limited by the manner in which the text was published and marketed, further distorting its meaning to suit Calvinist interests. This type of post-composition alteration became commonplace in black writing after the publication Gronniosaw’s *Narrative*; Ignatius Sancho’s letters, for example, were carefully copy-edited before they were made publically-readable.

Unscrupulous publishers re-appropriated Gronniosaw’s text long after his death and embellished it with the mercantile aim of exploiting a readership newly interested in African culture. After Thomas Lord’s Clonmel edition of the *Narrative*, publishers could pick and choose which ideological aspects of the text they wanted to emphasise. For those who specialised in devotional tracts, the first version published by Gye and Mills was essentially a conversion narrative in the Calvinist tradition whose relevance was increased by the debate surrounding the slave trade. For those whose markets were interested in the debate on a secular level, Lord’s edition presented an essentially neutral standpoint while still dealing in relevant subject matter, opening up both the pro- and anti-slavery demographics.

Readers of Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* must be aware of its history of having been plagiarised in this manner in order to fully understand its impact on British culture. Ultimately, while the history of the composition and publication Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* during the eighteenth century details the repeated and calculated misrepresentation of the author, the first black voice in British print culture

¹³¹ Gronniosaw, *Narrative*, p. 2.

persisted for decades, generating an original framework for successive writers to come.

Chapter 2

Ignatius Sancho, Frances Crewe, and London's Sentimental Libertines, 1769-1782

INTRODUCTION

Although his autobiography fell comfortably within the tradition of the spiritual conversion narrative, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw laid the foundations for black writing to penetrate into other regions of Britain's literary landscape. Ignatius Sancho, probably the best-known of the authors discussed in this thesis, is routinely described as a 'man of letters'.¹ This phrase is freighted with the connotations of gentility, cultural refinement and social 'politeness' which regularly characterise popular depictions of eighteenth-century British society. Unlike other black writers of the period, Sancho was raised from an early age in bourgeois and aristocratic London households, enabling him to form a sophisticated understanding of these specific social contexts. Born into slavery in 1729, he came to Britain at the age of two and was given as a gift to 'three maiden sisters, resident at Greenwich'.² The sisters tried to keep him in a state of 'African ignorance', which led him to flee their household as a young man to live with the Duke and Duchess of Montagu. In 1758, he married Anne Osborn, a black West-Indian woman, and in 1773 they left the Montagu household to set up a grocer's shop in Westminster. Throughout this time, and until his death in 1780, Sancho cultivated and maintained meaningful social relationships with a wide range

¹ See, for example, the collection of essays published to coincide with the unveiling of his portrait at the National Portrait Gallery, Reyahn King et. al. (eds.), *Ignatius Sancho: African Man of Letters* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997).

² Ann Dingsdale has conjectured 'that these may have been the Legge sisters, three single women, sisters of the earl of Dartmouth, who lived directly opposite Montagu House'. Greenwich Education Services, *Ignatius Sancho (1729-1780): Life and Times* (London: 1998) cited in Brycchan Carey, "'The extraordinary Negro": Ignatius Sancho, Joseph Jekyll, and the Problem of Biography', *British Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies*, 26 (2003), p. 2.

of correspondents, carving out a position for himself in London's 'polite' society primarily through his mastery of the familiar letter.

The key to maintaining these relationships lay in the performative nature of the letters themselves. As Clare Brant has suggested, the Habermasian conceptualisation of social arenas – as consisting of two 'mutually infiltrating' but essentially separate spheres into which 'public' and 'private' social functions could be divided – is an active hindrance to the reader of the eighteenth-century letter.³ Social convention, particularly among culturally elite circles, allowed for ostensibly private manuscript letters to be composed and read in company, discussed, reviewed, circulated and even submitted for publication without permission from the original correspondent.⁴ Letters might also be written with a view to posterity, since it was not unusual for particularly good epistolary performances, or the correspondence of well-known individuals, to be archived and/or posthumously published. For this reason, suggests Lyn Innes, we must remember that 'the age did not demand or expect an essential self to be revealed, nor did it use the criteria of authenticity and sincerity, and it is as post-Romantic critics that we judge by such criteria'.⁵ The status of a handwritten letter as neither fully 'private' nor 'public' facilitated (indeed actively encouraged) the construction of multiple epistolary personae, easing some of the

³ Clare Brant, *Eighteenth-Century Letters and British Culture* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), p. 5. For a definition of the Habermasian public and private spheres, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: Polity, 1989), pp. 1-26.

⁴ The latter happened to Sancho when his letter to John Browne was supposedly 'inserted unknown to Mr. Sancho' into the 13 May 1778 edition of *The Public Advertiser*. Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African* (London: J. Nichols et. al., 1782), v.1 pp. 191-192. For public letter reading and writing, see Eve Bannet, *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1680-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 225-273.

⁵ Lyn Innes, 'Eighteenth-Century Men of Letters: Ignatius Sancho and Sake Dean Mahomed', in Susheila Nasta (ed.), *Reading the 'New' Literatures in a Postcolonial Era* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000), p. 24.

tensions inherent in a bourgeois social environment which made often contradictory demands of its actors.

To no-one was the process of enacting multiple epistolary characters more necessary than Sancho. As a man, he was expected to be world-wise, gallant and carousing; as a Christian, he should display sobriety and devotion to his family. As an educated man of property, he was expected to discourse knowledgably on literature, music, philosophy, art and politics; as a mere shop-keeper, he needed to display due deference to his customers and social superiors. As a British man, he should be patriotic and dedicated to his country; as a black man, he had to acknowledge his alien status. The only way Sancho could exist in all these different states at once was to emphasise particular aspects of his personality, values and beliefs according to different correspondents and social situations. In combination, these epistolary techniques helped Sancho to maintain a precarious social situation as black ‘insider’ in the rarefied world of aristocratic and bourgeois London society. A number of literary critics have pointed out Sancho’s utilisation of his own marginal status to pass judgement on British society.⁶ However, with the exception of his correspondence with Laurence Sterne, Sancho’s letters have yet to be understood explicitly in terms of the specific social relationships that they helped to construct and maintain.⁷

Sancho’s skilful and multiple self-representations have divided scholars’ opinions of him. In the late twentieth century, historians tended to view his willingness to tailor his letters to his correspondents as assimilationist. Paul Edwards

⁶ See Vincent Carretta, ‘Introduction’, in Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 1998), pp. ix-xlii; Felicity Nussbaum, ‘Being a Man: Olaudah Equiano and Ignatius Sancho’, in Vincent Carretta and Phillip Gould (eds.), *Genius in Bondage: Literature of the Early Black Atlantic* (Lexington, KT: University Press of Kentucky, 2001), pp. 54-71.

⁷ For Sancho’s correspondence with Sterne, see Markman Ellis, ‘Ignatius Sancho’s Letters: Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form’, in Carretta and Gould (eds.), *Genius in Bondage*, pp. 199 – 217.

described Sancho's 'almost complete assimilation into eighteenth-century British society', while James Walvin's initial description of him in passing as 'obsequious' is now almost infamous among scholars of eighteenth-century black British history.⁸ Folarin Shyllon, even while framing Sancho's work in the context of the later formal abolitionist movement, thought of him as 'the golden black boy of the English aristocracy and gentry', though he noted that his correspondents saw him as 'always a "nigger" first'.⁹ This perspective remained popular until at least 1996, when Norma Myers complained that 'Sancho expressed his self-awareness in apologetic, complaisant terminology, clothing himself in a cloak of meekness to win the immunity which society would allow an unthreatening outsider'.¹⁰ Sukhdev Sandhu succinctly summed up this academic tendency when he lamented that 'Sancho has often been condemned by critics and historians for being a ludicrous, preening traitor to his race'.¹¹ However, a new critical tendency has since emerged, largely championed by literary critics (most extensively by Brycchan Carey and Markman Ellis), which positively valorises Sancho's 'heterogeneous self-portrayal' as a powerful indicator of his intellectual and social achievements.¹² Many critics have

⁸ Paul Edwards, 'Introduction', in Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Later Ignatius Sancho* ed. Paul Edwards (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1968), p. xv; James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro in English Society, 155-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), p. 61. It should be noted that Walvin later modified his opinion of Sancho.

⁹ Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain, 1555-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 33, 192.

¹⁰ Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1770-1830* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 133.

¹¹ Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Ignatius Sancho and Laurence Sterne', *Research in African Literatures*, 29:4 (1998), p. 88.

¹² See, for example, Soren C. Hammerschmidt, 'Character, Cultural Agency and Abolition: Ignatius Sancho's Published Letters', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 31:2 (2008), pp. 259-74; Francoise Le Jeune, "'Of a Negro, a Butler and a Grocer" (Jekyll, 7) - Ignatius Sancho's Epistolary Contribution to the Abolition Campaign (1766-1780)', *Etudes Anglaises*, 61:4 (2008), pp. 440-45; Brycchan Carey, "'The Hellish Means of Killing and Kidnapping": Ignatius Sancho and the Campaign against the "Abominable Traffic for Slaves"', in Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis and Sarah Salih (eds.), *Discourse of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its Colonies, 1760-1838* (London: Palgrave

now recognised his contribution to generating antislavery sentiment among the wider British reading public as fundamental. In particular, Sancho's enactment of the related discourses of sensibility and libertine masculinity in many of his letters has been understood as one of the most powerful weapons in his antislavery arsenal.¹³

The first part of this chapter contributes to this growing area of interest in Sancho's literary letters, contextualising some of his sentimental and libertine letters with an analysis of popular representations of black male sexuality in British print media. Focusing on his letters to young men, it demonstrates that Sancho defined a new type of black masculinity in response to popular depictions of black men as intellectually and culturally inferior and as having brutal sexual appetites towards white women. The second part of the chapter complicates and nuances this picture by discussing how Sancho was publically remembered following his death, with particular reference to the process of edition undergone by his manuscript letters prior to their publication. By examining how his editor, biographer and memorialisers attempted to emphasise his literary achievements by accentuating the sentimental aspects of his character and 'story', it shows that they actually shifted focus away from the intrinsic personal characteristics for which he was remembered by his friends, and on to the perceived ethnic differences which were to mark him out as a novelty. Sancho's contribution is ultimately shown to be a commodity of both social

MacMillan, 2004), pp. 81-95; Lyn Innes, *A History of Black and Asian Writing in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 17-55.

¹³ See, for example, Brycchan Carey, *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility: Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), pp. 1-72; Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 189-212; Ellis, 'Ignatius Sancho's Letters', pp. 199 – 217; Nussbaum, 'Being a Man', pp. 54-71; Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 49-128.

aspiration on the part of the author and well-meaning but essentially reductive understanding of black intellectual capacity on the part of the editor.

IGNATIUS SANCHO'S SENTIMENTAL AND LIBERTINE LETTERS

Sancho's position within a circle of 'polite' acquaintance should not be taken to mean that he always expressed himself with staid decorum. His correspondence with his male friends was characterised by playful insults, bawdy innuendo and a worldly appreciation of others' sexual adventures. Sancho honed these specific social skills while still in Montagu's service; indeed, his enactment of these peculiar forms of politeness – retained throughout his adult life – stemmed from his position as a servant in an aristocratic household. Gillian Russell has suggested that 'some servants revealed a tendency to mimic the master's [social] performance' in the eighteenth century, 'thus destabilising the [...] reliability of signs of rank'.¹⁴ As Montagu's butler, Sancho had many opportunities to witness these performances of jocular fraternalism, and to identify this type of social behaviour as *de rigueur* between highly-educated, moneyed men. Moreover, having evidently been educated in literature and the arts in the Montagu household, he was well aware that, to borrow Brant's expression, 'making elegant insults was an important part of eighteenth-century politeness', especially in letters to young men of similar social rank.¹⁵

He incorporated these generic aspects of the familiar letter between well-to-do men into the more declarative style of emotional expression associated with

¹⁴ Gillian Russell, "'Keeping Place": Servants, Theater and Sociability in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *The Eighteenth Century*, 42:1 (2001), p. 23.

¹⁵ Brant, *Eighteenth Century Letters*, p. 4.

sentimental discourse.¹⁶ For example, on 17 September 1769, he wrote to his friend John Meheux, the future Secretary to the [India] Board of Control,

Now, my dear M----, I know you have persuasive eloquence among the women – try your oratorical powers. – You have many women – and I am sure there must be a great deal of charity amongst them – Mind, we ask no money – only rags – mere literal rags – patience is a ragged virtue – therefore strip the girls, dear M----, strip them of what they can spare – a few superfluous worn-out garments – but leave them pity – benevolence – the charities – goodness of heart – love – and the blessings of yours truly [...] ¹⁷

Here a playful acknowledgement of Meheux's popularity among women veered firstly towards the language of libertinism (the oblique reference to his 'oratorical powers', and the jokey assumption that, being interested in Meheux, 'there must be a great deal of charity' among the women) before deftly dropping into the conventions of sentimental writing. Sancho's yoking of both libertine and sentimental discourse to the service of charity situates these letters squarely within the tradition of masculine sensibility popularised in contemporaneous novels, most prominently those of Sancho's correspondent Laurence Sterne.¹⁸ As Ellis has pointed out, this 'propensity to indulge the pathetic scene, might be called a kind of libertine masculinity'.¹⁹

¹⁶ Brycchan Carey defines sentimental literature as 'characterised by an interest in feelings and emotional states. Much of this literature is devoted to stories of woe and moments of distress, and the quintessential sentimental moment is when one or more characters begin to weep'. Carey, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, p. 18.

¹⁷ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, pp. 13-14.

¹⁸ Carey has suggested that 'the growth of sensibility as a popular literary phenomenon and philanthropy as a social force are seemingly related'. Carey, *Rhetoric of Sensibility*, p. 19.

¹⁹ Markman Ellis has also discussed the role of this masculine sensibility on both Sancho and Sterne's writings in Ellis, 'Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form', pp. 209; 199-217.

Meanwhile, his invocation of the classic eighteenth-century British ‘manly’ virtues of pity, benevolence and charity revealed his commitment to the conventions of masculine sensibility.

Sancho’s constant references to the body, and in particular to physical manifestations of emotions, underlined his desire to be understood as a man of sensibility by certain of his correspondents. Paul Goring’s observation that ‘there grew up around sentimental novels a culture in which bodily responses were widely lauded as signs of moral status’ might well be applied to Sancho’s representations of the human body as an eloquent object in his letters.²⁰ When Meheux’s charitable donation – it was unclear as to whether this was monetary or if he had indeed ‘stripped the girls’ of their clothes as Sancho suggested – reached the distressed young woman mentioned above, Sancho’s description metonymically mapped her emotional reaction to a few key bodily sites of expression. The ‘object of thy charitable care’ thus suddenly became a collection of disembodied organs: ‘the lip quivering, and the tongue refusing its office, thro’ joyful surprize – the heart gratefully throbbing – overswelled with thankful sensations’.²¹ In its very paralysis the woman’s tongue articulated both her own ‘moral status’ as a feeling individual and Sancho’s literary sensibility in noticing and expressing it. Still, he could not resist reciting his own emotional reaction to this affecting scene of gratitude, paraphrasing *Othello*: ‘...a heart o’ercharged with gratitude, or a deed begotten by sacred pity – as thine of this day – would melt me, atho’ unused to the melting mood’.²²

²⁰ Paul Goring, *The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 142.

²¹ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, p. 14.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

This allusion to Shakespeare, seemingly a throwaway remark, revealed some of the tensions and contradictions inherent in Sancho's assertion of his own literary masculinity in the face of racialized assumptions about him and stereotypical depictions of black manhood. Firstly, by his own repeated insistence, his heart was actually *very* used to 'the melting mood' – or at least in his letters to young men. In fact, he was often at pains to demonstrate his emotional and intellectual engagement with sentimental literature. For example, when he read Voltaire's *Semiramis* in January 1777, he complained that he 'found nothing of the sentimental novelty – which I expected from its great author'.²³ Indeed, the basis of his friendships with his young male correspondents was supported by the tension between sentimentality and a masculine sense of enterprise, sexual or otherwise. In a letter to Meheux about a mutual acquaintance's health, Sancho articulated this tension in a short aside: 'I honour you for your humane feelings – and much more for your brotherly affection; – but do not Namby-Pamby with the manly exertions of benevolence'.²⁴ This was a skilful inscription of the values underpinning friendship between two 'men of feeling'. But, given Sancho's sophisticated understanding of the paradigm of emotionally sensitive masculinity, Othello might appear a strange choice as a role model. Felicity Nussbaum has convincingly demonstrated that, as British masculinity became increasingly tethered to nationalism and anti-black discourse, black writers had few paragons of masculinity to invoke or emulate.²⁵ When the question of his blackness was such a prominent issue, Sancho could hardly equate himself to Charles

²³ Ibid., p. 107.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 66.

²⁵ Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human*, pp. 189-213.

Grandison or McKenzie's Harley, though he was familiar with them.²⁶ He was left ventriloquizing Othello, a figure whose fatal flaws of jealousy and wrath – and unmelting heart – were emphatically absent from the sentimentalist persona Sancho was so careful to project elsewhere in his letters.

When Sancho left Montagu's service in early 1774, his new-found economic independence was reflected in the evolution of his libertine discourse. While he was no longer under Montagu's control, neither was he entirely under his protection. Beyond the relative security afforded by his attachment to high-ranking aristocracy, Sancho needed to emphasise his right to be included in the new social fold of the aspirational bourgeoisie. His status as an independent, black property-owner thus emboldened his libertine writing to new heights of bawdiness while tethering it more closely to notions of industry, honesty and self-sacrifice. In a letter to Meheux of 1 September 1776, for example, he wryly parodied the dissipated coming-of-age traditions of aristocratic men:

How comes it that – without the advantages of a twentieth generation of noble blood flowing uncontaminated in your veins – without the customary three years dissipation at college – and the (nothing-to-be-done-without) four years perambulation on the Continent --- without all these needful appendages---with little more than plain sense---sheer good-nature---and a right honest heart---thou canst---

“Like low-born Allen, with an aukward shame,

Do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame.”²⁷

²⁶ For these and other white ‘men of feeling’ in eighteenth-century literature, see Alex Whetmore, *Men of Feeling in Eighteenth Century Literature: Touching Fiction* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

²⁷ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. 103.

Sancho was calling attention to the similarities between himself and his correspondent in this passage as a means to cement or maintain their relationship. But more specifically, by turning his wit against the traditions of aristocratic young manhood, he declared his allegiances to socially- and culturally-aspirational bourgeois society. Sancho's compliment to Meheux was in some respects intended to reflect back on himself. Through autodidacticism, he suggested, they had each progressed to greater heights of intellectual and moral refinement than could be afforded with all the economic and social benefits of aristocratic birth.

The ever-present issue of his blackness, however, required him to tread carefully when enacting libertine discourse. While he was indulgent, even encouraging, of his correspondents' dalliances with women, he was cautious to site his appreciation for such a lifestyle as external to himself. In other words, while he was happy for other men to sleep around, he himself either did not, or did not admit to it. Even though Joseph Jekyll's biography suggests that he left the service of the three aristocratic sisters due to 'the dread of constant reproach arising from the detection of an amour' – and there is reason to doubt the veracity of this claim – his letters to both male companions and women he claimed to find attractive routinely mentioned his love of and fidelity to his black wife, Anne.²⁸ Writing to his friend (and the future editor of the *Letters*) Frances Crewe in 1777, his flirtatious protestations that 'could I new-model Nature – your sex should rule supreme – there should be no other ambition but that of pleasing the ladies – no other warfare but the contention of obsequious lovers' were tempered by the mention of 'Mrs. Sancho', who 'joins in

²⁸ Joseph Jekyll, 'The Life of Ignatius Sancho', in Sancho, *Letters*, p. vii.

every good and grateful wish'.²⁹ Writing to William Stevenson during the same year, Sancho was careful to mark the distinction between his own position as a faithful family-man and that of his more dissolute correspondent, playfully chiding him that 'While thou hast only one mouth to feed – one back to cloath – and one wicked member to indulge – thou wilt have no pity from me'.³⁰ One year earlier, the postscript of a letter thanking Meheux for a gift of venison demonstrated similarly bawdy humour, but again suggested a vicarious, rather than direct experience of gallantry:

P.S. I tell you what – (are you not coming to town soon?) – F----- and venison are good things, but by the manes of my ancestors – I had rather have the pleasure of gossipation with your sublime highness. – What sketches have you taken? – What books have you read? – What lasses gallanted?³¹

The comic tension here arose firstly from the dual potential of the elided 'F-word', as referring either to 'fawn' – i.e. veal – or 'fucking', both of which were indulgences well-suited to the libertine mode.³² More interesting, though, was the positioning of 'lasses gallanted' alongside 'sketches taken' and 'books read' in a trio of bourgeois cultural pursuits. This suggested a very particular type of male sexual enterprise: one contained within a model of educated sociability and cultural refinement. Sancho's desire to hear about what 'lasses' Meheux had 'gallanted' was evidently part of a

²⁹ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, pp. 131-133.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 170-171.

³¹ *Ibid.*, v. 1, p. 93.

³² In his manuscript letters, Sancho sometimes used dashes or cross-hatches in place of certain words to create double meanings or imply profanities. See BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, 'Ignatius Sancho to William Stevenson, 1 Apr 1779'.

wider homosocial exchange of class-specific ideas which extended at least as far as art and literature.

Sancho's preference for hearing about Meheux's libertine experiences over indulging in them for himself should not be overlooked, either. It was particularly important for him to express his interest in Meheux's sexual adventures as both vicarious (as against 'shared') and 'gentlemanly' because the two men both held a commitment to challenging prejudicial representations of black men's sexuality. Nussbaum has suggested that Sancho, along with Equiano, generated 'original enactments of black manhood' and that 'both former slaves refuse to be limited to the incommensurable elements they are assumed to embody, or in particular, to allow virility, especially in relation to white women, to stand as the primary measure of their person'.³³ A look at some of Meheux's published writing, and Sancho's reactions to it, shows these 'original enactments of black manhood' in a more distinctly historical light.

On 3 June 1777, a letter written under the pseudonym 'Pro Bono Publico' appeared in *The Morning Chronicle*, requesting Lord North to set to work 'reducing the number of *Blacks* among us, and, as far as possible, extirpating their disgraceful growth in a fair and beautiful land'. The letter expressed particular fears over miscegenation, stemming both from aristocratic women simply looking at their black servants while pregnant, and also from 'the intercourse of the *Blacks* with the females of the lower class'.³⁴ Pro Bono Publico went on to suggest that 'every female debasing herself to the arms of any black whatever' should be 'declared INFAMOUS' and then 'transported, with her offspring, to some of the wilds, where a

³³ Nussbaum, 'Being a Man', p. 57.

³⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 03 June 1777, p. 1.

fair face never yet was seen, to enjoy her taste with her favourites’, while ‘on conviction of the father’s villainous act of subverting our species, he be *Tenducci’d* in the first instance’.³⁵ One continuing thread of the tirade was the repeated insistence that ‘a most sincere respect for beauty, and the fair sex, chiefly persuaded me to touch upon the subject’ and that miscegenation amounted to ‘the destruction and decay of that beauty, which at present is the greatest honour and ornament of these kingdoms’.³⁶ Pro Bono Publico fastened his own libertine masculinity very explicitly to racial purity and national-social ideals of white women as the ‘ornament’ of the British state, harping on the same strain as Edward Long vis-à-vis the supposed rapaciousness of black men, but also, inadvertently, revealed his anxieties over emasculation and rejection by women in favour of black sexual partners.

Pro Bono Publico was not alone in his assumptions about black sexual licentiousness. Long’s now infamous description of Africans as having ‘no moral sensations; no taste but for women; gormondizing, and drinking to excess’, first published in his *History of Jamaica* in 1774, was popularised among a wider audience when the ‘anthropological’ sections of his book were reprinted serially in full front-page spreads in the *London Chronicle*, shortly after the book’s release.³⁷ Accounts of enslaved black people in the West Indies similarly emphasised an assumed moral degeneracy in their behaviour. In a 1778 review of an early antislavery poem, for example, slave dances were represented as taking place ‘as in a state of nature’, exhibiting ‘attitudes and gestures which are exceedingly obnoxious to

³⁵ Ibid., p. 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica* (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), v. 2, p. 353; see, for example, *London Chronicle*, 27 August 1774, p. 1.

our ideas of delicacy'.³⁸ Pro Bono Publico's suggestions of corporeal punishment for inter-racial relationships were not alone either: a similar suggestion was made again by another anonymous complainant in September 1778, who wrote to the *Gazetteer* to suggest that 'the intercourse between black and white, should, on the part of the white, have the severest punishment', and that 'the American Islands should be left to themselves, where, women, I am informed, lose a hand on being detected of any familiarities with negroes'.³⁹ While it must be recognised that these attitudes were not ubiquitous in the British media (at least not in 1777), they do illustrate that Pro Bono Publico's comments were representative of a particularly virulent strand of anti-black rhetoric which marked as one of its primary targets sexual relationships between black men and white women.

Meheux responded to Pro Bono Publico under the pseudonym of 'Linco' in the *Morning Chronicle* of 13 June 1777.⁴⁰ His attack on the letter was lengthy, addressing each point in turn, but again the primary focus was on masculinity and sexual adventure. After a blunt accusation that Pro Bono Publico had the 'antlers' of a cuckold, the letter went on to challenge him:

But as I think you a man, I'll only suppose you in a country where there was no other women than black, that you should be continually with them, and that on your first advances, or offers of love, you should be treated in the manner prescribed by yourself, and if you would not run the hazard of such a detection, I *here* declare you *no man*.⁴¹

³⁸ Anon., '[Review of] Jamaica; a Poem, Written in the Year 1776', *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 58 (1776), pp. 143-144.

³⁹ *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, 28 February 1777, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁰ Carretta has identified 'Linco' as Meheux, in Sancho, *Letters*, (ed. Carretta), pp. 259-260 n. 12.

⁴¹ *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 June 1777, p. 1. (Original emphasis).

Meheux's counterfactual pitted Pro Bono Publico's interpretation of libertine masculinity as a protector of ethnic purity against one which demanded libido – indeed a willingness to risk castration for sex – as a prerequisite for true manhood. The male impulse for sex was seen quite specifically to override concerns of miscegenation, even while they were accepted as legitimate. 'A mixture of breed, is a thing I do not recommend,' Meheux's letter stated, but went on to concede that, 'on the other hand, how can the men be blamed, when there are so few of their own colour amongst them[?]'⁴² The letter ended with an indignant response to Pro Bono Publico's euphemism '*Tenducci'd*', meaning castrated – an allusion to the Italian castrato singer Giusto Fernando Tenducci. 'Your alluding to Mr. T----i is an unmanly reflection,' he wrote, 'for which you deserve a manly contempt; it shews [...] inhumanity, to sport at another man's misfortunes'. The twin preoccupations of the libertine – that is, of course, gentlemanly social conduct and sexual potency – were here united in Meheux's appeal to good taste. Some subjects were clearly beyond the pale of polite discussion.

Sancho, aware of the stereotype of the oversexed black man, was critical of Pro Bono Publico on higher intellectual grounds in a 1777 letter addressed to Meheux. 'Indeed,' he wrote of Pro Bono Publico's rebuttal to the 'Linco' letter, in which he had accused Meheux of consorting with black people, 'the poor fellow foams again, and appears as indecently dull as malice could wish him. I went to the coffee house to examine the file, and was greatly pleased upon the second reading of your work, in which is blended the Gentleman and the Scholar'.⁴³ This was a

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ *The Morning Chronicle*, 20 June 1777, pp. 1-2; Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, pp. 10-11.

fastidiously cool response to quite a vicious exchange of words which concerned him directly. Not only had Pro Bono Publico specifically targeted black domestic staff in his initial letter, but Meheux had used a section from one of Sterne's letters to Sancho (cited only as 'Sterne's letter to one of the colour') in his response.⁴⁴ Sancho's suggestion that Pro Bono Publico was as 'indecently dull as malice could wish him' was rhetorically very sophisticated in that, like Sancho's curiosity about others' sex lives, it positioned the hot-headedness and sensuality assumed by many to be natural to Africans as external to himself. Hence, 'malice', as something separate from Sancho, took on its own agency in wishing ill of Pro Bono Publico. Meanwhile, Sancho *internalised* the pleasure derived from Meheux's intellectually nourishing contribution to the debate, thus framing his response in the traditions of sensibility and libertinism. It should not be overlooked, either, that Sancho offhandedly mentioned that he had read the papers in the 'coffee house'; another pointed signifier of his investment in bourgeois literary culture.⁴⁵ Sancho's enactment of the related discourses of sensibility, sentimentalism and libertinism was tactically deployed as a counterpoint to stereotypical depictions of black male sexuality and moral degradation.

It is perhaps for this reason that he did not retain his jocular attitude towards gallantry when he wrote to a younger black man known as a notorious bounder. Julius Soubise, the son of an enslaved black woman and a white man in St. Kitts, was brought to England in 1764 at the age of 10, and worked as a servant to the Duchess of Queensberry. He 'soon became the subject of satiric engravings as a macaroni or

⁴⁴ *The Morning Chronicle*, 13 June 1777, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Amelia Faye Rauser, *Caricature Unmasked: Irony, Authenticity, and Individualism in Eighteenth-Century English Prints* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2008), p. 32.

fop', and he and the 'eccentric' Queensberry were 'rumoured to be lovers'.⁴⁶ These rumours were clearly circulating by 1773, when a suggestive etching featuring the two of them fencing was produced by William Austin (see fig. 2.1). But while Sancho's letters to Meheux, for example, were filled with curiosity about his sexual adventures, his two surviving letters to Soubise took on the opposite character.



Fig. 2.1: William Austin, The D---- of ----- playing at FOILS with her favorite Lap Dog MUNGO after Expending near 10000l to make him a ----, 1773, hand-coloured etching, 273mm x 376 mm. Lewis Walpole Library, Yale University, <http://images.library.yale.edu/walpoleimages/dl/003000/lwlpr03665/lwlpr03665.jpg> (Accessed 11/06/2014).

Despite Soubise's being of similar age and, through his connection to Queensberry, financial means to Meheux, Sancho's correspondence with him deployed a 'tone of pious morality more akin to conduct-book discourse and the

⁴⁶ Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (Lexington KY, University Press of Kentucky), p. 103 n. 3; Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human*, p. 7.

reforming language of the sermon' than the libertine mode.⁴⁷ In a letter dated 11 October 1772, he advised Soubise to be more cautious and Christian in his lifestyle:

Happy, happy lad! What a fortune is thine! – Look round upon the miserable fate of almost all our unfortunate colour – superadded to ignorance – see slavery, and the contempt of those very wretches who roll in affluence from our labours superadded to this woeful catalogue – hear the ill-bred and heart-racking abuse of the foolish vulgar. – You, S[oubis]e, tread as cautiously as the strictest rectitude can guide ye [...]⁴⁸

At the time, their social positions were relatively comparable – Sancho was still working as the Butler in the Montagu household in 1772, while Soubise's position was technically that of valet to Queensberry, who had apparently solicited an intervention from the older servant in the first place.⁴⁹ Sancho's advice to tread carefully drew its seriousness and authority from another thing they had in common – the likelihood that either of them could have remained in slavery. But the imperative to stop philandering seemed to be related to anti-black prejudice in Britain – the 'heart wracking abuse of the foolish vulgar'.

Indeed, much of the abuse and ridicule endured by Soubise in particular centred upon his sexual exploits, and in particular his attempts to court genteel white women of the London *ton*. For example, his friend Henry Angelo recalled

⁴⁷ Ellis, 'Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form', p. 210.

⁴⁸ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. 42.

⁴⁹ Jekyll, 'Life', in Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. xiii.

seeing him, while presenting a chair to a lady, if from some distance, make three pauses, pushing it along some feet each time, skipping with an *entre-chat en avant*, then a *pirouette* when placed. [...] As an orator, his favourite exhibition was Romeo in the garden scene. When he came to that part, “O that I was a glove upon that hand, that I might touch that cheek,” the black face, the contrast of his teeth, turning up the white of his eyes as he mouthed, a general laugh always ensued, which indeed was not discouraging to his vanity, and did not prevent him pursuing his rhetorical opinions of himself.⁵⁰

The laughs in these instances, whether in respect of his performance or not, came at Soubise’s expense, rendering ridiculous his attempts to act in the manner of a gallant English gentleman. Knowing that his enactment of Romeo – a white, tragic literary figure – could not be taken seriously by his white audience, he chose to play the role comically, drawing laughter from his pretensions to both culturally elite status and romantic interest from ‘polite’ white women.

Soubise’s only known surviving letter – suitably enough, a love letter – is now well-known, though few if any critics have commented extensively on its contents or the disturbing story behind its composition.⁵¹ Though the source from which the letter was taken is unreliable, it nevertheless deserves attention as a representation of British attitudes towards black men’s sexuality.⁵² The story states that, after years of sexual exploits, Soubise attempted to woo ‘a celebrated toast’ into marriage after

⁵⁰ Henry Angelo, *Angelo’s Pic Nic, Or, Table Talk* (London: John Ebers, 1834), pp. 60-61.

⁵¹ The most complete analysis of Soubise’s life in polite society is in Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham NC, Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 27-77. Miller does not, however, discuss the following incident.

⁵² Ellis has described *Nocturnal Revels* as ‘distinctly unreliable’. Ellis, ‘Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form’, p. 213; Nussbaum has described the biographical information about Soubise as ‘sparse and somewhat suspect’. Nussbaum, ‘Being a Man’, p. 63.

applying corrosive cosmetics to his face in an attempt to lighten his skin. The lady ridiculed his love letter, and when they later both attended the same masque (coincidentally dressed as a sultan and sultana), she publically rejected his advances in emphatic fashion, declaring that '[s]he bid him stand off, he was an imposter – she could perceive he was only a black Eunuch in disguise; that she should acquaint the Grand Signior of the indignity offered his Sublime Highness by such a wretch, and have him flayed'.⁵³ The story ended with Soubise leaving the masque in disgrace, and the sarcastic statement that 'he has never since had the least relish for a masquerade'.⁵⁴

Regardless of whether this anecdote was based in reality (academics have tended to treat Soubise's letter as a genuine sample of his writing without acknowledging the rest of the story at all), it demonstrated a desire for and enjoyment of social humiliation for black men who attempted to engage romantically with 'respectable' white women.⁵⁵ In other words, Soubise's method of enacting the masculine libertine persona – based upon sexual virility, financial profligacy, keen fashion sense and literary education – had socially failed, where Sancho's had succeeded. The differences between their approaches to entering the bourgeois social world via the discourse of libertine sociability were twofold. Firstly, Sancho's sophisticated understanding of the social conventions of epistolary correspondence (particularly in their fluid public/private status) prevented him from sharing such potentially socially embarrassing information by letter. Secondly, Sancho's heightened awareness of prejudicial attitudes regarding black male sexuality led him

⁵³ Anon., *Nocturnal Revels* (London: M. Goadby, 1779), p. 232.

⁵⁴ Anon., *Nocturnal Revels*, p. 232.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Ellis, 'Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form', pp. 209-212; Vincent Carretta, 'Explanatory Notes' in Sancho, *Letters*, (ed. Carretta), pp. 257-258 n. 11.

to express his libertine discourse ‘at one remove’, siting his sexual curiosity externally to his own body, either vicariously through friends like Meheux, or by approximating it to intellectual cultural pursuits such as reading, painting or the composition of music. Soubise’s expressions of sexuality were more overt, more personal, and more directly linked to the physicality of sex itself. Sadly they also assumed a much lesser degree of prejudice among his wealthy peers than he actually discovered.

Soubise’s story demonstrated the rarity (and precariousness) of Sancho’s position as a genuinely well-respected black figure amongst London’s socio-cultural elite. Moreover, the way it was told – invented, exaggerated, fictionalised, sensationalised, sexualised – revealed that the limits of polite conduct were fundamentally influenced by emerging ideas of racial difference.⁵⁶ Eventually, Soubise was accused of raping one of Queensberry’s maids and left the country to work breaking in horses in Madras. The *Morning Post* reported the incident a week after he had left, describing him as having ‘the most vicious appetite, that perhaps ever was implanted in the heart of a vile slave’.⁵⁷ Here the lines between the philosophical question of race and the political reality of slavery were blurred, and the distinction between free and enslaved black humanity removed. The implication was clearly that black people were unsuited to anything other than slavery and poverty because of their ‘vicious appetites’ for sex with white women.

In this context, it is not difficult to see why Sancho took such a stern line with Soubise. Writing to him on 29 November 1778, after he had settled at Madras,

⁵⁶ For example, 1777 saw the publication of a revised and extended edition of Kant’s essay, ‘Von der Verchiedenen Rassen der Menschen’ [‘Of the Different Races of Man’]. For an analysis of the impact of this and Buffon’s *Histoire Naturelle*, in eighteenth-century Europe, see Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 252-271.

⁵⁷ See *Morning Chronicle and Daily Advertiser*, 22 July 1777, p. 2.

Sancho advised him to reform his character, with the ultimate goal in mind of reintegration into polite British society.

You may safely conclude now, that you have not many friends in England – be it your study, with attention, kindness, humility, and industry, to make friends where you are – industry with good-nature and honesty is the road to wealth. – A wise oeconomy – without avaricious meanness – or dirty rapacity will in a few years render you decently independent.⁵⁸

At first glance, it might have appeared that Sancho was merely trying to inspire particular manly values in Soubise. In fact, he was recommending a new model of masculinity in the face of increasingly prejudicial attitudes towards black men in Britain. In the years between this and the first letter, Sancho had become a self-reliant businessman, open to greater economic opportunities but also to more vicious and cruder forms of discrimination.⁵⁹ His focus here and elsewhere in the same letter on ‘independence’, ‘honest poverty’ and ‘industry’ draws his own cautious expressions of masculine sexuality into contrast with the excesses of libertinage latterly enjoyed by his younger correspondent. His first letter, written while he was still Montagu’s butler, appealed to an aristocratic sense of social propriety in its advice to ‘tread as cautiously as the strictest rectitude can guide ye’. Sancho highlighted the common ground between himself and Soubise by reminding him that truly equal status with much of their social circle was precluded because of their shared blackness. For

⁵⁸ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 2, p. 36.

⁵⁹ See, for example, his letter to Daniel Braithwaite, 17 December 1779: ‘Figure to yourself, my dear Sir, a man of convexity of belly exceeding Falstaff – and a black face into the bargain – waddling into the van of poor thieves and pennyless prostitutes [...] – what a banquet for wicked jest and wanton wit’. Sancho, *Letters*, v. 2, p. 126.

Sancho, the younger man's attempts to woo 'celebrated toasts', and the consequent gossip and ridicule, only underscored the fact that they were seen as more akin to slaves than the educated free men they were. His second letter, on the other hand, was written after he had joined London's culturally and financially aspirant independent middle class. In this social milieu, Soubise's reintegration (indeed his very right to be there) depended more on his intrinsic than external characteristics.

However, this was only one part of the picture. Another, larger change had taken place in the years between Sancho's letters of 1772 and 1778 which complicated his thoughts on the relationship between slavery and British national identity. The rejection of a peace treaty between Britain and the newly-independent American colonies in 1778 prompted Sancho to write a public letter to the *Morning Post* on 28 August that year, revealing his patriotic, anti-revolutionary political rhetoric. Referring to the Americans as 'an ungrateful set of parricidal S-c-ts', and 'Englishmen no more, but aliens and bastards', he suggested that America's rejection of Britain's offer would cost the former colonies dearly, and save the metropolis hundreds of thousands of pounds per year.⁶⁰ Disturbingly, unsupported by sentimental or libertine literary frameworks, Sancho's hard-headed political discourse subordinated his antislavery commitments to a nationalist economic imperative. He celebrated the fact that 'the planting tobacco at home [i.e. in the British West Indies] will soon indemnify us for the loss of Virginia and Maryland'.⁶¹ He ended his letter with optimism that either 'the Americans may return to their senses, and their allegiance', or otherwise that 'the African, and East Indian trades, if rightly managed,

⁶⁰ *Morning Post*, 28 August 1778, cited in Vincent Carretta, 'Three West Indian Writers of the 1780s Revisited and Revised', *Research in African Literatures*, 29:4 (1998), pp. 77-78.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

and under kingly government, will soon make amends for the loss of the other'.⁶²

While he had expressed abhorrence of slavery on humanitarian grounds using the language of sentiment elsewhere, this letter, explicitly and exclusively focused on the *economic* outcomes of the American Revolution, acknowledged it as both a necessary and lucrative source of national financial security. Thus, while his anti-prejudice agenda never wavered, Sancho's position as an independent British businessman, as much as his reliance on slave and bondsman-grown produce, complicated his position on the question of slavery.

This unclear stance on slavery was not the one the readers of the published *Letters* would encounter. Sancho died of 'a series of complicated disorders' on 14 December 1780, almost certainly related to his gout, obesity and consequent sedentary lifestyle.⁶³ Before he died, he put a series of measures in place to care for his family; Carey has speculated that one of these was to arrange the publication of his correspondence.⁶⁴ If this was the case, then Sancho was able to have a hand in the selection of the letters which were finally published in 1782. The exclusion of the *Morning Post* letter from the final published volumes suggests that, in furtherance of the project of accommodating himself within the sentimental literary mode, Sancho consciously chose to elide some of his more unsentimental writings – particularly those which appeared to undermine the general thrust of his antislavery and anti-prejudice writing.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Jekyll, 'Life', in Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, p. xii.

⁶⁴ Carey, 'Ignatius Sancho and the Campaign', pp. 88-89.

IGNATIUS SANCHO'S LITERARY AFTERLIFE

Sancho was not the only person interested in how his letters portrayed him. Shortly following his death, one of his correspondents, Frances Crewe, began contacting their shared acquaintances to request copies of letters they had received from Sancho. At the same time, she began to raise a subscription to publish them. Writing to Sir Martin Holkes on 24 July 1781, Thomas Lord recalled how this process took place.⁶⁵

Miss Crew lately dind here, she patronizes Ignatius Sancho's family, a widow, & three children, one a cripple, Mr. Holkes answered for one of them, Miss Crew hath received already near one hundred pounds by subscription for his Letters, knowing Sancho I threw in my mise. I fear as Dr Johnson at present declines the drawing up the Memoirs of Sancho's Life, that the account may not be so entertaining as the subject would bear, some of Sancho's letters being surprising, when known, that he wrote them behind his counter, whilst he was serving in a little retail way to his customers, women and children, at a time that he was in a very bad state of health, labouring under a complication of distempers.⁶⁶

This quotation illuminates a number of the processes that concern the remainder of this chapter. Above all, as this letter was written by a correspondent not included in the *Letters*, it demonstrated that Sancho was fondly remembered by a larger social network than that represented in his published correspondence. Secondly, this letter

⁶⁵ This letter also confirms William Stevenson's widely-accepted identification of Crewe as the editor. See Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, eds. Paul Edwards and Polly Rewt, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), pp. 279-281.

⁶⁶ Norfolk Record Office, MC 5D/30/3 503X7, 'Thomas Lord to Sir Martin Holkes, 24 July 1781', ff. 1-2. 'Mise': 'A crumb, a breadcrumb'. *OED*.

demonstrates that the colour of Sancho's skin was not the primary measure of his character given by his friends, nor even the most 'surprising' aspect behind the composition of his erudite letters. This might in itself be surprising given the wording of the editor's preface and the biography included with his published correspondence. Thirdly, its phrasing sheds new light on the commissioning of Sancho's biographer by demonstrating that Johnson was asked first and 'declined' the task, or at least could not find time to complete it to the publication deadline. This contradicts the account of Joseph Jekyll, the man finally commissioned to write the biography, who suggested that Johnson first promised and afterwards neglected to write it.⁶⁷ Finally, Lord's mention of Mr. Holkes 'answering for' one of Sancho's children suggests a wide network of patronage for the family, incorporating and stretching well beyond the subscription to and sale of the *Letters*. This suggests that Sancho was aware of his own impending death and put measures in place to provide for his family once he was gone. All of these circumstances demand a reading of the *Letters* as a purposefully constructed commercial and literary artefact, in which Sancho's self-representations were carefully but not unproblematically manipulated by Crewe and Jekyll to show him in the best light presumed possible and thereby advance an antislavery agenda and maximise income for the support of his family.

While Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis and Sukhdev Sandhu have all demonstrated that close readings of Sancho's letters mark him out as a consistent and outspoken attacker of racial prejudice and slavery, less has been done to demonstrate how his status as a black man influenced how he was edited and then read after publication.⁶⁸ Soren Hammerschmidt has suggested that Sancho's blackness overtook

⁶⁷ See Sancho, *Letters*, eds. Edwards and Rewt, p. 268.

⁶⁸ See Carey, 'Ignatius Sancho and the Campaign', pp. 81-95; Ellis, 'Sentimental Libertinism and the Politics of Form', pp. 199-219; Sukhdev Sandhu, 'Ignatius Sancho: An African Man of Letters', in

his own 'heterogeneous self-portrayal' in the years after his death as the primary arbiter of his identity. 'The treatment Sancho's letters received at the hands of his abolitionist editors, and the reception of his letters in the print reviews,' he writes, 'may finally indicate that his strategy to diversify his social characters and thereby transcend socio-cultural limits of race failed beyond the social networks and the individual social contacts created by his familiar letters'.⁶⁹ White readers beyond Sancho's immediate circle of acquaintance found themselves unable to look beyond the issue of his black skin, leading to a homogenised understanding of his writing in the isolated contexts of racial philosophy and/or slavery. A reading of three poems written about Sancho, two during his own lifetime and another shortly after his death, broadly supports Hammerschmidt's assertion, but suggests that reductionist readings of his letters began well before Crewe and Jekyll's interventions in the manuscripts.

The first two of these poems, written by Ewan Clark (a stranger to Sancho, as far as we are aware) and published in his *Miscellaneous Poems* in 1779, were a reworking of the exchange of letters between Sancho and Sterne. This exchange has been the focus of the overwhelming majority of critical engagement with Sancho's work during the past two hundred years, and therefore the contents of these letters will not be revisited at length here. The text of these letters was reprinted several times during Sancho's lifetime, accruing him a small degree of 'reflected' celebrity as a correspondent of Sterne's and moreover as an oddity because of the combination of his race and level of education and refinement. As well as appearing in Sterne's posthumously-published correspondence, this exchange appeared in the *Monthly Review*, the *Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, the *Monthly Miscellany* (twice), the

Reyahn King et. al. (eds.), *Ignatius Sancho: African Man of Letters* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 1997), pp. 45-75.

⁶⁹ Hammerschmidt, 'Character, Cultural Agency and Abolition', p. 270.

Gentleman's Magazine, the *Sentimental Magazine*, and the *Weekly Miscellany*, all before Sancho's death, with several more republications appearing immediately afterwards and another spate after the publication of the *Letters* in 1782.⁷⁰ Sancho was identified in various ways in the titles of these reprints, ranging from the specific ('Ignatius Sancho, a free Black in London'), to the generalised ('a Black, in the service of the Duke of Montague'), to the obviously 'vulgar and illiberal' ('a NEGROE').⁷¹ In other words, before the publication of the *Letters*, Sancho was well-known primarily (and often generically) as a 'Black' who wrote to Laurence Sterne on the topic of slavery.

Clark's poems, entitled 'From Ignatius Sancho to Mr. Sterne', and 'From Mr. Sterne, to Ignatius Sancho', were fairly literal versifications of the original letters.⁷² The chief artistic liberty Clark appears to have taken is the elevation of Sancho's sentimental rhetoric to a more declarative pitch. For example, Sancho's original letter stated by way of introduction that 'I am one of those people whom the vulgar and illiberal call "*Negurs*." – The first part of my life was rather unlucky, as I was placed in a family who judged ignorance the best and only security for obedience'.⁷³ In Clark's reworking, this was rephrased to become

I am from that ill-fated lineage sprung,
Term'd *Negroe* by the low, illiberal tongue.

⁷⁰ *Monthly Review, or Literary Journal*, 53 (Nov. 1775), pp. 403-413; *The Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, 4 (Dec. 1775), pp. 696-698; *The Monthly Miscellany*, 3 (Dec. 1775), pp. 561-563; *The Monthly Miscellany*, [no number], (Sep. 1776), pp. 405-406; *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 46 (Jan. 1776), pp. 27-29; *The Sentimental Magazine*, [no number] (Sep. 1776); pp. 405-406; *The Weekly Miscellany*, 9 February 1778, pp. 451-452.

⁷¹ *The Monthly Miscellany*, [no number], (Sep. 1776), p. 405; *The Edinburgh Magazine and Review*, 4 (Dec. 1775), p. 696; *The Weekly Miscellany*, 9 February 1778, p. 451.

⁷² Ewan Clark, *Miscellaneous Poems* (Whitehaven, J. Ware & Son, 1779), p. 214-219.

⁷³ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, pp. 95-96.

Fate on my youthful years indignant low'r'd,
 And in life's bowl her baneful acids pour'd:
 Plac'd me where unenlighten'd ignorance,
 Was for obedience deem'd the best defence.⁷⁴

While this passage anticipated the coupling of sentimentalism and antislavery discourse which was to characterise much abolitionist rhetoric in the following decades, the other major deviation from the original letters undercut the essentially universalising message given by Sancho in the first place.⁷⁵ Where the original passage read ‘the latter part of my life has been – thro’ God’s blessing, truly fortunate, having spent it in the service of one of the best families in the kingdom’, Clark’s poem stated that ‘Plac’d with the truly good, and nobly great / more mild than freedom seems my servile state’.⁷⁶ This transliteration of free domestic service into bonded servility drew attention to Sancho’s own supposed lack of agency in his professional capacity as a butler to the Duke of Montagu, and the resonances therein with his infant status as enslaved. In other words, the cardinal marker of Sancho’s identity, for Clark, was his ethnic and professional similitude to slaves.

An elegiac poem published in 1782 represented Sancho quite differently. The ‘Epistle to Mr. J. H----, on the Death of His Justly Lamented Friend, Ignatius Sancho’ focused primarily on his intrinsic personal qualities and interests. Mentions of his profession emphasised his industriousness as opposed to the comparative modesty of his stations as butler and shop-keeper. For example,

⁷⁴ Clark, *Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 214.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Brycchan Carey, ‘William Wilberforce’s Sentimental Rhetoric: Parliamentary Reportage and the Abolition Speech of 1789’, *The Age of Johnson: A Scholarly Annual*, 14 (2003), pp. 281-305.

