

## FOR NOTES & DOCUMENTS

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### A Radical Change of Heart: Robert Wedderburn's Last Word on Slavery

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#### Abstract

This article introduces to modern scholarship *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*, a recently rediscovered anti-abolitionist tract by the black radical author and orator Robert Wedderburn, written in 1831, towards the end of his life. It gives a brief biography of the author and introduces some of the key themes that characterised his earlier work. Questions of authenticity and authority are raised in the context of earlier appropriations of Wedderburn's already fluid authorial identity and the specific social and political circumstances surrounding the text's publication. A transcript of the text is provided with some minor elisions.

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A 'notorious firebrand'; 'a ragged Soho tailor and a notorious revolutionary conspirator'; a 'spectacular Atlantic revolutionary'; 'an intellectual organic to the Atlantic proletariat'; 'a key intellectual figure in the circulation of a new vernacular discourse'; 'a Mulatto [...] of the most contemptible description'; 'possibly a pornographer and keeper of a brothel'; a 'rebel'; a 'breeches-maker, Field-preacher, Radical Reformer, Romance writer, Circulatory Librarian, and Ambulatory dealer in drugs, deism and demoralisation in general'.<sup>1</sup> Whatever has been said of the black

writer and orator Robert Wedderburn, he could never be called predictable. Uncompromising in his opposition both to slavery and to the abuse of political power, he is routinely described as among the most radical abolitionists, black or white, active in early nineteenth-century Britain. However, an apparently anti-abolitionist tract addressed to the Lord Chancellor, Henry Brougham, written and published in 1831 and only recently rediscovered in the Rhodes House collections of the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford, suggests that this most charismatic and distinctive figure still retains the capacity to surprise his readers. This text, written and published during the fractious years preceding the passing of key colonial slave emancipation and domestic reform legislation, demonstrates that Wedderburn adopted a radically new approach to antislavery writing in his twilight years, reflecting the shifting landscape of contemporaneous British politics. The result was a characteristically idiosyncratic approach to political reform and antislavery rhetoric, as challenging as any of his earlier work.

Wedderburn was born in Kingston, Jamaica, around 1762. His father, James Wedderburn, was a Scottish surgeon and slave trader, and his mother Rosanna was an enslaved woman on his estate.<sup>2</sup> Despite his repeated claims to have been born free, he was in fact emancipated by his father in 1765.<sup>3</sup> After travelling around Jamaica for some years, eking out a living as ‘a jobbing millwright’, he joined the Royal Navy and came to Britain aboard the HMS *Nabob* in April 1779.<sup>4</sup> He married Elizabeth Ryan on 5 November 1781 before returning to the Royal Navy to serve aboard the HMS *Polyphemus*.<sup>5</sup> He had set himself up as a journeyman tailor in Shoreditch by 1795.<sup>6</sup> The radical publishers William Glendon and George Rieubau published his first tract: a freethinking doctrinal essay entitled *The Truth Self-Supported*, in around 1802.<sup>7</sup> In 1813, he met Thomas Spence, a veteran of the 1790s radical scene whose

vision for wholesale land redistribution was one of the few iterations of the earlier reform movement to successfully endure the conservative backlash of the wartime years.<sup>8</sup> After Spence's death in 1814, Wedderburn became a leading figure in the 'Spencean Philanthropists', an ultra-radical working-class debating society agitating for political reform (and in some cases hoping to incite a revolution) in Britain.<sup>9</sup> As well as publishing a short-lived radical periodical called *The Axe Laid to the Root* in 1817, Wedderburn took the lead at debates held at his 'chapel' in Hopkins Street, Soho, having himself ordained as a Unitarian minister as a defensive measure against the Home Secretary Lord Sidmouth's draconian anti-sedition legislation.<sup>10</sup> However, this only bought him time: he was charged with seditious blasphemy and imprisoned in Dorchester gaol for two years in 1820. Here he wrote the anticlerical radical pamphlet *Cast-Iron Parsons*.<sup>11</sup>

Scholars have speculated that a visit from the aging William Wilberforce in Dorchester galvanised Wedderburn to 'devote himself to the urgent cause of emancipating his West Indian brethren instead of squandering his talents on blaspheming God and subverting the King', though he had been publishing antislavery writing since at least 1817 and he continued as an active participant in radical meetings until at least 1834.<sup>12</sup> In 1824, two years after his release, he was involved in an acrimonious exchange of letters with his white paternal half-brother, Andrew Colvile, published in the popular sporting weekly *Bell's Life in London*.<sup>13</sup> This was to form the seed of Wedderburn's most complete autobiographical work and a blistering *exposé* of the sexual and physical abuse inherent in slaveholding, *The Horrors of Slavery*, published later that year.<sup>14</sup> Struggling to find work as a tailor following his conviction and increasingly out of step with the radical 'march of mind' of the late 1820s, Wedderburn dropped from the limelight of the reform movement. In

1830, he was convicted of ‘keeping a disorderly house’, most likely a brothel, and imprisoned again, this time for twelve months.<sup>15</sup> During this second stint in gaol, he wrote *An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux*, an anti-abolitionist tract that emphasised the rights of slaveholders to compensation, suggested slaves should work to purchase their own freedom individually, and attacked the methods of earlier abolitionist campaigns as vulgar and shocking. It represented a complete inversion of his former approach and style, and a significant reassessment of the position on slavery and abolition he so forcefully championed during the 1810s and 1820s. Nevertheless, this new position did little to impress his peers in the radical movement, and he never regained his status as a leader for parliamentary reform. He died during the winter of 1834/5 and was buried on 5 January 1835.<sup>16</sup>

Prior to the *Address*, Wedderburn’s written discourse was always typified, in the most general terms, by a distinctive anti-authoritarianism. While the intermixture of a number of issues was characteristic of his writing, it is possible to identify three key strands to which he returned most often. The first was a pronounced emphasis on religious free thought. This is the major constituent of Wedderburn’s written discourse that has, so far, received the least scholarly attention, though it was the most consistent and longstanding.<sup>17</sup> Beginning with *Truth, Self-Supported*, his criticism of the clergy became increasingly outspoken, reaching an apogee of direct condemnation in the pages of the *Axe*. During the 1820s his writings moved from away from this type of anticlericalism and towards the rational scepticism favoured by, for example, Richard Carlile.<sup>18</sup> Published accounts of his trial and subsequent sentencing for seditious blasphemy in 1820 attributed to him a sophisticated defence strategy based on demonstrating several inconsistencies in the Bible, though these were written by his then-publisher, the *déclassé* radical and pornographer George Cannon.<sup>19</sup> Several

short anticlerical publications with Wedderburn's name on the cover came out of Cannon's printing-house that year, though according to Ian McCalman only one—*Cast Iron Parsons*—was likely to have actually been composed by him.<sup>20</sup> By 1828, his published work had become outspokenly anti-Christian, gleefully mocking the church by proposing a new Devil-worshipping denomination called 'Christian Diabolism' in a letter printed in Carlile's radical periodical *The Lion*.<sup>21</sup>

