

Introduction

It must have been quite a sight at the Court of King's Bench on 9 May 1820, when the infamous 'mulatto' revolutionary Robert Wedderburn, half-blind, dressed in rags and covered in the accumulated filth of six months in gaol, stood up and began to lecture the judge on legal ethics. Wedderburn had been arrested the previous December for preaching blasphemy and sedition at his hayloft chapel on Hopkins Street in London. He was held without charge until February 1820 before he was allowed to stand trial. The jury found him guilty at the February hearing, but recommended him to leniency due to the extenuating circumstance of his being raised on a Jamaican slave plantation, without 'the benefit of parental care'. As Wedderburn himself had argued, how could the son of an enslaved black woman, with no access to education, who had been abandoned by his rapacious white father before he was even born, be expected to know any better? The presiding judge – no less a figure than the Lord Chief Justice, Sir Charles Abbot – declared that Wedderburn was to be sentenced at a separate hearing in May.¹

At the sentencing, he was supposed to appear contrite and respectful, to acknowledge his guilt, to reiterate his unfortunate origins and to throw himself on the mercy of the judge, Justice Bailey. In 1820, it was possible to 'diminish the quantum of punishment' for blasphemy, by proclaiming one's repentance and prostrating oneself before the court. If he chose, Bailey could then issue a fine, or perhaps a short custodial sentence, and thus demonstrate how merciful and fair-handed the British justice system could be, especially toward those who had been degraded by slavery. But contrition was never Wedderburn's style. Instead, he stood defiant and read out a statement which laid the blame for his notoriety on the authorities now charged with sentencing him. 'Those doctrines which would have been confined to my obscure chapel – to my small

¹ Erasmus Perkins [pseud. George Cannon] (ed.), *The Trial of the Rev. Robt. Wedderburn, a Dissenting Minister of the Unitarian Persuasion, for Blasphemy* (London: W. Mason, 1820), 20.

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congregation, – are now by the fostering aid of my prosecutors, published to the whole world’, he harangued. ‘They have effectually advertised the very thing which they dislike. By preventing me from preaching, they have compelled me to become an author. They have dragged me from obscurity into public notice.’ This line of reasoning could hardly have recommended him to Bailey’s mercy – and he was not yet finished. ‘[S]ince 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, on the Alarming Progress of Infidelity; and the means which ought immediately to be resorted to, to check its frightful career.*”² Given the opportunity to mitigate his legal punishment for blasphemy, Wedderburn had instead advertised a blasphemous publication to the court. Justice Bailey was clearly unimpressed by his entrepreneurial spirit; the revolutionary preacher got two years’ hard labour in Dorchester Gaol.

Wedderburn’s complaint, and his brazen advertisement of new writing, pose the two key questions this book sets out to answer. The first he mentioned directly: how did black celebrities, preachers and radicals in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Britain become authors? Wedderburn seemed to be suggesting that the decision to publish his work was never his at all, but that circumstances, helped by a designing network of influential figures, gave him no choice. Even as he staked his claim to authority over his ‘doctrines’, he acknowledged that they would never have been put into print without ‘the fostering aid’ of a group of interacting individuals, who had come together to further their own interests. Black authors during this period, perhaps more than any others, were likely to depend on networks – of friends, co-religionists, conspirators, and even those we might think of as their enemies – for publication, financial support or social prestige. Uncovering the composition of these networks, therefore, is essential to understanding how and why black writing came to be published in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain.

The second key question for this book is also raised by Wedderburn’s mitigation plea, though it requires some hidden knowledge to access. Specifically, we must be aware that he did not write it. Or, at the very least, he alone was not responsible for its contents. George Cannon,

² Erasmus Perkins [pseud. George Cannon] (ed.), *The Address of the Rev. R. Wedderburn, to the Court of King’s Bench at Westminster, on Appearing to Receive Judgement for Blasphemy* (London: T. Davison, 1820), 15; 10–11.

a white, *déclassé*-radical, classically educated amateur lawyer and sometime pornographer, was the man chiefly responsible for Wedderburn's foolhardy courtroom speech. The two had met a couple of years earlier through their mutual involvement in London's ultra-radical scene, and perhaps Wedderburn entrusted Cannon with the task of composing the speech because of his superior education. In any case, it was misplaced trust. This is not to say that Wedderburn necessarily objected to its contents, much less its defiant overtones. But Cannon stood to gain, financially and professionally, from a sensational trial and an overly harsh sentence: he edited the published transcripts of Wedderburn's prosecution and sentencing hearing. He was also the true author and publisher of the 'critical, historical and admonitory letter' to which he'd had Wedderburn allude in court. (He was, of course, a ghost writer; Wedderburn's name appeared on the cover of this scurrilous publication as author, again shielding Cannon from prosecution.)³ It was Cannon who reaped the financial and reputational profits from the harsh sentence passed down to Wedderburn, and it was his speechwriting that ensured any such sentence could not be anything other than exemplary.

