<u>"THE LANGUAGE OF THE TRAFFIC"</u>:

<u>COLONIAL SLAVERY AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE</u>

<u>IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY</u>

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I explore the impact of black chattel slavery in the New World colonies on the language of domestic politics in the eighteenth century, paying particular attention to the figurative uses of the words <u>slave</u> and <u>slavery</u>. When eighteenth-century writers represent other politicians, or the public at large, or the working class, or women, as slaves, what form of slavery do they have in mind — ancient chattel slavery, or medieval serfdom, or colonial slavery? If any of these groups <u>are</u> compared to colonial slaves, how are we to interpret such comparisons? Are they predominantly antislavery or proslavery? Are colonial slaves seen as victims to be pitied or as agents in their own liberation?

In the introduction I outline the broad issues of this thesis, discuss and modify some existing theories of language, and apply these theories to figurative language in a way I intend as helpful to the thesis rather than as a theoretical foundation for it.

In the first chapter I argue that when political writers of the early and mid eighteenth century refer to slavery they are rarely using figures of colonial slavery, and when they <u>do</u> use such figures it is hardly ever in opposition to colonial slavery.

In the second chapter I investigate the formation of antislavery discourse in the late eighteenth century, which I see as the main factor behind the emergence of figures of colonial slavery in radical discourse in the 1790s.

The third chapter discusses various uses of the discourses of colonial slavery by radical prose writers in the 1790s, but suggests that contemporary slave resistance in the Caribbean had little influence on the language of opposition in Britain.

In the fourth and final chapter I explore figures of colonial slavery in the poetic language of the first-generation Romantics in their radical years. In the case of poets in whose works such figures are clearly present, I suggest this presence may be related to a combination of linguistic creativity and abolitionist commitment.

INTRODUCTION.

The subject of this study is the impact of the production-mode of colonial slavery on the discourse of British domestic politics in the late eighteenth century. By production-mode I mean that complex of economic forces and of economic and social relations which, whether as colonial slavery or industrial capitalism, I see as influencing if not underlying the political and cultural phenomena of a historical period. In the case of colonial slavery such forces would include the slave ship, the sugar plantation and the slave's manual labour, and such relations would include the power-relation between white slaveholder and black slave.

Both Raymond Williams and E.P. Thompson have, for understandable reasons, criticised the orthodox Marxist concept of the economic base (a concept approximating to that of the mode of production). Williams thinks there is a danger in using the term base in that it might give the impression of something "static", (1) while Thompson regards the base-superstructure analogy as "mechanical". (2) However, Williams does not completely reject the notion of the base, provided it is viewed as process, and Thompson does not avoid using the term mode of production. I feel that the term is valuable, but I add that by mode of production I mean not only a complex of forces and relations but also a complex of processes and practices.

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(1) Raymond Williams, Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays (London: NLB, 1980), pp. 33-34.

(2) E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory: Or an Orrery of Errors (London: Merlin Press, 1978), pp. 212-213.

I should also define what I mean by discourse, a word which allows me more precision than "language" or "utterance". By discourse I mean a practice of linguistic communication which encompasses a certain area of reality, a certain frame of reference, and certain participants including an audience. When I use the term _discourse_ I do not particularly stress nor entirely exclude the idea of structures constraining consciousness, since in my view both structure and agency are realities in a society of human beings. I would only add to this, taking on board what Alex Callinicos has written in another context, structures can enable as well as constrain. (1)

Colonial slavery was a mode of production adjacent and inseparably linked to the agricultural and mercantile capitalist mode dominant in Britain for most of the eighteenth century. Colonial slavery was essential to the massive economic growth occurring during the eighteenth century and, it has been argued by several historians, helped fuel the industrial revolution which began towards the century's end. (2) Signs of the existence and importance of colonial slavery were omnipresent in Hanoverian Britain, ranging from adverts for runaway slaves to antislavery protests, from paintings of nobles accompanied by black servants to tavern signs such as "The Black's Head". (3)

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(1) Alex Callinicos, _Making History: Agency, Structure and Change in Social Theory_ (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), p. 235.

(2) Peter Fryer, _Staying Power: The History of Black People in Britain_ (London and Sidney: Pluto Press, 1987), p. 16.

(3) David Dabydeen, _Hogarth's Blacks: Images of Blacks in Eighteenth Century English Art_ (Mundestrup, Denmark, and Kingston upon Thames, England: Dangaroo Press, 1985), p. 18.

The words _slavery_ and _slave_ were key terms in political discourse throughout the eighteenth century, and, even earlier, throughout the seventeenth. Whether protesting against the oppression of themselves or their readers, or condemning the evident vices of their political enemies, eighteenth-century polemicists often had recourse to such words. Therefore it might be assumed that such political terms "reflected" in a very simple way the hugely important production-mode of colonial slavery which had emerged in the mid-seventeenth century and had become ascendant by the early eighteenth century.

However, despite the economic significance of colonial slavery in the eighteenth century, and the noticeable impact of colonial slavery on the cultural formations of that century, it seems that political terms such as slavery (at least as discursive structures) did not originate as metaphors with colonial slavery as their vehicle. In fact such terms had their origin in the constitutive structures of eighteenth-century political discourse - in the traditions of classical republicanism, biblical republicanism and the "Norman Yoke" - traditions preceding the predominance, even the existence, of black chattel slavery in the American and West Indian colonies.

For most of the eighteenth century, in most political polemics, there tends to be a lack of relation between the kind of subservience referred to as "political slavery" and the chattel slavery endured by Africans in the New World. Proslavery ideology, coupled with constraining discursive structures, conspire to exclude the black chattel slave from political discourse whether as a victim in his/her own right or as a simile or metaphor.

It might be asserted, then, that the structures of political
discourse serve to mediate, in what Raymond Williams sees as the
negative sense of mediation (namely that of projection and
disguise), the production-mode of colonial slavery. (1) Due to a
submerged contradiction within the dominant ideology, in which
Africans are regarded as naturally the slaves of Europeans and
yet liberty is regarded as the birthright of all human beings,
the political term slave comes to appear as a kind of slip of the
tongue by most political polemicists for much of the century.
The black chattel slave, a silent consonant in the language of
liberty, becomes audible usually in this way only.

The concept of political slavery had its origin in the
classical republics of antiquity, societies whose wealth and
power were founded on systematic chattel slavery. For Aristotle
the chattel slave was one naturally deficient in reason and
virtue, and he was willing to apply the term slavery to those he
considered similarly deficient - such as artisans. (2) Therefore
classical-republican writers of eighteenth-century Britain (a
society itself largely resting on chattel slavery), when they
denounce political slavery, perhaps can never quite succeed in
sundering this kind of slavery from the kind existing in
Britain's New World colonies.

Occasionally, in the political writings of the early and
mid-eighteenth centuries, colonial slavery seems to be mediated
in the second positive sense described by Williams: a process

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(1) Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature, Marxist
     Introductions, (OUP, 1977), p. 98.

(2) Aristotle, The Politics, Penguin Classics, trans. T.A.
     Sinclair, revised Trevor J. Saunders, (Harmondsworth:
     Penguin, 1962, rpt [with revisions] 1981), p. 69, p. 96.

"intrinsic to the properties of the related kinds." (1)   In this
case it is usually mediated by the proslavery discourse through
which colonial slavery became an object of consciousness for many
people at this time. For instance, in proslavery discourse black
slaves were usually represented as contemptible just as political
slaves were usually represented as contemptible in classical-
republican discourse. Sometimes political slaves were compared
to colonial slaves on the basis of this idea of contemptibility
common to both discourses.

It is mainly in the _late_ eighteenth century – during a
period of political revolution first in America then in France,
of economic revolution and radical reformism in Britain, and of a
connected popular onslaught against the slave trade – that there
appears a positive relation between the political term _slavery_
and the production-mode of colonial slavery. In Britain, often
under the pressure of the first phase of the industrial
revolution, always under the inspiration of the American and
French revolutions, a popular radical movement emerged by the
early 1790s both in London and the provincial towns. (2) Now
"political slavery" became inflected with colonial slavery in the
polemics of revolutionary fraternisation and radical reform.

Yet the new inflection of political slavery did not simply
displace older inflections: in 1790s radical polemic the
relatively new discourses of colonial slavery (of abolitionism

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(1) _Marxism and Literature_, p. 98.

(2) Albert Goodwin, _The Friends of Liberty: The English
     Democratic Movement in the Age of the French Revolution_
     (London: Hutchinson, 1979), pp. 22-23. See also
     E.P. Thompson, _The Making of the English Working Class_
     (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968; rpt [with new preface] 1980),
     pp. 19-27.

and anti-abolitionism), which emerged largely during the conflict over the slave trade, co-existed with older discourses like classical republicanism. Such older discourses were re-interpreted in order to serve new strategies: protest against the landed and mercantile oligarchy or the economic exploitation of labourers and mechanics. Sometimes, particularly in poetry, the new discourses of colonial slavery were fused with the older discourses in a kind of _bricolage_. Such _bricolage_ and re-interpretation indicates that the structures of political discourse had the potential to enable as well as constrain.

Also, the appropriation of these new discourses is by no means a consistent strategy in radical polemic. Many radical polemicists, usually with strong antislavery views, were inclined to such a strategy. Yet others, often with proslavery opinions, either make no attempt to alter the inflection of political slavery or effect such alteration within a strategy of utilising proslavery discourse. And there are those whose hostility to the slave trade is apparent, yet the term _slavery_ in their polemics is inflected by colonial slavery rarely if at all.

So the relation between discourse and mode of production is, in this case, neither direct nor symmetrical. It is mediated in Williams' second and positive sense of a process "intrinsic to the properties of the related kinds." The fact that both domestic political discourse and the discourses of colonial slavery (by which eighteenth-century people registered colonial slavery in an intelligible form) shared the same constituting structures, often because writers on colonial slavery had drawn on political discourse, enabled the political term _slavery_ to become inflected with colonial slavery.

There is, in addition, the mediating factor of the general overlap between the abolitionist and radical movements, both of them involving the opposition of largely disfranchised classes to mercantile monopoly and landed oligarchy. Many extra-parliamentary abolitionist were also radicals and, since the late 1760s when Sharp first spoke out on the behalf of runaway slaves in Britain, colonial slavery had been seen by many radicals as the epitome of "Old Corruption". As Robin Blackburn notes, antislavery arose as a popular and national movement at the same time as dissenters and radicals became disillusioned with Prime Minister William Pitt who had failed to reform a corrupt and unrepresentative parliament or repeal the Test Act which excluded dissenters from public office. (1)

There are other mediating factors: the relevance of the new concept of slavery, as developed by antislavery writers, to the kind of subordination (often economic) protested against by popular radicals; changes in the political and economic situation as these bear on radical polemics; and the social background and ideology of the polemicist or audience concerned.

The impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse is manifested in three ways, ways which can be seen as levels of impact: firstly there is the merest appropriation of the discourses of colonial slavery by radicals, as when a polemic against Britain's oligarchy includes an antislavery protest; secondly there are comparisons between the politically excluded or economically exploited in Britain and black chattel slaves in the colonies; thirdly there are cases in which the political term

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(1) Robin Blackburn, The Overthrow of Colonial Slavery 1776-1848, (London and New York: Verso, 1988), pp. 136-137

slavery in turned into a colonial slavery metaphor, the comparison sometimes being compressed and implicit.

It is the third most complete level of impact, in which an effective alteration of language takes place, that is my main interest in this study. Since my main focus is a colonial slavery metaphor, and an effective alteration of language, the ultimate chapter of this thesis is concerned with poetry, since poetry is often seen as an exemplar of linguistic creativity.

I think it is now necessary to discuss the general operation of language as both social and figurative process. However, while I believe such a discussion has a bearing on my thesis, I do not intend to produce a comprehensive theory of language underpinning the thesis. Certainly the theories about language I will explicate, and attempt to modify, are ones which I think are helpful to an understanding of the impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse; but I do not believe these theories explain every aspect of language generation. I see the following discussion as a useful starting point.

Since my subject is the impact of a set of social and economic processes and practices on a set of linguistic processes and practices, it is necessary first to discuss and critique existing theories of language of a historical materialist and sociolinguistic nature. Also, as my main focus is a specific example of human (social) creativity in language, I will then explore the figurative aspect of language creation. I will, of course, attempt to link the general discussion of language as social process and practice with the more specific exploration of language as a figurative practice and process.

I will take as my starting point the attempt to theorise the effect of social change on language by the American sociolinguist Joshua A. Fishman. Fishman criticises as reductionist the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis that language consists of given structures which determine, in Fishman's terms "constrain", consciousness and thereby society. This view of linguistic constraint he terms the "linguistic relativity view". (1)

An example of what Fishman is criticising is Benjamin Lee Whorf's claim that "the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious", patterns which "are the unpercieved intricate systematisations of his own language". Whorf gives as an example the "commonsense" idea of medieval man that the world is flat. While Whorf is aware that such ideas change when a new "group of needs is felt and is worked out in language", he makes the contradicting and rhetorical claim that the conscious mind is a "puppet" of language patterns. (2)

To the "linguistic relativity view" Fishman counterposes a "linguistic reflection view", and asserts that research fails to show that "cognitive organization is directly constrained by linguistic structure". He provides evidence that linguistic structure reflects "sociocultural structure": one example he gives is that the Russian Revolution "brought with it such far-going social change that the kinship terms used in Czarist

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(1)   Joshua A Fishman, Language in Sociocultural Change, select.
      and introd. Anwar S. Dil (Stanford, California: Stanford
      Univ. Press, 1972), p. 286.

(2)   Benjamin Lee Whorf, Language, Thought and Reality:
      Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, ed. John B. Caroll
      (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1956), p. 252, pp. 250-51,
      p. 257.

days had to be changed to some degree", and he notes that "the complexities of the pre-revolutionary kinship taxonomies in Russia did not keep Russians from thinking about or engaging in revolution." However, Fishman admits that the "linguistic reflection" of social reality is usually "slow and partial". Also he admits that "linguistic relativity" does obtain in some aspects of language. (1)

Furthermore, Fishman sees an inadequacy in his "reflection" theory: like "constraint" theory it is "unidirectional", failing to show that language and society are "equal partners" rather than one being the "boss" of the other; in fact "language behaviour is an active force as well as a relective one", and it "feeds back upon the social reality that it reflects and it helps to reinforce it (or to change it) in accord with the values and goals of certain interlocutors." (2) It might be that, despite Fishman's valuable contribution to an understanding of language, such understanding is constrained by his use of the reflection metaphor.

One criticism of Fishman is that linguistic constraint may indeed be a significant force, if one takes into account the possibility that such constraint may serve dominant interests. To adapt a saying of Marx, the ruling linguistic structures of a society may be, to an extent, the linguistic structures of the ruling class. The kinship terms of Tsarist Russia no doubt served to strengthen the rule of Tsarism, and their constraint on the thinking of Russians could be indicated by the need for a revolutionary discourse in order to undermine them.

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(1) Language, pp. 286-87, p. 290, pp. 292-94, p 296, p. 290.

(2) ibid., p. 299.

This political-ideological aspect of linguistic constraint was seen by the Russian Marxist semiotician V.N. Vološinov. While denying that the idea of fixed, constraining, politically neutral structures was an adequate way of seeing language, he asserted that the ruling class sought to fix the meanings of words (meanings which can come to be contested in class struggle), precisely to make language a matter of structures which constrain the minds of most members of society:

> The ruling class strives to impart a supraclass, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual. (1)

Also, in his tendency to polarise the concept of linguistic structures with social and linguistic change, Fishman does not seem to emphasise enough that it is exactly linguistic structures which are a means by which his "interlocutors" seek to change language and society in accord with their "values and goals". Callinicos, writing on the way in which social structures can be enabling as well as constraining to human (collective) agency, stresses "structural capacities" rather than "structural determinants". (2) I would argue that linguistic structures can be structural capacities for collective agents.

Because Fishman is confined by the reified concepts of "reflection" and "constraint" he is unable to do justice to the role of human agency in the field of language. Vološinov starts

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(1) V.N. Vološinov, Marxism and the Philosophy of Language, trans. Ladislav Metejka and I. Titunik (Cambridge, Mass, and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1986), p. 23.

(2) Making History, pp. 235-37.

from human agency, and he criticises the structuralist view of
Ferdinand de Saussure, that language is a collective phenomenon
but a collective phenomenon of fixed structures imposed on
speakers. Yet he also criticises the Romantic view of Wilhelm
Von Humboldt, that language is created spontaneously by
individuals. Vološinov cuts across the conventional dichotomy of
langue and parole and proposes that language is a creative
enterprise but at the same time an enterprise which is collective
and social. (1)

For Vološinov acts of speech, even of "inner speech",
presuppose not merely isolated individuals but "a social audience
that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values
and so on are fashioned". Because both speaker and listener
share a "social purview" (also an "evaluative purview"), both
participate in linguistic creativity: "word is a two-sided act",
"the product of a reciprocal relationship between speaker and
listener". And the meaning of an utterance is something fluid
which cannot be separated from its social context. (2)

Because Vološinov's view of society is a conflictual one,
his sociological theory of language is also conflictual. The
social audience, purview and context includes a class audience,
purview and context. While language is shared by all classes in
society, its meanings are contested: as Vološinov writes "[s]ign
becomes an arena of the class struggle". Words do not have fixed
meanings but are "multiaccentual"; and through this semantic
antagonism and instability language changes. (3)

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(1) Marxism, pp. 47-98.

(2) ibid., pp. 85-86, 105-106, p. 102.

(3) ibid., p. 23.

I do not accept that class conflict is the only mechanism of linguistic change, but I believe Vološinov's sociological and conflictual language theory is of significance to the way the political term <u>slavery</u> became inflected with colonial slavery. Vološinov writes "[in] order for any item, from whatever domain of reality it may come, to enter the social purview of the group and elicit ideological semiotic reaction, it must be associated with the vital prerequisies of the particular group's existence." (1) The issue of slave trade abolition entered the social purviews of middle-class and artisan radicals largely because it was inseparable from their struggle against mercantilism and monopoly.

However, Vološinov collapses language into such notions as superstructure and ideology, and applies these notions incorrectly. (2) Superstructure is not synonymous with consciousness but is limited to practices which enforce and legitimise the economic base. (3) Clearly language can be superstructural as it is used by the ruling class to legitimise its productive relations; but language is also infrastructural in that production involves linguistic communication — indeed language is a productive force. A better formulation is Marx's statement that language is "practical consciousness". (4)

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(1)   <u>Marxism</u>, p. 22.

(2)   ibid., p. 9, p. 13.

(3)   Chris Harman, "Base and Superstructure", <u>IS</u>, 2: 32 (Summer 1986), pp. 13-14.

(4)   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, <u>The German Ideology</u>, ed. and introd. C.J. Arthur (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 50-51.

In _The German Ideology_ Marx emphasises that consciousness is not separate from nature: consciousness is material, existing in the material form of language; consciousness/language is also a "social product" which "arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men." (1)   In his preface to _A Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy_ Marx avers that consciousness is "determined" by "social being". (2)   Yet, in order to avoid crude materialistic or dualistic errors found among later Marxists, it is important to note that earlier Marx wrote that thought and being are both distinct and in unity. (3)

Vološinov also tends to use the term _ideology_ in an indeterminate way. As Williams states, the term can have three different senses in Marxist thought: firstly "a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class", secondly "a system of illusory beliefs" (i.e. dominant ideology), thirdly "the general process of the production of meanings and ideas." (4)   Obviously language is ideological in the third sense, and here Vološinov is correct, but language is not always ideological in the first and second senses which he fails to distinguish from the third. No doubt, in these first and second senses, ideology is always semiotic but signs are not necessarily ideological.

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(1)   _German Ideology_, p. 51.

(2)   Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, _Collected Works_, 47 vols. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975-1995), XXIX, 263. ·

(3)   Karl Marx, _Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844_ (Moscow: Progress Publishers; London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977), p. 93; see also Franz Jacobowski, _Ideology and Superstructure in Historical Materialism_, introd. Frank Furedi, (London and Winchester, Mass: Pluto Press, 1976, rpt [with introduction] 1990), pp. 14-15.

(4)   _Marxism and Literature_, p. 55.

It is also necessary to criticise the notion of "reflection" found in both Fishman and Vološinov (though the latter modifies this notion by using that of "refraction" - compensating for the crudeness of his mirror by recourse to a prism!). The reflection model gives the impression that language is passive and lacking in relative autonomy, and that its relation with social reality is direct and symmetrical. The terms correspondence and mediation provide better ways of describing the way language relates to social reality.

Correspondence can have several meanings. It can mean, as Williams writes, "resemblances, in seemingly very different practices, which may be shown by analysis to be both direct and directly related expressions of and responses to a general social process." (1) I find his formulation unclear and unsatisfactory. Firstly, he does not define what he means by the direct relation between the two practices: if the relation is not a causal one, then it might be asked what kind of relation it is; perhaps he means a similar effect of the general social process on the practices concerned - but this would not be a direct relation. If, as the phrase directly related suggests, the relation is a causal one, then its very directness suggests the idea of reflection. Secondly, as "direct expressions" of a general social process, the two practices seem to be no more than two distinct though resembling reflections of one overall process. Thus the problematic reflection theory is not truly surmounted.

Walter Benjamin used ideas of correspondence in his study on Baudelaire. But Theodor Adorno criticised Benjamin both for postulating direct unmediated connections (really reflections)

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(1) Marxism and Literature, p. 104.

between cultural and economic practices, and also for correlating

such practices in a "metaphorical" or analogical way — his study

was "located at the crossroads between magic and positivism." (1)

Williams has attempted to improve on the idea of

correspondence as analogy, by proposing correspondence as

homology: while analogy is correspondence in "appearance and

function", homology is correspondence "in origin and

development". (2) While I do not find his formulation of

homology very clear, it seems that, as the organic metaphor of

homology implies, the idea involves a view of society as a

totality of practices in which no set of practices, such as the

economic, has priority as a determinant. But I feel such a model

of society cannot do justice to the facts of class domination and

antagonism which arise from the relations into which people have

entered within the sphere of economic production.

Also, homology, like analogy, appears to deny a causal

relationship between corresponding practices (while, at the same

time, implying an all too direct causal relation between such

practices and a social totality). While I do not disagree that

there are homologous practices, I do not think that homology

applies to the relation between colonial slavery and political

discourse which I seek to show involves causality though not

reflection. Williams' formulations arise largely from his

intellectual engagement with the theories of Adorno and Benjamin

and other Western Marxists. But the term correspondence had been

used in a different sense by earlier and more orthodox Marxists.

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(1)   Theordor Adorno et al, <u>Aesthetics</u> <u>and</u> <u>Politics</u>, trans. ed.
      Ronald Taylor, afterword Fredric Jameson (London and New
      York: Verso, 1980), pp. 128-129.

(2)   <u>Marxism</u> <u>and</u> <u>Literature</u>, pp. 104-105.

The idea of correspondence is utilised by Marx himself in his preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy. He asserts that "definite forms of social consciousness" (by which he means such forms as political ideas, art, religion and philosophy) "correspond" to the "economic structure of society" (the base). In the light of his following statement, that the mode of production "conditions" these forms, it seems that he sees such correspondence as a causal relation, though one that is not mechanical, unlike that implied by terms such as reflection and expression which he uses elsewhere. (1)

The term correspondence is also used by Vološinov, when he seeks to show a non-mechanical causal relation between literary themes and economic processes. He argues that an adequate explanation of such correspondence must involve an analysis of the "specific role" of the particular theme within the genre and of the particular genre within society. While he regards correspondence as a causal relation, it is clear that he does not see literature as directly and passively reflecting modes of production. (2) Similarly, as I will show in this thesis, it is impossible to understand the correspondence between the political term slavery and colonial slavery without understanding what the term meant in political discourse and without placing such discourse within specific social and historical contexts. Yet, while correspondence can be used in this sense, it appears, particularly in view of Vološinov's assertion of the relative autonomy of literary practices, that the idea of mediation is also necessary.

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(1) Collected Works, XXIX, 263.

(2) Marxism, p. 18.

In my opinion it is _not_ incorrect to see a causal relation
between certain economic and linguistic practices, _provided_ the
relation is not the crude and obvious one existing between an
object and a mirror. The term _correspondence_ has some value
here, though it has acquired the senses of analogous and
homologous relations which are not applicable to my object of
study. The idea of mediation is probably more valuable, as a way
to avoid the misleading routes of both magic and positivism.
Mediation does not deny causal relation, while, at the same time,
it allows that which is influenced a relative autonomy,
specificity and activity.

Whatever criticisms may be made of Fishman's and Vološinov's
theories, both make a valuable contribution to our understanding
of language. Both show language to be a social artefact produced
by people organised in social relations, rather than merely being
something given and imposed or a random and spontaneous product-
ion by individuals. And both demonstrate that language registers
change and conflict in society. I wish to focus on a specific
mechanism of language production: language is not only social and
creative, it is also figurative.

While I do not insist that figuration is the only mechanism
by which language is produced, much language production involves
figurative practices. Also, such practices are _social_ practices,
rarely unaffected by social change or the intentions of social
groups. For instance, while I write, a "casual" starts up his
"wheels" outside in the street. The above statement contains two
recent coinages, the first a metonymy, the second a synecdoche.
Furthermore these figures register changes in transport and
clothing-production (the second quite recent). It might also be

that a certain social judgement, even a social class judgement,

is implicit in the term casual. Certainly the semantic

customisation of "wheels" would not be approved of by a certain

member of the Royal Family. Even figures may not be politically

neutral.

The traditional distinction between "live" and "dead"

figures in not purely literary. Giabattista Vico, in his New

Science, portrayed language as composed of strata of dead

"fossilised" metaphors. (1) We may refer to journalists as "the

press" and speak of "the British way of life" quite automtically,

unaware that we are using a metonymy and a metaphor. Yet

language is not merely an inherited collection of preserved dead

figures — it can be replenished by the invention of new live

figures (such as "casual" and "wheels"). There are terms which I

think improve upon those of "live" and "dead": Terence Hawkes has

suggested that in all societies figurative language has

"normative" and "explorative" functions, meaning that it is

concerned both with "what we know" and "what we don't know". (2)

If "normative" figures can be linguistic structures

constraining consciousness, then it may be that "explorative"

figures break out of· the prison-house of language (to borrow a

phrase from Fredric Jameson) and mediate new social realities.

But it is valid to ask who might often continually benefit from

the predominance of "normative" figures, and who might at times

be empowered by the creation of "explorative" ones. It is

necessary to stress the figurative practices involved in language

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(1) Terence Hawkes, Metaphor, The Critical Idiom, (London:
     Methuen, 1972), p. 38.

(2) ibid. p. 88.

are not only social (in the general sense), but can also be political in that the social includes social domination and antagonism.

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have noted that "people in power get to impose their metaphors", to define reality by highlighting certain features and hiding others. An example of such mystifying figures in which "[p]olitical and economic ideologies are framed" is the phrase "[l]abour is a resource", which can lead to the "blind acceptance" of "exploitation". (1) Two more examples, ones I take from the period with which this thesis is concerned, are Edmund Burke's description of the nation as a "corporate body" (by means of which he obscures inequalities and divisions that cut across nations), and his portrayal of the French revolution as a "plague". (2)

Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman have numbered the disease metaphor among the manipulative vocabulary of modern right-wing agitators. But they also claim that left-wing agitators, rather than stirring irrational feelings, produce in their audience "a heightened awareness of its predicament." (3) This assertion, while perhaps biased or naive, seems to indicate that figurative language used by radical polemicists, addressing the disempowered and exploited, might often be "explorative".

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(1) George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live By (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1980), ·
     pp. 156-157, p. 158, pp. 326-327.

(2) Edmund Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France: and on the Proceedings of Certain Societies in London Relative to that Event, ed. and introd. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 247, p. 185.

(3) Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator, Foreword Herbert Marcuse (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1949), p. 54, p. 101, p. 8.

The concept of "explorative" and "normative" figures is
compatible with Vološinov's theory of language: "explorative"
figures might be produced when a new and significant phenomenon
enters the "purview" of a given social group; such figures might
also be part of the semantic contest and change involved in
struggles against dominant interests; those interests' attempts
to impose fixed linguistic structures on subordinate groups might
include an insistence on "normative" language - I think of
Burke's accusing claim that British radicals describe the
revolutionary French in terms of maroon slaves. (1)

I see the colonial slavery figure of late eighteenth-century
radical discourse as mainly an example of the "explorative
function" of figurative language operating within a social and
political context. The idea of colonial slavery as paradigmatic
domination and exploitation having entered the popular radical
purview when the slave trade became a hot issue, the colonial
slave became available for comparison with dominated and
exploited Britons in the semantic contest of 1790s domestic
political discourse. Such a comparison was sometimes manifested
in colonial slavery metaphors such as those I will discuss in the
following chapters of this thesis.

The chapters of this thesis are arranged in a generally (but
not purely) chronological order, charting the development of the
colonial slavery inflection of the political term slavery and of
the colonial slavery figure. The first chapter is about the term
slavery in domestic political discourse during most of the
eighteenth century, the term's actual origins in the traditional

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(1) Reflections on the Revolution, p. 123.

structures that constituted political discourse, its largely negative relation to colonial slavery, and the mainly proslavery context of instances in which the term is indeed inflected with colonial slavery.

The second chapter is about the discourses of colonial slavery, since it is during the late eighteenth-century conflict over the slave trade that the political term slavery is widely given a colonial slavery inflection. I examine the early abolitionists' attempts to define the term slavery in the face of its indeterminacy, their engagement with a ruling ideology of liberty which had grown in a way that accommodated black chattel slavery in the West Indies, the influence of relatively new and potentially revolutionary ideas on their polemics, and the confluence of abolitionism and radicalism. All of these factors were instrumental to the development of the new inflection.

In the third chapter I discuss the variable appearance of the new inflection in the radical prose polemics of the early and middle 1790s. The bulk of the chapter is divided by author, and the authors with whom I am concerned for most of the chapter are Paine, Wollstonecraft and Thelwall. However, there is a concluding section in which I examine a variety of political pamphlets, and a variety of responses to colonial slavery in such pamphlets, and seek to explain the several ways, positive and negative, in which colonial slavery is mediated. I also examine a strand common to almost all these writers: the lack of relation between their use of the political term slavery and contemporary slave resistance in the Caribbean.

The fourth and final chapter is a shift from radical prose to radical poetry. This shift is not an abrupt departure but a natural movement, because such poetry was influenced by such

prose and because it is in poetry we might expect to find the fullest development of the colonial slavery figure. This chapter (again divided mainly by author) focuses on the first-generation Romantics Wordsworth, Coleridge and Blake at a radical moment in their careers, and omits lesser poets (apart from Southey). In this section I suggest that a combination of linguistic creativity and abolitionist commitment may be involved in the figurative use of colonial slavery in Romantic poetry of the 1790s.

The quotation in the title of this thesis, "the language of the traffic", is taken from a speech by William Wilberforce in the Commons debate on the slave trade on 2 April 1792. (1) He used the phrase to denounce the rhetoric of the slavery interest. I re-use it to describe the language of 1790s radicalism with its colonial slavery figures. But the phrase also serves to indicate that a slave trade without a language, or an abolitionist movement without one, is not humanly possible. Thus the impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse cannot be the direct impact of fact upon figure. It is to the vocal opposition to the slave trade by many late eighteenth-century people that the colonial slavery figure owes its force, even its existence.

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(1) Houses of Parliament, The Parliamentary Register: Or a History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of. Commons and the House of Lords, 45 vols. (London: J. Debrett, 1782-1796), XXXII, 163.

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"POLITICAL SLAVERY":

SLAVERY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY POLITICAL DISCOURSE.

INTRODUCTION

In <u>England, Slaves and Freedom</u> James Walvin notes "the

parallel growth of slavery and liberties" in the mid-seventeenth

century, and points out that "slavery" was, at that time, used as

a political term: "[w]hat added piquancy to the mid-seventeenth

century denuciation of slavery", he observes, "was the parallel

development of slavery - black chattel slavery - in the European

settlements of the New World." (1) Robin Blackburn also remarks

on this strange parallel: "in the period 1630-1750 the British

Empire witnessed an increasingly clamorous, and even obsessive,

'egotistical' revulsion against 'slavery' side by side with an

almost uncontested exploitation of African bondage." (2)

But to argue for a "parallel development" between colonial

slavery and denunciations of political slavery is not to argue

for a simple and straightforward causal effect of economic

practices on discursive practices, or even for any causal effect

at all. It is not, indeed, the same as arguing that seventeenth-

century and early eighteenth-century polemicists made the chattel

slavery of black people in the West Indies into a metaphor for

the oppression or subservience of white people in Britain and on

the Continent. Unless it can be shown to be otherwise, the

parallel remains an odd but interesting coincidence.

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(1) James Walvin, <u>England, Slaves and Freedom, 1776-1838</u>
     (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1986), p. 17, pp. 26-27.

(2) <u>Overthrow of Colonial Slavery</u>, p. 42.

In fact, while it is true that colonial slavery was developing in the mid-seventeenth century, it was not until the <u>late</u> seventeenth century (at the time of the Stuart Restoration) that the British slave trade "took off" and that colonial slavery began to make a noticeable impact on life in Britain. As early as 1562 Sir John Hawkins encroached on a Portuguese monopoly, and sold slaves to the Spanish - but this was a small-scale enterprise with only half-hearted approval from the Crown. For over a century Britain's slave trade and colonial slavery were dwarfed by those of other nations. It was not until 1663, when the Company of Royal Adventurers was formed, that the British slave trade became a large-scale enterprise with full backing by the State. (1)

From 1660 till 1783 the slave trade became, according to Eric Williams, "a cardinal object of British foreign policy". Williams gives the following figures: between 1680 and 1686 the Royal Africa Company transported 5000 slaves a year; between 1698 and 1707 Bristol alone shipped 160, 950; between 1680 and 1786 two million Africans were transported to the British colonies. (2) Between 1713 and 1791, Peter Fryer writes, Britain cornered a quarter of the European market in slaves. (3) Britain's era of ascendent colonial slavery did not begin till at least a generation after political polemicists began to denounce the kind of slavery they saw in Britain under the sway of Charles I.

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(1) Eric Williams, <u>Capitalism</u> <u>and</u> <u>Slavery</u> (New York: Russell, 1961), p. 30.

(2) ibid., p. 30, pp. 32-33.

(3) <u>Staying</u> <u>Power</u>, p. 35.

Furthermore, it was not till the eighteenth century that the "entire productive system" of the metropolis was "fertilised" by the trade in slaves to the colonies, and that "slavery existed under the very eyes" of people in Britain. (1)   So, however political terms such as slavery may have changed in their inflection over the passage of time, such terms did not _originate_ in the impact of colonial slavery on British society. For such an impact did not truly occur until at least a century after Britons began to protest against their own slavery.

It might be supposed, alternatively, that such protests derived their force from a strong widespread hostility to the European practice of enslaving Africans. However, while such a practice had its opponents in the seventeenth century, the Quaker George Fox for instance, these opponents were few and far between. Even as late as 1782 British Quakers themselves were often participants in the slave trade. (2) Condemnations of colonial slavery do indeed appear in early and mid eighteenth-century literature, but, once again, only rarely.

Williams may exaggerate when he writes that, before the 1783 Quaker petition against the slave trade, all classes in Britain were united in support of the trade. (3) Yet antislavery as a mass movement cannot have begun before 1783, perhaps not until 1788 when the Abolition Society was formed. Antislavery opinion, marginal before the late eighteenth century, could not account for the use of the term _slavery_ in domestic political polemics from the seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth.

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(1) Williams, _Capitalism and Slavery_, p. 105, p. 52, p. 44.

(2) ibid., p. 43.

(3) ibid., p. 38.

The definitions of the words _slave_ and _slavery_ in Johnson's

Dictionary suggest that for many Britons, even in the late

eighteenth century, there was no clear dividing line between

various uses of the words, such as would exist were one ˄use a _to_

literal reference to chattel slavery and others figurative

comparisons of various kinds of subordination to chattel slavery.

Even when Johnson seems to be defining the chattel slave - "[o]ne

manicipated to a master; not a freeman; a dependent" - he gives

as examples "the slaves of nature" and the ancient Romans' loss

of liberty under the latter days of their Republic. (1)

Johnson correctly derives the word _slave_ from "the Slavi, or

Sclavonians, subdued and sold by the Venetians." (2) It seems

that, though the word many have originated in more distant times

as a figure, by the eighteenth century all uses of the word (even

ones we might now regard as figurative) were seen by most people

as literal. The word _slave_ had, it appears, become normative, as

deceptively literal as "film star" in our day, not only in

reference to chattel slavery but even in reference to

subordination to nature and the political subservience of the

ancient Romans. Rather than referring literally to chattel

slavery, and then figuratively to other forms of subordination,

the words _slave_ and _slavery_ had a range of literal senses by the

eighteenth century. These literal senses formed a semantic

constellation.

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(1) Samuel Johnson, A _Dictionary of the English Language: In_
     which the Words are Deduced from their Originals and
     Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples
     from the Best Writers. To which are Prefixed a History of
     the Language and an English Grammar (London: 1785).

(2) Johnson, loc.cit.

Indeed it might be argued that, until late eighteenth-century abolitionist writers put the plight of the black chattel slave clearly on the map, the use of the term slavery to describe the mode of production in the West Indian colonies was less prevalent than its use to describe the political subordination or moral corruption of the citizens of Britain and Europe. Among the meanings constellated in the term, one might claim, certain meanings were more to the fore than others (one could say they shone more bright); certainly, for many people during most of the eighteenth century, the use of slavery to describe political subordination or corruption was at least as significant as the one use we now regard as literal and even correct.

It may be true that certain linguistic practices directly relate to economic practices, but such political terms as slavery (for most of the eighteenth century) do not perhaps provide the best examples of such a relationship. The changing inflections of such terms undoubtedly relate to the ideas and motives of different social groups entering, in turn, the political arena. But, as I will demonstrate, in most cases these semantic changes do not include a colonial slavery inflection.

In order to understand what "political slavery" meant for the eighteenth century, it is necessary to explore the traditional structures which constituted political discourse. Such an exploration reveals that such political terms as slave and slavery were embedded in these traditional structures; and, while they were re-interpreted according to the political needs of certain writers and their audiences, they remained thus embedded. For the most part what was referred to was kinds of subservience whose conception was very ancient and preceded the growth of black chattel slavery in the West Indian colonies.

1. THE CONSTITUENTS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE

Political discourse changes according to the conditions in which it is used, and the intentions of those who use it. However, change usually occurs within limits: there are deep structures which tend to survive alterations of inflection and tend to be the material on which newly inflected discourse is inscribed. "Political slavery", prominent among that range of meanings contained for the eighteenth century in the word slavery, has a history long preceding that of black chattel slavery. Its foundations are those deep and ancient structures which constituted eighteenth-century political discourse, in particular classical republicanism, "gothicism", biblical republicanism and primitivism.

The notion of political slavery most obviously derives from classical republicanism. Classical republicanism entered modern Europe in the Renaissance, particularly in the political philosophy of Machiavelli, who linked the classical notion of civic virtue to the creation of an armed citizenry and who revived the classical theory of mixed governmment. These notions of civic virtue, popular armies and mixed government were utilised in Britain during the Civil War chiefly by the Parliamentarians. However, in mid-seventeenth century Britain classical republicanism had to compete with more rooted traditions such as that of the ancient constitution and of a community of saints. (1)

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(1) J.G.A. Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition (Princeton and London: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), p. 333, p. 348, p. 365, p. 381, p. 382, p. 350.

The ultimate origin of classical republicanism is in the
ancient classical period, in the writings of those such as
Aristotle, Plato, Polybius and Cicero. It is clear that as early
as the period of classical republics (which were also slave
societies), the term _slavery_ was often used as the antonym of the
civic virtue and martial spirit needed to maintain a "free"
republic. In these ancient societies, in which chattel slavery
was the defining mark of complete inferiority and non-
citizenship, those citizens who lacked the qualities necessary to
govern and defend the state were regarded as, in a sense, slaves.

For Aristotle a "natural slave", one innately fitted for
chattel slavery, is one who lacks reason and spirit. A citizen
participates in the governing of a state but, since the state
exists "for the sake of noble actions", the true citizen is
characterised by "virtue", by reason ruling emotion. The true
citizen also possesses "spirit" which is "imperious and
unsubdued" and produces "the urge to be free and in command".
Nations, as well as individuals, need spirit: those which "cannot
bravely face danger are the slaves of their attackers." (1)
Of course, in ancient times chattel slavery might literally be
the fate of those unable to defend themselves. But what is
clear, nevertheless, is that the character of an ideal citizen
is exactly the opposite to that of a chattel slave. Therefore,
by implication perhaps, a citizen without virtue and spirit is
only nominally a citizen and essentially a slave.

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(1) _Politics_, p. 69, p. 437, p. 169, p. 198, p. 410, p. 437.

The notion of political slavery is more distinguishable from chattel slavery in the writing of Cicero. Cicero praises the "active patriotism" epitomised by Cato, which involves a "virtue" in "the government of the State" not possible in one who is "a slave to any passion". He defends mixed government against pure aristocracy which is "like slavery for the people". He also defines "slavery" as an oligarchy based on "birth and wealth", and describes "unjust slavery" as a situation in which citizens "capable of governing themselves are under the command of another." (1) He apparently distinguishes unjust slavery from chattel slavery: his complaint about "Roman citizens... tortured and executed like slaves" may suggest that he does not disapprove of Roman citizens treating their chattel slaves in this way. (2)

My point is that these classical authors thought that a lack of virtue and militarism among the citizenry, and an absence of mixed government in the polis, resulted in a form of slavery other than chattel slavery; and this theory was translated into modern Europe at a time preceding the ascendency of colonial slavery. But an equally important point is that the theory was also translated into uniquely Continental or British terms.

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(1) Cicero, De Re Publica De Legibus, trans. Clinton Walker Keyes (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press; London: Heinemann, 1977), p. 79, p. 69, p. 73, p. 215.