The second persistent characteristic of Wedderburn's work is perhaps more familiar to his modern readers: a commitment to political radicalism. Eric Pencek, David Worrall, Malcolm Chase and especially McCalman have examined his leading role in London's 'radical underworld', including his close ties to the so-called 'Cato Street conspirators' and the Spencean Philanthropists.<sup>22</sup> This was reflected most clearly in his Hopkins Street speeches, but his writing was also influenced by domestic radicalism, especially during the late 1810s. The *Axe*, for example, demonstrated a particular emphasis on Spence's plan for land reform as an effector of social equality.<sup>23</sup> One of the things that made Wedderburn's writing unique was its early recognition of what Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker have termed 'the Atlantic proletariat', and more specifically its extension of the language of radical political discourse to include enslaved people in the West Indies.<sup>24</sup> While his anti-authoritarianism was nebulous in his earliest published work, it reached political maturity with the *Axe*. Here he envisaged a sophisticated plan for Spencean land reform in Jamaica, actuated by and incorporated into large-scale organised slave rebellion.<sup>25</sup> However, following his imprisonment between 1820 and 1822, Wedderburn tended to emphasise his radicalism less than his antislavery activism—at least in his published tracts. His longest single work, *The Horrors of Slavery*, for example, was dedicated to the archly anti-radical William Wilberforce, and in terms

of reformist sentiment contained only a passing mention of Wedderburn's paternal grandfather's role in the Jacobite rising of 1745.<sup>26</sup>

At least during the Peterloo years, Wedderburn's transatlantic radicalism necessarily invoked the third persistent strand of his written discourse: antislavery activism. While this is impossible to completely isolate from his radicalism and anticlericalism, several scholars—including Sue Thomas, Nadine Hunt and Edlie Wong—have focused on his articulations of resistance in the specific context of slavery and its overthrow.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, it was in descriptions of slaveholding brutality and slave insurrections that Wedderburn's writing best discovered its characteristic violent articulacy, described by Michael Morris, gratifyingly, as 'pugilistic vernacular'.<sup>28</sup> This first appeared in easily identifiable form in *The Axe Laid to the Root*, though *The Horrors of Slavery* was no less experimental or formally 'pugilistic' in its attack on slavery, nor in any way more 'respectable'. As Wong and others have pointed out, Wedderburn intensified his focus on abolitionism after Wilberforce's visit to him in Dorchester, 'but felt little need to uphold the moral imperatives of the campaign'.<sup>29</sup> In terms of form and genre, *The Horrors of Slavery* was chimerical: part-autobiography, part-personal vindication, and partly a reprint of the exchange between Wedderburn and Colvile. Its antislavery rhetoric was as confrontational as anything he had published before, but this tract was primarily a response to a personal affront, rather than a manifesto for emancipation.<sup>30</sup> Many of *The Horrors of Slavery's* 24 pages were given over to descriptions of the 'brutal lust' and 'carnal appetites' of Wedderburn's father, a 'scoundrel of a Scotchman', whose 'deep and dark iniquity' was demonstrated by his '*covertly and falsely*' contriving to buy Rosanna 'for purposes of lust'.<sup>31</sup> In the context of the letter-war with his litigious half-brother, the specificity with which he made these accusations was as brave as it was scandalous.

Even a cursory reading of his work published prior to 1831 paints a picture of Wedderburn as an outspoken, anti-authoritarian and controversial writer who above all valued independence of thought and directness in expression. The enduring popular and scholarly perception of him as an innovative, uncompromising, pointedly unrespectable, committedly radical abolitionist is therefore well-supported. The *Address to Brougham and Vaux*, however, inverted the approach to antislavery writing he had favoured in his earlier work. In many ways, it epitomized everything scholars have believed him to stand against. Reading this conflicted final tract may drastically alter our picture of this most distinctive and charismatic figure. It is necessary, then, to establish its provenance with some caution.

### **Authority and Authenticity**

Issues surrounding authority and authenticity apply more particularly to texts written by black authors during this period than to those by their white peers. A higher likelihood of illiteracy, often coupled with greater financial dependency on the social, religious and professional networks facilitating their publication, tended to lead to more extensive editorial intervention and often necessitated the use of amanuenses.<sup>32</sup> A number of scholars have raised questions over both the authorship and authenticity of most of the tracts published under Wedderburn's name, to varying degrees and resulting in a number of conclusions being drawn. His adoption of a number of authorial perspectives, tonalities and even characters complicates any reading of his work that seeks to understand it as uncomplicatedly representative of a static political or ethical perspective. Moreover, the intellectual dynamics of the radical circles in which he moved facilitated exceptionally fluid relationships between composition,

publication and authorial attribution. Establishing the ‘authenticity’ of the *Address*, therefore, requires some prior awareness of these contexts.

The most fundamental question relates to Wedderburn’s written literacy. When he married in 1781, he could not sign his own name on the wedding certificate.<sup>33</sup> He was still unable to provide a signature in 1795, when he was arraigned before the Middlesex magistrates for vagabondage.<sup>34</sup> At his trial for seditious blasphemy in 1820, he suggested, perhaps in an attempt to gain the jury’s sympathy, that ‘his sight was too bad for him to read’ Cannon’s prepared speech.<sup>35</sup> His literacy had improved somewhat by 1831, but he never attained the standard of written English that might be expected of a published author.<sup>36</sup> This has raised questions regarding the level of authorial and editorial control he had over his printed *oeuvre*. Such discussions remain hobbled by the fact that his amanuenses have yet to be positively identified. However, as Linebaugh has emphasised, limited literacy diminishes neither Wedderburn’s authorial agency nor his legitimacy as a writer.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, as Pencek has suggested, radical discourse of the early nineteenth century valued heterogeneity of expression and the free circulation of ideas, often without attribution. This destabilised authorial identities and complicates the task of identifying individual authors.<sup>38</sup> At a more mundane level, bourgeois ‘radicals’ sometimes published their more controversial views under the names of their working-class peers. McCalman has demonstrated, for example, that Cannon published a number of his own tracts under Wedderburn’s name in the fraught months after Peterloo, using him to distract the attention of an increasingly zealous and antidisestablishmentarian Home Office.<sup>39</sup> Any attribution of authorship in this context must therefore be caveated as partial and contestable.



It is not surprising, then, that the issue of authenticity has preoccupied many modern readers of Wedderburn's work. It seems increasingly clear that the Romantic notion of an essential authorial perspective, representative of a particular ontology of truth, cannot be usefully applied in analyses of Wedderburn's work. For example, McCalman, Pencek, and Thomas have all suggested that the correspondence published in the *Axe* between him and 'Miss Campbell', his half-sister in Jamaica, was entirely written by him alone.<sup>40</sup> But, as these scholars point out, this again demonstrates Wedderburn's rhetorical sophistication and authorial dexterity rather than delegitimizing these texts as 'counterfeit'. Taking into account how his writing was profoundly influenced by his participation in the anticlerical, radical and abolitionist debates of the early nineteenth century, it appears that further study of the political and material exigencies influencing him may be as fundamental to understanding Wedderburn's published work as the contents of the texts themselves.

With these qualifications in mind, some questions might be reasonably asked of the *Address*'s authenticity. First, could this text have originally been written by someone else and merely published under his name, as with the Cannon pamphlets? By the very nature of his radicalism, Wedderburn had made a number of enemies by 1831, and it is plausible to hypothesise that the *Address* was falsified in a conscious effort to undermine his position. Second, given his limited literacy, is it possible that his amanuensis or editor significantly altered the tone and content of the original manuscript or dictation, either to defend themselves from prosecution or public opprobrium, or to further their own interests? Finally, if Wedderburn did write the *Address*, to what extent did it genuinely reflect his own attitudes toward slavery and emancipation?