Our second question thus emerges. How did networks – whether social, professional, political, or religious – influence the *content* of early black writing, and to what extent did they affect how it was published, distributed and read? When we return to the published mitigation speech, aware that it was (in large part if not completely) written by Cannon, its true, mercenary purpose becomes clear. Moreover, we come to agree with scholars of early African American writing: that evaluating the level of authority or control an author had over the work attributed to them is centrally important to understanding slavery-era black literature.⁴ This does not mean that black intellectuals were the unwitting dupes of designing or self-interested networks of white intrigue; far from it. Black authors were respected comrades, beloved friends and intellectual authorities in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Britain. In many cases, they were powerful and influential people. But, like all authors,

³ Robert Wedderburn [pseud. George Cannon], *A Critical, Historical, and Admonitory Letter to the Right Reverend Father in God, His Grace the Lord Archbishop of Canterbury* (London: W. Mason, 1820). Iain McCalman convincingly attributes this pamphlet to Cannon in *Radical Underworld: Prophets, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London, 1795–1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 153–154.

⁴ William Andrews, *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of Afro-American Autobiography, 1760–1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 34–37; John Blassingame, 'Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems', in Charles T. Davis and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (eds.), *The Slave's Narrative* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 78–98; Francis Smith Foster, *Witnessing Slavery: The Development of Ante-Bellum Slave Narratives* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979).

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they adjusted their writing according to the needs of patrons, publishers, editors and their likely readership. Like all of us, their world-view was affected by those around them. And like all published books, their work went through careful processes of revision and edition, passing through several pairs of hands before readers ever encountered it. When we read a text by an eighteenth-century black author such as Wedderburn, just as when we read one by Charles Dickens or Toni Morrison, we are never reading the work of just one person.

This book examines the lives and works of eight early black authors in Britain: Ignatius Sancho, Olaudah Equiano, Mary Prince, Ukawsaw Gronniosaw, Boston King, John Jea, Ottobah Cugoana and Robert Wedderburn. It uncovers the influential networks that surrounded them and their published works during the period falling roughly between 1770 and 1830. It demonstrates that black intellectuals, as literary celebrities, evangelical preachers and leaders of domestic political radicalism, participated in the full gamut of British social, religious and political culture.

Of course, the black presence in Britain long pre-dated the late eighteenth century. But while Peter Fryer's famous pronouncement that there 'were Africans in Britain before the English came here' is perfectly accurate in itself, he was referring to a largely transient population of a few hundred Roman soldiers temporarily stationed here.⁵ The earliest evidence of a substantial resident black population dates back to the sixteenth century, culminating in Elizabeth I's well-known declaration that 'there are of late divers blackamoors brought into this realm, of which kinde of people there are already to manie'.⁶ As Jeremy Brotton has illustrated, the presence of black or 'Moor' populations in early modern Britain was related to crucial trade links with the Islamic world.⁷ Accounts of black individuals and families recurred throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – the Resonable family of Southwark, for instance, may have influenced Shakespeare's depiction of his most

⁵ Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain* (London: Pluto, 1984), 1–32 (quotation at 1). For the early history of black people in Britain, see also Paul Edwards, 'The Early African Presence in the British Isles', in Jagdish S. Gundara and Ian Duffield (eds.), *Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1992); David Olusoga, *Black and British: A Forgotten History* (London: Macmillan, 2016), 29–76.

⁶ Cited in Fryer, *Staying Power*, 10. For black people in early modern England, see Miranda Kaufmann, *Black Tudors: The Untold Story* (London: OneWorld, 2017); Onyeka, *Blackamoors: Africans in Tudor England, Their Presence, Status and Origins* (London: Narrative Eye, 2013).