⁷⁶ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. 96; Clark, ‘From Ignatius Sancho to Mr. Sterne’, p. 215.

Look where, his brow ne'er forrow'd by a frown,
 An honest industry his labours crown;
 See him oft listen with attentive ear,
 The calm Revenge, and stifle Censure's sneer:
 Home pac'd Compassion where Detraction came,
 And Anger, as she stalk'd, put out her flame!⁷⁷

This poem chiefly lamented the loss of Sancho as a friend, and while it acknowledged the 'sublimer beams' of 'Learning's ever-copious streams,' emanating from his conversation, the focus remained upon his social status as 'Monitor and Sage' to his friends.⁷⁸ Tellingly, the poem made only one oblique reference to Sancho's skin:

Who judge complexion ere they look for sense;
 And count the heart an atmosphere too dense;
 Ah! pity these, and teach them yet to know,
 Content and truth, superior beauties, flow
 From hidden worth; teach them with joy to scan,
 Those brighter honours that exalt the man;⁷⁹

While extreme caution must guide any interpretation of absence in an historical text, it noteworthy that the only mention of skin colour, in an 80-line poem on the subject

⁷⁷ Anon., 'Epistle to Mr. J. H---, on the Death of His Justly Lamented Friend, Ignatius Sancho', in Anon (ed.), *A Select Collection of Poems: With Notes, Biographical and Historical* (London: J. Nichols, 1772), v. 8, p. 277.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 278.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 278-279.

of a man best known to the public for being black, was a repudiation of proliferating racial prejudice.

This is all the more significant when considering that no further mention of his 'complexion' was made in the page of biographical notes accompanying the poem. Rather, they highlighted Sancho's elite literary, musical and intellectual preferences. The chief measure of his character was not his 'complexion', but rather his 'wit and humour'; the fact that he was 'conversant with music in its happiest branches'; his 'strong inclination for literary pursuits'; and his extensive 'knowledge of the Sacred Writings'.⁸⁰ The final line of the biographical notes functioned like an advertisement for the forthcoming *Letters* and thus revealed a practical motive behind the publication of the poem, complementing its nominal elegiac function. Sancho's 'correspondences', the editor wrote, 'were chiefly of a literary kind, and are now preparing for the public inspection, in two volumes 8vo. for the benefit of his Widow and four Children, under the auspices of a very respectable subscription'.⁸¹ The dual meaning implied by 'respectable subscription', as referring to a subscription by respectable persons as well as a respectably large sum of money, further reinforced Sancho's public status as an individual whose personal qualities entitled him to a position within London's literary society. It appears that Sancho's popularity among his friends inspired them not only to publically declare his intellectual achievements, but also to support his efforts to provide financially for his family after his death.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 280.

⁸¹ Ibid.



Fig. 2.2: Ignatius Sancho's Trade Card, engraving on paper, 620mm x 970mm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O98106/ignatius-sancho-trade-card-print-unknown/> (Accessed 11/06/2014).

In Crewe's case, the desire to care for both Sancho's family and his posthumous reputation led to the collection, edition and publication of some of his letters. While it seems likely that Sancho himself initiated this process, it is now agreed amongst academics that Crewe was the editor of the *Letters*.⁸² An examination of manuscript versions of some of his letters indicates that Crewe continued the construction of a sentimental epistolary style with the intention of drawing attention to Sancho's intellectual prowess and, especially, his moral sensibilities. Editorial decisions included the elision of details dealing with the unglamorous minutiae of Sancho's daily life as a shopkeeper, such as the removal of a postscript about

⁸² For suggestion of Sancho's involvement, see Carey, 'Ignatius Sancho and the Campaign', pp. 82-93. Consensus on Crewe as the editor has been unilateral since Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho*, eds. Edwards and Rewt. Manuscript evidence cited above confirms this identification.

sausages from his sentimental letter of 5 December 1778 to Seth Stevenson.⁸³ More problematic were Crewe's interventions shading the ethical ambiguities of his connection to slave-grown produce such as sugar and tobacco. Ellis has noted the 'heavy irony' in Sancho's sale of slave-grown produce, though there is no mention of this seeming conflict of interests in the published *Letters*.⁸⁴ But Sancho himself never attempted to conceal his sale of such commodities as sugar or tobacco, or their links to slavery – indeed, as his trade cards show, slave-grown products formed a key part of his livelihood, and he was keen to advertise them for their quality (fig. 2.2).

A letter to Rev. Seth Stevenson (William Stevenson's father) written on 4 January 1779 revealed Sancho's anxieties over selling sugar to be largely expressed in mercantile, rather than ethical terms.

I have with utmost care & attention strove that the Quality of the Goods (you so kindly commissioned one to send) should be the very best in kind - The Scotch snuff I got at Mr. Arnold's - the Rappee is Harham's best - the tea I hope will meet with approbation- the Sugar, I have doubts of - it doth not please me - in truth, it is a shocking article at present - it will I fear be so for some time - there is a villainy in that business - tamely suffer'd - too gross for patience - I am loseing in the course of the last 12 months - above as many pounds by it - & can not please any of my customers - the lumps I have sent you are at prime last - & indifferent as they are sell usually now at

⁸³ BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, 'Ignatius Sancho to Seth Stevenson, 5 Dec. 1778'. The published version of this letter appears without postscript in Sancho, *Letters*, pp. 120-121.

⁸⁴ Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, p. 58.

9d/pr pound - the coffee - is pick'd - & is the very same - as his Majesty
(God Bless him) constantly has [...]⁸⁵

Upon first reading, this reference to the ‘villainy’ in the sugar business would seem like an outspoken attack on slavery. However, such an outburst would have been completely self-destructive in what was essentially a courtesy letter accompanying a large and profitable order from a well-respected elderly clergyman. Sancho’s concern over his losing money by the ‘shocking article’ suggests that his concerns are rather more to do with the quality of the product he was able to offer his customer, as also indicated by his protestations of the quality of the rest of the order. It was common in the eighteenth century for importers and wholesalers to mis-package inferior quality produce and claim that it was of a higher standard. As Selwyn Carrington has demonstrated, imports of high-quality sugars into Britain had been falling throughout the American Revolution, leaving the market saturated with ‘indifferent’ produce.⁸⁶ Sancho would have struggled to obtain the top-quality groceries expected by his high-status clientele, and therefore it is not surprising that he would feel the need to apologise for selling inferior sugar.

It is possible that Crewe made the conscious decision not to include this letter when she compiled the published correspondence. The letter formed part of a collection originally owned by Sancho’s friend William Stevenson, and most of the other manuscripts from the same bundle made it into the final published *Letters*. As well as the removal of this and other letters primarily dealing with trade, evidence

⁸⁵ BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, ‘Ignatius Sancho to Seth Stevenson, 4 Jan. 1779’.

⁸⁶ Selwyn H. H. Carrington, ‘The American Revolution and the British West Indies Economy’, in Barbara Solow and Stanley Engerman (eds.), *British Capitalism and Caribbean Slavery: The Legacy of Eric Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 135-162.

suggesting that Crewe intervened in selecting the content of the published *Letters* may be inferred elsewhere. For example, the published version of Sancho's account of a conversation he had with Meheux about Stevenson read, 'I made him read your letter – and what then? “truly he was not capable – he had no classical education – you write with elegance ---- ease ---- propriety.” ---- Tut, quoth I, pr'ythee give not the reins to pride [...]'.⁸⁷ By comparison, the original manuscript version included an additional passage: 'I made him read yr. letter - & what then - truly, he was not capable - he had no classical education - you write with elegance - ease propriety - tut Quoth I - my bum in a hat box - man! Prithee - give not the reins to pride [...]'.⁸⁸ Crewe removed the reference to Sancho's 'bum' because it undercut the serious tone of the advice he was offering. The result was a rather more sonorous passage which emphasised Sancho's oracular role to his younger male friends. The reader was presented with the image of a far more serious exchange of philosophical advice, both in the reported scene and the in report itself, than Sancho had originally intended. While the libertine and sentimental mode of many of his letters led to frequent references to his body (and at least one mention of his 'bum' was retained in the published *Letters*), Crewe may have made this particular editorial decision with the intention of emphasising the intellectual gravitas of the author.⁸⁹

Another omitted manuscript letter hints at the extent to which Sancho's original libertine letters were sanitised by Crewe's editorship. Dealing with the potentially thorny issues of domestic politics, ethnicity and debauchery, and written

⁸⁷ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, pp. 159-160.

⁸⁸ BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, 'Ignatius Sancho to William Stevenson, n.d'..

⁸⁹ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. 55.

on 1 April 1779, apparently when Sancho was drunk, this extraordinary manuscript justifies reproduction in full.

No - that was your mistake - tho a kind one - I have no Irish stuff - wish I had - but by the folly of our saving every debt in the way of Irish Commerce - the duty of so Extravagantly high - as to preclude every Idea of national profit. - Read the crisis - & blush for the blunders, barbarity, & madness of thy countrymen - Read - the transactions of both houses - & then reply - I am sir an Affrican - with two ffs if you please - & proud am I to be of a country that knows no politicians - nor lawyers - nor [scribbled out] - nor x1x2x3x4x5x [sic] nor thieves of my denomination save natural for by the pomposity of Ministerial Omnipotence, I do aver that you , aye & Highmore - one of the Douces form a Jametto - mark, I do not mean a Trio - for most exquisite - as I know thy feelings are, I would not wound them by a design'd blunder - no, not for a tenth Aldremediah - but the Macaban is fine - & I thank thee - for thy zeal to serve me - tell Osborne to Love me - as I do him - Give Highmore a drubbing for debauching - thy room - & wronging the chastity of thy Pembroke table - abuse him - for his naughty poetry - & to conclude maledict him & every soul thou meetest with - in the salt fish manner - but beware of connivances - & remember, there is nothing less wholesome than the spawn of barble - from which - & the 7 plagues of the Hebrew Talmad.

Pray heaven of his mercy keep us all - now to &c &c.

Invincibly inexplicable,

Ign Sancho⁹⁰

In the bottom-right corner of the verso section of the folded sheet, Sancho had scrawled ‘Damn’d High’ in a bubble, by way of explanation for his ‘invincibly inexplicable’ prose. The libertine preoccupations of this letter – manly interest in politics, over-indulgence in alcohol, lewd double-entendre – were mixed with tropes and characteristics unique to Sancho’s correspondence.⁹¹ While absolving himself of responsibility for the ‘blunders, barbarity and madness’ of the British political state by avowing himself to be ‘an Affrican’, he simultaneously reminded Stevenson of the rightfulness of his place within their social circle. His enactment of the libertine mode here, as elsewhere, was dependent on an external locus of sexuality, mastery of literary and arcane texts, intellectual elitism and good humour. Once again, bourgeois cultural pursuits became a surrogate for sex when Highmore ‘debauched’ the ‘chastity’ of Stevenson’s writing desk with his ‘naughty poetry’. Sancho’s pride in his origins, meanwhile, was expressed in direct opposition to the British statesmen who, he assumed, embodied masculine characteristics antithetical to his own. British ‘lawyers’ and ‘politicians’ thus became synonymous with ‘thieves’, and other words too foul to write out; their deceitfulness was counterpoised against the honesty and industry he had inherited from his African origins. The now well-known links between literary sentimental libertinism and political radicalism were uniquely reconfigured by Sancho to incorporate a positive image of African ethnicity – one

⁹⁰ BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, ‘Ignatius Sancho to William Stevenson, 1 Apr 1779’.

⁹¹ Sancho was no stranger to writing about politics. His account of the Gordon riots of 1780, for example, are now among the best-known to historians. See Brycchan Carey, “‘The worse than Negro barbarity of the populace’”: Ignatius Sancho witnesses the Gordon Riots’, in Ian Heywood and John Seed, *The Gordon Riots: Politics, Culture and Insurrection in Late Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 141-162.

whose ‘natural’ characteristics were amenable to idealised British masculine social behaviours supposedly neglected by British politicians.⁹²

Crewe’s probable decision to exclude these manuscripts from the published collection can thus be understood to stem from a desire to exalt Sancho’s posthumous public reputation as an exemplarily intelligent, respectable black man and minimise opportunities to attack him as anything less than British. Indeed, she explicated her ‘desire of shewing that an untutored African may possess abilities equal to an European’ in her preface to the text.⁹³ Deletions of humorous or banal details from Sancho’s original letters helped her to heighten their sentimental tone and remind readers of Africans’ capacity for higher intellectual and moral reasoning, helping to make the *Letters* resemble, in Carey’s words, ‘an epistolary novel of sentiment illustrating the immorality of slavery’.⁹⁴ However, this process was not unproblematic. Hammerschmidt, for example, has suggested that in Crewe’s hands, Sancho was ‘turned into the object of abolitionist argument: he became a specimen to illustrate and validate the larger abolitionist discourse, at the expense of his heterogeneous self-portrayal’. Of necessity, Hammerschmidt argues, ‘Sancho himself must not figure as anything but black and African, so that his intellectual achievements can assume their full representative function in the service of the abolitionist argument’.⁹⁵ While Hammerschmidt’s definition of the term ‘abolitionist’ in this context is debatable, his broader contention is supported by new evidence.

⁹² For libertinism and radicalism, see G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 215-287; Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility*, pp. 190-221.

⁹³ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, p. ii.

⁹⁴ Carey, ‘Ignatius Sancho and the Campaign’, p. 82.

⁹⁵ Hammerschmidt, ‘Character, Cultural Agency and Abolition’, pp. 259, 270.

The printed version of Sancho's 16 November 1779 letter to Stevenson linked an exclamation about his poverty to a mention of his ethnic status: 'never poorer since created - but 'tis a general case - blessed times for a poor Blacky grocer to hang or drown in! - Recieved from your good reverend parent (why not honoured father?) a letter [...]'.⁹⁶ The mention of the 'poor Blacky grocer' invited the reader to be moved to compassion at a spectacle of another's hardship – a classic characteristic of sentimental literature. However, the manuscript version of the same passage read slightly differently: 'never poorer since created - but tis a general case - receiv'd from your Good revd parent (why not honrd father) a letter[...]'.⁹⁷ In this passage the emphasis fell on the fact that financial hardship was *shared* amongst *all* British people – there was no suggestion that Sancho was suffering more than anyone else because of his position as 'a poor Blacky grocer'. Indeed, there was no mention *at all* of Sancho's being black – this appears to have been an invention on Crewe's part. In her attempt to inspire sympathetic feelings in the overwhelmingly white readership of the *Letters*, she had actually distanced them from the object of sympathy by drawing attention to the perceived *differences* between them. Several scholars have recognised this effect as a recurring limitation of sentimentalist antislavery discourse in general.⁹⁸ In attempting to continue Sancho's work of constructing for himself a fully legitimate sentimental authorial persona, and thereby undermine hierarchies of race, Crewe actually generated a spectacle of racial difference.

⁹⁶ Sancho, *Letters*, v. 2, p. 116.

⁹⁷ BL, Add. MSS. 89077, Stevenson Papers: The Letters of Ignatius Sancho, 'Ignatius Sancho to William Stevenson, 16 Nov 1779'.

⁹⁸ Marcus Wood has explored the 'essentially solipsistic base of Sentimentalism' and its relationship to representations of slavery in Marcus Wood, *Slavery Empathy and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. 12-18. Stephen Ahern similarly suggests that sentimental interactions with slavery can 'produce an erotics of pathos'. Stephen Ahern, 'Introduction', in Stephen Ahern (ed.), *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770-1830* (London: Ashgate, 2013), p. 8.

A similar effect can be observed in the biography Crewe commissioned to preface the edited letters. From its opening words, Joseph Jekyll's biography of Sancho introduced him as, above all, an 'extraordinary Negro'.⁹⁹ Simultaneously, scenes of affective distress invited sympathy from the reader while recalling stereotypical depictions of personal characteristics supposedly 'innate' to Africans. Carey has challenged the veracity of many episodes depicted in Jekyll's biography as 'almost certainly untrue'; in particular, he suggests that an episode in which Sancho's father committed suicide bore 'some remarkable similarities' to John Bicknell and Thomas Day's 1773 sentimental poem 'The Dying Negro', as well as other literary sources.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, Jekyll suggested that Sancho left the three sisters to whom he had been given as a child because of the 'dread of constant reproach arising from the detection of an amour, infinitely criminal in the eyes of three Maiden Ladies'.¹⁰¹ This episode recalled quite clearly the Soubise controversy, of which Jekyll was well aware. Indeed, an oblique reference was made to the fact that Queensberry had 'intrusted to his [Sancho's] reformation a very unworthy favourite of his own complexion' later in the biography.¹⁰² Jekyll's well-meaning attempts to paint Sancho as a victim of circumstances (as per the sentimental mode of his biography as a whole) even threatened to disrupt the antislavery prerogative of the *Letters*. The 'freedom, riches and leisure' Sancho enjoyed from his inclusion in the Duchess of Montagu's will, Jekyll claimed, 'naturally led a disposition of African texture into indulgences; and that which dissipated the mind of Ignatius completely drained his

⁹⁹ Sancho, *Letters*, v.1, p. iii.

¹⁰⁰ Carey, "'The extraordinary Negro'", pp. 1-14.

¹⁰¹ Jekyll, 'Life', in Sancho, *Letters*, v. 1, pp. vii-viii.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

purse'.¹⁰³ Here the sympathetic narrative hinged upon the supposedly irreconcilable conflict between being African and being free. Just like in 'Ardrach, Whydah, and Benin', where 'a Negro will stake at play his fortune, his children and his liberty', Sancho was unable to handle his freedom responsibly, and fell victim to gambling, or, as Jekyll put it, 'the propensity which appears to be innate among his countrymen'.¹⁰⁴ Thus Jekyll's attempts to remain faithful to his subject's commitment to the sentimental mode backfired; by framing Sancho as the victim of his own inherited ethnic characteristics, he inadvertently questioned the capacity of black slaves to live free.

These paratextual editions and additions formed part of a broader attempt to market Sancho's *Letters* as a piece of sentimental literature intended to challenge the morality of slavery and secure his posthumous reputation as a 'man of letters'. Generically, the text was designed to sit alongside posthumous letter collections by well-known libertines and sentimentalists of the time, such as *Letters of the Late Lord Lyttelton* and, of course, *Letters of the Late Rev. Laurence Sterne*.¹⁰⁵ Given that the nominal objective behind publishing Sancho's letters was to support his family, an edited collection after the model of Sterne and Lyttelton's *Letters* was a safe bet. Sterne's expensive three-volume sets of correspondence had gone through at least three major editions in the seven years since they were published, while Lyttelton's slightly cheaper text had gone through no fewer than nine editions in the three years since his death.¹⁰⁶ Recognising the scale of the potential market, Crewe selected John

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. ix.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p. ix.

¹⁰⁵ Thomas Lyttelton, *Letters of the Late Lord Lyttelton* (London: J. Bew, 1780); Laurence Sterne, *Letters of the Late Laurence Sterne* (London: T. Beckett, 1775).

¹⁰⁶ Based on ECCO keyword search: 'Author = "Sterne" OR "Lyttelton" AND "Date = "1768-1782"' [i.e. from the year of Sterne's death until the year of publication of Sancho's *Letters*]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (Gale Cengage, 2008-2013). Retrieved 09/07/2014.

Nichols as the printer and primary seller of Sancho's correspondence. This was another canny choice, since Nichols was a successful publisher of a range of 'serious' literary works of the sort suited to aristocratic and aspirational middle-class readers. During 1782 alone, as well as Sancho's *Letters*, he produced translations of Dante and Euripides, reprints of Shakespeare and Henry Fielding's works, biographies of William Hogarth, Latin treatises, Greek and British histories, scientific dissertations and an eight-volume *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*.¹⁰⁷

Nichols' prestige as a publisher, as well as his commitment to bourgeois respectability, had been confirmed in 1780, when he took over as editor-in chief and publisher of *The Gentleman's Magazine*.¹⁰⁸ Evidently, Sancho proved a memorable character for Nichols' aspirant clientele: he included an anecdote about him in *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century*, which he edited in 1814.¹⁰⁹ Crewe's choice of him as the publisher of the *Letters* ensured that they were directed towards a readership receptive to Sancho's commitment to literary sensibility.

CONCLUSION

Sancho's *Letters* attest, most overtly of all the primary texts presently under discussion, to the central contention of this thesis: that the content of early published writing by black authors was primarily influenced by the networks surrounding its composition, publication and dissemination. While his letters demonstrated a striking

¹⁰⁷ Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno of Dante*, trans. Charles Rogers; Euripides, *The Nineteen Tragedies and Fragments of Euripides*, trans. Michael Wodhull; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, a Tragedy*; Henry Fielding, *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* (4 vols.); John Nichols, *Biographical Anecdotes of William Hogarth*; George Isaac Huntingford, *Metrika Tina Monostrophika*; Samuel Musgrave, *Two Dissertations*; Anon., *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica* (8 vols.), all (London: J. Nichols, 1782).

¹⁰⁸ Julian Pooley and Robin Myers, 'Nichols family (per. c.1760–1939)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/63494> (Accessed 20/02/2015).

¹⁰⁹ John Nichols (ed.), *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century* (London: J. Nichols, 1812-1814), vol. 8, pp. 682-683.

degree of social plasticity, they were also useful as tools to maintain and build upon his social position. Rebecca Earle has suggested that letter writing was a practise which ‘not only affirmed the authority of the elite, but also provided a means of expression for more marginal members of society’.¹¹⁰ At times, Sancho’s correspondence fulfilled either of these functions separately; in other cases it united them, enabling him to articulate his own marginalisation *while* affirming the authority of his socially elite correspondents. An acknowledgement of this complexity enables a new reading of Sancho’s *Letters* as a text fundamentally influenced by social networks.

In the first instance, the content, style and tone of the original manuscript letters were dictated by the relationship between Sancho and his social network. In accordance with accepted standards of eighteenth-century decorum, Sancho altered his epistolary identity to suit the social dynamics of the situation, writing differently to men and women, social superiors and inferiors, literary celebrities and patrons of his shop. Through rhetorical processes such as the use of humour, irony and deference, he negotiated a situation for himself amongst London’s fashionable elite and challenged prevalent dismissive attitudes towards black intellectualism. Through new iterations of sentimental and libertine discourse, he was able to produce new performances of masculinity which challenged stereotypes of black male sexuality, such as those attached to his young friend Julius Soubise. By insisting that his libertine and sentimental letters be understood as products of his intellectual achievements, he challenged prominent and proliferating arguments that black men desired above all else sexual knowledge of polite white women. Through these

¹¹⁰ Rebecca Earle, ‘Introduction’, in Rebecca Earle (ed.), *Epistolary Selves: Letters and Letter-Writers, 1600-1945* (London: Ashgate, 1999), p. 1.

processes, Sancho was able not only to claim his inclusion within London's literary polite society, but a central role within his own social network.

A second set of processes further refracted the posthumous image of him that readers finally encountered as the author of the *Letters*. While his friends remembered him fondly for his personal qualities, those who had not met him in person continued to see the colour of his skin as the primary expression of his person. As his celebrity grew beyond his own social network, thanks largely to the exchange of letters between him and Laurence Sterne, the focus on his blackness tightened. Through selection, edition, excision and even addition, Frances Crewe continued the project of accommodating him in the sentimental literary tradition after his death, simultaneously drawing attention to his ethnic alterity as an unfortunate circumstance which he had ultimately overcome by his heroic simulation of inherently British values. Jekyll's brief biography underscored this process, painting him as the victim of his own African personality traits and hinging the narrative tension of the 'Life' upon the obliteration of these characteristics in favour of more agreeable British tendencies.

As with Gronniosaw's *Narrative*, any reading of Sancho's *Letters* must be influenced by the knowledge that they were posthumously published to support the author's family. In some respects, Sancho's letters were also originally *written* with this ultimate goal in mind. When his daughter Elizabeth wrote to William Stevenson on 26 May 1818, she thanked him for agreeing to pay her rent of twelve pounds per year. She mentioned that the Duchess of Buccleuch had also given her forty pounds, and that John Meheux, now married, was also 'very good to me'.¹¹¹ Without the

¹¹¹ BL, Loan 96 RLF 1/583, Miss Elizabeth Sancho, Daughter of Ignatius Sancho, 'Elizabeth Sancho to William Stevenson, 26 May 1818'.

networks of patronage established through Sancho's popularity and social intelligence, Elizabeth, a black shopkeeper's daughter in nineteenth-century London, would simply not have had access this level of financial help. When on 2 February 1820 she presented Gainsborough's portrait of her father to Stevenson, she ensured that the esteem in which her father was held would be retained in posterity.¹¹² So, both in terms of ensuring his family was financially well-provided for, and of his own posthumous reputation as a serious figure in London's literary and culturally elite circles, Sancho succeeded. His careful balancing act in constructing manly libertine and sentimental personae without appealing to stereotypical depictions of black sexual profligacy gave future abolitionists a paragon of black masculinity which powerfully counterpoised racist depictions of Africans as intellectually and morally incapable of managing their own freedom. While this nuanced self-portrayal was somewhat undercut by well-meaning editorial interventions, Sancho was remembered fondly by enough wealthy people to ensure that his daughter enjoyed the protection of a Duchess almost forty years after his death.

¹¹² BL, Loan 96 RLF 1/583, Miss Elizabeth Sancho, Daughter of Ignatius Sancho, 'Elizabeth Sancho to William Stevenson, 02 Feb 1820'. This letter was also published anonymously in Anon., 'New Light on the Life of Ignatius Sancho: Some Unpublished Letters', *Slavery & Abolition*, 1:3 (1980), p. 358.

Chapter 3

Ottobah Cugoano, London's Black Loyalists, and the Sierra Leone Resettlement Projects, 1786-1791

INTRODUCTION

While neither apolitical nor silent on the issue of slavery, Gronniosaw and Sancho's works were not composed with a view to directly engendering popular support for abolition.¹ Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's 1787 text, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of Human Species* was the first piece of published black writing in Britain which can be considered as an unequivocally abolitionist political text. However, an investigation into the contexts surrounding the publication of Cugoano's writing suggests that it was as much a radical articulation of black political engagement as it was an attack on the slave trade and colonial slavery.² This chapter examines this antislavery writing in terms of Cugoano's personal involvement with two manifestations of black anti-establishment resistance in London. The first was participation in radical politics through rioting, resisting arrest, and letter-writing; the second took the form of disrupting, delaying and protesting against the execution of the Sierra Leone resettlement project of 1786-1787.

¹ While Sancho's *Letters* represented a consistent antislavery stance, no scholars have so far argued that he or his editor had intended to generate support for the abolition of the slave trade or slavery as Cugoano's work did. See the introductory section Chapter 2.

² Cugoano published two similar texts with similar titles, but the subtle differences between them are material to the argument presented in this chapter. The first, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, first appeared in 1787. The second, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, was published in 1791, and was an abridged version of the 1787 edition with some new notes and details, and a list of subscribers. For the sake of clarity, the original 1787 text will hereafter be referred to as *Thoughts and Sentiments*, while the shorter 1791 text will be referred to as *Evil of Slavery*. This also applies to short-form citations. Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species* (London: [n.p.], 1787); Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery* (London: Kirkby et. al., 1791).



Fig. 3.1: Richard Cosway, Mr. and Mrs. Cosway, 1784, monochrome etching on paper, 293mm x 362mm. National Portrait Gallery, London. From: National Portrait Gallery, http://images.npg.org.uk/800_800/9/2/mw148292.jpg (Accessed 10/04/2014).

Cugoano was born around 1757 ‘in the city of Agimaque, on the coast of Fantyn’ in present-day Ghana.³ He was kidnapped and sold into slavery in 1770, being transported at first to Grenada and then on to various other parts of the West Indies in the service of Alexander Campbell. In late 1772, he was brought to Britain, where he could not be legally compelled to return to slavery abroad due to the recent Somerset case, though it is not clear whether he left Campbell’s service with or without his blessing.⁴ By 1784, Cugoano was working as a domestic servant to the painters Richard and Maria Cosway, and he was depicted in Richard Cosway’s 1784

³ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 6.

⁴ Ottobah Cugoano, ‘Advertisement for *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*’ (London: [n. p.], 1787?), p. 4.

etching, *Mr and Mrs. Cosway* (fig. 3.1).⁵ He did not become involved in political campaigning until around 1786, when an influx of former slaves, freed in exchange for military service for Loyalist forces in the American Revolutionary Wars, settled in London. This chapter focuses primarily on Cugoano's political relationships and activities as they related to London's 'black poor' community of former Loyalists, from 1786, throughout the first attempt to establish a settlement on the west coast of Africa during the winter of 1786/1787, up to the second such attempt in 1791.⁶

Just as Gronniosaw had faced 'what must have seemed like a deafening silence in black literary antecedents', Cugoano had to break new ground to establish himself as a credible political commentator.⁷ Black people in Britain were actively excluded from positions of political authority in the eighteenth century.⁸ Among all black people in eighteenth-century Britain, only Sancho has been identified as being eligible to vote in parliamentary elections.⁹ In common with the majority of the population, black people were therefore disenfranchised from the democratic process. However, between 1786 and 1792, both London's ethnic demography and political landscape began to change. The black Loyalist migrants met with mixed treatment when they arrived in the metropolis. Many had been injured in the wars, and begging

⁵ Vincent Carretta, 'Introduction' in Ottobah Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 1999), p. xv.

⁶ The historiography of the 'black poor' in London and the establishment of the Sierra Leone colony is discussed below. See also Cassandra Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom: Runaway Slaves of the American Revolution and their Global Quest for Liberty* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2006), pp. 75-121; Gretchen Gerzina, 'Black Loyalists in London After the American Revolution', in John Pulis (ed.), *Moving On: Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999), pp. 85-102.

⁷ Henry Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 133.

⁸ See, for example, the story of a black sugar cooper who was at first admitted to 'the freedom of London'. When the Court of Aldermen realised this, they passed an ordinance that 'no Black should ever again be admitted to the freedom of London'. *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 29 December 1786, p. 2.

⁹ Vincent Carretta, 'Introduction', in Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 1998), p. xiv.

was widespread among the black community in Britain.¹⁰ But the loss of America, as Seymour Drescher has demonstrated, led to an increase in popular support for a broad range of humanitarian causes, and in January 1786, a committee was established to provide for the relief of the ‘black poor’.¹¹ This coincided with the emergence of a new popular movement for domestic political reform, later spurred on by the French Revolution and reaching an apogee with the establishment of radical corresponding societies across the country between 1790 and 1792.¹² It was through black intellectuals like Cugoana that the formerly enslaved were able to participate in these political debates, without being limited solely to that concerning the transatlantic slave trade.

Before embarking on an investigation of the political activities of London’s ‘black poor’, it is necessary to acknowledge that there is some disagreement among historians as to the cohesiveness of eighteenth-century London’s black population. Peter Fryer and James Walvin, for example, take the existence of a unified black community with a shared social and ideological (if not strictly political) perspective for granted, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards.¹³ Fryer even goes as far as to

¹⁰ Perhaps the best-known black Loyalist beggar in London was Shadrack Furman, who lost his sight and one leg because of the torture he endured after being captured by Patriot forces. When he got to London, he was reduced to playing the fiddle to support himself and his wife. He was eventually granted a lifetime pension of eighteen pounds per year from the Loyalist Claims Commission. See Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, pp. 79-80.

¹¹ Seymour Drescher, ‘The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:4 (2012), pp. 571-593. For the establishment of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, see Stephen Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists: London’s Blacks and the Foundation of the Sierra Leone Settlement 1786-1791* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), pp. 63-129.

¹² There is a wealth of scholarship on the establishment and activities of the various radical corresponding societies of the 1790s. Influential edited collections on the topic include: Pamela Clemit (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Literature of the French Revolution in the 1790s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Michael T. Davis and Paul Pickering (eds.), *Unrespectable Radicals? Popular Politics in the Age of Reform* (London: Ashgate, 2008); Mark Philp (ed.), *The French Revolution and British Popular Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Robert Maniquis (ed.), *British Radical Culture of the 1790s* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library Press, 2002).

¹³ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto Press, 1984), pp. 67-88; James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro in English Society, 1555-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 1973), pp. 46-79.

suggest that ‘London had by the 1760s become a centre of black resistance’.¹⁴ On the other hand, Cassandra Pybus has reconstructed some of the individual stories of black survival in London’s streets following the American Revolution, but does not explore in depth how they came together in furtherance of common political or social objectives.¹⁵ Studies by Norma Myers and Kathleen Chater have understood the black experience in Britain during the 1780s as socially fragmented.¹⁶ However, while we must remain mindful of Myers’ criticism that ‘historians tend to perceive the black population as comprising an undifferentiated “Black Poor”’, this chapter demonstrates that black people did in fact socialise with one another and joined together in support of political and social causes which overwhelmed their differences in social strata or professional background.¹⁷ Neither were these meetings or exchanges between members of a socially undifferentiated underclass of beggars and charity-cases. Comparatively well-heeled black intellectuals like Cugoano represented the interests of their less connected black peers to established political networks, acting as a conduit between ‘grass roots’ forms of political activism and more formalised attempts to obtain changes in government policy.

These established political networks were not limited to elected Parliamentary representatives and their circles, though some of Cugoano’s most public interactions were with such figures. In fact, while he was keen to publicise his approval of ‘establishment’ moves towards limiting or abolishing the slave trade, certain elements of Cugoano’s work share much in common with contemporaneous radical tracts. In terms of his abolitionism, his work drew heavily on that of white abolitionists more

¹⁴ Fryer, *Staying Power*, p. 72

¹⁵ Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, pp. 75-121.

¹⁶ Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 56-81; Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales During the Period of the British Slave Trade, c.1660-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), pp. 35-73.

¹⁷ Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*, p. 56.

associated with ‘radical’ than ‘establishment’ politics. Even the title of his first work, *Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil and Wicked Traffic of the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, consciously evoked Thomas Clarkson’s *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. But Cugoano’s politics were unique in that they deployed the language of the new political radicalism to combat racialized discrimination in Britain. His occasional adoption of the radical vernacular was a necessary reaction to the marginalisation of the black political voice. This is not to say that all black people in London shared a homogenous political perspective. Rather, Cugoano wrote in reaction against a set of social grievances specific to London’s black community in the late 1780s.

Cugoano’s radical spirit, as well as his dim view of the government’s continuing toleration of transatlantic slavery, could be seen in his reaction to the two phases of the Sierra Leone resettlement project in 1786/1787 and 1791. The project, funded largely by the British government, has been viewed by James Walvin, James Walker and (most resoundingly) Folarin Shyllon as a proto-racist attempt to ‘rid Britain of her black population and make Britain a white man’s country’.¹⁸ On the other hand, more recent work by Stephen Braidwood and Suzanne Schwarz has contended that ‘the earlier historiographical picture of a racist deportation of the Black Poor engineered by the British government is no longer tenable’.¹⁹ But while Braidwood’s assertion that the black community were involved in the planning of the first Sierra Leone voyage is well-founded, his analysis of the motives and ideology

¹⁸ Walvin, *Black and White*, pp. 144-159; James Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 94-145; Folarin Shyllon, *Black People in Britain 1555-1833* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp. 117-158. Quotation: Shyllon, *Black People in Britain*, p.117.

¹⁹ Stephen Braidwood, ‘Initiatives and Organisation of the Black Poor’, *Slavery & Abolition* 3:3 (1982), pp. 211-227; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*; Suzanne Schwarz, ‘Commerce, Civilization and Christianity: The Development of the Sierra Leone Company’, in David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 252-276.

behind government involvement in the project exaggerates the level of consultation undertaken by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor. Consequently the relationship between the Committee and the black people involved in the project is represented as being far more collaborative than was actually the case. Cugoano's writings on the Sierra Leone resettlement project demonstrate that, far from a harmonious partnership, government involvement was seen by the black Loyalists as an opportunistic and cynical attempt to transport a social problem out of sight.

Through an analysis of the specific social contexts of black political activism and resistance to resettlement in which Cugoano wrote his anti-racist radical narratives, this chapter demonstrates how he used his education and position of relative financial security to further the interests of a network of politically-active black people in the metropolis. It further demonstrates that he sought to extend his own social capital and the reach of his work by constructing an authorial persona which emphasised his respectability and gentility in personal correspondence, written to promote his work to respectable statesmen.

OTTOBAH CUGOANO AND LONDON'S BLACK RADICALS

On 28 July 1786, Ottobah Cugoano took his first decisive action against slavery. Along with his friend, another black man named William Green, he approached the famous abolitionist lawyer Granville Sharp and asked for his help. Samuel Jeffries, owner of the huge Windsor Estate in Westmoreland, Jamaica, had 'trepanned his Negro servant Harry [Demaine] and sent him on ship board,' intending to take him back to slavery in the Americas against his will.²⁰ Cugoano and Green had chosen

²⁰ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D/3549/13/4/2, 'Extracts from Diary of Granville Sharp, 1783-1792', f.36; 'Samuel Jeffries': 'Diary' only states 'Mr. Jeffries', but Samuel Jeffries was the only former owner identified in the *Legacies of British Slave-ownership* database with this surname. See: *Legacies*

their ally wisely: Sharp was the lawyer chiefly responsible for bringing about the Mansfield ruling.²¹ He acted swiftly. Three days later, Jeffries received a visit from his former servant Demaine, not only free but accompanied by law officers and demanding restitution.²²

At the time, Cugoano worked as a servant for Richard Cosway, the official portrait-painter to the Prince of Wales.²³ Vincent Carretta suggests that Cugoano met Sharp through Cosway.²⁴ It is equally likely though, that they met through Olaudah Equiano, who had petitioned Sharp for redress following the infamous *Zong* massacre of 1781, in which 132 slaves were thrown overboard during the middle passage.²⁵ Certainly, Cugoano and Equiano knew each other well enough by 1788 to be collaborating on public abolitionist letters.²⁶ Paul Edwards has even suggested that Cugoano's published tracts emerged as a 'collaboration between him and Equiano', since the former's holograph letters contained poor spelling and grammar.²⁷ Edwards' suggestion is predicated on the comparatively 'elevated rhetorical manner' of Cugoano's published work, but as he acknowledges, frequent grammatical mistakes persist throughout both *Thoughts and Sentiments* and *Evil of Slavery*.²⁸ Chief among these was a 'failure of agreement' between subject and verb, producing, for example

of British Slave-ownership, 'Samuel Jeffries, 1745-19th Dec 1819' [Online] Available from: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/1301937073> (Accessed 06/11/2013).

²¹ See Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 99-104.

²² GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D/3549/13/4/2, 'Extracts from Diary of Granville Sharp, 1783-1792', f.36.

²³ See Vincent Carretta, 'Three West African Writers of the 1780s Revisited and Revised', *Research in African Literatures*, 29:4 (1998), pp. 81-83.

²⁴ Vincent Carretta, 'Introduction', in Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, ed. Carretta, p. xv.

²⁵ For a detailed overview of the *Zong* massacre, see James Walvin, *The Zong: A Massacre, the Law and the End of Slavery* (London: Yale University Press, 2011).

²⁶ See, for example, *The Diary: or Woodfall's Register*, 25 April 1788, p. 2.

²⁷ Paul Edwards, 'Three West African Writers of the 1780s', in Charles Davis and Henry Gates (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 183-187.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 182-184.

‘exertions [...] has’ and ‘every slave holder [...] do’.²⁹ These reflected the grammar of Cugoano’s manuscript correspondence. For example, in a letter to Granville Sharp in 1791, his habit of confusing the plural and singular forms of the verb ‘to be’ resurfaced: ‘as there is several ships now going to New Brunswick [...]’.³⁰ Edwards accommodates the notion of an external ‘reviser’ and ‘probably, an expander’ with these ‘characteristic grammatical errors’ by suggesting that ‘the reviser, while having better control of English’, may not have been ‘a native speaker of the language’. This leads him to nominate Equiano as the reviser and/or expander.³¹ However, as Carretta points out, Cugoano’s holograph letters ‘are not significantly less polished than those by Equiano’.³² Moreover, the grammatical errors identified by Edwards appeared in *Thoughts and Sentiments* and *Evil of Slavery* but did not feature in Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative* or published letters.³³ As Carretta suggests, ‘many of the formal qualities of Cugoano’s *Thoughts and Sentiments* that strike readers as ungrammatical’ can be explained by understanding the work to have emerged from the tradition of the ‘*jeremiad* or *political sermon*’, but again none of these featured extensively in Equiano’s published work.³⁴ All of this implies that Equiano did not in fact co-author the tracts produced under Cugoano’s name as Edwards has suggested, though he may have had a hand in editing them.

Indeed, a comparison between Cugoano’s manuscript letters and published work demonstrates that some copy editing is likely to have taken place. Besides the ‘failure of agreement’ issues, some spelling and vocabulary problems presented themselves in Cugoano’s manuscript writing which were absent from his published

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D3549/13/1/S36, ‘John Stuart to Granville Sharp, [1791]’.

³¹ Edwards, ‘Three West African Writers’, p. 185.

³² Carretta, ‘Revisited and Revised’, p. 83.

³³ Edwards, ‘Three West African Writers’, p. 184.

³⁴ Carretta, ‘Revisited and Revisited’, p. 83. (Original emphasis).

tracts. For example, in his 1791 letter to Sharp he was optimistic about the second Sierra Leone project (discussed below) because most of the settlers were ‘people of property, and able to pay their own passage, and the family, as well as the Country been by far the cheapest market for victual’.³⁵ Given that these minor mistakes were corrected while his characteristic grammar was retained, it seems likely that the published *Thoughts and Sentiments* and *Evil of Slavery* had only undergone relatively minor editorial intervention between their original composition and publication. Ultimately, there is insufficient evidence to suggest confidently whether this minor work was undertaken by a white copy-editor or even a conscientious typesetter in the printing-house, or (as seems more likely) by Equiano or another of Cugoano’s educated black friends. In any case, by the time *Thoughts and Sentiments* was published in 1787, Cugoano could draw upon an entire network of articulate and organised black people, who were mobilising not just against slavery, but also against the poverty and discrimination they encountered as free men in Britain.

Although he had been resident in England since at least 1772, Cugoano did not emerge as a leading figure in either abolitionism or London’s ‘black community’ until the mid-1780s. This is unsurprising, considering Cugoano’s youth – he was about 15 when he arrived in 1772 – and his status as a domestic servant, not to mention the generally limited public support for abolitionism in the 1770s. Two shifts in the British political landscape had to take place before he could safely begin participating in public conversations about domestic and international reform. The first was demographic rather than ideological. The arrival of black Loyalists into Britain after 1783 was one of the many consequences of defeat in the American Revolutionary Wars. Arming slaves had been an act of desperation on the British generals’ part; their manumission of around ten thousand in return for their military

³⁵ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D3549/13/1/S36, ‘John Stuart to Granville Sharp, [1791]’.

support had no basis in colonial policy whatsoever.³⁶ As Philip Morgan and Andrew O'Shaughnessy argue, 'British policy, insofar as there was such a thing, was an untidy sequence of advances and retreats, with no simple forward movement, with respect to the idea of arming slaves'.³⁷ As a result, when the several hundred black Loyalists who had chosen to migrate to Britain arrived after the Peace of 1783, there were no social structures in place to help them find work or relieve them from poverty.

Norma Myers has estimated the number of black people resident in London between 1785 and 1789 at 4,290, or 0.5 percent of the capital's total population, based on an analysis of Old Bailey Session Papers. 'Blacks represented 0.5 per cent of those indicted for criminal activities in the period 1785-1789 and taking this figure as a proportion of the total London population [...] it then becomes possible to calculate that 4,290 blacks were present in London at this time'. Yet, as Myers acknowledges, this calculation is made on the assumption that black and white people were equally likely to be indicted for a crime, and as such her data should not be used as 'direct, decisive estimates of blacks but to seek indications of numbers'.³⁸ In reality, a number of circumstances meant that black people were far more likely to appear at the Old Bailey indicted for a crime than their white peers.

Firstly, due perhaps to the prerequisite of military service for emancipation, the vast majority of the former slaves coming to Britain in the 1770s and 1780s were

³⁶ Walker concedes that 'there is considerable difficulty in establishing the total number of Black Loyalists', but the 'Book of Negroes', detailing every black Loyalist wishing to leave New York in November 1783 alone records over three thousand names. Alan Gilbert estimates the number at 'between 9,100 and 10,400 free blacks.' Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 12; Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 208.

³⁷ Philip D. Morgan and Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, 'Arming Slaves During the American Revolution' in Christopher Leslie Brown and Philip D. Morgan (eds.), *Arming Slaves: From Classical Times to the Modern Age* (London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 190-191. The role of black Loyalist soldiers in the American Revolution is covered in more detail in Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, pp. 116-206.

³⁸ Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*, pp. 29-30.

young and male, and therefore statistically more likely to be indicted for a crime.³⁹ Secondly, since they had only recently arrived in Britain, none of the Loyalists were eligible for charity under the poor laws, again increasing the likelihood of their being indicted for theft.⁴⁰ Finally, the post-war economic recession reduced employment opportunities for unskilled labourers and ordinary seamen just as the influx of former slaves were arriving. Coupled with hardening discriminatory attitudes towards the employment of black people, this environment essentially circumscribed any form of economic opportunity for members of the new immigrant community.⁴¹ While a tiny minority of London's black community, like Cugoano, had trained as domestic servants, the fashion for black butlers and waiting-boys had largely passed. In any case, supply far outstripped demand for these jobs. Pybus has demonstrated that many black men 'who had come to England as servants to officers, and then lost their employment when the officers resigned their commissions, were in dire straits'.⁴² In newspapers, advertisements placed by black men trained as barbers, butlers, and chamber-men seeking employment far outnumbered those placed by houses specifically seeking black servants.⁴³ One black servant advertising in 1792 anticipated racial discrimination, and adjusted his offer accordingly: 'AS FOOTMAN, or Porter in a Warehouse, a Black man, who lived upwards of three

³⁹ See Deirdre Palk, *Gender, Crime and Judicial Discretion, 1780-1830* (London: Boydell Press, 2006), pp. 21-37.

⁴⁰ Anne Winter and Thijs Lambrecht, 'Migration, Poor Relief and Local Autonomy: Settlement Policies in England and the Southern Low Countries in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 218:1 (2013), pp. 91-126; Anne-Marie Kilday, "'Criminally Poor?'" Investigating the Link between Crime and Poverty in Eighteenth Century England', *Cultural and Social History*, 11:4 (2014), pp. 507-526.

⁴¹ For discriminatory attitudes toward employing black people, see Walvin, *Black and White*, pp. 57-58.

⁴² Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, p. 81.

⁴³ Keyword searches for 'black man' in the classified advertisements of the British Library's Burney Collection of archived newspapers between 1786 and 1792 return thirteen black domestic servants seeking employment and no employers seeking black servants. See, for example, *Morning Herald*, 17 February 1787, p. 3; *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 25 September 1789, p. 4; *World*, 23 March 1791, p. 4.

years in his last place [...] His colour and appearance not being in his favour, he would be content with moderate wages'.⁴⁴ According to the *Public Advertiser*, by 1791 the mere sight of a black man in a well-to-do social space was enough to leave some local dandies sniggering behind their hands: 'A black man, in white cloaths, mounted on a black horse, with a white face, caused much pleasantry amongst the fashionable wits last Thursday in Hyde-park'.⁴⁵

By 1786, a significant black presence was established in London, characterised by underemployment, poverty and consequently by over-representation in criminal indictments. For this reason, Cugoano, much like Equiano, was at pains to demonstrate not only the intellectual faculties of black people but their good taste and respect for eminent establishment figures. The emerging campaign for the abolition of the slave trade provided a natural platform from which to demonstrate black intellectual and political engagement. In 1786, Cugoano wrote to the Prince of Wales, recommending a 'few little tracts' against slavery – probably including James Ramsay's *Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of Slaves*, which he defended in print the following year – for his perusal.⁴⁶ This was not the last letter Cugoano wrote to the prince. When *Thoughts and Sentiments* was published in 1787, he sent a copy to him directly, as well as to other establishment policymakers such as Edmund Burke.⁴⁷ Despite their obsequious tone, these letters were not apolitical. In his 1787 letter, Cugoano gently pointed out to Prince George the disparity in political means between black and white people: '... and whereas we have no institution of Ambassadors to demand restitution for the injuries which the Europeans have pursued against us we can no where lay our case more fitly than at the feet of your

⁴⁴ *Morning Herald*, 10 May 1792, p. 4.

⁴⁵ *Public Advertiser*, 21 May 1791, p. 2.

⁴⁶ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D/3549/13/1/S36, 'John Stuart to Prince of Wales, 1786'.

⁴⁷ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D/3549/13/1/S36, 'John Stuart to Prince of Wales, 1787'; Sheffield Archives, Papers of Edmund Burke, WWM/Bk/P/1/2105 'Letter from John Stuart [1787]'.

Highness'.⁴⁸ He was ostensibly referring to the case of all African people injured by the transatlantic slave system. However, his pseudo-litigious language of laying a 'case' to 'demand restitution for the injuries which the Europeans have pursued', along with his use of the first-person collective pronoun, hinted at a more narrowly and formally defined collective identity – one which represented pragmatic political goals.

Of course, by December 1787 Cugoano was indeed part of an all-black political organisation – the first of its kind in Britain. The 'Sons of Africa', as they became known, were a corresponding society writing public and private letters to prominent figures in support of their efforts towards abolition.⁴⁹ Along with Equiano and nine others, Cugoano co-signed a letter to Granville Sharp thanking him for his 'humane commiseration of our brethren and countrymen unlawfully held in slavery'.⁵⁰ After the passing of the Slave Trade Act of 1788 limited the overcrowding of slaves aboard ships during the middle passage, the Sons of Africa published separate letters of thanks in the *Morning Chronicle* to three of the Bill's highest-profile proponents, William Dolben, William Pitt and Charles Fox.⁵¹ In total, twenty correspondents identified themselves as members of the Sons of Africa. These letters further contributed to Cugoano's efforts to demonstrate the politeness and respectability of black people, specifically addressing prejudices that supposed licentious behaviour to be natural to black people. For example, the letter to Dolben specifically stated that 'we are not ignorant, [...] Sir, that the best return we can make [for your efforts against the slave trade] is, to behave with sobriety, fidelity and

⁴⁸ GRO, Granville Sharp Papers, D/3549/13/1/S36, 'John Stuart to Prince of Wales, 1787'.