Despite the disparity in written competency between his contemporaneous holograph letter and the published *Address*, evidence from the text strongly suggests that Wedderburn was chiefly responsible for both initiating the latter's composition and determining its content. Most compelling is the new biographical material, which is, to an extent, borne out by official records. For example, after having 'lived eighteen months in Spanish Town, and the like period in Port-Royal', Wedderburn claimed to have come to Britain 'in the year 1779, as a gunner's servant, on board the *Nabob*, king's store ship'.<sup>41</sup> The *Nabob* was indeed a Royal Navy store ship, which set sail from Port Royal early in November 1778 and arrived in Woolwich on 15 March 1779.<sup>42</sup> Wedderburn's claim to have been a gunner's servant is also consistent with a speech he made at the Hopkins Street chapel 12 years earlier, on 3 October 1819, when he declared that 'some years back I was on board a Man of War there I learnt to prime and load and fire the great gun.'<sup>43</sup> While his name does not appear on the muster rolls for the *Nabob* (the gunner's servants, Robert Morty and Thomas Heifer, had both been on the crew since 25 October 1777, before the ship came to the Americas), it is quite possible that he enlisted using a false name.<sup>44</sup> There are several individuals listed on the muster rolls who could plausibly have been Wedderburn, and in 1824 he had expressed a fear of being identified in Jamaica by his father's associates, whom he believed 'would most certainly have trumped up some charge against me, and hung me.'<sup>45</sup> By virtue of his fiery disposition and articulate attacks on slavery, he had more reason than most to hide his identity when enlisting in the Royal Navy at Jamaica.

The *Address* was also thematically similar to Wedderburn's earlier work. It reprised his complex arguments on the relationship between Christianity and slavery, for example, rejecting parliamentary abolitionists' calls for emancipation on purely

doctrinal grounds with a characteristically confrontational freethinking rebuttal, concluding that '[w]e are not to take a jot or tittle' from the Bible's stance on slavery.<sup>46</sup> Wedderburn had always singled out Methodist missionaries in the West Indies for special censure, for example holding a debate at Hopkins Street on 10 November 1819 asking 'which is the greater crime, for the wesleyan Missionaries to preach up passive obedience to the poor Black Slaves in the west Indies, or, to extort from them at the rate of 18, 0–0–0 per annum, under the pretence of supporting the gospel'.<sup>47</sup> In the *Address*, he again suggested, repeatedly, that 'the Methodist preachers should be compelled to desist from extorting money from the slaves' and claimed to have invited the Treasurer of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society, Joseph Butterworth, to debate him at Hopkins Street.<sup>48</sup> Though not as radical in tone as his earlier works, the return to this quite unusual target for censure again suggests that Wedderburn composed the *Address*.

Similarly, Wedderburn once again raised his concern for the conditions of black working-class people in Britain in the context of slave emancipation. Each of the 'four intelligent slaves' with whom he recounted having met in England apparently chose to return to the security of slavery rather than be exposed to the financial hardships and economic uncertainty of life as a poor black person in eighteenth-century Britain.<sup>49</sup> This blurred the lines between corporeal and wage slavery in a fashion new to his corpus, but it was balanced by the story of another young man who was so badly abused in the West Indies that, with some encouragement from Wedderburn, he chose to take his chances in Britain as a free man. Indeed, even when outlining his new anti-abolitionist agenda, Wedderburn inadvertently recounted elements of his prior antislavery agitation: of the five

enslaved people he claimed to have met in Britain, he attempted to convince every one to reject the authority of the slave system and abscond from their masters.

Traces of his earlier radical agrarianism also remained in the new publication, albeit couched in far more self-consciously ‘respectable’ language. Indeed, the plan for gradual emancipation outlined in the text depended upon slaves’ participation in (if no longer their reclamation of) the agrarian economy. The principle ‘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’ could only be realised if they owned and cultivated their own lands.<sup>50</sup> If slaves ‘were allowed to breed horses, meals, and horn and cattle,’ as well as growing yams and curing meat, Wedderburn argued, ‘a man and his wife would be enabled to purchase their own children.’<sup>51</sup> This emphasis on land ownership as foundational for corporeal and political freedom was brought forward from his days in the Spencean Philanthropists. For example, when addressing the slaves of Jamaica to outline a plan for revolutionary mass self-emancipation in *The Axe*, he had insisted that ‘[a]bove all, mind and keep possession of the land you now possess as slaves; for without that freedom is not worth possessing’.<sup>52</sup> Ironically, taken in isolation, the final clause of this passage, written in 1817, anticipated elements of the gradualist agenda he posited in 1831.

Despite constituting a near-complete betrayal of the type of radical antislavery activism Wedderburn had promoted during the 1810s and 1820s, the *Address* was by no means divorced from contemporaneous reformist discourse. Marcus Wood has demonstrated the unstable and sometimes dysfunctional relationship between radicalism and antislavery before 1820; by 1831, the centre ground of British working-class politics *vis-à-vis* the issue of slavery had shifted decidedly against the position occupied by parliamentary abolitionists.<sup>53</sup> Like *The Horrors of Slavery*, the

*Address* retained some of Wedderburn's characteristic independence of thought in addressing one such figure in (putatively) respectful tones. What separated the *Address* from his earlier work, however, was that it reinforced rather than counterpoised reformist anti-abolitionist orthodoxies. For example, Wedderburn claimed to 'have always considered that the condition of the slaves were far superior to European labourers' and that the 'nobility and gentry, who court popularity,' should 'consider the poor of their own country, before they reduce the slaves to the same state of starvation, by making them free.'<sup>54</sup> The exact same sentiment was expressed by a number of radicals of the period, not least vociferously by the virulently racist William Cobbett.<sup>55</sup> The *Address* was also linked to the radical movement through its publisher. John Ascham, erstwhile pornographer and major seller of pirated editions of Shelley's *Queen Mab* (the so-called 'Chartist Bible'), was a known associate of Wedderburn's fellow former Spencean Philanthropist and Cato Street conspirator, Arthur Thistlewood.<sup>56</sup> The text, therefore, was similar to Wedderburn's earlier work in its combination of domestic radicalism and antislavery, both in content and in relation to its means of production. The key difference was that each of these was approached far more conventionally than before.