⁷ Jeremy Brotton, *This Orient Isle: Elizabethan England and the Islamic World* (London: Allen Lane, 2016).

famous black character, Othello.⁸ However, it was not until the expansion of the slave trade with its deregulation in 1712 and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 that the black presence in Britain began, slowly, to expand.⁹ To an unprecedented degree, black people became enmeshed in British culture during the eighteenth century. As immortalised in William Hogarth's chaotic paintings, young, black, serving boys became prized fashion accessories among Britain's fashionable elite.¹⁰ Slave-trading African dignitaries Ayuba Suleiman Diallo and William Ansah Sessarakoo caused quite a stir in such circles when they visited the country after having themselves been mistakenly enslaved and subsequently 'rescued' by British traders.¹¹ At the other end of the social hierarchy, black sailors and soldiers, along with formerly enslaved young men and women, firmly established themselves in working-class British society, much to the alarm and bemusement of some social commentators.¹²

The exact size of the black population during the eighteenth century is hard to gauge, partly because of the lack of reliable census information (the first national census was taken in 1801, but ethnicity was not recorded in any standardised way until as late as 1991). When they were noted, as an aside in ships' muster rolls, criminal proceedings or local church and government documents, racial or ethnic groupings were recorded inconsistently.¹³ In fact, the term 'black' as used in this book – that is, in reference exclusively to people of African descent – is something of a linguistic and conceptual anachronism. As Roxann Wheeler has pointed out, a number of different characteristics besides skin colour were used to define 'race' in the eighteenth century.¹⁴ While comparative

⁸ Imtiaz Habib and Duncan Salkeld, 'The Resonables of Boroughside, Southwark: An Elizabethan Black Family Near the Rose Theatre', *Shakespeare*, 11:2 (2015), 135–156.

⁹ See William Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt: The Royal African Company and the Politics of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1678–1752* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 153–178.

¹⁰ For black people in Hogarth, see David Dabydeen, *Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth-Century English Art* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987); Catherine Molyneux, *Faces of Perfect Ebony: Encountering Atlantic Slavery in Imperial Britain* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 178–218.

¹¹ See Ryan Hanley, 'The Royal Slave: Nobility, Diplomacy and the "African Prince" in Britain, 1748–1752', *Itinerario* 39:2 (2015), 329–347.

¹² See, for example, James Tobin's complaints about 'the great numbers of negroes at present in England' and 'the strange propensity shewn for them by the lower orders of women'. James Tobin, *Cursory Remarks upon the Reverend Mr. Ramsay's Essay* (London: James Phillips, 1785), 118.

¹³ See 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), 22–23.

¹⁴ Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 288–302.

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anatomy and pseudo-scientific attempts to fix particular intellectual characteristics to certain races began to take hold in Britain toward the end of our period, thinking around human difference for most commentators remained characteristically muddled and contradictory.¹⁵ Enlightenment climatic theory, stressing the influence of region and climate on civilizational development, retained currency, as did the ancient concept of the ‘Great Chain of Being’, whereby all living beings (including the supposedly separable races of man) could be placed in a linear hierarchy.¹⁶ Stadial theories of civilizational progress, as propounded by Adam Smith and others, were also deeply imbricated in debates over race and heredity, and in turn impacted on moral discussions of slavery and Empire.¹⁷ This unsettled theoretical and ideological landscape had ramifications as to how people saw, and chose to record, their encounters with African people and their descendants in Britain. One eighteenth-century recorder might see someone from South Asia and someone from Africa as equally ‘black’, by virtue of the fact that they were both equally not ‘white’.¹⁸ Another might take great care distinguishing a ‘Negroe’ from a ‘Quadroon’ or a ‘Mustee’.¹⁹ Another recorder might not see race as relevant and omit it from their record altogether, leaving us to speculate as to whether, for example, the ‘Francis Othello’ who was indicted at the Old Bailey for theft in May 1786 was a member of London’s black community or not.²⁰

¹⁵ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 83–156; Francisco Bethencourt, *Racisms: From the Crusades to the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 247–270; Ivan Hannaford, *Race: The History of an Idea in the West* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 205–215; Felicity Nussbaum, *The Limits of the Human: Fictions of Anomaly, Race, and Gender in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Ryan Hanley, ‘Slavery and the Birth of Working-Class Racism in England, 1814–1833’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 103–123.

¹⁶ Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 23–44; Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Britain, 1800–1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 1–19.

¹⁷ See Sebastiani, *Scottish Enlightenment*, 45–72. ¹⁸ See Chater, *Untold Histories*, 22–23.