⁴⁹ The group published letters under this name. See *London Advertiser*, 15 July 1788, p. 3.

⁵⁰ Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp* (London: Lilerton and Henderson, 1820), pp. 274-375 cited in Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, ed. Carretta, pp. 187-188. The other nine cosignatories were George Robert Mandeville, William Stevens, Joseph Almaze, Boughwa Gegansmel, Jasper Goree, James Bailey, Thomas Oxford, John Adams and George Wallace.

⁵¹ *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, 15 July 1788, p. 3.

diligence in our different stations'. Dolben was not ignorant of the implications of this promise, and his reply recognised that 'showing their gratitude by their future conduct in steadiness and sobriety, fidelity and diligence, will undoubtedly recommend them to the British Government, and he trusts, to other Christian powers, as most worthy of their further care and attention'.⁵² In a similar vein, at some point during the same year, the Sons of Africa wrote another private letter to Sharp, reassuring him that 'humbleness and sobriety, we are sensible, will best become our condition'.⁵³ These letters connected the black presence to the mainstream abolitionist campaign by directly repudiating prevailing racialized notions that sought to link black political involvement with moral degeneracy.

Other organised forms of black resistance to prejudice in London did not seek to attain the same forms of establishment approval. In September 1786, for example, over a hundred black men, drawing on their military experience, came together to violently resist one of their number being arrested. An account of the incident appeared in the *General Evening Post* on 9 September:

Mr. Drawwater, Sheriff's Officer, and two of his men, went to the White Raven, in Mile-End road, to arrest one John Pegg, a black man, and commonly called one of the Corporals, who receive the charity-money [...]. After he was arrested, the blackmen, to the number of about one hundred, insisted, that the Officer should not take him away; and hallooed out to their comrades, "shut the gates!" [...]. But Mr. Drawwater, and his men, being resolute, they got the prisoner, with difficulty, on the outside of the gates [...]. Several of [the black men] instantly armed themselves with sticks &c.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ 'Letter to Granville Sharp, esq. [Undated]', repr. in Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, ed. Carretta, pp. 189-190 [no source cited].

and came on a second time; and after a desperate onset, in Mile-End road, in which Mr. Drawwater's cloaths were torn off, and he was terribly bruised on the head, and almost every part of his body, they rescued the prisoner, and carried him off in triumph.

[...]

It is the complaint of the neighbourhood, in which these blackmen live, that they are a dreadful nuisance; for, that immediately after receiving their money, they go about the fields, in gangs, of about twenty each, gambling &c. to the great terror of the inhabitants. And so luxurious have they become, that they have established weekly balls, among themselves, at five shillings a-head. Decency prevents saying more.⁵⁴

These imagined orgiastic gatherings were another manifestation of the type of illicit behaviour Cugoano was keen to disassociate from black political activity. Whether they existed solely in the imagination of a reactionary press or not, such 'luxurious' pursuits as dancing, alongside large-scale violent clashes with law officers, soured relations between London's 'black poor' and the government.

By 1788, some of London's black people were participating in more mainstream, though not necessarily more respectable, forms of popular radicalism. On 22 July, the last day of voting for one of the City of Westminster's MPs, a 'desperate mob' led by Charles James Fox assembled in Covent Garden. They were supporting the Foxite Whig Lord John Townshend's bid against the incumbent Tory Lord Samuel Hood in an extremely close-run contest when a fracas broke out. When it became clear that the Bow-Street Runners were unable to suppress the riot, local

⁵⁴ *General Evening Post*, 9 September 1786, p. 2.

magistrate Sir Sampson Wright called in the support of the militia.⁵⁵ Fox, incensed at this ‘violation of an existing statute’, confronted the magistrate on Bow Street.

During the altercation between them, one of the soldiers aimed a stroke at Mr. Fox with his bayonet; which Thomas Carlisle, a black man, observing, he threw himself between Mr. Fox and the soldier, and received a dangerous wound in his head. [...] Mr. Fox and Mr. Sheridan at length withdrew to Sir Sampson’s house, where a discussion of business was entered into, and two of the soldiers, who were identified by the wounded black, were ordered for commitment.⁵⁶

The scene was parodied shortly afterwards in an etching by James Gillray (fig. 3.2). In it, the radical Whig James Brindley Sheridan could be seen threatening a kneeling Sampson Wright while Fox and Edmund Burke were stabbed in the breeches by guardsmen. Tellingly, while Burke was inserted into this scene despite not actually being present, there was no sign of Carlisle or his dramatic personal intervention in the etching.

⁵⁵ *The Times*, 24 July 1788, p. 2.

⁵⁶ *General Evening Post*, 24 July 1788, p. 3.



Fig 3.2: James Gillray, *The Battle of Bow Street*, 1788, Hand-coloured etching and aquatint, 248mm x 358mm. National Portrait Gallery, London. From: National Portrait Gallery, http://images.npg.org.uk/800_800/0/7/mw63207.jpg (Accessed 14/11/2013).

It might seem difficult to see how a figure as committed to courting respectable patrons as Cugoano could have fit in with London's black radical scene. Yet links existed. Thomas Carlisle, for example, was a member of the Sons of Africa, and co-signed a private letter to Granville Sharp along with Cugoano the same year as the Covent Garden riot.⁵⁷ John Pegg, the man whose arrest sparked the riot at the White Raven in 1786, was a 'Corporal of the black poor', meaning that he was given charity money for distribution to a 'division' of London's black people by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor.⁵⁸ Another of these 'Corporals' was

⁵⁷ 'Letter to Granville Sharp, esq. [Undated]', repr. in Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, ed. Carretta, pp. 189-190 [no source cited].

⁵⁸ *General Evening Post*, 9 September 1786, p. 2.

William Green, who was with Cugoano when they applied to Sharp in July the same year to assist Harry Demaine.⁵⁹ Several more of the ‘black poor’ who received the money had co-signed the Sons of Africa letters.⁶⁰ Additionally, Cugoano could claim links with leading white radicals through his abolitionist connections.⁶¹ For example, Sharp was a longstanding member of the Society for Constitutional Information, which had been pushing for parliamentary reform in since 1780.⁶² By 1792, Cugoano’s correspondent and friend Equiano was lodging with Thomas Hardy, secretary of ‘by far the most important of the new radical societies’, the London Corresponding Society (LCS).⁶³ Thus, figures like Cugoano and Equiano provided a link between the street-level direct action of London’s poor black community and the pamphleteering and corresponding societies which came to characterise British radicalism in the early 1790s.

Similarly, Cugoano’s print and distribution networks linked his text with revolutionary ideology. Of his two texts, the only one to list booksellers was *Evil of Slavery*. Of the four named sellers on the title page to this 1791 tract, two were committed and consistent publishers of reformist and pro-French Revolution polemics. As well as selling Cugoano and Equiano’s texts and a few other abolitionist pamphlets, Taylor and Company at South Arch, Royal Exchange, kept their

⁵⁹ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/632, ‘Proceedings of the Society for the Relief of the Black Poor, 7 June 1786’.

⁶⁰ James Bailey and Jonathan Adams are recorded as receiving money from the Committee, as well as ‘Joseph Allambazi’ who may have been Joseph Almaze. TNA, Treasury Solicitors’ Papers for 1786, T1/638, ‘An Alphabetical List of the Black People who have Received the Bounty from Government’.

⁶¹ For connections between political radicals and abolition before 1794, see John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 42-43; James Walvin, ‘The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1838’, *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 292:1 (1977), pp. 343-355; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 343-468.

⁶² Society for Constitutional Information, *To the Public: The Address of the Society for Constitutional Information* (London: Society for Constitutional Information, [1780]).

⁶³ H. T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789-1815* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. 9.

customers up to date with the latest happenings from across the Channel. For example, in 1790, the anonymous *Account of the Escape of the French King*, detailing Louis Capet's flight to Varennes and accompanied by a literal translation of some 'effusions of a patriotic annalist' on the subject, could be bought alongside Cugoano's tract.⁶⁴ Another of his booksellers, H. Symonds, specialised in polemics relating directly to parliamentary reform in Britain, printing reports of sedition trials and, in 1793, Thomas Erskine's *Declaration of the Friends of the Liberty of the Press*.⁶⁵ Symonds also published a number of provocative pro-French Revolutionary tracts during the period.⁶⁶

These were not the only links Cugoano's text had to revolutionary France. In 1788, a translation of *Thoughts and Sentiments* appeared in Paris under the title *Reflexions sur la traite et l'esclavage des Negres*.⁶⁷ The text's translator, Antoine Diannyere, an abolitionist and political economist, went on to become a founding member of the Class of Moral and Political Sciences (CMPS) in 1795.⁶⁸ A pan-disciplinary intellectual institute born from the ashes of the French royal societies, the CMPS was founded on 'true principles of republican equality'; members swore a formal oath of 'hatred to royalty' upon admittance and no hierarchy was recognised.⁶⁹ Diannyere's translation of the text's title suggests something of its intended

⁶⁴ Anon., *An Account of the Escape of the French King* (London: Symonds et. al., 1790).

⁶⁵ Anon., *The Patriot: Addressed to the electors of Great Britain, by a Member of the House of Commons. Containing a Dissertation on the Proposed Reform of Parliamentary Election* (London: G. Bourne and H. Symonds, 1790); Thomas Muir, *An Account of the Trial of Thomas Muir [...] for Sedition* (London: J. Robertson et. al., 1793); Thomas Briellat, *The Trial of Thomas Briellat for Seditious Words* (London: H. Symonds et. al., 1794).

⁶⁶ Anon., *Flower of the Jacobins: Containing Biographical Sketches of the Leading Men at Present at the Head of Affairs in France* (London: J. Owen and H. Symonds, 1792); Charles James, *An Extenuation of the Conduct of the French Revolutionists* (London: H. Symonds, 1792).

⁶⁷ Ottobah Cugoano, *Reflexions sur la traite et l'esclavage des Negres*, trans. Antoine Diannyere (Paris: Royez, 1788).

⁶⁸ For the attribution to Diannyere, see Gregory Pierrot, 'Insights on "Lord Hoth" and Ottobah Cugoano', *Notes and Queries*, 59:3 (2012), pp. 367-368.

⁶⁹ See Martin S. Staum, 'The Class of Moral and Political Sciences, 1795-1803', *French Historical Studies*, 11:3 (1980), pp. 371-397.

readership. The original English title consciously paraphrased Clarkson's *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*, implying both Cugoano's literacy and political leanings. In the same spirit, the title of Diannyere's translation paraphrased Nicolas de Condorcet's 1781 antislavery pamphlet *Reflexions sur l'esclavage des Negres*. Like Clarkson in Britain, Condorcet was considered a radical figure in France during the 1780s and in 1791 was elected as a Paris representative in the Assemblée Nationale.⁷⁰ In both cases, an association was purposefully formed between Cugoano's ideas and those of high-profile abolitionists known to support domestic political reform. This technique helped booksellers to market writing by a black author to an audience broadly sympathetic to either abolitionism, political radicalism or both.

At points, Cugoano's antislavery writing became intertwined with a politically radical message, though his domestic politics were vague in comparison with the publications of the corresponding societies. For example, he suggested that any form of justice in government was impossible to realise while an amoral economic elite was able to influence policy in its own favour:

But it so happens in general, that men of activity and affluence, by whatever way they are possessed of such riches, or have acquired a greatness of such property, they are always preferred to take the lead in matters of government, so that the greatest depredators, warriors, contracting companies of merchants, and rich slave-holders, always endeavour to push themselves on

⁷⁰ For Condorcet's radicalism in the 1780s, see Nicolas de Condorcet, *Writings on the United States*, ed. and trans. Guillaume Ansart (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); for Clarkson's radicalism, see, for example, Oldfield, *Popular Politics*, pp. 70-95.

to get power and interest in their favour; that whatever crimes any of them commit they are seldom brought to any just punishment.⁷¹

For Cugoano, participation in the slave trade was such a corrupt enterprise that slaveholders' sitting in parliament invalidated its moral authority to govern. By the 'magnetic influence' of a powerful and wealthy slave-owning political class, 'there [was] a general support given to despotism, oppression and cruelty'.⁷² Though expressed in abstract terms, this rhetoric blurred or disregarded the distinctions between the despotism of slavery and that of a corrupt British government, anticipating the antislavery radicalism of, for example, Robert Wedderburn (see Chapter 6).

Cugoano's synthesis of antislavery and radical rhetoric blurred not only the lines between the different forms of tyranny permitted by the British government, but also those between the revolutionary movements that challenged them. 'History affords us many examples of severe retaliations, revolutions and dreadful overthrows,' he warned, 'and of many crying under the heavy load of subjection and oppression, seeking for deliverance'.⁷³ In the context of his extended attack on chattel slavery, the references to 'subjection and oppression' would seem like an obvious reference to the withholding of physical freedom inherent in the transatlantic system. Yet, coupled with the mentions of historical 'retaliations, revolutions and dreadful overthrows', these generic terms took on threateningly radical overtones. Gesturing towards the American Revolution, still fresh in the popular consciousness, as well as the upcoming centenary of the 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688, Cugoano picked his words from the lexicon of radical polemic. A couple of pages later, he even went as

⁷¹ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, pp. 89-90.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 90.

⁷³ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 75.

far as to invoke the Painite refrain of ‘the natural rights and liberties of men’ in his declamation of the evils of slavery:

What revolution the end of that predominant evil of slavery and oppression may produce [...] is not for me to determine [...] And nothing else can be expected for such violations of taking away the natural rights and liberties of men, but those who are the doers of it will meet with some awful visitation of the righteous judgement of God[.]⁷⁴

For Cugoano, the language of revolutionary politics, blended with religious millenarianism, best articulated the urgency and necessity of abolishing slavery.

Even the changing use of pronouns in *Thoughts and Sentiments* bore noticeable political connotations. Babacar M’Baye has discussed the use of the collective first person in Cugoano and Equiano’s work as signifiers of a developing sense of ‘self’ in various social (to which may be added ‘political’) contexts.⁷⁵ The identifying marker ‘we’ thus came to refer variously to ‘we the Africans’, ‘we the enslaved’, ‘we the black poor’, ‘we the Christians’ and ‘we the British people’. Cugoano’s authorial perspective demonstrated a startling degree of plasticity, which only avoided destabilising the text’s argument thanks precisely to the socially dislocating experiences of kidnap, enslavement, renaming, forced transportation, sale, resale, emancipation, and finally employment in bourgeois domestic service. The constant disruptions in his social status enabled him to view British and slave societies from both within and without at the same time, in much the same way as

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 76-77.

⁷⁵ Babacar M’Baye, *The Trickster Comes West*, (Jackson, MS: University of Mississippi Press, 2009), pp. 103-104.

Ignatius Sancho had.⁷⁶ This was how the suggestion that ‘you might seek grace and repentance’ for ‘the horrible iniquity of making merchandize of us’, could be coherently followed a few pages later by the patriotic assertion that ‘we would wish to have the grandeur and fame of the British empire to extend far and wide’.⁷⁷

In terms of Cugoano’s domestic radicalism, even more interesting was his fluid use of the second-person collective pronoun. In the final paragraph of the text, the mood shifted from accusatory to directly confrontational:

And let me now hope that you will pardon me in all that I have been thus telling you, O ye inhabitants of Great-Britain! to whom I owe the greatest respect; to your king! to yourselves! and to your government! [...] I must yet say, although it is not for me to determine the manner, that the voice of our complaint implies a vengeance, because of the great iniquity that you have done, and because of the cruel injustice done to us Africans; [...] it ought to sound in your ears as the rolling waves around your circum-ambient shores; and if it is not hearkened unto, it may yet arise with a louder voice, as the rolling thunder, and it may increase in the force of its volubility, [...] to rend the mountains before them, and to cleave in pieces the rocks under them [...]; and even to make that which is strong, and wherein you think that your strength lieth, to become as stubble, and as the fibres of rotten wood, that

⁷⁶ Carretta discusses Cugoano’s developing/competing identities in terms of his ‘binomial identity’ (i.e. John Stuart/Ottobah Cugoano) in his private correspondence. Carretta, ‘Revisited and Revised’, p. 84. Christine Levecq has discussed how the political messages embedded in published petitions written by black authors in late eighteenth-century America reveal that they ‘were both assimilating and expanding on the revolutionary ideology that surrounded them’. Christine Levecq, “‘We Beg Your Excellency’: The Sentimental Politics of Abolitionist Petitions in the Late Eighteenth Century” in Stephen Ahern (ed.), *Affect and Abolition in the Anglo-Atlantic, 1770-1830* (London: Ashgate, 2013), p. 152.

⁷⁷ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, pp. 129, 143.

will do you no good, and your trust to it will become a snare of infatuation to you!⁷⁸

For all his protestations of respect for Britain's inhabitants, king, and government (in that order), Cugoano's final declaration of his identity was made specifically *in opposition* to a nation-state which condoned and perpetuated slavery. The very geology of Britain as an 'island nation' was turned against its governing elite. The 'rolling waves around your circum-ambient shores' became a tsunami of divine wrath, 'cleav[ing] in pieces the rocks under them'. The economic benefits derived from Britain's investments in slavery, 'wherein you think that your strength lieth' will 'do you no good' when the time of reckoning arrived. Cugoano's powerful millenarian imagery, later re-used in both nominally religious and overtly political black writing in Britain (see Chapters 5 and 6), reinforced his (pro)nominal status as a righteous outside commentator passing judgement on a guilty political and social nation.

Of course, it should be remembered that Cugoano's intended readership was not exclusively white, nor British-born. As with other radical corresponding societies, the Sons of Africa supported their members' published tracts. While poverty was a pressing issue for most black people in eighteenth-century London, a few found the money to buy Cugoano's *Evil of Slavery* when it was published in 1791. The publication's list of subscribers named 'Mr. Adams', 'Mr. Baily', 'Mr. Dent' and 'Mr. Elliott' as having bought a copy.⁷⁹ At least some of these corresponded to John Adams, James Bailey, George Dent and Bernard Eliot, all cosignatories of the Sons of Africa letters to Sharp, Fox, Pitt and Dolben in 1788 and 1789. William Green was

⁷⁸ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 148.

⁷⁹ Cugoano, *Evil of Slavery*, pp. [49-54].

also named as a subscriber.⁸⁰ For Cugoano's part, he was listed among the subscribers to the first four editions of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*.⁸¹ Subscription lists have not survived for Cugoano's 1787 tract *Thoughts on Slavery*, but given that many of London's black community travelled to Sierra Leone in the intervening years, it is fair to assume at least as many members of London's black poor read that as did his later text.

THE SIERRA LEONE RESETTLEMENT PROJECT

The plan to expatriate London's 'black poor' came about as an initiative of the all-white Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor. The harsh winter of 1785/1786 had a severe impact on the former Loyalists. A group of gentlemen, operating from Batson's Coffee-house at the Royal Exchange, began collecting public subscriptions on 5 January 1786 for free bread to be distributed to 'every Black in distress, who will apply'.⁸² The response, both in terms of subscriptions and clients, was extensive. By 28 January, some 250 black people had availed themselves of the offer, and the list of subscribers expanded weekly.⁸³ But it was clear that the effects of extreme poverty went beyond hunger, and by 15 March public subscription-money was being spent on medical expenses, clothing, lodging and preparation for work at sea.⁸⁴

Despite the success of the subscriptions, it was evident that a longer-term solution was required. The Treasury Solicitors' Office began contributing £50 per

⁸⁰ Ibid. For further evidence of black readerships of early black writing, see Eve Bannet, *Transatlantic Stories and the History of Reading, 1720-1810: Migrant Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 139-158.

⁸¹ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, first edn. (London: Johnson et. al., 1789); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, second edn. (London: Johnson et. al., 1789); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, third edn. (London: Johnson et. al., 1790); Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, fourth edn. (Dublin: W. Sleater, 1791).

⁸² *Public Advertiser*, 5 January 1786, p. 5.

⁸³ See, for example, *Public Advertiser*, 27 January 1786, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *Public Advertiser*, 15 March 1786, cited in Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 69.

week to the subscriptions by 17 April, on the understanding that the Committee begin working towards a permanent ‘solution’.⁸⁵ Over the course of the spring, Henry Smeathman, a member of the Committee and later its Chair, redrafted some plans he had drawn up earlier for a mass relocation of hundreds of London’s ‘black poor’ to the coast of Sierra Leone. This would be a means, he wrote to the Treasury Solicitors’ Office, of ‘removing such a burthen from the Public for ever, and of putting them in a condition of repaying this country the expense thereof’.⁸⁶ The Treasury agreed to fund the scheme to the value of fourteen pounds per head, and underwrote the cost of ‘temporary relief’ for black people in the capital, on the proviso that every recipient of this charity money would sign up for permanent resettlement.⁸⁷

As Braidwood has demonstrated, black people were at the heart the administration of the charity money as well as the resettlement project.⁸⁸ Indeed, a formal organisational structure for London’s black community emerged through the Committee’s plans to distribute the Treasury’s money, borrowing the military language already familiar to many of the Loyalists. At the 24 May meeting of the Committee, it was resolved that

the blacks and people of colour who assemble to receive the six pence a day allowed by the government for their temporary support understood to be continued till such time as they commence the voyage on the agreement with Mr. Smeathman be [ar]ranged in Companies of at least twelve each under a

⁸⁵ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/631, ‘B. Johnson to Geo. Rose, 1 June 1786 [Accounts of the Committee, 17 April to 1 June, 1786]’.

⁸⁶ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/631, ‘Memorial of Henry Smeathman, 24 May 1786’.

⁸⁷ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/631, ‘Commrs Navy report, that Mr. Smeathman’s proposals are reasonable, 24 May 1786’.

⁸⁸ Stephen Braidwood, ‘Initiatives and Organisations’, pp. 211-227.

chosen man to be called Corporal, who can write or give account to our clerk by memory.⁸⁹

At the next meeting on 7 June, the first eight of these ‘Corporals’ were named as James Johnson, Jonathan William Ramsay, Aaron Brookes, John Lemon, John Cambridge, John Williams, William Green and Charles Stoddard.⁹⁰ By July these had been joined by John Wilson, Jacob Jackson, Paul Clarke, J. W. Harris, Abraham Elliot, George Jemmison, Daniel Christopher and Thomas Holder.⁹¹ Since this new externally-imposed hierarchy was based on perceived intellectual and social weight, it might be surprising to see that Equiano and Cugoano were not put forward as Corporals. For Equiano’s part, he may already have set his sights on a higher office for the voyage, which he attained upon his appointment as government commissary in August.⁹² Cugoano, in a comparatively comfortable situation as Cosway’s servant, had no need of the charity-money, and consequently was not eligible as a Corporal. However, because of his connections to Equiano, Green and others involved in the project, he became one of its highest-profile commentators. Cugoano’s writings (first published in 1787, and therefore admittedly written with the considerable benefit of hindsight) suggest that he had serious reservations about the plan from the beginning.

It must be acknowledged that black people viewed the charity-distributing Committee and the government-funded resettlement project quite separately, and in

⁸⁹ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/631, ‘Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 24 May 1786’.

⁹⁰ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/632, ‘Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 7 June 1786’.

⁹¹ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/633, ‘Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 15 July 1786’.

⁹² Vincent Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 224.

very different ways. Cugoano in particular was clear in his opinions on both. In *Thoughts and Sentiments*, he acknowledged that:

Particular thanks are due to every one of that humane society of worthy and respectful gentlemen, whose liberality hath supported many of the Black poor about London. [...] For they have not only commiserated the poor in general, *but even those which are accounted as beasts, and imputed as vile in the sight of others.* The part that the British government has taken, to cooperate with them, has certainly a flattering and laudable appearance of doing some good [...]⁹³

This mention of the British government was handled with care. Cugoano had to balance his commitment to respectability with his social role as a leading figure in London's black community. Thus the British government's early support of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor was represented, with appreciable cynicism, as having only the 'appearance' of doing good. Similarly, no objections from black Loyalists against this early financial support were recorded in the minutes of the Committee.

Nevertheless, the italicised section of this passage, a modified bible quotation from Job 18:3, was an obvious reference to discriminatory attitudes supposing the sub-humanity of black people promoted by, among other groups, the West Indies interest.⁹⁴ Since he did not quote the remainder of Job 18, Cugoano's citation seemed

⁹³ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, pp. 138-139. Original emphasis.

⁹⁴ See, for example, in a published letter on the slave trade: 'And all this, as if the Negroes were human creatures like ourselves, which is a mistaken notion'. *St. James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post*, 29 November 1787, p. 4.

innocuous enough. It obscured the radically millenarian character of the rest of the verse:

Wherefore are we counted as beasts, and reputed vile in your sight?
 He teareth himself in his anger: shall the earth be forsaken for thee? [...]
 Yea, the light of the wicked shall be put out, and the spark of his fire shall
 not shine. [...]
 For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he walketh upon a snare.
 The gin shall take him by the heel, and the robber shall prevail against him.
 The snare is laid for him in the ground, and a trap for him in the way.
 Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall drive him to his feet.
 His strength shall be hungerbitten, and destruction shall be ready at his side.
 It shall devour the strength of his skin: even the firstborn of death shall
 devour his strength.⁹⁵

The imagery in this passage, in the context of Cugoano's racially egalitarian agenda, revolved around the inversion of the dyadic white/black, enslaver/enslaved relationship. The punishments for denying the humanity of the African were for the perpetrator to be ensnared, trapped, caught in a net; that 'the robber shall prevail against him'. The 'strength' of protection against enslavement afforded by his 'skin' was devoured by God's destruction. The apologist for slavery became himself enslaved. Cugoano's choice to invoke rather than directly quote this passage anchored his political views to the most violent repudiation of discriminatory attitudes to appear in Christian theology, without sacrificing the air of gratitude and restrained tone required to appeal to 'establishment' policymakers.

⁹⁵ *AVB*, 18 Job 3-13.

Many of the black Loyalists did not share Cugoano's faith in British intentions for the new Sierra Leone settlement. Embarkations on the three ships fitted out to convey them to Sierra Leone slowed to a crawl, even after the charity money was withdrawn from those who refused to go.⁹⁶ As another harsh winter drew in, the sight of black Loyalists in distress on the icy streets once again became commonplace for Londoners. Their reaction was less favourable than it had been the previous year. On 23 December 1786, *The Times* reprinted the opinion given by John Dunning, one of the lawyers on the losing side of the Mansfield ruling, 'that the numerous dingy-coloured faces which crowded our streets, must have their origin in our wives been terrified [sic] when pregnant, by the numerous Africans who were to be seen in all parts of the town'.⁹⁷ Dunning's theory, like the Pro Bono Publico letters to which Sancho's friend John Meheux had responded, seemed to suggest that dark skin could be developed *in utero* through some kind of osmotic process or, as he euphemistically implied, as a result of rape. This notion proved as popular as it was outlandish; it was echoed again and again in the reactionary press during the winter of 1786/1787. In *The Public Advertiser*, as well as *The Times* of 28 December 1786, a correspondent lamented that:

Two blacks are daily walking the streets, the one leaning on the other's shoulder, as if in great pain. This object is sufficiently disagreeable, and to our magistrates highly disgraceful. Must our wives and children be always exposed to be frightened in this manner? As soon as the wife of any

⁹⁶ See, for example, *Morning Herald*, 3 November 1786, p. 2; TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/632, 'Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 7 June 1786'.

⁹⁷ *The Times*, 23 December 1786, p. 2.

Alderman or Magistrates shall have lost an heir, owing to the frequency of such horrid sights, the public will probably be relieved. – But not till then.⁹⁸

For this correspondent, spectacles of black distress could lead to white miscarriages. An inverted pyramid of suffering was constructed, in which the physical deformity and death of countless unborn white innocents flowed upwards from the distress of a tiny minority both at the bottom of, and alien to, the social hierarchy.

The presence of a burdened ‘public’ in need of ‘relief’ from such disagreeable and terrifying spectacles of black suffering underlined a sense of civic identity based on (white) ethnicity. The letter’s allusions to ‘the public’, counterpoised against the frightening black beggars, suggested a form of national social self-definition redrawn along the lines of ethnic signifiers. With the ameliorative effects of the Eden Agreement of 1786 yet to reach most of the population, the social and economic burden of the nation’s humiliating defeat in America seemed to be articulated in the suffering bodies of a visibly alien Other, to whom the boundaries of ‘Britishness’ could no longer afford to extend.⁹⁹ In other words, the desire to morally ‘atone’ for the loss of America began to equivocate under the economic pressures of the post-war recession. Black people, regardless of their record of supporting British interests (i.e. their military service), were now defined *against* a white British ‘public’. Thus the ‘public’, in the imagination of the popular press, took on the character of a racially homogenised society from which black people, former British military or not, were emphatically and by definition excluded.

⁹⁸ *The Public Advertiser*, 28 December 1786, p. 3.

⁹⁹ For background on the postwar British economy and the Eden treaty, see John E. Crowley, ‘Neo-Mercantilism and *The Wealth of Nations*: British Commercial Policy after the American Revolution’, *The Historical Journal*, 33:2 (1990), pp. 339-360, esp. pp. 353-355.

Black people did not need to suffer to become ‘sufficiently disagreeable’ objects in the eyes of the British press. Those who were not pathogenic were parasitic, and black people in the comparatively comfortable position of domestic service such as Cugoano were seen to be depriving ‘real’ British citizens of work. On the day after the *Public Advertiser* piece appeared, *The Morning Post* published an article complaining that ‘When so many of our own young men and women are out of employment [...] it is abominable that aliens, and more particularly Black aliens, should be suffered to eat the bread of idleness in Gentlemen’s houses’.¹⁰⁰ Here again, the nationalist rhetoric of supporting formerly ‘British’ soldiers and sailors had given way under the weight of carrying it out in practice. British people had sympathised with the black Loyalists, and helped them as much as they were willing to. But there was never any possibility of permanent asylum. By December 1786, the message emerging from the press was as consistent as it was shrill: it was time for the black Loyalists to leave.

Even with so much vitriol targeted at them, London’s black people remained reluctant to board the ships. While Smeathman was responsible for the expedition, the project had been popular, but after his death in July 1786 enthusiasm waned. This was possibly because the Loyalists themselves came to recognise that their relocation was rooted at least as much in political expediency as in altruism. Cugoano articulated the sentiments of his peers the following year:

What with the death of some of the original promoters and proposers of this charitable undertaking [...] and by the adverse motives of those employed to be the conductors thereof, we think it will be more than what can be well

¹⁰⁰ *Morning Post and Daily Advertiser*, 29 December 1786, p. [2].

expected, if we ever hear of any good in proportion to so great, well-designed, laudable and expensive charity.¹⁰¹

The Loyalists' distrust of government influence slowed down embarkations, and despite the charity money being stopped altogether after 31 October 1786, the ships remained at anchor in the Thames until 16 January 1787, when they sailed half-full to Spithead in preparation for their voyage.¹⁰²

The problems with the project went deeper than a failure to convince black people that they would be better off in Sierra Leone. Many of the settlers who had initially signed up for the project were, in the event, reluctant to go. Lack of communication from the Committee and an increasingly dictatorial approach from the Treasury Solicitors' Office made many of them nervous. On 15 December 1786, the *Morning Herald* reported that

some of the leaders of the seven hundred poor Black [sic] who had signed an engagement to go to a Free Settlement on the coast of Africa, submitted the new system, intended for their government in Ethiopia, to the consideration of the Right Hon. Lord George Gordon, and requested his advice and opinion on the subject, before they sailed from England. His Lordship advised them *not to go*.¹⁰³

Gordon, best known for instigating the anti-Catholic riots of 1780, was not the obvious choice for the 'black poor' to select as their advisor. Newspaper reports show that condemned prisoners and those under sentence of transportation appealed to him

¹⁰¹ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, pp. 140-141.

¹⁰² Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 145.

¹⁰³ *Morning Herald*, 15 December 1786, p. 3.

at around the same time to intercede in their sentences.¹⁰⁴ *The Times* parodied this sudden flurry of requests on 12 January 1787: ‘*Lord George Crop* knows not what to do, or where to turn himself – *Newgate Prisoners, Botany Bay convicts, and vagabond Blacks*, solicit his divided and distracted attention’.¹⁰⁵ Connections may have been made between some of the free black Loyalists and Gordon through black ‘Botany Bay convicts’, such as ‘Peter, a black man’, or Francis Othello.¹⁰⁶ In any case, the leaders of the ‘black poor’ bound for Sierra Leone, according to various newspaper reports, visited Gordon in Newgate prison several more times during December and January.¹⁰⁷ They even published a letter addressed to him in the *Morning Herald*, drawing the public censure of the new superintendent of the expedition, Joseph Irwin.¹⁰⁸

The British authorities were so keen to fill vessels bound for Sierra Leone that they quickly acceded to demands made by the Corporals that certain black prisoners be released from gaol to take part in the voyage.¹⁰⁹ This accommodating spirit, intended to kick-start the mass expatriation of London’s black community, now appeared suspect for entirely new reasons, and the Corporals began to see parallels between their own and the convicts’ situations. A number of the Loyalists had undergone the horrors of the middle passage once already, and they were not keen to be transported in comparable conditions again. Matters were not helped when it

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *Public Advertiser*, 25 December 1786, p. 2; *General Evening Post*, 6 January 1787, p. 4.

¹⁰⁵ *The Times*, 12 January 1787, p. 2.

¹⁰⁶ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, s17860531-1, ‘Punishment summary, 31 May 1786’ [Online] Available from: <http://www.oldbaileyonline.org> (Accessed 25/10/2014). My assumption that Francis Othello was black is based solely on his surname. Pybus has reconstructed more individual biographies of black convicts transported to Australia. Pybus, *Epic Journeys of Freedom*, pp. 89-102.

¹⁰⁷ See, for example, *The Morning Herald*, 2 January 1787, p. 3.

¹⁰⁸ This letter is unfortunately no longer available in any major collection. For Irwin’s response, see *The Morning Herald*, 13 January 1787, p. 4.

¹⁰⁹ See, for example, TNA, T 1/636, ‘Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 6 October 1786’.

became apparent that the Royal Navy ship *HMS Nautilus*, which was assigned to escort the settlers to Sierra Leone, had only just returned from scouting the West African Coast for a suitable site to build a new penal colony.¹¹⁰ Even Smeathman had ‘undertaken a government commission to explore the possibilities of the African coast for use as a convict settlement after the American Revolution deprived Britain of one convenient dumping-ground for unwanted citizens’.¹¹¹ By comparison, Gordon had intervened on behalf of the Botany Bay convicts so spiritedly that his actions led to a seditious libel conviction in 1787.¹¹² If the contracts the ‘black poor’ had signed did indeed turn out to amount to the same bonded servitude as that meted out to convicts, they were unlikely to find a more forceful or better-qualified advocate.

While it is unlikely that Cugoano ever boarded the ships bound for Sierra Leone, it is quite possible that he was among the ‘Chiefs of the Black Poor’ who visited Gordon. The lengthy criticisms Cugoano gave of the Sierra Leone voyage in his *Thoughts and Sentiments* (discussed in detail below), demonstrated a keen but distrustful interest in the proceedings of the project. Equiano certainly wrote to him to keep him up to date with the latest problems aboard the ships.¹¹³ And according to the *Morning Chronicle*, ‘Mr. John Stuart’, described as one of ‘the principal persons concerned in the abolition of the Slave Trade’ visited Gordon in Newgate in January 1788, ‘and requested his Lordship to look over and revise all the publications, and

¹¹⁰ Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 131. Emma Christopher has discussed the rejection of West Africa as a suitable site for a convict settlement. Emma Christopher, ‘A “Disgrace to the very Colour”: Perceptions of Blackness and Whiteness in the founding of Sierra Leone and Botany Bay’, *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 9:3 (2008) [Online] Available from: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v009/9.3.christopher.html (Accessed 28/01/2015).

¹¹¹ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 97.

¹¹² See George Gordon, *The Whole Proceedings on the Trials of two Informations Exhibited ex Officio by the King’s Attorney-General against George Gordon, Esq.* (London: M. Gurney, 1787).

¹¹³ *Public Advertiser*, 4 April 1787, p. 3.

appeals lately printed on their [the abolitionists'] behalf'.¹¹⁴ While it is and was a common enough British name, Cugoano was the only leading abolitionist figure active in London in 1788 known as John Stuart.

There is another social link between Cugoano and Gordon. Even though he was not keen to promote the fact, Thomas Hardy, Secretary of the LCS and landlord of Cugoano's correspondent and collaborator Equiano, was an old friend of Gordon's. In a passage deleted from the published version of his memoirs, Hardy described how he was 'well acquainted with Lord G. Gordon' and 'always much entertained and expressed a sincere respect for the many admirable virtues of that misguided but much injured, and oppressed man'.¹¹⁵ While Equiano did not lodge with Hardy until 1790, it is possible that he or Cugoano had met him by 1786 through mutual radical friends – such as Gordon's cousin and legal counsel Thomas Erskine – and that Hardy introduced them to Gordon.

Though the *Morning Herald's* assertion that 'there are very few now left aboard, except such decoy blacks as are paid by government to go out with enormous salaries' was an overstatement, Gordon's advice further slowed embarkations at London.¹¹⁶ By the time the ships sailed to Spithead on 16 January 1787, only 459 people had embarked – well short of the 675 who had signed the agreement and received the charity money after 3 June 1786.¹¹⁷ A combination of severe weather and mismanagement by Irwin and Equiano caused further delays at Spithead and forced the ships to dock again at Plymouth for repairs. Here, Equiano was dismissed

¹¹⁴ *Morning Chronicle*, 19 January 1788, p. 3.

¹¹⁵ BL, Add. MSS. 65153A, 'Manuscript copy of Memoirs of Thomas Hardy', ff. 8-9.

¹¹⁶ *Morning Herald*, 15 December 1786, p. 3.

¹¹⁷ Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 148.

from his post as commissary, and it was not until 9 April 1787 that the ships finally set sail for Sierra Leone without him.¹¹⁸

Equiano was not pleased with his dismissal from the project. His attainment of the post of Commissary to the Black Poor had represented the greatest level of trust and prestige ever placed by the domestic British government in a black person, and its loss was felt bitterly. In a letter addressed to Cugoano dated ‘Plymouth, March 24, 1787’, Equiano complained that the white leaders of the expedition were ‘great villains’, and that he was ‘exceeding much aggrieved at the conduct of those who call themselves gentlemen’.¹¹⁹ His anger had barely softened two years later, when he accused Samuel Hoare, former chairman of the Committee, of undermining him in London and procuring his dismissal by ‘unjust means’.¹²⁰ Given the personal address of the letter and its uncharacteristically incautious tone, it is most likely that Cugoano rather than Equiano forwarded the letter to *The Public Advertiser*, where it appeared on 4 April.

Two days later, an unsigned letter written by Cugoano appeared in the same paper.¹²¹ It represented a blistering attack on the management of the project, couched in even more critical terms than Equiano’s:

We find his Majesty’s servants have [taken] away the Commissary’s commission [from Mr.] Vasa. He came up from Plymouth to complain, and is now gone back again to take his effects on shore. The memorials of all the

¹¹⁸ Carretta, *Self-Made Man*, p. 231.

¹¹⁹ *Public Advertiser*, 4 April 1787, p. 3.

¹²⁰ Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, pp. 247-248.

¹²¹ ‘by Cugoano’: This letter was paraphrased heavily in *Thoughts and Sentiments*. While Cugoano freely drew on sources without citing them elsewhere in the text, this passage is paraphrased, with the same key points made in a different order (see in the main text below). This, in conjunction with the chronological proximity to Equiano’s letter, plus the fact that it appeared in the same newspaper, strongly suggests strongly that the 6 April letter was written by Cugoano in response to the news of his friend’s dismissal from the voyage. Braidwood also asserts that the letter ‘may well have been written by Cugoano’. Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 158.

Black people, which they have sent up from Plymouth, represent that they are much wronged, injured, and oppressed natives of Africa and under various pretences and different manners have been dragged away from London and carried captives to Plymouth, where they have nothing but slavery before their eyes, should they proceed to Africa or the West Indies under the command of the persons who have charge of them.¹²²

Cugoano's lines of communication with the black settlers on board the ships put him in a position, as he saw it, to represent their views in the media. His articulation of the understandable fear of re-enslavement reflected the Botany Bay rumours as well as Gordon's response to the contracts when he reviewed them in December 1786. He simultaneously highlighted the hypocrisy of the British government with regard to their support of slave forts on the West African coast: 'They cannot conceive, say they, Government would establish a free colony for them, whilst it supports its forts and factories to wrong and ensnare, and to carry others of their colour and country into slavery and bondage'.¹²³ But Cugoano has misjudged the public mood. He approximated the broad public support for the relief of the 'Black poor' in early 1786 with a popular turn against the slave trade. Perhaps naively, he assumed that his suggestion that the enslavement process was beginning in London, and that passengers were 'carried captives to Plymouth', would direct public indignation towards the project. He reckoned, wrongly, that humanitarian feeling would overcome the financial burden and social inconvenience represented by the 'black poor'.

¹²² *Public Advertiser*, 6 April 1787, p. 2.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

Cugoano's letter echoed and reinforced Equiano's when it went on to criticise the white managers of the project personally, stating that 'the contract, on Mr. Smeathman's plan' had 'not been fulfilled [...] but a Mr. Irwin has contrived to monopolize the benefit to himself'.¹²⁴ Even though, according to the Committee's July 1786 minutes, the Corporals declared that 'there is no man in whom they can now repose the same confidence and trust as in Mr. Joseph Irwin', they were then judging him solely on Smeathman's recommendation.¹²⁵ Once they were aboard the ships, relations broke down very quickly. Cugoano's impressions of Irwin could not have been helped when another old friend, William Green (his co-applicant to Granville Sharp in the Harry Demaine case) was ejected from the voyage in Plymouth following a row with him.¹²⁶ Given the fact that several of Cugoano's known associates were on board the ships at Plymouth – including Green, and Cugoano's fellow members of the Sons of Africa, Equiano, Daniel Christopher and George Mandeville – it is safe to assume that his information was coming directly from them. In a thinly-veiled reference to Irwin in his *Thoughts and Sentiments*, Cugoano blamed 'some disagreeable jealousy of those who were appointed governors' for the project's problems.¹²⁷ In the *Interesting Narrative*, Equiano made further reference to the letter published by the 'Chiefs' of the Loyalists published in the *Morning Herald* on 4 January, in which they criticised Irwin's management of the project.¹²⁸ While there is ample evidence to suggest that Equiano made administrative mistakes, it is clear that clashes between Irwin and his black shipmates were a contributing factor in the

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ TNA, Treasury Papers, T1/634, 'Proceedings of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor, 15 July 1786'.

¹²⁶ Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 152.

¹²⁷ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 140.

¹²⁸ Equiano, *Interesting Narrative*, first edn., p. 247.

Committee's decision to dismiss the 'Commissary to the Black Poor' from the project.¹²⁹

Cugoano's criticisms of the project did not end with the letter. In his *Thoughts and Sentiments*, he repeated many of the same arguments and expanded upon them, reiterating his comparison between the coercive methods used to ensure black people boarded the ships and the process of enslavement:

Many more of the Black People still in this country would have, with great gladness, embraced the opportunity, longing to reach their native land; but as the old saying is, A burnt child dreads the fire, some of these unfortunate sons and daughters of Africa have been severally unlawfully dragged away from their native abodes, under various pretences, by the insidious treachery of others, and have been brought into the hands of barbarous robbers and pirates, and like sheep to the market, have been sold into captivity and slavery.¹³⁰

Two forms of coerced migration here were purposefully conflated by the repetition of the euphemistic phrase 'under various pretences', which Cugoano had used in his *Public Advertiser* letter in reference to the Sierra Leone project. In his hands, the phrase had sufficient elasticity to encompass both the brute-force approach of kidnap associated with the slave trade and the more subtle forms of coercion imposed in the execution of the resettlement attempt. Similarly, the comparative distinction between 'captivity' and 'slavery' recalled that the project had, in effect, divested the settlers of their freedom once they boarded the ships. While he accepted the charitable and

¹²⁹ Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, p. 156.

¹³⁰ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 141.

humane intentions of the project in principle, the ends remained resolutely unjustified by means too similar to enslavement to be worth differentiating from it.

Such harsh criticism of the government may seem at odds with Cugoano's attempts to court 'establishment' figures like Burke and Pitt. But he managed to incorporate the analogy between the Sierra Leone project and transatlantic slavery into his model of respectability by invoking the patriotic myth of a national love of freedom.¹³¹ He redefined cardinal measures of alterity away from visible, extrinsic signifiers like skin colour, and towards intrinsic personal characteristics such as morality. Thus, slave traders, not black Loyalists, fell outside the boundaries of morally upstanding, charitable and benevolent 'Britishness'. Cugoano countered the collective 'public' identity based on whiteness, as engineered in the popular press, with one based on a supposedly shared intuition for moral justice. Service in the public interest demanded incorporation into public society. Thus he reminded his readership that many of the black people aboard the ships, 'by various services either to the public or individuals, as more particularly in the course of the last war, have gotten their liberty again in this free country', but explained that they were 'afraid of being ensnared again; for the European seafaring people in general, who trade to foreign parts, have such a prejudice against Black People, that they use them more like asses than men, so that a Black Man is scarcely ever safe among them'.¹³² Here the racialized terms of villainy and victimhood expressed by the press during the winter of 1786/1787 were renegotiated again. In Cugoano's account, black settlers were forced by the avarice of white seafarers to remain ever vigilant. Readers assuming a degree of exaggeration regarding dehumanising attitudes towards black

¹³¹ Nicholas Hudson discusses 'establishment' antislavery rhetoric in relation to the 'patriotic image of Britons as a freedom-loving people' in Nicholas Hudson, "'Britons Never Will be Slaves": National Myth, Conservatism, and the Beginnings of British Antislavery', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 34:4 (2001), pp. 559-576.

¹³² *Ibid.*

people needed only look at a misguided humanitarian essay published two years later in *Woodfall's Register* entitled, without irony, 'Cruelty to Horses, and Asses, and Negroes' to see the literal truth behind his assertion.¹³³

The agents of the Committee were keen to counter this type of negative publicity. As well as directly attacking Equiano's character in a series of public letters, an anonymous 'Gentleman' aboard the *Atlantic* wrote to the *London Chronicle* from Tenerife, describing the positive effects of his dismissal: 'Vasa's discharge and the dismissal of Green and Rose, are attended with the happiest effects. Instead of that general misunderstanding under which we groaned through their means, we now enjoy all the sweets of peace, lenity, and almost uninterrupted harmony'.¹³⁴ The inclusion of the word 'lenity' in this letter was crucial to the task of reframing public perceptions of the project, since Cugoano's attack relied upon the easily-made comparison between resettlement and enslavement. 'Lenity' implied both a re-assertion of white authority over the black settlers and benevolent paternalism as its inevitable corollary. For all the letter's protestations that 'the odious distinction of colours is no longer remembered', the implication was clear: with the confusing element of black authority figures removed, the 'natural' hierarchy was restored and the project could succeed.

Of course, it is a now well-documented fact that this first attempt to establish a 'Province of Freedom' in Sierra Leone ended in catastrophic failure. Events in Sierra Leone between 1787 and 1791 have been well rehearsed by historians, who broadly agree that the settler population was devastated by a combination of unfortunate timing, mismanagement, bad luck, poor communication with local

¹³³ *Diary or Woodfall's Register*, 29 December 1789, p. 1.

¹³⁴ *London Chronicle*, 3 July 1787, p. 8.

Temne peoples, and infighting.¹³⁵ By 1790, the settlers' new home in Sierra Leone, Granville Town, was deserted, with all the inhabitants either dead, enslaved or seeking refuge as employees of local African or European slave traders. In 1791, a new Sierra Leone Company was established in London with the aim of reviving the project's fortunes. This time the company received the full backing of the government from a very early stage in its development. Meanwhile, a black Loyalist from Nova Scotia named Thomas Peters had arrived in London to petition Secretary of State William Grenville for 'some Establishment where [black people in Nova Scotia] may obtain a competent settlement for themselves'.¹³⁶ This convenient piece of timing was seized upon by the new Company, and in 1791 they sent John Clarkson, younger brother of the abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, to Nova Scotia in order to convince some of the black people there to relocate to Sierra Leone.¹³⁷

Cugoano felt more comfortable with the plans of this new Sierra Leone Company. In *Evil of Slavery*, the passages decrying the failures of the original 1786/1787 project had been removed. By comparison, the passages dealing with Irwin remained in every edition of Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* up to the 1794 edition, the last to be published before his death in 1797.¹³⁸ Cugoano was so keen on the new project that he even wrote to Granville Sharp, volunteering to go to New Brunswick to convince some of the black Loyalists there to participate in the venture:

¹³⁵ See, for example, Wallace Brown, 'The Black Loyalists in Sierra Leone', in Pulis (ed.), *Moving On*, pp. 103-134; Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, pp. 181-225; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, pp. 94-115; John Peterson, *Province of Freedom: A History of Sierra Leone 1787-1870* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969) pp. 17-27. The classic account of the establishment of Sierra Leone is Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), esp. pp. 13-25.

¹³⁶ TNA, Correspondence of Secretary of State, 1790-1792, CO 217/63, 'Enquiry into the Complaint of Thomas Peters', cited in Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 95.

¹³⁷ See Brown, 'The Black Loyalists in Sierra Leone', pp. 106-109; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, pp. 115-144.

¹³⁸ Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative*, 8th Ed. (London: n.p. 1794), pp. 343-347.

...as there is several ships now going to new Brunswick I could wish to have your answer that I might be able to gived [sic] the black settlers there some kind of answer to their request, the generality of them are mediately the natives of africa who Join the british forces Last war, they are consisting of different macanicks such as carpenters, smiths, masons and farmers, this are the people that we have imediate use for in the Provence of freedom.¹³⁹

The fact Cugoano knew that black people in Canada were actively seeking a new home suggests that he was in contact with Peters. He was certainly communicating with a large black community in London, since *Evil of Slavery*, unlike *Thoughts and Sentiments*, was explicitly addressed to his ‘Gentlemen Countrymen and brother Sufferers’ and written in the collective first-person throughout.¹⁴⁰ It is not unreasonable to assume, given Cugoano’s close associations with a number of black Loyalists in London, that he had met Peters through mutual friends or at one of the ‘black Loyalist pubs’, such as the White Raven on Mile-End Road or the Yorkshire Stingo. An awareness that the impetus for this new phase of the Sierra Leone project came from black people themselves goes some way to explaining Cugoano’s apparent *volte face* on the issue of resettlement. But his objections to the original plans were founded largely in the coercive nature of the government’s involvement. A broader view is therefore needed to explain his esteem for the Sierra Leone Company, which was *more*, not less, incorporated with Pitt’s administration than the Committee had been.