In January 1831, Henry Brougham, the new Lord Chancellor, was the obvious choice as an addressee for such a reformist pamphlet on slavery. Unlike, for example, Thomas Fowell Buxton, his abolitionism was closely bound to an outspoken criticism of the Duke of Wellington's administration and a longstanding commitment to parliamentary reform.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, he had always presented himself as the hard-headed, pragmatic alternative to the evangelical Westminster abolitionists. A specialist in colonial policy, Brougham sought to lend the abolitionist cause an attractive sense of rational credibility, expressed in the conservative humanitarianism

of his 1803 *Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers*.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, from the time he joined the Abolition Committee in 1804, Brougham had taken a self-consciously ‘moderate’ stance on the issue of colonial slavery. Keen to be perceived, as Robin Blackburn puts it, as ‘a politician not a “Saint”’, Brougham took particular pains to demonstrate his sensitivity to both planters’ economic interests and colonial security against slave uprisings.<sup>59</sup>

To an even greater extent than Wilberforce, he remained categorically opposed to emancipation after 1807.<sup>60</sup> However, the ‘mercurial’ Brougham sensed a shift in the public mood after the Demerara slave uprising in 1823, and helped to found the Society for the Mitigation and Gradual Abolition of Slavery that year.<sup>61</sup> During his campaign for election as one of the four representatives for Yorkshire in August 1830, he leaned heavily on his antislavery credentials (including vocal support from Wilberforce) and began calling for immediate emancipation.<sup>62</sup> His new stance merely reflected the overwhelming support that he had witnessed for the ‘immediatist’ notion proposed at the first meeting of the newly-formed Anti-Slavery Society in March, but he had not had the time to formulate a clear vision of how this might be achieved.<sup>63</sup> His speech in Commons on 13 July, which had called for immediate discussion of the issue of emancipation in the House without suggesting any practical plan for enacting it, was widely reprinted in newspapers and in pamphlet form.<sup>64</sup> On Brougham’s promotion to Lord Chancellor in November 1830, some wrote to him with their own plans for ‘equitable’ slave emancipation on the assumption that he would take budgetary responsibility for the process. Wedderburn’s *Address* was one, but not the only such response. In December 1830, for example, an anonymous ‘West Indian’ planter apparently sent Brougham the outline of a scheme for gradual abolition based on heavy taxation of slave labour, which was published in

1833.<sup>65</sup> The gradualism of the *Address*, therefore, not only reflected the ambivalence of extra-parliamentary radicals towards the prospect of immediate emancipation, but also attempted to give some substance to the antislavery ideals articulated by an apparently well-situated establishment reformer.

This raises the issue of sincerity. Wedderburn regularly employed a vicious irony in his attacks on establishment authority figures. Indeed, the piece Wedderburn had published most recently to the *Address*—a short anti-clerical article named ‘The Holy Liturgy’ printed in Carlile’s periodical *The Lion* in March 1828—was praised by the radical sceptic Robert Taylor specifically for its ‘exquisite sarcasm’.<sup>66</sup> For all its deferential overtones, the *Address* was not as uncharacteristically respectful as it appears upon a superficial reading. Besides clearly rejecting the immediatist position that had won Brougham the Yorkshire election in 1830, the text seemed to goad its nominal addressee on a number of specific points. For example, Wedderburn’s complaint about the ‘base practice’ employed by abolitionists of the 1780s and 1790s, ‘of exhibiting pictures of the different modes of punishing slaves’ may have been made mindful of Brougham’s Commons speech, in which he had recounted instances of slaves being tortured to death for minor acts of defiance.<sup>67</sup> Similarly, Wedderburn’s unfavourable comparison of the conditions endured by ‘European labourers’ with enslaved people echoed those Brougham had described as ‘outrageous assertions’ which he would not ‘stoop to answer’. These examples, taken alongside Wedderburn’s rather assiduous early assurance that he had ‘no reason to approve of slavery’, imply that the text represented a sincere, rather than ironic counter-proposal to Brougham’s ill-defined immediatist approach, but that it was not completely lacking the distinctive sting of radical critique.<sup>68</sup> As in *The Axe*, the recital of the injustices and abuses of power engendered by slavery presented in the *Address* were

paired with criticisms of the sufferings of the urban poor in Britain under an unreformed and corrupt political system.

Wedderburn's willingness to consider a new agenda for emancipation is less surprising in the broader political context of the period. The fraught atmosphere of the early-1830s slavery debates, bound up as they were in a series of hotly contested elections, led to a number of surprising accommodations, compromises and sudden changes of opinion. This is especially true of leading figures in the movement for parliamentary reform. Cobbett, for example, converted to an anti-slavery position (albeit with dubious sincerity) during his contest against a West India merchant in Oldham in 1832.<sup>69</sup> Brougham himself faced criticism during the elections of 1830 over his own, seemingly sudden *volte-face* on the gradualist position he had publically advocated seven years earlier.<sup>70</sup> In this environment, Wedderburn's sudden change of approach does not stand out as particularly incoherent or even unusual.

Finally, several additional factors help to establish that the *Address* was not written by an outside party in an attempt to undermine him, or edited substantially enough to reverse or otherwise materially impact on its primary message. Unlike any of the texts ghost-written by Cannon, Wedderburn's name appeared only at the very end of the text, and not anywhere on the title page. Moreover, in 1831, positing a gradualist emancipation agenda would hardly have besmirched his character, especially among the radical circles in which he mixed.<sup>71</sup> Towards the end of the text, Wedderburn reassured his nominal addressee that the 'cause of my imprisonment arises from having let out furnished lodgings' to tenants 'who unfortunately (for them and myself) were addicted to drunkenness and noise'.<sup>72</sup> This was a subtle misrepresentation of the far more disreputable actual charge of 'keeping a disorderly house', represented in press coverage of the trial as a brothel and pornographer's



shop.<sup>73</sup> All this implies, at least, that the text was not the result of an attempt to defame him. As to the question of an over-zealous amanuensis or editor, it should be borne in mind that although he was not perfectly literate, Wedderburn's holograph letter to Francis Place demonstrates that he could read and write to a perfectly functional extent by 1831.<sup>74</sup> He would have been able to recognise if the person recording his testimony was grossly misrepresenting him.

While none of these individual factors alone is conclusive proof of the 'authenticity' of this document, taken together they represent a compelling case that Wedderburn was primarily responsible for its composition. New biographical information consistent with government records and obscure testimony; the reprisal of several tropes and details threaded throughout his existing corpus, (though sometimes represented in a radically different light); and a lack of evidence to suggest the text was ghost-written or fundamentally altered—these factors all point to the text having been written by Wedderburn himself (at least to the same extent as can be said of his earlier work), and sincere in intent. There is, however, no denying that the *Address* represents an unsettling, even disappointing departure from his earlier work. The final question, relating to the influence of outside parties on his views, is one for further historical investigation and interpretive analysis. Such investigations may be key to understanding his disturbing change of heart.

### ***An Address to Lord Brougham and Vaux***

[Image 1.png – title page of the *Address*]

**[p. 3]** MY LORD,

The individual who now takes the liberty of addressing you, is a poor old man, a native of Jamaica, and in his seventieth year; he came to this country in the year

1779, as a gunner's servant, on board the Nabob, king's store ship. My great grandmother was a slave, from the coast of Guinea; her daughter and grand daughter lived to a great age, and all died in slavery: I myself had a narrow escape; my freedom was given to me by James Charles Shalto Douglas Esq., a relative of the late Duke of Queensborough, in virtue of an agreement made between Mr Douglas and my father, James Wedderburn Esq. of Inveresk near Musselborough: the above agreement was at the time of sale made, when my mother was pregnant with me. I have no reason to approve of slavery; for I have seen my grandmother flogged on a charge of bewitching her master and his ship, thereby causing the Spaniards to apprehend him at the Bay of Honduras, for smuggling mahogany. My mother was also stretched on the ground, and actually flogged before me, while she was in a state of pregnancy: her only fault was, in not acquainting her mistress, that leave had been given by her master to go and see her mother. I have travelled as a jobbing millwright throughout the different parts [p. 4] of Jamaica: though only a lad, I was yet capable of making observations on passing occurrences; being reared in Kingston, and having also lived eighteen months in Spanish town, and the like period in Port Royal; possessing an inclination to rove, gave me a still better opportunity to observe the manners and customs of that country. On my arrival in London, I immediately discovered that I was ignorant of theology and politics, and being very desirous of gaining knowledge, I began with theology; and have attained to that degree of information (though an unlearned man), I can now contend with the most learned. I next attended debating societies, and gave that attention to which the subjects demanded of me, particularly on slavery, and liberty generally. I have always considered, that the condition of the slaves were far superior to European labourers, and therefore could never hold up my hand to support those ignorant fanatics, who were so frequently troubling the