¹⁹ Edward Long, one of the most outspoken and committed racist ideologues of the eighteenth century, outlined some of these perceived distinctions in his chapter on ‘Creoles’ in *The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of That Island*, 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774), vol. 2, 260–263; see Catherine Hall, ‘Whose Memories? Edward Long and the Work of Re-Remembering’, in Katie Donington, Ryan Hanley and Jessica Moody (eds.), *Britain’s History and Memory of Transatlantic Slavery: Local Nuances of a ‘National Sin’* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), 129–149.

²⁰ *Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, s17860531–1, ‘Punishment summary, 31 May 1786’, available at www.oldbaileyonline.org.

Despite these challenges, through careful and extensive archival work, scholars have been able to sketch some outlines of the approximate size and shape of the African diaspora in Britain. Historians very tentatively (and, some claim, rather conservatively) suggest that around 10,000 black people were resident in Britain between 1780 and 1830.²¹ However, as demonstrated by the recent discovery of records pertaining to more than 2,500 black prisoners of war held at Portchester Castle near Portsmouth during the late 1790s, this figure was prone to significant fluctuations over time.²² As might be expected, the largest resident urban black population in Britain was in London (0.55 per cent of the total population in the late 1780s), with other significant concentrations in port towns around the coast, notably in the capital of the European slave trade, Liverpool.²³ In common with most migrant communities, and no doubt accentuated by regular replenishment of Royal Navy personnel in the Caribbean, the black British population was skewed significantly in favour of young men throughout the period.²⁴ For similar reasons, occupations often centred on maritime industries and military service, though domestic service, agricultural labour and even street arts have all been noted as ways black people made a living in eighteenth-century Britain.²⁵ Indeed, as Kathleen Chater has pointed out, within these broad brush-strokes, a key characteristic of the black population in Britain during this period was diversity: diversity of experience, diversity of interest and diversity of perspectives.²⁶ Accordingly, writings produced by black people during this period reflected not a homogenous ‘black perspective’ but a staggering *diversity* of views and experiences.

This study therefore 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. These texts were never published in a social vacuum. Like all writers, black authors had to interact with the world around them, and not only with one or two issues. While the life stories of a few early black authors (especially Equiano and Prince) are now well known, and their writings

²¹ Norma Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past: Blacks in Britain, 1780–1830* (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 35. Chater suggests this figure could be higher when rural populations are taken into account. Chater, *Untold Histories*, 29.

²² At the time of writing, these archives were undergoing preservation and cataloguing and were not available for consultation. See Abigail Crippins, ‘Black Prisoners of War at Portchester Castle’, available at www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/portchester-castle/history-and-stories/black-prisoners/.

²³ Myers, *Reconstructing the Black Past*, 29, 24. ²⁴ Chater, *Untold Histories*, 30–31.

²⁵ Well-known black street musicians during this period included the fiddlers Billy Waters and Shadrack Furman. See Fryer, *Staying Power*, 231.

²⁶ Chater, *Untold Histories*, 35–73.

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widely available, the specific circumstances surrounding the composition, production and dissemination of much of this corpus remain obscure or undiscussed. Early black British writing is often incorporated into the later, American tradition of the abolitionist ‘slave narrative’, denoting an assumption about these texts as confining themselves to the issues of slavery and race.²⁷ We should be clear: black intellectuals and enslaved people were fundamental to the abolition movements, and as Manisha Sinha has demonstrated so convincingly, the global antislavery cause could not have succeeded without them.²⁸ But while there is no doubt that black contributions were and are of central importance to these discussions, it must be acknowledged first that eighteenth-century black authors’ work was produced with a much more diverse range of interests in mind, and second that early black British writing was not always uncomplicatedly abolitionist.

These two factors were often interrelated – for example, in Chapter 4 of this book, I explore how Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’s relationships with prominent slave-owning Calvinists helps to explain his autobiography’s apparently ambivalent attitude toward slavery. More to the point, black authors were more likely to be poor or illiterate than their white contemporaries. Their texts therefore often underwent more direct forms of outside influence before publication – i.e. edition, transcription and censorship. In Gronniosaw’s case, he himself, his amanuensis and his editor were all followers of his slave-owning patron, the Countess of Huntington. Author, editor, amanuensis and sponsor – each of them held dear, as a fundamental precept of their world, the Calvinist belief that corporeal freedom was not necessary to achieve spiritual salvation. We should not be surprised, then, to find that Gronniosaw’s autobiography was not a radically abolitionist political tract.²⁹ We must use precisely this type of contextual detail if we are to gain a more complete understanding of early black writing, one rooted firmly in the historical realities in which it was 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

²⁷ 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), 167–271.