Firstly, the new Company could boast Sharp as its first Chair. This represented a far greater degree of involvement than he had taken in the first attempt

¹³⁹ Gloucestershire Archives, Granville Sharp Papers, D3549/13/1/S36, ‘John Stuart to Granville Sharp, n.d.’.

¹⁴⁰ Cugoano, *Evil of Slavery*, p. 5.

at resettlement. While he had directed funds towards the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor in 1786, and took an active interest in the developments of the first project, he was not as closely involved at that stage as has been suggested by some historians.¹⁴¹ In fact, the Committee's minutes never mentioned him attending a single meeting. Even though his plan for the government of the new territory (based on a medieval system of land-sharing called Frankpledge) was adopted by the settlers, and the first town named for him, his influence over the 1786/1787 project was, at most, indirect.¹⁴² By contrast, the new Sierra Leone Company had come about primarily because of his actions. It was first conceived under the name of the St. George's Bay Company as a means of organising relief for the ailing settlement. Later, reorganised and renamed the Sierra Leone Company, it was viewed explicitly as a way to set up alternative forms of trade with Africa to compete with the slave trade.¹⁴³ Sharp had been the driving force behind the St. George's Bay Company, and he was responsible for the involvement of a number of abolitionists in its involvement. When the organisation became fully incorporated in July 1791, Sharp remained a director, and was instrumental in the election of Henry Thornton – a member of the London Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade and former member of the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor – as the Company's chairman.¹⁴⁴ Just as with Henry Smeathman during the first half of 1786,

¹⁴¹ Walker, for example, suggests that the project came about largely because of Sharp, and that he was among the individuals who staged collections for London's 'black poor' in early 1786. Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, pp. 96-97.

¹⁴² For Sharp's system of Frankpledge, see Granville Sharp, *An Account of the Constitutional English Polity of Congregational Courts* (London: B. White and C. Dilly, 1786). Sharp's plan for the government of Sierra Leone, in the form of a response to Smeathman's plan, was entitled 'Memorandum on a Late Proposal for a New Settlement to be made on the Coast of Africa', and was published as an appendix in the same volume, pp. 262-282.

¹⁴³ See Braidwood, *Black Poor and White Philanthropists*, pp. 225-250; Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, pp. 94-114.

¹⁴⁴ Walker, *The Black Loyalists*, p. 103.

Cugoano's personal regard for Sharp reassured him as to the motives of this new project.

Secondly, Cugoano's perception of the government's reasons for becoming involved had changed since he published *Thoughts and Sentiments* in 1787. In the intervening years, Wilberforce had successfully moved for a Privy Council inquiry into the slave trade and William Dolben had implemented tighter regulations on overcrowding in slave ships. Evidence against the slave trade gathered by Clarkson and others was introduced into Commons from 1789, and in 1791 Wilberforce introduced the first parliamentary bill for abolition.¹⁴⁵ The process of abolishing the slave trade seemed well underway. Cugoano was already considering the details of post-abolition economics, proposing that 'should the abolition of that horrific traffic take place, as it ought, next sessions of Parliament; that there may be a plan adopted to meet the general approbation of our African friends'.¹⁴⁶ His optimism was palpable in the opening address of *Evil of Slavery*, in which he offered thanks to 'these truly worthy and humane gentlemen (viz. Mr. Wm. Wilberforce and Mr. Grenville Sharp) with the warmest sence of gratitude, for their beneficent and laudable endeavours'.¹⁴⁷ Claiming to represent all formerly enslaved people, he now lionised parliamentary abolitionists for beginning to effect the changes he had campaigned for since at least 1786, expressing confidence in their success as inevitable and forthcoming:

The part that has been taken lately by the generous senator WILLIAM WILBERFORCE esq. to co-operate with the British parliament, in behalf of the oppressed Africans, and many other gentlemen, [...] shews the aimiable

¹⁴⁵ Anon., *The Speeches of Mr. Wilberforce, [...] on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: John Stockdale, 1789).

¹⁴⁶ Cugoano, *Evil of Slavery*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

intentions of that august and much revered Assembly; we, as part of the sufferers, cannot but rest with the strongest confidence, and hope that the end of so laudable exertions, are the total abolition of that horrible traffic.¹⁴⁸

These effusions were written after 1787 and inserted into the newer *Evil of Slavery* pamphlet. Combined with the fact that he had volunteered to become involved in the 1791 project, these additions – and the removal of the passages criticising the 1786/1787 project – suggest that Cugoano had significantly reassessed his position on government involvement in resettling Loyalists in Sierra Leone.

It was against a backdrop of shrill press antagonism that the first expedition had sailed from London in 1787, led by white people with no proven commitment to antislavery and whom many of the black settlers did not trust, and funded by a government which appeared to be reacting more to widespread xenophobia than to the worsening humanitarian crisis affecting the homeless black Loyalists on London's streets. This first plan, as Cugoano saw it, was that the 'black poor' 'were to be hurried away at all events, come of them after what would'.¹⁴⁹ But in 1791, the Sierra Leone Company was an organisation run by committed abolitionists (some of whom he knew personally), and funded by a government which appeared to be progressing quickly with the abolition of the slave trade. While he was understandably unwilling to publically endorse the project after the catastrophe of the 1786 venture, his private involvement demonstrated a quiet optimism regarding the government's intentions at Sierra Leone.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁴⁹ Cugoano, *Thoughts and Sentiments*, p. 140.

CONCLUSION

The influx of black Loyalists into London after 1783 significantly bolstered the capital's black population. As a well-educated and socially well-connected domestic servant, Cugoano met with black Loyalists such as William Green in order to interpose in individual cases of illegal re-enslavement and quickly established himself as an advocate for black rights. The relationships between Loyalists and black intellectuals formed the basis of the Sons of Africa, the first black political organisation in Britain. When he wrote *Thoughts and Sentiments* in 1787, Cugoano directed copies to policymakers and socially significant figures such as the Prince of Wales and William Pitt, encouraging them to promote a widespread reevaluation of black intellectual capabilities. His writing reflected the increasing involvement of black people in domestic political radicalism, including protest and organised resistance to arrests. These forms of radicalism emerged in part as a reaction to widespread racial discrimination as well the disproportionate rates of poverty and crime affecting black people in London.

Cugoano was also highly critical of the government's chosen method of dealing with the new social crisis presented by the 'black poor'. Both his and Equiano's reactions to the 1786/1787 project demonstrated that many black people in London felt deeply jaded by the execution of the design, in which the Committee gave relief only on the extraction of a promise to go to Sierra Leone, and publically requested that white people cease giving money to starving black beggars in order to encourage them aboard the ships.¹⁵⁰ Cugoano's work in particular gave voice to the legitimate (and ultimately justified) concerns held by the black settlers that they might be re-enslaved once they got to Africa, and pointed out the hypocrisy of the

¹⁵⁰ *Public Advertiser*, 14 December 1786, p. 1.

government funding the scheme while it supported slaving castles a few miles down the West African coast. The 1786/1787 attempt at resettlement was, in Cugoano's appraisal, a kowtowing reaction to the xenophobic reports of the British press, rather than a legitimate humanitarian endeavour. However, his view of the 1791 attempt to relocate black Loyalists in Nova Scotia to Sierra Leone was altogether more positive, since the British government appeared by then to be far more committed to the abolition of the slave trade. The 1791 attempt took the establishment of an alternative African trade, and the undermining of the slave trade, as its primary objective, whereas the 1786/1787 attempt saw it as merely an additional benefit of solving the local social crisis represented by London's 'black poor'. As demonstrated by his plan to establish a school for black people in London, Cugoano worked ever in the interests of his fellow former slaves.¹⁵¹ Even though he required patronage for his writing, he remained resolute in his principles, and as his stinging criticism of the government's hypocrisy in supporting the slave trade shows, he was unwilling to compromise them even for the sake of the respectability he so carefully cultivated in his correspondence.

¹⁵¹ Cugoano, *Evil of Slavery*, p. 47.

Chapter 4

Boston King, Kingswood School, and Thomas Coke's Methodists, 1794-1798

INTRODUCTION

I doubt not but the day will arrive, when Negro-preachers may be found, that will carry the gospel into the Negro-land.¹

Thomas Coke's prediction, published as part of a report on his 1789 missionary tour of the British West Indies, was to be fulfilled very quickly indeed. To take the Methodist word into Africa had been the ambition of a number of black itinerant preachers, and one of the first to achieve it in 1791 was a man who later became known personally to Coke: Boston King.² Coke had, by that time, himself ordained more than one black preacher, acting in his capacity as one of the two appointed Superintendents for the Methodist connexion in America.³ However, opportunities for preachers to travel from America to Africa were limited, and during this period missionary funds were more often directed towards evangelising in the New World than to free people born in Africa.⁴ However, the second attempt at creating a settlement in Sierra Leone in 1791 provided an opportunity for former black Loyalists in Nova Scotia to return to Africa. Among the first wave of these black emigrants was Boston King, an ordained Methodist minister. King was born into slavery in

¹ Thomas Coke, *To the Benevolent Subscribers for the Support of the Missions Carried on by Voluntary Contributions in the British Islands* (London: [Epworth Press], 1789), p. 17.

² King's missionary activity formed one arm of a 'pan-evangelical' effort to spread of Christianity through Africa from Sierra Leone. See Suzanne Schwarz, 'The Legacy of Melvill Horne', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 31:2 (2007), pp. 88-94.

³ John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 139-158.

⁴ Missions to convert black people in the Americas began in Nova Scotia in 1784. The first concerted Methodist mission to West Africa was in 1811, well after King travelled alone to preach to the Sherbro people between 1798 and 1802. David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 151.

Charleston, South Carolina in the late 1760s. In about 1779, he absconded from his master Richard Waring and joined the British colonial forces. After the final defeat of the British in 1783, he and his wife Violet escaped to Nova Scotia.⁵ He converted to Methodism on 5 January 1784, and started preaching in 1785. By 1791 he was placed in charge of a Methodist meeting in Preston, Nova Scotia, about 11 miles northwest of Halifax. On 16 January 1792, he led his congregation across the Atlantic to join the new settlement on the West African Coast. After teaching school children and preaching the gospel at Sierra Leone for two years, he was offered the opportunity to come to Britain to further his education at the Methodist School at Kingswood, near Bristol.⁶ During his time at Kingswood between 1794 and 1796, he wrote an autobiography, 'Memoirs of the Life of Boston King', which was published in instalments in *The Methodist Magazine* between March and June 1798.

This chapter examines how Coke's Methodist network influenced the contents of King's final published 'Memoirs'. These individuals shared a common agenda for the future of the Arminian Methodist movement, and shared an idea of how to ensure the survival and continuing expansion of the connexion in the turbulent decade following the death of their leader, John Wesley, in 1791. Coke, as head of the Methodist missions and one of the most influential figures in the movement, had the means and motive to ensure that King's 'Memoirs' espoused the particular political and doctrinal stances that he believed were central to the survival of the Methodist Church during the 1790s.

⁵ In 1783, King was recorded as being 23 years old in 'the Book of Negroes', a record of the black Loyalist soldiers fleeing to Canada after the American Revolution. The book also states that he left his master 'about four years ago'. However, King's *Memoirs* state that he was 12 years old when he absconded, putting his year of birth at 1768. TNA, Dorchester Papers, 'Book of Negroes', [1783], 30/55/100/10427, ff. 70-71; Boston King, 'Memoirs of Boston King', *The Methodist Magazine*, 21 (1798), p. 107.

⁶ Boston King, 'Memoirs of the Life of Boston King' in Anon. (ed.), *The Methodist Magazine, for the Year 1798; Being a Continuation of The Arminian Magazine* (London: G. Whitfield, [1799]), pp. 157-161, 209-213, 261-265.

While the Methodist networks of the 1790s have been mapped by both political and ecclesiastical historians alike, British Methodist abolitionism – particularly the work of black Methodist preachers in Britain – has perhaps not received as much attention as it deserves.⁷ E. P. Thomson’s seminal study *The Making of the English Working Class* has coloured much historical understanding of the movement in its political context, characterising it as a deeply conservative movement ‘serving *simultaneously* as the religion of the industrial bourgeoisie [...] and of wide sections of the proletariat’.⁸ More recently, ecclesiastical scholars such as David Hempton have demonstrated that Methodism in particular was a movement besieged by internal conflict during the 1790s. Consequently, to attribute any particular political ideology to the connexion as a whole would be problematic, and a more flexible model, factoring in specific geographic and social contexts, is required to understand the political sentiments of any particular Methodist group of circuit. Hempton goes as far as to suggest that ‘Methodism forged a symbiotic relationship with its host environments’.⁹ The protean nature of Methodist political sentiment, along with the uncertain position of black preachers within it, may explain the lack of any sustained historical or literary study of Boston King’s ‘Memoirs’, or the specific social or cultural contexts surrounding their production and publication. Wherever King has been mentioned or anthologized, his ‘Memoirs’ have been discussed only in

⁷ For work on Methodist social networks, see Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*; David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984); David Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture in Britain and Ireland: From the Glorious Revolution to the Decline of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 25-49; John Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England 1740-1982* (London: Epworth Press 1985); Bernard Semmel, *The Methodist Revolution* (London: Heinemann, 1974). For Methodism in Sierra Leone, see Suzanne Schwarz, “‘Our Mad Methodists’: Methodism, Missions and Abolitionism in Sierra Leone in the Late Eighteenth Century”, *Journal of Wesley and Methodist Studies*, 3 (2011), pp. 121-133.

⁸ E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Random House, 1963), pp. 355.

⁹ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, p. 7

relation to his personal status as a former slave or migrant to Nova Scotia, and then only briefly.¹⁰

The first part of this chapter examines King's time in Britain. His relationships with other Methodists had a direct influence on his career as a preacher. He relied on Coke as his Superintendent and a potential means of returning to preach in Africa. While he was living at Kingswood School, he was financially dependent on Joseph Bradford, the Governor there. Even after his studies at Kingswood were complete, King's extant correspondence shows that his standard of written English was nowhere near as high as that in the final text. It is safe to assume, therefore, that he was assisted in the composition of his 'Memoirs' by someone at the school. While King was studying at Kingswood, the school was governed by a committee almost exclusively populated by men who shared Coke's vision for the future of Arminian Methodism. These men wanted the connexion to be more respectable, more hierarchical in structure, and to have a closer relationship to the established church and government policymakers. They were also the individuals central to the composition and edition of King's 'Memoirs'.

The second part of the chapter, examines how the 'Memoirs', as a piece of black autobiography, also gave additional legitimacy to Coke's avowed support for the abolition of the slave trade – a gesture that helped to ingratiate the Methodists to the Tory cabinet through William Wilberforce. This was not simply a case of Coke attempting to catch the attention of a potential ally for the Methodists in the House of Commons. Wilberforce and Coke were in sustained written communication with one another, discussing precisely these issues, during the two years between the completion of the manuscript in 1796 and its publication in 1798. King had left

¹⁰ See, for example, Henry Gates and Evelyn Higginbotham (eds.), *African American Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 498-499; Suzanna Ashton (ed.), *I Belong to South Carolina: South Carolina Slave Narratives* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2010), pp. 14-39.

Britain by August 1796, and as such his authorial control over the text was severely compromised during its edition. King's 'Memoirs' formed part of a demonstrative dialogue between Coke and Wilberforce, in which political support for abolition and avowals of constitutional loyalty were bartered for a leavening of legislation that many Arminians felt to be repressive.¹¹ A close reading of the text in this light reveals it to espouse precisely those political ideologies which would have been most useful to Coke and his circle in ensuring good relations between Methodism and Wilberforce's parliamentary abolitionism, and by extension the Tory administration.

BOSTON KING, KINGSWOOD SCHOOL, AND THE WRITING OF THE 'MEMOIRS', 1794-1796

King arrived in Plymouth on 16 May 1794. He had sailed aboard the *Harpy* which set off from Freetown on 26 April, making the crossing in a remarkably quick 51 days.¹² He travelled to London a couple of days later, spending six weeks there and occasionally preaching at Methodist meeting-houses across the city, including the New Chapel at City-Road, and Snowsfield Chapel, two of the largest in the connexion.¹³ While he was in London, he travelled upriver to visit an old friend from Sierra Leone: the settlement's first governor, John Clarkson. It is easy to see why King was keen to pay him a visit. Clarkson led the exodus of Nova Scotian black Loyalists to Africa in 1791/1792, proving so popular among the former soldiers that he became known as 'Moses' during the voyage.¹⁴ He vigorously supported their

¹¹ Hempton has pointed out that, in a letter to Wilberforce, Wesley had 'bemoaned the fact that Methodists were neither accepted as Anglicans nor afforded relief as dissenters under the Act of Toleration.' For this reason, they were afforded no protection from anti-dissenter mobs, though these were uncommon by the late 1790s. David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 88.

¹² *Lloyd's Evening Post*, 19 May 1794.

¹³ King, 'Memoirs', p. 264.

¹⁴ James Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783-1870* (London: University of Toronto Press, 1976), p. 157.

rights during the turbulent first year of the settlement, even when this approach brought him into conflict with other members of the board. Hugh Brogan suggests that the well-documented spat between Clarkson and the Sierra Leone Company's Chairman, Henry Thornton, came about 'above all because Clarkson insisted on putting the views and interests of the Nova Scotians first', even before the economic imperatives laid down by the board of directors.¹⁵ King's personal association with Clarkson, and his 1794 visit in particular, was to contribute to his increasing financial dependence on the Methodist network centred on Kingswood School. He also met a number of other important figures in London, including the moderately pro-reform MP Samuel Whitbread at his home at 17 Grosvenor Street.¹⁶ In August 1794, King moved to Bristol, where he met Coke, who was there to act as Secretary to the Methodist conference. It was Coke who took King to Kingswood School, where he spent the next two years, and wrote his 'Memoirs'.

The exact nature of King's daily experience of Kingswood school is uncertain, since his status there was never clearly defined. Although he was a schoolteacher back in Sierra Leone, he had only ever taught young children 'the Alphabet, and to spell words of two syllables, and likewise the Lord's Prayer'.¹⁷ The curriculum at Kingswood, as laid out by John Wesley in 1749, was designed to give boys between the ages of six and twelve a grounding in key works of ecclesiastical literature as well as a grasp of the classical languages. Classes covered 'Reading, Writing, Arithmetick, English, French, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, History, Geography,

¹⁵ Hugh Brogan, 'Clarkson, Thomas, 1760-1846', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5545> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

¹⁶ Whitbread had chaired a meeting of the moderately pro-reform Society of the Friends of the People in April of 1794. Anon, *At a General Meeting of the Society of the Friends of the People* (London: [n.p.], 1794). *The Fashionable Court Guide for 1794* lists his address. Patrick Boyle, *The Fashionable Court Guide, or Town Visiting Directory, for the Year 1794* (London: Patrick Boyle, 1794).

¹⁷ King, 'Memoirs', p. 263.

Chronology, Rhetorick, Logick, Ethicks, Geometry, Algebra, Physicks, Musick'.¹⁸

The staple academic texts for the boys included English and Latin grammar textbooks, William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, and dialogues of Erasmus, Phaedrus and Sallust. The emphasis in most of the classes was on translation between English and another language.¹⁹ While it is safe to assume that some of the specific texts to be taught were updated between 1749 and King's arrival in 1794, (probably to include one or more of Wesley's tracts after his death in 1791) it is clear from the nature of the syllabus that King lacked the language skills and experience to act as a teacher at Kingswood.

However, he could not have attended as a pupil, either. Obviously, age was an issue – the school syllabus had been designed for boys 'between the years of six and twelve', and King was in his late twenties by the time he arrived at Kingswood.²⁰ Moreover, the ethos of the school relied upon a gruelling disciplinarian regime which would not have been applicable to an adult learner. In particular, King would have resented the expectation of daily supervised field labour, having witnessed the horrors of chain-gang plantation slavery from a young age in Carolina.²¹ There was a two-year course of 'academical learning' for older boys available at Kingswood, designed as a more theologically-focused alternative to the courses at Oxford and Cambridge. But this would have been far too advanced for King, since again they relied upon an accepted level of preliminary reading in French, Latin and Greek as well as a wide-ranging knowledge of classic religious and philosophical tracts such as Bunyan's

¹⁸ John Wesley, *A Short Account of the School, in Kingswood, near Bristol* (Bristol: William Pine, 1768), p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 3-5.

²⁰ See Vincent Carretta, 'Explanatory Notes', in Vincent Carretta (ed.), *Unchained Voices: An Anthology of Black Authors in the English-Speaking World of the 18th Century* (Lexington, KA: University of Kentucky Press, 1996), p. 366 n. 1, 368 n. 40; Wesley, *A Short Account of the School*, p. 3.

²¹ King, 'Memoirs', p. 105.

Pilgrim's Progress and even Hume's *History of England*.²² Since his purpose in coming to Kingswood was that he 'might be better qualified to teach the natives' in Sierra Leone 'not only to learn the English language, but also [to] attain some knowledge of the way of salvation thro' faith in the Lord Jesus Christ', it seems unlikely that he would have invested his limited time in learning the classical languages.²³ Moreover, extant manuscript letters written by King show that his standard of written communication in English was not up to the standard of his verbal skills, even after his time at Kingswood, and he certainly would not have been qualified to write academic essays. For example, when he wrote to Clarkson from Free Town in 1798 to request financial support, his spelling and grammar actively obscured his meaning: 'And many other Familys is thinking of going when the Rin id over & it appire that their cheif reason is because the Company enquire quit rent for their Lands a yea ago but the people will not compy with it I should wonder if one half of the Colony should [undecipherable]'.²⁴ What seems most likely is that, because of the disparity between his theological knowledge and his less well-developed academic skills, King occupied an interstitial academic position in the school, occasionally sitting in on classes, discussing theological matters with the masters (quite possibly including the prospect of a mission to Sierra Leone, attempted unsuccessfully by Coke in 1796), and studying independently in the school's considerable library.²⁵

King was financially dependent on the school's governing body during his time at Kingswood. As well as paying for his food, lodging and tuition (valued

²² Wesley, *A Short Account of the School*, pp. 9-11.

²³ King, 'Memoirs', pp. 264-65.

²⁴ Boston King, 'Boston King to Thomas Clarkson, 16 January, 1798', in Christopher Fyfe (ed.), *'Our Children Free and Happy': Letters from Black Settlers in Africa in the 1790s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), p. 54.

²⁵ For Coke's 'disastrous' Sierra Leone mission, see Schwarz, "'Our Mad Methodists'", pp. 121-133.

normally, at child's rations, at £12 per annum), the school also allowed him free use of their library. This privilege was denied to the students on the 'course of academical learning', who had to supply their own textbooks in addition to their fees.²⁶ The account books for the school show that the parents of the boarders almost always received the invoice for additional or unforeseen expenses incurred by their children, such as damage to property or surgeon's bills.²⁷ Kingswood's account books also show that, uniquely, the cost of King's clothes and boots was defrayed by the school. For example, on 25 September 1795, the school paid out £6. 11s. to 'Mr. [William] Hunt, for Boston King's clothes'.²⁸ However, unlike the masters at the school, and its governor, Joseph Bradford, King was not given a salary. There was a portion of the budget set aside for the boys' spending money, which they received each month, but it is not clear from the accounts whether King was allotted any of this for his own personal use. If he was, the amount would have been very small indeed, since the total 'pocket-money' for twenty-five boys for the year of 1796 was only £6. 13s.²⁹

Nevertheless, King's education evidently amounted to a noticeable financial investment, even though Kingswood was still a comparatively buoyant part of the Methodists' fundraising portfolio (see below). Coke's motivations in bringing him to Kingswood in 1794, therefore, needed to be compelling, since he would need to convince the Kingswood Committee and the national Arminian conference to release the funding. As the Superintendent of Methodism's overseas missions, he had a long-standing ideological interest in the 'salvation' of black slaves through their

²⁶ Wesley, *A Short Account of the School*, p. 9.

²⁷ See, for example, Kingswood School Archives, 'Account books for 1796', n. f.

²⁸ Kingswood School Archives, 'Account books for 1795', f. 3. The only clothier named 'Mr. Hunt' advertising in Bristol newspapers between 1780 and 1800 was 'William Hunt Junr. Woollen-Draper, Taylor, and Salesman, Wine-Street'. Hunt also gave 'generous discounts' for business clients, so it would seem likely that Kingswood would have preferred him. *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 30 August 1783, p. 4.

²⁹ Anon., *History of Kingswood School by Three Old Boys* (London: Charles Kelly, 1898), p. 86.

conversion to Methodism. Indeed, it was Coke who finally convinced Wesley to establish Methodist missions in America, and between 1784 and 1793 he had personally undertaken four missions the British West Indies.³⁰ In 1789, he wrote publically to the subscribers to the Methodist missionary fund, reassuring them of his personal commitment to evangelising the slaves: 'I confess, the interests of this work, particularly that part of it which relates to the myriads of poor Negroes who inhabit the British Isles in that great Archipelago, possess a large portion of my heart'.³¹ After he had set up the Episcopal Methodist Church in America in 1784, Coke ordained the first two black Methodist preachers, Absolom Jones and Richard Allen.³² He ordained another, William Black, at the Baltimore Conference in 1789, and asked him to superintend the mission in Nova Scotia, where over ten thousand of the black Loyalists had settled following the American Revolution.³³ It was Black who appointed King to his first ministry in Preston, Nova Scotia in 1791.³⁴

It may have been that Coke's investment in King was simply an extension of his missionary activities. However, it should be kept in mind that his influence at Kingswood was deeply affected by the paranoid political environment of the late 1790s, both among the Arminian Methodists and in the broader context of British religious society. He had been busy establishing himself as Wesley's spiritual successor as *primus inter pares* in the Methodist conference since the founder's death in 1791. In order to shake off the reputation he had acquired as something of a dissenter following his establishment of the separatist Episcopal Church in America, Coke became increasingly conservative in his approach as the 1790s went on. In

³⁰ See Thomas Coke, *A Journal, of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Fourth Tour on the Continent of America* (London: G. Paramore, 1793).

³¹ Thomas Coke, *To the Benevolent Subscribers*, p. 17.

³² Wigger, *American Saint*, pp. 244-248.

³³ Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), p. 208.

³⁴ King, 'Memoirs', p. 213.

terms of his stance on slavery, for example, this meant that he recommended evangelising unfree black people without directly agitating for their emancipation.³⁵ Moreover, rising pressure for separation from the Church of England from the lower ranks of the movement drew unwelcome attention from the Pitt administration, especially after 1794.³⁶ Coke's solution was to attempt to consolidate the power base of British Methodism within a more rigidly hierarchical structure, while simultaneously reasserting the Methodists' loyalty to the Crown and the established Church. Relations with the Tory administration were helped by the association between Coke and Wilberforce, based on a mutually beneficial arrangement in which government scrutiny was allayed in exchange for renewed Methodist support for the abolition of the slave trade. Kingswood School's governing body, the Kingswood Committee, was central to Coke's plan to quash dissenting voices within the Methodist movement itself. Since these events came to their crisis during King's stay at the school (and during the composition, of the first draft anyway, of his 'Memoirs'), it is to this period that we must turn first.

The year of King's arrival at Kingswood, 1794, was a turbulent one in the Methodist Church, and consequently a difficult time for the school's management. Until 1791, day-to-day management was undertaken by a headmaster, selected and supervised personally by Wesley, or exceptionally an appointee. But following the first enactment of the Deed of Declaration in 1791, in which Wesley had vested ultimate authority over all Methodist strategy in an annual conference of Superintendents, it was decided that a committee should be set up to inspect the school and report back to each conference. Kingswood School, clearly a venture of

³⁵ See, for example, Coke's mention of the 'necessity of the New Birth' at a sermon for enslaved people in Montego Bay in 1791. Thomas Coke, *A Continuation of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Third Tour through the West Indies* (London: G. Paramore, 1791), p. 5.

³⁶ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, pp. 68-69.

deep personal significance to Wesley, was as an institution fiercely loyal to his original doctrine. The long serving headmaster, Thomas McGeary, was a personal friend of Wesley's. McGeary left the school in 1794, because of a dispute regarding the Plan of Pacification, which was passed during the conference in 1795.³⁷ The Plan allowed the Methodist itinerant preachers to administer the sacraments where all the parishioners expressed a desire for it, without requesting authorisation from the Church of England. Kingswood was one of the first parishes to take up this offer.³⁸ The school at Kingswood had to share the use of the local chapel, and the sacrament was delivered to the boys (and to King) there by a minister without the official sanction of the Church of England. McGeary, obviously unhappy with the situation, resigned his post at Kingswood and moved to teach at a school in Keynsham, near Bath.³⁹

McGeary's stance was representative of only a tiny minority of British Methodists. As the name suggests, the Plan of Pacification was designed as a compromise to calm the most agitated proponents of full separation from the Church of England without upsetting the vast majority of Methodist preachers. For his part, John Wesley was not always forthcoming with praise for the Anglican Church, but he had maintained a consistent position on the question of separation, namely 'that none who regard my judgement or advice, will ever separate'.⁴⁰ But increasingly blatant mistreatment of Methodist preachers by the Anglican authorities, including the dispersal of Methodist meetings even where there were no local Anglican ministries, led a majority of Arminians to desire some form of autonomy. McGeary's view of the

³⁷ A. G. Ives, *Kingswood School in Wesley's Day and Since* (London: Epworth Press, 1970), pp. 107-108.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ John Wesley, 'Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church', *The Arminian Magazine*, 13 (1790), pp. 215-216.

situation, therefore, was extreme, and despite his excellent record as headmaster (Coke described him as having ‘ever given, since his first appointment, great satisfaction’), his resignation did not cause much of a stir within the connexion at large.⁴¹

Perhaps ironically, the key aspects of the Plan of Pacification which McGeary found so repugnant were put together largely by members of the Kingswood Committee, working together with Coke. On 2 April 1794, Coke held a secret meeting in Lichfield with other prominent Methodists to discuss the issue of the sacrament, deciding upon a new plan for the government of the Methodist church, in which ‘the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper shall be administered wherever there is a majority of the Society who desire it’.⁴² This suggestion was indeed taken up at the Bristol conference in 1794, with the modification that support from the local laity had to be unanimous. But the Lichfield meeting also suggested a plan for a restructure of the entire British Methodist connexion. In this new model, the overall governance of the movement would fall on seven Superintendents, with each taking responsibility for a large geographical area and the itinerants who preached within it. ‘Dr. Coke, Dr. Mather, Dr. Pawson, Dr. Taylor, Dr. Moore, Mr. Hanby, Mr. Bradburn’ were all suggested as Superintendents in this new plan.⁴³ Of the eight people present at the meeting, four of them (Alexander Mather, Samuel Bradburn, John Pawson and Henry Moore), had served at some point on the inspection committee for Kingswood School, and the other four (Coke, Clarke, Thomas Taylor and James Roper) all had long-standing connections with the institution.

⁴¹ Thomas Coke, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), p. 296.

⁴² JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/489, ‘Dr. Clarke’s Minutes of the Lichfield Meeting, 2nd April 1794’.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

It was the Kingswood Committee who were tasked with finding a replacement for McGeary as headmaster, and Clarke asked his father to take up the position during the interim.⁴⁴ Early in 1795, the Committee came to a decision. Academic affairs at Kingswood would still be run by a headmaster. They selected Andrew Mayer, an itinerant preacher who had worked the Liverpool circuit with Clarke and Pawson the previous year.⁴⁵ But Kingswood was becoming a considerable source of income for the Arminians – the reading room even borrowed £600 from the school's coffers in 1796.⁴⁶ The school was operating at maximum capacity, and in 1795 it closed its doors to all but the sons of Methodist preachers.⁴⁷ Even with this proviso in place, demand for places still outstripped supply, though the school was financially stable enough to make allowances for the sons of preachers who could not be accommodated onsite.⁴⁸ The demands of Kingswood as a lucrative institution competed for administrative attention with the superintendence of the boys' education. The Kingswood Committee decided that the school needed executive, as well as academic direction. Thus the office of school Governor was created, and filled by Joseph Bradford.⁴⁹ Bradford was given a modest salary at the school of £6 per month, most likely indicating that the work at the school was part-time and could be undertaken alongside his normal itinerancy.⁵⁰

Like McGeary, Bradford had been a close personal companion of Wesley, and his loyalty to Wesleyan ideals could not be questioned. Bradford acted as President at

⁴⁴ Ives, *Kingswood School*, p. 108.

⁴⁵ Anon. *Minutes of Several Conversations, Between the Preachers Late in Connection, with the Rev. Mr. Wesley* (Bristol: W. Pine, 1794), p. 9.

⁴⁶ Anon., *An Extract of the Minutes of Several Conversations Held at Leeds, July 31, &c. 1797* (London: G. Whitfield, 1797), p. 41.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Anon., *Several Conversations Held at Leeds*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ Gary Best, *Continuity and Change: A History of Kingswood School, 1748-1998* (Bath: Kingswood School, 1998), pp. 46-47.

⁵⁰ Kingswood School Archives, 'Account books for 1795', f. 12.

the conference which enacted Coke's suggestions about the administration of the sacrament. Even though the President's personal opinion could not directly affect the decisions of conference (there was no presidential veto, for example), it is safe to assume from Bradford's taking up the Governor position at Kingswood that he harboured no personal grudge against the devisors of the Plan of Pacification, nor they against him. Bradford had also sided with Coke during a row with George Whitehead over the publication of Wesley's official biography, co-signing a letter of disapproval addressed to Whitehead on 9 September 1791.⁵¹ The key figures in the management of Kingswood school, therefore – headmaster, Governor and committee – all shared a similar view of how the Methodist movement should be run in the future, and had all sided together in previous ecclesiastical disputes.

It is impossible to say if this political stance percolated down to King or any of the older students at Kingswood School, and the question of separation never appeared in his 'Memoirs'. Yet his manuscript letters, written after his stay in Kingswood, show that his autobiography could not have been produced without a significant editing process. King acknowledged that his standard of written English was not sufficient to write a full-length text unaided:

It is by no means an agreeable task to write an account of my Life, yet [...] the importunity of many respectable friends, whom I highly esteem, ha[s] induced me to set down, as they occurred to my memory, a few of the most striking incidents I have met with in my pilgrimage. I am well aware of my

⁵¹ John Annesley Colet, *A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Coke LLD. and Mr. Henry Moore* (London: J. Luffman, 1792).

inability for such an undertaking, having only a slight acquaintance with the language in which I write.⁵²

While it is a matter of conjecture as to who at the school helped King in the production of the first draft of his ‘Memoirs’, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of ‘the many respectable friends’ whose ‘importunity’ led him to write an autobiography would have known him in Kingswood or Bristol. Certainly, he was put under pressure from without to write his ‘Memoirs’.

Moreover, King was at great pains to ‘acknowledge the obligations I am under to Dr. Coke, Mr. Bradford and all the Preachers and people’ in his narrative.⁵³ The special notice of Dr. Coke may have been in reference to his introducing him into Kingswood, although as a lay-preacher with a self-professed desire ‘spreading the knowledge of Christianity’ amongst ‘my poor brethren in Africa’, it would have been in King’s own interests to maintain a positive relationship with the Superintendent for Foreign Missions.⁵⁴ But considering Bradford’s comparatively minor presence in the academic affairs of Kingswood School, King’s mention of him at the exclusion of any of the other masters may be significant. Although Bradford did occasionally interact with the boys at Kingswood (true to Wesley’s vision for the school, he was evidently quite a disciplinarian), he did not teach any of the lessons, and his role was essentially administrative rather than academic.⁵⁵ Bradford, having ministered to some black people during his time in Bristol, may have felt himself particularly well-

⁵² King, ‘Memoirs’, p. 105.

⁵³ Ibid. p. 265.

⁵⁴ Ibid., pp. 261, 210.

⁵⁵ One former pupil recalled Bradford’s draconian morning regime: ‘One stroke on the ground with his oaken staff was expected to rouse the youthful sleepers. Then, with his watch in his hand, he counted three minutes, at the end of which their simple toilet was to be completed. [...] After this their ablutions were performed in a long, low gallery, open on one side to the air, which, as they rose at five in summer and six in winter, was chilly enough’. Anon., *History of Kingswood School*, p. 84.

qualified to assist King in his studies in English, or even in the composition of his life story.⁵⁶ In any case, King's 'Memoirs' nominate Bradford and Coke as individuals to whom the author was particularly indebted.

Once King had finished writing his 'Memoirs', he left Kingswood School for London. The school paid for his transportation, and the record books show an invoice for £7. 14s. 6d. 'for removal of Mr. Bradford, B. King,' and several of the older boys 'to London with boxes' on 19 July 1796.⁵⁷ According to a letter sent to John Clarkson on 16 January 1798, King had been promised free passage back to Sierra Leone from London by Henry Thornton, the chairman of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company.⁵⁸ Yet King had underestimated how divisive popular politics had become since his visit to London two years previously, and in particular the potentially damaging effects of his personal association with the Clarkson brothers, who by this point were under intense scrutiny for their supposedly Jacobinal tendencies.⁵⁹ For his part, John Clarkson had no patience for the 'insistent evangelicalism' and profit-driven focus of Thornton's direction of the Company, and the two had clashed during Clarkson's stint as Governor of Sierra Leone between 1791 and 1792.⁶⁰ Thornton, a member of the Clapham sect and supporter of Pitt and Wilberforce, was evidently unimpressed by the news that King had visited Clarkson on his first visit to London, and reneged on his offer of free transportation. King called this to Clarkson's attention upon his return to Sierra Leone: 'Do you know Dear Sir that Mr Thornton after promous me my passag if I wantd work And only because I came don the river

⁵⁶ For the high proportion of free black people in Bristol during the 1790s, see Madge Dresser, *Slavery Obscured: the Social History of the Slave Trade in an English Provincial Port* (London: Continuum, 2001). For the historically high proportion of black Methodists, see Hempton, *Religion and Political Culture*, pp. 158-159.

⁵⁷ Kingswood School Archives, 'Account books for 1796', n. f.

⁵⁸ King, 'Boston King to John Clarkson, 16 January 1798', pp. 55-56.

⁵⁹ See John Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution: An International History of Anti-slavery, c. 1787-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 108-109.

⁶⁰ Brogan, 'Clarkson, Thomas (1760 – 1846)'.

to see you that time He desired Cappin Smith to charge 15 Ginny but Sir I regardeth not because I know I shall able to Pay them and I do ashoure it will only serve To attach my love more to you because I know it was only out of spite'.⁶¹

King may have been bending the truth slightly in this letter to Clarkson. He had other connections in Britain who were willing to help him financially. Through Bradford, Coke or the Kingswood Committee, the school was able to pay a significant amount towards his passage back to Sierra Leone, although they did need to hide the payment in amongst some of the additional expenses so as not to arouse too much attention at the conference. Under the heading 'What Sons of Preachers, who were not admitted into Kingswood School, have an allowance for their education', in the school's annual financial report to the conference, ten pounds and ten shillings were allocated to 'Boston King, for his conveyance to Africa'.⁶² While this is not the fifteen guineas that King specified as the asking price for his transport costs, £10. 10s (or 10 Guineas) was a reasonable rate for the cost of a voyage to the West African coast. It is likely that Kingswood School covered the complete costs of King's travel, and that the fifteen guineas he was initially quoted after his row with Thornton was an intentionally prohibitive price for such a journey. Another possibility, though one impossible to prove or disprove, is that Coke requested the funds to be released as part of his planned mission to the Fula people in Sierra Leone, due to start late in 1796.⁶³ This plan proved itself to be unworkable at around the time King was in transit to Sierra Leone, so there is no way to tell if his journey was paid for through Coke's influence or for simple charitable reasons by Bradford.

⁶¹ King, 'Boston King to Thomas Clarkson, 16 January 1798', pp. 55-56.

⁶² Anon., *Several Conversations Held at Leeds*, p. 40.

⁶³ John Pritchard, 'Sierra Leone', in *DMBI* Available from: <http://wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=2484> (Accessed 03/06/2012)

From the moment King arrived in Britain, throughout his studies and the composition of his ‘Memoirs’, he was financially and socially dependent on a relatively small network of individuals within the Methodist connexion. His home and place of study were managed by a Committee and Governor, all of whom had a close political, professional or personal relationship to the man who took ultimate responsibility for King’s career as a preacher and missionary in Africa. It is clear that he was aided in writing his ‘Memoirs’ while he was at the school, and the content of the narrative seems to suggest that he felt more indebted to Coke and Bradford than most. However, during his stay in Britain, political and personal differences divided even fellow abolitionists to the extent that the paternalist vision of evangelising in Africa was subordinated to partisan squabbling. When he fell afoul of such squabbles, King turned once again to his brethren in the Methodist Church – specifically, to Kingswood – for support. They were happy to oblige. Vincent Carretta has ascertained that King returned to Sierra Leone, worked as a schoolteacher briefly, and then travelled as a preacher to the Sherbro people, around a hundred miles south of Free Town, where he died in 1802.⁶⁴ Research carried out by Christopher Fyfe shows that he maintained contact with John Clarkson until at least 1798.⁶⁵ However, when King returned to Sierra Leone, he left his memoirs, in manuscript form, behind him.

THOMAS COKE, WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, AND THE PUBLICATION OF THE ‘MEMOIRS’, 1796-98

There is a gap in the history of the production of King’s ‘Memoirs’, between the completion of the manuscript in 1796 and the publication of the first section in the *Methodist Magazine* for March 1798. This cannot be accounted for by the publication

⁶⁴ Carretta, ‘Explanatory Notes’, p. 368, n. 41.

⁶⁵ King, ‘Boston King to Thomas Clarkson, 16 January 1798’, pp. 55-56.

process alone. The turnaround for articles in a monthly periodical was relatively short, illustrated by the appearance of regular opinion pieces commenting on current affairs. The common difficulties in distribution (as identified by John Feather and others) which might have otherwise slowed the production process were essentially circumvented by the ready-made readership, root-and-branch structure and the roving nature of the Methodist itinerancy.⁶⁶ The 'Memoirs' most likely either remained at Kingswood under Bradford's care, or Coke arranged to have them sent them to his friend and ally George Whitfield in London to be filed away.⁶⁷ What can be said with some certainty is that the publication dates, between March and July 1798, were specifically chosen by those involved in publishing it.

Even during the early 1790s, when support for parliamentary reform was widespread, Coke had been trying to maintain the relationship between the state and the Methodist connexion. He was keen to demonstrate to the government, as well as his fellow clergymen, that his vision for the future of British Methodism was in-keeping with Wesley's own. The fact that Wesley had evidently kept Coke close during the final years of his life granted this contention the appearance of legitimacy. Coke designated himself and his followers as the true Wesleyan Methodists. His faction tended towards reconciling some of the more 'enthusiastic' evangelical characteristics of the movement to 'establishment' politics, particularly through their open denunciation of domestic political radicalism.⁶⁸ By reassuring Anglican authorities that they did not desire a break from the established church, Coke and his circle reaffirmed their reliability and the respectable nature of Methodism, aping

⁶⁶ John Feather, *A History of British Publishing* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 110.

⁶⁷ George Whitfield, not to be confused with the Calvinist minister George Whitefield, ran the Epworth Press, the official publishing house for the Methodist connexion.

⁶⁸ See, for example, Thomas Coke, *Four Discourses on the Duties of a Minister of the Gospel* (London: G. Whitfield, 1798), pp. 1-19.

Wesley's 'conservative tendencies'.⁶⁹ Indeed, during the first few years after Wesley's death, Coke began to style himself and his allies as 'the preachers late in connexion with the Rev. Mr. Wesley'.⁷⁰

His main opposition within the Methodist movement came from Alexander Kilham. While the high regard for Wesley's memory common to all Methodists required him to pay lip-service to the founder's opinions on the matter, Kilham attempted to garner support for a formal separation from the Anglican Church months before the Plan of Pacification was ratified in April 1795. Moreover, his nascent political radicalism manifested itself in his unerring support for greater democratic control within the Methodist connexion, and particularly for the appointment of unordained lay-preachers to the annual conferences.⁷¹ Yet, even in the early 1790s, Kilham's reformist sentiments did not take serious hold among mainstream Methodists, in part because of the continuing popularity of Wesley and his conservative habits.

In general, support for Kilham's plans within the connexion was muted. However, the sudden intensification of government suspicion of religious dissent prompted Coke and his circle to take action against him in 1795. While it was always against the ordained preachers' interests to support Kilham's plans for more democratic representation at the conferences, they were not galvanised into direct action against his ideas until 'gentlemen of rank' in London made it known to them

⁶⁹ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society*, p. 59.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Anon., *Vindex to Verax. Or, Remarks upon "A Letter to the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D. and Mr. Henry Moore* (London: J. Moore, 1792). Coke retained this appellation for his group well into the conservative period of the 1800s, even when the term "Wesleyan Methodists" was in common parlance. See, for example, JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/473, MAW Ms 326, 'Coke to Viscount Erskine, 1806'.

⁷¹ For evidence of Kilham's political radicalism, see his attack on 'Civis', an antiradical polemicist, in Alexander Kilham, *The Hypocrite Detected and Exposed; and the true Christian Vindicated and Supported* (Aberdeen: J. Chalmers, 1794). For Kilham's plan to restructure the Methodist church, see Alexander Kilham, *The Progress of Liberty, Amongst the People called Methodists. To Which is Added, the Out-lines of a Constitution* (Alnwick: J. Catnach, 1795).

that Pitt's government was, as Hempton puts it, 'concerned about the constitutional loyalty of provincial preachers'.⁷² In particular, Wilberforce, one of the few leading Tories who was keen to preserve evangelical diversity, 'delivered timely hints of government intentions to nervous London preachers', appraising them of the potential consequences if they allowed a politically radicalised element to grow within the connexion.⁷³ Kilham was brought before regional disciplinary court in 1795, and was formally expelled from the connexion in 1796.

Wilberforce's communication with the prominent London preachers in 1795 (doubtless including Whitfield) opened a crucial dialogue between senior members of the Methodist connexion – primarily Coke – and the Tory government. Considering his background in missionary activity in the West Indies, and his support through ordination and other means of free black people like King, Wilberforce must have seen Coke as a potential ally in his abolitionist campaign. For his part, Coke recognised the need to reassert the mainstream Methodists' allegiance to the crown and the government, particularly given Kilham's recent reformist agitation. A key outcome of this dialogue was that Coke drafted a letter of allegiance to the House of Hanover, in which he declared that the monarchy would be sustained by a 'cloud of incense', meaning the prayers of Methodists.⁷⁴

More importantly, perhaps, Coke and Bradburn's public denunciation of Kilham and his secessionist movement, the New Methodist connexion, helped to allay some of the fears that Wilberforce had communicated. But in truth, Coke's personal view of the situation in 1797 was of a connexion more politically divided than was actually the case. In a somewhat melodramatic letter to his fellow preacher Charles Atmore on 15 May 1797, he wrote 'I pity you all exceedingly. You are in an

⁷² Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, pp. 68-69.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

awful state. The spirit of sedition stalks with Giant-like strides: and the professors of Christianity, yea of vital religion among you, are devouring each other. What will this come to?’⁷⁵ Yet this view was not the official line on the state of the Methodist church. Publically, Coke was keen to show that the expulsion of Kilham and his associates was ‘a fatal blow to Methodist Jacobinism’.⁷⁶ Still, elements of the Tory government went unconvinced, and the Methodists were watched closely as potential radical sympathisers.

This was where Wilberforce became indispensable to Coke’s circle. As a member of Pitt’s cabinet, he was above suspicions of Jacobinism, yet he was keen to support evangelicalism, particularly where it could be properly controlled through a formal connection to the Anglican Church. In addition, Wilberforce’s support for the abolition of the slave trade could always be depended upon, and transcended the vagaries of party politics. For example, he organised a collection for Thomas Clarkson following his retirement from public life, despite the fact that the retirement came about largely because of suspicions over his ‘enthusiasm for the French Revolution’.⁷⁷ It was probably because of John Wesley’s early efforts towards abolition (see Chapter 1) that Wilberforce was kindly predisposed towards Wesleyan Methodism, rather than any new personal regard for Coke or anyone else. Indeed, Wesley’s last letter, written to Wilberforce in 1791, mentioned that he had read ‘a tract wrote by a poor African’, probably Cugoano or Equiano, and urged him to ‘go on, in the name of God, & in the power of his might! Till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it’.⁷⁸ Coke, of all people, would have recognised the potential common ground between the political establishment (or

⁷⁵ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/489, ‘Thomas Coke to Charles Atmore, 15th May 1797’.

⁷⁶ Hempton, *Methodism and Politics*, p. 69.

⁷⁷ John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), pp. 80-81.

⁷⁸ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/609, ‘John Wesley to William Wilberforce, February 26th 1791’.

at least one member of it) and his own circle within the Methodist connexion. Specifically, the conformity to Wesleyan ideals which he had been as such pains to demonstrate, as well as his longstanding commitment to the conversion of the enslaved, could have helped to strengthen relations between himself and Wilberforce. Coke knew also that Wilberforce and Wesley had bonded specifically on the issue of abolition, and in particular, that they were both supporters of black authors.

At the time Whitfield decided to publish King's 'Memoirs', Coke was in correspondence with Wilberforce specifically regarding the 'persecution' being suffered by members of the Methodist society at that time in Jersey. The Assistant Governor there had apparently taken the local Methodist preacher into custody under suspicion of 'Jacobinism', and the laity of the island had petitioned George III for his release. Coke wrote to Wilberforce regarding the matter, circuitously attempting to gain some leverage with Pitt. 'Would it be well, sir, if I could by any possible means obtain an interview with Mr. Pitt? Would you favour me with your judgement in this matter?'⁷⁹ In the same breath, Coke was quick to distance himself from the potentially seditious mass petition, assuring Wilberforce that 'I could on no account have any friend in that petition or address'.⁸⁰ It is unclear as to whether or not Wilberforce obliged Coke (or indeed Pitt) with his 'judgement in this matter'. Nevertheless, this letter illustrates how keen Coke was to ingratiate himself to the Tory cabinet.