parliament with petitions against slavery. I acknowledge there are grounds for much improvement in the condition of the slaves: much has been done towards that end, and much more may still be accomplished, at the same time, and not to the injury, but to the benefit and safety of the proprietors, as well as to the advantage of the overseers and book-keepers. Now, as slaves, they are landholders; but when free, they will be dispossessed of this necessary foundation of human happiness: three free men will be by necessity compelled to do the work of five slaves: the other two will be obligated to rob for subsistence. 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 provisions; accepting in few instances, no separation of relatives takes place: in war or peace there is no alteration in the situation of the slaves: no mourning widows, or parents bereft of their sons: no remorse for crimes, that being unknown to them; as slavery does not admit of such—their time being fully occupied in their work and they being amply provided with everything necessary for their comfort; the overseers taking care that they shall not dispose of their produce, unless there is a superabundance: the idler, though not one in a hundred, is watched and made to keep his ground in good cultivation, that he may not rob his fellow slave. They are not required to labour more than ten hours a day, and when past labour, they know no difference, as regards their supply; for they retain their plantations until death. Even their offspring are allowed to enjoy what property they died possessed of: children of tender years are not put to work so early, nor near so many hours, as they are in the manufactories in this country, where they necessarily inhale that unwholesome sulphuric condensed air, so prejudicial to their health. As for the pious saying, it is not the will of God, revealed in the Bible, that men should deal in men, it is easy to prove that not only a toleration, but a command

to purchase men as slaves, is to be found in the Old Testament:—the Jews were not to make slaves of their brethren longer than seven, fourteen, or twenty-one years; but such that would not accept of their liberty, was to have their ears slit, and never to be free during life; they were allowed to purchase their heathens as slaves, and in the 21st chapter of Deuteronomy, verse 14, it says, he was deprived of the rights to sell a female slave, which he had taken to his bed; if he chose to part with her, she was free: in reference to this text, my father ought not to have sold my mother.

My Lord Morpeth would do well to study his bible, and though the word slave is not found in the Old or New Testament, the term bond-servant is synonymous with slave. The supporters of emancipation, in all they say against the right of holding men as slaves, is blasphemy against God, if the Scriptures be true. We are not to take a jot or tittle from that book: 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.

Let the slaves, under certain limitations, have the right of **[p. 6]** giving evidence, and sitting as jurors; and as many have embraced Christianity, it is inconsistent with that religion to be compelled to work on the Sabbath. In my humble opinion, the slave should be allowed one day in the week beside Sunday: Monday would be the fittest, instead of the half day now allowed on the Saturday; and as Christianity has been received and amongst many, they are restless in their consciences about working on the Lord's day. I would not have any law to punish those who have not embraced the Christian religion, for continuing to work on that day, as they have been accustomed: the same quantity of labour would be performed in the five, as in five and a half days heretofore.

During the period I have been in this country, I have had an opportunity of conversing with four intelligent slaves: one a female, my brothers wife, who came to this country about fourteen years since, as nurse to her aged master, the minister of Port-Royal church: I proposed to her, to stop in this country and be free, rather than go back as a slave: her answer was, no; for such a proposition was made to her about 12 years previous, when she first came to England in 1804, and was also offered £30 per annum to be a lady's maid. She very naturally asked the proposer, where would be her salary, was she to fall sick, or be sent to the work-house, give offence and be discharged?—to which no answer was given. She returned home and experienced slavery for that term, either as an in-door servant, or hired herself (as is the custom of the country). So that she had those twelve years to reflect upon, betwixt the state of slavery and freedom; for when my sister came again to this country, as before related, fourteen years ago, 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 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 [p. 7] indemnify the owners for the loss they would thereby sustain, as the law originally sanctioned the traffic.

One of the men I allude to, ran away from Jamaica to his master, residing in America Square, London. I asked him, would he prefer staying in England, and be free, rather than go back to slavery?—His reply was, no; that he came to procure a letter from his master, to exempt him from being flogged by his overseer. He was a millwright who did the work of the estate, and which saved his owner full one hundred pounds a year; and he felt happier at home, enjoying his house, land, and pig in the sty, than be here as a poor mechanic. The two other men, were gentlemen's

servants, who were lent to some ladies coming from Barbados and Antigua, preferring them to English servants on board: I proposed to them to remain here, but the answer was, no; They had a good owners, who placed confidence in their return, and they felt happier in the service of such masters.

I could never prevail but on one individual to stop in this country, who had a severe and cruel master, and that threatened to punish him if he ever returned: he was only eighteen years of age. All England are at their wits end, to know how to act towards the slave and his owner.—I am certain, they can never find a way to extricate themselves from the difficulty; for it is quite just to set the slave free, and it is equally unjust to rob the master of his value. This point ought to be settled first: will these lovers of emancipation subscribe to pay anything to the owners? I answer no. Besides, charity ought to begin at home. It is easy for an orator to work upon the feelings of his auditors, respecting the supposed horrid state of slavery, which they know little of; entreating their audience (taking advantage of their heated imaginations) to sign petitions against slavery, without any consideration of the West-India proprietors' right by law. As for the nobility and gentry, who court popularity, I advise them to consider the free poor of their own country, before they reduce the slaves to the same [p. 8] state of starvation, by making them free. Let one and all then take the advice which is offered, of one, who, (independent of all parties) states that the slaves will be satisfied, and their masters too; for both their interests are therein studied.

It appears, my Lord, to me, that the methodist preachers should be compelled to desist from extorting money from the slaves, under pretence of directing them to heaven! It is said, that they have about forty thousand proselytes, and upon the average, they each pay one pound per annum, which monies have never (to my knowledge) been accounted for. I acquainted the late Mr. Butterworth, by letter, of an

intended meeting, to be held in Hopkin Street, Golden Square, for the purpose of discussing the conduct of missionaries, to which he did not attend. No wonder they should (from mercenary motives) seem to express kindness to these poor slaves: these blind guides 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. The way to increase this money, is to enable the slaves to buy live stock, such as their masters will allow them to rear: at present they do breed hogs and poultry; if they were allowed to breed horses, meals, and horn and cattle, a man and his wife would be enabled to purchase their own children: the majority of these should be females, as the children born of them would be free. A law to meet this would prevent the master demanding an exorbitant price, and the parents should have the choice at what age to purchase the children. This will also give them the ability to pay their masters rent, for such land as may be necessary for their free children. I know from experience that the slaves can save (each couple) full ten pounds in the year, by raising hogs and poultry; it is not know the general practice, but the desire for freedom would excite in them an emulation which would in effect this laudable object, and no doubt the owners would encourage this. Strange as this may appear to Europeans, they can do all this without any expense, as the [p. 9] country is ever green, and the Indian corn is produced in about three months, on the same land and at the same time with the yams, which take nine months to bring the latter to perfection. With the exception of a very few, all the produce which is consumed in the times, is the property of the slaves. On sugar estates, the slaves also may be allowed, without any injury to their masters, to grow cotton, coffee, ginger, and pimento.