(2) Cicero, The Verrine Orations, 2 vols., trans. L.H.C. Greenwood (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press; London: Heinemann, 1928), I, 123.

In the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century

Britain became increasingly indebted to booming financial

institutions like the newly formed Bank of England; it became

dependent on a professional army instead of on the armed body of

propertied citizens, and ruled by the executive power of

ministers rather than the legislative power of the elected

representatives of such citizens. In response to these changes

classical republicanism changed, and what was presented as the

antithesis of virtue and approximation of political slavery

became a corruption originating in luxury and faction. (1)

Perhaps equally important as classical republicanism among

the constituents of eighteenth-century political discourse, and

as a foundation of the idea of political slavery, are two related

traditions that one might subsume under the term "gothicism".

These are the traditions of Anglo-Saxon freedom (or the ancient

constitution) and the "Norman Yoke". The origins of both these

traditions may have been as early as 1066. They existed

embryonically during the Middle Ages, and were used to argue for

the Magna Carta. In the thirteenth century Andrew Horn wrote The

Mirror of Justice, a treatise on Anglo-Saxon freedom influential

among the supporters of Parliament in the Civil War, but it was

not until the fourteenth century that these traditions began to

blossom in England's towns and cities. (2) During the mid-

seventeenth century's growth of opposition to Charles I and his

pretension to absolute power, they reached their heyday. Clearly

they predate the impact of colonial slavery on British society.

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(1) Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, p. 466.

(2) Christopher Hill, Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in the
     Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th
     Century, (London: Panther, 1968), pp. 65-66.

The advocates of Anglo-Saxon freedom believed that the ancestors of the modern English possessed a fierce and innate love of liberty, due to the cold climate of the northern lands from which they had migrated during the fall of the Roman Empire, and that they had implanted on British soil traditions of public assemblies and limited and revocable monarchy. Often Parliament was seen as direct descendent of the Anglo-Saxon Witenagemot, and the rights of Englishmen founded in an ancient constitution. (1)

In the usually more radical "Norman Yoke" version of "gothicism", the Conqueror had swept away the ancient constitution, and from the Conquest onwards the English had been slaves of an aristocracy of Norman descent. The "Norman Yoke" version, in particular, is anciently and inextricably linked to an idea of slavery. The tendency to describe Norman rule as "bondage" existed by the sixteenth century. The expression "Norman bondage" is attributed to Pole, a fifteenth-century defender of the middle classes, by Thomas Starkey in the 1530s. As early as the sixteenth century the idea of Norman slavery was used to attack arbitrary taxation and defend the sovereignity of the Commons, or to demand a wider franchise: it was thought the Conqueror had deprived most Englishmen both of rights of property and of representation. (2)

Protests against Norman slavery became clamorous in the mid-seventeenth century. A relatively conservative parliamentarian, Samuel Hartlib, would denounce feudal tenures as "badges of our Norman slavery". One of the communistic Diggers spoke of

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(1) Samuel Kliger, The Goths in England: A Study in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Thought (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1952), p. 2, p. 113, p. 117.

(2) Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, p. 67, pp. 73-75.

property itself as "Norman power" over the "enslaved English".

Even the radical Levellers, who generally utilised a discourse of

natural rights in their struggle against Parliament in the late

1640s, were not averse to declaring that most Englishmen were

still "slaves" under Norman laws and government. (1)

These two versions of "gothicism" overlap, since, obviously,

both involve the idea of an original "gothic" liberty exemplified

by Anglo-Saxon society. But they tend to divide into a radical

and conservative version of "gothicism". The belief that the

liberties of the Anglo-Saxon constitution had had a continuous

existence in Britain, had survived relatively intact after the

Norman Conquest, was common among less radical seventeenth-

century Parliamentarians and eighteenth-century Whigs. Such

Parliamentarians and Whigs were often part of the substantially

propertied political nation and therefore had a stake in the

system. (2) The belief that the English continued to endure a

Norman slavery from which they should emancipate themselves,

clearly more threatening to the status quo, was prevalent among

the plebeian radicals of the English Revolution and reappears in

the pamphlets of plebeian radicals at the time of the American

and French Revolutions.

The classical origin of the cognates of slavery in

eighteenth-century political discourse ("despotism", "tyranny"

and "servitude"), suggests the firm link between the idea of

political slavery and classical republicanism. However, slavery

itself is not a word of classical derivation but originates in

the Middle Ages, when such non-Christians as Slavs could be

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(1) Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, p. 88, p. 91, p. 87.

(2) Kliger, Goths in England, p. 253, pp. 201-202.

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lawfully made chattel slaves by Christian West Europeans. (1)

The word slavery could have acquired additional senses, such as

subjection to arbitrary government, some time before the

classical revival of the Renaissance. And the fact that, even by

the eighteenth century, both chattel slavery and feudal serfdom

could be designated as slavery meant that a supposed survival of

English vassalage to the Normans could be referred to as slavery.

An important though perhaps marginal constituent of

eighteenth-century political discourse, and foundation of the

idea of political slavery, is the tradition I shall term biblical

republicanism. This tradition has three interwoven strands: the

first strand derives from the Old Testament legend of the

Hebrews' slavery in Babylon and Egypt, and their divine

emancipation; the second strand stems from the apparent liberty

of the Hebrews who, for many centuries, knew no other king than

God; the third originates in the New Testament apocalypse that

describes the world under the bondage of Babylon and Anti-Christ.

To be completely accurate only the second strand is strictly

biblical republicanism, but the assumption that the Elect should

enjoy a liberty willed by God, a liberty threatened by absolutist

rulers on earth, is common to all of them.

The English origins of biblical republicanism may well have

been in the late fourteenth century, when peasant rebels

reputedly sang "When Adam delved and Eve span/ Who was then the

gentleman?" But perhaps biblical republicanism first sprang to

life at the Reformation. The sixteenth-century martyrologist

John Foxe, in his Acts and Monuments of the Church, had claimed

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(1) Rodney Hilton, Bondmen made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements
     and the English Rising of 1381 (London and New York:
     Routledge, 1988), p. 56.

that the persecution of the Protestant "Saints" was prophesied in the Bible, particularly in Revelations. (1) In the same book he described Catholics, and no doubt Episcopalians also, as "those idolatrous Egyptians here in England". (2)

It was in the English Revolution of the mid-seventeenth century that the Bible gained a more overtly political inflection. Christopher Hill notes that Egypt was a popular political metaphor among radicals of this period. (3) In The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth, written on the eve of the Restoration, Milton expressed anxiety that his countrymen were prepared to "put [their] necks again under kingship, as was made use of by the Jews to return back to Egypt." (4) Babylon was another popular metaphor in the political polemics of the time: Gerald Winstanley, in The True Levellers' Standard Advanced (1649), had referred to the power of the ruling class as "the Babylonish yoke laid upon Israel of old" and to his fellow Diggers as "the poor enslaved English Israelites". (5)

The seventeenth-century revolutionaries also utilised biblical republicanism in its stricter sense. Milton, in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649), justifies the recent

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(1) Ernest Lee Tuveson, Millenium and Utopia: A Study in the Background of the Idea of Progress (New York, Evanston and London: Harper, 1964), p. 47.

(2) Christopher Hill, The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 63.

(3) ibid., pp. 113-114.

(4) John Milton, Prose Writings, introd, K. M. Burton (London: Dent; New York: Dutton, 1927; rpt [with revisions and introduction] 1958), p. 243.

(5) Gerald Winstanley, Selected Writings, ed. Andrew Hopton (London: Aporia Press, 1989), p. 16.

execution of Charles I by the biblical precedent of "tyrant-killing" among the Jews. In the same pamphlet he speaks of the Jews "since the time they chose a king against the advice and councel of God" as "much inclinable to slavery." (1)   That in referring to the Jews' slavery Milton is thinking of slavery in Babylon is debatable, but it is clear he means that their abrogation of republicanism resulted in political slavery.

Also in The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates Milton employs millenarian language for republican purposes, interpreting the "beast" of Revelations as "the tyrannical powers and kingdoms of the earth." (2) Winstanley, who does not confine his apocalyptic ire to monarchy, describes the "Dragon" as "striving to hold Creation under slavery" and the "Lamb" as "labouring to deliver the Creation from slavery." (3) So all three strands of this tradition, a tradition preceding the ascendency of colonial slavery, can be concerned with a kind of slavery, one other than colonial slavery, endured by God's people in the Bible and by their latter-day equivalent.

Eighteenth-century radicalism had a strong link with Dissent, particularly since dissenters were deprived of the right to hold most public posts under the Test and Corporation Acts. During the eighteenth century a "Dissenting cult of liberty" replaced Puritan ideas, while the impact of Socinianism, Newtonian physics and empiricism produced the Rational Dissent of Joseph Priestley and Richard Price. However, some dissenters

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(1) Prose Writings, p. 193, p. 178.

(2) ibid., p. 196.

(3) Selected Writings, p. 34.

still harked back to the mid-seventeenth century. (1) And many,

even _rational_ dissenters, had millenarian tendencies. (2) Many

made use of the Bible in their arguments against the Hanoverian

oligarchy, and their protests against their slavery may have had

more to do with ancient Egypt than modern subsaharan Africa. (3)

Of the traditional structures I have mentioned primitivism

is a special case in that, with its privileging of tribal peoples

(which eventually included Africans), it was most likely to have

enabled political slavery to become inflected with colonial

slavery. Yet, as a constituent of eighteenth-century political

discourse, primitivism was even more marginal than biblical

republicanism. It was not until the late eighteenth century,

with the adoption and adaption of Rousseau by British radicals

and French revolutionaries, that primitivism came to the

foreground of political discourse.

In a sense the three traditions I have already discussed are

primitivist, in that they express the longing for a good and

original state of existence, and tend to voice criticism of

present society as fallen and corrupt. But primitivism in its

strict sense focusses on the "noble savage" and "noble

barbarian", and represents the pristine state as still existing

in the modern world though beyond the reaches of civilisation.

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(1) Goodwin, _Friends of Liberty_, pp. 65-72.

(2) Jon Mee, _Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture
     of Radicalism in the 1790s_ (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994),
     p. 195.

(3) James E. Bradley, _Religion, Revolution, and English
     Radicalism: Non-Conformity in Eighteenth-Century Politics
     and Society_ (CUP, 1990), p. 4, p. 135.

The noble primitive is in "the state of nature" of which Locke wrote, where there is no social compact but men are free, equal, at peace and content with what the earth provides.

Primitivism stems from the earliest encounters of modern Europeans with tribes who lived mainly by hunting and gathering, for example the encounter of Columbus with Caribbean natives in 1492. Acccording to Peter Hulme, Columbus's view of these natives was refracted by a discourse of orientalism. When they proved to be neither the Khan's subjects nor docile, he had recourse to a classical discourse of African anthropophagy. (1)

Yet discourses still older may also have distorted Europe's perception of primitives: the classical discourse of the "Golden Age" and medieval discourse of the "Earthly Paradise"; the depiction by imperial Roman authors like Tacitus of the ancient Germans as imbued with republican virtues which such authors felt their own countrymen to have lost. (2) Classical ideas of the "Golden Age" and "Arcadia" influenced the pastoral tradition of the Renaissance just when primitives were being encountered. Montaigne's sixteenth-century work Of Cannibals is an early example of emerging primitivism. (3) Modern primitivism developed parallel to mercantile and landed capitalism, and may have encoded a certain recoil from social change and a certain vague nostalgia for an earlier system.

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(1) Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797 (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 14-43.

(2) Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage: A Study in Romantic Naturalism (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1928), p. 2, pp. 4-6.

(3) Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, p. 62.

The earliest noble primitives are not subsaharan Africans, or, even if they are subsaharan Africans, they are not the victims of the slave trade. Shakespeare's Othello may be literally a Moor and, while an ex-slave, has been emancipated from the galleys of Venice, not from the then barely existing plantations of the New World. Typical of most primitivism from the sixteenth to the late eighteenth century is John Smith's 1624 account of his rescue by the Amerindian princess Pocahontas. (1) The first representation of a noble colonial slave is probably Aphra Behn's Oroonoko, written in 1688 when Britain's slave trade was booming. Oroonoko, and its later rewritings, I will come to discuss when I turn to those few examples in which the colonial slave appears, either literally or figuratively, in political discourse before the 1790s.

The most important primitivist influence on eighteenth-century political discourse was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In his 1755 Discourse on the Origin of Social Inequality he writes that the savage "prefers the most turbulent liberty to the most peaceful slavery". The virtue and love of liberty he believes savages to possess, leads him to declare "it is not for slaves [civilised Europeans] to argue about liberty". A savage desires only life and leisure; civilised man, craving "honour", is not "ashamed" to grovel before a ruling class; he scorns the savage, but he himself is in "slavery". Rousseau imagines an American native's disgust on meeting a "European minister of State". (2)

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(1)   Hulme, Colonial Encounters, pp. 137-173.

(2)   Jean-Jacques Rousseau, The Social Contract and Discourses, trans. and introd. G.D.A. Cole, revised J.H. Brumfitt and John C. Cole (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1913, rpt [with revisions] 1973), pp. 102-103, p. 115.

It is clear that in Rousseau's thought the idea of the primitive is linked to an idea of slavery, in that these ideas are an antithesis. However, Rousseau does not write of African primitives enslaved in the West Indies, and the only concrete example he gives of a noble primitive is the typical one of the Amerindian. Though abolitionist writers would appropriate Rousseau's primitivism, Rousseau himself gives no sign of any nascent abolitionist sentiment, and his contrast between primitive virtue and civilised slavery seems to derive from the classical republican virtue-slavery antithesis - his savages owe much to Tacitus's Germans. (1)

Primitivism, classical republicanism, biblical republicanism and "gothicism" have in common the opposition between a mythical pristine state and a supposedly corrupt society. Together these traditions amount to a complex of structures which was the basis of eighteenth-century political discourse, a discourse which often called for a restoration of the original state of purity and liberty. Yet, with the exception of some versions of the noble primitive, the ideas of slavery embedded in this complex of structures was something other than the chattel slavery which came to flourish in Britain's New World colonies.

The structures I have outlined above were the foundations of the notion of political slavery from the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688 to the French Revolution of 1789. This is particularly the case with classical republicanism. Tacitus, writing on the fall of the Roman Republic, often refers to Roman citizens in those

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(1) Fairchild, Noble Savage, pp. 127-28

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times as ready for slavery. (1) Writers in the early and mid-

eighteenth century wore classical spectacles, so to speak, and

often drew parallels between ancient and modern times. Adam

Ferguson, writing on political slavery in the 1760s, finds in the

twilight of the Roman Republic a prototype for the deterioration

of present societies: Roman "despotism" arose when the people

became unfit for freedom and the great desired unlimited power.

(2) The rise of faction allowed Julius Caesar's "usurpation and

tyranny", though he was opposed by Cato who possessed "manly

fortitude and disinterestedness". (3)

Edward Wortley Montagu cites Polybius in order to defend

mixed governemnt and to assert that freedom is threatened chiefly

by "passions". He attributes to Polybius the then fashionable

theory that luxury corrupts free nations and causes "absolute

monarchy and tyranny". He constantly compares Britain's

constitution to those of Sparta, Athens and Rome, and insists

that Britain resembles those republics in their "declining

period". However, he stresses that the 1689 constitution is

superior to those of antiquity. (4)

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(1) Tacitus, The Histories. The Annals, 4 vols., trans. Clifford
     H. Moore and John Jackson (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard Univ.
     Press; London: Heinemann, 1962), II, 5, 627.

(2) Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society,
     ed. and introd. Duncan Forbes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ.
     Press, 1966), p. 240.

(3) Adam Ferguson, An Essay on the History of Civil Society
     (Dublin: Grierson, 1767), p. 200.

(4) Edward Wortley Montagu, Reflections on the Rise and Fall of
     the Ancient Republics: Adapted to the Present State of Great
     Britain (London: A. Miller, 1759), p. 357, p. 360, pp. 357-
     59, p. 370, pp. 373-74, p. 371.

Furthermore, it is clear that when slavery is discussed by political polemicists of the eighteenth century, it is often part of a classical allusion. John Trenchard quotes Brutus's "[n]isi forte non de servitudine sed de conditione serviendi, recusandum est a nobis", which he translates as "[w]e do not dispute about the qualifications of a master; we will have no master". He also accuses Caesar of having "enslaved his country" before he goes on to attack stock-jobbers who prey on British citizens. He imagines a "great Ancient", Cato perhaps, bewailing Britain's destruction by those with the "Spirits" of "Slaves". (1)

Isaac Kramnick has remarked on Trenchard's comparisons of eighteenth-century Britain to the declining Roman Republic. He also observes that Bolingbroke utilised similar classical allusions in his polemics of the early eighteenth century. In The Craftsman Bolingbroke attacked the rising commercial bourgeoisie by discussing "the excessive power of freed imperial slaves". (2) And John Brewer also notices the classical parallels, relating to mixed government, empire, luxury and corruption, in the Wilkite propaganda of the 1760s. (3)

There is an example of such classical parallels in John Wilkes's own writing. Wilkes compares the expulsion of the Stuarts with that of the Tarquins; continuing this comparison between ancient Rome and modern Britain, he writes "[a]s we have

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(1) J. Trenchard and T. Gordan, Cato's Letters or, Essays on Liberty, Civil and Religious, and Other Important Subjects, 4 vols., 4th ed., corrected (London, 1737), I, xxvii, 24.

(2) Isaac Kramnick, Bolingbroke and his Circle: The Politics of Nostalgia in the Age of Walpole (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1968), p. 238, pp. 74-75, p. 77.

(3) John Brewer, Party Ideology and Popular Politics at the Accession of George III (CUP, 1976), pp. 258-59.

had our tyrants as well as they, a Roman spirit had rose against

them here, and as it ever will, has bore down all before it." (1)

Writing in the 1780s John Cartwright, calling on Britons to

resist their "slavery", claims that the Romans' failure to defend

liberty resulted in Caesar becoming "tyrant"; from that day "hath

Rome continued in slavery and contempt." (2)

Thomas Gustafson asserts that John Adams, and other American

revolutionary writers, believed their battle against the British

State in the 1770s was the same one as "their bookish study of

Catiline's conspiracies against liberty had prepared them for."

(3) John Dickinson, writing that there are impositions that

"even slaves will not bear" (and thinking of taxation without

representation), gives the example of Julius Caesar deciding not

to make himself a king for fear of popular resistance. (4)

As well as classical republicanism, "gothicism" continued to

influence political discourse throughout the eighteenth century.

As I mentioned in the previous section, mainstream Whigs often

held the view that Anglo-Saxon freedom had survived relatively

uninterrupted throughout English history. In 1689 John Locke,

like Parliamentarians earlier in the century, denied the royalist

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(1)   John Wilkes, A Complete Collection of the Genuine Papers,
       Letters, etc. in the Case of John Wilkes, Late Member for
       Ayrlsbury in the County of Bucks (Paris, 1767), p. 198.

(2)   Major John Cartwright, Give Us Our Rights! A Letter to the
       Present Electors of Middlesex and the Metropolis (London:
       Dilly and Stockdale, 1782), pp. 1-2.

(3)   Thomas Gustafson, Representative Words: Politics, Literature
       and the American Language, 1776-1865 (CUP, 1992), p. 124.

(4)   John Dickinson and Richard Henry Lee, Empire and Nation,
       Letters from a Farmer in Pennsylvania. John Dickinson.
       Letters from the Federal Farmer. Richard Henry Lee, introd.
       Forrest McDonald (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Inc.,
       1962), p. 74.

view that the Norman Conquest gave monarchy "a title to absolute dominion". (1)   A few years later Robert Molesworth would praise the "true old Gothic constitution", with its "three estates", in which the monarch is "accountable to the whole body of the people". (2) James Thomson, in his poem Liberty (1735-38), depicts the spirit of Liberty successively deserting the classical republics due their their decline into political slavery. She finds the Anglo-Saxons, "Untam'd/ To the refining subleties of slaves", living under a free constitution. (3) William Collins, in Ode to Liberty (1747), represents English liberty as both "Grecian" and "Gothic" in origin. (4)

Bolingbroke, though a Tory, borrowed the main-stream Whig version of Anglo-Saxon freedom for his polemics of the 1740s: English liberty was enshrined in a mixed constitution established prior to 1066 but surviving the Conquest; this ancient constitution had been destroyed by bad rulers at moments in history, but had also been restored at other moments - such as the Magna Carta, the reign of Elizabeth I and the 1688 "Glorious Revolution". (5) A few years later Montagu, in his classical-

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(1) John Locke, Two Treatises on Government, introd. W. S. Carpenter (London and Melbourne: Dent, 1986), p. 208.

(2) Robert Molesworth, The Principles of a Real Whig: Contained in a Preface to the Famous Hotoman's Franco-Gallia, Written by the Late Lord-Viscount Molesworth and Now Reprinted at the Request of the London Association. To which are Added their Resolutions, and Circular Letter (London: J. Williams, 1775), p. 6.

(3) James Thomson, The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson, Oxford Edition, ed. with notes J. Logie Robertson (OUP, 1908), p. 377; 11. 686-697.

(4) William Collins, The Works of William Collins, ed. Richard Wendorf and Charles Ryscamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 40.

(5) Kramnick, Bolingbroke, pp. 25-26, p. 178.

republican work of 1759, refers to Northern European states as "founded by our Gothic ancestors" and "originally free" but, with the exception of Britain, these had lost their liberty. (1)

The Wilkite radicals of the 1760s also appropriated the idea of Anglo-Saxon freedom. (2) Yet soon afterwards the more radical version of "gothicism", the Norman Yoke, re-appeared in radical pamphlets: in 1771 Obadiah Hulme, author of the anonymous An Historical Essay on the English Constitution, claimed that universal male suffrage, annual parliaments and trial by jury had existed in Anglo-Saxon times but had been removed by the Conqueror. This work influenced Cartwright's Take your Choice (1776). (3) It may be that in Cartwright's Give us our Rights! (1782), when Cartwright calls Britons to the task of "RESTORING THOSE THINGS WHICH ARE GONE TO DECAY", he is representing corruption as a legacy of the Conquest. (4)

Yet not only classical republicanism and "gothicism" continued to influence political discourse throughout the eighteenth century - biblical republicanism had a certain power, paticularly towards the end of the century. The American patriots, according to Gustafson, turned "the language of the Puritan sermon... into a revolutionary language by supplying new referents for the highly charged and polarised terms of that language: God and Satan, saint and sinner, liberty and bondage". (5) Thomas Paine, in his Common Sense (1776), echoes the

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(1) Reflections on the Rise and Fall, p. 153.

(2) Brewer, Party Ideology, pp. 259-261.

(3) Hill, Puritanism and Revolution, p. 98, p. 100.

(4) Give us our Rights!, p. 31.

(5) Representative Words, p. 225.

revolutionaries of over a century before, when he denounces

George III as "the hardened, sullen tempered Pharoah" of Britain.

For several pages of this American revolutionary pamphlet Paine

conducts a biblical-republican critique of monarchy, giving

examples from the Old Testament of God's displeasure when his

people requested a king. (1)

Yet the British radicals, like their American brethren at

the time, also utilised biblical republicanism. In a 1778 sermon

the radical dissenter James Murray drew a parallel between

biblical and modern times. Like Milton over a century before,

Murray described the assassination of Eglon the wicked king of

Moab by the divinely appointed regicide Ehud. The parallel lay

in the unjust taxation of both Israel and America (and probably

Britain as well) by their respective rulers. Another radical

dissenter, Caleb Evans, denied that political slavery was

consistent with Scripture. (2)

In 1789 the rational dissenter Richard Price delivered the

sermon A Discourse on the Love of our Country, which celebrated

the French Revolution. The sermon includes the biblical

quotation "Lord, now letteth thou thy servant depart in peace,

for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." (3)   These verses of

Scripture are from the "Nunc Dimittis" spoken by Simeon on

beholding the Christ child: the first verse alludes to "the

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(1)   Thomas Paine, Common Sense, Penguin Classics, ed. and
      introd. Isaac Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986),
      p. 92, pp. 72-76.

(2)   Bradley, Religion, Revolution, p. 152, p. 135.

(3)   Richard Price, Political Writings, Cambridge Texts in the .
      History of Political Thought, ed. and introd. D.O. Thomas
      (CUP, 1991), p. 195.

manumission of a slave", and the second is borrowed from an

apocalyptic passage in Isaiah. (1) The victory against political

slavery seems to be presented in biblical-republican terms.

Primitivism also prevailed upon eighteenth-century political

discourse to some extent, and grew in its prevalence towards the

end of the century. Adam Ferguson may well be influenced by

Rousseau when, in 1767, he imagines the savage's recoil from a

civilised society divided by class and individualism. Like

Rousseau he sees the savage as virtuous, in that the savage is

free from the civilised vices of "servility" and "envy". (2)

However, for Ferguson political slavery is not an antithesis

to the primitive, but more to a civic virtue of a classical-

republican kind. Though such slavery results from a "corruption"

in "manners" due to "luxury", primitives may also be corrupted

and enslaved - "true liberty" can only exist in civil society.

(3) Yet, sharing the idea of a lost purity that should be

restored, primitivism and classical republicanism have much in

common and may be merged in eighteenth-century political

polemics.

Those most influenced by Rousseau were late eighteenth-

century radicals sympathetic with the American and French

Revolutions, just when abolitionists were promoting the idea of

the African as noble primitive. Holcroft's Anna St. Ives (1792)

has primitivist leanings, and the noble primitive idea inspired

Mary Wollstonecraft when she wrote her Historical and Moral

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(1)   Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger eds., The New Oxford
      Annotated Bible (OUP, 1973), p. 1244.

(2)   Essay on the History, 1966, p. 181, p. 186.

(3)   ibid., p. 244, p. 261.

<u>View</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Origin</u> <u>and</u> <u>Progress</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>French</u> <u>Revolution</u> (1794).

Already in 1789 one of the characters in Thomas Day's novel

<u>Sandford</u> <u>and</u> <u>Merton</u>, is a noble African inspired by Rousseau. (1)

As well as the traditions I have so far discussed there was,

from the seventeenth century, a tradition of natural liberty or

natural rights in which a notion of political slavery was

embedded. In this tradtion the term <u>slavery</u> is synonymous with

such terms as absolute power, arbitrary will and coercion, and

antonymous with such terms as limited power, rational authority

and consent. As this tradition was dominated by John Locke I

will defer discussing it till the following section which

includes an exploration of Locke's views of political slavery.

2. POLITICAL SLAVERY, 1689-1789

In this section I will demonstrate that, while throughout

the eighteenth century the political term <u>slavery</u> remained

embedded in the structures I have discussed above, the term

changed in its inflection as new social forces successively

entered the battlegound of eighteenth-century politics. However,

as I shall conclude this section, despite such re-inflection

political discourse remains, by and large, unaffected by the

impact of the growing practice of slavery in New World colonies.

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(1) Fairchild, <u>Noble</u> <u>Savage</u>, pp. 150-51, p. 157, p. 143.

J.G.A. Pocock has written usefully on the varieties of

Whiggism in the eighteenth century, distinguishing between the

classical-republican "Old Whiggism" of country gentry and city

traders excluded by the Whig oligarchy and the capitalistic

"polite Whiggism" of regime Whigs. But, when he criticises

"liberal-Marxist" historians like Isaac Kramnick for asserting

that the utilisation of classical republicanism by the country

opposition had "nostalgic" connotations while that of the urban

opposition had "bourgeois" ones, I find his idea of discourse

rather inflexible. (1)

Vološinov, with a more flexible and socially contextualised

view of discourse, distinguishes between fixed and mutable

semantic elements. He also relates the _varieties_ of meaning that

a discourse might take on to the existence of and conflict

between distinct social groups who share discourse but not

necessarily wealth and power. It is not only a question of _what_

discourse is utilised but _who_ _in_ _society_ is utilising it.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not urban merchants and

master-manufacturers in the eighteenth century can be accurately

termed bourgeois (though I admit to finding few others better

qualified for such a title), I will confine myself to asserting,

with Vološinov, that different even opposed social groups can

make different, even opposed, definitions of the terms which are

currently available and which they share. (2)

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(1)   J. G. A. Pocock, _Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on_
      Political Thought and History, Chiefly in the Eighteenth
      Century (CUP, 1985), pp. 241-42, p. 246.

(2)   Vološinov, _Marxism_, pp. 90-103, pp. 22-23.

Furthermore, in reply to Pocock's claim that "people's language" not only "articulates their experience" but "has something to tell us about what that experience was", (1) I will again cite Vološinov. It is impossible to fully understand what is being said, even when one is an expert on a discourse with its fixed structures, unless one understands the specific context in which an utterance takes place. (2) There are varieties of context as well as varieties of Whiggism. And, while one can assert that there is a discourse of exclusion, one should not confuse contexts which are mutually exclusive.

While both a Tory squire in a 1720s context and a radical manufacturer in a 1770s context might have used the term slavery, they did not mean precisely the same thing. Pocock has some awareness of this when he refers to "a plebeian version of of the Roman republican ideal" utilised by "professional men, tradesmen and artisans". But his hostility to the Marxist idea of class and his fetishisation of classical republicanism, as much a "mystical term" for him as "bourgeois" may be for Isaac Kramnick, leads to a less than dynamic view of political discourse. (3)

As Vološinov writes, words are not fixed in meaning: a "reevaluation" takes place, one which occurs with the "transposition of some particular word from one evaluative context to another". (4) As the social and political context changes, so changes the inflection of "political slavery".

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(1) Virtue, Commerce and History, p. 246.

(2) Marxism, p. 35, pp. 85-87.

(3) Virtue, Commerce and History, p. 260, p. 259.

(4) Marxism, p. 105.

In the century between John Locke's _Two Treatises on Government_ (1689) and Richard Price's _Discourse on the Love of our Country_ (1789), a period containing successive political crises and waves of opposition to the Hanoverian establishment, the political term slavery undergoes successive semantic transformations.

Locke's _Two Treatises_ live in the context of the struggle against absolute monarchy during the seventeenth century. The treatises discredit justifications for absolute monarchy, and defend the use of violence against such monarchy such as had recently occurred. Published in 1689, a year after the overthrow of the absolutist monarch James II, they provided eighteenth-century Whigs, radicals, and even Tories, with a rich source of arguments. Slavery is a central term in the treatises, and Locke presents political slavery as the central tenet of Sir Robert Filmer's _Patriarchia_ (1680) which defended Stuart absolutism.

Locke accuses Filmer of being an apologist for political slavery. Filmer never overtly describes the people's relation to the monarch as slavery; on the contrary he writes that "the greatest liberty in the world... is for the people to live under a monarch... All other pretexts of liberty are but several degrees of slavery." Yet his arguments from the "facts" that Adam and the patriarchs had "absolute power of life and death... within their houses and families", and his seeming approval of the right of Roman parents to kill or sell their children, leaves him open to such an accusation. (1) Whether out of conviction, or for polemical purposes, Locke represents _Patriarchia_ as a book justifying the slavery of the human race.

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(1) Robert Filmer, _Patriarchia and Other Writings_, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, ed. and introd. Johann P. Sommerville (CUP, 1991), p. 4, p. 16, p. 18.

Locke's views on political liberty and political slavery are set out in his chapter "On Slavery". He states that natural freedom consists in not being under the will or laws of another. But in civil society liberty consists in being subject to authority and laws established by the "consent" of all citizens. This political liberty in civil society he opposes to subjection to "the inconstant, uncertain, unknown, arbitrary will of another man." (1)

Therefore political slavery means subjection to a certain kind of power, the antithesis of free government by "compact" or "consent". The contractual relationship found in free societies involves "consent" on the part of the governed and "limited power" on the part of the government. Political slavery, on the other hand, involves "force" and "absolute power". It also involves power that is "arbitrary", against reason and above the law: "absolute arbitrary power" is "government without settled standing laws", to which the state of nature is preferable. (2)

Locke denies that "absolute monarchy" is "civil government": the absolute prince is above the law, his power unlimited, and the person he rules is more his "slave" than his "subject". Locke defends those who rebel against absolute monarchy. He also implies that even Parliament could become an arbitrary power and "enslave" the people. Should the people, "the supreme power", be reduced to such a "slavish condition" under "absolute will and arbitrary dominion", they would again be entitled to revolt.

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(1) Two Treatises, p. 127.

(2) ibid., p. 127, p. 128, p. 125, p. 186.

Any absolute and arbitrary power wages an unjust war on the people, and attempts to conquer and enslave them; therefore they have a right to defend themselves. (1)'

Thus for Locke and many of his audience, in the "evaluative context" of 1688 and 1689, political slavery means subjection to absolute monarchy. Yet during the following century, as new "evaluative contexts" successively appear, the term slavery in domestic political discourse is successively "reevaluated", re-inflected. The key moments of such reinflection are the split in the Whig ranks soon after 1689, the South Sea Bubble, the ministry of Sir Robert Walpole, the Wilkes affair, the American Revolution and the rise of a middle-class radical movement seeking an extended franchise.

At the turn of the century dissatisfaction with post-Revolution society set in among some of the landed interest, who split off from the main body of Whigs and designated themselves "real Whigs". Opposition writers began to present their case in terms of a struggle between "country" and "court", which they believed had replaced the distinction of Whig and Tory. A financial revolution that began at the end of the seventeenth century, and started to shift power and influence towards the "moneyed interest" and professional politicians, the maintenance and growth of a standing army which began during the reign of William III, and increasing aristocratic patronage towards M.P.s and electors were three factors in this new context. (2)

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(1) Two Treatises, pp. 160-61, pp. 192-193, p. 240.

(2) Pocock, Virtue, Commerce and History, p. 234.

Robert Molesworth's _Principles of a Real Whig_ is an early
example of country-party polemic. Molesworth, defending Queen
Anne and mixed government, denounces absolute monarchy as
"slavery" just as Locke had done. But his attack on the Stuarts,
who had tried "to destroy this union and harmony of the three
estates", shows an eighteenth-century obsession with governmental
checks and balances and with power-sharing between Crown,
nobility and (landed) commoners. (1) The term _slavery_ becomes
re-inflected in the new situation.

As well as supporting triennial parliaments (removed by the
Septennial Act of 1716 which extended parliaments from three to
seven years), disfranchisement of moneyed men, restraint on
monopolies, press freedom, and liberation of the French with whom
Britain is at war, a "real Whig" advocates a citizen militia as
opposed to a professional army: "citizens", unlike common
soldiers, have lands to defend - thus "citizens" are brave and
can be trusted by the English who "heartily hate slavery".
Molesworth does not only fear slavery from France: a standing
army, "subservient" to a British "tyrant", would assist in "the
enslaving of the nation". (2)

In claiming that that "arming and training" all the
"freeholders of England" accords with the "antient constitution",
and is therefore an Englishman's right, Molesworth utilises
"gothicism". (3) Yet he utilises this tradition in a way
peculiar to the situation in which he writes, the situation of a
growing standing army in Britain. Slavery, while still embedded

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(1) _Principles of a Real Whig_, pp. 3-4.

(2) ibid., p. 18.

(3) ibid., p. 17.

in the "gothic" tradition, comes to mean not only absolute

monarchy but also the disarming of the citizen body and their

subsequent subjection to a standing army.

Particularly after the 1716 Triennial Act, the speculative

fiaso of the 1720 "South Sea Bubble", and Sir Robert Walpole's

prime ministership between 1721 and 1742, political slavery again

became re-inflected by opposition writers, both Whigs and Tories.

These writers directed their polemics against both landed

magnates and a rising commercial elite seen to be in conspiracy

with Walpole's government (branded the Robinocracy). The writers

themselves tended to voice the grievances of the lesser gentry,

(1) though they also expressed the resentment of urban traders

effectively disfranchised by the Septennial Act. (2)

John Trenchard, another "real Whig", began in 1720 a series

of "letters". These "letters", written under the pseudonym

"Cato", became a polemic directed against Walpole and the

commercial interests with which Trenchard saw Walpole conjoined

(interests Trenchard blamed for the disastrous "South Sea

Bubble"). Trenchard's praise of English freedom, and his

denunciation of Stuart and foreign absolutism as "slavery", are

typically whiggish. Yet when he writes of the "Slavery" of

"passive obedience" he is condemning not just absolute monarchy

but also the Robinocracy - a ministerial absolutism. (3)

In letter 17, "What measures are actually taken by wicked

and desperate ministers to ruin and enslave their country",

Trenchard writes more on ministerial absolutism. Bad ministers

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(1) Kramnick, Bolingbroke, pp. 4-27, pp. 56-72, pp. 326-360.

(2) Pocock, Virtue, Commerce and History, p. 239.

(3) Cato's Letters, I, 4, 52, xxiii.

devise "wicked and dangerous Projects" to enrich themselves and impoverish the nation: they know that "Poverty dejects the Mind, fashions it for Slavery, and renders it unequal to any generous Undertaking, and incapable of opposing any bold Usurpation." (1) He is claiming that governmental corruption - electoral bribery, placemen, pensioners, monopolies and the national debt - brings about political slavery.

Yet in this and other diatribes against the Whig oligarchy and the commercial bourgeoisie, Trenchard derives the threat of "slavery" from a "general dissolution of manners", from the corrupting effect of "Luxury". (2) What is evident in _Cato's Letters_ is that peculiarly early eighteenth-century brand of classical republicanism which, reacting against the financial revolution, presents corruption and luxury as the antithesis of virtue and the cause of political slavery. The enemies of liberty are now less Stuart kings than absolute ministers and moneyed upstarts who are the source of a moral contagion.

Trenchard urges the people of Britain to resist the new menace, just as in the previous century they had resisted absolute monarchy: "[l]et them rouse the bold Spirit of a free Nation; and shew by all Lawful and Loyal means, that they who always scorned to be the Property of Tyrants, will not be the Prey of Stock-Jobbers." (3) While in a Lockean vein the people are urged to resist political slavery, the emphasis of such a call has been altered in the context of the financial revolution and the rise of prime-minsterial government.

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(1) _Cato's Letters_, I, 113.

(2) ibid., I, 115.

(3) ibid., I, 9.

Isaac Kramnick has noticed Bolingbroke's contrast between "liberty" and "faction". (1) Trenchard, in a similar way to Bolingbroke, links political faction to political slavery, in that faction involves self-interest and is therefore incompatible with civic virtue. Faction, he writes, "is the base office of a Slave, and he who sustains it breathes improperly English air; that of the Tuilleries or the Divan would suit him better." (2) The view of foreign absolutism as slavery is typically whiggish, and can be found in polemics of a generation before, but the concern about faction is particularly relevant to the first half of the eighteenth century when a Whig junta held sway and seemed to be acting at the behest of the moneyed interest.

The Robinocracy and the "South Sea Bubble" angered others as well as those who called themselves "real Whigs". Henry St. John, stripped of his title Lord Viscount Bolingbroke because of the Jacobite sympathies of his youth, is often held to be a Tory; nevertheless, he has much in common with the "real Whigs". Bolingbroke's opposition writing, while expressing the nostalgia of a traditional intellectual dismayed at a "Brave New World", also voices the small landowner's and urban trader's resentment towards land-grabbers and monopolists. (3) In addition urban traders had, according to Pockock, been "effectively disfranchised" and often looked to Tory opposition politics. (4)

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(1) <u>Bolingbroke</u>, p. 25.

(2) <u>Cato's Letters</u>, I, xxii.

(3) Kramnick, <u>Bolingbroke</u>, p. 11.

(4) <u>Virtue, Commerce and History</u>, p. 241, p. 245.

Bolingbroke, like Trenchard, uses such interrelated terms as
slavery, faction and corruption to attack the Robinocracy and new
commercial elite. When faction prevails, because of the "wicked
arts" of certain ministers, there arises a situation in which
"[a] complete victory on one side will enslave all sides." (1)
Thus, in The Idea of a Patriot King (1736), Bolingbroke warns
that the Robinocracy may destroy the organic society and bring
about a new form of absolutism or slavery.

Corruption is also a factor in this version of the fall into
slavery. As Bolingbroke writes in the same essay, the "general
corruption of the people", rather than a coup d'etat, is the
usurper's "method of destroying liberty". In Bolingbroke's
polemics "virtue" or "public spirit" are virtually synonymous
with the "spirit of liberty" and faction and corruption with the
"spirit of slavery". (2)

In the case of Bolingbroke and many of his audience, as in
the case of Trenchard and many of his, the political term slavery
gains a new inflection in the new political and social context.
The term becomes part of an early eighteenth-century version of
classical republicanism, part of a discourse of faction and
corruption. But the term will gain yet another inflection less
than a generation later with the Wilkes affair.

From the 1689 Bill of Rights until the 1716 Septennial Act
there was a vigorous independent electorate in Britain. Between
1716 and 1758 (the year the Whig oligarchy began to
disintegrate), the population rose by 18% but the electorate only

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(1)   Henry Bolingbroke, The Miscellaneous Works of the Right
      Honourable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke,
      4 vols. (Edinburgh: Alexander Donaldson, 1773), IV, 262.

(2)   ibid., IV, 174, 203.

by 8%. But a sleeping giant began to awake: not just 40-shilling

freeholders but disfranchised tenants, small traders,

manufacturers and wage-earners, sought to empower themselves by

means of demonstrations, petitions, newspapers, pamphlets, and

politicians like John Wilkes. (1)

In 1763 Wilkes was arrested on a general warrant for

publishing a seditious libel in The North Briton 45, and his

papers were confiscated. Returning from exile in 1768 he was

elected M.P. for Middlesex; but, owing to his criminal

conviction, he was expelled from the Commons; the following year

he was elected M.P. for Essex, and again expelled. (2) These

events caused anger over the violation of personal and political

liberties. A Society of Supporters of the Bill of Rights

(S.S.B.R.) was formed, the first radical organization, and

Wilkite agitation became a national and cross-class phenomenon.