It was into this political and social environment that King's autobiography was published in the official Wesleyan *Methodist Magazine*. The renaming of the magazine from the *Arminian Magazine* in early 1798 was significant in that it represented an assumption of Wesleyan, Arminian Methodism as the definitive

⁷⁹ Huntingdon Library, California, Wilberforce: Slavery, Religion & Politics, 'Thomas Coke to William Wilberforce, 8 November 1798', c.3 f.39.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

incarnation of the movement, over and against Kilham's fledgling Methodist New Connexion (MNC). George Whitfield was the printer and bookseller for the mainstream Methodists throughout the turbulent 1790s. He also edited and printed the *Arminian Magazine*, both before and after it changed its name. This made Whitfield the only named individual who definitely edited King's 'Memoirs' prior to their publication. One of Whitfield's unofficial functions in the connexion was to act as Coke's agent in London when he was travelling in America. At the conference in 1796 for example, it was resolved that every preacher in the connexion should make a collection for Coke's missions, 'and let the money so collected, be deposited into the hands of Mr. Whitfield'.⁸¹ Whitfield had also been a minor actor in Coke's public dispute with Whitehead in 1791, and was one of Coke and Bradford's co-signatories on a letter condemning Whitehead's behaviour. Coke's influence within the Methodists, therefore, clearly extended to the machinations of its publishing output during the period.

While the majority of the *Methodist Magazine's* output was ostensibly depoliticised, it is fruitful to examine some of the ideologies at play in King's contribution. Eschewing the more outspoken denunciation of conditions on plantations that characterised, for example, Cugoano's work, the first part of King's narrative focused instead on his life as a Loyalist soldier during the American Revolution. To escape the cruelty of his American owner, King 'determined to go to Charles-town, and throw myself into the hands of the English. They received me readily, and I began to feel the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before'.⁸² The 'establishment' arm of the British abolitionist movement had been making a virtue out of this particular necessity for quite some time, and in the long

⁸¹ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/483, 'Papers relating to Dr. Coke'.

⁸² King, 'Memoirs', p. 107.

shadow of the French Revolution it was a timely reminder that abolitionism and loyalty to the British government were not mutually exclusive. As Mark Philp has pointed out, while the connotations of the word 'liberty' had been associated with Painite political radicalism during the first half of the 1790s, there had been a concerted effort to reclaim it for counterrevolutionary purposes after 1794.⁸³ In the case of King's narrative, the binary was simple: British liberty, or the tyranny – indeed the *slavery* – represented by revolutionary insurrectionism.

King's 'Memoirs' went on to show that his conduct in fighting for the British army was conspicuously meritorious. After foiling a defector's plot to steal horses, he managed to infiltrate American lines to raise support for the besieged forces at Nelson's-ferry.⁸⁴ This type of detail, in attesting simultaneously to King's unshakeable loyalty to the Crown and natural bravery, emphasised the continuing usefulness, both economic and political, of freed slaves at the same time as reinforcing their humanity and nobility.

Equally important in King's narrative was the representation of the benefits arising from evangelising black people, something which both Wilberforce and Coke had long advocated. For example, when King was recaptured by the Americans and put back into slavery, his suffering was ameliorated only by the fact that 'many of the masters send their slaves to school at night so that they may learn to read the scriptures. This is a privilege indeed'.⁸⁵ However, King's granted no concessions to the ameliorationist proslavery lobby who opposed Wilberforce's abolitionist bills in parliament, and he was quick to point out that 'all these enjoyments could not satisfy

⁸³ Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 294.

⁸⁴ King, 'Memoirs', pp. 108-110.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 110

me without liberty!’⁸⁶ Indeed, King’s narrative fits best into the tradition of earlier evangelical black autobiography – particularly Gronniosaw’s *Narrative* – in that the protagonist displays an almost supernatural affinity with Christian religiosity with little or no external influence. Whereas Gronniosaw’s narrative was designed to construe the Calvinist message of predestination, King’s conversion – the commencement of his quest for Christly perfection – was reliant upon his corporeal freedom.

King’s narrative struck a balance between sensitivity to the need for an economically and ethically workable alternative to the transatlantic slave trade and giving a forceful argument for its discontinuation. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, some black abolitionist writing had been associated with some of the radical political societies of the early 1790s. Following the famous treason trials of John Horne Tooke and Thomas Hardy in 1794, this association became deleterious for the British abolitionist movement. Even worse, the conservative establishment began to view the types of popular political activity that had hitherto characterised British abolitionism – particularly mass protest – as potentially insurrectionary and dangerous.⁸⁷ The British government in turn took the example of the revolution in Saint Domingue, with its scenes of shocking black-on-white violence, as one of the potential consequences of seditious meetings.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, poor relations between white directors and prominent black settlers in Sierra Leone were being communicated back to a British readership that was largely unsympathetic to the

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ For a wide-ranging and authoritative discussion of the government’s response to perceived seditious gatherings, see John Barrell, *Imagining the King’s Death: Figurative Treason: Fantasies of Regicide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁸⁸ A recent discussion of conservative reactions to the Haitian Revolution can be found in Srividhya Swaminathan, *Debating the Slave Trade: Rhetoric of British National Identity* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 28-29. See also David Brion Davis, ‘Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions’, in David Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 3-9.

complaints of the black people there.⁸⁹ What was important for the publishers of the *Methodist Magazine* was that King's antislavery views did not stray into the category of 'radical' abolitionism.

Therefore, some British readers of King's 'Memoirs' may have been relieved to hear that Methodism acted as a means by which a former slave became reconciled to his white peers.

[O]ne Sunday, while I was preaching at Snowsfield-Chapel, the Lord blessed me abundantly, and I found a more cordial love to the White People than I had ever experienced before. In the former part of my life I had suffered greatly from the cruelty and injustice of the Whites, which induced me to look upon them, in general, as our enemies: And even after the Lord had manifested his forgiving mercy to me, I still felt at times an uneasy distrust and shyness towards them; but on that day the Lord removed all my prejudices.⁹⁰

This dispelled any image of the vengeful slave rising up in violence against his former master, effectively defusing what some saw as a potentially explosive association between evangelicalism and slave revolts. This passage explicated the central role that evangelicalism was supposed to play in the emancipation of the slave. King did not claim to have been self-emancipated, as was actually the case, but rather that his freedom came about as a manifestation of God's 'forgiving mercy'. The lines between evangelisation and emancipation were blurred – freedom of the spirit and freedom of the body became one and the same thing. This was the shared

⁸⁹ See, for example Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 59-87.

⁹⁰ King, 'Memoirs', p. 264.

central tenet of both Wesley and Wilberforce's evangelical abolitionism. This may have seemed like a strangely depoliticised take on what was ultimately a matter of policy, especially if it was, as already implied, directed towards Wilberforce. Yet King's uncoupling of the concepts of personal emancipation and political abolitionism enabled him to denounce the slave trade without a whisper of support for the forms of popular protest which had linked the abolition movement to other forms of political unrest in the past.

The text's final word on abolitionism was both conciliatory and congratulatory to British abolitionists. 'I have great cause to be thankful that I came to England,' it stated, 'for I am now fully convinced, that many of the White People, instead of being enemies and oppressors of us poor Blacks, are our friends, and deliverers from slavery, as far as their ability and circumstances will admit'.⁹¹ The final part of this passage offered a proviso to the reconciliation of the Christian African to the Briton. It would certainly have been naïve of King to imagine that there were no white proslavery advocates in British politics. Indeed, Wilberforce's defeated bills for abolition had already proved that there were. But the characterisation of British people, in canonical language, as the 'deliverers from slavery', echoed Wilberforce's own speeches given in the House of Commons, in which he encouraged his fellow Members of Parliament to 'withdraw from temptation' by 'diffusing our beneficence' in abolishing the Slave Trade.⁹² King's 'Memoirs' represented an appropriately grateful and emphatically non-violent black voice in which the dividends of the virtuous self-denial represented by abolition were paid in the form of interracial harmony. The fact this text was published in *The*

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 264.

⁹² William Wilberforce, *The Speech of William Wilberforce Esq. [...] on the Question of the Abolition of the Slave Trade* (London: Logographic Press, 1791), p. 49.

Methodist Magazine served as a reminder of the compatibility between Methodist abolitionism and political loyalty.

These protestations of loyalty echoed those expressed by Coke in some of his direct correspondence with Wilberforce. Indeed, in a letter written around the time of Kilham's secession from the Methodists, Coke had written to Wilberforce, outlining a formal 'plan in respect of the union between the Establishment and the Methodists'.⁹³ Coke recognised that Wilberforce was keen to preserve the loyalty of the hugely popular Methodist movement from the potentially radicalised influence of the MNC, which was by this point beginning to gain ground among the working-class laity. After all, if certain Methodists became disillusioned with the Tory government, they may have broken ranks and joined with Kilham's more democratic and reformist MNC. Such new democratic institutions were threatening for Pitt's government as well as the Anglican Church, since they drew popular allegiance away from both. 'I would just observe,' wrote Coke, 'that division among us, would not at all serve the establishment; for the present seceding parts are gathering large congregations'.⁹⁴ Coke had yet to mention this plan to the Methodist conference, since he first needed to deal with opposition from within the Anglican Church. Coke perceived Wilberforce as a crucial ally if 'this probably last chance to save the Methodists to Church and state' was to succeed.⁹⁵ However, his confidence in his own power within the connexion is telling. 'I am nearly certain, if the Dean [of Carlisle, who opposed the plan] knew the minds of the leading preachers members [sic] of the Conference as

⁹³ Huntingdon Library, California, Wilberforce: Slavery, Religion & Politics, 'Thomas Coke to William Wilberforce, n.d.', v. 17, f. 129.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

well as I do & my present influence among them, he would not think my plan impracticable as far as it respects us'.⁹⁶

While it is clear from these letters that Coke's epistolary style had little in common with King's, the 'Memoirs' espoused a very similar political ideology to the one Coke was keen to demonstrate to Wilberforce. They also owed something of a stylistic debt to Coke's earlier published writing, as well as the earlier output of *The Methodist Magazine* edited by Whitfield. King's 'Memoirs' were, after all, designed to fit into the tradition of the Methodist spiritual conversion narrative. For example, a comparison of the 'Memoirs' with the earlier conversion narrative of a white British soldier named Sampson Staniforth, published in the same magazine (then *The Arminian Magazine*) in 1783, and also edited by Whitfield, might make King's text seem derivative. Staniforth described a dramatic revelatory moment, in which his solitary, kneeling meditations culminated in a vision of Christ:

As soon as I was alone, I kneeled down, and determined not to rise, but to continue crying and wrestling with God, till He had mercy on me. How long I was in that agony I cannot tell: but as I looked up to heaven, I saw the clouds open exceeding bright, and I saw Jesus hanging on the cross. At the same moment these words were applied to my heart, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." My chains fell off, my heart was free.⁹⁷

Compare King's account of his own revelation:

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Sampson Staniforth, 'A Short Account of Mr. Sampson Staniforth, in a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Wesley', *The Arminian Magazine*, 6 (1783), p. 72.

As soon as my wife went out, I locked the door, and determined not to rise from my knees until the Lord fully revealed his pardoning love. I continued in prayer about half an hour, when the Lord again spoke to my heart “Peace be unto thee.” All my doubts and fears vanished away: I saw, by faith, heaven opened to my view, and Christ and his holy angels rejoicing over me.⁹⁸

The similarities between these two passages illustrate that King’s ‘Memoirs’ were first and foremost intended as a story of spiritual awakening. The fact that their subject was a black man was perhaps intended to convey the universality of the power of Methodist spiritual enlightenment, but the timing of their publication suggests that more pragmatic motivations were at work. In any case, the reassertion that Methodism did not preclude former slaves from spiritual awakening would have had some political utility for Coke.

Coke himself was no stranger to the spiritual conversion format, having written and published two biographies about converted sinners during the 1790s. In the first of these two, *A Sermon [...] on the Death of the Rev. John Richardson*, he demonstrated his famously vehement preaching style, sharply contrasting the everlasting fate of the righteous with that of the atheist:

Behold the placid countenance of the dying saint! See the crowns of glory and the palms of victory! Smiling angels minister unto him, and long to tune their golden harps, and shout him welcome to the skies! [...] Behold the miserable wretch, that is dying without an interest in Christ! Does he look upward, the wrath of Christ lowers down upon him. Does he look

⁹⁸ King, ‘Memoirs’, p. 160.

downward? Tophet opens to receive him. Does he look within? Mountains of guilt separate him from the only Being that can reverse his doom. Does he look around him? Devils await to lead him to their own habitation. Such as they have themselves, they will give to him.⁹⁹

The hectoring evangelical style in this passage is a sample of the kind of preaching Coke perceived to be vital to the continuing expansion of the Methodist Church. In 1798, he exhorted his fellow preachers to do the same:

It is my desire, above all things, that you my brethren, and myself should, in the highest spiritual sense, be FLAMES OF FIRE: then [...] all opposition would fall before us; and we should, with our evangelical brethren of other parties, become principal instruments of bringing all mankind to the unity of the knowledge of the son of God.¹⁰⁰

Aside from Coke's apparent subordination of sectarian interests to the more important objective of Christian evangelicalism (an objective he was keen to demonstrate that he shared with Wilberforce), this passage represented a direct instruction to his fellow Methodist preachers (whose membership included King) regarding their mode of delivering the gospel.

An instance of such 'flaming' evangelicalism could be seen in King's 'Memoirs', in the passage where he attempts to have the African 'pagans' send their children to his Christian school in Sierra Leone. It was remarkably similar in its

⁹⁹ Thomas Coke, *A Sermon Preached at the New Chapel, in the City-Road, London, Feb. 19, 1792, on the Death of the Rev. John Richardson, A.B.* (London: G. Paramore, 1792), pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ Coke, *Four Discourses*, p. iv.

apocalyptic tone to Coke's funeral sermon for the Rev. John Richardson, particularly in the way it drew a contrast between the fates of the righteous and the atheists.

[I]f you will obey [God's] commandments he will make you happy in this world, and in that which is to come; where you will live with him in heaven; – and all pain and wretchedness will be at an end; – and you shall enjoy peace without bitterness, and happiness for all eternity. [...] He likewise gives you an opportunity of having your children instructed in the Christian Religion. But if you neglect to send them, you must be answerable to GOD for it.¹⁰¹

It is conceivable that King had based his own preaching style upon Coke's. However, it is important to remember the King's 'Memoirs' were intended as a demonstrative account, to be held up as an example for other Methodists, and that Coke likely had a hand in their composition. Moreover, this method of preaching was shown in the 'Memoirs' to be extraordinarily effective for King, quintupling his African scholars of Christianity from four to twenty in the space of a few days.¹⁰² This gave additional gravity to the exhortation Coke had published for Methodist preachers to be 'FLAMES OF FIRE' during the same year, and simultaneously attested to the effectiveness of missionary activity being carried out in association with the Sierra Leone company. With this in mind, it is worth pointing out here that Wilberforce was a member of the board of directors of the Sierra Leone company at the time the 'Memoirs' were published.

¹⁰¹ King, 'Memoirs', p. 263.

¹⁰² Ibid.

Structurally, the ‘Memoirs’ have much in common with another of Coke’s biographical accounts. The sermon he delivered at the funeral of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers at Spitalfields on 26 October 1794, celebrates Rogers’ pious life, but emphasises the role of her conversion to Methodism in the creation of her godly character. Considering that the primary focus of both the *Sermon* and the ‘Memoirs’ is the spiritual conversion of the subject, it is worth examining the points of congruence between the two, especially since the experiences of the black slave-born King and the white middling-class Rogers differed so widely in every other respect.

Following the death of their respective fathers during their childhoods, both King and Rogers described dreams or nightmares about the wrath of God being visited upon them, and for both this marked the beginning of their journey of religious enlightenment.¹⁰³ They both next experienced deep feelings of guilt or inadequacy during a religious sermon, King identifying himself as a ‘miserable wretched sinner’ and Rogers considering herself as ‘a lost, perishing sinner’.¹⁰⁴ After a long period of self-doubt, both found comfort in Methodism and became finally confirmed in their belief. Both subsequently began to guide others towards God, though unlike King, Rogers ‘never indeed assumed the authority of teaching in the church’.¹⁰⁵ What is remarkable (and unusual) in both of these narratives is that as the commitment of the subjects to their new-found religion increased, so too did their sense of inadequacy and resolve to turn from sin.

Of course, the notion of Christly perfection was always a central tenet of Wesleyan Methodism, and was to be expected in any Methodist conversion narrative. But the narrative structure of Rogers’ conversion story was closely echoed in King’s

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 106; Thomas Coke, *A Funeral Sermon Preached in Spitalfields-Chapel, London on Sunday Oct 26, 1794 on the Death of Mrs. Hester Ann Rogers* (Birmingham: J. Belcher, 1795), p. 15.

¹⁰⁴ King, ‘Memoirs’, p. 158; Coke, *A Funeral Sermon*, p. 16.

¹⁰⁵ Coke, *A Funeral Sermon*, p. 32.

‘Memoirs’. The ecclesiastical element of his text – that is, the element extolling the virtues of Methodism – had much in common, both in terms of content and form, with other conversion narratives written by Coke. It is possible that King was keenly following the published output of Coke during the composition of the ‘Memoirs’ and attempting to emulate his style. However it is more likely that Coke, who was politically invested in the way that Methodism was represented in the text, had some hand in the composition of the sections of the narrative dealing with spiritual conversion.

CONCLUSION

Boston King’s ‘Memoirs’ were written at the end of a period of massive popular support for both reform of British parliament and the abolition of the slave trade, but they were published during a time when oppressive government measures had, to some extent, muted both. His friends among the British Methodists, that is, those people upon whom he financially relied while he was in Britain, all shared a formalised, hierarchical vision for the future of the connexion. Led in the conference by Thomas Coke, key figures such as Thomas Pawson, Alexander Mather and Joseph Bradford managed to minimise secessions from the connexion without budging on the issue of separation from the Church of England. These figures were also directly involved in the management of Kingswood School, where King’s ‘Memoirs’ were written. Coke’s close friend George Whitfield ran the Epworth Press, the publishing house which produced the magazine in which King’s memoirs was published. Coke himself had written more than one spiritual conversion narrative during the 1790s, and the similarities between these and King’s ‘Memoirs’ suggest an authorial or editorial connection.

Perhaps most pertinently, a close reading of King's narrative shows it to espouse precisely the political opinions, relating to both loyalty to the Crown and abolitionism, with which Coke and his circle were most keen to publically associate. The most obvious explanation for this is that King's political and doctrinal stance was influenced by Coke and his circle during his time in Britain. However, King had left Britain by the time issues surrounding separation from the Anglican Church and suggestions of political radicalism within the Methodist connexion became critical for Coke to address. Indeed, the view expressed in the 'Memoirs', that the freeing of slaves was a matter for the attention of the evangelical elite was at odds with King's own act of self-emancipation. Nevertheless the illustrative message of King's story – that emancipated slaves would remain loyal to the British state when its sovereignty was under question – was a political view welcomed by Coke's correspondent Wilberforce.

It is clear from the verifiability of the content of the 'Memoirs', such as the specificity of the shipping dates, that King himself originally composed his story. However, given his financial dependence upon the elite in charge of Kingswood school, as well as his own limited literacy, it seems likely that he was assisted in writing it, and that his assistant held a particular view on the management of the Methodist connexion at large which they hoped to further. When King left Britain in 1796, he left his 'Memoirs' in the hands of the same social network which had financially supported him at Kingswood. Their appearance in 1798 coincided with a point of crisis in relations between Methodism and the British state. A reading of their religious and political ideologies finds them to express precisely the same views of conversion and abolition which Wilberforce and Coke held in common. Either Boston King was remarkably prescient in his understanding of the political climate of a country he only visited once, or his narrative went through a process of edition and

revision by those who stood to gain from so doing. Whatever the cause, it is clear that King's 'Memoirs' formed part of a dialogue intended to attest to the compatibility of Wesleyan Methodism and political loyalty to the Crown in the wake of the extensive religious and political dissent of the early 1790s.

Chapter 5

John Jea in Lancashire and Hampshire, 1801-1817

INTRODUCTION

John Jea ‘was born in the town of Old Callabar, in Africa, in the year 1773’. He was enslaved at the age of two along with his family and sold into slavery in New York.¹ By around 1790 he had emancipated himself and became an itinerant Methodist preacher. A true ‘citizen of the world’, over the next three decades he travelled and preached in various parts of the British Isles, the United States, the West Indies and Argentina, as well as a short stay in the port of ‘Venneleia, in the East Indies’.² His autobiography, *The Life, History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher*, was written between June 1815 and October 1816, in Portsea, a working-class town very near to Portsmouth.³ In 1816 he also selected and compiled *A Collection of Hymns*, some of which were of his own composition, from the same location.⁴ Little is known about Jea’s movements after these two publications, but he was still travelling at least as late as October 1817, when he was to be found preaching on the Grand Parade in St. Helier, Jersey.⁵ This chapter focuses on Jea’s experiences in Britain, specifically during his visits to the two port cities of Liverpool and Portsmouth and their hinterlands, between 1801 and 1817. It examines the effect

¹ John Jea, *The Life, History and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, The African Preacher* (Portsea: John Williams, [1815/16]), p. 3. For the role of Old Calabar in the slave trade of the early 1770s, see Randy Sparks, *The Two Princes of Calabar: An Eighteenth-Century Atlantic Odyssey* (London: Harvard University Press, 2004), pp. 33-69.

² Jea, *Life*, p. 78.

³ ‘between June 1815 and October 1816’: Jea described coming to Portsmouth from being held as a prisoner of war in France when ‘peace was proclaimed between France and Great Britain’, presumably after the Battle of Waterloo in June 1815 but before the Second Treaty of Paris in October 1815. He mentions that his third wife Mary was ‘well’ at the time of the text’s publication but he married a fourth time in October 1816. Therefore the text was almost certainly in print before this date. Jea, *Life*, pp. 92, 95; *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 October 1816, p. 3.

⁴ John Jea (ed.), *A Collection of Hymns* (Portsea: James Williams, 1816).

⁵ *La Chronique de Jersey*, 4 October 1817, p. 2.

of local social and political concerns, specifically those related to the primary subjects of Jea's writing: the slave trade and Methodist theology.

Given Jea's globetrotting lifestyle, this 'local' focus requires some explanation. While Jea himself crossed oceans and national borders almost continuously after his emancipation, the social and political contexts in which he preached and published were often tethered to local concerns. As seen in Chapter 4, this was as true of the political machinations of British Methodism as it was of popular opinion on the slave trade and its suppression. Jea visited Lancashire twice: once in 1801-2 and again around 1804-5. During this period, Liverpool's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade generated employment for many of his working-class parishioners.⁶ At the same time, secessionism began to unsettle Wesleyan Methodists in the large manufacturing towns of the region. On the other hand, when Jea came to Portsmouth in 1815, the town served as a key administrative centre and home port for the Royal Navy's role in the suppression of the slave trade.⁷ Here, Wesleyan Methodism was relatively (though not completely) untroubled by the new secessionist groups gaining popularity across the north of England. Congregations in Hampshire in 1816, by and large, felt differently about the slave trade and Methodism from those in Lancashire in 1801. Jea emphasised different elements of his Methodist-antislavery ideology according to what he perceived were the needs of local Wesleyan networks and working-class congregations in each of these locations.

⁶ Jane Longmore has suggested that approximately one in eight Liverpool families were dependent on the slave trade by 1801. Jane Longmore, "'Cemented by the Blood of a Negro"? The Impact of the Slave Trade on Eighteenth-Century Liverpool', in Richardson, Schwarz and Tibbles (eds.) *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, p. 243.

⁷ See, for example, Anon., *Steel's Original and Correct List of the Royal Navy and Hon. East-India Company's Shipping* (London: Steel and Co., 1814), [n. p.]; Anon., *The Navy List: Corrected to the End of June, 1818* ([London?], John Murray, 1818), pp. 54, 65; National Royal Navy Museum, Portsmouth, Admiralty Library, Selected Parliamentary Papers for 1818, 'Return of all Vessels Engaged in the Slave Trade', ff. 59-61.

Local historiographies, by definition, tend to focus on the historical events and contexts which are perceived to have impacted significantly on the social, political and cultural makeup of a given geographical area. By their very nature they do not correspond perfectly to the needs of a study such as the present one, in which the large-scale social contexts affecting one roving individual are used to understand their experiences and re-evaluate their cultural contributions in specific regional milieux. For example, numerous accounts of Liverpool's relationship with the slave trade exist, with several more published since the 2007 bicentenary of the passing of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act.⁸ This has coincided with a greater (though still not great) degree of scholarly attention being paid to the history of the city's black community, the best example of which is Ray Costello's *Black Liverpool*.⁹ Similarly, the historiography of Portsmouth largely reflects its position as a large naval base, though little has been said of the history of the local black community, and still less about local attitudes to suppression of the slave trade.¹⁰ Despite David Hempton's call for more localised studies of British Methodism, no significant contributions have been made in the study of Methodist networks in either Lancashire or Hampshire since John Vickers' PhD thesis on central southern England in 1986.¹¹ There is also a

⁸ See, for example, Franca Dellarosa, *Talking Revolution: Edward Rushton's Rebellious Poetics, 1782-1814* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014); Arline Wilson, *William Roscoe: Commerce and Culture* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Hugh Crow, *The Memoirs of Captain Hugh Crow: The Life and Times of a Slave Trade Captain*, ed. John Pinfold (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2007); David Richardson, Suzanne Schwarz and Anthony Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007); Gail Cameron, *Liverpool: Capital of the Slave Trade* (Liverpool: Picton Press, 1992); Roger Anstey and P. E. H. Hair (eds.), *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition: Essays to Illustrate Current Knowledge and Research* (Liverpool: Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 1976).

⁹ Ray Costello, *Black Liverpool: The Early History of Britain's Oldest Black Community, 1730-1918* (Liverpool: Picton, 2001).

¹⁰ See John Field, *Portsmouth Dockyard and its Workers 1815-1875* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Council, 1994); J. G. Coad, *The Portsmouth Block Mills: Bentham, Brunel and the Start of the Royal Navy's Industrial Revolution* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2005).

¹¹ W. Donald Cooper, *Methodism in Portsmouth, 1750-1932* (Portsmouth: Portsmouth City Council, 1973); D. A. Gowland., *Methodist Secessions: The Origins of Free Methodism in three Lancashire Towns: Manchester, Rochdale, Liverpool* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1979); John Vickers,

noticeable lack of modern Anglophone scholarly historiography of any focus taking Jersey as its primary subject matter.¹² As such, parts of this chapter draw on contemporaneous local histories, which tended to give greater attention to the task of constructing prosopographies of ecclesiastical and evangelical movements than those published more recently.

The difficulties posed by the comparative paucity of secondary historiography are compounded by a lack of clarity in the primary texts over the processes of authorship. The *Hymns* were accompanied by a preface in which Jea set out his motivation (being ‘importuned by a number of respectable and religious friends’), and to some extent the means by which he selected the hymns, but did not explicate who had written each one. Those referred to in this chapter as being written by Jea are those identified as such by Graham Russell Hodges in his edited collection of Jea’s works.¹³ Similarly, like most black autobiography published during the period of British abolitionism, the *Life* contained a caveat regarding the author’s literacy. ‘My dear reader, I would now inform you,’ the final page of text read,

that I have stated this in the best manner I am able, for I cannot write, therefore it is not quite so correct as if I had been able to have written it myself; not being able to notice the time and date when I left several places, in my travels from time to time, as many do when they are travelling; nor

‘Methodism and Society in Central Southern England 1740-1851’, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Southampton (1986).

¹² A rare Anglophone counterexample is Godfrey Le Quesne, *Jersey and Whitehall in the Mid-nineteenth Century* (St. Helier: Société Jersiaise, 1992). A classic local history of Jersey is George Balleine, *A History of the Island of Jersey from the Cave Men to the German Occupation and After* (London: Staples Press, 1950).

¹³ Graham Russell Hodges (ed.), *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White* (London: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 165-178. Page numbers in citations of Jea’s *Hymns* refer to the original 1817 edition. Hymns not identified by Hodges as being written by Jea are listed as ‘Anon’.

would I allow alterations to be made by the person whom I employed to print this Narrative.¹⁴

This statement presented a contradiction: Jea could not write, yet he claimed a degree of authority over the means of the text's transmission from spoken testimony to printed artefact. Jea relegated his publisher to a mere employee – and elided his amanuensis altogether – with deceptive off-handedness. In fact, no other black devotional autobiography had yet been published in Britain with such a direct statement of editorial control. Yet such control was circumscribed, quite literally, by the invisible influence of the amanuensis. Unlike Boston King, Jea was able to oversee the production and distribution of his autobiography and thereby claim a degree of personal authenticity or immediacy in the text. Yet, like King, his inability to write it down for himself required his words to be represented, at some stage, by an outside party.

Jea's refusal of editorial alterations demands a very specific methodology in the recovery of his movements. Anecdotal asides, such as his childhood memory of 'a day of fasting, prayer and thanksgiving [...] commanded by General Washington' allow a fairly accurate chronology of events to be constructed and used as a framework in which to understand the text.¹⁵ In this example, Jea alluded to the day of national humiliation ordered by Congress on 6 May 1779, during which 'all recreations and unnecessary labour' were strictly forbidden, though Jea and his family were still forced to work.¹⁶ However, the processes of dictation and transcription, subject to two separate processes of interpretation, render the

¹⁴ Jea, *Life*, p. 95.

¹⁵ Jea, *Life*, p. 7.

¹⁶ George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington*, ed. John Fitzpatrick (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1936), vol. xiv, p. 369.

reconstruction of specific details problematic. Nowhere in the *Life* is this more evident than in the relation of events occurring in Lancashire. Since Jea's amanuensis was from (or at least *in*) Portsmouth, these sections had been through a *triple* process of inflection. For example, when Jea heard any proper noun during his time in Lancashire, it was usually enunciated in a Lancashire accent. Since he could not write, he then verbally related this word as he remembered hearing it (i.e. in Lancashire dialect) in his own New England accent, to his amanuensis. The amanuensis in Portsmouth then wrote the noun down as well as they were able, using their own cultural knowledge to correct the text where they could.

For example, the *Life* stated that Jea travelled to 'Baudley Mores, about fourteen miles from Liverpool' in 1801, where he met with 'Mr. Cooper' and 'Christopher Hooper'.¹⁷ Here the influence of a Lancashire dialect was palpable in the translation of 'Bolton-le-moors' (more commonly known simply as Bolton) into 'Baudley Mores', while Jea's referral to Wesleyan Methodist preacher Christopher Hopper as 'Hooper' might be evidence of misread handwriting, mishearing or simple misremembering. A certain amount of logical deduction is therefore required to reconstruct the contexts to which Jea alluded in his text. In this case, a keyword search for 'Cooper' and 'Hooper' in the *Methodist Magazine* produced a funeral sermon for Christopher Hopper given by Thomas Cooper in 1802. This suggested that Hopper was living in Bolton-le-moors at the time Jea was in the area.¹⁸ A consultation of the placements of the Methodist preachers, detailed annually in the same publication, confirmed that Cooper was also on the Bolton circuit during that

¹⁷ Jea, *Life*, p. 57.

¹⁸ *Methodist Magazine*, 26 (1803), p. 395.

time.¹⁹ By this method, Jea's itinerary in Britain can be deduced with some degree of accuracy. Hereafter, such deductions are explicated in the footnotes of this chapter.

The differing demographics, political environments and perceived spiritual needs of Liverpool, Portsmouth and Jersey coalesced with their developing relationships to the transatlantic slave trade to produce unique political environments and congregational needs. Jea's texts and sermons, in attending to these needs, were not uncomplicatedly representative of his own opinion of slavery and antislavery. By using specific local contexts to reconstruct Jea's experiences in these settings, we can re-read the *Life* for evidence of competing interests, particularly with regards to local evangelical and pro- and anti-slavery attitudes. Equally, by highlighting these differences, we can begin to get a sense of the changing range of experiences – economic, social and spiritual – available to black people in non-metropolitan Britain across the crucial two decades framing the abolition of the slave trade.

JOHN JEA IN LANCASHIRE, 1801-1805

According to the *Life*, Jea converted to Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury's Methodist Episcopal Church around 1790, was baptised and subsequently absconded.²⁰ When his former owner tried to have him re-enslaved, he demonstrated his knowledge of the Gospel to the New York magistrates, who consequently told him that he was 'at liberty to leave'.²¹ Jea's experience was unusual; while a law abolishing the importing and exporting of slaves was passed in New York in 1788, the same act, in David Gellman's words, 'confirm[ed] the long-established legal principle that Christian

¹⁹ *Methodist Magazine*, 25 (1802), pp. 395-402.

²⁰ Jea, *Life*, p. 32

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

baptism did not change a slave's status' and 'highly restricted use of slave testimony' in emancipation proceedings.²² Jea's assertion that

[i]t was a law of the state of the city of New York, that if any slave could give a satisfactory account of what he knew of the work of the Lord on his soul he was free from slavery, by the Act of Congress, that was governed by the good people the Quakers, who were made the happy instruments, in the hands of God, of releasing some thousands of us poor black slaves from the galling chains of slavery

was therefore entirely erroneous.²³ It is far more likely that Jea absconded. This would explain why, apparently apropos of nothing, 'it pleased God to put it into [Jea's] mind to cross the Atlantic main' and come to Britain, where the Mansfield ruling of 1772 ensured that he could not be forcibly deported back to slavery.²⁴ His decision to misinform his readership about this technically illegal escape stemmed, like the publication of his autobiography, from a desire to link evangelical Christianity with personal and spiritual freedom.

The emancipating power of the church remained with Jea for the rest of his life. When he eventually re-crossed the Atlantic, arriving in Liverpool aboard the *Superb* on 25 June 1801, his first concern was to enquire 'for the people that were followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, seeing that the place was large and populous, I

²² David Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), p. 68.

²³ Jea, *Life*, p. 39.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49. There are numerous accounts of the Mansfield ruling, and its impact on British society is still the subject of discussion. See, for example, Kathleen Chater, *Untold Histories: Black People in England and Wales during the Period of the British Slave Trade, c.1660-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009) pp. 88-92; Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 99-104.

believed in my heart, that God had a people there'.²⁵ His intuition proved correct. The Liverpool Wesleyan circuit was the second largest in the Chester district after Manchester and served as an administrative hub for local connexional affairs. Among other factors, the above-average proportion of committed Roman Catholics (many of them Irish immigrants) in Liverpool produced a tough environment for an expansionist church like Wesleyan Methodism, which was steadily reconciling itself to the approach and character of the Anglican Church.²⁶ The working-class community (around 25 percent of the total population), was transient in Liverpool as it was comprised chiefly of casual dock workers and sailors.²⁷ This prevented the Wesleyans from establishing and maintaining large and committed working-class congregations of the sort seen in Lancashire's manufacturing towns, like Manchester and Bolton, at around the same time.²⁸ The Wesleyan conference's response was simple: they sent more preachers to Liverpool than any other nearby circuit and stationed the district Superintendents Adam Clarke and James Wood there to oversee operations.²⁹ Jea's offer to preach 'unto the people in Liverpool' the key Methodist tenets of 'faith, repentance, and remission of sin by Jesus Christ' would have been welcomed by Clarke and Wood.³⁰

²⁵ Jea, *Life*, pp. 49, 54-55; *The Lancaster Gazetteer*, 27 June 1801, p. 3; Jea rendered the Captain's name 'Able Stovey' - the *Superb* only docked in Liverpool once prior to 1807, when Jea was in South America. The captain's name was Abel Storey.

²⁶ John Belchem has estimated that the number of Irish Catholics in Liverpool was 4,950, or about 10% of the total population, in 1800. John Belchem, *Irish, Catholic and Scouse: The History of the Liverpool-Irish* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 7; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 188.

²⁷ John Langton and Paul Laxton, 'Parish Registers and Urban Structure: The example of Late-Eighteenth Century Liverpool', *Urban History*, 5 (1978), p. 80.

²⁸ Hempton, *Empire of the Spirit*, pp. 90, 104.

²⁹ *Methodist Magazine*, 24 (1801), p. 562; *Methodist Magazine*, 25 (1802), p. 478.

³⁰ Jea, *Life*, p. 56.

Jea's sermons proved popular locally, and 'the report of [his] preaching and exhorting spread all through Liverpool, and in the country'.³¹ While for reasons to be discussed shortly he was careful to avoid denouncing the slave trade too rigorously during his time in Liverpool, his experiences as both a slave and sailor tethered his old-fashioned revivalist theology to concrete experiences shared by many among his congregation. He spoke with a tendency towards sensationalism when describing miraculous occurrences, in a style reminiscent of the 'flaming evangelicalism' Coke was so keen to encourage in the Methodist Episcopal itinerants then travelling between plantations in North America.³² In other words, Jea brought something of the spiritual experience of the plantations to the very heart of Britain's slave-trading infrastructure. For example, Jea illustrated the dangers of blasphemy with a spectacular anecdote from his voyage to Liverpool:

[T]hey [the other sailors] were making game of the works of the Lord, and said that the old man had fine fire works, for it gave them light to go up on the yards to furl the sails; but to their great terror, after they had furled the sails, it pleased the Lord to send his lightning and thunder directly, which killed two men on the spot. One of them was burnt like a cinder, his clothes were totally consumed, not so much as a bit of a handkerchief nor any thing else being left. [The other's] body was entirely burnt up, not a single bit of it was to be seen, nothing but the cinders of his clothes, one of his shoes, his knife, his gold ring, and his key.³³

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Chapter 4.

³³ Ibid., p. 51.

This parable of a (statistically unlikely) manifestation of God's fury was successful with local sailors specifically because of its remarkable, demonstrative nature. Since the secession of the MNC in 1796, the Wesleyans in Britain had become increasingly authoritarian and loyalist, losing some of their appeal to (especially radicalised) working-class laymen in the process. David Hempton has suggested that 'Methodism became more centralised, more bureaucratic, more clerical and more respectable' and thus 'less attractive to the increasingly class-conscious proletariat' during the course of the nineteenth century, but the Wesleyans' focus was already shifting away from working-class populism by 1801.³⁴ The emergence of so many secessionist groups during the first decade of the nineteenth century, all of whom emphasised expansion into working-class communities, attests to widespread dissatisfaction with the Wesleyans' lurch towards 'respectability'. The solidifying of hierarchical structures and reiteration of loyalty to the state church under Coke's influence (see Chapter 4) saw a greater dependence on ordained ministers at the expense of lay-preachers like Jea. In Liverpool, the Kilham controversy had already led to the establishment of a small MNC circuit, but it floundered after 1797.³⁵ The town was seen as such a difficult place to preach in the first years of the nineteenth century that the Wesleyan Conference stationed exclusively senior preachers there.³⁶ Jea's low-status credentials, sensationalist narratives and revivalist zeal, in truth suited better to the MNC, actually addressed a deficiency in the local Wesleyan circuit.

For similar reasons, Jea held a unique appeal for the growing black community of Liverpool, which was, proportional to the total local population, the largest in Britain outside London. The actual *size* of this population should not be

³⁴ David Hempton, *The Religion of the People: Methodism and Popular Religion, 1750-1900* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 17.

³⁵ See Gowland, *Methodist Secessions*, pp. 20-21.

³⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, 24 (1801), p. 562; *Methodist Magazine*, 25 (1802), p. 478.

overstated, however. The total number of black people in Liverpool in 1801 was around 500, or 1.5 - 2 percent of the population, and this figure is inflated by the fluctuating numbers of Asian 'Lascar' sailors recorded simply as 'black'.³⁷

Nevertheless, a significant number of former slaves and their children had settled in the town, particularly Loyalist soldiers who were freed by British forces during the American Revolution.³⁸ Jea's appeal to these former slaves went beyond shared skin colour or even shared experiences of slavery. His experience and training as a preacher had tailored his repertoire and style to the needs and spiritual desires of enslaved and formerly enslaved people. Jea lamented the practice of denying slaves spirituality in his hymn 'Confession':

When we were carried 'cross the main
to great America
There we were sold, and then were told
That we had not a soul.³⁹

The Episcopal Methodist emphasis on miraculous rebirth and reinvention of the spiritual self, inherited from older, Wesley-era British Arminianism, appealed to people whose enslavement was supposedly justified by their erstwhile spiritual wretchedness. Even while the mainstream Wesleyan Methodist movement in Britain increasingly distanced itself from revivalist 'enthusiasm' in pursuit of greater state approval, across the Atlantic the Episcopal Church was at the forefront of the evangelical 'Second Great Awakening'. Revivalist elements of Methodist Episcopal

³⁷ Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780-1830* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 22.

³⁸ See *Ibid.*, pp. 73-74.

³⁹ John Jea, 'Confession', in Jea, (ed.), *Hymns*, pp. 202-203.

sermons were especially popular with black churchgoers, and when the African Methodist Episcopal Church was established in America in 1816 to cater specifically to black congregations, greater emphasis was placed on revivalism.⁴⁰ While Jea was trained in the Methodist Episcopal tradition prior to the African Methodist Episcopal secession, he was used to preaching to majority-black congregations comprised largely of slaves, former slaves and their immediate descendants. He understood how to effectively deploy the imagery of slavery in his sermons.

The language of slavery, emancipation and rebirth peppered Jea's sermons at Liverpool. He recounted a number of them in the *Life*. For example, he presented the 'lightning' anecdote cited above with a commentary from Psalm CVII: 'He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder'.⁴¹ Other sermons frequently made use of the story of Moses, who led his people out of slavery.⁴² Yet the sermons Jea delivered in Liverpool, for all their antislavery evocations, did not amount to abolitionist agitation. True to the early Methodist heritage, they emphasised forgiveness, stoicism and the universality of salvation over direct action and self-emancipation of the sort that Jea himself had achieved. 'I could not forget,' he preached to a Liverpool congregation in 1805, 'God's promises to his people if they were obedient, that he would send blessings upon them,' before quoting some 31 verses from Leviticus detailing the apocalyptic consequences of disobedience to the Lord.⁴³ Freedom from corporeal misery was represented as achievable only in death:

⁴⁰ See James Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 3-31.

⁴¹ Jea, *Life*, p. 53.

⁴² See, for example, *ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 68-71.

[W]e shall meet in heaven around his throne: [...] where all trials and troubles shall have an end, where sorrow and sighing shall flee away, where the tears shall be for ever wiped from our eyes, where our wearied souls shall be at rest, where the wicked shall cease troubling us, and where our souls shall rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory, and join with all the host of heaven, in singing the song of Moses and the Lamb.⁴⁴

Even without the mention of Moses, Jea's discourse was resonant with the imagery of slavery. The collective second-person pronoun delineated the shared identity, following Biblical precedent, of a race of enslaved people; 'wearied souls' being 'troubled' by the 'wicked', living lives filled with 'trials and troubles', 'sorrow and sighing', seeking a transcendental but essentially *social* form of acceptance which was at once emancipatory and spiritually transformative. What Jea was offering in these sermons was an evangelistic vision of post-corporeal freedom as against a political schema for the end of slavery. Jea was careful to state at the outset of this sermon that his concerns were 'not of the world', but 'of God' – so too, in his Liverpool sermons, was his vision of emancipation.⁴⁵

This reluctance to preach the virtues of abolitionism and self-emancipation did not only reflect Jea's faith. The concentration of wealth from the slave trade in Liverpool meant that the local infrastructure, including the jobs of many black people in the area, was dependent on the institution.⁴⁶ This, in combination with the 'successful mobilization of the pro-slavery lobby' made it a difficult place to be an abolitionist in the first years of the nineteenth century. As Brian Howman puts it, 'for

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 75.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

⁴⁶ See Longmore, "'Cemented by the Blood of a Negro'?", p. 243.

reasons of self-preservation (physical and economic), abolitionists were perhaps keen to avoid attracting attention to themselves in a town with such a numerous, active and potentially violent pro-slavery lobby'.⁴⁷ When Thomas Clarkson visited the city in the 1787, for example, he reported being pushed to 'within a yard of the precipice' of the pier head on the Mersey by locals disgruntled at his abolitionist preaching.⁴⁸ True, the local antislavery circle headed by William Roscoe and William Rathbone had been active in the late 1780s and early 1790s. But like Clarkson, Roscoe and his circle were bourgeois reformists whose abolitionism was bound up with their sympathies for the ideals of the French Revolution.⁴⁹ After the onset of war with France in 1793, local resistance to abolition only hardened, and Liverpool, in F. E. Sanderson's appraisal, 'was not to experience any significant local agitation on the subject until 1804' when slavery was reintroduced in the French colonies after a ten-year hiatus.⁵⁰ However, agitation did not denote popularity, and unemployed sailors rioted in Liverpool's streets when Roscoe spoke for Catholic emancipation and against the transatlantic slave trade in the House of Commons in 1807.⁵¹ The riots were ostensibly in protest against 'popery', but proslavery interests were also clearly at issue. It was not a coincidence that the only other riots in the country following Roscoe's speech took place in Bristol, Britain's second-largest provincial slaving port. Keen to focus on the town's interest in the slave trade, *The Morning Chronicle*

⁴⁷ Brian Howman, 'Abolitionism in Liverpool', in Richardson, Schwarz and Tibbles (eds.), *Liverpool and Transatlantic Slavery*, p. 279.

⁴⁸ Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade* (London: Longman et. al., 1808) v.1, pp. 409-410.

⁴⁹ Wilson, *William Roscoe*, pp. 133-154.

⁵⁰ F. E. Sanderson, 'The Liverpool Abolitionists', in Anstey and Hair (eds.), *Liverpool, the African Slave Trade, and Abolition*, p. 220.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

wryly described the Liverpool rioters as ‘a set of wretches more savage a thousand times than the Coromantyn negroes, or the most savage tribes of Africa’.⁵²

While this tumultuous political environment was not especially unkind to Jea – he preached at a chapel in Byrom Street, Liverpool for five months in around 1805 – it might have contributed to his decision to leave the city and tour other towns in Lancashire during the winter of 1801-2.⁵³ Jea first moved to ‘Baudley Mores, about fourteen miles from Liverpool, where [he] met with Mr. Christopher Hooper, who had travelled in the time of Mr. Wesley. [He] also met with Mr. Cooper, a Methodist preacher’.⁵⁴ Unbeknownst to the amanuensis in Portsmouth, ‘Christopher Hooper’ was Christopher Hopper, a retired eminent preacher who was credited with leading Methodist evangelism in the newly industrialised north-west of England during John Wesley’s premiership.⁵⁵ Hopper was too elderly and frail to continue in his preaching duties by the time Jea arrived. When he died of a stroke on 5 March 1802, his funeral sermon was given by his protégé and Jea’s friend, the Methodist preacher then stationed in Bolton, Thomas Cooper.⁵⁶

A reading of Cooper and Hopper’s sermons yields clear evidence of their influence on Jea’s attitude towards religion and class. A veteran from the early days of Methodist expansion in the 1740s, Hopper was like Jea in that he prided himself on engaging ‘the lower orders’ in religion. In a 1766 sermon he declared that ‘I have done with flattering titles, bare names, and empty sounds; therefore I do not ask

⁵² *The Morning Chronicle*, 9 May 1807, p. 3.

⁵³ Jea, *Life*, p. 71.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁵⁵ Thomas Jackson, *The Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers* (London: William Nichols, 1865), v. 1, pp. 179-240.

⁵⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, 25 (1802), pp. 395-402; *Methodist Magazine*, 26 (1803), pp. 389-397, 456-465.

whether thou art a king, or a subject; a rich man, or a beggar'.⁵⁷ Cooper had less time for the working classes, but praised Hopper for his heroic commitment to evangelising them. In a funeral sermon published in 1803, he described how

[T]he lower orders of the inhabitants, especially, were sunk into such a degree of ignorance, superstition, bigotry, immorality, and brutality as, perhaps, had not before been known since the first dawn of the glorious Reformation to that time. Finding them in a condition so truly deplorable, it was natural for the preachers who were supposed to have no right to legal protection, to expect the most determined and abusive opposition [...]

Among the honoured instruments of this extraordinary work, Mr. Hopper deservedly held a distinguished place.⁵⁸

Jea was already in the habit of preaching to low-status congregations by the time he met Hopper, but it was not until afterwards, at Portsmouth, that he began to address himself directly to 'those rebellious children' at the fringes of legal society.⁵⁹

But Jea emulated Hopper and Cooper in more than approach and target congregations. The language of redemption through obedience which resonated through Hopper's earlier work found similar utility (though pregnant with far more politicised subtext) in the sermons of a former slave. For example, Hopper's 1770 *Discourse on Haggai* conflated the languages of civil disobedience and sin: 'Only let the sinner know, that he is a rebel against God, that he has taken up arms against his

⁵⁷ Christopher Hopper, *The Plain Man's Epistle to Every Child of Adam* (Newcastle: J. White and T. Saint, 1766), p. ii.

⁵⁸ *Methodist Magazine*, 26 (1803), p. 395-398.

⁵⁹ Jea, *Life*, p. 73.

rightful Sovereign, his Lord and maker'.⁶⁰ Jea's sermons were more forgiving, but deployed similar rhetoric: 'My young friends, I would intreat [sic] of you, by the grace of God, to examine yourselves, and search the bottom of your heart, to know if you are one of those rebellious children'.⁶¹ The notion of obedience ran through much of Jea's work – including a hymn edited (and possibly written) by him, entitled 'Obedience is Better than Sacrifice', in which the voice of God demanded 'thy thankful lips declare / the honour due to me'.⁶² Jea's use of this language took on quite a different character in Bolton to when he had used it in Liverpool.

Demographically, the most obvious difference between his congregations was the fact that Bolton, unlike Liverpool, had no especially high proportion of black people. And despite the fact that the local infrastructure revolved around a cotton mill, regional support for abolition was high.⁶³ Bolton echoed other Lancashire cities with large working-class communities (like Manchester, where Jea also preached) in this respect.

Wesleyan Methodist congregations at Bolton and Manchester comprised largely of factory workers in the first five or so years of the nineteenth century. Over the succeeding decades, which saw both towns become centres for working-class radicalism, MNC, Primitive and Independent Methodists made greater gains locally than the Wesleyans, filling the vacuum left behind by the latter's move towards establishment 'respectability'.⁶⁴ When Jea was preaching in Bolton and Manchester in around 1802-3, the only established secessionist form of Methodism was the MNC,

⁶⁰ Christopher Hopper, *Substance of a Discourse, on Haggai* (Leeds: Griffith Wright 1770), p. 14.