I wish to remark here, that as there are bibles sufficient now distributed all over the islands, as well as throughout Europe, if those charitable individuals who

have hitherto supported bible societies, &c., would turn their attention to the liberation of the slaves, and apply these donations to their emancipation, it would add much to their credit, as a sincere proof of their love of negro liberty. If the slaves would take my advice, they would dig pits in clay ground, where they could salt pork, and in houses cure their bacon. I have seen several flitches so cured in the parish of St Mary's, and it is a general practice amongst the Maroons, to cure their wild hogs without salt; and this practice should be generally encouraged, as the slaves would then increase in wealth; the landholders would likewise be materially benefited. This recommendation being adopted, would cause the maiden wood-lands to be cleared and cultivated, which the owners have now no occasion for, as the lands now employed produces sufficient for the market. The slaves might be let to grow Indian corn by the sides of the cane fields and hedges, which has always lain waste: even young children might be employed to do this; and, as in some parts, the new cultivated land is too rich to produce good sugar cane, for the first three or four years, Indian corn or yams might be grown, if the proprietors thought proper to let it to the slaves. I doubt not that the planters will assist the slaves in procuring their emancipation by all possible means; for I never knew any of them but who were gentlemanly and kind in all their ways:—it is the overseers who are so frequently [p. 10] severe, which occasions the slave to rebel and to destroy them. The late Right Honourable William Pitt has said, “that individuals farming an estate and slaves, had extorted labour from them more than nature could bear, and which mainly contributed to insurrection;” if such practices now exist, they should be immediately abolished. Should the slaves ever obtain their freedom (which no doubt they will), it is not likely the landholders will demand rent of them, and render the situation of the slaves equally bad with our own peasantry at home, were it not that the West-India climate



affords such quick fruition of produce to abundance, but which cannot be stored up like wheat, and other grain, in this country.

I am very sorry to learn that many of the advocates, from their speeches for slave Emancipation, in both houses of parliament, treat the proprietors of slaves almost as receivers of stolen goods. The newspapers have made Mr O'Connell to say, that there ought to be a bill passed to free all children born from this period: the author would wish to know from the honourable gentlemen, at whose expense should these children be reared to the years of maturity? It would require a foundling of vast extent, and an immense fund to support it. This assertion is as a void of sense as many others he has made to the deluded Irish, respecting their independence. Let this *wonderful champion* attempt the experiment in his own dear country, where the peasantry are without food, clothing, or lodging, not so with the slaves: charity ought to begin at home. If the experiment was tried, of freeing about five thousand slaves, the landholders would dispense with one third of that number, for a freeman must and will work harder than a slave: then what, may I ask, is to become of this third part? Will they not be driven to act as the poor of this country, by unlawful means, for their subsistence? If this position is correct, would it not operate in like ratio, and to the acknowledged number of eight hundred thousand? It would be well for those who are against the slave trade, to be cautious and how they express themselves, [p. 11] lest they should be guilty of blasphemy against that God, which they acknowledge to be all wise [...]

It is necessary I should refer back to a period of forty years, when the advocates for slave emancipation had recourse to a base practice, of exhibiting pictures of the different modes of punishing slaves, with the intent of making horrified impressions upon the public in general; thereby endeavouring to obtain

signatures to those numerous petitions which were presented about that time: I attended two meetings, and I found that there was no information would be received in favour of the planters, or of the continuance of slavery; it would there- [p. 12] fore have been impolite in me, to have advanced at that period anything contrary to what really was their desired object; I could have informed those meetings what I am now about to relate. During the ten years, previous to leaving my native country, I saw but one slave that was picketed in Kingston; I never heard of any other, and believe it was never thought of in any part of the islands: that of whipping them publicly in the towns was no more than what is practised in this country; hanging and gibbetting was the result of the law equally affecting the master and the slave; during the foregoing period there were four white persons hung at Kingston, a clergyman for coining, two men and one woman for murder: I know of no other whites who suffered death during the whole of that time: there were five slaves suffered death during the same period, one man was burnt alive for murdering an overseer, unregretted even by his fellow-slave; a man and woman for robbery, and two men for being absent from their owners for more than one year. Now I wish that the law affecting the latter to be repealed; there is no occasion to such an act to be in force now, for the cause of its existence is removed since the days of Cromwell, in whose time the island was taken from the Spaniards [...] [p. 13] With respect to the iron collars, I never saw, during the above period, and more than above twenty worn, and these were put on by owners that wished to avoid flogging; for a slave loses his value after being flogged. This mode of punishment is also practised in France, it answers to the same purpose as the pillory in England; as for the gags, I never saw but one in use, and that was in the parish of St. Mary: as for the flogging, so much spoken against, it is more frequently in force in this country than in the West Indies; Although a negro driver attends the slave in the

fields with the whip, and yet he dare not use it without the direction of a book-keeper, who is invariably in attendance, and he, the book-keeper, must be cautious, for his life would be in danger if he exceeded what the slave deems necessary; the fact is, they have set fire to the fields of cane, and thereby have brought the white men to the extinguishing of it, and then destroyed and committed these task-masters to the flames. When disposed to exercise their vengeance, they do not send previous notice, as the poor incendiaries have done in this country of late. Throughout all the country parts I have travelled in Jamaica, I have never seen or heard of officers to keep the peace, to prevent depredations: happy for Old England could it be said so of her. I recollect, when I was a boy, of knowing one Price, a white man, who lived with my grandmother's mistress, and by her authority she was to harbour such slaves as this *Price* had seduced to leave the country: young as I was, I felt a sympathy for such slaves as I saw with iron collars, and could not prevail upon more than one to consent to Mr. Price's felonious scheme. I merely introduce this tale to shew, that's the slaves would rather suffer the punishment of wearing these collars for two or three months, than leave their owners. Allow me, my Lord, to mention what I understand, and firmly believe, to be a practice among the methodist preachers to evade the law, which finds them twenty [p. 14] pounds for every slave found in the congregations. These teachers send out a well-trained black into the negro marketplaces, who, in appearance, talking to himself, invites them to come to the door of the Chapel, in language similar to the following:—"Come to day, Massa Buckra, make house for Garra-mighty, he want money, come put your hand in your pocket, big." These deluded slaves make their appearance with their baskets in crowds at the chapel door; after sermon, they are waited upon, and their subscriptions are collected, which frequently amounts to more than is gathered within from the whites and the freemen

of colour; and the preachers never fail to express the difference. I need hardly remind your Lordship of the existence of a law in all the colonies, where the parents are allowed to sell their own offspring, if born of a slave; an instance like this occurred in my own family where my uncle and aunt were sent, and sold by their father's brother, to America, their being left as saleable property. During the American rebellion my uncle returned to Jamaica, and after the peace, his American master sent a power of attorney to demand him as a runaway slave, or to receive one hundred pounds for his freedom. How can Christians reflect upon the Africans for selling their children, when themselves are allowed by law to do the same. To the honour of the West India planters let it be known, that they do not take away any property from the slaves which they accumulate, though he has a right to do so by law. It is the duty of masters, to see that the property of their slaves is not extorted from them by any pretence whatever. I am fully satisfied in my own mind, that ultimately, when slave emancipation shall be effected, (as I should rather recommend by gradual operation, as before stated), then will be realised that happiness is consistent with justice, so long desired by a British nation.