Wilkes often seems to echo earlier polemics, such as those

of the Bolingbroke circle and the "real Whigs". In a 1768

address to the cheated voters of Middlesex, he flatters them for

showing they "are neither to be deceived nor enslaved." He

contrasts them with their venal compatriots who "bow the knee to

the idol of self-interest", "sacrifice every virtue at the shrine

of corruption", and "call their PUSILLANIMITY prudence", while

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(1) Brewer, Party Ideology, pp. 5-6.

(2) ibid., pp. 164-68.

they "tamely stoop to the yoke" prepared by "artful ministers".
(1)   In other words Wilkes, writing in the classical-republican
tradition, claims that these others lack the virtue and spirit of
patriot citizens.

However, Wilkes is writing in a new context and his use of
classical republicanism is different to that of earlier
polemicists. He is attacking an apparently Tory government who
have violated the rights of electors. (2) Slavery and
corruption, linked to faction and luxury by earlier writers, have
now more to do with such violated rights and a corrupt parliament
of placemen and pensioners than with the predominance of the
moneyed interest. And in Wilkite polemic the terms liberty and
slavery are peculiarly personified and personalised: there is now
an opposition between "Wilkes and Liberty" and "Bute and
Slavery". (3)

The term slavery becomes particularly associated with the
violation of what Wilkes calls "the rights of the free-born
English subject". (4) This changed inflection occurs in the
context of Wilkes's arrest and expulsion. In his 1769 address to
the Essex voters, a swipe against French absolutism is worked
into a diatribe against ministers who "treat Englishmen as

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(1)   John Wilkes, English Liberty: Being a Collection of
      Interesting Tracts, from the Year 1762 to 1769, Containing
      the Private Correspondence, Public Letters, Speeches and
      Addresses of John Wilkes Esq. Humbly Dedicated to the King,
      2 vols. (London: T. Baldwin, 1769), I, 162.

(2)   Brewer, Party Ideology, pp. 47-49.

(3)   English Liberty, I, ix.

(4)   ibid., I, iv.

.slaves." (1) Yet _this_ "real whiggery" does not appear as an

attack on faction, as it would in Trenchard, but as a warning

that popular and parliamentary sovereignity will be lost if

electoral rights are not respected.

Essex freeholders, petitioning the king when their M.P. has

been replaced, complain they are "deprived even of the franchise

of Englishmen, reduced to the most abject state of slavery, and

left without hopes or means of redress but from your Majesty or

God." (2) This protest against slavery, and implied threat of

recourse to God, has a seventeenth-century ring to it, but the

inflection of the term _slavery_ is changed in the context of the

alleged violation of the Bill of Rights involved in Wilkes's

repeated expulsions.

Wilkite polemics influenced American patriots, but they, in

their turn, re-inflected political slavery in the context of

their struggle against the British State. (3) Slavery was a key

term in American polemics. Gustafson cites this term as one of

those seen in Britain as "rhetorical claims with no

substantiation". In a letter to the _Boston Gazette_ John Adams

denied Americans were "duped" by an "artful use" of the words

liberty and _slavery_ as "an application to their passions", and

asserted they could "distinguish between realities and sounds."

(4) It seems many Americans feared they were threatened with a

kind of slavery.

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(1) _English Liberty_, II, 291.

(2) ibid., II, 330.

(3) Brewer, _Party Ideology_, pp. 202-204.

(4) _Representative Words_, p. 205.

While in Britain the political term _slavery_ had acquired the meaning of a violation of electoral rights, in America it gained the sense of taxation without representation. In a "letter" protesting against the taxation of unrepresented colonists, John Dickinson asks if it is "possible to form an idea of a slavery more complete, more miserable, more disgraceful, than that of a people, where justice is administerd, government exercised, and a standing army maintained, AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PEOPLE, and yet WITHOUT THE LEAST DEPENDENCE ON THEM?" (1) Utilising the classical-republican idea of slavery as lack of spirit, yet applying it to the American context, Dickinson complains that "millions voluntarily fasten their chains by adopting a pusillanimous opinion" that might is right. But such lack of spirit can only exist when rulers have first "stripped" the people of "property and liberty". (2) So the classical-republican paradigm is in effect reversed: a willing slavery, attended by spiritlessness, follows an imposed slavery — the loss of liberty and property involved in taxation without representation.

Dickinson was a man of property, and held Lockean ideas of liberty as property rights and of a form of government with consent that includes monarchy and aristocracy. In _Common Sense_, written after the Declaration of Independence by a radical whose father was a stay-maker, political slavery takes on revolutionary, republican and plebeian nuances. Paine, decrying monarchy for corrupting the "republican" part of Britain's

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(1) McDonald, _Empire and Nation_, p. 57.

(2) ibid., p. 71.

constitution (the Commons), declares that "when republican virtue fails, slavery ensues." (1) Paine utilises classical-republican ideas of virtue and corruption, yet to him and many of his audience "republican" means the overthrow of monarchic and aristocratic government. Referring to the commercial bourgeoisie of London (many of whom had supported Wilkes a decade before) he claims that the "rich are in general slaves to fear, and submit to courtly power with the trembling duplicity of a spaniel." (2) Again Paine uilises a classical-republican idea, the link between slavery and lack of spirit. But, whereas for Molesworth and many of his audience the property-owner was a valiant defender of liberty, for Paine and many of his audience quite the opposite is true. Here the classical-republican idea of slavery as spiritlessness receives a populist, even democratic emphasis.

While Wilkite discourse may have influenced American patriots, American revolutionary discourse exerted an even stronger influence on Britons seeking radical parliamentary reform. Due to a "process of ideological contamination from the American debate about British attempts to tax the thirteen colonies", the issue of political representation became crucial for middle-class radicals of the 1770s and 1780s. (3) Again the issue of political slavery was crucial, and again political slavery was re-inflected in a new context.

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(1) Common Sense, p. 81.

(2) ibid., p. 107.

(3) Brewer, Party Ideology, p. 207.

Many of these middle-class radicals were dissenters deprived
of the right to hold public office, nationally or locally, by the
Test and Corporation Acts. Dissent had large concentrations in
manufacturing centres such as London, Norwich, Birmingham,
Sheffield and Manchester, and dissenters were often involved in
manufacture. The growing manufacturing towns of the North and
Midlands were not represented in Parliament, while depopulated
Old Sarum and the numerous but tiny Cornish boroughs had
parliamentary seats. Many of those involved in small trade and
manufacture were, unlike 40-shilling freeholders and freemen in
chartered towns, disfranchised. While most of the urban middle
class was disfranchised, in some rural boroughs the vote was
extended to the labouring poor. Yet most of the "productive
classes" were politically excluded, and Britain was ruled by an
oligarchy of land-owning magnates and big overseas merchants.

The British radicalism influenced by the American Revolution
was anticipated by the 1771 schism in the ranks of the S.S.B.R.,
when Horne Tooke broke with the more moderate Wilkes. (1) In
1780 Tooke, Major John Cartwright and other London radicals
founded the Society for Constitutional Information (S.C.I.). The
S.C.I. was more radical than the Yorkshire Association, led by
the landowner and clergyman Christopher Wyvill, which was
composed mainly of freeholders, sponsored by opposition Whigs
such as Lord Rockingham and favoured only a limited extension of
the franchise. The S.C.I. contained many dissenters and those of
the new urban middle class. (2)

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(1) Brewer, Party Ideology, p. 199.

(2) Eugene Charlton Black, The Association: British
     Extraparliamentary Political Organization 1769-1793
     (Cambridge: Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1963), p. 61, p. 34.

The radical discourse of the 1770s and 1780s differed from the country-party discourse still employed by moderate reformers. Political slavery was now presented as not merely a matter of arbitrary ministers, the corrupting power of big business and of aristocratic patronage, and the declining power of the smaller landowner. It also came to mean the representation of property rather than the representation of persons. (1) In 1782 Cartwright denounced both the Septennial Act and the Triennial Act of the seventeenth century, insisting that parliaments should be of annual duration; he also condemned the 1430 Statute of Disenfranchisement which limited the vote to 40-shilling freeholders and freemen. These laws, he writes, "carry slavery in every line, and every word is a link in the chain that binds us." (2)

Although addressing the freeholders of Middlesex whom Wilkes had addressed, Cartwright is not condemning the violation of existing electoral rights but rather the fact that the majority of the male population is completely deprived of the vote. He seeks to convince these propertied voters that only an alliance with disfranchised manufacturers can free the "enslaved people" of Britain. Like earlier polemicists he attacks corruption, faction and arbitrary ministers — but he sees such ills as mere symptoms of the "slavery" that is the disfranchisement of the majority of Britons. (3)

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(1) Black, Association, p. 189.

(2) Give us our Rights!, p. ii.

(3) ibid., p. 51, p. 29, p. 35.

Clearly the American patriots' inflection of political slavery is utilised by Cartwright in his polemic against the disenfranchisement statute: "the far greater part of the English nation are constantly taxed without being represented, and compelled to obey laws to which they never assented; which is the very definition of slavery." (1) But his redefinition of slavery differs from that of more conservative American patriots like Dickinson, in that for Cartwright taxation includes the indirect taxation imposed even on the poorer classes in Britain.

Cartwright's ultimate definition of slavery is political exclusion: "[t]hose Englishmen who have no votes for electing a representative, are not free men, as justice and the constitution of our country require; but are enslaved to the representatives of those who have: For to be enslaved, is to have no will of our own in the choice of lawmakers, but to be governed by rulers, whom other men have set over us." (2)

Cartwright also defines the term _freeman_ as well as the term _slavery_, and, unlike earlier polemicists, he denies that a "freeman" is a property-holder: "[e]very Englishman... is, of common right, and by the laws of God, A FREE man, and entitled to the full enjoyment of liberty". He blames his readers for priding themselves "in the invidious distinction of being the free holders of counties, and the free men of corporate towns, by which it is implied that all others are wretches without a right to share in the freedom of the country." (3) A freeman is simply a British subject.

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(1) _Give us our Rights!_, p. 8.

(2) Cartwright, loc.cit.

(3) ibid., p. 7, p. 45.

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The term _slavery_ had had successive applications during the century in which Cartwright wrote, whether it was applied to the corrupting effect of the moneyed interest or the violation of the rights of voters. Cartwright redefines the term in order to apply it to a new situation - that of a radical reform movement seeking a considerable extension of the franchise. Though addressing freeholders, and himself a landowner, he voices the aspirations of the urban middle class, such as the Birmingham manufacturer whom Cartwight mentions as one worthy of political representation. (1)

The rational dissenter Dr. Richard Price was a member of the London Revolution Society by the 1780s, but he had been a member of the S.S.B.R. and was connected with the S.C.I. during the 1787-1792 campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts. (2) His sermon _A Discourse on the Love of our Country_ was delivered at the Old Jewry Meeting House on November 4 1789, five years after the S.C.I. had lost its original momentum but shortly after the French Revolution which revived that organization and inspired a new generation of popular radicals. (3)

The language of Price's sermon echoes that of late seventeenth-century Whigs, as he makes the "Glorious Revolution" a parallel for the revolution in France. Speaking of the 1688 revolution, whose anniversary was being celebrated in Britain, Price asserts that had the British not rejected "passive obedience, non-resistance, and the divine right of kings" they would still be "wretched slaves". Yet, as Price concludes his

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(1) _Give us our Rights!_, p. 14.

(2) Black, _Association_, p. 28, p. 175.

(3) ibid., p. 207.

sermon, the French people have in recent months, like their

British brethren a century ago, overcome an "arbitrary monarch"

and ended their "slavery". (1)

The whiggish discourse of absolute monarchy as political

slavery now gains a new connotation because of the new situation

of the French Revolution. In seventeenth-century and eighteenth-

century Whig discourse France had been virtually synonymous with

political slavery. Now, in the present context of French self-

emancipation and the promise it holds out for British radicals,

Price suggests that perhaps Britain's rulers will be shamed into

consenting to parliamentary reform in the increasingly likely

event of "the acquisition of a pure and equal representation by

other countries." (2)

One could say that, in the new context of 1789, the whiggish

discourse of absolute monarchy as political slavery has lost its

nationalist flavour. Price, redefining patriotism, condemns the

national aggrandisement that involves "enslaving surrounding

countries" and the blind loyalty that is really "a passion for

slavery". He states that people should become "citizens of the

world" as well as patriots. (3) What was once seen seen as

patriotism is now re-inflected as a political slavery, and, for

the internationalist radical of 1789, political enslavement has

become a crime committed across national boundaries.

In this section I have used as evidence what I believe to be

a representative sample of political discourse from the period

between the ""Glorious Revolution" and the French Revolution.

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(1) Political Writings, p. 189, p. 195.

(2) ibid., p. 192.

(3) ibid., p. 179, p. 181.

This evidence shows that, during the eighteenth century, the political term _slavery_ was successively re-inflected by new political movements often responding to new conditions. But, in spite of the growth and importance of black chattel slavery during this period (which certainly amounts to a new condition), the term does not appear to have been often inflected with colonial slavery.

Slavery in Locke's _Two Treatises_ exists in a network of terms and oppositions: arbitrary will as opposed to law and reason, absolute power as opposed to limited governemnt, force and conquest in contrast to consent. These terms and oppositions would be utilised by later writers attacking colonial slavery. But despite this and the fact that Locke _does_ (as we shall see) discuss chattel slavery, one gets little impression that his justification of the "Glorious Revolution" involves comparisons of James II to a New World planter and the British people to maroon freedom-fighters.

Of course the details of colonial slavery were little known in 1689. But later polemicists of the eighteenth century, when black chattel slaves were becoming a common sight in Britain, do not seem any much more inclined than Locke to such comparisons. Trenchard, for instance, warns his countrymen of the South-Sea Company speculators: if a people "will tamely suffer a Fall from Plenty to Beggary, they may soon expect another, and a worse, from that to Slavery." (1) Trenchard's warning of slavery may

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(1) _Cato's Letters_, I, 14.

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reflect contemporary anxiety at the Financial Revolution, but not

the fact that the South Sea Company had, from 1713, a monopoly in

the slave trade to Spain. (1)

The British, according to Trenchard, have been hoodwinked

and corrupted by the commercial bourgeoisie: "whoever would catch

mankind, has nothing better to do, but throw out a bait to their

Passions, and infallibly they are his slaves." (2) Trenchard,

like other early eighteenth-century writers, connects political

slavery with moral weakness and a disavowal of reason. It is

hard to see how this psychopolitical slavery could simply relate

to colonial slavery with its basis in physical violence.

Nor does Bolingbroke's use of the term slavery, similar to

Trenchard's, relate to colonial slavery whose victims were

degraded through the venality of others not through their own.

And it is unlikely Bolingbroke would regard black slaves as

victims to which British unfortunates could be compared: in 1735

his Craftsman voiced approval of the riches gained by foreign

trade - of which the slave trade was a major ingredient; in 1730

Swift, his collaborator, bought shares in the slave-trading South

Sea Company. (3) When Bolingbroke does compare the victims of

ministerial absolutism to contemporary chattel slaves, it is the

galley-slaves of the Austrian empire he has in mind. (4)

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(1) David Dabydeen, "Eighteenth-Century English Literature on
     Commerce and Slavery", in The Black Presence in English
     Literature, ed. David Dabydeen (Manchester: Manchester Univ.
     Press, 1985), p. 44.

(2) Cato's Letters, I, 27.

(3) Dabydeen, "Eighteenth-Century English Literature", p. 26,
     p. 44,

(4) Henry Bolingbroke, A Dissertation upon Parties: in Several
     Letters to Caleb D'Anvers Esq., 8th ed., (London: R.
     Franklin, 1754), pp. xxiv-xxv.

In his poem "The Traveller, or a Prospect of Society"
(1764), Goldsmith speaks of "The wealth of climes where savage
nations roam,/ Plundered from slaves to purchase slaves at home".
While it might appear that Goldsmith utilises a figurative
comparison between subordinated Britons and colonial slaves,
Roger Lonsdale suggests that Goldsmith's figurative comparison
involves the "slaves" of the East not the West Indies. (1)

The petition of the Essex freeholders to the king, on the
occasion of their M.P. John Wilke's expulsion, contains a veiled
threat which may allude to the revolutions against absolute
monarchy in the previous century. But there is no allusion to
the large slave revolt in Jamaica less than ten years before this
petition. (2) There is no indication that when Wilkes himself
uses the term slavery he makes any comparisons between his
supporters, deprived of their electoral rights, and the victims
of colonial planters. One of his supporters, an influential ally
he might not wish to offend, was the immensely rich West Indian
planter William Beckford.

In Paine's Common Sense the term slavery is used as part of
a new version of political discourse with its classical-
republican and other constituents. Yet despite Paine's tract
against the slave trade written the previous year, there is no
more indication that he compares his audience to black slaves
than there is in Dickinson's writing. In fact by 1776 such
slaves are seen by Paine as something of a nuisance, since they

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(1) Thomas Gray, William Collins and Oliver Goldsmith, The
     Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, and Oliver Goldsmith,
     ed. Roger Londsdale (London and Harlow: Longman, 1969),
     pp. 653-54; 11. 387-88.

(2) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 55.

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are being encouraged by the British State to revolt against their

revolutionary masters. (1)

    It might be expected that comparisons between political

subjection in Britain and chattel slavery in the colonies would

have become more common in the 1770s and 1780s when Granville

Sharp, Thomas Clarkson and others spoke out on behalf of black

slaves. Though slavery's signs were omnipresent in eighteenth-

century Britain, its more unpleasant facts were hardly known

until revealed by such abolitionist campaigners in the late

eighteenth century: until then, according to Blackburn, the "new

culture of commercialised consumption was oblivious of the human

cost that its satisfactions entailed." Granville Sharp was a

leading member of the S.C.I., and there was a strong link between

antislavery and radicalism in 1770s and 1780s. (2) Yet one of

his radical pamphlets, while condemning in one breath "the

exercise of domestic slavery and Oppression in the colonies, and

of political Corruption and venality at home", yields no evidence

of political slavery being inflected with colonial slavery. (3)

    Nor is it clear from the 1782 pamphlet of Sharp's fellow

S.C.I. campaigner Cartwright, despite the S.C.I.'s involvement in

the Quaker petition against the slave trade the following year,

that political slavery is inflected with colonial slavery.

Cartwright's only unarguable reference to Africans is an

apparently disparaging one: complaining of ludicrous voting

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(1) Common Sense, p. 99.

(2) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 13, p. 37.

(3) Granville Sharp, A Declaration of the People's Natural Right
     to a Share in the Legislature, which is the Fundamental
     Principle of the British Constitution of State (London: B.
     White, 1775), p. 38.

qualifications in some boroughs, Cartwright jests that "such trumpery" is no more "proof of being a free-born Englishman" than of being "[a] Christian, and not a pagan; a white man, and not a negro; a human being, and not a horse." (1)

The abolitionist movement of the late eighteenth century was dominated by dissenters, and we might expect to find the political term slavery inflected with colonial slavery in Price's 1789 sermon. That the sermon might contain such an inflection is suggested by Edmund Burke's attack on Price the next year. Burke swipes at the "apologists" of the French Revolution for seeking to excuse the "enormities" of the French people by representing them as "a gang of Maroon slaves, suddenly broke loose from the house of bondage, and therefore to be pardoned for [their] abuse of liberty to which [they] were not accustomed and ill-fitted." (2)

Maroons were self-emancipated blacks in the West Indies, who had fought long wars against white colonists in order to maintain their liberty. By the term maroon Burke seems to mean not only maroons but also rebel slaves whose violence abolitionists often excused, attributing it to ill-treatment by their owners. As he was still an abolitionist in 1790 Burke may have felt that maroons were more worthy of such excuses than the revolutionary French. Burke's comment, which comes shortly before he quotes Price's description of the French people resisting slavery, could well be a criticism of the very language used by Price and other radicals in order to celebrate the French Revolution. Yet, bearing in mind the way the term slavery is actually inflected in

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(1) Give us our Rights!, p. 14.

(2) Reflections on the Revolution, p. 123.

the sermon, it appears that Burke is mistaken or dishonest in his

criticism. Certainly the term _slavery_ is used in a new way in

Price's sermon, but, however it is inflected, it is not with

colonial slavery. The same can be said of most of the texts I

have discussed in this section.

3. THE COLONIAL SLAVE IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

While in the main there is a negative relation between the

term _slavery_ in political discourse and black chattel slavery

throughout most of the eighteenth century, there are some

examples of a positive relation in this period and even in some

of the writers I have examined in the previous section. But

discussions of chattel slavery in political works, and

comparisons between Britons and black slaves, usually appear in

the context of the predominant approval of or, at any rate,

indifference to the fate of the colonial slave. It is mainly in

the late eighteenth century, as abolitionist opinion gathers

force, that such discussions and comparisons begin to involve the

idea of the colonial slave being the victim of an injustice.

Blackburn sees a contradiction in Locke's use of the term

slavery in his _Two Treatises_. While attacking the political

slavery Locke regards as the implication of Filmer's _Patriarchia_,

he seems to provide a rationale for a growing chattel slavery in

Britain's New World colonies. (1)   Locke begins his first

treatise with an attack on royalists and what he takes to be

their central tenet: "[s]lavery is so vile and miserable an

estate of man, and so directly opposite to the generous temper

and courage of our nation, that it is hardly conceivable that an

Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it."   Yet in

his second treatise Locke describes, with apparent approval, "a

sort of servant which by a peculiar name we call slaves, who

being captives in a just war [against aggression] are, by the

right of Nature, subjected to the absolute dominion and arbitrary

power of their masters." (2)

Locke also describes chattel slavery as justified when a

person "having by his fault forfeited his own life by some act

that deserves death" is enslaved by another person who has the

power to kill him but spares his life.   In this instance the

enslaver "does him no injury", for if the slave finds his life

not worth living he has it in his power "by resisting the will of

his master, to draw on himself the death he desires." (3)

Whether or not the last two quotations amount to approbation of

the slave trade, Locke does clearly state that chattel slavery

can be lawful.   Yet Locke condemns Filmer for having written "a

treatise which would persuade all men that they are slaves." (4)

While these two uses of the term slavery may appear to involve a

contradiction, in fact they involve what is for Locke and many of

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(1)   Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 42.

(2)   Two Treatises, p. 3, p. 158.

(3)   ibid., p. 128.

(4)   ibid., p. 3.

his audience a nice distinction. The distinction is between <u>most</u> men who merit freedom, and <u>some</u> men (aggressors and felons) who deserve to lose their freedom.

While Locke definitely justifies chattel slavery in certain cases, it is not clear he justifies the enslavement of Africans by the British, since his comments on the subject do not involve concrete examples. It may be that he rationalises the servitude of white persons, transported Jacobites and criminals. However, the defenders of black chattel slavery, particularly in the late eighteenth century, would utilise these Lockean arguments and insist that slaves were captives of war and convicted criminals. Abolitionists would respond that slaves were the victims of unjust wars fomented by slave traders, or were innocent persons convicted and sold by corrupt and greedy rulers.

While Locke distinguishes between political slavery and chattel slavery, he describes both in similar terms: both involve subjection to "absolute, arbitrary power"; and both involve a loss of the property rights whose preservation is the main objective of civil society. (1) This overlap enabled late eighteenth-century abolitionist agitators to appropriate the Lockean attack on political slavery for their protest against colonial slavery. Radicals, condemning arbitrary taxation and lack of political representation in the same period as such abolitionist protest, could <u>then</u> compare Britons to the victims of colonial slavery.

It may be that Locke himself compares the subjects of absolute monarchy to chattel slaves. Writing on royal prerogative he asserts that royalists regard subjects not as

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(1) <u>Two</u> <u>Treatises</u>, p. 128, p. 158, p. 180.

"rational creatures" but as "a herd of inferior creatures under the dominion of a master, who keeps them and works them for his own pleasure and profit." (1) This description of absolute monarchy, whose language anticipates that of abolitionist protest, seems to use the exploited labour and prejudice involved in chattel slavery as an analogy for such a form of government.

However, while Locke may indeed be comparing absolute monarchy to chattel slavery, the vagueness of reference makes it uncertain that he compares it to <u>black</u> chattel slavery. Milton, writing his <u>On</u> <u>the</u> <u>Tenure</u> <u>of</u> <u>Kings</u> <u>and</u> <u>Magistrates</u> forty years before Locke's <u>Two</u> <u>Treatises</u>, had condemned absolute monarchy on the grounds that it made "the subject no better than the king's slave, his chattel, or his possession that may be bought and sold." (2) While Milton definitely compares Charles I's subjects to chattel slaves, and while there were some black chattel slaves in Britain's overseas dominions, Milton's constant paralleling of seventeenth-century Britain with ancient slave societies such as Rome make it unclear just what kind of chattel slavery is involved in the comparison.

It may be that Locke both discusses colonial slavery and utilises a colonial slavery figure. Yet a more definite instance of a colonial slavery metaphor in political discourse occurred a year before Locke's treatises. In 1688 Aphra Behn published <u>Oroonoko</u>, <u>or</u> <u>the</u> <u>Royal</u> <u>Slave</u>, a primitivist novel whose hero is an African prince betrayed and sold into slavery in the West Indian colony of Surinam. It has been argued that the royal slave is a metaphor for James II, whose deposition had just

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(1) <u>Two</u> <u>Treatises</u>, p. 201.

(2) <u>Prose</u> <u>Writings</u>, p. 193.

occurred. It has also been claimed that the figurativeness of
the novel involves an identification between the slave and upper-
class British women like Behn herself. These interpretations of
Oroonoko have been discussed by Anne Fogarty among others. (1)

Oroonoko - with his courage, chivalry, beauty and courtly
love for the female slave Imoinda - is an idealised monarch
deserted by an abject rabble of slaves and destroyed by the
moneyed upstarts whom he has resisted. The argument that Behn
identifies this noble African with James II I find quite
convincing. Yet Oroonoko is not an antislavery novel in which
all Africans are depicted as noble. Africans are contrasted with
the noble savages native to Surinam, and the virtuous and
beautiful Oroonoko with the rest of his "gloomy" race. (2)
For Behn's narrator Oroonoko resembles a European king rather
than an average African. Behn satirises the venal white
colonists, but she also portrays the majority of slaves as venal.
Oroonoko condemns the other slaves, in the same terms that might
be used by a self-justifying slaveholder, as "by nature slaves".
(3)

Thomas Southerne, adapting Behn's novel for the stage in
1696, shows a Tory "politics of nostalgia" reacting against the
"Glorious Revolution" and the Financial Revolution which followed
it. He may also, like Behn, utilise a colonial slavery metaphor
for Tory purposes. This Tory metaphor is suggested by the words

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(1) Anne Fogarty "Looks that Kill: Violence and Representation
     in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", in The Discourse of Slavery:
     Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison, ed. Carl Plasa and Betty J.
     Ring (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-15.

(2) Aphra Behn, Oroonoko and Other Writings, ed. and introd.
     Paul Salzman (OUP, 1994), pp. 7-9, p. 10.

(3) ibid., pp. 11-12, pp. 65-66, p. 62.

of the character Blandford, a gentleman planter, whose "heart
drops blood" for Oroonoko "a prince betrayed and sold". It is
also suggested by the slave Aboan's plea for Oroonoko to lead a
revolt: Oroonoko is "a prince, born for the good of other men,/
Whose god-like office is to draw the sword/ Against oppression
and set free mankind." (1)

In their introduction to the play Oroonoko Maximilian Novak
and David Rhodes have suggested that, by means of a parallel sub-
plot involving women who journey to the colonies in search of
husbands, Southerne compares white women "for sale" in a marriage
market to black chattel slaves. "The men would have us at their
own scandalous rates" says Lucy to her female friend. (2)
Southerne's play is part of a tradition of social satire in which
blacks are used either as metaphors for degradation or as
primitivist foils for corruption in British society. Novak and
Rhodes also claim that Southerne draws on contemporary ideas of
noble slaves and corrupt Europeans, and that he condemns cruelty
to black slaves committed by white planters. The text does
provide evidence that Southerne can portray black slaves as noble
primitives: Oroonoko plans to "plant a colony/ Where in our
native innocence we shall live/ Free and able to defend
ourselves". Aboan is inspired by the untamed spirit of Surinam's
natives, and justifies rebellion on the grounds of "self-defence
and natural liberty". (3)

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(1) Thomas Southerne, Oroonoko, ed. and introd. Maximilian E.
    Novak and David Stuart Rhodes (London: Edward Arnold, 1977),
    pp. xxxii-xxxiv, p.30, p. 65.

(2) ibid., p. 12.

(3) ibid., pp. xxx-xxxi, p. xxiv, p. 71, pp. 62-63.

However, Southerne's primitivism and paternalism exist alongside proslavery ideas. Oroonoko, himself a former slave-owner, tells Aboan that the Europeans had acquired them in "an honest way". When the slave revolt is crushed, through the cowardice of the majority of the slaves, Oroonoko decides that his countrymen are fit only for slavery. Blandford, insisting that most of the blacks had been born into slavery in their native country, anticipates anti-abolitionist arguments of a century later. (1) Southerne's strategy is not so much to condemn colonial slavery as to denounce what he sees as the rottenness of post-Revolution society.

There is one instance in Molesworth's _Principles of a Real Whig_ in which he appears to make an (unfavourable) comparison between Britons and colonial slaves. Condemning the practice of punishing not only traitors but, through dispossession, their families as well, Molesworth muses that it "seems very unreasonable, that frail man, who has so often need of mercy, should pretend to exercise higher severities upon his fellow-creatures than that fountain of justice on his most wicked revolting slaves." (2)

If Molesworth is referring here to black chattel slaves, then it seems that he approves of the savage punishment of rebel slaves by colonial government, which he describes as "that fountain of justice", and has a rather negative view of blacks. It appears that, unless Molesworth is being ironic, his contrast between what he presents as the just punishment of black slaves

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(1) _Oroonoko_, p. 64, pp. 90-91.

(2) _Principles of a Real Whig_, p. 21.

and the unjust punishment of traitors' families exists in the
context of what may be termed a proslavery consensus, a consensus
to which he firmly adheres.

In Trenchard's _Cato's Letters_ there is an example similar to
that in Molesworth's pamphlet. Trenchard opines that party
leaders "put a price on the Calves Heads [their followers] and
sell them." This swipe at party leaders follows an anecdote
about "Sancha Pancha" who "desired that his subjects in the
promised island might be all Blacks, because he would sell them."
(1) In this case Trenchard's attack on faction _does_ seem to
involve a comparison between faction and the slave trade.
However, his view of blacks is hardly positive, since for him
they appear to epitomise passivity and gullibility.

While slavery in Wilkite discourse tends to be a classical-
republican term re-inflected in the context of an alleged
violation of the Bill of Rights, Wilkes's friend William Beckford
would re-inflect the term with colonial slavery. In "Some
Observations Upon the Slavery of Negroes", first published in
Beckford's _A Descriptive Account of the Islands of Jamaica_ and
reprinted in _The Scots Magazine_ in 1772, Beckford claims British
workers are more enslaved than blacks in the New World. (2) He
describes British workers as "more real slaves to necessity, than
to Egyptian task-masters", because "necessity makes no allowance
for sickness but suffers the sick labourer's wife and children to
starve". He mocks the supposed liberty of workers to change
their employers and still receive "the same wages", since they

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(1) _Cato's Letters_, I, 104-105.

(2) David Bryon Davis, _The Problem of Slavery in the Age of
     Revolution 1770-1823_ (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ.
     Press, 1975), p. 462.

invariably "change their masters for the worse, while they remain slaves to the necessity of constant and hard labour." (1) Here the biblical republicanism appropriated by popular abolitionist writers is ridiculed: slavery to "necessity" is worse than to "Egyptian task-masters".

The year 1772, when Beckford's comments were republished, is a significant one. It was in this year that Granville Sharp came to the assistance of the runaway slave James Somerset, whose owners were attempting to force him to return with them to the West Indies. The plantocracy rallied around Somerset's owners, and a number of proslavery works were published to contest the pamphlets of Sharp and other abolitionist campaigners. The above comments of the planter Beckford, while they may indeed express hostility to wage-slavery, were (as the essay's title suggests) written mainly in defence of colonial slavery.

Jay Fliegelman, writing on the American Revolution, asserts that the "metaphorization of slavery in Revolutionary discourse as any constraint on the private will had the rhetorical consequences of trivializing the literal reality of chattel slavery at the same time that it permitted a new kind of sympathetic identification with blacks as, ironically, another oppressed people." (2) However, my discussion of Dickinson and Paine in the previous section raises questions as to the claim that, in most examples of revolutionary discourse, a metaphorisation of black slavery occurs. Rather than a black slavery metaphor it seems there is a protest against what is seen by most

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(1) Davis, Problem of Slavery, p. 462.

(2) Jay Fliegelman, Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance (Stanford, California: Stanford Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 141-42.

American patriots as a kind of literal slavery. And the

Declaration of Independence's condemnation of George III for

capturing Americans and carrying them into slavery, may not

involve a comparison with the slave trade (as Fliegelman thinks)

but with the fate of the Israelites. (1)

Bernard Bailyn, in his discussion of American patriots' use

of the term slavery, emphasises that slavery was a "central

concept in eighteenth-century political discourse", had a

"specific meaning", and was not "mere exclamation and hyperbole".

Yet also he asserts that "[t]he identification between the cause

of the colonies and the cause of the Negroes bound in chattel

slavery — an identification built into the very language of

politics — became inescapable." (2) It may be, however, that he

overestimates the link made between these two kinds of slavery in

the minds of Americans at this time, and the degree of anti-

slavery sentiment among American revolutionaries.

Even when a black slavery figure is being utilised it may

not be that there is the "sympathetic identification with blacks"

that Fliegelman claims and Bailyn intimates. George Washington's

1774 call on Americans to rebel, or else allow themselves to

become "tame and abject slaves, as the blacks we rule over with

such arbitrary sway", appears to contain the guilt of a slave-

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(1) Declaring Independence, p. 142.

(2) Bailyn, The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution
     (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 232,
     pp. 234-35, p. 235.

owner. (1) But he does not suggest he and many of his audience

should renounce slave-owning, and he hardly recommends the "tame

and abject" blacks as examples of virtue and spirit.

Blackburn writes that "[a]ttacks on slavery and the slave

trade became a point of contact between patriot leaders and the

patriot mob". In the American ports many white workers opposed

black slavery because of their own experience of apprenticeship

and indenture, and because they were joined with black workers in

conflicts with employers and the authorities. (2) But it is not

necessarily the case that patriot leaders, among them Washington,

shared the antislavery sentiments of these workers they sought to

stir and organise. Washington's comparison between political

slavery and chattel slavery may not involve an unequivocal

approval of chattel slavery, since he seems to express a

paternalism towards blacks, but neither does it involve his own

abolitionist sentiments. There are, however, instances at this

time or earlier in which the term slavery is inflected with

colonial slavery in the context of a positive attitude towards

blacks, even of an opposition to their enslavement.

According to David Dabydeen the early eighteenth-century

artist William Hogarth often used primitivist images of blacks as

a contrast to images of a corrupt aristocracy and commercial

elite. Hogarth's portrayal of blacks differs from the dominant

representation of them as inferiors or mere possessions in much

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(1) Winthrop D. Jordan, White over Black: American Attitudes
     toward the Negro, 1550-1812 (Williamsburg, Virginia: Univ.
     of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 292.

(2) Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, pp. 91-92.

early eighteenth-century painting. His portrayal of them may
reflect a mingling of black and white in London's slums, even a
proletarian identity transcending race. (1) In Hogarth's
Marriage a la Mode a black figure, serving as a "foil" and
"critic", "symbolises" the "natural" as opposed to the
"artificial" in a "primitivist" satire on ruling-class decadence.
Yet in the same picture the rich are "savages", in the negative
sense, as wealth-creating progress is depicted as social regress-
ion. Such genteel savagery is portrayed in Industry and
Idleness: a black servant, almost certainly a slave, contrasts
with gluttonous dignitaries who exclude the poor from their
banquet and are implicitly the real "cannibals". (2)

Hogarth's primitivist satires may involve colonial slavery
symbolism. In one of the pictures in his series The Harlot's
Progress, in which the protagonist Moll Hackabout is confined to
Bridewell Jail, there is an "imagery of slavery" which includes
chains, a whipping post and a black convict. For eighteenth-
century people a comparison between the sufferings of chattel
slaves and convicts, both of whom were shipped to the colonies
and exploited as forced labour, may have been visible. Also
visible may have been a comparison between rustics like Moll and
Africans, both of these uprooted from nature then used, corrupted
and destroyed by mercantile capitalism. (3)

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(1) Hogarth's Blacks, p. 11, pp. 21-36, pp. 37-39.

(2) ibid., pp. 80-100, pp. 61-82.

(3) ibid., p. 106, pp. 107-108, p. 113.

Hogarth's pictures may play on an idea prevalent among the educated classes at the time, that the uneducated classes were an image of primordial man. In 1767 Ferguson would observe that "we" view the lower classes as "an image of what our species must have been in its rude and uncultivated state." (1)   In the context of primitivism, which increasingly included the idea of noble Africans, comparisons between the lower classes and savages could be appropriated and turned into a defence of such classes, or, at any rate, an attack on a ruling class viewed as corrupt.

Such strategies employed by Hogarth are not confined to the visual art of the time. In the 1730s Thomson, in his poem Liberty, pours scorn on corrupt members of the ruling class: "O far superior Afric's sable sons/ By merchants pilfered to these willing slaves!" (2)   The classical-republican term slaves is here inflected with colonial slavery, and, it appears, in the context of a primitivist antipathy to the slave trade.

Another example of a figurative contrast involving classical-republican denunciation of political slaves and proto-abolitionist protest on behalf of colonial slaves, occurs in Moses Mather's 1747 article in the New York Evening Post:

> he that is obliged to act or not to act according to the
> arbitrary will and pleasure of a governor, or his director,
> is as much a slave as he who is obliged to act or not
> according to the arbitrary will and pleasure of a master or
> his overseer. And indeed, I never see anything of the kind
> but it gives me a lively idea of an overseer directing a
> plantation of Negroes in the West Indies; the only difference,
> I know is that the slaves of the latter deserve highly to be
> pitied, the slaves of the former to be held in the utmost
> contempt. (3)

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(1)   Essay on the History, 1966, p. 186.

(2)   Complete Poetical Works, p. 396; 11. 153-56.

(3)   Bailyn, Ideological Origins, p. 234.

However, Thomson's figurative contrast between those corrupted by luxury and those kidnapped by slave merchants, and Mather's between the spiritless subjects of arbitrary government and the unfortunate victims of colonial planters, is rare in the early eighteenth century when a tacit approval or blissful ignorance of the slave trade seems to have predominated. It is in the late eighteenth century, when middle-class radicals and dissenters began to notice and abhor the plight of Africans, that strategies like Thomson's become more common in domestic political discourse.

While not a middle-class radical like Cartwright (who I will discuss next) Burke was both a protester against the political slavery of Americans at the time of early abolitionist agitation, and later himself an opponent of the chattel slavery of Africans. It may be that in a Commons speech of 1774 he compares Americans to black slaves: he challenges opponents to tell him "what one brand of slavery they [Americans] are free from, if they are bound in their property and industry by all the restraints you can imagine on commerce, and at the same time are the pack-horses of every tax you choose to impose, without the least share in granting them". (1) The phrase "brand of slavery" may allude to the branding of black slaves. (2) Yet chattel slaves in ancient Rome and galley-slaves in modern Europe were branded, so it is not certain that Burke is thinking of black slaves. (3)

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(1) Edmund Burke, Selected Prose, Falcon Prose Classics, ed. and introd. Sir Philip Magnus (Liverpool: Falcon Press, 1948), p. 29.

(2) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 23.

(3) The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, Literature and General Information, 11th ed. (New York: Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., 1910), under GALLEY.

Despite the general absence of colonial slavery figures in

Cartwright's <u>Give us our Rights!</u> it may be that, in one case,

when Cartwright expresses relief that "there is now no fourth

class of men, no <u>villani</u>, no <u>slave</u> acknowledged by our law!", he

makes an oblique reference to Lord Chief Justice Mansfield's

decision in the Somerset case a decade before. (1) In court

Sharp had used the precedent of the unlawfulness and obsolescence

of villeinage as a major part of his defence of Somerset. (2)

When Mansfield decided in favour of Somerset, his decision was

interpreted by abolitionists as a ruling against chattel slavery

in Britain.

Cartwright is attacking an electoral system which he

presents as a relic of feudal times, just as Sharp had presented

chattel slavery as a relic of such times. It may be that

Cartwright appropriates Sharp's anti-feudal defence of Somerset

the chattel slave, in order to defend the cause of disfranchised

Britons whom he defines as political slaves. If this is so, the

term <u>slavery</u>, while still embedded in the tradition of the

"Norman Yoke", is here also inflected with colonial slavery.

Elsewhere Cartwright suggests that for Britain's rulers to

keep British subjects disfranchised means such rulers must see

them as as "void of reason, sentiments of justice or capacities

of suffering." (3) Of course Locke, nearly a century before, had

used a similar argument in his polemic against political slavery

under absolute monarchy. Yet in the context of abolitionist

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(1) <u>Give us our Rights!</u>, p. 30.

(2) Davis, <u>Problem of Slavery</u>, p. 482.

(3) <u>Give us our Rights!</u>, p. 31.

discourse at the time when Cartwright wrote this - for instance
Anthony Benezet's attack on the idea that Africans were inferior
as regards intelligence, justice and sensibility - it is possible
that Cartwright's protest could have been read as a comparison
between the prejudices of the British oligarchy towards political
slaves and that of the West Indian plantocracy towards black
chattel slaves. (1)

Yet there are more tangible examples of political slavery
being inflected with colonial slavery, in an abolitionist
context, by middle-class radicals of the 1770s and 1780s. In his
Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution (1785),
Price had criticised Americans who had, a decade ago, protested
at their political slavery and yet were still involved in the
"negro trade": "it is self-evident", he writes (perhaps parodying
the American Constitution), "that if there are any men whom they
have a right to hold in slavery, there may be others who have had
a right to hold them in slavery." (2) Here political slavery is
presented as a condition equivalent to the chattel slavery
endured by Africans.