⁶¹ Jea, *Life*, p. 73.

⁶² Anon., 'Obedience is Better than Sacrifice', in Jea (ed.), *Hymns*, p. 189.

⁶³ See, for example, Seymour Drescher, *Capitalism and Antislavery: British Popular Mobilization in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 131.

⁶⁴ Gowland, *Methodist Secessions*, pp. 42-67; Hempton, *Religion of the People*, pp. 115-116.

which was still in its infancy. And since the individuals who led the later secessions were still members of the Wesleyan conference when Jea was in Lancashire, the character of preaching within the mainstream connexion was still very diverse. Jea's revivalist, accessible style could be accommodated wherever there was a perceived demand for a working-class (or black) lay preacher.

However, when Jea left Britain in around 1805, a charismatic young preacher with some definite ideas about the trajectory of the Wesleyan Methodists was stationed in Manchester.⁶⁵ Jabez Bunting's rise to prominence within the connexion, and his emphasis on respectability, left no place for undignified revivalism and rough congregations. When Jea left Liverpool to tour the Americas, he was part of the Methodist mainstream, mixing with some of its most august figures. When he returned to settle in Portsmouth in 1815, he found himself at the very fringes of the movement. His preaching had not changed; Methodism had.

JOHN JEA IN HAMPSHIRE, 1815-1817

By the time Jea returned to mainland Britain around 1815, he had experienced a great deal. From Liverpool he travelled to Boston by way of Newburyport, Massachusetts.⁶⁶ After about three months, he went on to 'Vennelia, in the East Indies' to preach, but his ship was not permitted to dock there and after a fortnight the received orders to travel to Buenos Aires.⁶⁷ Here, between February and September 1807, he preached until 'all the vessels that were there, were ordered to the different

⁶⁵ *Methodist Magazine*, 28 (1805), p. 421.

⁶⁶ Jea, *Life*, p. 75. 'Newburyport': rendered 'Newberry Port' in the text.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77. 'Venneleia': I have yet to identify this location.

ports to which they belonged'.⁶⁸ After disembarking in Boston, Jea travelled the West Indies, Virginia and Baltimore, where 'I was put in prison, and they strove to make me a slave, (for it was a slave country)'.⁶⁹ This may have contributed to his decision to travel to Limerick in Ireland at the end of the winter of 1807-08, where he contended with Calvinist and Catholic ministers for two years and married a local woman named Mary.⁷⁰ In 1810, they travelled together through the Cove of Cork to Portsmouth, with the intention of joining the Methodist mission to St. John's in Halifax, Nova Scotia. But on arrival in Portsmouth, Mary was taken ill and forced to stay with their Methodist friends there. Jea went on towards St. John's aboard the *Izette* of Liverpool, but the ship was captured off Torbay by the French privateer *Le Petit Charles* on 22 August 1811 and taken to Paimpol in north-west France.⁷¹ The prisoners were then marched across the country to a prison in Cambria, where Jea continued to preach the gospel for eighteen months. After around eighteen months, 'orders came from the minister of Paris, that all who were called Americans, were to go away; we were accordingly marched away to Brest'.⁷² Here Jea was ordered aboard a French corvette under American colours and told to fight against the British, but he refused and was thrown into Morlaix prison, about 35 miles from Brest. He was released shortly afterwards, and he preached around the town of Morlaix for the

⁶⁸ Jea, *Life*, pp. 78-79. 'Between February and September 1807': Jea refers to preaching in 'Buonos Ayres' at 'the period that General Achmet took Monte Video, and General Whitelock came to assist him with his army'. Samuel Auchmuty took Montevideo, in modern-day Uruguay, from Spanish colonial forces on 3 February 1807, and was relieved by John Whitelocke shortly afterward. The city was retaken by the Spanish on 2 September 1807, when Whitelocke ordered the evacuation of friendly forces.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-87.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 88. '*Izette*': Jea stated that 'our vessel was the brig *Iscet* of Liverpool, HENRY PATTERSON, Master'. In September 1811, the *Liverpool Mercury* recorded that the '*Izette*, Patterson, of this port, from Portsmouth for St John's New Brunswick, was taken on the 22d ult. off the Start, by the *Little Charles*, French privateer, and carried into Paimpol'. *Liverpool Mercury*, 20 September 1811, p. 2.

⁷² Jea, *Life*, p. 88.

remainder of the Napoleonic Wars and returned to Portsmouth via Guernsey and Southampton, arriving near the end of 1815.⁷³

All these events inflected Jea's practise and outlook as a preacher. Most importantly, they introduced him to an aspect of Methodist preaching which was to become his speciality, in Portsmouth and beyond. Between 1805 and 1815, he preached almost exclusively to sailors and soldiers. This was as true during his time Britain as it was during his time in South America, since even military men who were not stationed in port cities tended to gravitate around them, where they were likely to gain employment suited to their skills. The work undertaken by Methodist preachers in Buenos Aires during the siege of Montevideo was reflected in a few conversions among the British soldiers. One such convert spoke to the Methodist missionary James Bell in the Cove of Cork, Ireland. Bell related the conversation in a letter to Thomas Coke, who had it published in the *Methodist Magazine* in October 1808. 'I was conversing,' wrote Bell, 'with the quarter-master of the Horse Royal Artillery, about to sail immediately to Portsmouth. I find he was converted to God lately, when on the Monte Video expedition'.⁷⁴ The geographical trajectories of Jea and this unnamed soldier were remarkably similar, given the distances being covered. Both were at Buenos Aires, then the Cove of Cork, and then Portsmouth at around the same times.

This is less surprising when one considers both the Methodist practice of preaching to soldiers while they were stationed abroad and the extent of Methodist evangelical ambition in Ireland. And because many of the soldiers and sailors from the South American campaigns returned to mainland Britain via ports in Ireland, there was a considerable degree of crossover between overseas missionary activity and the

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 90-95.

⁷⁴ *Methodist Magazine*, 31 (1808), p. 478.

‘Irish mission’, reinforced by the fact that both were superintended by Coke.⁷⁵

Seafaring preachers with experience of tending to soldiers’ spiritual needs – men like Jea – found a renewed demand for their skills in Irish ports due to the influx of returning sailors with little time for the gentility of the local Wesleyan ministers. The feeling was often mutual. Bell, for example, was deeply unimpressed in March 1808 by the loose morality of the sailors:

Here many abominations are practised, such as dancing, drunkenness, gambling, and gross sins of all kinds, particularly in the harbours, where sailors and the dregs of mankind are numerous. [...] I have visited that most ungodly place, the Cove of Cork, where hundreds of sailors, and other rude and disorderly people assemble on the Lord’s day [...] and have sometimes met with harsh treatment.⁷⁶

It is not difficult to see why men like Bell met with ‘harsh treatment’ from the ‘dregs of mankind’. Missionaries like Jea however, seasoned in the tough atmosphere of plantations – where slave-owners and overseers were often reticent to allow slaves to engage with Christianity – and latterly aboard military vessels, found it far easier to build a rapport with the sailors. These specialist preaching skills were only reinforced during Jea’s time as a prisoner of war in France between 1811 and 1815.

When Jea published his *Life* in around 1816, he continued to build on these relationships. It was for this reason that he chose to settle in Portsmouth – more specifically in a suburb adjacent to the harbour, Portsea. Despite, or perhaps *because*,

⁷⁵ John A. Vickers, ‘Coke, Thomas (1747–1814)’, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5830> (Accessed 13/02/2015).

⁷⁶ *Methodist Magazine*, 31 (1808), p. 621.

of the increasingly ‘respectable’ character of the mainstream Wesleyan church during Bunting’s primacy, alongside an increase in population of 117 percent in Portsea (17 percent above the national average), there was a special and growing need for preachers with Jea’s kind of experience.⁷⁷ Yet the nature of his relationship to the Wesleyan connexion is not clear. No evidence has emerged to suggest any formal link between Jea and any denomination – though it is clear from his work and evidence from the *Life* that he preached Methodist doctrine and associated primarily with Wesleyan Methodists. Graham Russell Hodges suggests that Jea was a member of the Primitive Methodist church, on the basis that the Primitives’ emphases on ‘visions, glossolalia, constant reference to the Bible’ and hymn-singing suited the content of Jea’s *Life*.⁷⁸ It is true that the spectacular and visionary nature of Jea’s discourses were at odds with general trends in Wesleyan preaching, especially as Bunting consolidated his control after 1810. Indeed, a Wesleyan preacher stationed in Portsea praised the local congregations for their restraint, exclaiming ‘here is no [...] extravagance, no dreams, visions, revelations, and lying miracles, but good common sense & decorum’.⁷⁹ As Hodges suggests, Jea’s preaching was better suited to one of the new secessionist Methodist bodies, particularly the Primitive Methodists. But Hodges overestimates the reach of the Primitive Methodist movement in Britain by the time Jea published his *Life* in 1816. They were based largely in the urban centres of the North Midlands and Yorkshire, and even by the time of the first formal general meeting for the movement in 1819, only four circuits existed: Tunstall, Nottingham, Loughborough and Hull.⁸⁰ W. Donald Cooper has stated that Primitive Methodists

⁷⁷ Vickers, ‘Methodism and Society’, p. 169.

⁷⁸ Hodges (ed.), *Black Itinerants of the Gospel*, p. 32.

⁷⁹ JRL, Methodist Collections, Preachers Letters, 1977/655, ‘John Aikenhead to Isaac Keeling, 21 May 1814’.

⁸⁰ Anon., *Minutes of a Meeting [...] Primitive Methodists* (Hull: John Hutchinson, 1819), p. 2.

‘first appeared in Portsmouth in 1849,’ well after Jea had left.⁸¹ The only other possible secessionist body to which Jea could have belonged was the MNC. By 1828 there was a small MNC chapel established ‘behind the walls of the Dock-yard at Portsea’, but in 1816 the organisation was ‘weak in the large cities,’ especially in southern England.⁸² Even while he was in Lancashire, where the MNC *had* made significant gains in popularity, Jea never recorded socialising with even remotely ‘radical’ members of the Wesleyan church, much less open secessionists. He simply had no opportunity to meet them. Even if he had, there is no reason to expect him to have been sympathetic to their goals.

Wesleyan Methodism, on the other hand, had not only provided Jea with a network to facilitate his preaching in Lancashire, but was also making strident progress in Portsmouth at the time he arrived. In 1811, at a cost of around £7,000, a new Wesleyan chapel was erected in Green Row, large enough to ‘contain two thousand persons’. Two more large preaching-houses in Gosport and Portsea were bought for the connexion over the next fifteen years, though Jea was unlikely to have been able to use them before he left for Jersey in October 1817.⁸³ The Wesleyans were the only Methodist organisation with either the access to funding or the local support needed to keep pace with the rate at which the working-class community in Portsmouth grew during the wars with France and America. Even by 1824, the “‘Gospel Church’” and MNC chapels, ‘near the streets behind the walls of the Dock-yard at Portsea’ barely warranted a footnote in one local history, while the Wesleyan meeting-houses, Green Row and St. Peter’s, each received a lengthy description and

⁸¹ Cooper, *Methodism in Portsmouth 1750-1932*, p. 3.

⁸² Henry Slight and Julian Slight, *Chronicles of Portsmouth* (London: S. and R. Bentley, 1828), p. 94; E. Alan Rose, ‘Methodist New Connexion’, in *DMBI* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=1909> (Accessed 26/07/2013).

⁸³ Slight and Slight, *Chronicles of Portsmouth*, p. 93.

praise for their ‘handsome parapet[s]’ and ‘peculiar beauty’.⁸⁴ Despite the connexion’s increasing tilt towards ‘respectability’, the area in which Wesleyans grew their churches’ capacity fastest was Portsea, and it was here that Jea lived and published his two books.

The strength of Wesleyan Methodism in Portsea also suggests that these networks were involved in the transcription of Jea’s *Life* and his original hymns. In the short preface to his published *Hymns*, Jea stated that ‘I have been importuned by a number of respectable and religious friends, to publish such a collection’.⁸⁵ The mention that these ‘friends’ were specifically ‘religious’ implies that his connection to them was through his organised preaching activity, and his overt characterisation of them as ‘respectable’ places them as more likely to be involved (if only informally) in Wesleyan Methodism than one of the more rustic secessionist movements. Indeed, many of the hymns he had collected were originally written by Charles Wesley. But the Wesleyans had their own print and distribution networks established through the Epworth Press in London, with a far greater reach than John Williams, the Portsea publisher who produced the *Hymns*.

It appears that the networks Jea favoured for the production his songbook, while quite likely Wesleyans, had limited connections to the more formalised movement. In any case, he never explicitly stated the affiliations of his ‘respectable and religious friends’. Jea was even more allusive over the editorship of the *Life*:

My dear reader, I would now inform you, that I have stated this in the best manner I am able, for I cannot write, therefore it is not quite so correct as if I had been able to have written it myself; not being able to notice the time and

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁸⁵ Jea, *Hymns*, p. [1].

date when I left several places, in my travels from time to time, as many do when they are travelling; nor would I allow alterations to be made by the person whom I employed to print this Narrative.⁸⁶

The perfect spelling and grammar of most of the printed text indicates that a formally educated amanuensis was employed in its production. The constant misspelling of proper nouns (and the noticeable impact of dialect and phonetics in these mistakes) implies that the amanuensis transcribed Jea's speech relatively faithfully. That these issues were accentuated when describing places in northern England and France might suggest that the amanuensis was from southern England – most likely Portsea or Portsmouth – and was not particularly well-travelled. They had also never heard of Christopher Hopper, one of the grandees of the early Methodist movement. All this suggests that the amanuensis, while educated and religious-minded, was, like Jea himself, not involved formally with the Wesleyan Methodist movement, and was less concerned with national connexional affairs than the religious affairs of their local area.

By the time Jea published his *Life*, Portsea was already larger and more populous than Portsmouth itself. The centrality of the military base to the local economy gave the area a distinctly working-class character, even in comparison with the rest of Portsmouth.⁸⁷ Social divisions, broadly speaking, manifested themselves along the line of Queen Street, a bustling commercial thoroughfare leading east out of the docks. Soldiers and sailors took up lodgings and patronised prostitutes in 'overcrowded lodging houses in the alleys and rows that ran at right angles to Queen

⁸⁶ Jea, *Life*, p. 95.

⁸⁷ John Langston Field, 'Bourgeois Portsmouth: Social Relations in a Victorian Dockyard Town, 1815-75', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Warwick (1979), pp. 6-9.

Street'.⁸⁸ In terms of overpopulation, Portsea was, in John Vickers' estimation, 'the only area' in southeast England 'at all comparable to the situation in London and the new industrial towns of the Midlands and the North'.⁸⁹ Jea himself lived in the midst of this environment, in a lodging house on Hawke Street, which ran, north to south, from the west end of Queen Street, about 200 yards from the dock walls themselves.⁹⁰ Surrounded by the carousing of sailors and dock-workers, he needed to deliver a brand of preaching which spoke to the particular needs of a transient, working-class community used more to seafaring and hard drinking than chapel-going.

There is no doubt that the core of Methodist support in Portsmouth came from the military presence in these economically deprived areas. In May 1814, for example, one of the local Wesleyan preachers, John Aikenhead, expressed his 'fear, that as the Peace will diminish the number of our inhabitants, we shall lose a portion of our society'.⁹¹ While Aikenhead's prediction proved correct – Methodist congregations in Portsmouth and Portsea declined in line with the local population after 1815 – the Portsmouth circuit remained the largest in the area. The individual congregations were also the largest in central southern England. As Table 5.1 shows, by 1825, preachers in Portsmouth needed to attend to congregations over treble the size of those in the region's second-largest circuit of Salisbury.

⁸⁸ Field, 'Bourgeois Portsmouth', p. 12.

⁸⁹ Vickers, 'Methodism and Society', p. 34.

⁹⁰ Jea, *Life*, p. 95.

⁹¹ JRL, Methodist Collections, Preachers' Letters, 1977/655, 'John Aikenhead to Isaac Keeling, 21 May 1814'.

**Table 5.1:
Methodist Circuits, Preachers and Members in Central Southern England, 1825**

Circuit	Local Preachers	Preaching Places	Members	Members per Preacher	Members per Preaching Place⁹²
Southampton	21	23	486	23	21
Salisbury	27	29	615	23	21
Poole	21	22	530	25	24
Weymouth	13	19	420	32	22
Shaftesbury	13	22	500	38	23
Portsmouth	14	13	1040	74	80

Source: Vickers, 'Methodism and Society', p. 154.

The nature of life in a port town also meant that congregants could rarely attend for more than a few weeks before volunteering or being pressed into service aboard a ship, or taking up casual labour at the docks. For Jea, this meant preaching to constantly-shifting congregations of between 70 and 100 soldiers, dockers, publicans, prostitutes, landladies and servers in tumble-down back rooms within earshot of the bars and brothels on the west-end of Queen Street. His sermons needed to be loud, engaging and emotionally evocative to hold the attention of his congregation in such an environment.

One of Jea's most shrewd rhetorical tactics, given this environment, was to invoke nationalist ideology in his sermons, utilising his own ethnic status to compound anti-French, anti-American and antislavery sentiment within a paradigm of patriotic, soldierly fraternity. For example, he related the following anecdote from his time in France:

⁹² Columns 'Members per Preacher' and 'Members per Preaching Place' do not appear in the original source.

As soon as we arrived at Brest we were sent on board of a French corvette, under American colours, to go and fight against the English, but twenty, out of near two hundred that were sent on board, would not enlist under the banner of the tyrants of this world; for far be it from me ever to fight against Old England, unless it be with the sword of the gospel, under the captain of our salvation, Jesus Christ.⁹³

A later anecdote, suggestive of the threat of re-enslavement under an American antagonist, completed the coupling of an American-French alliance with the continuing evil of slavery:

I then made application to [the American ambassador to France] Mr. Dyeott for a passport to England, but he denied me, and said that he would keep me in France until he could send me to America, for he said that I was an American, that I lied in saying I was married in England, and that I was no African. I told him with a broken heart, and crying, that I was an African, and that I was married in England.⁹⁴

In both these passages, Jea's claims to corporeal and political liberty were married, like the man himself, into 'Old England' – a sentimental title encompassing the whole of the British Isles. When the American and French 'tyrants of this world' colluded to re-enslave him, Jea's refusal was rooted in his association with Britain. Only through the imposition of British liberty, as articulated by the united authorities of British

⁹³ Jea, *Life*, p. 89.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

church and state law (i.e. his marriage in ‘England’), was he able to defeat slavery abroad.

In Portsmouth in 1816, these claims had significant resonance for the local congregants and readership. The suppression of the transatlantic slave trade was after all a military matter, and though the Royal Navy’s West Africa Squadron was in its infancy, it was comprised largely of Portsmouth ships, such as the 32-gun *HMS Solebay*, among the first Royal Navy ships assigned to the task.⁹⁵ Slavery had also been a significant factor during the War of 1812. Britain’s insistence on the right to search American ships for slaves had been a constant source of diplomatic friction between the two countries between 1808 and 1812.⁹⁶ During the war itself, as during the American Revolution, British forces in the Chesapeake Bay had offered freedom to any slave who fought for them.⁹⁷ Those who chose not to resettle in Canada returned to Britain through military harbours like Portsmouth. Additionally, Britain’s blockading of trade between France and America created another source of ill-feeling prior to the war. Jea’s writing reflected the basic propaganda of the Royal Navy in that it presented a binary opposition between antislavery Britain and its proslavery enemies.

British nationalist elements of Jea’s hermeneutics also permeated his hymns, reinforcing the rhetorical bonds between Methodism, international antislavery interventionism, and Britishness. In ‘Works of Creation’, Jea reified the British

⁹⁵ See TNA, Admiralty Records, ADM 1/163, ‘Minutes of Admiralty Board, Jun-Sep 1808’, [unpaginated].

⁹⁶ See Matthew Mason, ‘Keeping up Appearances: The International Politics of Slave Trade Abolition in the Nineteenth-Century Atlantic World’, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 66:4 (2009), pp. 809-832.

⁹⁷ Gene Smith, *The Slaves’ Gamble: Choosing Sides in the War of 1812* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 85-114; Alan Taylor, *The Internal Enemy: Slavery and War in Virginia, 1772-1832* (London: W. W. Norton, 2013), pp. 245-317.

suppression of the slave trade, compounding physical and spiritual liberation from slavery:

Africa nations, great and small,
 Upon this earthly ball,
 Give glory to the God above,
 And crown him Lord of all.
 'Tis God above, who did in love
 Your souls and bodies free,
 By British men with life in hand,
 The gospel did decree.
 By God's free grace they run the race,
 And did his glory see,
 To preach the gospel to our race,
 The gospel Liberty.⁹⁸

Evangelistic fervour and lionisation of Britain's role in abolishing the slave trade were fairly conventional features of post-1807 poetry on the subject. Abolition poetry published in Portsmouth tended to equate military valour with the fight against the slave trade, even before British ships began to patrol the west coast of Africa. 'J. H'. of 'George's Row, Portsea', writing for the *Hampshire Telegraph* in June 1807, chiefly commemorated British sacrifice and honour in the poem 'On the Abolition of the Slave Trade'. Even while the poem mentioned the achievements of Ignatius

⁹⁸ John Jea, 'Works of Creation', in Jea (ed.), *Hymns*, p. 182.

Sancho and Olaudah Equiano, it subordinated their efforts to the essentially liberating nature of British culture, society, and military endeavour.

A Sancho speaks in energetic terms
 The fond affections of the human heart;
 And soars in human greatness of the soul:
 Nor was Gustavus wanting in his mind:
 He was the sable portrait too, enrich'd
 By British kindness, British erudition.
 Stuart gain'd laurels on Calabria's shores;
 Britons fam'd for valour travers'd Maida's plains
 And caus'd the crimson flag triumphant wave.
 And Wilberforce: thou hast also honors gain'd,
 Immortal Wilberforce! Thy name I hail!
 The sympathetic friend of human kind.
 Triumph alone adorns victorious brows,
 And thou hast triumphed in the Senate House.⁹⁹

The 'Stuart' mentioned in this passage did not refer to John Stuart Ottobah Cugoano but to the newly-ennobled John Stuart, Count of Maida, who had commanded a British force to victory over the French in Maida near Naples in 1806.¹⁰⁰ The Battle of Maida had no discernible connection to the issue of slavery, yet it was included alongside the abolitionist struggles championed by Equiano and Wilberforce.

⁹⁹ *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle*, 22 June 1807, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ John Finley, *The Most Monstrous of Wars: The Napoleonic Guerrilla War in Southern Italy, 1806-1811* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), pp. 36-62.

There were two explanations for this apparent non-sequitur. The first was that ‘J. H’. was naive enough to have confused John Stuart Ottobah Cugoano with Sir John Stuart, the Count of Maida. This was unlikely not only because of the well-circumscribed boundaries of social mobility for black people during the early nineteenth century, but also because John Stuart’s victory had earned him the personal thanks of both Houses of Parliament, a pension of £1,000 in perpetuity and a commensurate degree of celebrity in Britain. A person with social awareness and access to newspapers would have been aware that he was white. The second explanation was that ‘J. H’. placed a line about a recent military triumph between the stories of Equiano and Wilberforce in order to draw particular parallels – to reinscribe the humanitarian victory of abolition in the language of a regionally-specific source of patriotism. Just as Stuart had triumphed at Maida, Wilberforce had ‘triumphed in the Senate House’. Both Stuart and Wilberforce were synecdoches of Britain itself, manifestations and products of a projected ‘national character’ which defeated tyranny and injustice in the international arena, and whose ‘kindness’ and ‘erudition’ enabled black people like Equiano and Sancho to flourish intellectually. In Portsmouth, antislavery activity was refigured in the language of military service, and after 1808, the praxis of abolishing the slave trade was understood, essentially, as a martial endeavour.

Jea attempted to contain this ideological couplet within the framework of Methodist theology. Significantly, he was specific about the fact that the ‘captain of an English ship of war’ initiated his extradition from France, transferring him to Guernsey to preach on the way back to Britain.¹⁰¹ At the same time, his devotional verse consistently reinforced two notions: first, that God controlled the seas, and

¹⁰¹ Jea, *Life*, p. 93.

second, that the Methodist doctrine of Christian perfection through the imitation of Christ (see Chapter 1) was the only route to freedom from slavery. The first of these notions was expressed most explicitly in hymns like ‘God’s Dominion Over the Sea’, ‘It is God That Rules the Sea’ and ‘For Mariners’.¹⁰² The second notion was expressed explicitly in ‘Encouragement’:

Hark! poor slave, it is the Lord,
 It is the Saviour, hear his word [...]
 Thou dost say “I’m not a slave,
 “I was born on British ground;”
 O remember when thou wast
 In chains of sin and mis’ry bound. [...]
 Can a man so hardened be,
 As not to remember me [the Lord]?
 Yes, he may forgetful be,
 Yet I will remember thee.¹⁰³

Jea bound British pride in antislavery ideology to Methodist perfection. The sinner’s insistence that he was not a slave because he was ‘born on British ground’ echoed not only the protestations of a number of free black people across the world during the period of abolition, but also the refrain of British patriotism itself. Just as being enslaved to tyranny and being British were incompatible in James Thompson’s ‘Rule,

¹⁰² See Jea (ed.), *Hymns*, pp. 215-218.

¹⁰³ John Jea, ‘Encouragement’, in Jea (ed.), *Hymns*, p. 209.

Britannia!', Jea reminded his reader that, since 1807, British liberty extended as far as the nation was able to enforce it.¹⁰⁴

In this way, Jea appealed not only to the sailors in Portsmouth, but also to his black congregants. Portsmouth's black community, while not on the scale of Liverpool's, was larger than most provincial towns. Their engagement with religious life is well-documented. Whole groups of black sailors had themselves baptised within short spans of time. Between 28 October and 17 November 1799, for example, five black sailors were baptised at St. Thomas' church alone.¹⁰⁵ In neighbouring Gosport, on 12 June 1816, eight black seamen from the *HMS Venerable*, including one 'Blackman born in Africa', were baptised on the same day.¹⁰⁶ But the black community in and around Portsmouth did not comprise entirely of sailors and soldiers. In its role as a military port, Portsmouth often received African men who had been liberated from illegal slaving voyages and impressed into the Royal Navy. Numerous baptism and burial records exist for African people coming to settle in the area after being freed in this manner. For example, on 6 June 1813, in Exbury near Southampton, 'Irby Amelia Frederick, aged 9 or 10, a native of Poppoe near Whidah, Africa, who was stolen as a slave, but rescued at sea on the way to Brazil, by HMS Amelia' was baptised.¹⁰⁷ Similarly, in September 1818, two African ordinary seamen of the Royal Navy were baptised in Gosport – either slaves liberated during the War of 1812 or during illegal slaving voyages, or freemen recruited on the West Coast of Africa by the West Africa Squadron.¹⁰⁸ What all of these individuals shared in

¹⁰⁴ While the question of abolishing slavery in the British colonies was under discussion by other black authors such as Robert Wedderburn at the same time (see Chapter 6), Jea did not enter into any such discussion.

¹⁰⁵ HRO, Fiche 248, 'Copy of Portsea St Thomas Parish Register'.

¹⁰⁶ HRO, Fiche 11, pp. 100-101, 'Gosport Holy Trinity Parish Register'.

¹⁰⁷ HRO, Exbury Parish Register, 50M80/PR1, 'Register of Baptisms'.

¹⁰⁸ HRO, Fiche 12, 'Copy of Gosport Holy Trinity Parish Register'.

common was first-hand experience of the Royal Navy's opposition to the transatlantic slave trade. If Jea wanted to appeal to this varied and vibrant demographic in his preaching – his hymns about life on a plantation suggest that he did – then his valorisation of British antislavery efforts would have likely brought him a degree of success.

Yet for all his patriotism, Jea may have come into conflict with establishment authority figures. On 23 March 1817, an unnamed black itinerant preacher was threatened with prosecution for preaching outside of proper licensed premises by the Magistrates of Winchester, about thirty miles from Portsmouth. While the preacher stood on a stool and exhorted an 'immense crowd of people' who had gathered 'in a large space of ground near the center of the city where the fair is generally holden', one of the local magistrates, the 'Reverend Doctor Sewbell', was summoned. When informed by Sewbell that 'he was acting very illegally in preaching in the aforesaid street', the black preacher 'very civilly' descended and stopped his sermon. The congregation however, reacted violently, becoming 'very riotous' and setting upon Sewbell, who had to make his escape 'thro' the premises of a neighbouring gentleman'. Determined to prevent this type of mass public gathering again, the magistrates enquired of the Law Officers if they had grounds to prosecute the preacher under the Toleration Act of 1812, which prevented dissenting meetings from taking place outside of licensed chapels and meeting-houses. The Law Officer, Albert Pell, responded that the case could be tried under the Toleration Act, unless the preacher was not licensed, in which case he could be tried for the more serious crime of organising an unlawful assembly.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ HRO, Opinions of Law Officers, W/D6/14, 'Case and Opinion of Albert Pell, Counsel, 21 April 1817'.

Even though black people were increasingly engaged in church life in Hampshire during the first decades of the nineteenth century, it is unlikely that more than one black itinerant preacher was touring the county in 1817. Jea was certainly the only individual fitting such a description to be documented, and as such the above case almost definitely referred to him. The case illustrates that establishment paranoia linking religious dissent to political radicalism was not confined solely to the metropolis and the industrial centres of the north of England. The titular ethnic status of the ‘black preacher’ (hereafter referred to, in context of the preceding proviso, as Jea) was not irrelevant in Sewbell and the other magistrates’ actions, either. Even from the magistrates’ account, it was clear that Jea’s intention was to preach a sermon rather than to stir up political discontent. The ‘very riotous’ behaviour of the ‘mob’ in this instance found its catalyst in the disruption of the sermon, easily perceived as state bigotry against freedom of worship – perhaps especially against dissenting worship led by a black man. In London at around this time, the black Unitarian preacher Robert Wedderburn (see Chapter 6), along with a number of his white peers, was holding radical political meetings under the title of sermons. Jea’s immediate compliance with the request to stop preaching indicated that he held no such ulterior motives, yet the magistrates’ desire to pursue a prosecution against him, alongside the Law Officer’s mention of ‘an unlawful assembly’, suggested a fear of political meetings disguised as worship.

Jea was ultimately never prosecuted for his meeting in Winchester, possibly because the magistrates did not know his name, or possibly because they did not know where to find him. In fact he was based nearby, in Portsea, until October 1817. His third wife Mary, who was ‘well’ when the *Life* was published, died there, shortly afterwards. On 28 October 1816 he married again, to Miss Jemima Davis in High

Wycombe.¹¹⁰ They returned to Portsea, and on 25 September 1817 their daughter Hephzabah was baptised in St. John's, an Anglican church which had been built there in 1788.¹¹¹ It is not clear why Jea chose to have his child baptised in an Anglican church when there were so many Methodist churches available locally. It may have had something to do with the fact that Jea was in a hurry – ten days later he was preaching ‘on the Grand-Parade’ in St. Helier, Jersey.¹¹² Given his avowed fear of drowning, and the repeated threats of repatriation and re-enslavement he had endured, it made sense for him to witness his daughter's baptism before travelling south by sea, regardless of whether or not she accompanied him.

Beyond the fact that he preached there on 5 October 1817, little is known about Jea's time in Jersey. As during his time in mainland Britain, he received no financial support from any of the local Methodist circuits, and he was never mentioned in any of the twice-yearly meetings of Wesleyan preachers stationed in the Guernsey area.¹¹³ The latest evidence of Jea's religious activity was an advertisement for one of his meetings in the 4 October 1817 issue of *La Chronique de Jersey*.¹¹⁴ It is likely that he continued travelling and preaching, but in Hodges' words, ‘by the time history swallowed Jea, he was an old man by standards of his time and profession’.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ *Hampshire Telegraph*, 28 October 1816, p. 3.

¹¹¹ Portsmouth City Record Office, ‘Baptisms Solemnised in the St. John's Chapel in the Parish of Portsea in the County of Southampton, in the year 1817,’ p. 268. Cited in Hodges (ed.), *Black Itinerants of the Gospel*, pp. 48-49, n. 119.

¹¹² *La Chronique de Jersey*, 4 October 1817, p. 2.

¹¹³ JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/398, ‘Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes for the Guernsey District, 1808-1818’; JRL, Methodist Collections, 1977/398, ‘Wesleyan Methodist Conference Minutes for the Guernsey District, 1819-1830’.

¹¹⁴ *Le Chronique de Jersey*, 4 October 1817, p. 2.

¹¹⁵ Hodges (ed.), *Black Itinerants of the Gospel*, p. 34.

CONCLUSION

Jea's connection to the local Wesleyan Methodist networks in Hampshire and Lancashire went unremarked in the official literature of the movement. Since he was a lay-preacher and not an ordained minister, he could never hope to gain an annuity or financial remuneration for his preaching beyond his bed and board. Almost from the time he first arrived in Britain in June 1801, Jea's style of preaching, cultivated in the emotionally charged atmosphere of the slave plantations of America's east coast, left him at the margins of an increasingly moderate Wesleyan Methodist connexion. By the time he left mainland Britain in 1817, there was little room in Jabez Bunting's new, hierarchical vision of Methodism for Jea's religious 'enthusiasm'.

Yet the intricate relationships between local identities and international politics allowed Jea to alter the content of his sermons, songs and writings, according to his location, to excite the greatest reaction from his working-class congregations. In terms of his engagement with the slave trade, Jea was flexible enough to preach the virtues of passive slave obedience in pre-abolition Liverpool, and militaristic paternalism in suppression-era Portsmouth. He was sensitive to the relationship between the spiritual, material and political needs of his audience. Crucially, he recognised that popular engagement in a political issue as large as abolition was bound to be inflected by its impact on local economics and politics, and he was able to suit his discourse to his audience.

When Jea visited Liverpool in 1801-03 and 1803-05, local involvement in the slave trade was as pervasive as ever. Between 1801 and 1805, no fewer than 630 slave-trading voyages disembarked from Liverpool.¹¹⁶ Local capital investment made

¹¹⁶ Voyages Database, 2009. *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*
<http://slavevoyages.org/tast/database/search.faces?yearFrom=1800&yearTo=1805&ptdepimp=10432>
 Accessed 20/08/2013

possible by the profits from transatlantic slavery benefitted not just shareholders and investors but also the labouring poor – both black and white – who made up the majority of Jea’s congregation. Politically, support for abolition, led in elite circles by Roscoe, was overwhelmed by the local proslavery interest. In this environment, Jea offered his congregation a vision of spiritual liberty available to all, achievable without necessitating freedom from physical bondage. Those among his congregations whose wages were derived ultimately from the profits of slavery therefore did not have to weigh their consciences against their immediate financial needs.

The local political perspective on abolition was drastically different in Portsmouth when Jea lived there between 1815 and 1817. The largest employer in this region was the Royal Navy, whose role in the suppression of transatlantic slavery was portrayed as a source for both national and local pride. Jea’s *Life* and *Hymns* were published in this military town, in the wake of two wars with two separate slaveholding nations, during one of which (the War of 1812), emancipating slaves had been used as a military tactic. From his experience with British soldiers and sailors working aboard military vessels, Jea knew that the issue of slavery was frequently expressed in patriotic terms, as a manifestation of the British ‘spirit’ of liberty. His experience also equipped him for the difficult task of preaching abstinence in a large military harbour; a task not as well-suited to the well-to-do ordained Wesleyan ministers in the area.

Jea’s approach to preaching was steeped in the missionary tradition from which the Episcopal Methodist Church in America had stemmed. Fiery, millenarian, and with an emphasis on spiritual metamorphosis, this approach proved popular among the dispossessed of society. On one side of the Atlantic, enslaved people saw

in revivalist theology a form of emancipation which was not only attainable but inevitable and universalising. On the other, ‘increasingly class-conscious’ but impoverished factory workers, sailors and manual labourers appreciated the sense of social cohesion which came with group rituals like hymn-singing. In both cases, limited congregational literacy necessitated that Christian lessons be illustrated by memorable example in hymns or sermons. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodism began to move away from this model. In large industrial towns, especially in Lancashire and West Yorkshire, this move left congregations feeling alienated, and ultimately resulted in a number of secessions and the establishment of the MNC, Primitive Methodists and a number of smaller Methodist organisations. Yet Wesleyan influence remained strong in the industrial towns of the south, in part due to the more diverse range of preaching the Wesleyans offered to the working-classes there. Jea moved through these networks to preach the virtues of abolition to the congregations of Portsmouth.

No evidence exists to suggest that Jea ever received any direct financial support from any Methodist organisation in Britain, though he himself acknowledged other forms of support, such as medical assistance and free board.¹¹⁷ Unlike, for example, Boston King, Jea was therefore relatively free to pursue his own evangelical line through this tumultuous period in the history of the Methodist church. Constantly moving, he navigated the complex web of Wesleyan confessional networks as he navigated Britain’s roads and shipping lanes. If Jea was not at the epicentre of his social network, neither was his ideology subsumed by its politics. The nature of his relations to other actors, from grandees like Hopper to Portsmouth’s poor sailors, was

¹¹⁷ See, for example: ‘I was very ill and desired to go to the infirmary; but the good friends that God had raised up unto me, Christian brethren and sisters, would not suffer me to go, but kept me still with them, in order that I should recover my health’. Jea, *Life*, p. 56.

always negotiated, always mutually influential. His lack of formal connections to any of the British Methodist bodies may have kept him at the margins of the regional itinerant scenes in Lancashire and Hampshire, but it also kept him free to express his faith in emancipation, from sin as well as slavery, in whatever way he thought would be most effective.

Chapter 6

Robert Wedderburn, Antislavery and London's Radical Underworld, 1817-1832

INTRODUCTION

The experiences of many black authors in Britain during the movement for abolition led them to become marginal figures within the social, political and confessional circles responsible for their publication. This was not the case for Robert Wedderburn, the son of a Jamaican slave and a Scottish slave-owner. Through a combination of pamphleteering and oratory, he carved out a position for himself as a leading member of London's working-class radical community during the politically tumultuous 'Peterloo years' of the late 1810s. Bringing together antislavery and radical discourses, Wedderburn acted as one of the most important individual links between working-class activism and the rarefied world of parliamentary antislavery politics. Unlike earlier black authors, Wedderburn never courted the approval of, or support from, 'respectable' authority figures, either within or peripheral to his own network. In fact, his articulation of antislavery sentiments were usually framed in conscious opposition to hegemonic British cultural ideals of politeness, restraint and respectability. In both his radical and antislavery work, Wedderburn remained an uncompromising and distinctive black voice.

Wedderburn's lifelong rejection of authority, along with his commitment to the emancipation of West Indian slaves, can to some extent be attributed to two traumatic moments from his childhood. He cited these two occurrences in all three of his published antislavery tracts, as well as in several radical speeches, and as part of

his own defence in court.¹ The first happened when he was four. His mother, a slave named Rosanna, was bound and flogged in front of him, while she was pregnant with his younger brother, for not informing her mistress that she was leaving the plantation to visit her mother.² The second came when he was eleven. His maternal grandmother, an Obeah woman known as Talkee Amy, was flogged, again in the sight of the young Wedderburn, for apparently bewitching her master's smuggling ship and causing it to be apprehended.³

His father, a Scottish slave owner named James Wedderburn, having sold Rosanna while pregnant with him, paid for his release from slavery in 1765, when he was two years old.⁴ When Robert was able, he left the plantation near Kingston and 'travelled as a jobbing millwright throughout the different parts of Jamaica', spending eighteenth months in Spanish Town and 'the like period in Port-Royal' before joining the British navy as a Gunner's mate.⁵ After assisting in the rescue of several sailors from a shipwreck off the coast of Newfoundland, Wedderburn travelled to Britain, arriving in January 1779.⁶ Wedderburn had been raised as a Christian, and like Gronniosaw, Equiano, Cugoano and Jea, believed that 'if he could once get to a Christian country, he should be happy'.⁷ But when he arrived he was disappointed by the squabbling and divisions between the various Christian denominations.

Eventually, he came to reject all religious authority, arriving at his own Unitarian

¹ See Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon] (ed.), *The Trial of the Rev. R. Wedderburn, (A Dissenting Minister of the Unitarian Persuasion,) for Blasphemy* (London: W. Mason, 1820).

² *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 29 February 1824, p. 3.

³ Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery* (London: R. Wedderburn, 1824), p. 11.

⁴ Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, 1B/11/6/9, 'Manumission of Slave Registers', ff. 37-38. Cited in Nadine Hunt, 'Remembering Africans in Diaspora: Robert Wedderburn's "Freedom Narrative"', in Olatunji Ojo and Nadine Hunt (eds.), *Slavery in Africa and the Caribbean: A History of Enslavement and Identity Since the Eighteenth Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), p. 178.

⁵ Robert Wedderburn, *An Address to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux* (London: John Ascham, 1831), pp. 4, 3.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 3; *London Evening Post*, 2 January 1779, p. 3.

⁷ [Cannon], *The Trial of the Rev. R. Wedderburn*, pp. 7-8.

freethinking position. At around the same time, Wedderburn became involved with members of the 1790s radical scene, and it was through these individuals that his ideas first found their way into print. Over the next three decades, he rose to prominence as one of the most recalcitrant, insurgent, and influential working-class advocates of radical political reform and antislavery activism in the capital.

Since the pioneering work of Iain McCalman rediscovered and re-popularised much of Wedderburn's work in the late 1980s, academics working on his life have tended to take one of two main approaches. Historians of popular radicalism have considered Wedderburn as first and foremost a radical concerned with domestic political reform, for whom antislavery agitation was part of a wider package of anti-establishment sentiment. McCalman's studies in particular leave little to say about Wedderburn's Peterloo-era radicalism.⁸ On the other hand, since the late 2000s, historians of diaspora, literary critics and cultural theorists have focused on Wedderburn's antislavery writing as a manifestation of his African ancestry and/or his ethnic status as a free black man in Britain.⁹ McCalman, in his introduction to a collection of Wedderburn's writings, has combined these two viewpoints, contextualising Wedderburn's involvement in the Spencean Philanthropists with material on the experiences of black people in both Britain and the West Indies

⁸ Iain McCalman, 'Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn', *Slavery and Abolition*, 7:2 (1986), pp. 99-117; Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 97-238; David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 129-146, 165-178.

⁹ Sue Thomas, *Telling West Indian Lives: Life Narrative and the Reform of Plantation Slavery Cultures 1804-1834* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 97-118; Hunt, 'Remembering Africans in Diaspora', pp. 175-198; Alan Rice, 'Ghostly and Vernacular Presences in the Black Atlantic', in Susan Manning and Eve Bannett (eds.), *Transatlantic Literary Studies 1680-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 154-168; Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits and the Legal Culture of Travel* (London: New York University Press, 2009); Peter Linebaugh, 'A Little Jubilee? The Literacy of Robert Wedderburn in 1817', in John Rule and Robert Malcolmson (eds.), *Protest and Survival, The Historical Experience: Essays for E. P. Thompson* (London: Merlin Press, 1993), pp. 174-220.

during the early nineteenth century.¹⁰ However, historians have yet to examine how Wedderburn's discourses, spoken and printed, related to 'mainstream' parliamentary abolitionism. In the same way, Wedderburn's insurrectionary antislavery writing has been seen as having been influenced by the Haitian Revolution without a full account of the impact of slave uprisings on the British political climate in which he wrote.¹¹ As Hilary Beckles and others have established, armed uprisings in the Caribbean formed a dialogical relationship with British abolitionism.¹² While Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have acknowledged the effects of the Barbadian rebellion of 1816 on Wedderburn's radical periodical *The Axe laid to the Root*, it has so far gone unacknowledged that his autobiographical account, *The Horrors of Slavery*, was published in the wake of the Demerara uprising of 1823.¹³ Similarly, while the influence of William Wilberforce on Wedderburn has been the subject of some speculation, there has been no attempt to compare their approaches to emancipation.¹⁴ There has also been little exploration of how Wedderburn's writing, particularly the relationship between his antislavery and radical work, developed and changed during his career. This is despite the well-established fact that both the radical and

¹⁰ Iain McCalman, 'Introduction', in Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1991), pp. 1-35.

¹¹ See, for example, Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 255-271.

¹² Hilary Beckles, 'Slave Ideology and Self-Emancipation in the British West Indies, 1650-1832', *Bulletin of Eastern Caribbean Affairs*, 10:4 (1984), pp. 1-8; Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988); Hilary Beckles, *Freedoms Won: Caribbean Emancipations, Ethnicities and Nationhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Gelien Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

¹³ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: The Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), pp. 302-305.

¹⁴ McCalman, 'Introduction', pp. 1-3; Wong, *Neither Fugitive Nor Free*, p. 79.

abolitionist movements of which he was a part were practically unrecognisable in 1831 from what they had been in 1817.¹⁵

This chapter therefore takes into account how shifts in the landscapes of abolitionism and radicalism on both sides of the British Atlantic affected Wedderburn and his writing, delineating his position in overlapping networks of British radical and antislavery activism. It also introduces to scholarship a forgotten publication by Wedderburn, *An Address to Lord Brougham*, written in 1831, towards the end of his life.¹⁶ This text represented a significant departure from Wedderburn's earlier antislavery works, and as such it requires a radical re-assessment of his development as both an author and abolitionist. Finally, this chapter introduces new material detailing the circumstances of an arrest and conviction of Wedderburn for attempted murder in 1832, throwing new light on the social alienation and acute poverty which blighted his twilight years.

RADICALISM AND ANTISLAVERY COMBINED, 1817-21

Wedderburn had established himself as a subversive author long before his first antislavery tracts appeared in print in 1817. Beginning around 1802 with *The Truth Self-Supported*, texts appeared under his name decrying the established church in terms reminiscent of early 1790s reformist pamphlets.¹⁷ It was no coincidence that

¹⁵ See, for example, Worrall, *Radical Culture*, pp. 165-178; for the changing radical movement (with specific reference to Spenceanism), see Malcolm Chase, *The People's Farm: English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); for the changing abolitionist movement, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 245-266.

¹⁶ Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham*.

¹⁷ Robert Wedderburn, *The Truth Self-Supported; or a refutation of Certain Doctrinal Errors Generally Adopted in the Christian Church* (London: W[illiam] Glindon and G[eorge] Riebau, [1802]). There is some disagreement as to the date of publication here. Eighteenth Century Collections Online and the British Library list the item as being published in 1795, but McCalman, an authority on British radical publishing and Wedderburn in particular, lists it as 1802 in his edited collection of Wedderburn's works. See Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, p. 65.

The Truth Self-Supported was published by William Glindon and George Rieubau, veterans of the 1790s radical scene.¹⁸ The text represented a coincidence of the two printers' and author's interests: its politics were similar to texts Glindon and Rieubau had been printing and collaborating on for years, while its Unitarian hermeneutics and opposition to Methodist and Anglican 'establishment' respectability served Wedderburn's interests as a religious free-thinker. As a result, *The Truth Self-Supported* struck a note of insurrectionary millenarianism and solidarity with the oppressed which was to resurface in his antislavery work: 'however he is rejected and despised, there is a day coming, when his friends and his enemies will know [...] that he is possessed with power, by authority of the Father, to condemn the one, and reward the other'.¹⁹ Wedderburn's childhood experiences of slavery were apparent here, but even a cursory reading of this text begs questions regarding his authority over it. Aside from its perfectly reflecting the interests of both publishing partners, the text was written in third person and furnished with a formal introduction to the writer, 'a West-Indian, son of James Wedderburn, Esq. of Inveresk'.²⁰ It is likely that Wedderburn dictated the text to his publishers or a third party, who then wrote it down and prepared it for print.

As was often the case with black authors during the period, Wedderburn's limited literacy necessitated the use of an amanuensis. Linebaugh and Eric Pencek have both examined this issue at length, but it is worth exploring further here in the

¹⁸ For examples of Glindon's publishing output, see: Anon, *Convention Nationale: Seances du Mois de Novembre* ([London]: W. Glindon, 1794); Anon, *Parlement Brittanique: Seances du Parlement Brittanique, comencees le 30 Decembre 1794* (London: W. Glindon, 1795). For Rieubau, see: G. Coggan, *A Testimony of Richard Brothers [...] On the Impending Judgement of God* (London: G. Rieubau et. al., 1795); Richard Brothers, *An Exposition of the Trinity* (London: G Rieubau et. al., [1795]).

¹⁹ Wedderburn, *The Truth Self-Supported*, p. 8.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p. 3.

light of some new manuscript evidence.²¹ Wedderburn was not literate enough to sign his own name on the wedding certificate when he married Elizabeth Ryan in 1781 (see fig. 6.1). By the 1830s, his literacy had improved, but he never attained the quality of written communication demonstrated in *The Truth Self-Supported*. ‘The Works of Mr. Spence I have lent and lost’, he wrote to Frances Place in 1831, ‘has [sic] to the bust, Edwards inform me that Mr. Galloway give him the orders to make about fiveteen’.²² Wedderburn’s competency in written English was moderate, and never reached the standard expected of a professional polemicist.²³ Indeed, both manuscript and printed sources written by him reveal a marked deficiency in conventional early nineteenth-century English grammar and spelling.²⁴ However, since he was the subject of numerous spy reports, examples of his spoken discourse have been preserved, and can be compared against the numerous texts published under his name.²⁵ As a result, it is possible to gauge the extent to which any particular text was subject to editorial intervention, since Wedderburn’s written style tended to reflect his oratory rather than grammatical convention. In the case of *The Truth Self-Supported*, the frequent use of elevated rhetoric and specialist religious terminology was so common that one contemporaneous reader found it to be ‘unintelligible jargon’.²⁶ This stood in marked contrast to Wedderburn’s forceful and direct spoken

²¹ Linebaugh, ‘A Little Jubilee?’, pp. 174-220; Eric Pencek, ‘Intolerable Anonymity: Robert Wedderburn and the Discourse of Ultra-Radicalism’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 37:1 (2015), pp. 61-77.

²² BL, Add MSS. 27808, Place Papers, ‘Robert Wedderburn to F[rances] Place, 22 March 1831’.

²³ Linebaugh, ‘A Little Jubilee?’, p. 177.

²⁴ See, for example, *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 1 (1817).