Permit me, my Lord, to add, that should my proposed plan be objected to altogether by the government and the slave [p. 15] holders; there still remains a hope, that some generous planter will try the experiment on his own estate, as far as the local, or the government here, may permit. I know well the danger there is, in the slave on one estate having more liberty or encouragement than his fellow on a neighbouring plantation; which would be liable to create jealousy and rebellion: but this result might be easily obviated, if the masters would mutually agree to the foregoing plan: there is danger acknowledged now by both planters and thousands in this country; witness the speeches delivered by those at the Jamaica Coffee House this

month, where it was proposed, a petition should remain for the signatures of those who are desirous that immediate emancipation shall not be granted; such well-disposed planters will be safer under all circumstances, for the gratitude and faithfulness of the slaves are known to a proverb; therefore perseverance in well doing is praiseworthy.

I am so proud with the child of my imagination, that my enthusiasm would lead me to imitate the martyrs of old: the plan is just; it is founded on the very principle of inherent right. Without meaning to give offence, I am bold to challenge the collective wisdom of the universe, to produce any other that will prove effectual. Truth in science is one, and discover it who may, it matters not how illiterate the individual is, in whose mind and assemblage of ideas takes place, by a combination of circumstances.

I can assure your Lordship, I had no previous thought or intention of submitting any plan, until I was incarcerated; neither is my object gain, but a sincere desire to serve my fellow-man: what I have penned, has arisen to my reflection since the early part of November last.

The cause of my imprisonment 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 addicted to [p. 16] drunkenness and noise; which gave rise to the indictment against me for the nuisance, for which offence I have been sentenced to twelve months imprisonment, and hard labour. Should I be in existence at the termination of my sentence, and provided any Committee of the House of Commons or Lords be sent to the colonies, for the purpose of ascertaining the state and condition of the slaves, I then would be most happy to be forwarded in the same ship, when I might be enabled by personal enquiry,

to gain much more information for the government than the gentleman so appointed could possibly do; for slaves would be more communicative to one in my station, than to their superiors.

I have the honour to be,

My Lord,

your Lordship's

most obedient servant,

ROBERT WEDDERBURN.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Devon County Record Office, Addington MSS, Corr. 1819; 'Unrest, Lord Sidmouth to H. R. H., Prince Regent, 12 Aug 1819', cited in Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery, and Other Writings*, ed. Ian McCalman (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener, 1991), 23; Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000), 289; Michael Morris, *Scotland and the Caribbean, c.1740-1833: Atlantic Archipelagos* (London: Routledge, 2015), 169; Alan Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic* (London: Continuum, 2002), 11; Eric Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity: Robert Wedderburn and the Discourse of Ultra-Radicalism', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 37:1 (2015), 61; Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 117; *The Hull Packet*, 3 March 1823.

<sup>2</sup> *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 1 (1817), 3; Robert Wedderburn, *The Horrors of Slavery* (London: R. Wedderburn, 1824), 4-5.

<sup>3</sup> 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 *Slavery in Africa and the Caribbean: A History of Enslavement and Identity since the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Olatunji Ojo and Nadine Hunt (London: I. B. Tauris, 2012), 178, 194 n. 18.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Wedderburn, *An Address to the Right Honourable Lord Brougham and Vaux* (London: John Ascham, 1831), 4, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Guildhall Library, London, St. Katherine Kree, P69/KAT2/A/01/MS7891/1, 'Register of Marriages, 1754-1785', no. 335; *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 5 (1817), 71.

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<sup>6</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/SP/1795/10/034, 'Robert Wedderburn, 3 October 1795'.

<sup>7</sup> Robert Wedderburn, *Truth, Self-Supported: Or, a Refutation of Certain Doctrinal Errors, Generally Adopted in the Christian Church* (London: W. Glindon and G Rieubau, [c. 1802]).

<sup>8</sup> BL, Add. MSS 27808, 'Thomas Spence: Collections for a Memoir of, and of the Spenceans', f. 322.

<sup>9</sup> For Spence and the Spenceans, see Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), esp. 7-180; Malcolm Chase, *'The People's Farm': English Radical Agrarianism 1775-1840* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 45-120.

<sup>10</sup> McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 132-39.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Wedderburn, *Cast-Iron Parsons, or, Hints to the Public and the Legislature on Political Economy* (London: R. Helder, 1820).

<sup>12</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Bell's Life in London*, 29 February 1824; 21 March 1824; 28 March 1824.

<sup>14</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*.

<sup>15</sup> See *Bell's Life in London*, 7 November 1830.

<sup>16</sup> For Wedderburn's burial see Sue Thomas, *Telling West Indian Lives: Life Narrative and the Reform of Plantation Slavery Cultures 1804-1834* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 116.

<sup>17</sup> Helen Thomas is one of the few scholars to discuss Wedderburn's religiosity in depth. Helen Thomas, *Romanticism and Slave Narratives: Transatlantic Testimonies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 255-65. Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 26-28; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 55-70. More recently, Sue Thomas has gone as far as to define Wedderburn's *Horrors of Slavery* as 'both life writing and jeremiad', though this refers more to form than content. Thomas, *West-Indian Lives*, 99.

<sup>18</sup> For Spencean anticlericalism, see McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 191-92. For Carlile's scepticism, see, for example, Richard Carlile, *The Gospel According to Richard Carlile, Shewing the True Parentage, Birth, and Life Of... Jesus Christ* (London: n.p., 1827).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Wedderburn and Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon], *The Trial of the Rev. Robt Wedderburn for Blasphemy* (London: George Cannon, 1820); Robert Wedderburn and Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon], *The Address of the Rev. R. Wedderburn, to the Court of King's Bench at Westminster, on Appearing to Receive Judgment for Blasphemy* (London: T. Davison, 1820).

<sup>20</sup> Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon], *A Few Hints Relative to the Texture of Mind and the Manufacture of Conscience* (London: T. Davison, 1820); Wedderburn, *Cast-Iron Parsons*; Robert Wedderburn and Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon], *A Critical, Historical, and Admonitory Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London, 1820); Robert Wedderburn and Erasmus Perkins [George Cannon], *High-Heel'd Shoes for*

*Dwarfs in Holiness* (London: R. Helder, 1821); McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 153-54.

<sup>21</sup> *The Lion*, 1:12 (1828), 359-61.

<sup>22</sup> Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity', 61-77; Chase, 'The People's Farm', 78-120; David Worrall, *Radical Culture: Discourse, Resistance and Surveillance, 1790-1820* (New York ; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 129-45; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 97-180; Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 20-35; Iain McCalman, "Anti-Slavery and Ultra-Radicalism in Early Nineteenth-Century England: The Case of Robert Wedderburn," *Slavery & Abolition* 7:2 (1986), 99-117.

<sup>23</sup> The Spenceans presume that the earth cannot be justly the private property of individuals [...] land monopoly is the cause of unequal laws'. *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 1 (1817), 9.

<sup>24</sup> Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, 289. See also Rice, *Radical Narratives*, 8, 11; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London: Verso, 1993), 12-13.