Already, in his Additional Observations on the Nature of
Civil Liberty and the War with America (1777), Price had
presented these two kinds of slavery as comparable. Writing
about political slavery, the worst degree of which often belonged
to colonies at a distance from a relatively free metropolis, he
gives the example of the Roman republic tyrannising over its

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(1) Anthony Benezet, Short Observations on Slavery: Introductory
    to some Extracts from the Writing of the Abbe Raynal, on
    that Important Subject (1776?), p. 12, p. 2.

(2) Political Writings, p. 150.

provinces. Yet he also uses the analogy of New World planters who consign their black slaves to "the management of rapacious servants", by which he means overseers. (1) Thus, as well as a classical parallel being utilised, the slavery endured by Americans at the hands of the British (implicitly) is compared to the slavery endured by Africans at the hands of Americans.

It is in the context of an emerging abolitionist movement, to which radicals and dissenters like Price and many of his audience undoubtedly subscribe, that such late eighteenth-century comparisons between political and colonial slavery come to be made. This situation did not exist in the early and mid eighteenth century, in which such comparisons occur usually in the context of an apparent acceptance of colonial slavery or, at any least, a lack of opposition to it. Even in the 1770s and 1780s the strategy of comparing Britons to black slaves is rare, compared to the 1790s which I will discuss in later chapters. This generally negative relation between political slavery and colonial slavery I will attempt to account for in my conclusion to this chapter.

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(1) Political Writings, pp. 93-94.

CONCLUSION

In The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Karl Marx

declares that the "tradition of all the dead generations weighs

like a nightmare on the brains of the living". Marx claims that

bourgeois revolutionaries "present the new scene of world history

in [a] time-honoured disguise and borrowed language", and he

gives as examples the classical republicanism of French

revolutionaries in the late eighteenth century and the biblical

republicanism of English revolutionaries in the mid-seventeenth

century. He adds that these borrowed languages "served the

purpose of glorifying the new struggle" and of "magnifying the

given task in imagination." (1)

It may well be that such traditions did indeed, as Marx

claims, serve as a mystifying ideology that blinded actors on

these stages of history to the real processes at work. However,

I doubt that these traditions can be accurately referred to, in

the way Marx refers to them, as mere "borrowed languages", or

that their utilisation should be given the necromantic quality

which he gives it. Not only did they constitute the shared

language of politics,.but they also constituted a language that

was, for those who utilised it, living and flexible. This life

and flexibility is evident in the successive uses of such terms

as slavery and slave by political writers throughout the

eighteenth century.

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(1)   Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte
      (Moscow: Progress Publishers; London: Lawrence and Wishart,
      1934, rpt [with revisions] 1954), pp. 10-12.

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Yet there are limitations to the flexibility of language, imposed both by the normative function of language itself and the overall social context in which language is used. Language has its structural aspect, and this aspect may constrain the way speakers understand the words they use and hear. Political discourse was constituted by structures such as classical republicanism in which were embedded notions of slavery which, far more than black chattel slavery, were at the front of early and mid eighteenth-century peoples' minds when they came to express themselves on the subject of domestic politics.

However, the constraining effect of discursive structures is not in itself sufficient explanation for the generally negative relation between the idea of political slavery and the fact of colonial slavery. As well as structures there are agents - in this case speech-agents with the power, under the right circum- stances, to bend discursive structures to their own requirements. Moreover, the way people see the world is also determined by powerful interests, including their own self-interest. A factor at least as significant as discursive structures is the wider social context.

For most of the eighteenth century, among most people, there was a widespread ignorance, silence, indifference, even approval, as regards the slavery of blacks in the New World which contributed so much to society's wealth and power. Taking into account both discursive structures and social context, it may be that for many people in this period the gulf separating them from classical tyranny and medieval feudalism was narrower than the Atlantic separating them from the plantation, even the yards separating them from the gutter in which black slaves walked.

A prevalent racism, that justified the enslaving of Africans, may be a factor in the general absence of comparisons between political slaves in Britain and chattel slaves in the colonies. It may also explain the fact that, even when such comparisons are made, they usually involve disparagement. Of course a negative idea of political slaves was predominant in classical republicanism: for domestic political writers such slaves tend to be as much the epitome of cowardice and sensuality as are blacks for plantocratic racists. But often in domestic political discourse a contrast is made in which political slaves are, unlike black ones, presented as worthy of better treatment.

The awkwardness of the fact that a land whose subjects "never shall be slaves" had turned the natives of another land into its property, may have been felt by many at the time. The ideas of the natural liberties of Britons and the natural slavery of Africans developed together, and perhaps this intertwined growth served to obscure the contradiction involved in chattel slavery in a land of freedom. Perhaps unease at black slavery among many was great enough to cause its fact to be repressed from a discourse of British freedom in which slavery, political slavery, was so frequently condemned.

Yet it may be that unease at black slavery is unconsciously projected in the frequent occurrence of the word slavery in political discourse, like some slip of the tongue or pen. Or could it be that the constant clamour against a slavery inflicted on Britons by modern-day William the Conquerors, Julius Caesars and Pharoahs, serves to drown out the noise of the plantation whip wielded by Britons themselves? That such mediations occurred cannot be established, and they must remain in the realms of conjecture and psychoanalysis.

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In the introduction to this chapter I quoted Blackburn's remark that in the British empire between 1630 and 1750, parallel with an almost unopposed enslavement of Africans, there was a constant "egotistical" condemnation of slavery. (1) We may call this condemnation of slavery egotistical in that Britons were mostly protesting against a kind of slavery other than that endured by Africans in the New World, against a slavery with which Britons felt threatened. And, even when they did indeed equate political slavery with colonial slavery, they were usually not opposing the latter. Yet in the late eighteenth century, especially in the 1790s, the clamour against political slavery became less egotistical.

One result of the French Revolution was, Walvin believes, "a universal identification between those who viewed themselves as dispossessed - the victims of an unrepresentative and oppressive system - and black slaves, stripped of their rights and consigned to inhuman bondage, by the same political and economic system". From this "universal identification", by which Walvin means one felt by Britons towards black slaves, he derives the fact that from 1792 onwards "the language and imagery of slavery were infused into British radical and working class politics." The new radicals would "compare the problems of Britons with those of contemporary slaves." (2)

Walvin's description of the discursive practices of 1790s radicals suggests they are producing a colonial slavery figure - a simile, even a metaphor or synecdoche. The statement that Britons are like black slaves would be a simile, an explicit

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(1)   Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 42.

(2)   England, Slaves and Freedom, p. 113.

comparisons between two things. If it were said that Britons are as much slaves as blacks in the West Indies it would be a metaphor, in which a thing is given the name of another thing on the grounds of comparability or even identity. A synecdoche, in which something is given the name of a part of itself, would be the case occur were slavery to be presented as a totality of which black chattel slavery is the representative part.

The word slave arose, like so many words, as a figure: the name Slav was used as a metaphor, or perhaps a synecdoche, for a person who was the property of another. By the same figurative process the word acquired other senses, an important one being political subservience. But, while by no means inactive as a word by the early eighteenth century, as a figure it was dead, normative, as seemingly literal as "hearse". Yet M.H. Abrams states that no metaphor is truly dead, only "moribund", and so can be "brought back to life again". (1) According to Hilary Henson "an old metaphor, opaque in normal use, springs back to life when placed in a context related to its literal sense." (2)

It may be that slavery, originally a live figure, sprang back to life when placed in a context related to its original sense of human property. I would argue that the colonial slavery figures of popular radicals were not only live but, perhaps for the first time, exploratory - means to a new advocacy of inter-national fraternity among producing classes and a new critique of economic exploitation and the commodification of labour.

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(1) M.H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1981), p. 64.

(2) Hilary Henson, "Early British Anthropologists and Language", in Social Anthropology and Language, ed. Edwin Ardener (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971), p. 15.

Such figures involve both an identification between producing

classes, transcending the nationalism and racism implicit in the

whiggish discourse of English liberty, and a perhaps more

realistic analogy between British workers and colonial slaves as

classes of exploited and commodified producers.

An early example of this new explorative slave figure in

popular radical discourse is the simile and metaphor used by

Joseph Mather, an illiterate artisan from Sheffield, in his 1792

poem "The File-Hewer's Lamentation":

> As negroes in Virginia,
> In Maryland and Guinea,
> Like them I must continue
>   To be both bought and sold.
> While negro-ships are filling
> I ne'er can save one shilling,
> And must, which is more killing,
>   A pauper die when old.

Mather, who earlier in the poem, describes himself "slaving",

ends with the hope that "[p]oor men" will one day "have cause to

sing", since there may come a "hanging day" on which "[r]ich

knaves" will die for their "unjust extortion". (1)

Despite the generally negative relation between the

political term slavery and colonial slavery for most of the

eighteenth century, it appears that 1789 marks a change. To

understand how a burgeoning and renewal of colonial slavery

figures came about, it is necessary to examine the context which

caused slavery to spring back to life as a figure. This I will

undertake in my second chapter on abolitionist discourse and its

influence on the radical discourse of the 1790s.

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(1) Roger Lonsdale, ed., The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-
     Century Verse (OUP, 1984, rpt [with corrections] 1987),
     pp. 788-790; ll. 25-32, ll. 9-16, ll. 49-56.

"MODERN SLAVERY":

THE FORMATION OF ABOLITIONIST DISCOURSE.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is concerned with the most important mediating

process involved in the impact of colonial slavery on radical

discourse in the 1790s. This process is the formation of the

discourses of colonial slavery, particularly the discourse or,

more accurately (as will become clear), discourses of abolition-

ism. The formation of abolitionist discourses was not a creation

ex nihilo: the polemical weapons of abolitionists were mainly

forged from the same discursive, even ideological, materials as

those of their opponents and of other eighteenth-century writers

especially in the field of domestic politics.

However, though the terms utilised by abolitionists are

often the same as those utilised by those who permit colonial

slavery (either expressedly or by their silence), the meanings of

such terms are often contested in abolitionist polemics. One

contested term is slavery itself, a polysemous and indeterminate

term in the eighteenth century. To depict the practices aboard

slave ships and in colonial plantations as despotic, impious, and

inefficient, abolitionists needed a precision tool. I will show

first how they defined slavery as chiefly if not exclusively the

condition endured by blacks in the New World colonies.

This contestation of meaning also involved a range of

discourses - political, economic, moral and religious -

constituting the ideological superstructure of Hanoverian

society. Because colonial slavery was wedded (often literally

wedded within ruling-class families) to a predominant landed and

mercantile capitalism, these ideological discourses silently or

vocally permitted such slavery. I will discuss the link between

colonial slavery and the dominant ideology in my second section.

Yet these ideological discourses could be appropriated by those attempting to abolish slavery, and, furthermore, the dominant ideology had contradictions or gaps. The abolitionists, armed with polemical weapons forged from these discourses, attacked at the weak points of dominant ideology. These appropriating and undermining strategies are particularly evident when abolitionists engage on the field of political and economic discourse, arguing against colonial slavery on the grounds of both liberty and utility, as we shall see in the third section.

Another constituent of the dominant ideology was religious discourse; scripture was used to justify colonial slavery. As I will explore in the fourth section, abolitionists utilised a relatively new discourse of Christian brotherhood, as well as ideas of natural rights and the noble primitive which were emerging or re-emerging in the late eighteenth century with the American Revolution and the British radical reform movement.

What will become evident in all these sections is that not only were abolitionist polemics influenced by domestic political discourse but such polemics were often by no means neutral in the class war of the metropolis. In most of the abolitionist polemics I will discuss, there is a noticeably radical emphasis. There is not only a question of influence, but also that of a confluence - one between abolitionism and radicalism. In my fifth and final section I will explore this confluence, and point to a refluence that would occur as abolitionist discourse flowed into the radical polemics of the 1790s. I will also point to the influence of anti-abolitionist discourse on such polemics, since the impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse was mediated not only by abolitionist discourse but by the discourses of colonial slavery as a whole.

1. CAPTURING SLAVERY: THE SEMANTIC STRATEGY

David Bryan Davis has stressed the distinction between
chattel slavery and "historical varieties of servitude and
dependence". (1) This was also the emphasis of those who, in the
late eighteenth century, were abolitionism's spearhead, Anthony
Benezet, Granville Sharpe, Thomas Clarkson and others, and who
were making this emphasis for the first time and in the heat of
controversy. Also they found it incumbent on them to stress an
additional and finer distinction, that between a chattel slavery
which was modern and one which had existed in antiquity.

It was necessary for these early abolitionists to "capture"
slavery in two related senses. They had to capture the full
horrors of the slave ship and plantation in order to convey their
unacceptability to a public ignorant, indifferent or even
approving of colonial slavery. Also they had, in a way, to
capture the _word_ slavery, to appropriate it from those who
already possessed it such as domestic political writers who used
the word in senses other than, even excluding, that of black
chattel slavery in the New World colonies; one could say they had
to capture the word and restrict its semantic liberty. Winthrop
D. Jordan asserts there was a "measure of precision in the
concept of slavery" during the centuries of New World slavery.
Yet he seems to contradict this claim when he states that "the
concept of slavery" was "vague and confused" in "the minds of
Englishmen", and his claim is certainly contradicted by the
evidence of my previous and current chapters. (2)

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(1) _Problem of Slavery_, p. 39.

(2) _White over Black_, p. 53, p. 52.

According to Jordan himself, while the term _slavery_ meant complete loss of freedom, rarely was it applied to those who were the property of others; nor did it refer only to those bound to persons rather than land, nor only to those whose condition was perpetual or would be passed on to their children. (1) In the eighteenth century convict labourers, feudal peasants, and the victims of absolutism, were all often termed slaves. In that century the word _slave_ was one with many permutations and connotations, and perhaps colonial slavery was the word's most unvoiced permutation. Nor can it be categorically stated that slavery and servitude were distinct terms, or, as Jordan puts it, that "slavery was a power relationship; servitude was a relationship of service." (2) While Samuel Johnson distinguishes between slave and servant, the first the antonym of freeman, the second of master, he treats slavery and servitude as synonyms. (3) Even slave and servant seem to semantically overlap in John Millar's work on political economy. (4) Abolitionists often refer to colonial slavery as servitude – though this is not because they are, compared to their contemporaries, hopelessly muddled.

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(1)   _White over Black_, pp. 53-55.

(2)   ibid., p. 55.

(3)   _Dictionary_, under SLAVE and SERVANT.

(4)   John Millar, _The Origin of the Distinction of Ranks: Or, an Inquiry into the Circumstances which Give Rise to Influence and Authority in the Different Members of Society_, 3rd ed., corrected and enlarged (London: John Murray, 1779), pp. 298-305.

When Benezet calls colonial slavery "endless servitude", he
may be labouring to convey how such slavery differs from a
temporary servitude like apprenticeship. (1) And when Clarkson
coins the phrase "modern servitude", he may be undertaking a
similar task of clarification - in this case an attempt to
differentiate colonial slavery from earlier forms of servitude
such as existed in Britain under feudalism, such as serfdom, or
even the chattel slavery that had existed in antiquity. (2) Yet
such a need to make differentiations hardly proves a precise
concept of slavery is available.

In fact, in his first abolitionist pamphlet, Granville Sharp
expressly denied that slavery and apprenticeship were the same
condition. (3) The fact that Sharp found it necessary to make
this distinction does little to corroborate Jordan's claim that
there was a precise distinction between slavery and servitude in
the eighteenth century, as when Jordan states that for that
century servitude had the precise meaning of apprenticeship and
indentured labour both of which involved a voluntary service
enshrined in a contract between servant and master and of benefit
to both of them. (4)

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(1) Anthony Benezet. Some Historical Account of Guinea... A New
     Impression of the Edition of 1788 which Contains an
     Advertisement Outlining the Life and Career of the Author
     (London: Frank Cass, 1968), p. 75.

(2) Thomas Clarkson, An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the
     Human Species, Particularly the African: Translated from a
     Latin Dissertation... for the Year 1785, with Additions
     (London: T. Cadell and J. Phillips, 1786), pp. 49-50.

(3) J. R. Oldfield, Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery:
     The Mobilisation of Public Opinion against the Slave Trade
     1787-1807 (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press,
     1995), pp. 31-32.

(4) White over Black, p. 52.

As well as such forms of unfree labour as apprenticeship and indentured service in the eighteenth century, there was the forced labour of convicts in the colonies and in the prisons of the metropolis. Clarkson minutely differentiates chattel slavery from convict labour: convict slavery merely involves forced labour, while chattel slavery involves human property; the first binds to the public a convicted criminal still regarded as human, while the second binds to a private person a guiltless captive reduced to a "brute". Yet significantly he refers to convict labour as "convict slavery", which shows that while trying to differentiate colonial slavery from convict labour, to capture colonial slavery, he is on slippery linguistic terrain. (1)

One of Clarkson's aims is to persuade the public that, in spite of what the slavery interest claims in self-justification, colonial slaves are not convicted criminals, nor could African criminals be legitimately punished with slavery by foreigners like the British. Yet another of his aims is to deny that colonial slavery is the same, similar, or no worse, than another form of contemporary forced labour termed as slavery. James Ramsay also asserted that "public slavery" was more relaxed than a slavery in which people were reduced to private property. (2) Many abolitionists strove to prove that not only was colonial slavery unlike co-existing forms of servitude and slavery, it was slavery of an absolute, unparalleled and unwarrantable kind.

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(1) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 102-109.

(2) James Ramsay, An Essay on the Treatment and Conversion of African Slaves in the British Sugar Colonies (London: James Phillips, 1784), p. 23.

Many abolitionists argued that colonial slavery was both unexampled as a modern evil and unequalled by past barbarism. Benezet quotes another author who insists that black slaves "endure a slavery more complete, and attended with far worse consequences, than what any people in their condition suffer in any part of the world, or have suffered in any other period of time". (1) John Wesley protests that not even heathen Turks or savages tolerate such slavery. (2) Ottobah Cugoano claims that "modern slavery" is rivalled only by "the Inquisition" and "Popish massacres". (3) Sharp, more cautiously, referred to "the extreme severity of modern slavery in many respects." (4)

The term "modern slavery", used by both Sharp and Cugoano, is significant. It was the unprecedented horror of colonial slavery that many abolitionists stressed. A twentieth-century historian, Robin Blackburn, insists colonial slavery was not a relic of ancient chattel slavery or medieval serfdom, but was indeed a modern phenomenon. (5) Eighteenth-century abolitionists found it necessary to define colonial slavery against other forms of slavery or servitude which had existed in the past, and which their opponents could use as a precedent or as a self-mitigation.

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(1) Some Historical Account, p. 73.

(2) John Wesley, Thoughts upon Slavery, 3rd ed. (London: R. Hawkes, 1774), p. 73.

(3) Ottobah Cuguano, Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evil of Slavery, Colonial History Series, introd. Paul Edwards (London: Dawsons, 1969), p. 3.

(4) Granville Sharp, A Representation of the Injustice and Dangerous Tendency of Tolerating Slavery in England: Or of Admitting the Least Claim of Private Property in the Persons, in England (London: Benjamin White and Robert Horsfield, 1769), p. 98.

(5) Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 7.

A form of unfree labour, which abolitionists sought to
contrast with colonial slavery, was serfdom. Like other forms of
unfree labour serfdom still existed, though confined to backward
parts of Europe. Yet as serfdom had predominated in Britain till
the fifteenth century, and perhaps lingered on·till more
recently, its danger to the abolitionists was as a precedent.
The issue of feudal precedent was disputed before Lord Chief
Justice Mansfield in the 1772 case of the runaway slave James
Somerset. Those who defended Somerset, such as Sharp, won the
day by arguing that the past existence of serfdom was not an
allowable legal precedent, and Mansfield ruled that Somerset
could not be forced to return with his owners to the West Indies.
(1)

A few years before the trial Sharp had defended the rights
of runaway slaves in Britain on the grounds that, since serfdom
had been abolished, colonial slavery was "an innovation" contrary
to "the laws and constitution". He also insisted that colonial
slavery had "not the least similarity to Villanage", though both
are "servitude" and "cruel oppression"; and, were serfdom allowed
as a precedent, a "vassalage" worse than serfdom would spread
throughout the land. (2) While Sharp is warning of a future in
which British soil is tilled by black slaves, he is also trying
to show that modern slavery is true slavery.

Ramsay, like Sharp, sought to differentiate chattel slavery
from serfdom, presenting serfdom as preferable to both modern and
ancient chattel slavery. In the Middle Ages the soul of the serf
was considered as equal to that of his earthly lord, and the serf

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(1) Davis, Problem of Slavery, p. 480.

(2) Representation, pp. 122-23, p. 41, pp. 134-35, p. 92.

had a right to marry, which contrasted with the racism, tyranny

and, for the Anglican clergyman Ramsay, immorality involved in

colonial slavery. Yet, while attempting to contrast serfdom and

chattel slavery, Ramsay still refers to serfdom as "slavery". (1)

A more precise, terminological distinction had been

attempted by the French enlightenment philosopher Montesquieu, a

major influence on British abolitionists, who had differentiated

between two kinds of "civil slavery", the "real and personal".

By "real slavery" he means serfdom, and by "personal slavery" he

means chattel slavery. However, his distinction is less between

a form of slavery in which a person is property and one in which

a person is not so, than a distinction between two kinds of power

relationships. In "real slavery" the slave is "annexed" to the

land, in "personal slavery" s/he is "annexed" to a person. (2)

Another precedent which abolitionists had to undermine was

the chattel slavery existing in ancient times, as evidenced by

the classics and the Bible in which eighteenth-century men and

women were so well versed. Ramsay, seeking to contrast ancient

and modern chattel slavery, contended that chattel slaves in

Athens were more kindly treated than their modern counterparts:

they were protected by law, allowed to own property, and often

purchased or earned their freedom. (3) Clarkson claims that

slaves were treated humanely in ancient Athens and Egypt. (4)

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(1) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, p. 26, pp. 29-30.

(2) Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, The Spirit of the
     Laws, 2 vols., trans. Thomas Nugent, introd. Franz Neuman
     (New York and London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1949), I,
     241.

(3) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, pp. 21-22.

(4) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 20-21.

However, Clarkson also insists that elsewhere in the ancient world slaves were subjected to "debasement and oppression". (1) Abolitionists could afford to allow a similarity between the conditions of ancient and modern chattel slaves, since this could be held as proof that chattel slavery was outmoded and unchristian. Cugoano denies that slavery among "the Greeks and Romans and other crowds of barbarous nations" could be a valid "precedent" for slavery among modern Europeans. (2) Sharp had written that arguments for colonial slavery from ancient precedent "do not at all concern a Christian government." (3)

Yet abolitionists, many of them dissenters or evangelicals, could hardly have found comfort in Holy Writ which, while forbidding "man-stealing", expressedly permitted property in people. (4) They were often too well acquainted with scripture, and too well convinced of its literal truth, to deny this fact; and, faced with opponents who used scripture to justify colonial slavery, they were obliged to justify the ways of God to men, and to seek to separate divinely sanctioned chattel slavery in biblical times from satanically inspired chattel slavery in modern times. (5)

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(1)   Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 20-21.

(2)   Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 58.

(3)   Representation, p. 6.

(4)   Exodus XXI: 2-8, Ephesians VI: 5-6.

(5)   Davis, Problem of Slavery, pp. 524-549.

Sharp argued that many Old Testament laws were secular, allowed by God because of the barbarousness of his Chosen People, and had been superceded by the Christian "doctrine of universal benevolence". (1) More importantly he claimed that slavery in Israel had been either voluntary or a divine judgement on wicked nations. (2) Ramsay insisted that the chattel slavery of biblical times could not be compared with the unprecedented cruelty of modern slavery. (3) Cugoano compared the "bond-servant" of ancient Israel to "a poor man in England paying rent for his cottage." (4)

It was not only Old Testament slavery that posed a stumbling block for abolitionists. They were also confronted by the New Testament's "silence" on the evil of slavery. Sharp's interpretation of the New Testament attitude to slavery is clearly inspired. Explaining Paul's somewhat lax abolitionism in his letter to Philemon, to whom the Apostle returned the run-away slave Onesimus, Sharp suggests that since Onesimus is called a "servant" he is not a slave. Paul "insinuates" slavery is a sin, Sharp then claims, while teaching a "brotherly love" potentially "subversive" of slavery. (5)

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(1) Granville Sharp, An Essay on Slavery, Proving from Scripture its Inconsistency, with Humanity and Religion (Burlington: New Jersey, 1773; rpt London, 1776), pp. 19-20.

(2) Granville Sharp, The Just Limitation of Slavery in the Law of God, Compared with the Unbounded Claims of the African Traders and British American Slaveholders (London: B. White and E. and C. Dilly, 1776), pp. 3-4; Essay on Slavery, p. 26.

(3) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, pp. 19-20.

(4) Thoughts and Sentiments, pp. 40-41.

(5) Essay on Slavery, p. 32.

Nor is it only ancient and modern forms of _unfree labour_ that abolitionists seek to differentiate from colonial slavery. As I showed in my previous chapter one of the meanings of slavery in the eighteenth century was political subjection under absolute governments, and this political slavery some abolitionists sought to differentiate from chattel slavery, even to undermine as a concept. Montesquieu had contrasted "proper slavery", no doubt the same as the serfdom and chattel slavery he subsumes under the term _civil slavery_, from "political slavery" under "despotic governments". (1) Though Ramsay describes a "distinction between political slavery and domestic slavery" as "imaginary and inconclusive", he is by no means trying to confound the two. He criticises a Scottish writer of the seventeenth century who had advocated reducing the poor to chattel slavery, a condition this writer claimed was preferable to political slavery under absolute governments which "alone deserved the name of tyranny". Ramsay asserts that the absolute power of a master over a personal slave is worse than the absolute power of a ruler over society. He goes as far as to say that the former, chattel slavery, "alone deserves the name of slavery". (2)

So these pioneers of the early abolitionist movement differentiated colonial slavery from various kinds of unfreedom, both ancient and modern, which were commonly regarded as kinds of slavery and which offered a precedent for colonial slavery or detracted from its horrors. In pursuing this strategy, in attempting to capture colonial slavery, they sought to show this form of slavery was exceptional and unacceptable.

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(1) _Spirit of the Laws_, I, 235, 239.

(2) _Essay on the Treatment and Conversion_, p. 45, p. 39.

Yet also they sometimes attempted a comprehensive definition

of the kind of slavery they were seeking to expunge. Millar

listed the following criteria for definitive slavery: the

master's absolute power over the servant, the servant's lack of

legal protection, the extreme exploitation of his labour, his

being denied wages or security of property, and the master's

right to treat him as mere property and sell him. (1)

Wesley, quoting Hargrave's plea for Somerset, writes that

"the variety of forms in which slavery appears, makes it almost

impossible to convey a just notion of it, by way of definition."

But "certain Properties" make black chattel slavery "easily

distinguished from that mild domestic Service which obtains in

our Country." Such properties are "perpetual service" without

"consent", "arbitrary power" allowing unlimited coercion, the

servant being unable to acquire any property, being liable to be

sold like "cows and horses", and, for his children, a

perpetuation of their parent's fate. (2)

What is lacking from Wesley's definition, though not from

Millar's, is the idea of colonial slavery as the extreme

exploitation of labour. Blackburn has emphasised colonial

slavery's economic nature: it constituted a global market of

unprecedented growth and political importance, and an epochal

system of unparalleled wealth-creation and labour-exploitation.

(3) Neither its novelty of scale, organisation and technique,

nor its uniquely racial character, seem to have been grasped by

abolitionists defining slavery for their century.

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(1) Origin of the Distinction, pp. 301-302.

(2) Thoughts upon Slavery, p. 3.

(3) Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 7.

Chattel slavery in the New World was a mode of production
that was "systematic" rather than "ancillary", a major rather
than marginal form of surplus extraction, like chattel slavery in
ancient Greece and Rome. (1) Yet colonial slavery was also
qualitatively different from earlier forms of systematic slavery:
Karl Marx, in the nineteenth century, saw that it involved
production for a world market and an intensive level of labour
exploitation both of which were unprecedented. (2) Colonial
slavery differed from serfdom as well as from ancient chattel
slavery, for not only was the producer bound to a person rather
than to the land, he/she was completely divorced from the means
of production. Though colonial slaves were given small plots of
land for subsistence cultivation the analogy between them and
British peasants, one often made by anti-abolitionists, was false
in that the production of commodities for a world market, and the
vast accumulation of capital, meant forced labour unmatched by
any kind of peasant production: a slave toiled on the plantation
for sixteen hours a day, six days a week. (3)

The organisation of labour that pertained to colonial
slavery (the plantation-gang) has been compared to the new
factories which began to appear in Britain at the end of the
eighteenth century. (4) Marx suggested links between

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(1) Perry Anderson, _Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism_ (London
     and New York: Verso, 1978), pp. 21-22.

(2) Karl Marx, _Capital: A Critique of Political Economy_, 3
     vols., Penguin Classics, introd. Ernest Mandel, trans Ben
     Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), I, 344-45.

(3) Clarkson, _Essay on the Slavery and Commerce_, pp. 141-43.

(4) Blackburn, _Overthrow of Colonial Slavery_, pp. 7-8.

colonial slavery and "wage-slavery": common features such as divorce from the means of production, and common forces impelling both into existence in the period of primitive accumulation. (1) Of course wage-labourers were unlike colonial slaves in that they were not bound to a single proprietor, let alone that proprietor's property, and in that wage-labour was not confined to those of a particular race. In addition wage-labourers were, unlike colonial slaves, considered to have rights and responsibilities under the law. Yet if there is any parallel between chattel slavery in its specifically modern form and another mode of production in history, it is with wage-labour, particularly wage-labour in factories.

Sometimes, as we have seen in the case of Millar, abolitionists do notice the exploitative feature of colonial slavery. Benezet defines a New World slave as one whose master "reaps the benefit of his labour, without paying him such wages as are reasonably due to free men for the like service." (2) Yet what Benezet emphasises is not so much the intensiveness of exploitation, common to both modern slavery and modern wage-labour, as the contrast between the exploitation of slaves and wage-labourers. Benezet does not not say who decides what is "reasonably due" to the wage-labourer – one suspects it is not the wage-labourer.

Davis writes that abolitionism was strongly linked with a capitalist ideology of free labour that grew, mainly among the new urban middle class, in the late eighteenth century. (3)

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(1) Capital, I, 873-76, 915-16.

(2) Some Historical Account, pp. 63-65.

(3) Problem of Slavery, pp. 251-53.

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Abolitionists, in their attempt to define slavery in its
specifically modern form, seem to have had an ideological blind-
spot when it came to the question of exploitation. While some
abolitionists defined modern slavery as exploitation they did so
in contradistinction to wage-labour, and did not see the
particularly modern nature of the exploitation, one common to
both colonial slavery and wage-labour. Most abolitionists
defined modern slavery as a relation of power rather than
exploitation, as an illegitimate form of authority or, as Wesley
called it, "arbitrary power".

As well as not capturing modern slavery as a form of
capitalist exploitation, abolitionists do not always capture it as
language. For instance Clarkson, while contrasting colonial
slavery with convict labour, is still prepared to refer to the
latter as "convict slavery". This apparent slippage reflects the
fact that linguistic structures exert a determining effect even
on those who are engaged in semantic struggles. But in other
cases, particularly that of some abolitionists' willingness to
refer to political subjection as slavery, it reflects the fact
that abolitionism is hardly an apolitical charity.

When Sharp denounces the ill-treatment of "Free Christian
Servants" in the American colonies, he claims such servants are
"entangled in slavery" by colonial law, their situation "almost
as uncertain, though not quite so abject and perilous, as that of
the poor wretched Negroes". (1) Sharp contrasts conditions of
the wage-slaves with the worse ones of black slaves, but his
concern for the oppressed means he is prepared to refer to
servants as enduring a form of slavery. In the same pamphlet

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(1) Representation, pp. 31-32.

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Sharp, warning of what he sees as the future consequences of allowing black slavery in the metropolis, foresees "the laborious part of mankind" in a "civil slavery" not seen since the reign of Richard II. He also claims that the slavery interest might bring about "a general bondage of the people" like that which had provoked the Peasants' Revolt. (1) Abolitionists like Sharp comprehended more than just the hold of a slave ship, and their polemics often comprehended an opposition not only to those who owned slave ships and slave plantations but to other great merchants and landowners as well.

The whole issue of chattel slavery, and the question of serfdom which it raised, had a popular resonance during the decade of Wilkite agitation — Sharp's pamphlet was published in 1769. London artisans who, in the 1760s, adopted the slogan "Wilkes and Liberty", were known to shelter runaway slaves. (2) Such artisans were to rally to the cause of James Somerset in 1772. (3) The hostility to a plantocracy from the colonies was not necessarily separate from hostility to a landed oligarchy in Britain, since the two were linked through business and family ties, and since the particular issue of slavery could be linked to the general issue of the power enjoyed by those who held significant property.

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(1) Representation, p. 17, pp. 99-100.

(2) Fryer, Staying Power, pp. 71-72.

(3) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 100.

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Ottobah Cugoano, ex-slave and leader of London's black poor,
seeks to define colonial slavery by drawing a contrast between it
and "a free, voluntary, and sociable servitude". Yet in other
passages of his pamphlet, in which he seems to adopt an
explicitly radical tone, he does not limit slavery to that
suffered by Africans in Britain's colonies. He condemns "all
stock-jobbing, lotteries and useless business" as tending to
"slavery and oppression". Also he argues that "unconstitutional
laws", which have enabled some Britons to enslave his countrymen,
may also reduce the British "people" to "slaves". (1)

Sharp was a declassé radical who had renounced many of the
advantages of a wealthy background in order to devote himself to
the causes of black slaves and disfranchised Britons. Cugoano
was a domestic servant and a dissenter who was connected with
Sharp and also with Olaudah Equiano, another ex-slave and leader
of London's black poor who in the 1790s was to join the popular
radical London Corresponding Society. (2) However not all
abolitionists had these class positions and alignments, and,
while abolitionist polemics always have a political emphasis, the
emphasis is not always a radical one.

Ramsay was ·an Anglican clergyman and, while a moderate anti-
slavery writer, he was no radical reformer. In his antislavery
book he attacks the "friends of America" (who included Sharp) not
only on the grounds that many of the American patriots they
defended were slaveholders but also because of their much-vaunted
notion of an "actual equality of men". (3) This notion contends

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(1) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 61, p. 88, p. 90.

(2) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 107.

(3) Ramsay, Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, p. 1.

with Ramsay's own belief in a "natural inequality" reflected in an organic society in which there are "ranks", and in which "superiority" meets with an appropriate "deference". (1) Rather than being linked to radicalism, Ramsay's defence of black slaves is connected with a paternalism inseparable from his commitment to most of the established order.

It could be argued that Ramsay's attempt to define chattel slavery in contradistinction to political slavery, and his assertion that the former is true slavery, has a Tory emphasis. Certainly radical or popular abolitionists like Sharp and Cugoano make no effort to deny political slavery is real slavery and, in fact, claim that slavery is a fate that threatens the common people of Britain. Ramsay is writing in 1784 in the wake of a successful independence movement in America and a failed parliamentary reform movement at home, both of which used the term slavery in their protests.

John Wesley was a convinced Tory. In his abolitionist tract, Thoughts upon Slavery, he seems anxious to assure his readers that he fulminates against a slavery which is "Domestic", of a "Servant to a Master", by which he might imply that that he does not object to a slavery which is political, of the people to its rulers. (2) The Tory emphasis of his Thoughts upon Slavery can be seen more clearly when the tract is placed side by side with his explicitly Tory pamphlet Thoughts upon Liberty. Indeed

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(1) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, p. 17.

(2) Thoughts upon Slavery, p. 3.

it might be the case that, as the similarity between the titles suggests, the two pamphlets are complementary. While _Thoughts upon Slavery_ defines true slavery, _Thoughts upon Liberty_ defines true liberty — enjoyment of homelife, business, and well-gotten gains — and denies the Wilkite claim that Britons are enslaved while itself insinuating that "Wilkes and Liberty" means mob-rule and regicide. (1) Together they serve to contrast colonial slavery with political slavery as interpreted by the Wilkite movement, and mark out the limits of legitimate protest.

So an important strategy of early abolitionist writers, who prepared the ground for the mass abolitionist movement of the late 1780s and early 1790s, was to capture colonial slavery both as an unprecedented evil and as definitive slavery. Yet as their struggle against slavery could be linked to fights on other fronts, many (though not all) abolitionists were not averse to using the term slavery in its political sense, or at any rate to mean the oppression of the common people.

Also, abolitionists were less concerned with semantics than with cruelty and mass murder. It was in the heat of the controversy over runaway slaves such as Somerset that Sharp wrote his early pamphlets. It was undoubtedly the 1783 Quaker petition against the slave trade which inspired Ramsay to take up his pen on behalf of black slaves. And Cugoano added his contribution in 1787, at the time of the launch of the London Abolition Committee which heralded the growth of a mass abolitionist movement. The semantic strategy lives in the context of these events.

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(1) John Wesley, _The Works of the Rev. John Wesley_, 17 vols. (London: John Jones, 1809-1813), XV, 276-87.

2. COLONIAL SLAVERY AND THE DOMINANT IDEOLOGY

As well as being involved in a contest over the meaning of slavery, early abolitionists engaged with the dominant discourses of their society. These dominant discourses - political, economic religious, and moral - were, to a great extent, aspects of a dominant ideology that served to ratify the landed and mercantile capitalism that prevailed in the eighteenth century. Since colonial slavery was a vital part of the economic foundation of Hannoverian society, the dominant ideology tended to accommodate such slavery however it might contradict ruling notions such as liberty. Before I describe how abolitionists sought to invade and occupy these dominant ideological territories, my task in the succeeding two sections, I will spend the present section discussing how the idea of the acceptability of black chattel slavery was entrenched in these territories.

First it is necessary for me to explain what I mean by dominant ideology. Marx writes the following:

> The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it. The ruling ideas are nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships, the dominant material relationships grasped as ideas; hence of the relationships which make the one class the ruling one, therefore, the ideas of its dominance. (1)

It is these ruling ideas of society, which are the ideas of the ruling class, which I mean when I use the term dominant ideology.

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(1) German Ideology, p. 64.

While I would not go as far as Marx as to reduce the intellectual productions of a society to "nothing more than the ideal expression of the dominant material relationships", a hyperbole perhaps reflecting his polemical intentions, I agree with him that such productions are implicated in such relationships. A class society's intellectual productions are limited and pressurised by the need of its ruling class to maintain its dominant exploitative position, the economic and social relations of production from which such a class benefits. A new capitalist ruling class, including planters and slave merchants, influenced the intellectual productions of the eighteenth century. There was a dominant ideology entangled with the discourses of Hanoverian society, and ratifying practices of domination and exploitation including colonial slavery.

Commercial agriculture, money-creating banks, foreign trade and improved manufacture had leapt forward by 1700. (1) In tow with such economic changes came political ones: the growing presence of capitalist farmers, merchants and bankers in the corridors of power, rubbing shoulders with a now more capitalist nobility. These changes were sealed in the seventeenth century when feudal vestiges and absolute monarchy were swept away. After this social revolution Britain was ruled by an oligarchy of capitalist landowners and of big businessmen from London and other commercial centres like the slave port Liverpool. (2)

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(1) John Kenneth Galbraith, A History of Economics: The Past as the Present (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), pp. 31-45, pp. 141-44.

(2) Christopher Hill, Reformation to Industrial Revolution, The Penguin Economic History of Britain (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969; rpt [with new preface] 1992), pp. 17-22.

The importance of colonial slavery to the new society, and
to the wealth and power of the new ruling class, was not lost on
contemporaries: a slave trader saw his business as "the main
spring of the machine which sets every wheel in motion". (1) A
proslavery discourse with an ideological function, a function of
justifying the practices of trading in and exploiting African
slaves, emerged in tandem with such practices by the late
seventeenth century if not earlier. As proslavery discourse
developed it drew on and, as will show, penetrated other
ideological discourses of the eighteenth century.

It might be argued that proslavery discourse, as
justification, as ideology, only arose in the late eighteenth
century in response to the onslaught of antislavery polemic.
Walvin attributes the widespread contempt towards Africans before
this time less to a need to justify their enslavement than to
"prejudice", "tradition" or "popular culture". (2) However, the
existence of an ideology of plantocratic racism, existing long
before the late eighteenth century, is attested by Fryer.

One piece of evidence for the early existence of this racist
ideology that Fryer supplies is the report of the clergyman
Morgan Goodwyn .in the 1680s. When Goodwyn had defended the right
of slaves to Christian baptism, a Barbadian planter had retorted
that "Negroes were Beasts, and had no more souls than Beasts".
Goodwyn saw the planters' denial of the humanity of their slaves
as their justification for their profitable yet unchristian
exploitation of them. (3)

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(1) Fryer, _Staying Power_, p. 17.

(2) _England, Slaves and Freedom_, pp. 81-82, p. 84, p. 24.

(3) _Staying Power_, p. 134, pp. 148-150.

While such plantocratic racism was, to some extent, a defensive reaction to the proto-abolitionism of Goodwyn and other late seventeenth-century critics of colonial slavery, the prevalence of such attitudes cannot be fully explained in this way. Such critics of slavery were few and far between at the time. Racism cannot be separated from the momentous rise of colonial slavery from this period onwards; and, while Fryer may exaggerate when he claims that "the theory came later" than the practice, the idea of African inferiority was less cause than effect of the economic practice of slavery. (1)

Not only does racist ideology accompany the rise of colonial slavery, but it may even precede the earliest criticisms of such slavery. "Negrophobia" among sixteenth-century Britons, which Walvin attributes to culture shock, might be seen instead as proslavery ideology in embryo. Richard Haklyut's Divers Voyages (1582), in which Africans are called "a people of beastly lynage", was published a generation after the first British slave trading ventures, those of John Lok in the 1550s and John Hawkins in 1562. (2) Even the denigration of Africans at this early date could be ideological: the rationalisations of those offered a financially rewarding prospect. A classical tradition of African monstrosity, and a popular aversion to black people, may indeed have predated Britain's slave trade. Yet these were the raw materials on which the slave trade's ideologists drew, and it was profit more than prejudice which prompted Britons to trade in Africans.