²⁵ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/195, cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, pp. 114-115.

²⁶ Anon., ‘Marginalia’, in Wedderburn, *The Truth Self-Supported*. (BL, General Reference Collection 4226.cc.47). My assumption that this reader is roughly contemporaneous with publication is based on the use of eighteenth (as opposed to nineteenth) century rhetorical conventions such as the use of a drawn human finger denoting an inserted comment and the use of the ‘long S’.

style, which, along with its use of the third-person throughout, indicated that *The Truth Self-Supported* was likely to have been heavily edited.

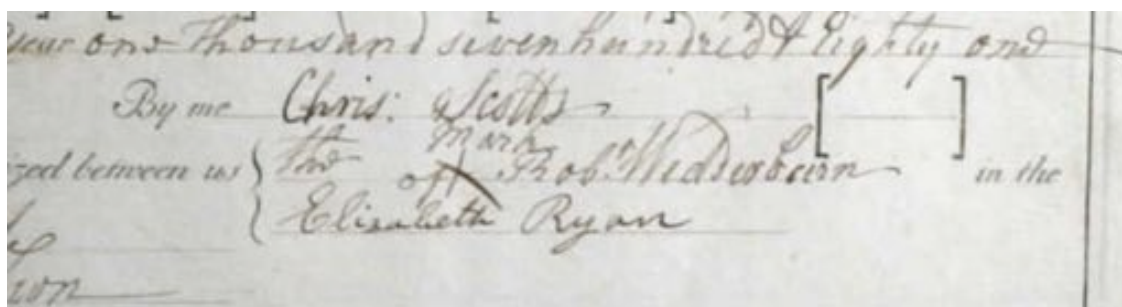


Fig. 6.1: Detail from wedding Certificate of Robert Wedderburn and Elizabeth Ryan, 5 November 1781, showing ‘the mark of Robt. Wedderburn’. Guildhall Library, London, St. Katherine Kree, P69/KAT2/A/01/MS7891/1, ‘Register of Marriages, 1754-1785’, no. 335.

Limited literacy was not necessarily a barrier to Wedderburn’s political engagement. In 1813, he came into contact with veteran radical orator Thomas Spence. A former leading member of the London Corresponding Society and United Englishmen, Spence had spent the first decade of the nineteenth century attempting to restart the effectively suppressed radical movement in Britain. A new cohort of young, working-class reformers gravitated towards the charismatic speaker, including Wedderburn and his future publishers Richard Carlile and Thomas Davison.²⁷ Spence also mediated introductions between these new revolutionaries and some of the older radicals from his days in the corresponding societies of the 1790s, including the ultra-radical Thomas Evans and another of Wedderburn’s future publishers, Andrew Seale. Together the group (known as the ‘Spencean Philanthropists’ after their leader’s death in 1814) contributed to the renewed national impetus for parliamentary reform

²⁷ H. T. Dickinson, ‘Spence, Thomas (1750–1814)’, in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26112> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

by hosting rough, loud debates in public houses and publishing cheaply available pamphlets and broadsides. It was in this environment that Wedderburn developed the oratorical skills which he later put to use agitating for the abolition of slavery and simultaneously rose to prominence within his social network.

Spence's politics influenced much of Wedderburn's own political thought, particularly his antislavery work. The plan of common land ownership, abolition of inheritances and working-class revolution, published dozens of times by Spence between 1783 and 1814 (most often as *The Rights of Man*), was one of the earliest plans of political reform to appeal explicitly to the emerging working-class readership to which Wedderburn belonged.²⁸ In *The Rights of Man*, Spence deployed a type of sceptical rationalism similar to that in *The Truth Self Supported*. However, Spence's tract galvanised working-class politicisation more explicitly:

Man nothing less than Lord was made,
 For nothing less was meant;
 That all things else he should subdue
 He to the world was sent.

But not content with this large sway
 Their brethren *Men* subdue;
 And all the Godlike Race is made
 Subservient to a Few.²⁹

²⁸ Thomas Spence, *The Rights of Man, First Published in 1783* (London: T[homas] Spence, 1793), p. 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Spence's plan, especially its rejection of elite authority, appealed to Wedderburn as both the son of a slave and a disenfranchised working-class artisan. In addition, Spence had been a quiet though committed opponent of slavery for over twenty years, illustrated in 1814 when he republished Cowper's "The Negro's Lament" in his periodical, *The Giant Killer*.³⁰

The very medium by which Spence expressed both his radicalism and antislavery position influenced Wedderburn. *The Giant Killer*, for example, was a pamphlet-sized document, printed in short instalments retailing for two pence per issue, to be reissued later in bound volumes in the style of Spence's older 1790s radical weeklies.³¹ A standard issue or 'penny-number' of the *Giant Killer* consisted of four pages of copy printed on each side of a single sheet of paper so it could be quickly folded into quarters and cut to make a pamphlet (or just as easily a signature for binding) with eight pages. This not only made the *Giant Killer* extremely quick and cheap to produce, but also highly portable, since bulk orders could be transported as soon as they were printed, and then folded and cut by the vendor. This type of printing and distribution met the challenge presented by increased literacy and political interest among the artisanal classes unmatched by the income required to regularly buy mainstream broadsheets, typically costing around sixpence-halfpenny per issue.³² Similarly, the *Rights of Man* was most often published as a broadside, in verse. The simple rhyme scheme, intended to be easily memorised and sung to well-known tunes, allowed those (like Wedderburn) with limited literacy to be engaged in popular radicalism and spread the Spencean message.

³⁰ McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 69.

³¹ *Giant Killer, or Anti-Landlord*, 1:1 (1814); See, for example, *Pig's Meat: Containing Lessons for the Swinish Multitude*, 1 (1794).

³² See, for example, *The Morning Chronicle*, which sold for 'sixpence halfpenny' in 1814, or *The Morning Post*, also at '6½D'. It was not until the mid nineteenth century and the Chartist movement that broadsheets were produced to be sold cheaply – see, for example, *The Chartist*, 2 February 1839.

Following Spence's death in 1814, Wedderburn joined a number of his fellow 'Spencean Philanthropists' in producing similar printed ephemera to continue in promoting his plan. After a short-lived co-editorship of a penny weekly named *Forlorn Hope*, Wedderburn struck out on his own in 1817 with a new periodical named *The Axe Laid to the Root*. In it, he accommodated Spencean land reform within his own distinctive brand of antislavery rhetoric.³³ He made much of his Jamaican ancestry and his witnessing his mother and grandmother being abused by tyrannical white overseers. His distinctive anti-establishment swagger pervaded much of the *Axe's* six issues, beginning in the first, when he charged 'all potentates, governors, and governments of every description' of the 'felony' of 'wickedly violat[ing] the sacred rights of man – by force of arms, or otherwise, seizing the persons of men and dragging them from their native country, and selling their stolen persons and generations'.³⁴ The mention of that ever-divisive phrase, 'the sacred rights of man', drew his condemnation of slavery and his hatred of 'all potentates, governors, and governments' together in terms reminiscent of the previous generation of black radical authors, such as Ottobah Cugoano. However, the emancipation envisaged by Wedderburn in Jamaica took the form of revolution from below, as opposed to reform from within. In this respect he was a far more radical figure than any earlier black writer.

If Wedderburn confidently assumed a black-led revolution in Jamaica was inevitable, he had good reason. Uprisings remained a common occurrence in the West Indian colonies as it became apparent that the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 impacted little on the lives of most slaves. One of the largest of these, 'Bussa's Rebellion' in Barbados in April 1816, resulted in the death of at least one white

³³ *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 1 (1817), p. 1.

³⁴ *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 1 (1817), p. 3.

colonist, and the Royal Navy were called in to quell the rebellion.³⁵ By the time the *Axe* was produced, news of the fighting in Barbados had made it across the Atlantic. Despite a disproportionate response from the navy in which up to 900 slaves were killed in battle or executed, newspaper reports in London spoke of ‘a perfidious league of slaves’, ‘pillaging and destroying the buildings’ and generally ‘pursuing a system of devastation which has seldom been equalled’.³⁶ The West Indies interest linked the uprising to the slavery registration bills introduced by Wilberforce and James Stephen in 1815. The bills, intended as ‘a first small step’ towards emancipation, were ultimately rejected in Lords following the rebellion in Barbados.³⁷ Opinion pieces appearing in the wake of the rebellion deployed a racialized discourse which suggested that ‘the natural indolence and ferocity of the passions of Negroes’ made the uprising inevitable in such a political environment.³⁸ The immediate effect of the Barbados uprising in Britain was to diminish abolitionist agitation and galvanise the proslavery lobby, for whom the rebellion was merely a manifestation of black slaves’ inherently violent nature.³⁹

Perhaps it is for this reason that Wedderburn’s advice to Jamaican slaves in 1817 expounded an entirely passive form of resistance, ironically echoing the sentiments of moderate Methodist preachers like John Jea:

³⁵ See, for example, TNA, Commonwealth Office Papers, CO 28/85, ‘James Leith to Earl Bathurst 30 April 1816’. For a full discussion of the Demerara uprising, see Michael Craton, *Testing the Chains: Resistance to Slavery in the British West Indies* (London: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 254-266.

³⁶ *The Morning Post*, 6 June 1816, p. 2.

³⁷ Drescher, *Abolition*, pp. 231-2.

³⁸ *The Morning Post*, 7 June 1816, p. 3.

³⁹ See, for example, Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and British Abolitionism*, pp. 28-29; Drescher, *Abolition*, p. 232-3; Hilary Beckles, ‘Emancipation by Law or War? Wilberforce and the 1816 Barbados Slave Rebellion’, in David Richardson (ed.), *Abolition and its Aftermath: The Historical Context* (London: Frank Cass, 1985), pp. 80-104; Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, pp. 302-305.

My advice to you, is, to appoint a day wherein you will all pretend to sleep one hour beyond the appointed time of your rising to labour; [...] let it be talked of in your market place, and on the roads. The universality of your sleeping and non-resistance, will strike terror to your oppressors. Go to your labour peaceably after the hour is expired; and repeat it once a year, till you obtain your liberty.⁴⁰

Wedderburn recognised the need to reaffirm the capacity for reason and restraint in black West Indian slaves, especially in the context of Bussa's revolt and the worsening situation in Haiti. As such his writing provided a rare counterpoint to proslavery writers keen to link abolitionism with 'the natural indolence and ferocity' of black slaves. 'Oh, ye oppressed,' he wrote, 'use no violence to your oppressors, convince the world you are rational beings, follow not the example of St. Domingo [...] leave revengeful practises for European kings and ministers'.⁴¹ As long as stereotypes of black violence and savagery persisted, Wedderburn understood that to encourage the same violent political action in Caribbean slaves as he could (and would) in British labourers would ultimately be counter-productive.

On first reading, this moderate abolitionist rhetoric appeared to be contradicted in a second article, also written by Wedderburn, which appeared in the same issue. In the second piece, he issued a darkly threatening warning to Jamaican planters that 'the fate of St. Domingo awaits you'.⁴² Indeed, he utilised the negative stereotypes appearing in the papers following the 1816 Barbadian rebellion to intimidate an imagined plantocratic reader, threatening that their slaves 'will slay

⁴⁰ *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 1, p. 4.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

man, woman, and child, and not spare the virgin, whose interest is connected with slavery, whether black, white, or tawny'.⁴³ The radical character of this second article might seem to undermine the coherency of the pacifist plan outlined in the first. But the key difference between these articles lies in their imagined readerships. The second was nominally directed at planters, intended to weaken their confidence in the institution of slavery. It stood to reason that the revolution imagined in this article would be violent. On the other hand, the first, more moderate article was supposedly intended to be read by slaves, Wedderburn's '[d]ear countrymen and relatives', and was intended to convince them of the benefits of Spenceanism as well as the dangers of 'vengeful practises'. The Jamaican revolution imagined in *this* article was bloodless.

Wedderburn's racial-authorial identity became fluid, adapting to reflect his relationship with each group of imagined readers. When he advised black Jamaicans, the collective first and second-person pronouns were married to ideals of reason, restraint and fraternity. When attempting to destabilise planters' sense of social and political security, slaves and Maroons were conflated and assumed the pronoun of the collective unknown third-person 'they', making them threatening and unpredictable: 'Their weapons are their bill-hooks; their store of provision is every were [sic] in abundance'. In these articles, the second-person pronoun took on the accusative case. The result was a mixture of a threat and a warning: 'you know they can live upon sugar canes, and a vast variety of herbs and fruits, - yea, even upon the buds of trees. You cannot cut off their supplies'.⁴⁴ This level of sophistication and flexibility was to become a hallmark of Wedderburn's abolitionist rhetoric.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 12.

However, it is important to remember that no evidence has emerged to suggest that a single copy of the *Axe* was ever read in Jamaica. Eric Pencek has pointed out that print culture in Wedderburn's radical circles emphasised heterodox discursive styles and blurred distinctions between numerous authorial identities.⁴⁵ This was enacted in the *Axe* most explicitly in an imagined correspondence between Wedderburn and his half-sister in Jamaica, Elizabeth Campbell, in which she recounted the spread of Spencean radicalism through the island and the colonial government's attempts to suppress it.⁴⁶ In reality, this never happened, and it is most likely that Wedderburn wrote both sides of the correspondence.⁴⁷ Similarly, while nominally addressed to slaves and planters, his two visions of revolutionary Jamaican emancipation were actually both intended for a metropolitan audience. By inhabiting such diverse authorial personae, Wedderburn was able to suggest that two separate authors had written for the *Axe*. This gave the impression that a group of activists dedicated to inciting a Jamaican revolution – with realistically diverse views on how that might look – was operating in London. In engineering these indications of constructive dialogue in his revolutionary discourse, Wedderburn hoped as much to inspire metropolitan confidence in transatlantic political radicalism as to encourage slave resistance in the Caribbean.

This authorial fluidity raises further questions about the editorial processes behind his published works. The writing in *The Axe*, despite its flexibility with regard to nominal author and readership, was uniformly riddled with halting prepositions

⁴⁵ Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity', pp. 61-77.

⁴⁶ *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 4 (1817), pp. 49-52; *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 6 (1817), pp. 64-96.

⁴⁷ McCalman and Pencek concur that this correspondence is fictitious, though Campbell herself may have been real. Wedderburn, *Horrors of Slavery*, p. 102, n. 1; Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity', pp. 67-68. Linebaugh and Rediker have not questioned the authenticity of the letters, but do not cite any documentary evidence suggesting that they were genuinely written by Campbell. Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, pp. 287-326.

and unresolved clauses. Stylistically, it bore little resemblance to *The Truth Self-Supported*, suggesting that the two texts underwent significantly different editorial processes. Where *The Truth Self-Supported* had little in common with Wedderburn's speeches, the articles in the *Axe* seemed to better reflect oral than written discourse. These articles were direct and simply put, though all hampered by an evident lack of grammatical training. Wedderburn's 1817 periodical, bearing little evidence of professional editorship, can therefore be understood as more closely reflecting his approach to antislavery and radical activism than his earlier tract.

Unusually for a black, impoverished (and thereby doubly marginalised) writer, a number of accounts of these oratorical skills survive. Spies working for the Home Secretary, Lord Sidmouth, reported that Wedderburn often took the lead at Spencean debates taking place in pubs around London.⁴⁸ His business as a tailor was going well, and in 1816, he and his family lived in the West End, at Smith's Court, just off Great Windmill Street.⁴⁹ Eventually, in partnership with the new leader of the Spencean Philanthropists, Thomas Evans, Wedderburn took out a joint licence at a chapel on Archer Street early in 1818 to use as a base for Spencean activities.⁵⁰ During the same year, Wedderburn had himself ordained as a Unitarian minister, affording the chapel a degree of protection from Lord Sidmouth's increasingly draconian anti-radical legislation under the Doctrine of the Trinity Act of 1813.⁵¹ This partnership was not to last long. Evans had already been arrested under suspicion of planning the Spa Fields riots of December 1816, and after Habeas Corpus was

⁴⁸ See, for example, TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/158, 'Report', ff. 383-4.

⁴⁹ London Metropolitan Archives, Holborn St Giles in the Fields, DL/T/036, 'Register of Baptisms', Item 024.

⁵⁰ McCalman, *Radical Culture*, p. 131; see also TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/190, 'Robert Wedderburn, "A Few Plain Questions for an Apostate"', f.73.

⁵¹ For a discussion of the impact of the Doctrine of the Trinity Act of 1813, see Julian Rivers, *The Law of Organised Religions: Between Establishment and Secularism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 13-25.

suspended again in March 1817 he was held without trial until the following spring. He emerged from prison anxious about being held accountable for any insurrectionary activities, directing the Spencean Philanthropists towards a more moderate position.⁵² Evans wanted to distance himself from the less respectable elements of his society, while Wedderburn was growing ever more violent in his speeches. On 2 November 1818, a government spy named James Hanley reported that Wedderburn's 'language is so horridly blasphemous at Archer St every Tuesday afternoon – that the Spenceans themselves are apprehensive of a prosecution – some of them wish him to withdraw his name from the society'.⁵³ When Wedderburn was finally ejected from the Archer Street chapel in January 1819, he burned his bridges by helping himself to the benches and desks. He was accosted in the street by Evans, and a fight ensued. Incensed, Wedderburn published two handbills within weeks, insulting Evans' wife and describing him as a 'two-faced politician' and 'an apostate'.⁵⁴ These handbills included an advertisement for debates to be held at Wedderburn's new chapel in a hayloft at Hopkins Street, Soho.

Freed from Evans' restraining influence, Wedderburn continued to hold ever more inflammatory debates at his new hayloft. His audience by now was rife with spies looking out for an opportunity to bring him to prosecution on a charge of treason or sedition. While his Unitarian licence afforded him only a limited degree of protection, Wedderburn was emboldened by the fact that the focus of many of his debates, ostensibly, fell on the less provocative question of Caribbean slavery. On the evening of 9 August 1819, the following questions were debated: 'Can it be murder to kill a tyrant? [...] Has a slave an inherent right to slay his master, who refuses him his

⁵² McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, p. 131.

⁵³ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/182, cited in *ibid*.

⁵⁴ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/202, 'Robert Wedderburn, *A Few Lines for a Double-Faced Politician* (London: E. Thomas, 1818)', f. 6; Wedderburn, 'A Few Questions'.

liberty?’⁵⁵ Either of these questions could apply to British working-class ‘wage slavery’ as much as West-Indian slavery, but Wedderburn’s reaffirmation of his ethnic status as ‘the offspring of an African’ in the advertisements for the event suggested that the question under discussion was the legitimacy of West-Indian insurrection.

Wedderburn’s opening comments on the night were a mixture of domestic and colonial politics. The literal enslavement of black Africans served as both a product of and metaphor for the tyranny of white land-owners, creating obvious resonances for the working-class audience. These resonances did not go unnoticed by government spies. As the Reverend John Chetwode Eustace wrote to the Home Office the next day, ‘Yesterday evening I proceeded to Hopkins St. Chapel to hear the question discussed whether it be right for the People of England to assassinate their rulers, for this my Lord, I conceive to be the real purport of the question tho’ proposed in other terms’.⁵⁶ Eustace may have brought his own prejudices against Wedderburn and the Spenceans to his reportage of the evening’s debate, since another spy, J. Bryant, reported Wedderburn speaking explicitly about the transatlantic slave trade and its links to British political corruption:

Wedderbourne – rose – Government was necessitated to send men in arms to West Indies or Africa which produced commotion. They would employ blacks to go and steal females [...] This was done by Parliament men – who

⁵⁵ ‘Handbill, 9 August 1819’, cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, p. 113.

⁵⁶ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/191, cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, pp. 116-117.

done it for gain – the same as they employed them in their Cotton factories to make slaves of them.⁵⁷

Eustace took Wedderburn's imagined West Indian uprising as a mask for a British revolution, assuming him to be more concerned with domestic politics than antislavery. Given the print and distribution networks surrounding the *Axe*, it is unlikely that Eustace was familiar with Wedderburn's existing antislavery corpus. If he had, he might have realised that Wedderburn saw the West Indies as having legitimate potential to demonstrate the usefulness and desirability of national political reform in their own right. Unlike Eustace, Wedderburn thought about the antislavery movement in terms by which the West Indian colonies were more than simply a surrogate for Britain.

Moreover, Eustace assumed that the attendees at Hopkins Street were more parochial in their concerns than was actually the case. When the final question was taken, 'has a Slave an Inherent right to slay his master who refuses him his Liberty?' almost all the hands in the room were raised in favour. The posters for the following week's debate proclaimed the result without any hint that the question was allegorical, and additionally that 'a numerous and enlightened assembly' had 'expressed their Desire of hearing of another sable Nation freeing itself by the Dagger from the base tyranny of their Christian Masters'. Moreover, 'Several Gentlemen declared their readiness to assist them'.⁵⁸ According to Bryant, when the 'sense of the meeting was taken', Wedderburn declared, 'I can now write home and tell the Slaves

⁵⁷ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/195, cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, pp. 114-115.

⁵⁸ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/192, 'Handbill', f. 119.

to Murder their Masters as soon as they please'.⁵⁹ In the advertising for this event, Wedderburn consistently identified himself as 'the Offspring of an African' or 'the descendant of a Slave', legitimising his authority to hold a debate at least partially concerning the enslavement of black people in the West Indies. More to the point, the explicit mention of 'another sable nation' in a revolution recalled not only revolutionary Haiti, but also Wedderburn's plan for the establishment of a Spencean utopia in Jamaica published in the *Axe*. To characterise Wedderburn's investment in antislavery as a mere decoy for his 'true' aim of British political and social reform, even in this single instance, was to ignore the largest part of his affirmed political outlook.

Encouraged by Eustace's account, the Home Office looked to prosecute Wedderburn for holding this debate on the grounds that it was seditious. When prompted by Sidmouth himself, the Law Officers summarily declared the meeting legal, since the question being debated was not designed to incite unrest among British subjects.⁶⁰ Wedderburn's entanglement of British politics with the slavery debate had kept him from prosecution. However it was now obvious to Sidmouth that the Hopkins Street Chapel was a centre for anti-establishment and perhaps even revolutionary agitation. It is a matter for speculation as to whether the Law Officers would have come to the same decision over Wedderburn's meeting in the tense political atmosphere following the Peterloo massacre, which took place six days later. Certainly, public outrage bolstered the ranks of meetings like Wedderburn's after Peterloo, but the Home Office reacted by tightening restrictions on them, notably

⁵⁹ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/195' cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, p. 115.

⁶⁰ TNA, Treasury Solicitors' Papers, TS25/2035/20, 'Opinion of Law Officers regarding the legality a meeting held for the purpose of debate at Hopkins Street Chapel, London', f. 136.

with the introduction of the Six Acts in November 1819.⁶¹ Revolutionaries like Wedderburn, wherever they imagined their revolutions, became seen as a potential threat to home security, and it was only a matter of time before he was arrested.

Evidence of sedition and blasphemy at Hopkins Street was amassing, even as Sidmouth's net drew tighter round Wedderburn's circle. Wedderburn's friend Richard Carlile's trial for sedition was in the news, since a loophole in the law meant that he was entitled to read aloud the entire text of Thomas Paine's banned *Age of Reason* to the jury, which could then be legally published as minutes of court proceedings.⁶² However, when Carlile offered to show some of the inconsistencies of Christian doctrine by reading extended passages from the Bible, an understandably tired Justice Abbott disallowed it. On 28 October 1819, Wedderburn, now completely jaded by the established church, reacted to this news by staging another debate. The question under discussion this time was 'Whether the refusal of Judge Abbott to Mr. Carlile's reading the Bible in his defence was to be attributed to a respect he had for the Scripture or a fear that the absurdities and falsehoods it contained should be exposed?'⁶³ Wedderburn's usual anticlericalism ran through his diatribe, as well as a close association between radical politics and truly Christian actions:

[Y]our fat gutted parsons priests or Bishops would see Jesus Christ damned or God almighty either rather than give up their Twenty or Thirty thousand a year [...] but what did He teach us what did He say Acknowledge no King

⁶¹ For an overview of the Six Acts, see Anon., *Abstract of the Six Acts of Parliament (Passed in the Month of December 1819)* (London: George Ayre and Andrew Strahan, 1820). The effects of the Six Acts on British literary culture are discussed in James Chandler, *England in 1819: The Politics of Literary Culture and the Case of Romantic Historicism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 42-43.

⁶² Philip Martin, 'Carlile, Richard (1790-1843)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4685> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

⁶³ TNA, Treasury Solicitors' Papers, TS11/45, 'R v. Robert Wedderburn, publisher'.

(he was a Reformer) [...] He said acknowledge no Rabbi (no priest) no he knew their tricks and he says stand it no longer [...]

At one point, Wedderburn even cast Jesus Christ as a radical reformer, making the radical reformer Henry Hunt into a messianic figure in his stead:

Times were bad then and Christ became a Radical Reformer. Now I never could find out where he got his knowledge but this much I know by the same Book that he was born of very poor parents, who like us felt with him the same as we now feel, and he says I'll turn Mr. Hunt and then when he had that exalted ride upon the Jack Ass to Jerusalem the people ran before him crying out *HUNT FOR EVER!!!*⁶⁴

The speed at which Wedderburn switched the focus of this debate from religion to politics was as controversial as its subject matter. Anticlericalism was one thing – for a registered Unitarian preacher it might even be explainable as necessary – but to proclaim a radical reformer like Hunt as being similar to Jesus, and at the same time to explicitly call Jesus Christ a ‘Radical Reformer’, all in the shadow of Peterloo, was practically to invite prosecution.

Still, Wedderburn persisted in giving anti-authoritarian and anticlerical speeches at Hopkins Street, binding the British government and missionary activity to the worst excesses of slavery and injustice whenever he could. On 10 November 1819, for example, the question was raised, ‘which is the greater crime, for the Wesleyan missionaries to preach up passive obedience to the poor black slaves in the

⁶⁴ Ibid.

West Indies, or, to extort from them at the rate of 18,000 [sic] per annum, under pretence of supporting the gospel'.⁶⁵ A Home Office spy named Richard Dalton recorded what Wedderburn had to say: '[T]he Missionaries that was sent from London by the secretary of State for the Home Department and for no other motives than to extort money for by the great Weslyans pretending to preach the Gospel to the poor devils and passive obedience to the planters there masters'.⁶⁶ Wedderburn was mistaken when he assumed any formal link between British government and Wesleyan missions in the West Indies, but his speech illustrated how closely he linked anticlericalism with antislavery. It also highlighted how the furore surrounding the rebellion in Barbados stifled the radical element of his earlier abolitionism. Wedderburn had not felt able to incite violent slave resistance in the *Axe* when it was published in late 1817, but two years later he was quite happy to decry the Methodists' pacifist antislavery position to a public assembly of dozens.

Among the audience on 10 November 1819, by special invitation from Wedderburn, were two other Jamaican-born black political radicals. One of them was the young William Davidson, who three months later achieved a degree of infamy as one of the 'Cato Street conspirators'.⁶⁷ Wedderburn and Davidson bore much in common: they had both witnessed at close-quarters the horrors of plantation slavery; they had both served in the Royal Navy; they both trained as artisans in Britain (Wedderburn as a tailor, Davidson as a cabinet-maker) and they both mixed in the same radical social circles. They had mutual acquaintances, not least Arthur Thistlewood, who was executed alongside Davidson for high treason following the

⁶⁵ TNA, Home Office Papers, HO42/196 cited in Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings*, pp. 126-127.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ McCalman has discussed the relationship between the two men at length. McCalman, 'Introduction', pp. 27-28; McCalman, 'Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism', pp. 107-112.

failed conspiracy to assassinate the cabinet in 1820. So close were they, that McCalman has surmised that Wedderburn would ‘almost certainly’ have taken part in the Cato Street conspiracy, and presumably would have been hanged and beheaded along with Thistlewood and Davidson, if he were not under such close scrutiny from government spies.⁶⁸

Given the vast amount of evidence against Wedderburn, it seems puzzling as to why the Home Office waited so long to prosecute him. Even though the first slavery debate on 9 August 1819 was decided not to have been illegal in principle, Home Office spies continued to amass evidence against him for months before he was arrested. It could be speculated that Wedderburn was allowed to continue preaching sedition and blasphemy until the government had enough evidence to punish him more severely. Wedderburn was arrested in late November 1819, but held in custody without trial because the courts were at Christmas recess between Michaelmas and Hilary Terms. In the meantime, the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act was updated to allow harsher sentencing in December 1819, ostensibly as a reaction to Peterloo. Sidmouth, already personally involved once in trying to bring Wedderburn to court back in August 1819, knew about the forthcoming changes to the law when he ordered the arrest in November – after all, it was his office which introduced them. Wedderburn was not tried until February 1820, just in time for the new harsher sentencing laws to be applicable to his case. It is of course impossible to prove whether Wedderburn was the subject of some such plot at the hands of Sidmouth and the Home Office, or if he was simply unlucky enough to have been arrested at precisely the earliest point at which he could be subject to the new harsher blasphemy and sedition laws. Regardless, he waited in Newgate Prison for two

⁶⁸ McCalman, ‘Introduction’, p. 23.

months before he was able to enter into recognizances of £100 for himself and a further £50 each from two others in early February.⁶⁹ His freedom did not last long, however, and on 25 February 1820 he was convicted of blasphemous libel.

One of Wedderburn's underwriters was almost certainly his future publisher George Cannon, a liberally-educated radical active in both anticlerical and anti-establishment circles since at least 1812. He was a regular attendee at Hopkins Street, and had published a number of anticlerical works under Wedderburn's name, as well as acting as his editor for at least one other.⁷⁰ Cannon also took responsibility for drafting Wedderburn's defence against the blasphemous libel charge in court. Historians have tended to represent the relationship between the two men as more mutually beneficial than was actually the case. For example, McCalman suggests that 'Wedderburn could experience the pleasure of seeing himself represented in print as "Reverend Robert Wedderburn, VDM", a scholar, theologian and member of the republic of letters' as a result of Cannon's ghost-writing.⁷¹ Yet Wedderburn was only to experience that 'pleasure' from within the cell into which Cannon had, intentionally or not, helped to place him.

Cannon's disastrous handling of Wedderburn's defence, first at the trial on 25 February 1820 and then at the sentencing on 9 May the same year, practically ensured his client's imprisonment for two years in Dorchester Gaol. On each appearance at

⁶⁹ *The Morning Post*, 7 February 1820, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Robert Wedderburn, *Letter to Solomon Herschel, Chief Rabbi of England* (London: T. Davison 1820); Robert Wedderburn, *Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: T. Davison 1820); Robert Wedderburn, *High-Heel'd Shoes for Dwarfs in Holiness* (London: T. Davison, 1821); Robert Wedderburn, *Cast-Iron Parsons* (London: T. Davison, 1820). McCalman has convincingly shown that all but the last of these were actually written by Cannon. 'All were written in Cannon's ironic, scholarly style and deployed the same patristic and ecclesiastical authorities, as well as Greek and Hebrew citations, used in his earlier *Political Register* articles. They contained footnotes to the *Theological Inquirer* and passages duplicated from a theistic tract (published under the Perkins pseudonym in 1820) advocating a materialist-sensationalist psychology of the mind'. McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, pp. 153-4.

⁷¹ McCalman, 'Introduction', p. 28.

court, Wedderburn's defence consisted of two parts: a spontaneous speech given by the defendant himself without notes, and an address composed in advance by Cannon and read out by the clerk. Wedderburn, whose 'demeanour throughout the trial', according to *The Morning Chronicle*, 'was extremely respectful', sought to ameliorate his part in the alleged blasphemy by referring to his own status as 'the offspring of a female slave, by a rich European planter'.⁷² On the grounds that 'he had received no education' as a consequence of his situation at birth, Wedderburn moved that he was not to be held accountable for his misinterpretation of the Bible.

Cannon's part of the defence could not have been in greater conflict with Wedderburn's, nor more inflammatory. Citing numerous canonical writings and scriptural references, he sought to persuade the jury (and at the sentencing, the magistrate) that the bible did in fact contain a number of inconsistencies. 'I defy the most inveterate of my enemies that can be found among the innumerable fanatics of the day,' Cannon's defence read, 'to prove that I have ever written, or spoken a single word derogatory to the honour of the Deity; for as Plutarch justly observes, it is far less infamous to deny the existence of a Supreme being, than to entertain dishonourable and degrading notions of him'.⁷³ This line of argument had three significant effects. Firstly, the appeal to classical authorities completely undermined Wedderburn's argument for mitigation on the grounds of his being uneducated. Secondly, it aggravated the offence by repeating a number of the supposed blasphemies for which Wedderburn was on trial. Thirdly, it provided a public forum for Cannon's own sceptical philosophies, and even allowed him to advertise another

⁷² *The Morning Chronicle*, 26 February 1820, p. 3; [Cannon], *Trial*, p. 7.

⁷³ [Cannon], *Trial*, p. 9.

of his ghost-written tracts, *A Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury*, to an incredulous courtroom.⁷⁴

Despite a recommendation to mercy from the Jury ‘in consequence of his not having the benefit of parental care’, the magistrate Justice Bailey sentenced Wedderburn to two years in Dorchester gaol. He left little doubt as to which part of the defence was responsible for this harsh sentence. ‘When persons stand upon the floor of this court to answer for an offence,’ he pronounced, ‘it is possible they may diminish the quantum of punishment, by proving that they have repented of their crime; but you still persist in justifying it, which is an aggravation of your crime’.⁷⁵ For his part, Cannon made sure to maximise his financial profit and intellectual prestige from Wedderburn’s imprisonment, publishing full accounts of both the initial trial and the sentencing hearings, with verbatim reports of his own sections of the defence. In addition, he republished an earlier tract named *A Dissertation on the Moral Sense* under the new title *A Few Hints Relative to the Texture of Mind and the Manufacture of Conscience*, with an introduction directing the tract to Bailey.⁷⁶

Wedderburn began his sentence at Dorchester on 16 May 1820, leaving his wife Elizabeth and their six children to provide for themselves.⁷⁷ Possibly out of his desperation to make money to support his family, he maintained his relationship with Cannon during at least the first year of his sentence. While in prison in 1820, he

⁷⁴ ‘They have dragged me from obscurity into public notice; and since they have made me a member of the Republic of Letters, I beg leave to recommend to their attention a critical, historical and admonitory letter, which I have just published, “*Addressed to the Right Reverend Father in God, His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury.*” Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon] (ed.), *The Address of the Rev. R. Wedderburn, To the Court of King’s Bench at Westminster* (London: W. Mason, 1820), pp. 10-11.

⁷⁵ Cannon, *Address*, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁶ George Cannon, *A Few Hints Relative to the Texture of Mind and the Manufacture of Conscience* (London: T. Davison, 1820).

⁷⁷ Dorset History Centre, Dorchester Prison, NG/PR1/D2/1 ‘Dorchester Prison Admission and Discharge Records, 1782-1901’, p. 111. This record contains a rare description of Wedderburn: ‘A man of colour, broad nostrils, a cut on the left side of the forehead, a slight cut across the bridge of the nose. Lusty.’

wrote a short anti-Anglican tract entitled *Cast-Iron Parsons* and sent it to Cannon to edit and forward to Davison for publication.⁷⁸ But the professional relationship between the two men did not last long beyond Wedderburn's incarceration, and *Cast-Iron Parsons* was the last tract Cannon published under Wedderburn's name.

RADICALISM AND ANTISLAVERY DIVIDED, 1821-31

Of all Wedderburn's acquaintances, one stood out as a beacon of establishment respectability: William Wilberforce. As might be expected, their first meeting, which took place in Wedderburn's cell at Dorchester, was engineered by the aging evangelical politician. As part of his connection with the Society for the Suppression of Vice, Wilberforce had been visiting incarcerated radicals since 1816 – especially those of deist or sceptical bent – in an attempt to reform them and bring them back to faith in God and loyalty to the government.⁷⁹ This bore him, at best, mixed results. One can easily imagine the reception he received, for example, during his visit to the recalcitrant sceptic Richard Carlile in Dorchester in the spring of 1820.⁸⁰ The reasons for radicals' dislike of Wilberforce are easy to spot: his opposition to an enquiry into the Peterloo Massacre was well-known, as was his 'unflinching support' for Sidmouth's Six Acts.⁸¹ Indeed, when the 'soft tactics' of conversation failed him, Wilberforce was not afraid to exercise his 'soft power' within the Home Office to prosecute sceptics and deists to the full extent of the new laws. When he found he was unable to prevail on Carlile to repent for his anti-Christian publishing, for

⁷⁸ Wedderburn, *Cast-Iron Parsons*. While this tract, as McCalman puts it, 'does seem to catch something of [Wedderburn's] authentic voice and outlook', it was heavily copy-edited and contains none of the linguistic idiosyncrasies that mark out Wedderburn's earlier work.

⁷⁹ Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), pp. 371-75.

⁸⁰ John Pollock, *William Wilberforce* (London: Lion, 1977), p. 258, cited in McCalman, 'Introduction', p. 36. n. 8.

⁸¹ Furneaux, *William Wilberforce*, pp. 368-370.

example, he pursued his prosecution relentlessly, ‘with an eagerness which in another man would be deemed vindictive’.⁸² When he discovered that Jean Carlile’s trial for publishing seditious libel (namely her husband’s *Republican*) had been postponed for several months, he personally intervened at the Home Office to bring it forward.⁸³ These personal interventions, as much as his vocal support for Sidmouth’s repressive legislation, his piousness, and his anti-vice politicking, made Wilberforce a deeply and especially unpopular Tory MP among London’s working-class radicals.

The accusation most frequently levelled at him from radical quarters was ‘that he loved the black slaves yet did nothing for the white “wage slaves” of Britain’.⁸⁴ Obviously this was not so much a cause for friction between him and his fellow antislavery campaigner Wedderburn. In addition, the two men found they shared some, limited, political common ground in their mutual support for Queen Caroline.⁸⁵ As a result, Wilberforce was able to make more headway with Wedderburn than he had with other radicals. In *The Horrors of Slavery*, which Wedderburn dedicated to Wilberforce, the author thanked the evangelical for his ‘advice’ as well as ‘two books beautifully bound in calf’.⁸⁶ The exact nature of their conversation, however, is unknown. McCalman suggests that Wilberforce advised Wedderburn ‘to devote himself to the urgent cause of emancipating his West Indian brethren instead of

⁸² Ann Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 196.

⁸³ ‘Mrs. Carlile every week issues a mass of ribaldry and sedition and has been issuing it without any pause in consequence of the trial, conviction and punishment of her husband [...] and so she is to go on without the expression of disapprobation until her trial in October next [...] When these facts came to my knowledge [...] I at once stated the particulars to government and they then and not until then applied to the judge themselves’. Wilberforce House, Hull, Wilberforce Letters, 16/15 ‘William Wilberforce to Olivia Sparrow, 20 July 1820’.

⁸⁴ Pollock, *William Wilberforce*, p. 255.

⁸⁵ For Wilberforce’s support for Queen Caroline, see, for example, Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends*, pp. 197-200.

⁸⁶ McCalman, ‘Introduction’, p. 1.

squandering his talents on blaspheming God and subverting the King'.⁸⁷ Yet Wilberforce would surely have been aware that the very subversive actions for which Wedderburn was incarcerated were irrevocably bound up with his antislavery activism; depositions of Home Office spies recounting Wedderburn's speech on slaves murdering their masters had been filed with the evidence for his blasphemy trial. Clearly, Wilberforce was keen to establish a relationship with the blaspheming, radical child of a slave, but evidence suggests that his motives went beyond a mere desire to save Wedderburn's soul.

The loyalist, evangelical character of Wilberforce and his abolitionist contemporaries (Hannah More, Thomas Fowell Buxton, et. al.) made the antislavery cause unpopular among working-class and freethinking radicals. Wedderburn, on the other hand, was in a social position to stir up working-class opposition to slavery. In addition, his ethnic status and personal experiences as 'the offspring of a slave' gave him unassailable moral legitimacy among an artisanal audience – the same audience who dismissed the 'Clapham Saints' as apathetic to the hardships of the British working classes. Wilberforce wanted to cultivate Wedderburn's 'popular talents' for spreading opposition to slavery. Yet Wedderburn's insistence on mixing his powerful antislavery rhetoric with religious scepticism and political radicalism was not only unacceptable to Wilberforce – it had also prevented him from preaching emancipation by landing him in prison. Wilberforce wanted to separate Wedderburn's antislavery and anti-establishment sentiments.

The effectiveness of this strategy has been dismissed by some historians, who can point to Wedderburn's continued presence at radical meetings and contributions to sceptical publications after his release from Dorchester as evidence of his

⁸⁷ Ibid.

continuing commitment to ‘unrespectable’ radicalism.⁸⁸ Others have seen Wilberforce’s visit as a ‘watershed moment’ in Wedderburn’s writing career, when his focus shifted away from domestic political radicalism and towards antislavery rhetoric. Edlie Wong, for example, acknowledges that ‘as many critics have noted, Wedderburn’s autobiography marked a departure from the radical propaganda that characterised his earlier work’, even stepping beyond the mandate of evidence to assert that Wilberforce specifically ‘suggested that he pen an autobiography’.⁸⁹ This both minimises Wedderburn’s earlier antislavery output and ignores his later political radicalism. It also runs the risk of oversimplifying the nature of Wilberforce’s influence over Wedderburn, who had been agitating for the abolition of slavery under his own initiative since at least 1817.

This is not to say that Wedderburn remained entirely unmoved by Wilberforce’s visit. A close investigation of the writing produced by Wedderburn after his time in Dorchester shows a marked division and clarification between his political radicalism and antislavery activism. *The Axe Laid to the Root* and the antislavery speeches given at Hopkins Street sought to promote West-Indian emancipation within the ideological framework of radical anti-establishment rhetoric. However, Wedderburn’s post-1820 works presented a much more ‘respectable’ moderatism when dealing with the issue of slavery. Clearly, he had no intention of being arrested again; his time in jail had been financially trying for his family. He was still in Dorchester when his son Jacob was baptised on 14 January 1822, and Elizabeth and the children had been forced to move to cheaper lodgings on New

⁸⁸ See, for example, McCalman, ‘Introduction’; McCalman, ‘Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism’; Linebaugh, ‘A Little Jubilee?’; Hunt, ‘Remembering Africans in Diaspora’.

⁸⁹ Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free*, p. 64.

Compton Street, near Seven Dials.⁹⁰ Wedderburn therefore continued to be an active non-publishing supporter of radical, sceptical and deist politics, but crucially he kept these activities separate from his commitment to antislavery. This would explain the relative absence of anticlericalism or insurrectionary rhetoric in *The Horrors of Slavery*, published in 1824. True, the text was still distributed through a relatively narrow network of former Spencean Philanthropists and sold chiefly by Carlile and Davison, but its actual content steered well clear of the specifics of domestic political radicalism.

Of course *The Horrors of Slavery* was not published in a political vacuum. Like the *Axe*, it was written in the wake of a major slave revolt in the West Indies. The uprising in Demerara in August 1823, itself apparently fuelled by false rumours of an emancipation act being passed in British parliament, began to feature heavily in the slavery debate in Britain.⁹¹ Parliamentary abolitionists like Fowell Buxton (who later that year established the cautiously-named Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery) and the Foreign Secretary George Canning took the uprising in Demerara as evidence of the folly of immediately freeing the slaves there. On 20 March 1824 Canning addressed the Commons, warning of the horrors awaiting those who would instantly abolish slavery: ‘The men who would emancipate the negro, without previous preparations,’ he said, ‘would be like *Frankenstein*, who had formed a giant without a mind, and trembled before the creature he had formed’. This was met with shouts of ‘hear, hear’ from the benches.⁹² Fowell Buxton followed Canning’s speech with a number of examples of torture and abuse suffered by slaves

⁹⁰ London Metropolitan Archives, Holborn St Giles in the Fields, DL/T/036, ‘Register of Baptisms’, Item 042.

⁹¹ For a full discussion of the impact of the 1823 uprising on the British antislavery movement, see Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*, pp. 135-179.

⁹² *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 21 March 1824, p. 2.

under British masters. For example, ‘by the law and custom of the West Indies, a *female Negro may be stripped naked, laid upon the ground, and, held down by four others*, in the presence of father, husband, or son, whipped with the cart whip’.⁹³ For the parliamentary section of the antislavery movement, the Demerara uprising was evidence of the dangers of over-harsh treatment of the slaves, and the necessity of educating and Christianising slaves as a prerequisite for their self-government.

While it hardly radicalised the abolitionist movement, the Demerara uprising altered the character of public discourse in Britain surrounding slave emancipation. The ‘perfidious league of slaves’ appearing in the mainstream British press in the wake of the Barbados rebellion in 1816 had by October 1823 been replaced by a group of merely ‘unfortunate men’.⁹⁴ The more sympathetic representations of the Demerara uprising may have stemmed from the central involvement of a white missionary named John Smith in the insurrection. Smith was convicted of complicity in the rebellion on 19 November 1823, and sentenced to death with a recommendation to mercy. But the King’s reprieve, signed on 14 February 1824, arrived too late, and Smith died of consumption while in custody.⁹⁵ The death of a white British clergyman provoked anti-colonial discourse in both popular and parliamentary forums, including Henry Brougham’s lengthy speech in Commons on 1 June 1824 calling for an inquest into Smith’s death and an amelioration of slave conditions.⁹⁶ The uprising in Demerara and Smith’s death emboldened the parliamentary arm of the British emancipationist movement to more openly and unapologetically support a gradualist position on abolition, and softened popular

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ *Morning Post*, 6 June 1816, p. 2; *The Morning Chronicle*, 16 October 1823, p. 1.

⁹⁵ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, pp. 288-289.

⁹⁶ *The Morning Chronicle*, 2 June 1824, pp. 5-6.

attitudes towards rebelling slaves in the West Indian colonies.⁹⁷ For Canning, Fowell Buxton and Brougham, the immediate abolition of slavery remained out of the question; it would not only have physically endangered the planters, but it would also have morally weakened the slaves themselves.

This view was quite at odds with the vision of Jamaica as a revolutionary republic outlined by Wedderburn in the *Axe* seven years earlier. However, Wedderburn did have an impact on the parliamentary debate surrounding slavery. Fowell Buxton's illustrative example of female slaves being whipped in front of their sons bore a striking resemblance to an anecdote of Wedderburn's published three weeks previously in *Bell's Life in London*.⁹⁸ While *Bell's*, a gaudy sporting weekly, specialised in sensationalist news items and was not particularly targeted at well-to-do gentlemen like Fowell Buxton, its consistent antislavery stance may very well have brought it to the MP's attention. For example, on 15 February, under the title 'THE BLESSINGS OF SLAVERY', it had run a lengthy and sarcastic editorial on an emergency meeting held by the West India Proprietors held in the wake of the Demerara uprising, attended by such major slave owners as William Lascelles and Samuel Hibbert. The reporter had interspersed the various comments made at the meeting with observations of his own:

One of the great arguments in favour of perpetual slavery – *Chains and Whips* for a RACE YET UNBORN – is “That the late insurrection in Demerara was not suppressed without a sacrifice of lives.” Astonishing! that

⁹⁷ See Craton, *Testing the Chains* pp. 267-290; Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*, pp. 28-58.

⁹⁸ The practice of publically flogging enslaved women featured frequently in abolitionist literature of the 1820s, but Fowell Buxton and Wedderburn's accounts were nevertheless strikingly similar. See Henrice Altink, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 131-139.

lives should be sacrificed by those in possession both of the power and the will to sacrifice them.⁹⁹

Encouraged by this stance, Wedderburn wrote in to the paper detailing some of the worst atrocities he had personally witnessed in Jamaica. First published on 29 February, they anticipated the example given by Fowell Buxton in Parliament three weeks later: ‘I HAVE SEEN MY POOR MOTHER STRETCHED ON THE GROUND, TIED HANDS AND FEET, AND FLOGGED IN THE MOST INDECENT MANNER, THOUGH PREGNANT AT THE SAME TIME!!!’¹⁰⁰ The emphasis here may have been added by the editor at *Bell’s*, but the detail of a mother being flogged in the presence of her son, while no doubt a common enough occurrence on slave plantations, was specific enough to suggest a connection between Wedderburn and Fowell Buxton’s anecdotes.

Wedderburn’s letter was to prove the seed of *The Horrors of Slavery*, published later in the same year. While the uprising in Demerara had stimulated interest in the issue of antislavery, Wedderburn’s motives for publishing an autobiography were more personal than commercial or political. While sharing his own personal experiences had certainly won him the support of the editor at *Bell’s*, his habit of ‘naming and shaming’ the perpetrators of such atrocities – in this case his father James Wedderburn – irked his (white, legitimate) paternal half-brother Andrew Colville. In the *Axe*, Wedderburn had already named their father in print as a rapist and abuser of his slaves.¹⁰¹ But the *Axe* was a specialist publication designed to be distributed among an already-established market of radicals and radical-sympathisers,

⁹⁹ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 15 February 1824, pp. 2-3.

¹⁰⁰ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 29 February 1824, p. 2.

¹⁰¹ *The Axe Laid to the Root*, No. 1 (1817), p. 3.

and as such it is unlikely that Colvile, a respectable West India Merchant based between Jamaica and London, ever came across it. *Bell's*, on the other hand, was a 'tabloid'-style newspaper with a very large circulation. Their line in sensationalist news stories along with their staunch antislavery position suited Wedderburn's letter perfectly. It also alienated the proslavery lobby as well as the rest of the taste-conscious, socially-aspirant middle class to which most of them belonged. Indeed, by 1828 an increasingly 'respectable' Richard Carlile would be 'mortified that such a paper as *Bell's Life in London* should be the leading paper, as to the extent of circulation'.¹⁰² Colvile himself acknowledged rather disdainfully that the paper needed to be 'put into [his] hands' before he took notice of it, but its market share could hardly be ignored.¹⁰³ To see his father maligned in such a public forum deeply offended Colvile, and he drafted a response to Wedderburn, printed in the same paper on 21 March 1824.

Colvile's letter was as personally malicious towards Wedderburn's mother as Wedderburn had been towards their father. In it he describes Rosanna as a 'negro woman-slave', a 'troublesome' 'cook' with 'so violent a temper that she was continually quarrelling with the other servants, and occasioning a disturbance in the house'.¹⁰⁴ Colvile flatly denied Wedderburn's accusation that Rosanna 'was FORCED to submit to [James Wedderburn], being *his Slave*, though he knew she disliked him'.¹⁰⁵ Rather, he called upon well-established racist stereotypes of sexual profligacy among black slaves (see Chapter 2) in an attempt to undermine Wedderburn's claim to kinship with him. According to Colvile, 'several years' after James Wedderburn

¹⁰² *The Lion*, 1:5 (1828), p. 144.