²⁸ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave’s Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016).

²⁹ See Chapter 4, below, and Ryan Hanley, ‘Calvinism, Proslavery and James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’, *Slavery & Abolition*, 36:2 (2015), 360–381. For an opposing reading, see Jennifer Harris, ‘Seeing the Light: Re-Reading James Albert Ukawsaw Gronniosaw’, *English Language Notes*, 42:4 (2004), 43–57.

a particular time and place.³⁰ This should apply to black writing, too. Texts were produced in, and in a very significant sense created by, the specific social and cultural contexts of the author's life, experiences and associative networks.

Instrumental networks of association like these – ‘actor networks’, as sociologist Bruno Latour calls them – are commonly visualised as consisting of ‘nodes’ and ‘vertices’. In network analysis, nodes represent actors (for instance, people, organisations or private companies), and vertices, which link nodes together, represent various types of relationship (such as kinship, business ties, or epistolary exchanges).³¹ Historians have traditionally focussed on the individual attributes of the actors or nodes, such as personal wealth or area of residence, as explanations for the extent of their personal influence.³² But if social change, as Latour suggests, is driven not by individual actors themselves but by the relationships between them, then any node's social influence is not necessarily derived from its individual attributes, but rather by the number and nature of its relationships with other actors within the network. 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, we should always bear in mind that the number of relationships alone is not sufficient to explain social influence. The nature and strength of the bonds themselves is also a significant factor in determining influence. Blood is thicker than water: a strong bond carries greater influence than a weak one.

In an eighteenth-century context, ‘networks’ have most often been taken to mean mercantile systems of exchange, distribution and information sharing, but scholars continue to emphasise inter-actor relationships as galvanising social change.³³ For example, in her study of the

³⁰ Miller, ‘The Biographical Turn’, in Lisa Lindsay and John Wood Sweet (eds.), *Biography and the Black Atlantic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 26.

³¹ Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1–18; Stanley Wasserman and Katherine Faust, *Social Network Analysis: Methods and Applications* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 148–150.

³² 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), 1259–1319. For an overview of this trend, see Bonnie H. Erickson, ‘Social Networks and History: A Review Essay’, *Historical Methods*, 30:3 (1997), 149–157.

³³ See, for example, Tijl 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).

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development of Liverpool business relationships, Sheryllne Haggerty stresses the importance of influence 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.’³⁴ Similarly, the networks of influence that concern this book are only defined as such when they were instrumental in the production and distribution of early black writing. Much of this book is dedicated to unpicking the exact nature of these relationships and considering precisely how instrumental they were.

Importantly, we must be aware that sometimes the relationships that most influenced the contents of early black writing did not even involve the author directly. As I discuss in Chapter 5 of this book, for example, the affiliation between leading Methodists Thomas Coke and George Whitfield profoundly affected how Boston King’s *Memoirs* were edited and distributed, despite the fact that King never even met Whitfield. Moreover, we should remember that the connections between actors 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. 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. Finally, we should always bear in mind that relationships do not need to be positive or cordial to facilitate influence.

Understanding these networks is especially important for the study of early black writing. Unlike most authors, the majority of the writers that appear in this book – Gronniosaw, Cugoana, King, Jea, Wedderburn and Prince – had quite limited literacy. This meant they needed to use an amanuensis, an editor, or both. The role of these figures, and their implications for authorial independence and ‘authenticity’, has been discussed at length by scholars. Editorial interventions are often seen as unwelcome obfuscations of the ‘true meaning’ lying encoded within a compromised text. John Blassingame claimed 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’.³⁵ William

³⁴ Sheryllne Haggerty, ‘Merely for Money?’ *Business Culture in the British Atlantic, 1750–1815* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), 163; see also John Haggerty and Sheryllne Haggerty, ‘Visual Analytics of an Eighteenth-Century Business Network’, *Enterprise and Society*, 11:1 (2010), 1–25.

³⁵ John Blassingame, ‘Using the Testimony of Ex-Slaves: Approaches and Problems’, in Davis and Gates (eds.), *The Slave’s Narrative*, 79.