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(1) Staying Power, pp. 132-34.

(2) Walvin, England, Slaves and Freedom, pp. 70-72.

Besides, it is not clear that most Europeans prior to the age of the slave trade regarded Africans as inferior to themselves. Traditions stemming from the Church Fathers held that Africans were equal, even superior, in God's eyes. (1) In the Middle Ages there were positive images of blacks - St. Maurice, one of the Magi, and the knight Prester John - images still prevalent in the sixteenth century. (2) These facts shed doubt on Jordan's claim that, in Christian Europe, blacks had always been associated with sin and the Devil. (3)

Even Jordan, while stressing "difference" as the cause of the peculiar "degradation" of Africans in slavery, takes as given "that there would have been no enslavement without economic need, that is, without persistent demand for labor in unpopulated colonies." (4) I argue, furthermore, that this sense of "difference" was more consequent than antecedent to the economic factors involved in the introduction and development of New World slavery. I also argue that the "degradation" of blacks was less due to "difference" than to the peculiarly intensive exploitative nature of modern slavery.

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(1) Jean Devisse, The Image of the Black in Western Art. II: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery". 1: From the Demonic Threat to the Incarnation of Sainthood, trans. William Grange Ryan (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979) pp. 9-22.

(2) Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, The Image of the Black in Western Art. II: From the Early Christian Era to the "Age of Discovery". 2: Africans in the Christian Ordinance of the World (Fourteenth to Sixteenth Century), trans. William Granger Ryan (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), p. 26, pp. 161-64; Devisse, The Image of the Black, pp. 150-166.

(3) Jordan, White over Black, pp. 29-30.

(4) ibid., p. 91.

One factor underlying the introduction and development of colonial slavery was obviously its profitability, particularly after the "sugar revolution" of the mid-seventeenth century. The reason why Africans were fated to become the solution to the labour shortage in the colonies was partly due to supply: the African continent was populous, in contrast to the New World whose natives had already been decimated by genocide and disease. The reason was also partly because, compared with Amerindians, Africans' methods of cultivation and forms of society were similar to Europeans'. (1)

Also, while racist ideology rose prior to the challenge of the abolitionist movement but not until the rise of the slave trade, it was not an ideology confined to those directly involved in colonial slavery. In a hysterical reaction to Mansfield's ruling in the case of James Somerset, the plantocratic writer Edward Long claimed that not only were blacks inferior but they were sub-human, even a kind of ape. (2) Yet, not only does Long borrow from racists writing well before the earliest abolitionist pamphlet as Fryer notes, he also borrows from sources that are not especially plantocratic. (3)

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(1) Jordan, White over Black, p. 89.

(2) Edward Long, The History of Jamaica, or a General Survey of the Antient and Modern State of that Island: With Reflections on its Situations, Settlements, Inhabitants, Climate, Products, Commerce, Laws and Government, 3 vols., New ed., introd. George Metcalf, (London: Frank Cass, 1970), II, 352-371.

(3) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 135.

For instance, Long quotes from David Hume who, in a 1753-54 footnote to his "Essay on National Character", claims that non-Europeans, especially Africans, are "naturally inferior". Hume also dismisses the black poet Francis Williams as a "parrot" without the least gift of inventiveness. (1) Also, Long is not the inventor of "scientific racism": such a form of racism had been growing since the late seventeenth century and often appears in works by those who, like Francois Bernier and Carl Linnaeus, wrote in Europe and had no direct involvement in the slave trade or slave plantations. (2)

My point is that racism, though not universal, was very prevalent in Hanoverian society and amounts to a social ideology relating to the vast benefits reaped by most of that society from colonial slavery. Of course those who reaped the greatest benefits were the landed and mercantile capitalists who dominated that society and its intellectual means of production and distribution. Also, as I will now show, the racist ideology of black inferiority was inextricably linked to a political and economic ideology of liberty which those who found slavery acceptable tended to share with those who found slavery unacceptable. .

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(1) David Hume, The Philosophical Works, 4 vols., ed. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose (Aalen: Scientia Verlag, 1964), III, 252; Long, History of Jamaica, II, 376, 476.

(2) P.J. Marshall and Glyndwr Williams, The Great Map of Mankind: British Perceptions of the World in the Age of Enlightenment (London: Dent, 1982), pp. 242-46.

Walvin has spoken of "the parallel growth of slavery and liberties". (1) I think, considering the harsh reality of social existence for the vast majority of the British population in the eighteenth century, it would be more apt to refer to the parallel growth of slavery and an ideology of liberty. I would also assert that not only was there a parallel growth between such a mode of production and such a ideology but the two were, to some extent, causally related in a way that is complex even reciprocal.

An idea of _British_ liberty had, to some extent by the eighteenth century, replaced the ideas of natural and civil liberties discussed by Locke. This nationalistic idea undoubtedly arose partly out of the need to cement together different classes and nations of the British Isles, some of whom had benefited less than others from the social revolution of the seventeenth century and the subsequent boom in production and trade. It may be that this need to unify the nation under the banner of British liberty gave additional urgency to the project of manning the lucrative plantations with slaves of decidedly non-British origin.

More importantly the growth of liberty as a more universal concept, evidenced by the writings of seventeenth-century political theorists such as Milton and Locke, was awkwardly contradicted by the growth of black slavery as a national practice. There was a need to explain why a revolution which had ostensibly brought liberty into the world had so clearly brought slavery to Africans, and why freedom-loving Britons enslaved those who were their fellow humans and heirs of natural liberty.

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(1) _England, Slaves and Freedom_, p. 17.

The production of an idea of slavery as naturally befitting

Africans, then of an idea of liberty as the peculiar birthright

of Britons, were both attempts to resolve this contradiction. By

such ideological means the kind of split consciousness exemplif-

ied by Locke, who denounced Filmer for advocating the slavery of

the human race, while himself owning shares in the Royal Africa

Company and prescribing black slavery for the constitution of

Carolina, were if not cured then cosmetically disguised. (1)

So during the eighteenth century the idea of liberty, losing

some of its universal and natural quality, becomes naturalised as

British - and the African becomes a slave by nature. Perhaps the

idea of the free-born Briton was even assisted by the idea of an

archetypal anti-Briton who merited chains. The age of obsession

with British liberty was criticised by Coleridge, when he

parodied Thomson's patriotic hymn in which Britons never shall be

slaves: in his "Ode to Addington" printed in the _Morning Post_ in

1801 Coleridge sang "Rule Britannia! rule the waves!/ Blacken

your sugar isles with slaves". (2)

The notion of British liberty could even be used, in tandem

with the notion of African inferiority, by those who defended

colonial slavery. In 1774 Long insisted that Africans "who have

never experienced... British freedom... cannot possibly hold the

same opinion of slavery that a Briton does." (3) When William

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(1) Seymour Drescher, _Capitalism and Antislavery: British
     Mobilization in Comparative Perspective_ (Houndmills and
     London: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 23-24.

(2) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, _Essays on his Times in "The
     Morning Post" and "The Courier"_, 3 vols., Bollingen Series
     LXXV, ed. David Erdman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul;
     Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978), I, 262.

(3) _History of Jamaica_, II, 401.

Wilberforce introduced his first bill to abolish the slave trade in 1789, the anti-abolitionist M.P. George Dempster responded that the "House might, if it pleased, prevent any British subjects from becoming slaves, but they could not, with any pretence of right, prescribe to the gentlemen of the West Indies by what hands their plantations should be cultivated." (1) Dempster clearly stresses that it is Britons, not Africans, who should never be slaves; he also, implicitly, accuses Wilberforce of violating the rights of free-born Britons which of course include rights of property.

As well as attempts to justify colonial slavery by claiming that Africans were naturally inferior, there were also religious justifications. From the seventeenth century it had been argued that Africans were the descendents of Ham, the son of Noah cursed by God, and inherited their ancestor's curse. Walvin regards this scriptural argument as an attempt to explain Africans' colour rather than their slavery. (2) Yet it is clear, from Goodwyn's reports of plantocratic racism, that from the late seventeenth century onwards this argument became a justification for black slavery. (3) It was a form of racism that might counteract any repugnance felt by Christians towards the enslaving of their brethren created in God's image.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 164.

(2) England, Slaves and Freedom, p. 73.

(3) Fryer, Staying Power, pp. 149-150.

According to Seymour Drescher the most widespread
justification for colonial slavery was a "commercial" one. The
ideologists of slavery argued that the importation of black
slaves was the only solution to the shortage of labour in the
colonies, and that the nation's unparalleled prosperity and power
in the world were founded on black slavery. (1) In 1788
petitioners from Liverpool, protesting against Sir William
Dolben's bill to regulate the slave trade, complained that not
only would they be ruined by the passage of the bill but it would
also prove "highly injurious to the interest and public revenues
of this country." (2) This economic justification was not just a
reaction to the abolitionist movement, but had been used since
the beginning of the century. (3)

This economic justification of colonial slavery is
inseparable from an ideological discourse of mercantilism that
predominated for most of the eighteenth century. This discourse,
related to the growing "power of the mercantile and moneyed
class" promoted after the "Glorious Revolution", is found not
only in the prose of the period but also in its poetry. (4) Such
mid eighteenth century verse generally maintained an embarrassed
silence on the subject of colonial slavery, but whenever the
subject was broached, as in James Grainger's The Sugar Cane,

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(1) Capitalism and Antislavery, p. 27, pp. 19-20.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXIV, 10.

(3) Dabydeen, "Eighteenth-Century English Literature", p. 28.

(4) C.A. Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760", PMLA, 41
     (1926), p. 364, p. 362; O.H.K. Spate, "The Muse of
     Mercantilism: Jago, Grainger, and Dyer", in Studies in the
     Eighteenth Century: Papers Presented at the David Nicholl
     Smith Memorial Seminar, Canberra 1966, ed. R.F. Brissenden
     (Canberra: Australian National Univ. Press 1968), p. 121.

John Dyer's The Fleece and Edward Young's Imperium Pelagi, the tendency is to defend slavery either reluctantly or wholeheartedly. (1)

There was also a moral justification for colonial slavery, a form of paternalism. This credited slave traders with rescuing Africans from a land of abominations, and placing them under the care and tutelage of benevolent British planters - the slave trade was a kind of social services department tendered out to the private sector and operating internationally. Long claimed that blacks were "abject slaves in Africa", subject to a "brutal and licentious tyranny". (2) Such arguments had been used in the late seventeenth century, and were part of the proslavery ideology of the period of relatively unchallenged colonial slavery. (3)

Moral justification often overlapped with political economic discourse. Long defined colonial slavery as "a legitimate, equitable species of servitude" involving "a sort of compact" or "reciprocal obligation", whereby "perpetual service" was exchanged for "life" and "sustenance". As a result, he maintained, a West Indian slave had a longer life expectancy than an African native, and was better off than a wage-labourer in Britain. (4) Long's political-economic defence of slavery may have been a response to John Millar's political economic attack on it in The Origin of the Distinction of Rank published three years before.

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(1) Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse", pp. 389-395; Spate, "The Muse of Mercantilism", pp. 127-130.

(2) History of Jamaica, II, 401.

(3) Dabydeen, "Eighteenth-Century English Literature", p. 28.

(4) History of Jamaica, II, 402, p. 404.

Thus the slavery interest had built its defences at strategic points of the dominant ideology of Hanoverian society, and was as entrenched in society's discourses as it was in society itself. As well as endeavouring to capture slavery, the early abolitionist polemicists strove to capture these strategic points, these political, religious, economic and moral discourses. This ideological campaign is the subject of the following two sections.

3. ABOLITIONISTS AND THE TERRITORIES OF LIBERTY AND UTILITY

Aside from racist justifications of colonial slavery the main arguments used to defend slavery were economic or, more precisely, arguments from "utility". Colonial slavery was regarded by its defenders as an example of, one might say, "the dynamism of the market". While racist ideology was linked to the ideology of British liberty, proslavery arguments affirming the liberty of British subjects to engage in their chosen line of business, or denying that British slaveholders were absolute rulers, were comparatively rare. It was not so much the case that political discourse was, like economic discourse, an area of strategic importance which abolitionists had to capture from the slavery interest. It was more the case that political discourse had long been silent on the question of the slavery of blacks in the colonies, and that abolitionists had to make it begin to speak on this subject.

It may be asked why the economic and political arguments of abolitionists are being discussed together in one section. This combined treatment is not so strange when one considers that in the late eighteenth century economics was not, as John Galbraith complains about twentieth-century economics, a separate department from politics. (1) Late eighteenth-century writers like John Millar and Adam Smith were _political_ economists who combined arguments of utility and liberty in their attacks on chattel slavery and their advocacy of wage-labour.

When one looks at the liberal economic discourse of Smith and Millar, one suspects that many of its terms were appropriated from political discourse: such terms as "absolute power", "consent", and "coercion", which one finds in Locke's writings on government and in a host of political polemics throughout the eighteenth century. (2) Only now these terms are applied not to the relationship between people and government but to that between labourer and proprietor. But the use of such terms in attacks on colonial slavery are particularly effective considering the fact that, since the seventeenth-century revolution, such terms were highly charged.

Scottish Enlightenment thinkers like Smith and Millar were not only indebted to Locke. They were also building on the ideas of French Enlightenment philosophers such as Voltaire, Montesquieu, Turgot, and Quesney, whose contribution to eighteenth-century thought was both political and economic. (3)

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(1) _History of Economics_, pp. 266-67.

(2) Millar, _Origin of the Distinction_, pp. 300-301, pp. 347-48.

(3) Galbraith, _History of Economics_, pp. 46-56.

Montesquieu's critique of chattel slavery involves a critique of
his intellectual predecessor Locke. Montesquieu denies that a
victorious warrior has a right to own the person whose life he
spares, a right that Locke had asserted in his _Two Treatises_.
Since no one is justified in killing a defeated foe, no one can
enslave him on the grounds that he has spared his life. Locke's
defence of chattel slavery on the basis of "right of conquest" is
opposed to the law of nations and nature - and is therefore
"contrary to the fundamental principles of all societies." (1)

Montesquieu also uses Lockean principles, contract and
consent, in his attack on colonial slavery. He asks if a slave
can be justly punished for maroonage when a slave is not party to
the social contract, or if he can be judged by laws binding only
on those who have consented to them. The slave can only be
subject to "family law", the very patriarchal authority against
which Locke directed his polemic. (2) So Lockean principles are
turned against a chattel slavery which Locke himself seems to
have defended.

French and Scottish Enlightnment thinkers, while they were
strongly influenced by Locke, found his defence of chattel
slavery incompatible with his liberal legacy, his ideas of
natural liberty, contract and consent. (3) They used this legacy
to attack the slavery he apparently defended, and which continued
to be defended by a slavery interest which included many who
would have considered themselves political heirs of Locke.

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(1) _Spirit of the Laws_, I, 236-37.

(2) ibid., I, 237.

(3) Davis, _Problem of Slavery_, p. 45.

Millar, attacking the slavery interest, expresses surprise
that in an era in which "progress in commerce and manufactures"
has been made there are still those lacking "liberal views",
whose viewpoints do not extend beyond "utility". Millar, while
occupying the same ideological territory of economic progress as
his opponents, also occupies the same territory as political
writers in his denunciation of "arbitrary will". Only he argues
on the grounds of "personal liberty" rather than political
liberty. Such liberty, Millar argues, far from being in conflict
with utility has an "infallible tendency" to make a nation
"industrious", increase its "populaceness" and aid its "strength
and security". (1)

Yet Millar also blasts slaveholding American patriots who
"talk in a high strain of political liberty, and who consider the
privilege of imposing their own taxes as one of the inalienable
rights of mankind", yet who "make no scruple of reducing a great
proportion of their fellow-creatures into circumstances by which
they are not only deprived of property, but also of every species
of right." (2) Millar's protest shows how the discourse of free
labour involves an appropriation of the discourse of free
government. Moreover, his protest shows that abolitionists can
appropriate the political discourse utilised by their opponents.
Davis has asserted that American patriots' "rhetoric of freedom"
was "functionally related" to the ownership of black slaves,
since, like British Whigs, they connected freedom with property
ownership. (3) He has cited proslavery petitions from

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(1) Origin of the Distinction, p. 305, pp. 347-48.

(2) ibid., pp. 359-360.

(3) Problem of Slavery, pp. 261-62

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Virginia in 1784 and 1785 which "employ the rhetoric of the

Revolution and the Lockean theme of property rights." (1) In the

case of the _American_ slavery interest, at least, there was a

widespread use of the discourse of liberty, and abolitionists had

to capture this area of strategic importance.

The abolitionist appropriation of political discourse occurs

even more in popular pamphlets than in weighty tomes on political

economy. Benezet, appealing to the Declaration of Independence,

tells his fellow Americans that their ownership of slaves is

inconsistent with their boasted belief in natural rights such as

liberty. Like Millar he appropriates the Lockean idea that

"unbounded power" is in conflict with legitimate authority, and

also asserts that slavery is actually a violation of the right of

property, since the slave is deprived of this right. He uses the

same political discourse as those he criticises - slaveholding

Americans protesting against taxation without representation. (2)

Thomas Day, writing from Britain in the year of the

Declaration, castigates the Americans he otherwise defends, for

claiming "inalienable rights" they deny to Africans. He

ridicules the American patriot "signing resolutions with one

hand, and with another brandishing a whip over his affrighted

slaves." (3) While Day utilises the idea of natural rights,

rather than that of liberty simply, like Millar and Benezet he

applies political discourse to the economic relations of master

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(1) _Problem of Slavery_, pp. 167-68.

(2) _Short Observations_, p. 1, p. 9.

(3) Thomas Day and John Bicknell, _The Dying Negro, a Poem. To
     which is Added a Letter on the Slavery of the Negroes by
     Thomas Day_ (London: John Stockdale, 1793), p. 76, p. 81.

and slave. Following a republican statement involving the "inalienable rights" of the people and government as "delegated power", Day asserts that chattel slavery is "as inconsistent with all ideas of justice as despotism is with the rights of nature", and then moves on to the liberal economic argument that slavery is a master-servant relationship which lacks a "fair and equitable compact". (1) Thus he extends the American revolutionary discourse of the government-people relationship, one used by slaveholders among others, into an abolitionist discourse of the master-servant relationship.

While the defenders of slavery in Britain rarely used the Lockean equation of liberty with property, they found Locke's comments about the justifiable enslavement of war-captives and criminals useful, claiming that African slaves were just such persons. (2) British abolitionists also found Locke useful, though it was his defence of natural liberty they appropriated. Clarkson, beginning his first abolitionist work with a theoretical underpinning ultimately derived from Locke, asserts the origin of civil society in "natural liberty", social "contract" and "voluntary" subordination. (3) A political discourse stemming from the philospher who provided a rationale for chattel slavery now becomes employed in the task of attacking that very slavery as it exists in Britain's West Indian colonies.

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(1) Dying Negro, p. 63, p. 68, p. 71.

(2) Long, History of Jamaica, II, 388.

(3) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 65-68.

It is significant that Clarkson begins from the principle of a liberty which is "natural". He seeks to rescue liberty from narrow nationalistic and ethnocentric confines, to return it to its Lockean naturalness, and to undermine the prevalent idea of "British liberty" so bound up with that of the "natural slavery" of Africans. Of course his use of the term natural liberty shows the impact of the American Revolution, the disavowal of a British identity in its discourse of liberty. Yet this revolution had equipped abolitionists with an idea of liberty which could be wielded effectively against Britain's enslavement of Africans.

While seeking to occupy this territory of political discourse, abolitionists also sought to capture a more strictly economic territory: as well as arguing from the principle of liberty they also argued from the principle of utility. Utility was perhaps the strongest section of the slavery interest's defenses, but abolitionists contended that slavery, far from being economically beneficial, was in fact inefficient, wasteful, unproductive and outmoded.

This strategy is used most by the political economists Smith and Millar. According to Millar "[a] slave, who receives no wages in return for his labour, can never be supposed to exert much vigour or activity in the exercise of his employment". Slaves, deprived of a material incentive, are ensured a "livelihood" even if they shirk, and furthermore they cannot increase their "livelihood" even if they increase their efforts. Also, since slaves are given only "the incentive of terror", they will avoid work whenever a painful stimulus is absent. Appealing

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to the business sense of the propertied classes, Millar stresses how "little profit can be drawn from the labour of a slave" in contrast to the profitability of waged and skilled workers such as those labouring in Britain's growing "branches of manufacture". (1)

Adam Smith also sees slave-production as marred by lack of incentives. In *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* he writes that "[a] person who can acquire no property, can have no other interest but to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible. Whatever work he does beyond what is sufficient to purchase his own maintenance, can be squeezed out of him by violence only". (2) Cheapness is, according to these political economists, another of wage-labour's virtues. "The experience of all ages and nations", Smith believes, "demonstrates that the work done by slaves, though it appears to cost only their sustenance, is in the end the dearest of any." (3) The expensiveness of slave-labour is ultimately due to its lack of incentives. Millar finds slave-labour "dearer" than free labour since slaves must either be bought or bred like livestock. To the cost of the slave's sustenance is added that of an original outlay and, as it were, the wear-and-tear of the human machinery. (4)

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(1)   *Origin of the Distinction*, pp. 305-306.

(2)   Adam Smith, *The Works of Adam Smith, LL.D.: With an Account of his Life and Writings by Dugald Stewart*, 5 vols. (Aalen: Otto Zeller, 1963), III, 88.

(3)   Smith, loc. cit.

(4)   *Origin of the Distinction*, p. 311.

According to Smith not only must the cost of such wear-and-tear be met by the master, but, compared with wage labour, the cost is greater. The "fund" for "replacing or repairing" the labourer, as Smith sensitively phrases it, is best left to the labourer himself, as in wage-labour, rather than, as in slave-labour, "managed by a negligent master or careless overseer." (1) Thus these political economists present slavery as unproductive, expensive and, above all, unprofitable - an anathema for the properly educated person or the improving proprietor.

Chattel slavery, for late eighteenth-century political economists, could be summed up in one word - obsolete. Both Smith and Millar describe how, over the course of centuries, chattel slavery gave way to more efficient and profitable forms of production involving successive increases in incentive: serfdom, then copyholds, and then leaseholds. (2) Millar sees the climax of progress as the appearance of "manufactures" and labour for "hire". But, ironically (and untidily), slavery "was no sooner extinguished by the inhabitants in one quarter of the globe, than it was revived by the same people in another." (3)

Those abolitionists who were more agitators than academics did not completely neglect liberal economic arguments. Benezet asserts that freed slaves, "having an interest in their own labour", are encouraged "to the utmost exertion of their vigour and industry". (4)

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(1) Works, II, 122-23.

(2) ibid., III, 90; Millar, Origin of the Distinction, pp 319-340.

(3) Origin of the Distinction, pp. 330-32, pp. 342-43.

(4) Short Observations, p. 6.

Millar and Smith share with their proslavery opponents an economic perspective, and their antislavery polemics are part of a debate among the propertied classes about the future of a developing capitalism. As with the strategy of capturing slavery, the strategy of capturing the territory of economic discourse is not neutral in the class struggles of late eighteenth-century Britain.

Smith's Wealth of Nations appeared in the same year as the Declaration of Independence, and a year after Watt and Boulton established their innovative engineering works in Birmingham. While Smith may not have been a friend of America, nor intentionally the herald of the Industrial Revolution, he was an enemy of "the old order". His attack on colonial slavery was part of a general thrust against mercantilism. Slavery was linked to the restrictive practices and monopolies he also opposed. (1) Lord Maitland would defend these, damning the first abolitionist bill as "a breach of the chartered rights of the country". (2)

Smith's liberal economics became a weapon of the manufacturing middle class who, in the first wave of industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century, had begun their fight against the landed and mercantile oligarchy. Large among the sins of this oligarchy, in the eyes of most middle-class radicals, was colonial slavery. Typical of those who organized the huge abolitionist petition in the booming Manchester of 1787 was the cotton-manufacturer and radical Thomas Walker. (3)

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(1) Galbraith, History of Economics, p. 59, pp. 68-70.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 192.

(3) James Walvin, "The Impact of Slavery on British Radical Politics: 1787-1834", Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, 292 (1977), p. 344.

Yet for most abolitionists the sin of slavery lay less in
its lack of utility than its violation of the right to liberty.
This is particularly so in the exceptional case in which the
abolitionist concerned is a wage-worker, unlike Benezet whose
middle-class business background is not unconnected with his use
of liberal economics. (1) The domestic servant Cugoano makes no
use of arguments from the principle of utility; he attacks
slavery as a form of service involving the loss of "natural
liberties". Furthermore, he implicitly undermines the idea of
"British liberty" by asserting that Africans "are born as free,
and are brought up with as great a predilection for their own
country, freedom and liberty, as the sons and daughters of fair
Britain"; in a radical Whig vein he gives the example of citizen
militias in Africa. (2)

In abolitionist polemics the utilisation of discourses of
liberty, like the employment of the discourse of utility, has a
domestic political emphasis. Sharp's appeal to the seventeenth-
century law securing "the liberty of the subject" had a strong
resonance in the decade in which many protested about what they
saw as the illegal and unconstitutional arrest of John Wilkes.
Sharp's protest about blacks thrown "clandestinely without
warrant into gaol" by "wicked and designing men", which begins
with the words "[n]o man can be safe", is not wholly separate
from the anxiety and rage provoked by the Wilkes affair. (3)

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(1)   Benezet, Some Historical Account, p. ix.

(2)   Thoughts and Sentiments, p. v, pp. 61-62, p. 28.

(3)   Representation, p. 23, p. 90.

Of course, the political emphasis of the term _liberty_ is not always radical in abolitionist polemics. While both Paine and Wesley harness the idea of natural liberty to the cause of the black slave, there is a different implication in each case. Paine's _African Slavery in America_ (1775) belongs to the same period of agitational production as his _Common Sense_ (1776), and the former is addressed to the same largely _plebeian_ radical audience as the latter. And his avowal of republican liberty in America and of the natural liberty of Africans in that country have a common source in political liberalism. (1)

Wesley, like Paine, asserts that natural liberty belongs to black slaves as much as to Britons. (2) Yet as is made clear by _Thoughts upon Liberty_, the companion-piece to _Thoughts upon Slavery_, for Wesley liberty "properly so called" is personal rather than political and, in contradiction to what the Wilkite crowd assert, such "civil and religious liberty" is not threatened in Britain. Indeed he condemns "the many headed beast, the people" which roars for a false liberty, an "Indian liberty" or "Highland liberty", which means civil disorder, rebellion against the monarch and even regicide. (3)

Yet, with such exceptions, the use of the term _liberty_ in abolitionist polemics tends to have radical emphasis. Arguments from the principles of both utility and liberty in such polemics are related to the economic interests and political aspirations of a rising urban middle class in the late eighteenth century.

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(1) Thomas Paine, _The Writings of Thomas Paine_, 2 vols., ed.
     Moncure Daniel Conway (New York: Burt Franklin, 1969),
     I, 6, 7.

(2) _Thoughts upon Slavery_, p. 16, p. 27.

(3) _Works_, XV, 287.

4. MEN, BROTHERS AND HEROES: THE NEW TERRITORY

When early abolitionists utilised religious discourse in their polemics, they were occupying the same territory as the slavery interest who had used such discourse to justify slavery since the seventeenth century. Yet the Christian notion of human brotherhood which abolitionists emphasised was, though not a new notion, one that had a new relevance in the late eighteenth-century era of radicalism and revolution. Another notion stressed by abolitionists which, if not entirely new, had a new significance at this time was the rights of man. Primitivism now gained a new force with the dissemination of Rousseau's writings, yet it was also a discourse renewed by abolitionists so that it no longer excluded Africans or singled out one noble African as an exception to the rule.

Abolitionists often countered racist justifications for slavery with scientific arguments proving that blacks were equal to whites in intelligence, feeling and morality. (1) Yet the above notions were also vital to an anti-racist strategy. The Christian notion of human brotherhood was particularly useful against the scriptural justification for slavery. Like the notion of natural liberty that of the rights of man uprooted the entwined ideologies of liberty as the birthright of Britons and slavery as naturally befitting Africans. The notion of the noble primitive also could be used to deny that Africans were in any way inferior to Europeans - more so it could be used to privilege Africans, to assert their superiority in terms of spirituality, spirit and virtue.

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(1) Clarkson, _Essay on the Slavery and Commerce_, pp. 165-214.

The Christian notion of brotherhood is typified by the abolitionist seal produced by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787 when the London Abolition Committee was formed. (1) Wedgwood depicted an African in chains, kneeling and raising clasped hands, as though to appeal to the British public. The image was accompanied by the motto "Am I not a Man and a Brother?" It may be true that, as Walvin writes, the motto "was to gain in power by the support it gained from the parallel development of secular rights (of man) after 1789". (2) Yet the iconographic sources of the seal were religious and secular images of kneeling black supplicants and servants. (3)

The kneeling black image may relate to the situation of middle-class dissenters: while the image seems patronising many abolitionists suffered "civil or religious disabilities", Blackburn writes, and felt themselves "outcasts" and "supplicants". (4) Hugh Honour, however, claims that the seal "came to crystallise and enshrine the idea of pathetic, docile subservience and black inferiority." (5) Yet I will show later in this section that some abolitionists, utilising not only primitivism and the rights of man but religious discourse also, represented the black in a more positive, even heroic, light.

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(1) Oldfield, Popular Politics, p. 156.

(2) England, Slaves and Freedom, p. 104.

(3) Hugh Honour, The Image of the Black in Western Art. IV: From the American Revolution to World War I. 1: Slaves and Liberators (Cambridge, Mass., and London, England: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), p. 63.

(4) Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 141.

(5) Image of the Black, p. 64.

While the seal's image may have a negative quality, its
motto asserts Africans' humanity and their brotherhood with
Europeans at a time when these were prevalently denied. The
seal's motto, like its image, has a religious origin - in this
case the Christian idea of all human beings being the children of
God and therefore brothers. According to Davis the Bible was not
an important area of controversy between abolitionists and their
opponents, and abolitionists opted for a "down-to-earth
strategy". (1) But I have found a strongly scriptural tendency
in the case of several early abolitionists.

The idea of human brotherhood is found in abolitionist
polemics considerably earlier than the abolitionist seal. It
provided a way of breaking the mental link, "the assumed causal
relationship" as Walvin calls it, between blackness and slavery.
As an important task of early abolitionists was to "establish a
contrary framework of perceptions", they asserted that all humans
were brothers. (2) Thus in 1771 the American Quaker Benezet had
argued that slaves are the planters' "brethren" and "children of
the same father". (3) And in his 1776 pamphlet Sharp grounds his
argument on the Old Testament principle that no one has a right
to make a slave of "his fellow man and brother", and on the New
Testament principle that "all mankind are to be esteemed our
brethren". (4)

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(1) Problem of Slavery, p. 524.

(2) Walvin, England, Slaves and Freedom, p. 83.

(3) Some Historical Account, p. 79.

(4) Just Limitation of Slavery, p. 20, p. 18, pp. 16-17.

Sharp, in his letter to Jacob Bryan, maintains that because

he thinks himself "obliged to consider [Africans] as Men", he is

"certainly obliged, also, to use [his] best endeavours to prevent

their being treated as beasts." His stress in this letter on the

importance of the "tracing of their [Africans'] descent" does not

lead to scientific arguments against the theories of polygenesis

or ape-ancestry which were part of proslavery ideology. Rather

he concentrates on proving that Africans are not the accursed

descendents of Canaan, as in one of the religious justifications

for slavery. (1)

Cugoano also draws on the Old Testament to challenge the

scriptural argument that God intended Africans to be slaves. It

is said, he notes, that some of Canaan's descendents settled in

Cornwall and "there may be some of the descendents of that wicked

generation still subsisting in the West Indies"; for, he

continues, "if the curse of God ever rested upon them, or upon

any other men, the only visible mark thereof was always upon

those who committed the most outrageous acts of iniquity." (2)

He cleverly turns the biblical story of Canaan against West

Indian planters who use it to justify the slavery of Africans.

The biblical story of Cain and Abel, to which Cugoano also

alludes as the reference to a "mark" of "iniquity" suggests, was

vital to the abolitionists' idea of brotherhood: Cain, having

murdered his brother, asks God "am I my brother's keeper?" (3)

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(1) Just Limitation of Slavery, pp. 45-46, pp. 47-48.

(2) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 36.

(3) Genesis IV: 9-10.

Benezet, also alluding to this story, tells the American slaveholder "[t]he blood of thy brother (for whether thou wilt believe it or no, such is he in the sight of him that made him) crieth against thee from the earth." (1)

The idea of the rights of man became especially relevant with the American Declaration of Independence which declared that all men have inalienable rights. Benezet and Day, as I have mentioned in the previous section, appropriated this idea in their polemics against American slave-holders. Paine, who advocated "the natural rights of all mankind" in his defence of the American Revolution, also asserted "the natural perfect right of all mankind" in his pamphlet against black slavery. (2) So the revolutionary discourse of natural rights was employed to assert the humanity and equality of black slaves.

After the Declaration, when the idea of the rights of man reached epochal significance, the idea was increasingly utilised by radicals agitating for parliamentary reform in Britain. The idea was also appropriated by British abolitionists: Cugoano praises his antislavery predecessors, "who have endeavoured to restore to their fellow-creatures the common rights of nature." (3) For abolitionists the idea of the natural rights of all humanity served to undermine racist ideology, and to break out of the narrow nationalist and ethnocentric confines of "the rights of free-born Britons" closely linked with this ideology.

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(1)   Short Observations, p. 8.

(2)   Common Sense, p. 63; Writings, I, 7.

(3)   Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 2.

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The primitivism by which abolitionists undermined racist and nationalist ideas is also an example of their appropriation of political discourse. Primitivism exerted a particular influence on late eighteenth-century political thought following the publication of Rousseau's works. However, in Britain most abolitionist primitivism was fused with sentimentalism. In the painter George Morland's Execrable Human Traffic (1788) and African Hospitality (1789) Africans are portrayed "as men and women capable of noble generous actions" rather than as Rousseau's free-spirited warriors. (1) The representation of Africans in late eighteenth-century antislavery versions of the plays Oroonoko and Inkle and Yariko were infused with such sentimentalist primitivism. (2)

Also, abolitionist writers often employed a religious, prelapsarian version of primitivism not out of keeping with the pious image of the kneeling black. Representing Africa as an edenic place Benezet quotes another writer who the Sengalese reminded of "the idea of our first parents". Benezet, in a similarly prelapsarian vein, laments the "woeful corruption" of civilised Europeans and human nature in general. (3) Wesley, a primitive Methodist of sorts, asks "where shall we find this day, among the fair-faced natives of Europe, a nation generally practicing the Justice, Mercy and Truth, which is found among these poor Africans?" (4)

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(1) Oldfield, Popular Politics, p. 171

(2) Hulme, Colonial Encounters, p. 259.

(3) Some Historical Account, p. 13, p. 54.

(4) Thoughts upon Slavery, p. 10.

Clarkson, in a similarly prelapsarian fashion, describes African existence as one of "indolence and ease, where the earth brings forth sponanteously the comforts of life and spares frequently the toil and trouble of cultivation" – an existence somewhat like Eden in which "our first parents" did not yet know the hardship of eating bread in the sweat of their brows. (1) And Cugoano describes himself and his countrymen torn "from a state of innocence and freedom" and dragged away "to a state of horror and slavery", a Fall for which the rather unsubtile serpent of European commerce can be blamed. (2)

However, as I will also show in the case of religious and rights of man discourse, a more overtly political even revolutionary version of *primitivism is available for use in* abolitionist polemics. Clarkson thunders at slave traders, "ye invade the liberties of those, who (with respect to your impious selves) are in a state of <u>nature</u>, in a state of original <u>disassociation</u>, perfectly <u>independent</u>, perfectly <u>free</u>." (3) Rousseau's influence is apparent in Clarkson's diatribe. Cugoano, in what also seems a Rousseauist passage, asserts that "in many respects, we may boast of some more essential liberties than any of the civilised nations of Europe enjoy; for the poorest among us are never in distress for want." (4) In his <u>Discourse on the Origin of Inequality</u> Rousseau had denounced civilised society in which "the poor perish of want". (5)

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(1) <u>Essay on the Commerce and Slavery</u>, pp. 138-39.

(2) <u>Thoughts and Sentiments</u>, p. 10.

(3) <u>Essay on the Commerce and Slavery</u>, p. 76.

(4) <u>Thoughts and Sentiments</u>, p. 138.

(5) <u>Social Contract</u>, p. 120.

Paine also utilises primitivism in his pamphlet against

American slavery. He insists that "many of these African nations

inhabit fertile countries, are industrious farmers, enjoy

plenty, and lived quietly, averse to war, before the Europeans

debauched them." (1) His abolitionist primitivism has a radical

emphasis in the light of his republican primitivism:

"[g]overnment, like dress, is the badge of lost innocence; the

palaces of kings are built on the ruins of the bowers of

paradise." (2) This emphasis is also the case in the context of

American farmers, whom Paine addresses, having their peace and

prosperity destroyed by British invaders.

However, Paine does not represent black slaves in America as

virtuous warriors like Rousseau's noble savage. In fact he

complains that the British State has stirred up "the Indians and

Negroes to destroy" the fledgling republic. (3) Yet some

abolitionists represent blacks in a way strikingly at odds with

the black on the official seal who, though a man, is a man on his

knees. William Fox, having asserted that Africans are "not a

race of savages inferior to the rest of the human species",

portrays them as possessing "noble and heroic minds, disdaining

slavery, and frequently seeking refuge from it in the arms of

death." (4)

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(1) Writings, I, 4-5.

(2) Common Sense, p. 65.

(3) ibid., p. 99.

(4) William Fox, An Address to the People of Great Britain on
     the Utility of Refraining from the Use of West India Sugar
     and Rum, 4th ed. (London: J. Phillips and M. Gurney, 1791),
     p. 9.

This revolutionary form of primitivism is even more evident in Day's poem The Dying Negro, which was dedicated to Rousseau. In Africa "Nature" has "imprest/ Her awful majesty on ev'ry breast", and the typical native is a "dauntless" warrior. The task of dispensing vengeance for the crime of the slave trade will be delegated to the "fierce genius" of Africa, who will one day "raging cross the troubled seas, and pour/ The plagues of Hell" on Britain. (1) This poem was composed in 1773, and shows that long before the production of abolitionism's official seal there was a more heroic, even revolutionary representation of Africans.

This revolutionary primitivism reached visual art by the 1790s, after the beginning of the slave revolution in St. Domingue. In 1792 Fuseli engraved The Negro Revenged to illustrate Joseph Johnson's edition of Cowper's poem "The Negro's Complaint". Fuseli seems more influenced by Day's avenger than by Cowper's complainer. As Honour writes "Fuseli (a disciple of Rousseau like Thomas Day) depicted the Negro himself calling down the wrath of the elements on a ship that founders beneath his commanding gesture." Whereas evangelicals like Cowper tend to go no further than threats of divine punishment, Fuseli evokes the war in St. Domingue, the self-emancipation of the slaves. (2)

According to Honour the revolution in St. Domingue brought in its wake images of maroon slaves which "make a striking contrast to the docile slave in the abolitionist emblem." (3)

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(1) Dying Negro, pp. 37-38, p. 46.

(2) Image of the Black, p. 93.

(3) ibid., pp. 85-86.

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Among such revolutionary primitivist images are William Blake's engravings for John Stedman's _Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Slaves of Surinam_. Of Blake's images of rebel slaves undergoing torture, produced between 1792 and 1793, Honour writes "[t]hey extol the physical and moral nobility of the slaves of Surinam and the stoicism with which they underwent their atrocious suffering." (1)

Yet Blake's illustrations show that the religious as well as primitivist ideas utilised by abolitionists can have a radical emphasis. _A Negro Hung Alive by the Ribs to a Gallows_ and _The Execution of Breaking on the Rack_ have something of martyrdom or even crucifixion about them. Erdman suggestively uses the word "crucified" in his discussion of the latter. (2) In the former a skull appears in the foreground, as the illustration's reproduction for Dabydeen's essay shows, apparently evoking Golgotha. (3) While the rack image undoubtedly resembles a crucifixion, the figure bound spreadeagled to a wooden frame, both the figure's invincible expression and tortured pose put me in mind of Poussin's _Martyrdom of St. Erasmus_. (4)

The idea of executed rebels as martyred saints had captured the radical protestant imagination since the sixteenth century. The militant idea of martyrdom became utilised in abolitionist representations of black slaves. Cugoano had referred to slaves

(1) _Image of the Black_, p. 90.

(2) David V. Erdman, _Blake, Prophet against Empire: A Poet's Interpretation of the History of his own Times_ (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954, rpt [with revisions] 1969), p. 231.

(3) "Eighteenth-Century English Literature", p. 40.

(4) Georg Daltrop and Francesco Roncali, _The Vatican Museums_ (Florence: SCALA, 1989), p. 17.

as "the suffering martyrs dying in the flames, whose blood cryeth out for vengeance on their persecutors and murderers". (1) Also, his hope that God will avenge His slaughtered saints undoubtedly has millenarian connotations. (2)

Cugoano's pamphlet is full of millenarian language, such as when he denounces "the merchants of the earth" who have "waxed rich through the abundance of [Babylon's] delicacies, by their traffic in various things, and in slaves and souls of men!" (3) In 1794 the radical prophet Richard Brothers used the same millenarian image as Cugoano, only to denounce not slave traders but the ruling class as a whole. (4) Like Brothers' more general revolutionary scenario, Cugoano sees the end of colonial slavery as an earth-shattering event: "[w]e have great reason to hope that the time of deliverance is fast drawing nigh, and when the great Babylon of iniquity will fall." (5)

Such millenarian language is part and parcel of the biblical republicanism that was particularly associated with radical Dissent. In the abolitionist pamphlet of Cugoano, a dissenter and wage-worker hostile to big business of all kinds, such language has a radical emphasis. Cugoano also utilises another strand of biblical republicanism in his abolitionist pamphlet, the idea of the Hebrews' slavery in Babylon and Egypt.