¹⁰³ *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 21 March 1824, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 29 February 1824, p. 2.

had sold Rosanna, ‘this woman was delivered of a mulatto child, and as *she could not tell who was the father*, her master, in a foolish joke, named the child Wedderburn’.¹⁰⁶ Were this true (the fact that James Wedderburn paid £200 in 1765 to have Robert and his brother James Jnr. emancipated suggests that it was not), it would have been, at best, a spiteful assault on the character of a rape victim.¹⁰⁷ Colvile had hardly endeared himself to the editor of *Bell’s* when he chastised them for ‘lending yourself to be the vehicle of such foul slander upon the character of the respected dead’, referring to Wedderburn’s statements about their father rather than his own insinuations about Rosanna.¹⁰⁸ However it was his signoff, threatening ‘that in the event of your not inserting this letter in your Paper of next Sunday [...] I have instructed my Solicitor to take immediate measures for obtaining legal redress against you’, that piqued Wedderburn to respond directly.¹⁰⁹

Wedderburn’s response was published the following week, systematically disproving Colvile’s claims and challenging him to ‘*show fight* before the Nobs at Westminster’ if he so wished. Wedderburn took the opportunity to announce that he would ‘publish my whole history in a cheap pamphlet’, in order to ‘give the public a specimen of the inhumanity, cruelty, avarice, and diabolical lust of the West-India Slave-Holders’.¹¹⁰ *Bell’s* ran the letter accompanied by an endorsement running to over 1,000 words. Colvile, repeatedly upbraided and humiliated in the most public setting imaginable, had nothing to say in response.

¹⁰⁶ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 21 March 1824, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ Jamaica Archives, Spanish Town, 1B/11/6/9 ‘Manumission of Slave Registers’, ff. 37-38, cited in Hunt, ‘Remembering Africans in Diaspora’, p. 178.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 29 March 1824, pp. 2-3.

Wedderburn, on the other hand, had a great deal more to say on the subject, and his promised autobiography, *The Horrors of Slavery*, was published within weeks. In it, Wedderburn included the entire exchange from *Bell's*, inviting the reader to 'judge which had the best of the argument'.¹¹¹ Interestingly, Wedderburn chose to reproduce the accompanying *Bell's* editorials promoting the improvement of conditions for slaves in the West Indies, as they 'wished not an *instantaneous* emancipation'.¹¹² He also included a narrative account of his own life, detailing, among other things, his father's 'very disgusting' seduction of his female slaves, 'like a bantam cock upon his dunghill', the whippings he witnessed administered to his mother and aged grandmother, and the unchristian lack of charity displayed by Colvile when he applied to him for financial help after coming to Britain.¹¹³ Yet this catalogue of the evils attendant on slavery was a strangely depoliticised tract – at least in terms of domestic reform. The public exchange with Colvile had led Wedderburn to respond in a manner that vindicated his mother's character while exposing the morally degenerative effects of slavery for both enslaved and slaver.

However, it should be acknowledged that Wedderburn's impetus in writing *The Horrors of Slavery* came not from his well-known political and ideological opposition to the institution, but personal outrage at Colvile's letter. 'Oppression I can bear with patience', he stated, 'but when to this is added insult and reproach from the authors of my miseries, I am forced to take up arms in my own defence, and to abide the issue of the conflict'.¹¹⁴ *The Horrors of Slavery* was thus a publication primarily concerned with a personal 'conflict' with Colvile. Of course, this conflict

¹¹¹ Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery*, p. 18.

¹¹² *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 29 March 1824, pp. 2-3.

¹¹³ Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery*, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

arose from and fed back into the broader transatlantic debate surrounding slavery, but *The Horrors of Slavery* was first and foremost a personal vindication.

In truth, Wedderburn no longer saw the abolition of slavery as an aim in which he himself could take a lead role in achieving. He recognised that the radical circles in which he moved were becoming increasingly ambivalent towards the antislavery movement, while the parliamentary abolitionists were making steady progress in improving conditions for slaves. As Canning (who Wedderburn had once described as a ‘jumping fiddling monkey’ at Hopkins Street) had pointed out in parliament, a system of Christian moral education for slaves was proving very successful in Trinidad, and was considered a preparatory step towards emancipation.¹¹⁵ More to the point, the swift and brutal suppression of the slave revolts in Barbados and Demerara illustrated quite clearly that the kind of mass political mobilization Wedderburn had envisaged for Jamaica in 1817 was not likely to result in success. The only route to the abolition of slavery which seemed realistic in 1824 was through the introduction of new legislature in the House of Commons, and the now-infamous Wedderburn could expect limited sympathy there.

In the tract’s dedication to Wilberforce, Wedderburn placed the onus for using his life experiences in the cause of abolitionism squarely on the shoulders of the parliamentary movement: ‘Receive, Sir, my thanks for what you have done: and if, from the following pages, you should be induced to form any motion in parliament, I am ready to prove their contents before the bar of that most Honourable House’.¹¹⁶ The reverence paid to the ‘most Honourable House’ of parliament in this quotation contrasted sharply with the anti-establishment speeches in which Wedderburn had

¹¹⁵ *Bell’s Life in London and Sporting Chronicle*, 21 March 1824, p. 2; TNA, Treasury Solicitors’ Papers, TS11/45, ‘R v. Robert Wedderburn, publisher’.

¹¹⁶ Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery*, p. 3

specialised during his time at Hopkins Street. Not once in *The Horrors of Slavery* did Wedderburn criticise the British government, either for their continuing involvement in slavery, or for any of his own personal difficulties while living under their rule.

Indeed, after his release from Dorchester, domestic-radical rhetoric disappeared altogether from Wedderburn's printed output, though he continued his association with radical networks for at least another six years. In 1828, a scurrilous article appeared under Wedderburn's name in Richard Carlile's sceptical periodical *The Lion* entitled "The Holy Liturgy, or Divine Service upon the Principles of PURE CHRISTIAN DIABOLISM". This sarcastic article described a fictional sect who worshipped the Devil, since the 'GOD OF HELL and "OF THIS WORLD," partakes in part of our character and imperfections, and is consequently, from his power superior to ours, a *Being to be feared, to be worshipped*'.¹¹⁷ This short article appeared as part of a series written largely by Carlile in support of Robert Taylor, a sceptic who had been imprisoned on charges of blasphemy. But, while Wedderburn's rough preaching style was extremely popular during his Hopkins Street days, radical and anticlerical luminaries strove for a more genteel approach during the late 1820s. When he read Wedderburn's piece in *The Lion*, Taylor wrote to Carlile in response. While praising the article for its 'exquisite sarcasm', he lamented that '[i]f Wedderburn's measure of talent were but served up in a better looking vessel, or some that have ten-fold his talent would but bring it forth with half his courage and honesty, we should not want rich intellectual feasts'.¹¹⁸ This was as clear an indication as any that Wedderburn had fallen out of step with his radical contemporaries on the issue of respectability. His limited education, low socio-economic status, public

¹¹⁷ *The Lion*, 1:12 (1828), pp. 359-361.

¹¹⁸ *The Lion*, 1:13 (1828), p. 395.

association with known pornographers like Cannon and increasingly frequent appearances in court were becoming embarrassing to his radical friends.

Proto-racist attitudes were also gaining popularity across all socioeconomic strata of British society, and Taylor's suggestion for the need of a 'better-looking vessel' to lead his and Carlile's anticlerical operations can be read in this context. Wedderburn had already been the subject of more than one form of racist satire. He was the central figure of George Cruikshank's 1819 print 'The New Union Club' (fig. 6.2), in which he was depicted standing on a table gesticulating with one hand while grabbing his genitals with the other. The image satirised the respectable pretensions of the parliamentary abolitionists, reimagining a dinner held by the African Society as a grotesque carnival of drunkenness and inter-racial sexual profligacy, with Wedderburn and Wilberforce presiding as chief revellers.¹¹⁹ When Wedderburn had appeared in court as a plaintiff in February 1823, attempting to reclaim some money he had been swindled out of by his editor George Midford, a reporter skewered him with a lengthy and derisive description even before describing the case. Wedderburn was mocked both for the colour of his skin and his cultural aspirations, the inference being that the two were incompatible:

Mr. Robert Wedderburn – or Robertus Wedderburn, as he delighteth to designate himself, is a man of colour – something the colour of a toad's back; plomp and puffy as a porpoise, and the magnitude of his caput makes

¹¹⁹ Marcus Wood has examined the racist stereotyping of 'The New Union Club', including its utility for galvanising working-class racism, at length. Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 165-172.

it manifest that nature cut him out for a counsellor, had not the destinies decreed that he should cut out cloth.¹²⁰

These caricatures of Wedderburn demonstrate a popular perception of him, both as a political reformer and more prominently as a black public figure. Both represented the perceived ridiculousness of Wedderburn's pretensions to cultural and intellectual parity with his white peers. It did not matter that in reality his speeches at Hopkins Street were no more or less dignified than those of his white radical contemporaries, such as Hunt or Carlile. Their ambitions of respectability met with some success, even without the benefit of associations with well-to-do individuals, as Wedderburn had when he met Wilberforce in 1820. Such an ambition, if Wedderburn ever held it, was rendered unattainable in the popular imagination by nothing so much as the colour of his skin.

By 1830, Wedderburn's continuing commitment to antislavery agitation (and especially his vocal support of relatively privileged parliamentary abolitionists) alienated him further from his former radical contemporaries, who saw it as an unwelcome distraction from the cause of improving conditions for the 'wage-slaves' in British manufactories. Richard Carlile's shift against abolitionism was a good indicator of how even Wedderburn's closest ultra-radical allies became hostile to the cause. Carlile's preface to a memoir of a young British 'wage-slave' appearing in *The Lion* in February 1828 demonstrated that his position was, at best, ambivalent:

The religion and the black humanity of Mr. Wilberforce seem to have been entirely of a foreign nature. Pardon is begged, if an error is about to be

¹²⁰ *The Hull Packet and Original Weekly Commercial, Literary and General Advertiser*, 3 March 1823, p. 3.

wrongfully imputed; but the Publisher has no knowledge, that Mr. Wilberforce's humane advocacy for slaves, was ever of that homely kind, as to embrace the region of the home-cotton-slave-trade.¹²¹

The reference to Wilberforce's 'black humanity' was reminiscent of Cruikshanks' representation of him presiding over 'The New Union' of abolitionists and debauched black people, in the bottom right-hand corner of which a black pauper could be seen kicking a white sailor out of the room (fig. 6.2). By February 1829, Carlile had incorporated anti-black racism into his anticlerical rhetoric. Following on from an anecdote about baboons stealing supplies from soldiers stationed at the Cape of Good Hope, Carlile suggested 'that if it be necessary to send missionaries to any part of Africa, it is necessary to send them to these baboons, who are as near to humanity as the negroes'.¹²² Finally, Carlile began lending his support to the proslavery lobby, and by 1834 he was printing and selling proslavery pamphlets.¹²³

¹²¹ *The Lion*, 1:5 (1828), p. 145.

¹²² *The Lion*, 3:6 (1829), p.168-170.

¹²³ See, for example, Henry Simmons, *Third Letter to the Right Hon. Earl Grey, First Lord of The Treasury &c. on the Question of Negro Emancipation* (London: Richard Carlile, 1834).

solely from political differences. Yet despite sharing their disdain for the clergy (most clearly represented in *Cast Iron Parsons*), Wedderburn gradually became ostracised from this ultra-radical circle. His appreciation for the antislavery work of the ‘saints’ in parliament made him appear inconsistent in his political line, while his rough take on domestic politics looked increasingly old-fashioned. Early in 1828, he had established a new preaching house in Whites Alley, Chancery Lane, but found himself unable to compete with his new, respectable-radical contemporaries.¹²⁵ By June the same year, the chapel at Whites Alley had closed down, and Wedderburn’s circle was less inclined than ever to associate with him.

The decisive break came on 11 November 1830, when Wedderburn was tried for ‘keeping a disorderly house’ – probably a brothel – in Featherbed Lane, in which the prosecution reported that ‘the character of the house was clearly proved’. Despite Wedderburn’s repeated insistence that ‘he kept, and should always keep, a house for destitute women,’ he was convicted and sentenced to twelve months’ hard labour. It is telling of how obscure Wedderburn had become that the news reporter on the case had confused him with one of his former circle, erroneously stating that he was ‘one of the persons tried with Thistlewood for the Cato-street conspiracy’.¹²⁶ In any case, this decidedly unrespectable conviction led to a permanent fracture between Wedderburn and the ultra-radical underworld with whom he had associated for fifteen years or more. While he continued to hold an interest in radical activities – for example attending an anticlerical speech given by Robert Taylor in 1834 – he never again took a lead role in the movement for political reform in Britain.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ McCalman, ‘Introduction’, pp. 30-31.

¹²⁶ *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser*, 13 November 1830, p. 2.

¹²⁷ McCalman, ‘Introduction’, p. 34.

Wedderburn's second stint in prison gave him time to produce one final tract on the issue of slavery, *An Address to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux*. Written in January 1831 and only recently rediscovered, this text represents an extensive revision of Wedderburn's stances on both slavery and political activism, in the light of which the latter part of his political life must be re-examined.¹²⁸ Aside from introducing numerous new biographical details (some of which are detailed above), the *Address* presented Wedderburn's readers with a respectful, measured authorial tone entirely distinct from the work he produced in collaboration with the London radical circle.

Now beneath the notice of his former circle, Wedderburn was free to pursue his own line on antislavery. Even Davison and Carlile, who had sold all of Wedderburn's previous writing from their shops, wanted nothing to do with his *Address*. Instead it was published by John Ascham, a jobbing publisher and bookseller with no discernible political affiliations. Wedderburn's final printed work represented a remarkable and disturbing reassessment of his position on slavery and its abolition. The fiery articles of *The Axe*, fuelled by the insurrectionary zeal of the Barbados uprising, saw a slave-led revolution in Jamaica as both desirable and necessary. *The Horrors of Slavery*, published in the wake of the Demerara uprising amid a vitriolic personal spat between Wedderburn and his half-brother, illustrated the evils attendant on the continuation of slavery, inferring if not directly stating that its parliamentary abolition was at hand. The *Address*, on the other hand, represents if

¹²⁸ The only known copy of this text is in the Rhodes House Library at the University of Oxford. While the style of the text bears little in common with, for example, the *Axe*, much of its content suggests that Wedderburn was in fact its author. For example, it revisited the issue of Methodist extortion, including a misconception about the nature of Methodist ministries in the West Indies. The fact the Wedderburn's name appears only on the back page and not on the title page indicates that he was not being used to take legal responsibility for another author's ideas, as with George Cannon's ghost-written tracts. Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham*, pp. 1-16.

anything an unusually *moderate* viewpoint on emancipation, at times even flirting with anti-abolitionist sentiments.

After giving a brief biographical sketch, detailing the events of his childhood with none of the anger that characterised *The Horrors of Slavery*, Wedderburn set out his position within the ideological topography of British abolitionism: ‘I have always considered, that the condition of slaves was far superior to that of European labourers, and therefore could never hold my hand up to support those ignorant fanatics, who were so frequently troubling parliament with petitions against slavery’.¹²⁹ This might seem to mirror Carlile’s earlier statements regarding Wilberforce’s supposed neglect of the rights of British labourers, but Wedderburn went on to advertise his ‘equitable plan for the emancipation of the slaves’ in terms of ‘the benefit and safety of the proprietors, as well as [...] the advantage of the overseers and book-keepers’.¹³⁰ This could hardly be more at odds with the anti-establishment, working-class principles that underpinned the radical movement of the 1810s and 1820s to which Wedderburn had once belonged.

Wedderburn went on in his *Address* to present a comprehensive ameliorationist argument, absolutely rejecting the prevailing abolitionist position – by this time even supported by moderates such as Fowell Buxton – of immediate universal emancipation.¹³¹ His Spencean roots showed through in his emphasis on land-ownership as the foundation of political worth, but much of his argument echoed the paternalism of the proslavery lobby. For Wedderburn, slaves’ exclusion from owning personal property shielded them from the worst difficulties faced by European labourers:

¹²⁹ Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham*, p. 4.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ See Matthews, *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement*, pp. 135-180.

Now, as slaves, they are landholders; but when free, they will be dispossessed of this necessary foundation of human happiness [...] In a state of slavery, there is no seizing for rent or taxes, no casting into prison for debt, no starving families obligated to destroy themselves, or their offspring, for want of provision; excepting in a few instances, no separation of relatives takes place: in war or peace there is no alteration of the situation of the slaves; [...] no remorse for crimes, that being unknown to them; as slavery does not admit of such – their time being fully occupied with work, and they being amply provided with every thing necessary for their comfort.¹³²

Like a number of contemporaneous proslavery advocates, Wedderburn's support for the continuation of slavery was predicated on the notion that slaves would be putatively less comfortable and secure in the event of immediate emancipation. He still needed to demonstrate, however, his conviction that the continuation of slavery was not only beneficial but desirable to the slaves themselves. Calling once again on the old rhetorical technique of anecdote, he furnished the reader with examples of slaves turning down the opportunity of freedom:

During the period I have been in this country, I have had an opportunity of conversing with four intelligent slaves; one a female, my brother's wife [...] I proposed to her, to stop in this country and be free [...] Her opinion was in no way changed – preferring slavery in Jamaica, to freedom in this country; as she was poor, and happy there. This female slave was decided in her

¹³² Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham*, pp. 4-5.

judgement that her master ought not to lose his money that was given for her, and she likewise made this judicious observation: - that should the government set the slaves free, they ought to indemnify the owners for the loss they would thereby sustain, as the law originally sanctioned the traffic.¹³³

Wedderburn here placed the slave's voice into the debate around emancipation as he always had, but now suggested, disturbingly, that the interest of slaves and slave-owners were held in common.

Wedderburn went on to attack the methods of abolitionist orators, seeming to turn on the position he himself had occupied at Hopkins Street and in *The Horrors of Slavery*. 'It is easy for an orator to work upon the feelings his auditors, respecting the supposed horrid state of slavery', he wrote, presumably drawing on his own experiences as an antislavery preacher, 'without any consideration of the West India proprietors' right by law'.¹³⁴ Apparently forgetting the descriptions of slave punishments he himself had given in the *Horrors of Slavery*, he went on to attack the 'advocates of slave emancipation' of the 1790s for the 'base practise' of 'exhibiting pictures of the different modes of punishing slaves, with the intent of making horrified impressions upon the public in general'.¹³⁵ Wedderburn went on to explain that he had rarely seen such torture employed during his time in Jamaica.

It is difficult to see why Wedderburn chose to represent West Indian slavery in such a sanitised manner, or why he suddenly began to value the economic rights of the slave-owner as equal to the human rights of the slave, stating for example that 'it

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

is quite just to set the slave free, and it is equally unjust to rob the master of his value'.¹³⁶ This change in stance once again raises the possibility of externally-imposed changes to the text. However, there was very little motive for any such edition. By 1831, Wedderburn was no longer a central figure in London's radical scene, and with parliamentary abolitionists increasingly agitating for immediate emancipation, the moderate plan presented in *The Address* was hardly controversial. While a comparison with a manuscript letter written by Wedderburn during the same year strongly suggests that the *Address* was copy-edited, there was little in its content to indicate that editorial intervention went beyond basic grammatical corrections.¹³⁷

If Wedderburn's stance on immediate emancipation had been reversed since he wrote *The Axe*, it should be noted that he retained some of his old principles in the *Address*. While he did now argue for the continuation of West-Indian slavery as an institution, *The Address* did not discount the possibility of future slave emancipation. For example, Wedderburn placed emphasis on the centrality of black agency and self-emancipation as a means to the gradual and 'equitable' abolition of slavery: 'I hold it right that a slave ought to have a law made in his favour, to demand his release from his master when he can purchase his freedom, or that he can choose another owner'.¹³⁸ Wedderburn brought forward from the *Axe* a conviction that black people should be involved in the judiciary process, suggesting that 'the slaves, under certain limitations, have the right of giving evidence, and sitting as jurors'.¹³⁹ Indeed, the very conditions outlined in the *Address* for the continuation of West Indian slavery were a realigning of legal and political rights to give slaves opportunities to earn their

¹³⁶ Ibid., p. 7.

¹³⁷ See BL, Add MSS., 27808, 'Robert Wedderburn to F[rances] Place, 22 March 1831'

¹³⁸ Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*, p. 5.

¹³⁹ Ibid., pp. 6-7.

own money by, for example, curing bacon and growing extra corn crops in fallow fields, thus enabling them to purchase their own freedom on a case-by-case basis. Wedderburn's *Address* was unique among the vast numbers of pro- and antislavery pamphlets published in the early 1830s in that it offered his promised 'plan for the emancipation of the slaves' without requiring the abolition of slavery.

Wedderburn also renewed his attack on the conduct of Methodist missionaries in the West Indies, by linking their 'extorting money from the slaves, under the pretence of directing them to heaven' to the continuation of their enslavement. Wedderburn's suggestion to the Methodists to atone for what he saw as their extortion of the slaves was again linked to his plan for self-emancipation. Methodist missionaries, according to Wedderburn, 'ought to be honest enough to pay back these monies, so long received by them, into a savings' bank, to enable their black brethren to purchase their freedom'.¹⁴⁰ Wedderburn's plan even included a proviso to prevent 'deluded slaves' from being swindled in such a manner, 'to see that the property of their slaves is not extorted from them by any pretence whatsoever'.¹⁴¹ Wedderburn envisaged a co-operative movement towards the simultaneous peaceful self-emancipation of the slaves and compensation for the planters, completely bypassing the need for a single parliamentary bill imposing emancipation on planters from above.

Regardless of his misguided new approach, Wedderburn had matured as a writer since he last published without significant editorial intervention in 1824. Moreover, his ability to mould his message to his intended readership, attuned to the global political context of the time, had obviously been sharpened. The Baptist War was still eleven months away when Wedderburn wrote his *Address* in January 1831,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., p. 14.

and the prospect of immediate abolition, even as it gained momentum, was causing friction in parliament. Brougham might not initially seem the obvious person to whom to address such a pamphlet, since he no longer held a vote in the House of Commons. Yet the Lord Chancellor shared many of Wedderburn's objectives, including parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery. Famously, he had acted as the 'Queen's lawyer' during the Queen Caroline affair, earning him plaudits among the radicalised working classes.¹⁴² As Lord Chancellor, his position was mostly ceremonial, but he still retained a vote in the House of Lords and wielded significant influence in Commons, especially among Whig MPs. Like Wedderburn, he was critical of the Established Church, to the extent that one clergyman judged 'his present appointment [to the office of Lord Chancellor] one of the severest blows which could have been inflicted on the Church of God'.¹⁴³ Perhaps most importantly, Brougham, like Wedderburn, had kept a close eye on the rebellions taking place in the West Indies in 1816 and 1823.¹⁴⁴ On 1 June 1824, for example, he had delivered a 'marathon' speech in Commons calling for an inquest into John Smith's death, and recommending that the slaves in Demerara be educated in preparation for their gradual emancipation.¹⁴⁵

Wedderburn ensured that his embarrassing conviction did not immediately prejudice the socially and politically elite Brougham against him by simply bending the truth. 'The cause of my imprisonment', he stated, 'arises from having let out furnished lodgings, though I did not reside on the premises; I was made to suffer through the misconduct of the tenants, who unfortunately (for them and myself) were

¹⁴² Lobban, Michael, 'Brougham, Henry Peter, first Baron Brougham and Vaux (1778–1868)', in *ODNB* [Online] Available from: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/3581> (Accessed 15/02/2015).

¹⁴³ *The Morning Post*, 25 November 1830, p. 2.

¹⁴⁴ Craton, *Testing the Chains*, p. 289.

¹⁴⁵ *The Morning Chronicle*, 2 June 1824, pp. 5-6.

addicted to drunkenness and noise; which gave rise to the indictment against me for nuisance'.¹⁴⁶ Wedderburn had mitigated his own crimes, and presented himself as, of all things, a respectable, moderate gradualist.

In reality, however, extreme poverty and ever-decreasing social capital continued to drag Wedderburn deeper into criminality. Upon his release, he set up another 'house for destitute women' – in reality a brothel and pornography shop – at No. 8, Field Lane in the notorious area of Saffron-Hill.¹⁴⁷ In February 1832, only three months after his release from prison, he was in court again. This time he had been indicted for the much more serious crime of attempting to 'burke' (garrotte) a woman named Mary Ann Jevitt at his house. A local landlord, hearing a cry of 'murder' coming from Wedderburn's house at nine o'clock on the morning of 11 February, had rushed to the house on Field Lane and found Jevitt with her arms and legs bound by a cord, which was also wrapped tightly around her neck. She 'appeared to be in a dying state'.¹⁴⁸ By this point a local constable named Waddington had arrived, and upon Jevitt informing him that Wedderburn had bound her, he took Wedderburn into custody. At court, Wedderburn stated that Jevitt had come to the house, drunk and raving, at seven that morning, pulling the clothes from the beds and throwing water over the lodgers. Wedderburn admitted to tying her arms and legs and placing her in a cellar, 'to keep her there until she became sober'. He did not reply to the magistrates questions regarding the cord around Jevitt's neck.¹⁴⁹ The following Monday, when Jevitt was well enough to come to court, she accused Wedderburn, along with his associates John Dunningham and William Rose, of a sustained and

¹⁴⁶ Wedderburn, *Address to Lord Brougham*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴⁷ 'Waddington said that part of the house was kept as a brothel, and in the front Wedderburn sold obscene books and prints, some of which, the most filthy that can be imagined, the officer produced'. *The Morning Post*, 13 February 1832, p. 4.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

violent attack in which she was sexually assaulted, punched, kicked and beaten with a log of wood. Wedderburn this time responded that he had bound her arms and legs ‘to prevent her laying violent hands upon herself’, insisting that ‘my intentions were good, though the law appears to be against me’.¹⁵⁰ Dunningham and Rose made no defence.

The magistrate found all three men guilty, though he regretted ‘that the law did not justify him in dealing with them to the extent their brutality deserved’.¹⁵¹ Each was fined a mere £5 each, to be imprisoned for two months in the event of default. Given Wedderburn’s desperate poverty, it is unclear as to whether he was able to pay this fine. In any case, he did not immediately go free. This may have been beneficial to his safety, however. When Wedderburn’s female associate Ann Whittingham stepped out into the street following the hearing, she was mobbed ‘and nearly every part of her dress torn from her back, and no doubt she would have been killed on the spot had it not been for the timely assistance of some officers’.¹⁵² Wedderburn, who had once made his living exciting crowds of working-class radicals into states of furious indignation, now in his dotage had himself cause to fear mob justice. While he maintained an interest in anticlerical and anti-establishment politics, Wedderburn never again attained the degree of respect and infamy he had accrued during his Hopkins Street days, and he died in poverty and near-total obscurity in December 1834 or early January 1835 – though not without the satisfaction of seeing a bill for the emancipation of his ‘oppressed countrymen’ passed in parliament. He was buried in London on 4 January 1835.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ *The Morning Chronicle*, 21 February 1832, p. 4.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Thomas, *Telling West-Indian Lives*, p. 116.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this chapter has been on Wedderburn's antislavery corpus. Yet it is impossible to consider his early antislavery work without the context of the politically radical social circles in which he mixed. Politically galvanised by Thomas Spence in 1814, the anti-establishment views inculcated by Wedderburn's traumatic childhood experiences of slavery found expression in political radicalism and abolitionism. Bussa's rebellion in Barbados in 1816 provided the catalyst for an innovative plan for a bloodless slave-led revolution in his home country of Jamaica, published in his periodical *The Axe Laid to the Root* in 1817. In Wedderburn's plan, the tropes of Spence's imagined agrarian utopia – common land-ownership, free universal education, abolition of both capital and corporal punishment – were enmeshed with his own embittered hatred of plantocratic tyranny and Christian hypocrisy. The result was a text which struggled to present a coherent imaginary, vacillating between millenarian insurrectionism (when addressed to the planters) and pacifist stoicism (when addressed to the slaves). The media furore surrounding Bussa's rebellion combined with the contraction in popular support for slave emancipation effectively prevented Wedderburn from inciting in Jamaica the type of armed insurrection seen in Barbados the preceding year. Nevertheless, the language and tone of the *Axe* bears much resemblance to the politically radical publications of his British peers.

While the threat of a prosecution for sedition hung over Wedderburn as a producer of published tracts, his status as a licenced Unitarian minister afforded his verbal discourse a degree of protection from the increasingly draconian anti-radical approach espoused by the Home Office, legitimised under the auspices of the Six Acts in late 1819. The dissolution of his partnership with Thomas Evans and the

increasingly moderate remnants of the Spencean Philanthropists in the summer of 1819 marked the beginning of a period of blatant anti-government and anticlerical activism which fed from and back into a militant perspective on abolition. Lord Sidmouth, who had tried and failed to indict Wedderburn on charges of sedition for holding a radical abolitionist meeting on 9 August 1819, responded by targeting him with a blasphemy charge, leading to his imprisonment for two years from May 1820.

Either his time in custody or a visit from Wilberforce led Wedderburn to re-examine the relationship between his radicalism and abolitionism, and after 1822 he no longer blended the two together. For example, when in 1824 he responded to an antislavery article in the popular newspaper *Bell's Life in London*, he gave anecdotes from his own life on a plantation without comment on the rebellion in Demerara, even though that was surely what had prompted the initial article. Similarly, *The Horrors of Slavery*, published in 1824, contained no discernible call for radical mobilisation, armed or otherwise, either in Britain or the West Indies, limiting itself instead to a recitation of Wedderburn's own experiences under the system of slavery. Yet even though *The Horrors of Slavery* was published and distributed through Wedderburn's existing radical social network, working-class support for abolitionism was waning while anti-black racism became more pervasive across Britain's entire social topography. Wedderburn himself had been the target of racist caricature in both news reportage and satirical visual culture, and by 1828 such ideas had permeated his own social network. The anti-abolitionist and increasingly racist character of the radical network of which Wedderburn was a part made his associations with them and Wilberforce's parliamentary abolitionists incompatible. Given the increased emphasis placed on 'respectability' by radicals such as Carlile and Taylor, Wedderburn's

earlier association with the pornographer George Cannon, and especially his conviction in 1830 for running a brothel, led to his ostracisation from their network.

Under these social circumstances Wedderburn was able to devise a highly pragmatic and unusually moderate model for gradual slave emancipation, published in early 1831 as *An Address to Lord Brougham*. Like the *Axe*, this tract emphasised the centrality of slave agency in effecting emancipation. However, the *Address to Lord Brougham* had been purged of all trace of the insurrectionary zeal and anti-authoritarian tone which had characterised Wedderburn's early antislavery work, favouring instead a measured, respectful attitude designed to maximise the chances of its being taken seriously by its titular addressee. More importantly, perhaps, it represented the extent to which Wedderburn had divorced himself from his radical peers, pursuing instead a system of slave emancipation from within the existing British West Indian colonial political establishment.

The seediness of Wedderburn's subsequent alleged criminal behaviour as much as his obscurity indicates that by 1832 his social and political capital were well and truly expended, though it tells us little about how the *Address to Lord Brougham* was received. Nevertheless, in his thirty-year writing career, Wedderburn was the most prolific black author of the period. For as long as he was able to accommodate his antislavery discourse within the framework established by his radical peers in London, Wedderburn remained an influential actor in a network of working-class political mobilisation. However, following his imprisonment between 1820 and 1822, he recognised that the cause of abolition transcended the social boundaries of class. His social circle, unable to reconcile his consolidated abolitionist position with their own developing ideas of class and race – both of which demanded a Manichean negative against which to function – rejected him. Wedderburn's final, misguided

position on slavery was defined neither by his relationship to his peers nor his own experiences, but rather by what he saw as a pragmatic commitment to the cause of freedom for slaves in the West Indies.

Conclusion

James Olney has suggested that if a person were to read dozens of early black autobiographies, ‘a sense not of uniqueness but of overwhelming *sameness* is sure to be the result [...] he is sure to come away dazed by the mere repetitiveness of it all: seldom will he discover anything new or different but only, always more and more of the same.’¹ Certainly, a number of discursive elements recurred throughout much black life writing of the British abolitionist era. However, an investigation into how and why some of these works were produced reveals early black authors to have engaged in a comprehensively diverse range of social, political, epistemological, cultural, doctrinal, aesthetic, spiritual, and scholarly concerns. Far from being marginal figures interested solely in the issues of race and slavery, black intellectuals were invested in the full spectrum of British life. They were significant, often central, actors in British and international networks as distinct and varied as the Countess of Huntingdon’s Calvinist connexion and London’s ‘radical underworld’.² It was the unique character of the connections they made in these networks that gave their work both personality and discursive value. With this in mind, the continuities and formal qualities that historians and literary critics have used to bind early black autobiographies together into a corpus – their ‘overwhelming *sameness*’ – becomes less significant than the specific, interdependent contexts in which they were each produced. An appreciation of these contexts helps to reveal the individuality – the messily *human* characteristics – of these authors and their diverse literary

¹ James Olney, “‘I Was Born’: Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and Literature”, in Charles Davis and Henry Gates (eds.), *The Slave’s Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 148.

² Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 1-4.

productions. This thesis, therefore, has sought to demonstrate the overwhelming *uniqueness* of early black writing.

Nevertheless, particular networks and concerns were more widely influential among black writers than others. Evangelical Christianity, and particularly Methodism, was a significant factor in almost all the writing under discussion: Ukawsaw Gronniosaw and Ottobah Cugoano were both professed Calvinists; Boston King and John Jea were Episcopal Methodists operating within British Arminian networks; and the rational Unitarianism pervading Robert Wedderburn's later works grew partly from his disdain for Methodism. Manifestly, the comparative readiness of evangelical networks to support the publication of black autobiography was related to their stances on slavery and abolition. This did not mean, however, that all black writers operating within evangelical networks unilaterally wrote abolitionist literature. Gronniosaw's Calvinist devotional autobiography largely reflected the paternalist proslavery stance of his patrons and peers. King's memoir, while clearly critical of slavery, was extremely careful not to appear anything like a 'radical' abolitionist text, since the Methodists in his network were keen to promote good relations with 'respectable' Tories like William Wilberforce. Similarly, Jea's antislavery rhetoric, while always present, was subordinated to his evangelising mission when he was in Britain – a tendency which became especially pronounced during his time in Liverpool. Conversely, the two most outwardly abolitionist authors in this study, Cugoano and Wedderburn, depended far less on evangelical networks for the publication of their work, and the most popular, Ignatius Sancho, had little to say on the subject of religious nonconformity.³

³ Sancho once mentioned that he had 'turned Methodist,' though Carretta has suggested that this was intended ironically. Ignatius Sancho, *Letters of the Late Ignatius Sancho, an African*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin 1998), pp. 34, 263 n. 10.

Modern scholarship has long explored the links between evangelism and abolition in Britain.⁴ However, the relationship between British Methodism and antislavery has yet to receive a dedicated full-length study.⁵ Chapters 1, 4 and 5 of this thesis demonstrate that the associations between these two movements, particularly in regard to their appeals to black people free and enslaved, were extremely fluid and complex. As Methodism grew from a popular revivalist tradition in the mid-eighteenth century into a more ‘respectable’, hierarchical connexion in the late 1790s, through decades of secessions and turmoil in the 1800s and 1810s, and finally emerging as a rigidly structured organisation under the premiership of Jabez Bunting after 1820, so its stance on abolition developed. This thesis has examined how some of these developments affected specific networks and the black writers within them, but a more comprehensive analysis of Methodism and slavery in eighteenth-century Britain would be both useful to scholars of these movements and instructive for future studies into early black writing.

The conflict between political radicalism and antiradicalism also provided a fruitful environment for black writing during this period. Like evangelical groups, reformist and conservative networks alike saw supporting the publication and/or distribution of black writing as a means of demonstrating their commitment to ideal of liberty. Thus all black writing produced in support of either side of this broad political divide espoused antislavery sentiments. However, the writing supported by

⁴ Shorter studies include John Coffey, “‘Tremble, Britannia!’: Fear, Providence and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1758-1807”, *English Historical Review*, 127:527 (2012), pp. 844-881; David Hempton, ‘Popular Evangelicalism and the Shaping of British Moral Sensibilities, 1770-1840’, in Donald Yerxa (ed.), *British Abolitionism and the Question of Moral Progress in History* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2012), pp. 58-80; Roger Anstey, ‘Parliamentary Reform, Methodism and Anti-Slavery Politics, 1829-1833’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 2:3 (1981), pp. 209-226; Roger Anstey, *The Atlantic Slave Trade and British Abolition, 1760-1810* (London: Macmillan, 1975), pp. 126-141, 157-235.

⁵ Christopher Brown, for example, has acknowledged the importance of Methodism in the early antislavery movement. Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 333-390.

groups with non-reformist interests – King’s ‘Memoirs’, for example – tended to avoid advocating immediate or universal emancipation, instead emphasising the need for patience and forbearance on the part of the enslaved. Given his stance on the American Revolution, Ignatius Sancho might be understood to fall at least partly into this category. On the other hand, authors like Cugoano and Wedderburn turned the language of the new working-class radical movements of which they were part and applied them to the problem of transatlantic slavery. The corruption and ‘tyranny’ of the British government, for these authors, was manifested in their cruelty towards slaves and their brutal suppression of slave uprisings. These authors tended to advocate (or at least imagine) direct, revolutionary and often violent action as the best means to securing freedom from both literal slavery and political oppression.

The relationship between popular politics and abolitionism in Britain has been the subject of a considerable amount of modern scholarly attention.⁶ Historians have long recognised that antislavery sentiments became more widespread in the late 1780s and early 1790s as part of an international wave of reformist and humanitarian sentiment arising first from the American, and then the French revolutions.⁷ A growing body of scholarship is also concerned with the impact of the Haitian revolution on British abolitionism.⁸ But, with the notable exception of McCalman’s

⁶ For some of the most authoritative, see Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 205-266; John Oldfield, *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery: The Mobilisation of Public Opinion Against the Slave Trade, 1787-1807* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995); David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery 1780-1860* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 108-195.

⁷ See, for example, Seymour Drescher, ‘The Shocking Birth of British Abolitionism’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 33:4 (2012), pp. 571-593, Drescher, *Abolition*, pp. 115-146; David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution 1770-1823* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 255-284.

⁸ See Joao Marques, ‘Four Examples of a New Equation’, in Joao Marques, Seymour Drescher and P.C. Emmer (eds.), *Who Abolished Slavery: Slave Revolts and Abolitionism: A Debate with Joao Pedro Marques* (New York: Berghahn, 2010), pp. 18-26; David Brion Davis, ‘Impact of the French and Haitian Revolutions’, in David Geggus (ed.), *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 3-9.

work on Wedderburn, few sustained studies of black authors and their place in British popular politics of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries have been undertaken.⁹ Authors such as Cugoana are routinely described as ‘radical’ or ‘subversive’ writers, but the task of tracing the specific associations between them and other established radical thinkers and activist groups had not, prior to the completion of this thesis, been undertaken. Taking into account both the social interactions which have concerned this study and the various discursive, aesthetic and generic influences on early black political writing, these connections were sufficiently complex and numerous to justify further scholarly investigation.¹⁰ In particular, the chronological boundaries of ‘black radicalism’, an idea usually deployed by historians in relation to the Black Power movements of the twentieth century, and occasionally to black rights activism in nineteenth-century America, might be usefully extended to include articulations of black resistance to older forms of hegemonic political oppression.¹¹

Black autobiography published in Britain during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was overwhelmingly male. Before the publication of Mary Prince’s *History* in 1831, no autobiographies of black women were published in Britain, and with the sole exception of Phillis Wheatley’s devotional poetry, no

⁹ Iain McCalman, ‘Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn’, in *Slavery and Abolition*, 7:2 (1986), pp. 99-117; Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 97-238; Iain McCalman, ‘Introduction’, in Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery and Other Writings* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1991), pp. 1-35.

¹⁰ See for example the connections between the discourse of sensibility and political radicalism as discussed in G. J. Barker-Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Chicago University Press, 1992), pp. 215-287.

¹¹ See, for example, Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917-1939* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); James Tyner, *The Geography of Malcolm X: Black Radicalism and the Remaking of an American Space* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Herbert Haines, *Black Radicals and the Civil Rights Mainstream, 1954-1970* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988); Manning Marable, *W.E.B. DuBois: Black Radical Democrat* (Boston, MA: Twayne, 1986).

writing by black women at all.¹² This might be accounted for by the strength of what Anna Julia Cooper in 1893 called black women's 'double enslavement', to both anti-black and patriarchal discrimination.¹³ While black women were able to produce some autobiographical accounts in the Americas during this period – such as the works of Anne Hart Gilbert and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites in Antigua – none published their life stories in Britain until 1831.¹⁴

One concern shared by all black writers during this period was that their intellectual and spiritual capacities were understood as being equal to those of their European peers. This is an orthodox finding, but this thesis has more specifically highlighted the prevalence of the notion of respectability in black writing. Whereas Sancho enacted class-specific performances of educated masculine sensibility with his white friends, Cugoano conversely demonstrated his moral rectitude through frequent allusions to his sobriety and seriousness of character. Gronniosaw and King proved their 'respectable' characters through their devotion to God, while in his hymns and sermons Jea specifically targeted supposedly immoral behaviours like drinking and swearing more closely associated with working-class lifestyles than with bourgeois culture. To be sure, Wedderburn was less concerned with respectability, but he was still careful to emphasise his rhetorical sophistication, and he was deeply invested in being perceived as an especially intelligent man. Certainly, his final

¹² Mary Prince, *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (London: F. Westley and A. H. Davis, 1831); for the first publications of Wheatley in Britain, see Vincent Carretta, *Phillis Wheatley: Biography of a Genius in Bondage* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), pp. 78-79.

¹³ Anna Cooper, 'The Intellectual Progress of the Colored Women in the United States since the Emancipation Proclamation: A Response to Fannie Barrier Williams (1893)', in Anna Cooper, *The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper: Including 'A Voice from the South' and Other Important Essays, Papers and Letters*, ed. Charles Lemert and Esme Bahn (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998), p. 202. For representations of enslaved black women during the period, see, for example, Henrice Altink, *Representations of Slave Women in Discourses on Slavery and Abolition, 1780-1838* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁴ Anne Hart Gilbert and Elizabeth Hart Thwaites, *The Hart Sisters: Early African Caribbean Writers, Evangelicals, and Radicals*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 57-114.

published text, *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*, demonstrated a far greater desire for establishment acceptance than his earlier work. In all these examples, black authors used their publications to challenge essentialist notions of Africans as less intellectually capable than Europeans. Moreover, through their intercessions in overwhelmingly white print culture, they were able to carve out for themselves a social situation well within the boundaries of self-defined 'polite', 'respectable' and 'intellectual' British networks.

Despite these achievements, it is evident that the period 1770-1830 did not see a smooth teleological increase either in creative agency or editorial control for black writers. Nor were the two necessarily coterminous. For example, Sancho, one of the earliest writers under discussion, had among the greatest degree of control over the original composition of his correspondence, but the least editorial influence over the published *Letters*, since they were edited posthumously. Conversely, Jea, one of the latest, declared absolute editorial control but was unable to enforce it due to his limited literacy; he needed an amanuensis to record his *Life*. Perhaps unsurprisingly, a correlation existed between the financial dependency of an author and the extent of a network's influence over the text. Gronniosaw had perhaps the greatest need of his network as he and his family depended on them, and the sale of the *Narrative*, for relief from their abject poverty. Similarly, King's only means of support while he was writing his 'Memoirs' (and indeed his only way back home to Sierra Leone) was Thomas Coke's Methodist network. These were the two authors whose work most closely reflected the aims of their surrounding networks. On the other hand, Cugoano, Jea and Wedderburn, as a domestic servant, sailor and tailor respectively, had their own (if sometimes irregular) sources of income. Their work was more singular and idiosyncratic in tone – and more confrontational. While the influences of each

network were still the driving factors behind the composition, publication and distribution of these works, they demonstrated less evidence of external editorial intervention than those by Gronniosaw, Sancho and King. In other words, white interlocutors and editors appear to have moderated texts more heavily when the authors in question were financially dependent upon them.

Networks' intervention in black writing did not always stop at composition. Very often, the same networks responsible for influencing the contents of early black writing were also involved in deciding where it was sold and by whom it was read. The first three editions of Gronniosaw's *Narrative* were published by the Countess of Huntingdon's preferred booksellers, and distributed in areas where support for her church was widespread. Frances Crewe's editorial intervention smoothed out some of Sancho's characteristic bawdiness and helped to frame his *Letters* as an epistolary novel of sentiment. Cugoano's *Thoughts and Sentiments* was marketed, both in Britain and France, in radical bookshops alongside reformist pamphlets. King's 'Memoirs' were published serially in the *Methodist Magazine*, which was edited and published by Thomas Coke's friend and ally George Whitfield. Jea's *Life and Hymns* were printed and sold exclusively in Portsmouth. Up until the early 1830s, Wedderburn's writing appeared in the publications of his radical peers, such as Richard Carlile's periodical *The Lion*, and the publicity generated by his public spat with Andrew Colvile in *Bell's Sporting Life* surely helped to direct the paper's working-class readership towards *The Horrors of Slavery*. In all these cases, networks of influence, at least as much as the authors themselves, helped decide who would actually *read* early black writing by guiding where, when and by whom the texts were published and sold.

This thesis has demonstrated that black intellectuals participated in a broad array of British concerns between 1770 and 1830, extending well beyond abolitionism. However, it also prompts a reconsideration of the nature of the British anti and proslavery movements. Formalised and semi-formalised groups like SEAST and the West India proprietors have often been seen as metonyms for two binary, neatly opposed factions in which everyone who wanted to abolish the slave trade and slavery stood against everyone who wanted to retain these systems.¹⁵ This thesis suggests that it would be more useful to conceive of these ‘two movements’ rather as consisting of numerous, competing, conflicting and sometimes untidily overlapping networks of interest and influence.¹⁶ In compiling the microhistories of individual authors, this study has demonstrated that these various networks thought about slavery and ethnicity in endlessly adaptable ways. Writings by Gronniosaw and Sancho, for example, bear little in common beyond the fact that their authors were black and formerly enslaved. At times, they both complained of the miseries of slavery. At others, they both saw it as necessary, either to the conversion of African pagans or to shoring up Britain’s economy after the loss of America. After the mid-1780s, black writing ceased to argue that the system was necessary, but its antislavery messages were no more unified. Cugoana and Wedderburn envisioned the system of slavery ending in the violent destruction of the slave-traders. King and Jea saw freedom as best achieved through forbearance and prayer. Each of these six authors’

¹⁵ See, for example, Steven Tomkins, *Clapham Sect: How Wilberforce’s Circle Transformed Britain* (Oxford: Lion, 2010), pp. 66-74, 80-90, 223-233; Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: the British Struggle to Abolish Slavery* (London: Macmillan, 2005), pp. 106-121.

¹⁶ See, for example, the relationship between the Wilberforce family and the slave-trading Hibberts and Pinneys, discussed in Katie Donington, ‘Transforming Capital: Slavery, Family, Commerce and the Making of the Hibbert Family’, in Catherine Hall et al, *The Legacies of British Slave Ownership: Colonial Slavery and the Formation of Victorian Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 216-218; Katie Donington, ‘The Benevolent Merchant? George Hibbert (1757-1837) and the Representation of West Indian Mercantile Identity’, unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University College London (2013), pp. 176-178; Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 232-244.

texts reflected different network of British people, each with a different way of thinking about slavery.

In this sense it may be more appropriate to think about British pro- and antislaver*ies* in the plural, rather than the singular. This approach is especially useful when considering contexts specific to localities beyond the boundaries of London. Half the authors under discussion in this thesis – Gronniosaw, King and Jea – spent more time out of London than in it, and so were largely influenced by attitudes towards slavery, politics, art and religion that were not necessarily reflective of those in the metropolis. This was most pronounced in Jea's work, since he moved from an area where slavery accounted for much of his congregations' employment, to an area where its suppression was a source of intense local pride. However, King's geographical location at Kingswood School, near Bristol, in some measure accounted for the extent to which his work represented the 'respectable' antislavery voice so expedient to Thomas Coke and his circle. Similarly, Gronniosaw lived the last years of his life in Kidderminster and Hertfordshire, where Selina Hastings' influence was strong, and his *Narrative* was published in the Calvinist hotspot of Bath. Because so many eighteenth-century networks were spatially as well as ideologically bounded, an acknowledgement of the quite specific geographies of black writings in Britain enables a greater understanding of them as both material objects to be bought and sold, and discursive artefacts to be read and understood.

Early black writing, then, was affected profoundly by the networks of association and influence that surrounded each author. While evangelical and political networks exerted the most extensive and direct forms of influence, the interventions of these outside parties produced a diversity of effects. Black authors wrote texts that ranged from proslavery Calvinist devotionals to radically insurrectionary abolitionist

polemics. All of these texts shared in common a desire to demonstrate the respectability, intelligence and spiritual parity of their black author-protagonists. However, just like the abolitionist movement, progress was neither smooth nor linear regarding black authorial and editorial control over their work. The individual character of their surrounding networks still deeply influenced black writers in Britain on the eve of abolition, just as they had when slavery was only rarely challenged. In the meantime, black writing had become unilaterally critical of slavery, but not within any single overarching aesthetic or political tradition. This reflected the multifaceted and dynamic nature of antislavery activism in Britain. As the period progressed, black authors took on an increasingly central role in the organisation, facilitation and popularisation of these activities. Black intellectuals like Gronniosaw, Sancho, Cugoano, King, Jea and Wedderburn provided links between the debates over slavery and a near-comprehensive range of other, seemingly disparate British interests. Through them, networks as disparate as the Hampshire Methodist circuit and the ultra-radical debating clubs of London could engage in the same conversations, however differently they articulated their views. What this thesis has demonstrated, above all, is that through their interactions with local, national and global networks of influence, black authors and their works helped to shape British society, just as they were shaped by it.

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