<sup>25</sup> *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 1 (1817), 4.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, *The Horrors of Slavery's* dedication to the archly anti-radical William Wilberforce. Wedderburn, *Horrors*, 3.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas, *West Indian Lives*, 105-17; Edlie Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free: Atlantic Slavery, Freedom Suits, and the Legal Culture of Travel* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 63-67; Hunt, 'Africans in Diaspora', 175-98.

<sup>28</sup> Morris, *Atlantic Archipelagos*, 181.

<sup>29</sup> Wong, *Neither Fugitive nor Free*, 64.

<sup>30</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*, 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 8, 7.

<sup>32</sup> See William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of African-American Autobiography, 1760-1865* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 32-60; John Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems', in Charles David and Henry Louis Gates (eds.) *The Slave's Narrative*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 75-98.

<sup>33</sup> Guildhall Library, London, St. Katherine Kree, P69/KAT2/A/01/MS7891/1, 'Register of Marriages, 1754-1785', no. 335.

<sup>34</sup> London Metropolitan Archives, MJ/SP/1795/10/034, 'Robert Wedderburn, a Rogue and Vagabond Apprehended by James Black, 3 October 1795'.

<sup>35</sup> Wedderburn and Cannon, *Trial*, 8.

<sup>36</sup> BL, Add MSS. 27808, Place Papers, 'Robert Wedderburn to F[rances] Place, 22 March 1831'.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Linebaugh, "A Little Jubilee? The Literacy of Robert Wedderburn," in *Protest and Survival: The Historical Experience - Essays for E. P. Thompson*, ed. John Rule and Robert W. Malcolmson (London: Merlin Press, 1993), 174.

<sup>38</sup> Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity', 68-74.



<sup>39</sup> Robert Wedderburn [George Canon], *Letter to Solomon Herschel, Chief Rabbi of England* (London: T. Davison 1820); *Letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: T. Davison 1820); *High-Heel'd Shoes for Dwarfs in Holiness* (London: T. Davison, 1821); McCalman has convincingly these were actually written by Cannon. McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 153-54.

<sup>40</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 102, n. 1; Pencek, 'Intolerable Anonymity', 61-77; Sue Thomas, "Robert Wedderburn's Correspondent Miss Campbell," *Notes and Queries*, 61:4 (2014), 510-14.

<sup>41</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 4, 3.

<sup>42</sup> TNA, ADM 51/617, Admiralty: Captain's Logs, 'Nabob'.

<sup>43</sup> TNA, HO 42/196, 'William Plush and Thomas Lea to Lord Sidmouth, 6 October 1819', f. 177. See also McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 53.

<sup>44</sup> TNA, ADM 36/7762, Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters, 'Nabob: Storeship'. For dangers of re-enslavement at sea, see Charles Foy, '“Unkle Sommerset's” Freedom: Liberty in England for Black Sailors,' *Journal for Maritime Research*, 13:1 (2011), 21-36.

<sup>45</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*, 24. One possibility from the *Nabob's* muster rolls is Robert Christford, ordinary seaman, aged 20, who was born in Jamaica and enlisted in Port Royal in November 1778. TNA, ADM 34/525, Navy Pay Office: Ships' Pay Books, 'Nabob (SS)'; TNA, ADM 36/7762, Admiralty: Royal Navy Ships' Musters, 'Nabob: Storeship'.

<sup>46</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 5. See also Wedderburn's demonstration of his mastery of canonical lore in his reference to the Epistle to Philemon in *ibid.*, 11.

<sup>47</sup> Wedderburn, *Horrors*, ed. McCalman, 126-27.

<sup>48</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 8. Eric Dykes, 'Butterworth, Joseph, MP, 1770-1826', *Dictionary of Methodism in Britain and Ireland* [Online] Available from: <http://www.wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk/dmbi/index.php?do=app.entry&id=516> (Accessed 11/06/2015).

<sup>49</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 6-8.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> *The Axe Laid to the Root*, 1 (1817), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Marcus Wood, 'William Cobbett, John Thelwall, Radicalism, Racism and Slavery: A Study in Burkean Parodies', *Romanticism on the Net*, 15 (1999) [Online] Available from: <http://id.erudit.org/iderudit/005873ar> (Accessed 23 June 2016). For the consolidation of working-class anti-abolitionism by 1831 see Patricia Hollis, 'Anti-Slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism in the Years of Reform', in Christine Bolt and Seymour Drescher (eds.), *Anti-Slavery, Religion, and Reform: Essays in Memory of Roger Anstey* (Folkestone: Dawson, 1980), 294-315; Betty Fladeland, "'Our Cause Being One and the Same": Abolitionists and Chartism', in James Walvin (ed.), *Slavery and British Society, 1776-1846* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 69-99.

<sup>54</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 4, 7.

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<sup>55</sup> See Wood, 'William Cobbett, John Thelwall', 9-15.

<sup>56</sup> Michael Rossington, 'Editing Shelley', in Michael O'Neill and Anthony Howe (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 647; McCalman, *Radical Underworld*, 205; Ian McCalman, 'Unrespectable Radicalism: Infidels and Pornography in Early Nineteenth-Century London', *Past & Present*, 104 (1984), 77.

<sup>57</sup> See Robin Blackburn, *The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, 1776-1848* (London: Verso, 1988), 436-459; Henry Brougham, *The Country without a Government, or, Plain Questions on the Unhappy State of the Present Administration* (London: J. Ridgway, 1830); Henry Brougham, *The Result of the General Election, or, What has the Duke of Wellington Gained by the Dissolution?* (London: J. Ridgway, 1830).

<sup>58</sup> Henry Brougham, *An Inquiry into the Colonial Policy of the European Powers* (Edinburgh: E. Balfour et. al., 1803).

<sup>59</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow*, 301.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>61</sup> Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 574, 599.

<sup>62</sup> Henry Brougham, *The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham, written by Himself* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1871), v. 3, pp. 37-48.

<sup>63</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow*, 436.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example, *The Morning Post*, 14 July 1830; Henry Brougham, *Corrected Report of the Speech of Mr. Brougham, in the House of Commons, Tuesday May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1830, on Colonial Slavery* [sic] (Leeds: Edward Baines and Son, n.d.).

<sup>65</sup> Anon., *A Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Abolition of Slavery. By a West Indian* (London: B. Fellowes, 1833).

<sup>66</sup> *The Lion*, 1:13(1828), 395.

<sup>67</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 11; Brougham, *Speech*, 9-10.

<sup>68</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 4, 3; Brougham, *Speech*, 4.

<sup>69</sup> Blackburn, *Overthrow*, 454.

<sup>70</sup> Anon., 'Preface', in Henry Brougham, *Opinions of Henry Brougham, Esq. on Negro Slavery* (London: H. J. M'Clary, 1830), 3-5.

<sup>71</sup> McCalman has seen Wedderburn as a counterexample to Hollis' claim that 'breaking up an anti-slavery meeting had become a statement of class-consciousness by working-class radicals' by the Chartist period. Hollis, 'Anti-slavery and British Working-Class Radicalism', 311; McCalman, 'Anti-slavery and Ultra-radicalism', 99.

<sup>72</sup> Wedderburn, *Address*, 15-16.

<sup>73</sup> See, for example, *The Lancaster Gazette and General Advertiser*, 13 November 1830, 2.

<sup>74</sup> BL, Add MSS. 27808, Place Papers, 'Robert Wedderburn to F[rances] Place, 22 March 1831'.