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(1) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 118.

(2) cp. Revelation VI: 9-10.

(3) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 85; cp. Revelation XVIII: 1-3.

(4) Thompson, Making, p. 127.

(5) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 127.

He appeals to the British people to "deliver us from that captivity and bondage which we now suffer under, in our present languishing state of exile and misery." (1) Sharp had also used this strand of biblical republicanism in one of his pamphlets, describing colonial slavery as "a heavy bondage under the Babylonian Tyrant". (2)

The religious discourse utilised by abolitionists has a radical emphasis in the context of surrounding events. Davis, though underestimating the importance of the Bible to abolition-ists, describes at length the scriptural debate between Raymond Harris, author of _Scriptural Researches on the Licitness of the Slave Trade_ (1788), and William Roscoe who replied the same year with _A Scriptural Refutation_. As Davis suggests Roscoe employs a _protestant_ invective, both patriotic and populist, against his _Jesuit_ opponent Harris in order to discredit his perhaps more biblically grounded arguments. (3)

Yet this strategy of Roscoe's had particular significance in the year his pamphlet was produced. 1788 was the centenary of the "Glorious Revolution" in which the Catholic and absolutist monarch James II was overthrown. The year was also that of the launch of the campaign against the Test and Corporation Acts by dissenters, among them Roscoe, who were pitted against an ecclesiastical establishment which denied them civil rights as well as depriving Africans of their liberty.

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(1) _Thoughts and Sentiments_, p. 127.

(2) Granville Sharp, _The Law of Retribution: Or a Serious Warning to Great Britain and her Colonies, Founded on Unquestionable Examples of God's Temporal Vengeance against Tyrants, Slave Holders and Oppressors_ (London: W. Richardson, 1776), p. 298.

(3) _Problem of Slavery_, pp. 542-48.

Cugoano's pamphlet, written a year before the centenary, may allude to the "Glorious Revolution". Having defended the slave's right to "retaliation", Cugoano observes that history gives "many examples of severe retaliations, revolutions and dreadful overthrows" and predicts that slavery will be destroyed by a "revolution". While still utilising religious discourse in his justification of resistance - "he who leads into captivity, should be carried captive; and he which destroyeth by the sword should die with the sword" - his view of the slave's part in God's plan is very different from that represented on the official seal of the abolitionist movement. (1)

When, as Davis observes, Wilberforce warned his abolitionist colleagues in Parliament against relying on the Bible, he may indeed have been worried about the weak scriptural case against colonial slavery. (2) But he may also have feared the association of biblical discourse with radical Dissent, even with the still more plebeian current of "enthusiasm". From 1789 anti-abolitionist M.P.s either insinuated or openly stated that popular abolitionist opinion had been whipped up by radical dissenters and "enthusiasts". (3) Cugoano's assertion that "an old woman selling matches" can preach better than "some of the clergy, who are only decked out... with the external trappings of religion" seems to place him within this plebeian tradition of "enthusiasm". (4) It is probably the case that for an ex-slave

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(1) Thoughts and Sentiments, pp. 73-74, p. 76, p. 74.

(2) Problem of Slavery, p. 525.

(3) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 212; XXXII, 205; XXXV, 561.

(4) Thoughts and Sentiments, p 146.

and domestic servant like Cugoano to sieze hold of the language of the Bible, and wield it against "spiritual wickedness in high places", would have been subversive in a society still dominated by ecclesiastical authority.

Differences of political emphasis, related to social position or political ideology, are also evident when abolitionists employ the secular notion of natural rights. Ramsay speaks less of natural rights than "natural inequality". Though a "law of nature" provides every person with rights, these are "rights adapted to his particular station in society". (1) Clarkson, on the contrary, states that there was an "original equality of man... no rank, no distinction" which he sees as the source of natural rights and, as his Rousseauist primitivism indicates, in some sense superior to modern society. (2)

The most striking difference between Clarkson's and Ramsay's views of rights lies in their attitude to the right of resistance. Ramsay's prime aim is the amelioration of slavery, and slaves' improvement through religious education. Action against cruel slaveholders is not to be taken by the slaves, but only by God who may "call in some dreadful vengeance to punish the abuse." (3) Clarkson praises slaves who "resist their oppressors... whom they have no obligation to obey, and whose only title to their services consists in a violation of the rights of men!" (4)

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(1) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, p. 1, p. 3.

(2) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 57.

(3) Essay on the Treatment and Conversion, p. 69.

(4) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 153.

Clarkson's attitude to resistance by slaves appears in a stronger light in his later pamphlet on the St. Domingue revolution: the slaves of St. Domingue, taking advantage of the fact that their masters are fighting among themselves, "assert their violated rights by force of arms." He also states the case in even more uncompromising language: the slaves are "endeavour-ing to vindicate for themselves the unalterable rights of Men." (1) The language he uses is that used by defenders of the French Revolution, of which Clarkson was one (2), only now applied to the revolution of slaves in a French colony.

In contrast Ramsay, and Wilberforce who rejoiced at the suppression of the Dominica slave revolt a year before the St. Domingue revolution, regard the slaves as mere victims whose acts of resistance are only a symptom of the disease of slavery, and whose role is to submit and wait for liberation brought about by white benefactors. (3) Their black brother is one who kneels raising his clasped hands. Clarkson's black brother is one who should be supported if he takes action to liberate himself. Although Clarkson and Ramsay share such terms as natural rights, their uses of them have quite contrasting timbres.

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(1) Thomas Clarkson, _The True State of the Case, Respecting the Insurrection at St. Domingo_ (Ipswich: J. Bush, 1792), p. 7, p. 8

(2) Oldfield, _Popular Politics_, pp. 80-81.

(3) _Parliamentary Register_, XXIX, 65.

5. THE CONFLUENCE OF ABOLITIONISM AND RADICALISM

What I hope has emerged in my discussions of early
abolitionist polemics is that there was an _influence_ of political
discourse on such polemics. This is the case with abolitionist
uses of the idea of liberty predominant in political discourse
since the seventeenth century. Furthermore, in the cases of the
rights of man which came to the fore with the American
Revolution, the primitivism which owed much to Rousseau, and the
biblical republicanism especially associated with Dissent, the
influencing discourse often had a distinctly radical flavour.

Another fact I hope has emerged is that early abolitionist
polemics are not politically neutral, but have marked political
emphases. Indeed it would be correct to speak less of abolition-
ism than of _abolitionisms_, and this is even more the case from
the late 1780s when there appears an official parliamentary
abolitionism confining its objectives to abolition of the trade
in slaves, and, increasingly, radical even popular radical
abolitionisms often hostile to parliamentary abolitionism and
often calling for the abolition of _slavery itself_. In most of
the polemics I have discussed the emphasis is already radical.

This radical influence and emphasis relates to the general
confluence between abolitionism and radicalism. While this
confluence is sometimes not the case, it is so in the case of the
virtual father of late eighteenth-century abolitionism, Granville
Sharp, a member of the S.C.I., a radical agitator as well as an
antislavery one, and in whose polemics against slavery a concern
about other oppressions is never far away. Clarkson, who took
over from Sharp, supported Paine and the French Revolution.

While the confluence of abolitionism and radicalism is already apparent in Sharp's earliest antislavery polemic, it becomes more marked at the time of the American Revolution and middle-class parliamentary reform movement in Britain. The "chief design" of Paine's 1775 antislavery polemic is "to entreat Americans to consider... [w]ith what consistency they complain so loudly of attempts to enslave them, while they hold so many hundred thousands in slavery". "We have enslaved multitudes, and shed much inncoent blood in doing it", Paine points out, "and now are threatened with the same" by the British State. (1)

It is clear that Paine, who himself complains of the attempt to enslave Americans in revolutionary polemics like Common Sense, is not objecting to an abuse of language. Rather he sees the enslavement of Africans by Americans as a crime comparable, or perhaps parallel but of greater magnitude, to the enslavement of Americans threatened by the British State. As shown earlier he sees both the enslavement of Americans and of Africans as a violation of the rights of man. Both are seen in similar terms; similar language is used to convey both.

While it is not clear that Cartwright compares disfranchised Britons to colonial slaves in his 1780s pamphlets, as I noted in the previous chapter, a comment he made in 1788 suggests he saw a link between radical parliamentary reform and the abolition of slavery: "[s]hould the West Indian slaves, who but the other day had not the slightest prospect of such an event, find themselves emancipated, who shall say that there is no hope of our constitutional rights and liberties being restored?" (2)

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(1) Writings, I, 7.

(2) Walvin, "Impact of Slavery", p. 345.

The confluence of extra-parliamentary abolitionism and radicalism became even more marked during the French Revolution and fiercer radicalism of the 1790s. The confluence was siezed upon by the less progressive members of the ruling class. Speaking in the House of Lords in April 1793 the Earl of Abingdon claimed that "in the very definition of the terms themselves, as descriptive of the thing, what does the abolition of the Slave Trade mean more or less in effect, than liberty, equality? what more or less than the rights of man?" These principles he, in turn, linked to the French Revolution. (1)

Hysterical as the Earl's diatribe may be, considering that the anti-Jacobin Wilberforce was the prime mover of the slave trade abolition bill, and was supported by none other than Pitt the national leader during the war against the French Republic, his assertion of an identity between the "terms" of abolitionist and radical discourse is correct. And his view of a more material link between the extra-parliamentary abolitionist and radical movements - "[t]o abolition abroad, abolition at home will follow" (abolition of voting qualifications, the Church, the House of Lords, the monarchy) - is not a complete delusion. (2)

Clarkson had a different attitude to revolutions, whether by Europeans or black slaves, than did Wilberforce. Yet he was prepared to co-operate with the Tory oligarch in a campaign to abolish the slave trade. A small contingent of middle-class abolitionists did not give Wilberforce and Pitt the benefit of the doubt even when it came to their antislavery credentials.

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(1) Walvin, "Impact of Slavery", p. 346; Parliamentary Register, XXXVI, 155.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXXVI, 159.

William Fox exemplifies such _radical_ abolitionism among the middle class. In 1794 he praises the French Republic for emancipating colonial slaves, and condemns parliamentary abolitionism as a fraud. Pitt, he claims, really intends to rationalise slavery by banning imports of rebellious Africans and turning the West Indian colonies into "breeding pens". (1) Fox's polemic is both a case of radical abolitionism and a _radical use_ of abolitionism. His avowal of slave emancipation is connected to an attempt to vindicate the French Republic and denigrate the British oligarchy.

Fox's defence of the French people, following the execution of Louis XVI, is another example of the confluence of abolitionism and radicalism. Fox exposes the hypocrisy of oligarchs who "have no leisure to prosecute the inquiry any further into the slave trade, because they are so extremely busy in pouring out vengeance on the murderers of the King of France". He ironically contrasts the "enormity" of "the execution of a king" with the daily slaughter of countless Africans. Were the French people to guillotine the entire nobility of Europe such loss of life would be dwarfed by that caused by the slave trade. But, he resumes ironically (and alluding to _Oroonoko_), "it is a _King_, and not an African, but a _European_ monarch"- thus he undermines both the idea of racial and of social inferiority at a stroke. (2)

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(1) William Fox, _Defence of the Decree of the National Convention of France, for Emancipating the Slaves in the West Indies_ (London: M. Gurney and D.J. Eton [D.I Eaton], 1794), pp. 3-4.

(2) William Fox, _Thoughts on the Death of the King of France_, (London, 1793), pp. 17-18.

There is also a confluence of abolitionism and the popular radicalism which emerged in the early 1790s as artisans, small masters _and_ wage-earning journeymen, became politicised. As I mentioned in the previous section Blackburn suggests an empathy felt by politically excluded members of the middle class, especially dissenters, with black slaves. While one should not underestimate the prevalence of racism among the working classes in the eighteenth century, there is evidence of a solidarity shown by many artisans towards black slaves such as those in London who protected runaways and supported James Somerset.

There is also the evidence of the ex-slave Olaudah Equiano, who decribes incidents in which poor whites empathised with him or even assisted him. When a ship's captain attempted to strike Equiano "a British seaman... interposed and prevented him." (1) This occurred many years before Equiano wrote his narrative at the home of the radical master shoemaker Thomas Hardy, and became a member of the London Corresponding Society (L.C.S.). (2) But, along with the other evidence mentioned, the occurrence suggests that at least some British workers showed solidarity towards blacks before the 1790s.

By the early 1790s such solidarity was not confined to London artisans. In the Sheffield of 1794 a mass meeting of journeymen cutlers called for "a total Emancipation of the Negro Slaves". As Peter Fryer points out, as well as "humanitarianism" the cutlers' call contains "radicalism" and "working-class

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(1) Paul Edwards, _Equiano's_ _Travels_, African Writers Series
      (Oxford: Heinemann, 1967), p. 70.

(2) Walvin, "Impact of Slavery", p. 345.

solidarity": "[w]ishing to be rid of the weight of oppression

under which we groan... we are inclined to compassionate those

who groan also." Furthermore the cutlers see a link between

slavery and their own oppression: slavery "tends to open wide the

flood gates of Patronage, Corruption and Dependence"; the

abolition of slavery will not only "avenge peacefully ages of

wrongs done to our Negro Brethren" but also "promote the cause of

liberty" in general. (1)

What travels the two centuries is the cutlers' sense of

solidarity, and their perception of a system or totality of

oppressions. This perception is suggested by the words of the

L.C.S. leader Thomas Hardy who, in 1792, insisted that "no man

who is an advocate from principle for Liberty for a black man,

but will strenuously support and promote the rights of a White

Man, and vice versa." (2)

Another popular radical, Thomas Spence, shows a perception

of a totality of oppressions in his 1795 "Letter from Ralph Hodge

to his Cousin Thomas Bull". Bull is asked for his opinion on the

national debt, places, pensions, taxation and the rich. When

Bull expresses hostility towards the rich, Hodge condemns their

behaviour on "the African coast" and in "both the Indies":

"insolence and robbery, rapine and murder, have been fully tried

in every quarter of the globe" by the rich. This exposé of the

crimes of international capitalism has the desired effect:

"[t]hen damn them, I've done with them", Bull exclaims. (3)

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(1) Fryer, Staying Power, pp. 211-12.

(2) ibid., p. 106.

(3) Thomas Spence, Political Works of Thomas Spence, ed. H. T.
    Dickinson (Newcastle upon Tyne: Avero, 1982), pp. 24-25.

Already in 1792 Spence had produced a farthing whose obverse depicted the kneeling slave and had the "man and brother" motto, and whose reverse portrayed Adam and Eve and had the motto "Man over man he made not Lord". Another of Spence's tokens combined the official abolitionist image and motto with the slogan "Advocates for the Rights of Man: Thos. Spence, Sir Thos. More, Thos. Paine". (1)   Visible here is both a confluence of extra-parliamentary abolitionism and popular radicalism, and a perception of a system of tyrannies which includes the tyranny suffered by slaves in the colonies and that suffered by the working classes in the metropolis.

However, the perception of a totality of oppressions did not always lead to calls for the immediate emancipation of slaves. At a mass meeting in 1795 L.C.S. orator John Thelwall emphasised that "the seed, the root, of the oppression [colonial slavery] is here... if we would dispense justice to our colonies, we must begin by rooting out from the centre the corruption by which that cruelty and injustice is countenanced and defended." (2) Thelwall was concerned that the abolitionist cause could serve to divert the radicalised working classes from fighting "corrupt-ion", the system of the propertied classes, at home. (3)

It is certainly true that many middle-class radicals percieved a totality of oppressions which included both colonial slavery and British oligarchy. But, as Davis observes, the outlook of middle-class radicals and abolitionists was

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(1) Oldfield, Popular Politics, p. 160.

(2) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 212.

(3) Walvin, "Impact of Slavery", p. 347.

constrained by a free labour ideology and often a positive

relationship with industrialisation. (1) Wage-earning

journeymen, and small masters threatened with proletarianisation,

were less likely to oppose colonial slavery because of the

contrasting utility of free labour. On the contrary they tended

to see their own economic position as similar if not connected to

that of black slaves.

Marx asserted that "the veiled slavery of the wage-labourers

in Europe needed the unqualified slavery of the, New World as its

pedestal." (2) The perception of a link between wage-labour and

modern slavery, of a totality of exploitations, began to be made

by popular radicals in the late eighteenth century. It was the

"economic experience" of artisans during the Industrial Revolut-

ion, if not earlier, that led them to show solidarity towards

black slaves. (3) Some middle-class radicals and abolitionists,

like Coleridge in his "Essay on the Slave Trade", linked the

exploitation of slaves with that of workers. (4) But this link

had already been made in a more sustained way by Thelwall, whose

lectures influenced Coleridge's, and as early as 1775 Spence had

connected slavery with wage-labour. (5)

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(1) Davis, Problem of Slavery, p. 402, p. 456.

(2) Capital, I, 925.

(3) Drescher, Capitalism and Antislavery, p. 134.

(4) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 212.

(5) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, pp. 59-60.

CONCLUSION

I have written of an influence of political discourse on
abolitionist polemic, and of the confluence of abolitionism and
radicalism. In the late eighteenth century, and particularly in
the 1790s, there occurs a _refluence_ - the reciprocal effect of
abolitionism on domestic political discourse. In this chapter I
have discussed the major factors that enabled this refluence to
occur. Firstly there is the early abolitionists' strategy of
capturing slavery, of seeking to convey its unparallelled
oppressiveness, of presenting it as the most severe form of
slavery, even as definitive slavery. This strategy would
influence radical polemicists' use of the term _slavery_, prompting
them to compare political slavery in Britain with chattel slavery
in the colonies. Furthermore, it foregrounded to some extent the
issue of economic exploitation which would enable popular
radicals to compare British wage-labourers to colonial slaves.

Secondly there is the abolitionists' strategy of capturing
the ideological territory of liberty. This strategy involved the
appropriation of a political discourse in which the idea of
liberty was synomymous with ideas of contract and consent, and
antonymous with ideas of absolute and arbitrary authority. It
also involved the wresting of the idea of liberty away from
nationalism and ethnocentricism, and returning it to its natural
origins. This made abolitionist discourse highly compatible with
political discourse with its own opposition of liberty and
slavery, particularly the internationalist political discourse of
1790s radicals, and enabled refluence to occur.

Thirdly abolitionists utilised relatively new ideas of Christian brotherhood, the noble primitive and the rights of man. Their appropriation of the rights of man idea also made abolitionist discourse highly compatible with an emerging internationalist radical discourse whose notion of the rights of man was counterposed with that of political slavery. Some abolitionists also utilised a primitivism derived from Rousseau, and a biblical republicanism owing much to radical Dissent. The influence of such brands of abolitionist discourse can be found in the language of a few radicals such as William Blake.

Fourthly and finally there is the confluence of abolitionism and radicalism which initially related both to the influence of radical discourse on most early abolitionist polemics and the radical emphasis in such polemics. This confluence is perhaps the most important factor in the refluence whereby abolitionist discourse, having been influenced by radical discourse, then influences radical discourse in turn. This refluence is particularly strong in the case of the popular radicalism of the 1790s, which protested not only against political subordination but also the economic subordination of wage-workers.

While the influence of Locke, primitivism and biblical republicanism is visible in early abolitionist polemics, that of classical republicanism is almost absent. Perhaps this was because early abolitionists affirmed the virtue of blacks even under slavery, and classical republics were founded on chattel slavery. On one occasion Day manages to be classical republican, while also making a telling point, when he writes that Britain has the all "cruelty" of Sparta without its "virtue". (1)

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(1) Dying Negro, p. 15.

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However, later parliamentary abolitionists like Wilberforce would attempt, in a way influenced by classical republicanism, to show the vitiation under slavery of erstwhile virtuous Africans. Such abolitionist classical republicanism would, to some extent, influence radical polemics in the 1790s.

The tradition of Anglo-Saxon freedom is also virtually absent from early abolitionist polemics, perhaps because its nationalist and ethnocentric quality would have hindered abolitionists in their attempt to affirm African liberty. One exception is when Clarkson apostrophises "[i]mmortal Alfred! father of our invaluable constitution" who has "forbidden" Britons to "tremble at the frown of a tyrant" and "secured, even to the meanest servant, a fair and impartial trial." (1) Yet this shows the radical emphasis of much abolitionist polemic, rather than that Anglo-Saxon freedom was a channel through which abolitionist discourse would flow back into radical discourse.

It must also be said that while early abolitionists rarely utilise the ideology of British liberty, one exception being Sharp in his first pamphlet, (2) but rather tend to assert the ideal of a liberty beyond the confines of nation, race and creed, many radicals in the 1790s would utilise the ideology of British liberty instead of that of the rights of man. (3) Therefore, while radicals re-interpreted British liberty, its utilisation cannot be attributed entirely to ideologists of the ruling

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(1) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 153.

(2) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 99.

(3) Mark Philp, "The Fragmented Ideology of Reform", in The
     French Revolution and British Popular Politics, ed. Mark
     Philp (CUP, 1991), p. 52.

class; nor is there always that correspondence between abolitionist and radical discourse which might enable the refluence I have mentioned to occur.

Radical polemicists were not influenced by abolitionist discourse alone. In one way, ironically, they were influenced by anti-abolitionist discourse. While some anti-slavery writers, for instance Ramsay, were markedly paternalistic, and while many combined with a "capitalistic attack on an archaic form of authority" a "traditionalist attack on a capitalistic innovation", a greater use of paternalist arguments was made by pro-slavery writers. (1) This proslavery paternalism, as well as abolitionist liberalism, influenced radical discourse in the 1790s.

Proslavery paternalism was pointedly directed against the more uncritical proponents of free labour in the abolitionist camp. One of the strategies used by the defenders of colonial slavery was to compare favourably the conditions of their slaves with those of peasants, labourers or military recruits in the metropolis. Long, who often employs this strategy, claims that colonial slaves are in fact better off than "poor labourers and the meaner class in Britain." He adds " [i]t is not therefore a mere sound, importing slavery, that makes men slaves; the Negroes are not the more so for their title." (2)

The response of most abolitionists, middle-class advocates of free labour, was to deny that colonial slavery was better or even as bad as forms of subordination in the metropolis. (3)

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(1) Davis, Problem of Slavery, p. 348.

(2) History of Jamaica, II, 402.

(3) Clarkson, Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 216-220.

Cugoano also makes such a denial, perhaps from personal know-
ledge, though he adds that were such a comparison apt "[w]ould it
plead for his [the proslavery writer's] craft of slavery and
oppression? Or, rather, would it not cry out for some redress,
and what every well regulated society of men ought to hear and
consider, that none should suffer want or be oppressed among
them." (1) Popular radicals of the 1790s appropriated such
proslavery comparisons between workers and slaves precisely to
urge their audience to seek redress for the want and oppression
which they suffered.

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(1) Thoughts and Sentiments, p. 18.

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"A GANG OF MAROON SLAVES":

COLONIAL SLAVERY AND RADICAL PAMPHLETS IN THE 1790S.

INTRODUCTION

Seymour Drescher has noted the impact of the slavery debates
on popular radical discourse, writing that both abolitionists and
anti-abolitionists "provided workers with food for thought of
their own." (1) Catherine Gallagher also takes this view, though
she claims that "the metaphoric likening of English workers to
slaves tended to retain a certain proslavery residue in both its
substance and tone." (2) As I suggested at the end of the
previous chapter, and will show in the following two chapters,
while comparisons between oppressed Britons and colonial slaves
may have been influenced to some extent by an anti-abolitionist
strategy, and while not all radicals held antislavery views, it
is mainly from the confluence of radicalism and abolitionism that
the colonial slave figure stems.

I also differ from Gallagher, and Drescher as well, on the
date of the impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse.
Drescher dates this impact to 1832-33, (3) and Gallagher makes
much of the "worker/slave metaphor" in the polemics of William
Cobbett (undoubtedly anti-abolitionist for most of his political
career). (4) Both seem unaware of the fact that the strategy of
comparing oppressed Britons to colonial slaves was widespread in
the radical polemics of the 1790s, and that there are examples of
this strategy at an even earlier date.

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(1) *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 158.

(2) Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English
    Fiction: Social Discourse and Narrative Form 1832-1867*
    (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 6-7.

(3) *Capitalism and Antislavery*, p. 158.

(4) *Industrial Reformation*, pp. 6-7.

In 1797 a political versifier attacking the Game Laws, which restricted hunting rights to men of property, compared his audience of tenant farmers and tradesmen to colonial slaves: "The Principle of Slav'ry is the same/ In Britain as on Afric's sun-burnt coast;/ It differs only in Degree." The versifier condemns "acts of cruelty" in the West Indian slave colonies while claiming that, in Britain, a partial slavery exists due to "Reliques" of "Feudal Times" such as Game Laws and other "Manorial Rights". (1) Thus s/he bricolages "Norman Yoke" and abolitionist discourses, and in doing so inflects political slavery with colonial slavery. "Lover of Freedom" is far from being an "English Jacobin", and declares himself/herself a loyalist averse to "French Principles". (2)

The comparison of oppressed Britons to colonial slaves appears in earlier and more radical poetry and prose. Gallagher's "worker/slave metaphor" is evident in the polemics of popular radicals like John Thelwall who, unlike Cobbett, was far from being anti-abolitionist. Colonial slavery figures occur still earlier in the polemics of writers perhaps less popular radical though certainly no less antislavery, in Thomas Paine's attack on "hereditary government" and Mary Wollstonecraft's advocacy of "the rights of woman".

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(1) Lover of Freedom, Poetical Remarks on the Game Laws: Shewing how Far they are Badges of Slavery, and Inconsistent with Real Liberty. Written with a View to Disseminate Useful Knowledge, by a Lover of Freedom (London, 1797), p. 7, p. 8, p. 11, p. 23.

(2) ibid., p. 23.

I have entitled this chapter "a gang of maroon slaves", a phrase I take from Burke's attack in his _Reflections on the Revolution in France_ on the language of radicals such as Price, an attack which I discussed in my first chapter. The phrase points to something which I find curious: despite the Haitian Revolution and other acts of self-emancipation by colonial slaves in the 1790s, and contrary to Burke's view of radical discourse, British radicals rarely if ever compare the European peoples whose natural rights they vindicate to African slaves who "vindicate for themselves" such rights by armed revolt. (1) Their comparisons tend to hinge on the idea of a victimhood which they see as common to European peoples and African slaves.

While in the following chapter I will discuss the radical poetry composed by British Romantics in the 1790s, in this chapter I will concentrate on the radical prose of that decade. In the first section I will explore Paine's _Rights of Man_, in the second section Wollstonecraft's _Vindication of the Rights of Woman_, and in the third Thelwall's _Rights of Nature_. Finally I will examine a number of radical pamphlets, including ones less well-known than those examined in previous sections of this chapter, which often show contrasting degrees and varieties of the impact of colonial slavery on radical discourse in the 1790s.

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(1) Clarkson, _True State of the Case_, p. 8.

1. GENERATIONS THE PROPERTY OF GENERATIONS: PAINE'S RIGHTS OF MAN

Near the beginning of his Rights of Man (1791-92) Paine

declares that "[m]an has no property in man". (1) While this

phrase is an abolitionist slogan, Paine is not attacking the

slave trade at this point; nor does he, in this work, clearly

attack Britain's oligarchy for its refusal to abolish the slave

trade despite nationwide petitioning, annual bills introduced by

Wilberforce since 1789, and speeches from both sides of the

Commons including those of Prime Minister William Pit and Burke

himself. The slogan is one of some vintage: Sharp, in his

earliest abolitionist pamphlet of 1769, had denounced "the modern

unnatural claims of private property in the persons of men". (2)

Yet when Paine uses this slogan he seems to be borrowing

abolitionist discourse to attack Burke's constitutionalist

arguments against social change:

> Man has no property in man; neither has any generation a
> property in the generations which are to follow. The
> parliament or the people of 1688, or of any other period, has
> no more right to dispose of the people of the present day, or
> to bind or to control them in any shape whatever, than the
> parliament or the people of the present day have to dispose
> of, bind or control those who are to live a hundred or a
> thousand years hence. (3)

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(1) Thomas Paine, Rights of Man, Penguin Classics, introd. Eric
     Foner, notes Henry Collins (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1969,
     rpt [with introduction] 1984), p. 42.

(2) Representation, p. 94.

(3) Rights of Man, p. 42.

In using chattel slavery as an important trope in his polemic against Burke, Paine is similar to Locke in whose polemic against Filmer slavery was a major concept. Yet Paine's trope of slavery may differ from Locke's in that it may involve an attempt to compare the subjects of hereditary government, the property of an earlier generation, with colonial slaves the property of modern individuals. That the term slavery is sometimes inflected with colonial slavery in Rights of Man is suggested by the language Paine occasionally employs, language which seems to be drawn from abolitionist polemic.

The abolitionist slogan, employed by Paine to attack Burke's brand of constitutionalism, is soon followed by a lunge at Burke hmself, who "must compliment all the governments in the world, while the victims who suffer under them, whether sold into slavery, or tortured out of existence, are wholly forgotten." It is not clear if, when Paine refers to slaves, he means colonial slaves, serfs, or simply the oppressed of all nations. The verb sold certainly strengthens the possibility that he has colonial slaves in mind, perhaps more so in the light of his use of natural rights discourse in the previous paragraph — "in the instance of France we see a revolution generated in the contemplation of the rights of man" — a discourse employed in abolitionist polemics including Paine's own of 1775. (1)

But the verb sold might also serve to strengthen the possibility that Paine draws an analogy between colonial slavery and other forms of oppression: as colonial slaves are literally sold, political slaves are sold in a figurative sense. The use of natural rights discourse is made in the context not of

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(1) Rights of Man, p. 49.

colonial slavery but of the French Revolution. The rights of man theme extends beyond abolitionism, extends into the world of general oppression and the epoch of its extirpation. The phrase "sold into slavery" might, furthermore, metonymically comprehend all kinds of slavery including colonial slavery, serfdom and political slavery under hereditary governments.

Throughout his polemic, Paine continues his strategy of identifying "old governments" with man having property in man. He dispraises Britain's "hereditary legislature" because it is founded on the "uncivilised principle" of "man having property in man and governing him by personal right." Later he dismisses monarchy in these terms: an "inheritable crown" has "no other significant explanation than that mankind are heritable property. To inherit a government is to inherit a people, as if they were flocks and herds." (1) His argument and language seem to derive from abolitionist discourse.

In 1785 Clarkson, using Lockean discourse to attack colonial slavery, had asserted that a ruler possesses power over a people and invades their "liberties" by a "right" given him by their "consent": thus they are under his "dominion" but not his "possessions". If this principle applies to kings, Clarkson continues, it also applies to private persons involved in colonial slavery and the slave trade. (2) Paine's strategy seem to mirror that of the abolitionists, and to be a reversed image: whereas they used the discourse of domestic politics for abolitionist purposes, he now apears to use abolitionist discourse for the purpose of domestic politics.

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(1) _Rights of Man_, p. 83, p. 172.

(2) _Essay on the Slavery and Commerce_, pp. 73-75.

Paine's dismissal of monarchy seems also to mirror another passage in Clarkson's essay. Clarkson condemns "tyrannical recievers" who use ancient theory to "excuse" their ownership of African slaves: according to this theory, because people were property, their children, like the "progeny of cattle... inherited their parental lot." (1) Protests against slaves being treated as cattle are common in abolitionist polemics, but Locke had described the subjects of absolute princes in such terms. (2) What Paine may derive from abolitionist polemics is an image of people as inheritable property.

Abolitionists had drawn from the same Lockean discourse as does Paine, that of consensual government and natural rights. Yet abolitionist pamphlets rather than Locke's treatises may be Paine's source when he avers that "[i]f the present generation, or any other, are disposed to be slaves, it does not lessen the right of the succeeding generation to be free". (3) For Locke only the freedom of criminals was alienable. But more recently Clarkson had stressed that, as long as ownership of a person does not mean ownership of his children, he may legally be "consigned to slavery" with his "own consent". (4)

That the language of Paine's attack on hereditary monarchy may be endebted to abolitionist discourse is further suggested by his own abolitionist pamphlet of two decades before: in answer to the proslavery argument that African slaves are convicted criminals and therefore deserve slavery he had insisted that

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(1) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 137.

(2) Two Treatises, p. 201.

(3) Rights of Man, p. 124.

(4) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 68-70.

"if the parents were justly slaves, yet the children are born free; this is the natural perfect right of all mankind." (1) Thus it may be that Paine re-uses his abolitionist argument of 1775 to argue against hereditary government in 1791.

When Paine, attacking hereditary government for forestalling the consent of succeeding generations, observes that "[i]t is no relief, but an aggravation to a person in slavery, to reflect that he was sold by his parent", it is quite possible that he is influenced by the discourses of colonial slavery including proslavery discourse. (2) Long had sought to justify colonial slavery on the grounds that Africans were sold by "brutal parents". (3) Clarkson had denied that this was the case, and while it might be that other abolitionists denied it as a justification rather than a fact, it may be that Paine's reasoning against hereditary political slavery stems from his own direct response to such arguments for colonial slavery. (4)

While the influence of the discourses of colonial slavery on Rights of Man seems quite likely, the case for the impact on it of earth-shaking events in the Caribbean is rather weaker. Shortly after its first volume was written a slave insurrection in Dominica was discussed in the House of Commons. On 19 April 1791 a proslavery M.P. John Stanley had derived the insurrection from a conspiracy involving British abolitionists, French revolutionaries, French slaves and the rebels themselves. (5)

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(1) Writings, I, 7.

(2) Rights of Man, pp. 122-23.

(3) History of Jamaica, I, 388.

(4) Essay on the Slavery, p. 107.

(5) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 268.

Had Paine read the work on colonial history written by Abbe

Raynal, as he may well have done since he refers to Raynal's

"loveliness of sentiment in favour of Liberty", (1) he would have

been aware of Raynal's call for an epochal revolution of African

slaves in the West Indian colonies. (2) It could be asserted

that this call was answered in November 1791 when a slave

revolution broke out in St. Domingue. But this event, unlike the

Dominica revolt, occurred after Paine's description of the Paris

insurrection in the first part of Rights of Man.

It might be claimed that the Dominica revolt, read in the

light of Raynal's history and of contemporary abolitionist

primitivism, informed Paine's use of the term slavery in his

description of the events in Paris in 1789. The Dominican rebels

were defended by William Smith in the Commons, who denied they

had "bloody, cruel, and malicious dispositions" as anti-

abolitionists claimed, but, rather, possessed a "natural love of

liberty". (3) In a tract republished the same year, William Fox

attributed to slaves "noble and heroic minds disdaining slavery".

(4) Paine, dismissing Burke's "horrid paintings" of sans-culotte

atrocities in Paris, uses similar arguments and language as

contemporary abolitionists, representing the French as heroes

inspired by liberty and rebelling against slavery.

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(1) Rights of Man, p. 94.

(2) Guillaume Raynal, A Philosophical and Political History of
     the Settlements and Trade of the Europeans in the East and
     West Indies, 6 vols., trans. J.O. Justamond (London: W.
     Henley, 1813), IV, 147-48.

(3) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, p. 28.

(4) Address, p. 6.

In Paine's description of events in France a plotting counter-revolutionary ministry is surprised by popular resistance: "[a]ccustomed to slavery themselves, they had no idea that Liberty was capable of such inspiration, or that a body of unarmed citizens would dare to face the military force of thirty thousand men." The citizens "had a cause at stake, on which depended their freedom or their slavery." The outcome is the storming of the Bastille, which is undertaken "with an enthusiasm of heroism such only as the highest animation of liberty could inspire". (1)

Smith describes the tortures and executions undergone by colonial slaves, and ascertains that they learn their vices from their owners. (2) Paine, in a similar way, asserts that the sans-culottes "learn" violence "from the governments they live under"; they "retaliate the punishments they have been accustomed to behold". He continues with a graphic description of modes of execution that bears a resemblance to Smith's speech. (3)

Yet it is much more probable that Paine's description of Paris in 1789 shows the influence of ancient traditions of political expression rather than the impact of recent events in the Caribbean and their discussion in Britain. One of these traditions stems from the mid-seventeenth century and, in Paine's hands, may be used to allude to the revolution that then took place in England. Beginning his narrative, Paine associates the Bastille with Bunyan's "Doubting Castle and Giant Despair". (4)

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(1) Rights of Man, p. 55, p. 56.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 283, 273.

(3) Rights of Man, pp. 57-58.

(4) ibid., p. 52.

As well as utilising this popular culture, with its anti-aristocratic implications, Paine describes the prison as "the high altar and castle of despotism". (1)   He seems to represent it by using the anti-feudal and anti-episcopal language of the English Revolution.   One of the royal policies which provoked the English Revolution was Archbishop Laud's order that the communion table be moved from the middle of the church to the east end where it was "placed behind rails like an altar." (2)

However, Paine's narrative is infused with classical republicanism as well as with these radical Protestant and anti-aristocratic traditions. Paine does not call the Parisians "citizens" in a merely factual way. The designation has certain implications in classical republicanism. These are summed up by Pocock who asserts that Americans in their revolution were "anchored" in the classical-republican tradition, and "saw themselves as freemen in arms, manifesting a patriot virtue". (3) The classical-republican concept of virtue implied a willingness to fight for the preservation of liberty in one's society.

Paine produces a plebeian re-interpretation of classical republicanism, involving not armed freeholders but unarmed sans-culottes. Yet, though dispossessed of the means, they display the virtue of patriot citizens and acquit themselves well against a standing army. (4) At the beginning of Paine's polemic Burke is accused of having the false opinion that "the French had

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(1)   Rights of Man, p. 56.

(2)   Brian Manning, Aristocrats, Plebeians and Revolution in
      England 1640-1660 (London and East Haven, CT: Pluto Press,
      1996), p. 14.

(3)   Machiavellian Moment, p. 506, p. 513.

(4)   Rights of Man, p. 55.

neither spirit to undertake it [revolution], nor fortitude to support it". (1) These qualities were precisely what constituted virtue. (2) Paine seems to represent the Parisian people as virtuous citizens rather than noble Africans, and the resemblance between his defence of the Parisian sans-culottes and abolition- ist defences of the Dominican rebels may lie in the fact that the same political discourse is being utilised in the latter as in the former.

It appears that often, when Paine attacks Britain's oligarchy in terms of slavery, he is drawing not on abolitionist discourse but on political traditions such as classical republicanism. Expressing the hope that representative government will be established throughout Europe, he prophesies a time when the "oppressed soldier will become a freeman; and the tortured sailor, no longer dragged along the streets like a felon, will pursue his mercantile voyage in safety." (3)

I suggested earlier that Paine may draw upon anti-abolition- ist discourse when he depicts ancient despotism. What might be significant here are anti-abolitionist analogies between colonial slavery and the military. In an April 1792 debate, Bailey, seeking to justify the ill-treatment of slaves, asked the Commons if they had not heard of "soldiers dying in the very act of punishment, under the lash of the drummer...?", or "even in this country of boasted liberty, of seamen being kidnapped and carried away, when returning home from distant voyages..?" (4)

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(1) Rights of Man, p. 39.

(2) Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, p. 37.

(3) Rights of Man, p. 268.

(4) Parliamentary Register, XXXII, 185.

Yet Paine's protest at the ill-treatment of military recruits bears no obvious resemblance to complaints about the abuse of colonial slaves, nor is there any evidence that he appropriates anti-abolitionist analogies between colonial slavery and the military. Although the oppressed soldier's status is described as the opposite of a "freeman", the pressed sailor is not depicted as being treated as a slave but rather as a "felon". The fate of felons could be what Paine has in mind when he asserts that the soldier is not a freeman.

If Paine does mean that making the soldier a freeman means liberating him from slavery, then rather than drawing on the discourses of colonial slavery he is probably appropriating the classical-republican argument against standing armies in which professional soldiers are often referred to as slaves. Price, in his Observations on the Importance of the American Revolution (1785) had called standing armies "armed slaves". (1) Of course in legal parlance a freeman, like a freeholder, was a man of property who was entitled to vote. For many classical-republican writers it was precisely such propertied and enfranchised citizens who were deemed worthy to belong to a militia.

One of the traditions which Paine is often utilising, when the term slavery appears in his polemic, is the "Norman Yoke". Paine claims that "[c]onquest and tyranny transplanted themselves with William the Conqueror from Normandy into England, and the country is yet disfigured with the marks". He adds "[m]ay then the example of all France contribute to regenerate the freedom

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(1) Political Writings, p. 122.

which a province of it destroyed!" (1) Thus Paine asserts that

Anglo-Saxon freedom was destroyed by the Norman Conquest, but can

be restored.

No doubt Paine's conception of what is to be restored, and

how it is to be restored, differs from that of Cartwright, who

saw the marks of Norman tyranny as virtual representation, long

parliaments and corruption, and the solution as petitioning and

gaining pledges from M.P.s. Paine's conception of such tyranny

is hereditary government and his program is less moderate. Yet,

however new may be Paine's conception of Anglo-Saxon freedom, it

is clear that in such passages, the term slavery appears in an

anti-Norman rather than antislavery context. Paine avers that

the Conqueror "parcelled out the country" and "bribed some parts

of it by what they called Charters": the chartered towns "were

garrisoned and bribed to enslave the country." When he speaks of

the Englishman as not having the freedom of his country because

he is not a "freeman" of a chartered town, "freeman" exists in

the context of Norman slavery. And when, in the following

paragraph, Paine speaks of France "regenerating itself from

slavery" he seems to mean the regeneration of a "gothic" freedom.

(2)

Indeed one "Norman Yoke" passage in Rights of Man suggests

that even Paine's trope of hereditary government involving human

property does not necessarily derive from abolitionist discourse.

Following on from a paragraph in which Paine describes the memory

of "Norman invasion and tyranny" as "deeply rooted in the

nation", he describes the conditions under the tyrannies of

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(1) Rights of Man, pp. 75-76.

(2) ibid., p. 74, p. 75.

ancient times: "[t]he conqueror considered the conquered, not as his prisoner, but as his _property_" [my emphasis]. (1)

Hereditary governments are, according to Paine, mutations of these ancient slave-monarchies, "plunder" having been transformed into "revenue" and usurpation into inheritance. The language he uses in his description of ancient tyrannies and their modern decendents seems to stem more from history books than from the slavery debates. While it is true that Clarkson had linked modern slavery to ancient slavery based on conquest, here the political figure of man reduced to "property" seems to appear purely in the context of such ancient slavery. (2)

The passage in which Paine seems to utilise the abolitionist slogan "man has no property in man", is soon followed by a passage in which he appears to allude to Locke's argument against political slavery. Paine alludes in particular to Locke's attack on Filmer: "Mr Burke has set up a sort of political Adam, in whom posterity is bound forever". (3) Filmer had claimed that the divine right of kings descended from Adam who had absolute power over his children. (4) Locke had contradicted this, while accusing his opponent of claiming that the subjects of a prince are "all his slaves". (5) Paine, in an ironic reversal, places into the mouth of an opponent who had appealed to the

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(1) Rights of Man, pp. 168-69.

(2) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, pp. 83-86.

(3) Rights of Man, p. 44.

(4) Patriarchia, p. 16.

(5) Two Treatises, p. 9.

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the constitutional principles of 1688, the kind of arguments that Filmer had used against limited government. His implication may be that Burke, like Filmer, pleads for slavery.

If Paine uses the term bound in the sense of bondage, "posterity" being in bondage due to Burke's "political Adam", then he is extending his figure of generations being the property of generations. The fact that Paine here seems to utilise Lockean rather than abolitionist discourse suggests once again that, while Paine's idea that hereditary governments involve hereditary property in people may at times be a colonial slavery figure, it is not always so. It also suggest that the idea may not even definitely be a colonial slavery figure in other passages of Rights of Man.

While it may be that Paine compares hereditary government to colonial slavery in certain passages of Rights of Man, his defence of the revolutionary French does not seem to involve a comparison with the current attempts of West Indian slaves to emancipate themselves. That he does not seem to draw such an analogy may be linked to the moderacy of his abolitionism in comparison to his republicanism, as evidenced by his antislavery pamphlet of 1775. In this pamphlet, while advocating the complete abolition of African slavery in America (except in the case of the old and infirm), he does not voice clear approval of slave revolts. While his assertion that "the slave, who is proper owner of his freedom, has a right to reclaim it" may refer to the right of resistance, it more probably refers to the right to escape. (1) Whatever Paine meant by black slaves' right to reclaim their freedom in 1775, it may be that by the following

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(1) Writings, I, 8, 5.

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year, when the British State was encouraging such slaves to rise against their revolutionary masters, while he had by no means lost sympathy with those enduring chattel slavery he had begun to develop a rather jaundiced view of slave revolts. (1)

In his description of events in France and most of his attacks on the Hanoverian oligarchy, he appears to use such terms as slave and freeman in the context of traditions such as classical republicanism, biblical republicanism, Lockean natural rights theory, and the "Norman Yoke", rather than in the context of the discourses of colonial slavery. Even his trope of generations being the property of generation sometimes appears in the context of these traditions, which tends to qualify (but not disprove) my initial argument for its abolitionist derivation.

However, it remains to be said that Paine's trope may involve a fusion of the language of abolitionism with the language of these traditions, whereby, for instance, the disfranchised in Britain are simultaneously compared to the subjects of absolute monarchy, to medieval serfs and to colonial slaves. Also it is probable that in some passages in which slavery is referred to, it cannot be determined with any precision whether or not a comparison with colonial slaves is taking place. This qualification applies to other polemics discussed in this chapter, including Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman to which I turn in the following section.

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(1) Common Sense, p. 99

2. "HOUSE SLAVES": WOLLSTONECRAFT'S RIGHTS OF WOMAN

In Rights of Men (1790) Wollstonecraft's utilisation of abolitionist discourse enables her also to draw analogies between oppression in Britain and Europe and chattel slavery in the West Indian colonies, analogies discussed by Virginia Sapiro. (1) Therefore it might be supposed, in the light of her strategy in Rights of Men and of the preponderance of women in the abolitionist movement noted by J.R. Oldfield among others (suggesting the preoccupation of many women with colonial slavery), that Wollstonecraft would develop and intensify such a strategy in her feminist polemic written two years later. (2) However, as I will demonstrate, though Wollstonecraft does indeed use such an analogising strategy in Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792), her use of the term slavery is more often part of other, more central strategies.

In Rights of Woman the plantation whip does not resound to the same extent as it had in Rights of Men and, when whips are mentioned, they are more likely to be those of the patriarchal variety found in Russia. (3) But women, like slaves, were commonly regarded as inferior by nature whereas, as Wollstone-craft argues (a line of argument used by abolitionists in the case of slaves), women had been degraded by relationships of power. And women, like slaves, were subject to a personal

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(1)   Virginia Sapiro, A Vindication of Political Virtue: The Political Theory of Mary Wollstonecraft (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 109-110.

(2)   Popular Politics, p. 133-37.

(3)   Mary Wollstonecraft, The Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, 7 vols., ed. Janet Todd and Marilyn Butler (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1986), V, 58, 266.

power unconstrained by society's laws. These are grounds of comparison between women and slaves which Wollstonecraft uses to good effect at several points in her polemic.

At the beginning of _Rights of Woman_, in her dedication to Talleyrand, Wollstonecraft appears to apply an abolitionist argument to women's oppression. She observes that women "may be convenient slaves [to men], but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the abject dependent." (1) This argument had been used by Montesquieu when he attacked "civil slavery": slavery is harmful both to slave and master because it results in a situation in which neither can act virtuously but, on the contrary, both are corrupted. (2)

Montesquieu's argument had been more recently used by many popular abolitionists, for instance Benezet in a work republished in 1788. (3) It had been used still more recently in the Commons, in the year before _Rights of Woman_ was published, when the abolitionist Philip Francis observed that "power of every sort of one man over another has a natural tendency to deprave and corrupt the mind. The moment I hear of such power, uncontrolled in any hand, I conclude the depravity is unlimited." (4)

In the same paragraph in which she seeeems to use antislavery discourse, Wollstonecraft describes arguments for male domination as those of "tyrants of every denomination". As an example of these advocates for tyranny she does not mention slaveholders; instead she mentions "the weak king", and describes women as

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(1) _Works_, V, 68.

(2) _Spirit of the Laws_, I, 235.

(3) _Some Historical Account_, p. 62.

(4) _Parliamentary Register_, XXIX, 238.

"immured in their families groping in the dark". (1) Her

strategy at this point in the paragraph seems to be to draw a

parallel not with colonial slavery but with the ancient regime,

Louis XVI and the Bastille.

Yet, though when Montesquieu attacks "civil slavery" he

means serfdom as well as chattel slavery, it can still be argued

that Wollstonecraft probably compares the man-woman relationship

to the planter-colonial slave relationship. (2) Firstly, the

very currency of abolitionist uses of Montesquieu in the 1790s

strengthens the possibility. Secondly, the serf or "real slave",

a servant tied to the land, is a less likely analogy for woman

than the "personal slave" tied to an individual. Earlier in the

paragraph she refers to "the weak father of a family", just the

sort of individual to whom a woman would be bound. So it seems

that she employs two strategies, comparing patriarchs both with

kings and with slaveholders.

There are other instances where Wollstonecraft more clearly

draws parallels between women and colonial slaves. Arguing

against Rousseau, who had claimed that the freedom of women

should be restricted since they are likely to abuse it, she

answers that "[s]laves and mobs have always indulged themselves

in the same excesses, when once they broke loose from authority."

(3) The fact that she differerentiates slaves from mobs means

that she does not use the word _slaves_ in a domestic political

sense (which would encompass mobs) but seems to draw an analogy

between women and both mobs and colonial slaves.

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(1) _Works_, V, 67.

(2) _Spirit of the Laws_, I, 241.

(3) _Works_, V, 152.

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If Wollstonecraft compares the behaviour of unrestrained women to that of rebel slaves this would be topical. In August of the previous year the slaves of the French colony of St. Domingue had risen in revolt, committed atrocities against their (hardly benevolent) owners, and were sweeping all before them while Wollstonecraft wrote her feminist polemic. (1) In the March 1792 debate on the slave trade, Bailey, blaming French abolitionists for the revolt, spoke of "the destruction of the most extensive and valuable colony in the world, the massacre of its inhabitants", and Colonel Tarleton reported "impaled infants". (2)

Matthew Montagu, replying, denied that the revolt in St. Domingue was caused by abolitionism and asserted that the true cause was the slave trade: "there was a point of endurance, beyond which human nature could not go, and the mind rose by its natural elasticity, with a violence proportioned to the degree to which it had been depressed." (3) Montagu's explanation is, to some extent, resembled by Wollstonecraft's in the passage in question: "The bent bow recoils with violence, when the hand is suddenly relaxed that forcibly held it". (4)

But also Wollstonecraft's reference to mobs may involve an analogy with current unrest in France which on 3 March 1792 led to the lynching of Simoneau, the mayor of Etampes, when he

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(1)   C.L.R. James, The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution (London: Allison and Busby, 1980), pp. 85-117.

(2)   Parliamentary Register, XXXII, 181, 204.

(3)   ibid., XXXII, 221.

(4)   Works, V, 152.

refused to order a reduction in the price of grain. (1) So any

analogy would be a double one which would include the strategies

both of applying an abolitionist defence of rebel slaves, and of

applying an "English Jacobin" defence of the sans-culottes to an

argument for women's rights.

In a later passage Wollstonecraft dismisses Dr Fordyce's

view of the ideal woman, who submits to a husband who ill-treats

her, as "the portrait of a house slave". (2) The analogy is

fitting, in the case of women not of the employing classes, since

domestic slaves on colonial plantations performed such roles as

cooks, house-cleaners, washer-women and seamstresses. Also

domestic slaves were, in some ways, worse off than field slaves,

as they probably had even less independence than the latter, and

"could be subject... to the sadistic whims of their frustrated

owners". (3)

Yet it is not clear that Wollstonecraft's use of the term

slavery always appears in the context of current events in the

colonies and debates over the slave trade. Rousseau, whom

Wollstonecraft castigates for advocating slavery for women, had

himself used the term slavery with respect to the relationship

between the sexes in his Emile (1762-1763): "[t]he superiority of

address, peculiar to the female sex, is a very equitable

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(1)   Albert Soboul, A Short History of the French Revolution
      1789-1799, trans. Geoffrey Symcox (Berkeley, Los Angeles and
      London: Univ. of California Press, 1977), p. 82.

(2)   Works, V, 165.

(3)   Edward Kamau Brathwaite, The Development of Creole Society
      in Jamaica 1770-1820 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971),
      p. 132, p. 156.

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indemnification for their inferiority in point of strength: without this, woman would not be the companion of man; but his slave". (1)

Wollstonecraft applies the term _slavery_ to women, throughout her polemic, partly in reply to Rousseau, who claims women are not slaves while attributing to them qualities (such as weakness and cunning) which she regards as slavish. But a more important strategy in _Rights_ _of_ _Women_ is to apply to the condition of the female sex notions of slavery not derived from abolitionist discourse but rather from older, more established discourses.

I wish to show now that Wollstonecraft's scope for drawing analogies between women and slaves is limited by her strategy of appropriating notions of slavery from domestic political discourses predominantly, if not totally, male. These discourses, in which woman's concerns are absent or from which woman's voice is excluded, Wollstonecraft either turns against male opponents who had employed them (e.g. Rousseau) or otherwise produces female versions.

Wollstonecraft, explaining what she means when she claims women are "slaves", writes that they are slaves "in a political and civil sense". Thus it seems she applies two notions of slavery to women's oppression. If she adopts Montesquieu's terminology of civil and political slavery, then she asserts that women are both the chattels of men and politically subjugated. Both these states involve moral corruption as becomes clear in the same sentence (in which she writes of political and civil slavery), when she describes women as "debased". (2)

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(1) _Works_, V, 154.

(2) ibid., V, 239.

Debasement is attributed to colonial slaves by the polemicists of abolition, but also to political slaves by earlier writers on domestic politics and political economy. In the case of the paragraph about political and civil slavery, the impression that women are slaves of the political rather than colonial kind, is strengthened by the language of the paragraph previous to it. In that paragraph, where French women have been described as "slaves" and French men as "masters", women are also depicted as "crafty ministers" and men as "luxurious despots". (1) This language, owing more to country-party idiom inherited from the earlier part of the century than to abolitionist polemic of more recent invention, may mean she compares women's lot less to chattel slavery than to political slavery — with its connotations of luxury, faction and corruption — though, of course, she may be comparing their lot equally to both kinds of slavery.

There are, in addition, passages in Rights of Woman where the term slavery is applied to women but in which there is not the slightest hint of an analogy with colonial slavery. In fact the language of such passages, replete with the terminology of Whig anti-absolutism, seems to amount to a strategy distinct from that of comparing of women's oppression to colonial slavery.

One example of this distinct strategy is in a passage where Wollstonecraft, roused to indignation by the false ideas that "enslave" women, speaks of the superiority assumed by men as a "sceptre, real or usurped" held by men, and she describes women's desire to be considered beautiful as "like the servility in absolute monarchies". (2) This use of anti-absolutist discourse

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(1) Works, V, 238-39.

(2) ibid., V, 105.

is part of a strategy pursued throughout Wollstonecraft's
polemic: in the following chapter she speaks of the "divine right
of husbands", (1) in much the same way that Paine had attacked
the "divine right" of Parliament. (2) Like Paine she
appropriates Whig anti-absolutism for new and more radical
purposes. But she also utilises the "English Jacobin" discourse
of her Rights of Men, and appropriates the Painite argument
against hereditary power, and applies these to women's
oppression. In his polemic Paine had mocked the nobility as
"artificial". (3) And Wollstonecraft, using this idea to a
different purpose, deplores the "artificial character" women are
forced to assume. (4)

     This artificiality amounts to a "slavery" of the under-
standing, "to which the pride and sensuality of man and their
short-sighted desire, like that of the dominion of tyrants, of
present sway, has subjected them". (5) In a subsequent paragraph
she asks "where shall we find men who will stand forth to assert
the rights of men, or claim the privilege of moral beings, who
should have but one road to excellence?", and adds "[s]lavery to
monarchs and ministers, which the world will be long in freeing
itself from, and whose deadly grasp stops the progress of the
human mind, is not yet abolished". (6)

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(1) Works, V, 110.

(2) Rights of Man, p. 43.

(3) ibid., p. 84.

(4) Works, V, 113.

(5) Wollstonecraft, loc.cit.

(6) ibid., V, 114.

It is evident here that Wollstonecraft compares the slavery of women with the slavery existing under old governments. This comparison is crystalised when she declares "[l]et not men then in the pride of power, use the same arguments that tyrannic kings and venal ministers have used, and fallaciously assert that woman ought to be subjected because she has always been so." (1) In _Rights of Men_ she had accused Burke of a "servile reverence for antiquity" - here she compares such advocacy of old governments with advocacy of male dominance. (2) Later in the passage she announces "[i]t is time to effect a _revolution_ [my emphasis] in female manners - time to restore them to their lost dignity". (3) This call may echo Paine's statement in the first part of _Rights of Man_ that "what we now see in the world, from the Revolutions of America and France, are a renovation of the natural order of things". (4) Throughout the passage cited above the term _slavery_ appears in connection with kings, ministers and calls for revolution; there is no slave ship on the horizon, no whips resounding on the slave's naked sides as in _Rights of Men_.

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(1) _Works_, V, 114.

(2) ibid., V, 14.

(3) ibid., V, 114.

(4) _Rights of Man_, p. 144.

Whenever the discourses of domestic politics are utilised in
Rights of Woman, a strategy is pursued which does not show the
influence of the slavery debate, and of recent events in the West
Indies, nor include any new resonance the term slavery might have
gained from these. This strategy is that of representing women
not only as slaves but as tyrants too. In the passage I explored
above, Wollstonecraft claims that women by "obtaining power by
unjust means, by practicing or fostering vice... become either
abject slaves or capricious tyrants." (1)

Abolitionists had always stressed the absolute powerlessness
of colonial slaves, and their subjection to "capricious tyrants";
nowhere in abolitionist polemic does one find the notion of
colonial slaves having "more real power than their masters", as
when Wollstonecraft compares women to "Turkish bashaws"; (2) this
view of women holding a form of illegitimate power is outside the
perimeters of abolitionism. But, like the portrayal of women as
the "crafty ministers" of "luxurious despots", it fits well with
a domestic political discourse in which courtiers are both venal
slaves and absolute rulers.

Wollstonecraft also appropriates and shapes for feminist
purposes the tradition of classical republicanism with
its notions of virtue and corruption, (3) a tradition which often
overlaps with that of Whig anti-absolutism. Indeed it might be
said that she attempts to produce a feminist version of classical
republicanism. This strategy arises partly out of her argument
with Rousseau, who had employed this tradition in writings other

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(1) Works, V, 114

(2) ibid., V, 109.

(3) Sapiro, Vindication of Political Virtue, p. 210, p. 293.

than _Emile_. In his _Discourse on Political Economy_ Rousseau

writes that civil government is founded on "morality" in "the

hearts of the citizens", and that "the corruption of the people"

will extend eventually to the government. (1)

In _Rights of Woman_ Wollstonecraft also writes of virtue and

corruption, though in connection with women as well as with civil

society. In the "present corrupt state of society", she writes,

many factors "contribute to enslave women by cramping their

understandings and sharpening their senses." (2) The corruption

of society affects women in a particular way, making them

irrational and sensual beings.

This observation precedes an attack, in classical-republican

style, on standing armies. In an earlier chapter she described

an "air of fashion" among army officers as "a badge of slavery";

now she explicitly compares officers to women: "[l]ike the fair

sex the business of their lives is gallantry." In a subsequent

paragraph she describes sisters, wives and daughters being being

kept "in rank and file" by gallants who are "slaves of their

mistresses". (3) So as well as being compared to officers, women

are also compared to the ordinary soldiers in standing armies.

After a paragraph in which Wollstonecraft has described

gentlewomen as "slaves to their bodies" who "glory in their

subjection", she compares them to the "Sybarites, dissolved in

luxury", and in whom "virtue" had been worn away. She also

compares them to "some of the Roman emperors, who were depraved

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(1)   _Social Contract_, p. 140.

(2)   _Works_, V, 91

(3)   ibid., V, 86, 93.

by lawless power." (1) Thus she makes the same condemnation of
effeminacy as had been made by men writing works of political
theory and political economy (such as Montagu, Ferguson and
Rousseau), only she applies it to those excluded from such
condemnation by their ascribed role in society.

For Wollstonecraft women should manifest a female version of
the virtue of active citizens which was expected of men by such
male writers: she writes "by the exercise of their bodies and
minds women would acquire that mental activity so necessary in
the maternal character, united with that fortitude that
distinguishes steadiness of character from the obstinate
peverseness of weakness." She counterposes a new idea of female
virtue to the traditional virtue allotted to women, denying the
existence of "sexual virtues, not excepting modesty." (2)

Yet Wollstonecraft's feminist version of classical
republicanism differs from abolitionist versions of that
tradition. It is clear from abolitionist pamphlets, and
parliamentary slave trade debates, that the concepts of
corruption and vice were applied to the condition of slaves.
Following Montesquieu the abolitionist M.P. Samuel Whitbread, on
2 April 1792, asserted that "it was the quality of despotism to
corrupt the heart" of both master and slave. (3) In an earlier
slave trade debate (8 April 1791) Wilberforce had referred to
"the state of degradation to which the slaves were reduced". (4)

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(1) Works, V, 113.

(2) ibid., V, 250, 120.

(3) Parliamentary Register, XXXII, 218.

(4) ibid., XXIX, 199.

However, this degradation that Wilberforce attributes to slaves consists not in feebleness and vanity but in violations of traditional morality: lack of religion and marriage, promiscuity, prostitution and "excessive indulgence in spirituous liquors". Nor does he wish to extend liberty to them, for, he opines on 8 April, they are "almost incapacitated for the reception of civil rights". (1) No friend of theirs could make them hope for emancipation, he declares on 2 April 1792: the "way to alleviate their misery, was to render them attached to their masters, governors, and leaders". (2)

Wilberforce, unlike Wollstonecraft in her feminist polemic, does not give the impression of a liberator, let alone a defender of assertiveness on the part of the oppressed, rather one who wishes to extend patriarchal protection towards weaker beings. In his 18 April 1791 speech Africans are represented in the somewhat patronising way which Wollstonecraft deplores in male writers on women: he mentions the "peacable and gentle dispositions" of African natives. (3) This feminised representation of Africans is dominant in the abolitionist movement as a whole: the medallion image of the slave kneeling docilely and pleading for protection. This predominant image of the feminised slave is a kind of ideal, not a vice of which the slave should be cured, in the way that Wollstonecraft desires to cure women of their submissiveness and passivity. The vices of which some abolitionists would want slaves cured are incontin- ance, dishonesty, violence and other forms of intractability.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 199, 216.

(2) ibid., XXXII, 161.

(3) ibid., XXIX, 197.

However, the feminised image is not uncontested in abolitionist polemic. More radical abolitionists, in primitivist vein, emphasise the slave's virtue. William Smith, in the debate of 19 April 1791, had testified to rebel slaves enduring slow death "with a fortitude scarcely credible, never uttering a single groan." (1) Benezet described the drawn-out struggle, during the seasoning period, to break down the African's "natural vigour and love of liberty". (2) Clarkson insisted on slaves' "spirit of liberty" and "sense of ignominy and shame". (3) These affirmations of Africans' virtue even in slavery seem to contrast with Wollstonecraft's assertion that women need to develop such a quality, just as she differs from less radical abolitionists as to the nature of vice and virtue.

Unlike the women Wollstonecraft represents, slaves can hardly be accused of vices stemming from luxury; yet the sensuality, irrationality and cunning of slaves seen by some abolitionists could, in the light of Wollstonecraft's view of women's degradation, be regarded as a kind of effeminacy. Wollstonecraft sets out to prove women are not naturally inferior to men, and to deliver them from sensuality, irrationality and dishonesty, the marks of a degradation caused by the present ordering of society. Her strategy overlaps with a similar one effected by many polemicists of abolitionism.

Clarkson had testified both to slaves' virtue and "contemplative power", and had insisted their apparent dishonesty, stupidity and lack of intellectual accomplishment

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 283.

(2) Short Observations, pp. 4-6.

(3) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 214.

were due to the conditions they were forced to endure. (1)
Wollstonecraft does not see women's inferiority to men in terms
of physical strength as constituting moral and intellectual
(real) inferiority, nor as disbarring women from the attainment
of virtue and reason. (2)

So there is some overlap between Wollstonecraft's feminist
classical republicanism and abolitionist utterances on the
corruption of Africans under slavery. This overlap might arise
from the fact that she appropriates the same tradition as do
abolitionists of the time. Yet she adapts the tradition
differently to them, and there is a noticeable contrast between
her feminist classical republicanism and the views of virtue and
corruption found in abolitionist polemic. This contrast seems to
show that, in her classical-republican passages, she tends to
pursue a strategy distinct from her one of comparing the
oppression of women to the slavery of Africans.

A feature of Wollstonecraft's classical republicanism is
that it is rationalist and perfectionist. As such she tends, in
Rights of Woman at any rate, to oppose Rousseau's primitivism, a
primitivism she sees as bound up with his denigration of women.
His primitivism is linked to a privileging of emotion, whether of
the "masculine" or "feminine" variety, which leads him to place
women on a pedestal while claiming they should submit to the
stronger sex; and such primitivism would, by implication, disbar
woman from a rational and perfectible virtue only possible in
civil society.

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(1) Essay on the Slavery and Commerce, p. 151, p. 214, p. 170.
(2) Works, V, 100.

She dispraises Rousseau's primitivism as "unsound" because "to assert that a state of nature is preferable to civilization, in all its possible perfection, is, in other words, to arraign supreme wisdom". She refers to "the brutal state of nature, which even his [Rousseau's] magic pen cannot paint as a state in which a single virtue took root". However, in spite of this dispraise, she later makes a primitivist call for women to "return to nature and equality". (1) Her attitude to primitivism in _Rights of Woman_ is ambivalent rather than totally hostile.

Primitivism strongly influenced abolitionists, particularly those that attributed to slaves the uncorrupted virtue of noble primitives. In one passage of _Rights of Woman_ Wollstonecraft's anti-primitivism may limit the strategy of drawing an analogy between women and slaves. Criticising the "attention to dress", which she sees as an aspect of woman's degradation, she writes that "even the hellish yoke of slavery cannot stifle the savage desire of admiration which the black heroes inherit from both their parents, for all the hardly earned savings of a slave are commonly expended in a little tawdry finery." (2)

Her ambivalence to primitivism appears when she calls such slaves "black heroes", while ascribing their love of adornment to a "barbarous" African survival, a trait they "inherit from both their parents". The phrase "black heroes", possibly an approving allusion to the "black Jacobins" of St. Domingue, seems strangely out of place in this passage. Thus far primitivism goes and no further, as if halted by an overriding strategy to valorise civilisation in which lies the hope of both women and savages.

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(1) _Works_, V, 83, 90.

(2) ibid., V, 259.

The overall tenor of the passage seems anti-primitivist, and she appears to compare women not to savages degraded by slavery but to persons degraded by savagery.

The vices she attributes to women are not those of slaves per se but of primitives in toto: "An immoderate fondness for dress, for pleasure, and sway, are the passions of savages; the passions that occupy those uncivilised beings who have not yet extended the dominion of the mind... And that women from their education and the present state of civilised life, are in the same condition cannot, I think, be controverted." (1) The strategy of advocating an insurgent feminism in terms of black heroism is clearly not utilised, nor, apparently, is her previous strategy of comparing women to Africans corrupted by slavery employed in this passage.

But even when Wollstonecraft applies the term slavery to women she does not only claim they are the slaves of men. Condemning the intellectual stunting caused by womens' confinement to domestic duties, she avers that "whilst they are kept in ignorance they become in the same proportion the slaves of pleasure as they are the slaves of man." Often she represents women as enslaved by psychological factors such as the senses, sensibility or association. (2) This psychological strategy seems to be distinct from her strategy of comparing women to colonial slaves.

Wilberforce, in the Commons debate of 12 May 1789, had claimed that "the slave trade has enslaved their [Africans'] minds, blackened their character, and sunk them so low in the

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(1) Works, V, 260.

(2) ibid., V, 245, 130, 195, 186.

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scale of animal beings, that some think that the very apes are of a higher class". (1) But, generally, abolitionists emphasised slavery as a force imposed from outside, an absolute subordination to the will of another person. While they described the psychological effects of slavery, they drew back from discussing inner slavery in that philosophical vein which arose in classical times and is often found in classical-republican writings.

But the disjuncture between attacks on chattel slavery and arguments against psychological slavery, corresponds to a real division between the nature of the oppression of colonial slaves and of the women about whom Wollstonecraft writes, a division that might make her strategy of comparing women to slaves inappropriate at points in her argument. Colonial slavery was a power imposed on Africans from without, an external violence, an almost complete physical control. One of the slaves' deprivations bewailed by Wilberforce was that of religion, a comfort but, no doubt, an internalised form of control he saw as preferable to naked force.

The plantation regime ruled out internal slavery of the kind Wollstonecraft evinces, a slavery to pleasure or feeling brought about through the consumption of "[n]ovels, music, poetry, and gallantry". (2) The musical entertainment permitted slaves by their owners was no doubt a sedative but never condemned by abolitionists as inner slavery. Wollstonecraft regards the more civilised forms of hedonism allowed to women as precisely inner slavery; but these forms are ones available only to select strata

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 147.

(2) Works, V, 219.

of women, those relatively privileged with the education and financial resources necessary to enjoy these forms.

Wollstonecraft's claim that "the most respectable women are the most oppressed", which to me seems questionable to say the least, reflects the fact that she addresses women who, like her, belong to the social classes which read books. Those she is most concerned with, and to whom she looks for a revolution (albeit an internal one) are women of the educated classes. Here the house slaves analogy appears most appropriate and most ironical: for domestic slaves were "regarded by most slaves and masters as being in a more 'honourable' position than the field slaves"; in addition many of them could read. (1)

The women most analogous to field slaves are those in the most menial of employments, the milliners and mantua-makers Wollstonecraft mentions; or, even more fittingly, the factory women of the north who, as their numbers grew in the early decades of the next century, were to be called mill-slaves. Of course, as wives and mothers as well as workers, these endured a double oppression analogous to both field slaves and house slaves. But the sweat-shop, the downstairs of a great house, or the mill, were perhaps more comparable to slavery than the "servitude" of a middle-class housewife or governess. (2)

While the use of the term _slavery_ in Wollstonecraft's polemic might often appear in contexts other than that of her occasional appropriation of abolitionist discourse, there aappears to be an attempt on her part to merge abolitionist discourse with domestic political discourse. Having launched

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(1) Braithwaite, _Development of Creole Society_, p. 155.

(2) _Works_, V, 218, 219.

into an attack on men in public life, particularly their "sanctioning the abominable traffic" of the slave trade, she then applies colonial slavery as a metaphor for the "severe restraint" of "propriety" placed on woman. (1)

Wollstonecraft asks "[i]s sugar always to be produced by vital blood? Is one half of the human species, like the poor African slaves, to be subjected to prejudices that brutalise them, when principles would be a surer guard, only to sweeten the cup of man?" (2) Steven Vine has commented on this rhetoric, and has observed the parallel Wollstonecraft draws between the subordination of woman to man's pleasure and the ruthless subordination of the slave to the business of producing sugar for the European market; like the relationship between master and slave, Vine suggests, that between man and woman is seen as exploitative and degrading. (3)

Yet more can be said: there is the context of popular abolitionist polemic and mobilisation which gives added life to Wollstonecraft's language. She drew the above parallel at the time of a mass campaign to boycott sugar products, a campaign which involved some 300, 000 families. A pamphlet by William Fox, calling on the British nation to take part in the sugar boycott, sold 70, 000 copies. (4) Wollstonecraft's language

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(1) Works, V, 214-15.

(2) Wollstonecraft, loc.cit.

(3) Steven Vine, "'That Mild Beam': Enlightenment and Enslavement in William Blake's Visions of the Daughters of Albion", in The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison, ed. Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 47.

(4) Oldfield, Popular Politics, p. 57.

bears a noticeable resemblance to William Fox's; to his claim, in the 4th edition of the pamphlet published in 1791, that "in every pound of sugar used, we may be considered as consuming six ounces of human flesh". (1)

Yet Wollstonecraft moves from her comparison between women and African slaves, to describing women as slaves in the terms of her feminist classical republicanism. In the succeeding paragraph she observes the following:

> [w]omen are, in common with men, rendered weak and luxurious by the relaxing pleasures which wealth procures; but added to this they are made slaves to their persons, and must render them alluring that man may lend them his reason to guide their tottering steps aright. Or should they be ambitious, they must govern their tyrants by sinister tricks, for without rights there can be no incumbent duties. (2)

Wollstonecraft's attempt to merge a comparison of women to colonial slaves with that of women to political slaves is problematical — there is an inevitable disjoin within the passage as a whole. That she addresses the degradation of women possessed of "wealth" severs the connection between them and the "poor African slaves", literally poor. Her portrayal of women as "slaves to their persons" might play on the prevalent idea of colonial slaves' "fondness for finery". (3) But in a later passage, she breaks any link between this degradation caused by male domination and that caused by slavery.

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(1) Address, p. 4.

(2) Works, V, 215.

(3) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 288.

In this later passage her portrayal of women who "govern their tyrants by sinister tricks" increases the rupture in the text. Although colonial slaves were so notorious for their cunning that abolitionists sought to prove this vice was due to their oppression (a strategy Wollstonecraft is employing in the case of women), one gets no sense, even from the most rabid proslavery polemics, of slaves ruling their masters. House slaves (who did not produce sugar) might use their catering position to become poisoners, or their situation as mistresses to gain advantages. But the idea of slaves governing their owners belongs to classical comedy.

This last point can be made in the case of another passage in which Wollstonecraft represents the relationship between men and women as one where the "master" has a "meretricious slave to fondle, entirely dependent on his reason and bounty". The depiction of a personal power-relationship might owe much to abolitionist polemic, and certainly evokes the idea of the slave mistress; yet Wollstonecraft, roused to fury by De Stael's suggestion that women want empire not equality, begins to portray the male-female relationship in terms of "prerogatives" and "throne". (1) Obviously Wollstonecraft's shift to Whig anti-absolutist discourse must be read in the context of the language she contests; however, there does seem to be a clash between the representation of the sexual relationship as one in which women are colonial slaves and one in which women are emperors.

One might suggest that Wollstonecraft employs different strategies for different polemical purposes. The comparison of women to sugar-producing slaves suggests victimisation — it

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(1) Works, V, 173.

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has an air of pathos (even of sensibility); while in the
following passage, in which woman are represented as political
slaves corrupted by luxury and sensuality, the tone hardens and
becomes more critical of women. Yet, despite the possibility of
such diversity of purpose, my overall impression is of a
divergence of strategies in which the strategy of comparing women
to colonial slaves is overridden by strategies more constantly
and rigorously employed.

Wollstonecraft's version of classical republicanism has an
ethnocentric or eurocentric tendency, in that virtue and freedom
are presented more as the products of a civilising progress than
as a lost inheritance. The ideas of natural rights, natural
liberty and natural equality, while they feature at times in
Rights of Woman, seem displaced by her classical republicanism in
this polemic. This displacement is undoubtedly due to her
argument with Rousseau, and to her appropriation of classical
republicanism from male writers, including the Rousseau of
Discourse on Political Economy.

That she may be addressing middle-class women imbued by
abolitionist opinion does not have as much bearing as one
might expect. Sensibility permeated the abolitionist movement
and the involvement of women in that movement seems to have been
permitted by the sensibility that was expected of them. (1) For
polite abolitionism, to which women appear to have contributed
most (if the instance of women of letters is strong evidence),
the slave was an idealised object for pity and protection. In

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(1) Oldfield, Popular Politics, pp. 133-34.

Rights of Women sensibility is a tendency Wollstonecraft

dispraises both in women and men. Indeed sensibility is a major

target of her polemic, in which women are represented as its

slaves, an irony considering that it was generally regarded as

what qualifed them to participate in the abolitionist movement.

Another current of abolitionism available to Wollstonecraft,

a current hostile to sensibility, is a primitivism that

characterises slaves as heroic, one we might associate with Abbe

Raynal: "[y]our slaves stand in no need either of your generosity

or your councels, in order to break the sacrilegious yoke of

their oppression. Nature speaks a more powerful language than

philosophy, or interest." (1) Yet for Wollstonecraft the use of

this current is perhaps precluded by her argument with Rousseau,

by the fact that primitivism is a tendency she seeks to

counteract in Rights of Woman.

Despite calling slaves "black heroes" (perhaps ironically),

Wollstonecraft strips them of primitive virtue and, as savages,

feminises them. Perhaps this strategy is due to the rampant

masculinism of such primitivism - she condemns Rousseau for first

celebrating the savage, then the "barbarism" of republican Rome

and the brutality of the Spartans "who in defiance of justice and

gratitude, sacrificed, in cold blood, the slaves who had shewn

themselves heroes to rescue their oppressors." (2) This is

perhaps ironic considering that it was to Rousseau that many

defenders of modern slaves turned. But Wollstonecraft's view of

colonial slaves, as manifested in Rights of Woman and Rights of

Men, is relatively unaffected by primitivism.

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(1) Philosophical and Political History, IV, 147-48.

(2) Works, V, 84.

In comparing women to colonial slaves Wollstonecraft is

describing not heroes but victims without hope of self-

deliverance. Her view of slaves constrains her analogy as a

means of representing women as capable of self-improvement, of

virtue. Even Wollstonecraft, with her dismissive view of other

women, could not paint so gloomy a picture. At one point she

opts for an analogy which is, also, a half-way house between the

situation of middle-class women and a subjugation which is

absolute. And "house slaves" has also, as I have suggested, a

certain ironic appropriateness.

There is, in addition, another irony. Toussaint L'Ouverture

was a house slave. (1) Yet under his leadership, vigorous and

intelligent (one could almost say virtuous and rational), the St.

Domingue slaves became "Black Jacobins" and, against all odds,

effected history's only successful slave revolution.

3. CORRESPONDING SOCIETY AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC CORRESPONDENCE: JOHN THELWALL'S RIGHTS OF NATURE

James Walvin has observed that not only was John Thelwall an

abolitionist but that, in the mid-1790s, he utilised antislavery

discourse in his radical speeches to working men, "comparing the

lot of the slaves to the English poor". (2)   In Thelwall's works

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(1)   James, <u>Black Jacobins</u>, p. 20.

(2)   "Impact of Slavery", p. 347.

one may therefore expect to find a correspondence, in the sense

of a causal relationship less direct and unidirectional than

reflection, between his political language and the economic mode

of colonial slavery. Walvin's observation about Thelwall's

abolitionism, and his use of abolitionism for domestic political

purposes, is indeed corroborated by Thelwall's October 1795

speech given at a mass meeting called by the London Corresponding

Society, the popular radical organization for which Thelwall was

a leading orator. Thelwall had just come out of a retirement

caused by the strain of his (unsuccessful) prosecution for

treason in 1794.

In this radical speech, entitled Peaceful Discussion and not

Tumultuary Violence the Means of Redressing National Grievances,

Thelwall extended good wishes not only to his predominantly

working-class audience, and to "the brave republicans of France",

but also to "the victims of Africa... the slaves of the West-

Indies, and to all the human race — be they black or white". (1)

Yet as well as this expression of universalism embracing

plebeian, republican and abolitionist empathies, he appropriates,

as I will show, abolitionist discourse for domestic political

purposes.

Earlier in this speech Thelwall, advising his audience

against attempting political change through violence, asks them

what would be achieved by pulling down a crimping house; his

answer to this question is that the result will be "that crimps

will practise their vile art of man-stealing with more cunning

and secrecy, and consequently more succcess, than they do at

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(1) Gregory Claeys, ed., Political Writings of the 1790s, 8
    vols., Pickering Masters (London: Pickering, 1996), IV, 401.

present". (1) This statement is being made in the context of large crimping riots which occurred in London in the late summer of 1794, as working people opposed the government's methods of getting recruits for the war against the French republic which was, for many, unpopular. The phrase "man-stealing", which Thelwall applies to the practice of pressing men into military service against the French republic, is an abolitionist term of some vintage. The phrase has a biblical origin, and thus appealed to early abolitionists, such as Sharp and Cugoano, with their evangelical roots and scriptural style. (2) Yet the phrase was still in currency: only six months after Thelwall's speech, during the 11 April 1996 Commons debate on regulating slavery in the colonies, "man-stealing" was condemned by the abolitionist M.P. William Smith. (3)

However, in a later speech delivered by Thelwall to the L.C.S. (November 12 1795), there seems to be not one example of a comparison of domestic oppression to colonial slavery, despite the fact that this speech was for the ears of radical artisans not dissimilar to those of Sheffield who, as I described in the previous chapter, expressed solidarity with "Negroe brethren". In this later speech it might even be claimed that Thelwall contrasts his audience to colonial slaves, declaring "we shall shew Ministers that we are not a Swinish Multitude, that we are not a herd of slaves [my emphasis], that we have not degenerated to a race of poltroons and cowards." (4) Such a contrast, were

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 391.

(2) Exodus XXI: 16.

(3) Parliamentary Register, ILIV, 418.

(4) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 414.

it the case, would be particularly inappropriate - at the time

Thelwall spoke, colonial slaves were far from being poltroons and

cowards. Since 1794 republican-inspired revolts of black slaves

and maroons had occurred in the British colonies of Jamaica,

Grenada and St. Vincent: on March 1795 the slaves of Grenada

raised the French Republican standard with its motto "liberty,

equality, or death". (1)

Thelwall's speech was delivered soon after the crowd attack

on the King's coach at the opening of Parliament on 29 October

1795, an attack for which the L.C.S. were blamed; at its general

meeting of 26 October, a handbill published by Citizen Lee,

entitled King Killing, was widely circulated. (2) Thelwall, who

denies his audience's slavish disposition immediately after

stressing the meeting's loyalty to the House of Brunswick and the

"Glorious Revolution", is evidently in a sticky position - he has

to denounce violence and deny revolutionary intentions, while

also stirring up opposition to impending repression by the

government which was pushing through the Seditious Meetings and

Treasonable Practices Bills.

One could connect the negative relation between the

Caribbean war and the language of Thelwall's speech to the

L.C.S.'s avowal of constitutional opposition and disavowal of

violent revolt. When the popular radical movement was attempting

to present itself as loyal "heroes" not "assassins", comparisons

with colonial slaves, now in violent revolt, may not have been

helpful. (3) In as much as it is possible to be sure of what

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(1) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 227.

(2) Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, p. 384.

(3) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 411.

Thelwall means or how he would be understood by an audience of radical artisans in 1795, it appears that he falls back on an older, classical-republican idea of slaves, and contrasts such spiritless slaves with his heroic audience.

Also, one gets the impression of a relative lack of correspondence between colonial slavery and political language in both speeches put together, if the speeches are compared with Thelwall's lectures and books of this period, works less available than speeches at demonstrations to an audience of artisans. This tends to qualify the idea that a solidarity and identification, felt by British workers with colonial slaves, altered the inflection of the political term slave.

Thelwall's lectures and books, as I will show in the case of his Rights of Nature (1796), better exemplify the radicals' appropriation of abolitionist discourse. Furthermore, Thelwall extends the comparison between colonial slaves and oppressed Britons beyond the limits of political exclusion to which it was largely confined by earlier radicals like Paine and Wollstonecraft; his strategies include comparisons, perhaps more apt ones, between the economic conditions of slaves and those of wage-earning workers.

This new strategy occurs as part and parcel of a new radical awareness of the suffering of wage-earning artisans and labourers, of a shift from the issue of parliamentary reform to that of social justice. This change was due to factors that characterised the mid-1790s: the fading of hopes in parliamentary reform after 1794, following the State Trials of Hardy, Thelwall and Tooke; from that year the predominance of mainly artisanal

corresponding societies in British radical politics as the S.C.I.

folded up; and food shortages, rising prices and distress among

the poor in 1795. (1)

Yet, while there is more evidence of the new strategy in

Thelwall's Rights of Nature than in his speeches, the book is (as

will emerge) subject to historical and political pressures not

dissimilar to those which affect the speeches. These pressures

tend to have the effect of muting (or perhaps more accurately of

warping) the new colonial slavery inflection in Rights of Nature;

though this inflection might be made possible by the historical

and political forces I described in the previous paragraph.

In Thelwall's Rights of Nature, published in 1796 as a reply

to Burke's Letters on a Regicide Peace, there are five instances

of comparisons between workers and slaves. However, three of

these are special instances of peculiar significance which I will

treat later and expand upon at some length. Two of these

instances, in which Thelwall makes a favourable comparison

between British workers and colonial slaves, I will explore

together in the following paragraphs.

In an argument about what is "natural", in which Thelwall

attacks Burke for championing all "that has the hoar of ancient

prejudice upon it" rather than "what is fit and true, and endures

the test of reason", colonial slavery is conjured up:

> Nay, with him... the Slave Trade, is also natural!!! Nor do
> I doubt that, with equal facility, and upon the very same
> principles, as he maintains the masters and employers of this
> country to be the natural representatives of the workmen they
> employ, he could prove, also... the West India planters and

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(1) Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, p. 360.

their Negro drivers... to be the natural representatives of
those poor, harrassed, half-starved, whip-galled, miserable
slaves, whom they, also, _employ_ in their farms and factories.
(1)

Nowhere in the above extract does Thelwall refer to

"workmen" as "slaves", and he is comparing Burke's argument for

the disfranchisement of workmen with arguments for the slavery of

Africans. But implicitly, with his reference to the "farms and

factories" of the West Indies and his emphasis on the word _employ_

in connection with sugar plantations, he himself compares workmen

and slaves. The master-slave relationship is introduced into an

argument on domestic politics less as an abolitionist digression

than to reinforce his attack on Britain's employing classes who

justify virtual representation with "_equal_ facility, and upon the

very _same_ _principle_" (my emphasis) as the defenders of slavery.

Soon after this passage Thelwall sneers at "the favoured

four hundred thousand" who are entitled to vote while the rest

are dismissed (by Burke) as "objects of protection", then he

denounces both the conditions of slaves and of the poor:

Ye murky walls, and foul, straw-littered floors of the
plantation hospital! Ye full-crammed, noxious workhouses of
Britain... What is the _protection_ which the feeble labourer,
or the sick Negro finds? (2)

Again Thelwall compares the conditions of slaves and workers,

while, once more, he does not refer to workers as _themselves_

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(1) John Thelwall, _The Politics of English Jacobinism:_
     Writings of John Thelwall, ed. and introd. Gregory Claeys
     (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State Univ.
     Press, 1995), pp. 405-406.

(2) ibid., p. 406.

slaves (as he will later in a quite different context). However, the concept of natural rights that provides Thelwall's polemic with its title, and amounts to a theme running through that polemic from start to finish, coincides with abolitionist discourse from its beginning as well as in recent years.

On the 26 February 1793, in the wake of the 1792 Commons resolution to abolish the slave trade, Charles James Fox had appealed to the House to fulfill its "pledge" and thereby show Europe that (unlike the French government) British rulers "revere the rights of nature!" (1) About a year later, in a debate over Wilberforce's motion to prevent British traders supplying slaves to foreign territories, Samuel Whitbread had condemned the slave trade "by which thousands of human beings were deprived of their natural rights". (2)

Both abolitionist M.P.s and the L.C.S. orator wield natural rights discourse on behalf of those they defend. Since, according to eighteenth-century political tradition a slave may be defined as one deprived of all rights, this overlap perhaps aids Thelwall in his comparisons between workers and slaves: abolitionists denounce slavery as the destruction of natural rights; Thelwall attacks the employing classes for depriving their workers of such rights, thus slaves and workers are comparable. Yet, it must be said, there is some divergence between Thelwall and abolitionist M.P.s in their application of such discourse.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXXIV, 622.

(2) ibid., XXXVII, 324.

Thelwall defines the natural rights of the worker as follows:

> every man, and every woman, and every child, ought to obtain
> something more, in the general distribution of the fruits of
> labour, than food, and rags, and a wretched hammock, with a
> poor rug to cover it... They have a claim, a sacred and
> inviolable claim... to some comforts and enjoyments, in
> addition to the necessaries of life; and 'some tolerable
> leisure for such discussion, and some means of information',
> as may lead to an understanding of their rights; without
> which they can never understand their duties. (1)

In the 15 March 1796 slave trade debate, which followed the

Commons' betrayal of its pledge of 1792 to abolish the trade, Fox

would demand how M.P.s could hesitate in deciding to "leave the

African in possession of... the privilege of his industry"

instead of dooming him "to be the drudge of avarice". (2) While

both Fox and Thelwall coincide in condemning exploitation as a

violation of rights, Thelwall extends natural rights beyond this,

adding the right to political education and activity. This right

is one that abolitionists do not prioritise; as will become

clear, this divergence between abolitionist and popular radical

polemic limits Thelwall's scope for comparing workers and slaves.

Eighteenth-century natural rights discourse derives to a

large extent from Locke. Thelwall transfers Lockean theory from

the political domain into the economic realm inhabited by

workers: "let us, for once, enquire a little into the RIGHTS OF

LABOURERS: for rights, as labourers, they most undoubtedly have,

grounded on the triple basis of nature, of implied compact, and

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(1) English Jacobinism, pp. 398-399.

(2) Parliamentary Register, ILIV, 313

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the principles of civil association". He describes the terms of employment, by which the "territorial monopolist" dictates to his labourer, as no "compact" but a "tyrannous usurpation". (1)

As I showed in the previous chapter abolitionists applied Lockean theory in their attack on the master-slave relationship. On 26 February 1795, in a Commons debate on abolition, William Smith had condemned the slave codes of the colonies as "barbarous edicts for the security of suspicious tyrants" which "afforded to the defenceless servant scarcely the slightest protection against either the rage, the malice, or the capricious and wanton cruelty of his master". (2) In the 16 Febrary 1796 debate Fox would condemn the "arbitrary power" of the slave-owner. (3) The Lockean dichotomy of social compact and arbitrary power provides both these abolitionists and Thelwall with critiques of two different kinds of productive relations. Furthermore, a false contract between worker and employer and bogus laws regulating the master-slave relationship can be seen as analogous: both conceal a situation in which master wields arbitrary power over servant. That this overlap enables Thelwall to compare slaves and workers is suggested by his ironic application of the term employ to master-slave relations in a polemic largely against existing capitalist-worker relations.

However, Thelwall's zeal to appropriate Lockean discourse, as well as abolitionist discourse (with its Lockean influence), in his defence of workers' rights, leads him to unfavourable comparisons between workers and slaves:

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 476, p. 477.

(2) Parliamentary Register, ILI, 15.

(3) ibid., ILIV, 76.

>   It has been said in our House of Commons, by the advocates
>   for the slave trade, that the condition of the negro, in our
>   West India Islands, is preferable to that of many of our
>   peasantry. It may be so. I protest it does not appear to me
>   impossible. (1)

Thelwall, in spite of his evident abolitionism, now seems to

appropriate anti-abolitionist discourse for the purpose of

defending the rights of the poor in Britain.

Comparisons, unfavourable and otherwise, between workers and

slaves had been a strategy of the proslavery lobby since Long's

polemics of the 1770s. In the 1794 debate Alderman Newnham had

insisted "the slaves in the West Indies were very well treated;

as well in every respect as we treated our servants". (2) The

following year Fox had found it necessary to undermine such

arguments: "[w]ith respect to what had been urged of the

situation of the slaves being better than that of the lower

orders of this country, he did not carry his philanthropy quite

so far as to be prepared to vindicate the continuance of the

trade upon this reasoning." (3) Perhaps Fox was angered at the

anti-abolitionist argument, in the same debate, of John Barham:

>   As to speculative notions of freedom, he admired freedom as
>   much as anyone, but nobody could advance that freedom might
>   not be alienated; the day-labourer parted with his liberty
>   for a day – the domestic one, for a year, and others for a
>   longer period, in consideration of an adequate recompence;
>   and he could not see any limitation to the principle, where
>   the right of alienation was once fairly obtained, and
>   therefore could not discover why it might not be obtained for
>   life. (4)

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 479.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXXVII, 325.

(3) ibid., ILI, 19.

(4) ibid., ILI, 9.

Such anti-abolitionist arguments had prompted Coleridge, in his "Lecture on the Slave Trade" of the same year as the above exchange, to "appeal to common sense whether to affirm that the Slaves are as well off as our Peasantry, be not the same as to assert that our Peasantry are as bad off as the Negro Slaves — and whether if the Peasantry believed it there is a man amongst them who [would] not rebel? and be justified in rebelling?" In the context of State repression, and perhaps ironically, he accuses his proslavery opponents of treason in comparing peasants to slaves. (1)

Comparisons, such as those made by Newnham and Barham, provided fuel to radicals like Thelwall, who wanted both to convince working people that their conditions amounted to a violation of their natural rights and to encourage them to resist (though not rebel in the sense that colonial slaves were currently rebelling). However, Thelwall's apparent willingness to accept that the lot of workers was worse than that of slaves, to concur with anti-abolitionists, seems odd in a writer who also expresses such detestation for the slave trade.

The reasons why Thelwall takes a stance which appears close to that of "the advocates for the slave trade", can be explained partly by the passage in _Rights of Nature_ in which he is prepared to consider that slaves are better off than workers. After considering this he proposes "[t]hat we ought to _begin_ with redressing grievances at home; and to despise the canting hypocrisy of a ministerial tool, who can feel no sympathy with

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(1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, _Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion_, Bollingen Series LXXV, ed. Louis Patton and Peter Mann (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971), pp. 250-251.

any sufferings but those which are too distant for his redress". (1) However, it is also noticeable that Thelwall emphasises that justice must begin at home, with the enfranchisement of working men - this, and not slave trade abolition, is the priority. Universal suffrage was seen as the universal remedy by many popular radicals; it would lead to the abolition of the slave trade and other desirable reforms. Thelwall evidently doubts the influence and sincerity of the leading parliamentary abolition-ists. Wilberforce, he suggests, was powerless to effect the abolition of the slave trade; other supposed abolitionists may not _want_ to effect it. This was a common opinion among radical abolitionists of the time: early in 1796, asking leave to bring in a motion regulating the condition of slaves in the colonies, Philip Francis had reported that "the public opinion, out of doors" was that Pitt's "support of the abolition was not real but pretended". (2)

No doubt many radicals, Thelwall included, saw the abolitionist commitment of oligarchs like Wilberforce and Pitt as a diversionary tactic, a sop to those who desired reform. Also there are reasons why Thelwall does not push further his comparison between workers and slaves, why he falters at this point. The first reason is his strategy of dignifying the labourer, the second is his use of certain discourses and rejection of others, the third is the polemical context of _Rights of Nature_ as a reply to Burke's _Letters on a Regicide Peace_.

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(1) _English Jacobinism_, p. 479.

(2) _Parliamentary Register_, ILIV, 398.

In his Letters on a Regicide Peace (1796) Burke had asserted
that even "the Negroes in the West Indies, know nothing of so
searching, so penetrating, so heart breaking a slavery" as
that endured by the people of revolutionary France. (1) He had
also accused the French of cannibalism (a charge anti-
abolitionists made against Africans), and imagined Britain's
ruling class condemned "by tribunals formed of Maroon negro
slaves covered over with the blood of their masters". (2) So
Burke, prior to Thelwall, utilises the discourses of slavery, and
compares common people to slaves, though to a different purpose
than Thelwall.

Thelwall responds by appropriating Burke's rhetoric,
referring to the "cannibal ferocity" of the counter-revolutionary
armies in Europe. But he also attempts to explain and excuse the
actions of Paris mobs and rebel slaves: "[h]ad the Maroons and
negroes never been most wickedly enslaved, their masters had
never been murdered. Had the chains of France been less galling,
they had never fallen so heavy on the heads of French
oppressors". (3) He blames the rulers rather than the rebels.
Yet also he insists that he deplores as much as Burke "'the
robberies and murders' committed by these poor wretches – the
blind instruments of instinctive vengeance" and that he is "no
apologist for the horrible massacres of revenge"; "we are", he
adds, not to expect whole nations (whether of Maroon negroes, or

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(1)   Edmund Burke, The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund
      Burke, 14 vols. (London: Rivington, 1801-1822), IX, 72-73.

(2)   ibid., VIII, 177-78, 195.

(3)   English Jacobinism, p. 442, p. 409.

of feudal vassals) to become of a sudden so entirely speculative". (1) Though Thelwall compares British workers to "whip-galled" slaves - they are both victims - he never compares them to "Maroon negroes", since the kind of rebellion he advocates is, unlike that of maroons, peaceful. And, as I will show, he represents British workers, or artisans at least, as "speculative", capable of rational and abstract thought.

In the passage in which Thelwall unfavourably compares the workers' lot with slaves', he also unfavourably compares it with primitives': "the condition of the naked savage [of America] appears, by far, more tolerable than that of a large proportion, at least, of the laborious classes" in Britain. (2) Yet, implicitly, he contrasts workers and primitives in another way, contrasting the civilised with the uncivilised, which is a clue to why he does not expand his comparison between workers and slaves to a comparison of radical artisans to noble primitives rebelling against slavery in the Caribbean. While Thelwall sometimes adopts a Rousseauist view, describing "the Savage state" as one of "almost absolute equality" preferable to "the wretched mockery" of civilisation now prevailing, he does not oppose property or civilisation. He insists that by "nature" and "the natural condition of man" he does not mean a primordial condition. (3) He applies these ideas to the civilised state, and he desires to extend civilisation and extend it to all.

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 408.

(2) ibid., p. 479.

(3) ibid., p. 464, p. 461, p. 455.

As I described in the previous chapter primitivism was a strand of abolitionism, and one which appealed to radical abolitionists romanticising slave resistance. In 1796 many slaves were revolutionaries in reality. Thelwall, alarmed by slave action in the Caribbean, as suggested by his view of the "melancholy prospect" consequent to "premature emancipation" of slaves by the French republic, omits this reality by comparing slaves with workers only on grounds of victimisation. (1) Furthermore, Thelwall wants to portray workers as peaceful, civilised and speculative. Though they can be compared to slaves as exploited producers, slaves (even peaceful ones) offer neither a picture of the civilised nor the speculative.

Thelwall departs from primitivism, in depicting workers as deprived of the benefits of civilisation — leisure, comfort and education. Yet he also dignifies a large number of workers (artisans), portraying them as the paragon of civilisation. He points out to Burke the existence of

> whole companies, whole neighbourhoods, nay, almost whole
> professions of labouring manufacturers, who understand the
> principles of government much better than himself, and who
> want nothing but practical fluency to render them most
> formidable antagonists to the whole college of aristocratical
> declaimers.. (2)

Thelwall also asserts that "every large work-shop and manufactory is a sort of political society" and that "a sort of Socratic spirit will necessarily grow up, wherever large bodies

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(1) English Jacobinism, 293-94.

(2) ibid., p. 400.

of men assemble". Thelwall depicts a large element of the working classes as, in effect, already part of the political nation, and equipped with civic virtue and sagacity of a classical-republican kind. Yet such virtue and sagacity is the very antithesis to slavery: "[r]ouse, then, once more to the investigation of your rights: for, if ye will be ignorant, ye must be slaves." (1)

In this contrast between virtue and slavery Thelwall's thought is in keeping with abolitionism (also influenced by classical republicanism). In the slave trade debate of 15 March 1796, Fox would declare "that all the virtues of man are allied to liberty... the vices fester on the dunghill of slavery." (2) Thelwall's view of colonial slaves does not appear to differ from Fox's; his abolitionism is fairly mainstream in this respect, and, in that he never represents slaves as "active citizens", there is a gap between his abolitionism and his radicalism. This gap shows in the contrast between his view of slaves and his view of a large number of British workers. The former are, if not politically passive, then still vicious and unenlightened; the latter are, in fact, "speculative" and responsible. The gap could partly explain why, though he compares workers to slaves, he never, in such comparisons, refers to the workers as slaves. When he _does_ refer to workers as slaves, it is in the context of discourses other than abolitionism and of strategies other than comparing British artisans with black plantation-labourers in the colonies.

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 400, p. 401, p. 434.

(2) Parliamentary Register, ILIV, 312.

Thelwall indeed describes British workers as slaves:

[p]roperty is accumulated in so few hands, and the condition
of the labourer has, in consequence, become so abject, that
the mass of people may, in reality, be considered as slaves;
with this distinction only, that they are subject to the
whole Corporation of Employers, instead of an individual
proprietor. (1)

Yet he is probably not comparing the workers' lot to that of

colonial blacks; what he compares it to more definitely is "the

state of society to which Athens and Rome declined". (2)

Similarly, when he claims that "the classes that have

neither land, nor wealth, nor arms, must, in effect, be slaves",

he is implying a parallel between British workers and the

"Helotes" of ancient Sparta. (3) These examples I have cited

amount not to an appropriation of abolitionist discourse but to

an appropriation of classical republicanism, the production of a

proletarian classical republicanism. This strategy fits in with

his stress on admitting the working classes into the political

nation, and his depiction of workers as already possessed of

civic qualities. Yet in the second case, at least, the more

allusive classical parallel may be Thelwall's response to the

Treasonable Practices Act (passed late in 1795) which compelled

him to be cryptic, as he was also in his 1796 lectures in which

he discussed contemporary politics under the guise of reflections

on the history of ancient Rome and Greece.

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 482.

(2) Thelwall, loc.cit.

(3) ibid., pp. 490-91.

Yet Thelwall's parallels between ancient and modern

societies should also be placed in the context of his polemic

against Burke. Thelwall's remarks on Sparta appear in a passage

in which he describes the wretched state of the majority under

feudalism, and draws a parallel between past societies and

present ones. One of his strategies is to depict Burke, who had

praised the old Gothic constitutions of Europe, as "the arch-

champion of feudal barbarism", and to portray Hanoverian Britain

as still oppressed by Burke's "feudal institutions". (1)

Earlier in 1796 Burke had portrayed the black revolution-

aries of the Caribbean war as "a race of fierce barbarians". (2)

Thelwall, though excusing them, does not contradict such a

representation; he does not, as had Clarkson in the case of St.

Domingue, describe them "endeavouring to vindicate for themselves

the unalterable Rights of Men". (3) Burke had paired sans-

culottes and Maroon slaves in a depiction of illegitimate

violence; Thelwall does not reject this equation, though he

explains their violence as a reaction against illegitimate

authority.

It may be, additionally, that classical and feudal analogues

provide a more dignified and heroic costume for British workers

than the naked fury of rebel slaves. However, Thelwall's

strategy of dignification, his appropriation of political

traditions, and his task-in-hand of refuting Burke, have further

implications: they must be placed in placed in the historical

context of both the war in the Caribbean and unrest in Britain.

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 436, p. 435.

(2) Works, VIII, 228-29.

(3) Clarkson, True State of the Case, p. 8.

A section of the oligarchy, most of the parliamentary abolitionists, had turned the issue of slave trade abolition into a matter crucial to the success of Britain's war effort in the Caribbean. In a slave trade debate of 1795 Wilberforce had made the following calculation:

> Every ship-ful of negroes which came from Africa, either directly added to the force of our enemy, if carried into the French islands, or added to it indirectly, and perhaps still more dangerously, by increasing the numbers of the disaffected, if brought into our own. (1)

Thus there was, by the mid-1790s, a variant of abolitionist opinion which was directed against the French republic and its supporters in Britain, however stalwart many radicals had been in the campaign against the slave trade from the 1780s onwards.

The link between the abolitionist and the reform movements had not been broken. Yet the image of the abolitionist movement must have been tarnished for radicals: its leaders were members of an increasingly reactionary oligarchy, which had passed the Seditious Meetings and Treasonable Practices Acts of 1795; these laws prevented even moderate reformers from meeting to petition and, for the first time, made republican writers liable to a charge of high treason independent of whether or not they were acting on their beliefs. (2) In the hands of such oligarchs the abolition campaign could be made to serve purposes quite contrary to the emancipation of Europe and Britain.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, ILI, 7.

(2) Goodwin, Friends of Liberty, p. 387.

Thelwall, who opposed the war with France, would have wanted
to differentiate himself from parliamentary abolitionists such as
Wilberforce. For him the abolitionist campaign was problematic,
as much a hindrance as an asset: the existence of the slave trade
could be used in diatribes against the oligarchy and the
employing classes; yet, in other hands, it was useful not only as
a distraction from poverty and oppression at home but also as a
means to attack "French principles" - as shown by Wilberforce's
abolitionist speech in 1796. (1)

The problematic nature of abolitionism by the mid-1790s may
partly explain Thelwall's apparent willingness to consider that
British workers were worse off than colonial slaves. The context
of the attack on the King and of the Two Bills (which became law
by the end of 1795) are factors which considerably limited
Thelwall's scope in drawing parallels between Britain and the
Caribbean. These factors compelled L.C.S. leaders like Thelwall
to tone down their rhetoric and to stress more than ever that the
working-class radical movement was constitutional and
"speculative".

Perhaps, in the light of unrest and repression at home and
of the sheer bloodiness of the Caribbean war, a position openly
friendly to the emancipation and self-emancipation of slaves (the
position of the French Republic since 1794) was not politically
expedient or even attractive. Thelwall may not have felt at
liberty, perhaps may not even have secretly desired, to compare
radical artisans to black revolutionaries. Yet three years
earlier Thelwall had used his strategy of comparing oppressed
Britons to enslaved Africans to a quite different effect.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, IVIV, 63.

In "King Chaunticlere; or, the Fate of Tyranny", printed in

Daniel Isaac Eaton's Politics for the People, or Hog's Wash

(VIII: 16 November 1793), Thelwall had equated the victims of the

press gang with those of the slave trade: "there are press-gangs

to make men slaves of labour as well as slaves of war". His

parable about a slave who prefers slow torture to instant death,

is an investigation into the conditioning which causes cowardice

in the face of oppression: the tortured slave is an analogue for

"men of base and abject minds" who instinctively submit to

tyranny in Britain. (1)

Thus, in Thelwall's 1793 fable, colonial slavery is used as

an analogy not for workers' oppression but for their prejudice

and passivity. In 1796, when slaves in British colonies are more

inclined to resist than workers in Britain, such an analogy would

have been anachronistic. It was also undesirable: the fable was

printed when the corresponding societies were at their most

aggressive - before the 1794 treason trials and the Two Acts of

1795. Thelwall is unable, perhaps unwilling, to utilise these new

events in his worker-slave comparisons. The colonial slave, even

if, in 1796, he is no longer an analogue for passivity, does not

become an analogue for opposition.

Thelwall denounces the military's actions in the Caribbean:

"[t]housands and tens of thousands of our British youth are

annually sacrificed by the yellow pestilence... for the

perpetuity of the African slave trade". (2) Yet he does not

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(1)   Marilyn Butler, ed., Burke, Paine, Godwin, and the
      Revolution Controversy, Cambridge English Prose Texts (CUP,
      1984), pp. 186-87.

(2)   English Jacobinism, pp. 391-92.

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praise the actions of the black revolutionaries. The blacks

remain pathetic victims, either "instruments of instinctive

vengeance" or, when compared to workers, "miserable slaves". (1)

Thelwall's polemical strategy may be contrasted with that of

a later, more extreme radical - the ex-slave Robert Wedderburn.

In 1819 the Rev. Chetwode Eustace had reported to the government

that, at a meeting in London:

> After noticing the Insurrection of the Slaves in some of the
> West India Islands he [Wedderburn] said they fought in some
> instances for twenty years for 'Liberty'- and then he
> appealed to Britons who boasted such superior feelings and
> principles, whether they were ready to fight now for a short
> time for their Liberties. (2)

This unfavourable comparison between workers and slaves, one

which represents the latter as the model of courageous

resistance, is made in a different historical period to that in

which Thelwall makes his comparisons in Politics for the People

and Rights of Nature. The period is that of both unsurpassed

working-class militancy, exemplified by the Spa Fields Meeting of

1817 and unprecedented slave resistance such as "Bussa's Revolt"

of 1816 in Barbados. A large number of workers now openly

discussed both revolution at home and emancipation in the

colonies. (3)

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(1) English Jacobinism, p. 408, pp. 467-468.

(2) Robert Wedderburn, The Horrors of Slavery and Other
    Writings by Robert Wedderburn, ed. and introd. Iain McCalman
    (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1991), p. 116.

(3) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, pp. 323-25.

It may well be that the plenitude of worker-slave comparisons in _Rights_ _of_ _Nature_, compared with the two speeches I examined earlier, can be explained by the audience to whom the book would have been available. These comparisons between colonial and metropolitan victims may have appealed to the sensibility of a middle-class audience; it was an audience long attuned to the abolitionist movement's sentimentalist and philanthopic strands.

Yet the book's readership does not explain the absence in it of emancipationist and revolutionist attitudes towards colonial slaves. In neither of his 1795 speeches does Thelwall privilege revolutionary slaves. Yet in the 1793 fable, originally perform-ed orally by Thelwall to a working-class audience, the slave's "_seditious_ attempt to regain his freedom" and his "impious love of liberty" is referred to with ironic outrage. (1) Thelwall voices approval of slave resistance, but years prior to the _bellum_ _servile_ in Britain's colonies and the constitutionalism advocated by many of the L.C.S. including, by then, Thelwall.

In fact, by 1795 at any rate, Thelwall was opposed to the emancipation of colonial slaves. In his _Tribune_ he condemns Henry Dundas, the Secretary for War, for two-faced behaviour over abolitionism. Yet while expressing disgust that the slave trade has not been abolished, Thelwall refers to the radical abolitionism of the French Republic in the following terms: "premature emancipation is rushing upon the kidnapped sons of Africa", and he sees the consequence in terms of a "melancholy propect" of brutal conflict. (2)

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(1) Butler, _Burke,_ _Paine,_ _Godwin_, p. 186.

(2) _English_ _Jacobinism_, pp. 293-94.

It is the historical context more than the context of

reception that explains the difference between Thelwall's

polemics of the mid-1790s and Wedderburn's of 1819. Thelwall's

worker-slave comparisons are part of a polemic in which

revolution, both by slaves and workers, is erased or

marginalised. His comparisons extend understanding of the

correspondence between colonial slavery and metropolitan

oligarchy beyond the political superstructure, into the economic

basis of Hanoverian society; yet they are limited by an ideology

that is reformist and by a situation of siege and impending

defeat - one in which the odds are stacked in favour of the

ruling class.

However, Thelwall's worker-slave comparisons of this period

are, in a way, truly radical; as part of a critique of emerging

modern capitalism, such analogies anticipate Marx's theory of the

commodification of labour. In his _Tribune_ Thelwall recorded an

observation voiced in a lecture of 1795:

> the spirit of speculation has destroyed the fair, honest, and
> manly character of traffic; and that at present (though the
> open barter only appears in the infamous African slave-trade)
> almost all the inhabitants of the universe are rendered, as
> it were, the saleable commodities of a few engrossers and
> monopolists.'(1)

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(1) _English Jacobinism_, p. 286.

"A CLASH OF LIVE SOCIAL ACCENTS": A RANGE OF PAMPHLETS EXPLORED

Vološinov describes the sign as "an arena of the class struggle", in that it serves as an arena for "the clash of live social accents": though a language may be shared between antagonistic social groups, the meanings of its words can be contested in "times of social crises or revolutionary change". (1) Such a hypothesis is partly borne out by the use of the word slavery in radical discourse during the social crisis and change of late eighteenth-century Britain, a use I explored in the case of the polemics of Paine, Wollstonecraft and Thelwall.

Yet there is a limit to the extent that the changing meaning of slavery registers changing economic and political conditions in society, and its meaning does not always neatly coincide with the social position or ideology of the radical writer and his/her audience. There are complex mediating factors, such as the conservative and restraining quality of available discourse, the specific historical and political context of a polemic, or the peculiar situation and outlook of a polemicist. What strikes me is the sheer diversity of the use of the term slavery, diversity not always corresponding to different class positions or ideologies.

It must be said that radicals are not alone in appropriating abolitionist discourse for domestic political purposes. Loyalists find, in the suffering of the colonial slave, a means to attack the radical movement, to defend the Hanoverian oligarchy, or (as we saw in Burke's case) to make a comparison with the oppressed people of France.

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(1) Marxism, p. 23.

In the "black" pamphlet of "A. Scott", Plain Reasons for Adopting the Plan of the Societies Calling themselves the Friends of the People (1793), abolitionist opinion is manipulated in an attempt to discredit the radical movement. The loyalist polemicist poses as a radical hairdresser in Edinburgh, who, speculating about life after the revolution, is forced to admit that he cannot see "how it will be possible to preserve handicrafts or manufactures, unless we kidnap a sufficient number of slaves from Africa, which God forbid!" (1) "A. Scott" then, befooled by his borrowed learning and radical rhetoric, foresees the future society as one like ancient classical republics "where all the citizens were a kind of idle gentlemen, who did nothing but walk about, and dispute on politics, and where the slaves outnumbered them twenty to one". Suddenly losing his abolitionist scruples he exclaims "[a]nd I rejoice in the prospect of it; for it will be a new golden age" (2) The radical is depicted as one so fanatical and opportunistic that he is prepared to continue the slave trade if that will assist him in his nefarious aims.

Earlier than "A. Scott"'s pamphlet, in 1791, John Somers Cocks M.P. had defended the Hanoverian oligarchy in Patriotism and the Love of Liberty Defended. In his pamphlet he maintains that, because of "bad men" (including radicals no doubt), "some degree of arbitrary power is necessary in every state". (3) He also claims that the true patriot, while supporting "liberty

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, VIII, 20-21.

(2) ibid., VIII, 21.

(3) ibid., VII, 17.

against bad government and slavery", "ought always to feel a strong bias in favour of the established government". (1) No doubt, as with Burke, Richard Price's _Discourse on the Love of our Country_ is one of the radical polemics at which he directs his hostility. Yet while Cocks is conservative as regards "established government", he is a reformer with respect to the slave trade. He argues with those M.P.s who opposed Wilberforce's abolition motion "whether a general conviction in the minds of the nation at large, and of the world, that the Parliament of Great Britain is just and humane, is not the most likely, as well as the most satisfactory method to preserve entire their own authority, and the established constitution of the kingdom". (2) So abolitionist discourse can have loyalist uses as well as radical ones.

While the parliamentary abolitionist campaign can just go to show that the British ruling class is "just and humane", the oppressed condition of the colonial slave can be used to "prove" how all Britons are free: the fact that a slave is deprived of power, wealth and greatness, and that even a slave's person belongs to his master, leads Cocks to exclaim "If you are possessed of liberty, O my Country, with power and understanding sufficient to preserve it, what would you ask more?" (3) No doubt when a free and great nation calls for parliamentary reform it asks for too much. Cocks refers to colonial slavery as

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(1) Claeys, _Political Writings_, VII, 23.

(2) ibid., VII, 3-4, 5.

(3) ibid., VII, 16.

"intimately connected with" his subject, and insists "private or domestic slavery... did not occur to [his] mind as an object of investigation distinct from slavery in general". (1) He condemns both "domestic slavery" and "slavery in general", but the latter (which would include political slavery) is not an abuse of which Britain's rulers can be accused. Radicals who also equated both kinds of "slavery", chattel slavery and political slavery, might disagree with this conceptual expulsion of "slavery in general" from Britain.

One loyalist less reluctant than Cocks to compare British subjects with colonial slaves was the anonymous loyalist author of A Brief Reply to the Observations of Ben. Bousefield Esq. on Mr Burke's Pamphlet (1791), who attacks the pro-Catholic politician Valentine Browne for his divide-and-rule tactics in Ireland: "with the policy of a negro-merchant he foments intestine warfare among the tribes and families of the country — puchases the captive slaves and stamps them his own for life." (2) In the 12 May 1789 abolition debate Wilberforce reported slave traders stirring up war between African towns, concluding that the slave trade was the "chief cause of wars in Africa". (3) Yet it is not clear that the author of A Brief Reply appropriates abolitionist discourse: his term "negro-merchants" might refer to African traders not European ones; he may appropriate the anti-abolitionist argument, voiced by John Henniker in the debate of

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, VII, 3.

(2) ibid., VII, 47.

(3) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 132.

the 21 May 1789, that "Africans were naturally inclined to barbarity... and could not have been taught by Europeans to act such scenes of cruelty". (1)

If the author of A Brief Reply, and Burke in his Letters on a Regicide Peace, utilise abolitionist discourse for loyalist purposes, their strategy is rare among loyalist polemicists. Such polemicists are far more likely either to ignore colonial slavery, or to take the position of William Hamilton in his Letters on the Principles of the French Democracy (1792). Hamilton asks if it is any wonder that the "flaming sword" of equality and rights "brandished by the avowed champions of impiety... should have depopulated the prosperous island of St. Domingo." (2) It is true Wilberforce himself expressed no solidarity with black Jacobins, that such solidarity is not a necessary ingredient of an abolitionist ideology. Yet this statement by Hamilton must be read alongside another, in which he clearly uses anti-abolitionist discourse for loyalist purposes: attacking the idea of equal rights Hamilton asks "[w]hy hath the various hand of nature planted, in the burning heats of Africa, a race so much inferior to us in the means of challenging and proving this equal birth-right of the human species." (3) As a strategy against radical polemic Hamilton makes use of racist polemic like that of Long in the 1770s.

Yet, it is by no means the case that all radical or liberal polemicists utilise abolitionist discourse. As I will now show some radical polemicists are as silent on colonial slavery as are

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 189.

(2) Claeys, Political Writings, VII, 142.

(3) ibid., VII, 146.

their opponents; a few radicals, even while showing evident

dislike of the slave trade, utilise <u>anti-abolitionist</u> arguments;

at least one goes as far as to show sympathy with the colonial

slavery interest. As well as this dramatic divergence between

reformers, there is also a more subtle though crucial difference

in the aims furthered by their appropriation of the discourses of

slavery. As will soon emerge, comparisons (unfavourable or

otherwise) between Britons and slaves are made on different

grounds by different reformers. These differences in the

analogising strategy usually, but not always, correspond to

differences in class position or ideology.

However, the appropriation of anti-abolitionist discourse is

more a strategy of spokesmen of artisan radicalism than of

liberal professionals, and, as I will show, one radical who takes

an evident and (to my mind) repugnant satisfaction in utilising

such a strategy, enjoys but few privileges extended to the upper

middle class. Most definitely the utilisation of abolitionist

discourse is distributed equally among radicals of different

class backgounds and differing degrees of political extremity. I

will turn first of all to the different political purposes

involved in the polemical strategy of comparing British subjects

to colonial slaves.

James Mackintosh's <u>Vindiciae</u> <u>Gallicae</u> was written in 1791 as

a reply to Burke's <u>Reflections</u>. In this work he attacks Burke

for defending the interests of "the several classes of the rich"

while announcing "that General LIBERTY is secure!" He compares

Burke's strategy to that of "a Polish Palatine" who harangues the

Diet on the liberty of Poland, without a blush at the recollect-

ion of his bondsmen", and to that of "the Assembly of Jamaica"
who "amidst the slavery and sale of MEN, profanely appeal to the
principle of freedom". (1) In comparing Burke to a Polish ruler
and the Jamaican assembly, he implicitly compares Britain's poor
to Polish serfs and Jamaican slaves. Yet his comparison between
the poor and slaves is different to Thelwall's worker-slave
comparison whose ground is often the economic exploitation of
labouring classes. Mackintosh makes his comparison in the
context of his attack on the idea of a "balanced constitution"
and his advocacy of the French form of representation.

Mackintosh, unlike Thelwall, who would condemn the economic
slavery of British workmen, merely condemns a "helotism" which is
"political" and regards the application of the adjective "civil"
as "untrue" in the case of helotism in Britain. (2) Thelwall,
with his tendency to focus on capital accumulation and the
exploiter-exploited relationship, does seem to assert that
workers are slaves in this "civil" sense, similar to chattel
slaves and serfs. Mackintosh is concerned much more with the
poor's subordination in the political sphere than in the
economic. And, judging from the lack of participation allowed
those with little or no property by France's constitution in
1791, it is doubtful he advocates the vote for artisans and
labourers. (3)

Daniel Stuart, like Mackintosh a radical of the professional
middle class and member of the Whig Society of the Friends of the
People, confines his appropriation of abolitionist discourse to

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, I, 352.

(2) ibid., I, 292.

(3) Soboul, Short History, pp. 67-68, p. 72.

his attack on the system of representation. In his _Peace_ _and_ _Reform_ _against_ _War_ _and_ _Corruption_ (1794), having accused Arthur Young and John Reeves of implying that Englishmen are slaves, he asks whether it is possible for Englishmen, now seeking to liberate "the blacks in the West Indies", to tolerate such an insinuation. (1) However, while Stuart objects to mechanics, labourers and manufacturers being called slaves, he is prepared to confine political reform to the vote for "every man of property". (2) Like his brother-in-law Mackintosh his reformism is moderate. Also, as I will expand upon later, Stuart's strategy is not to compare the disfranchised to slaves but to contrast those who are wrongly called slaves with those truly in bondage.

Those of humbler social status or whose audience is more plebeian, and whose idea of reform often extends to universal male suffrage, also appropriate abolitionist discourse. Also, compared to the Whig professionals cited above, they show even more inclination to utilise the strategy of drawing analogies between disfranchisement and colonial slavery. In addition these plebeian radicals extend the scope of the analogising strategy, applying it not only to the issue of popular representation but, as well, to matters such as military impressment, the workhouse regime and the daily experience of the wage-earner.

Henry Yorke, who was of creole origin but converted from proslavery opinions by a visit to revolutionary France, (3) uses black slavery as an analogue for disfranchisement. His

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(1) Claeys, _Political_ _Writings_, IV, 321-22.

(2) ibid., IV, 320.

(3) Walvin "Impact of Slavery", p. 347.

<u>Thoughts</u> <u>on</u> <u>Civil</u> <u>Government</u> (1794) has the subtitle "Addressed

to the Disenfranchised Citizens of Sheffield" - these citizens

being mainly members of the Sheffield Society for Constitutional

Information, and probably including the journeymen cutlers who,

that very year, expressed solidarity with colonial slaves and

called for their emancipation. He claims that in Britain "the

people have no more share in the Government, than the Negro Slave

in the West Indies". (1)

John Oswald was the son of a tradesman and formerly an

apprentice. In his <u>Review</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Constitution</u> <u>of</u> <u>Great</u> <u>Britain</u>

(1792) he compares an imagined parliamentary representation of

West Indian slaves, in which the "negro-drivers" are enfranchised

and the "colonial planters" are their "deputies", with the actual

"state of representation" in Britain. Britain can be compared

with such a hypothetical slave suffrage because, in that nation,

"the rich, or the dependents of the rich, elect from a class of

men still richer than themselves the representation of the poor."

(2) In his <u>Review</u> Oswald asserts that wars in Europe can be

compared to the African wars incited by slave traders:

> if we enquire into the real cause of all those wars which
> have so long agitated Europe, and deluged our fields with
> blood, we shall find them not a whit more respectable in
> their motives than those bloody contentions which the slave-
> merchant, with the brandy-bottle in his hand, excites
> between the drunken chiefs of Africa. In Europe, as in
> Africa, it is the proud intoxication of royalty, and the
> cruel avarice of traffic, that plan together those scenes of
> murder... (3)

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(1) Claeys, <u>Political</u> <u>Writings</u>, IV, 259.

(2) ibid., III, 422.

(3) ibid., III, 434.

Furthermore, Oswald goes beyond merely comparing the victims of militarism with colonial slaves, and asserts that the former are slaves like the latter: "in either country the object of and end of war is the same - to make slaves." (1)   In this passage the assertion that European peoples are enslaved does not appear purely in the context of classical-republican or "Norman Yoke" tradition but in that of a radical appropriation of abolitionist discourse.   In this case the semantic scope of the political term slave is clearly extended, and the term is given a colonial slavery inflection, becomes a colonial slavery metaphor even. Oswald also compares the lot of the "poor man", the impoverished labourer faced with the workhouse, to the colonial slave: "[s]ometimes, like the suicide African, the poor persecuted wretch lets loose his free-born soul, and rejoices to give his unfeeling oppressors the slip in the middle passage of his misery."   Undoubtedly it is workhouse discipline, where the pauper is (like the slave) "under the harsh controul of a master", which conjures up in Oswald's mind this idea of the journey to the workhouse being like the middle passage. (2)

In another passage of Review Oswald once again compares the subordination of British workers to that of colonial slaves:

> if to increase the necessity of labour, and render mankind
> the mere drudges of the State, be the grand purpose of
> Government, Why do they not introduce among us that effectual
> stimulus to industry; I mean the scourge which they have
> dared to sanction against the backs of our fellow-creatures
> in another quarter of the globe? (3)

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, III, 434.

(2) ibid., III, 428.

(3) ibid., III, 426.

Like colonial slaves British workers are "drudges", though for the political classes not for the plantocracy, and it only needs the introduction of the whip to reinforce the similarity.

In the pamphlet of a Canterbury cordwainer, John Butler, a worker-slave comparison also hinges on such an idea. In his *Brief Reflections upon the Liberty of the British Subject* (1792) Butler asks "[w]hat then are all our towns, cities, and parishes, but so many enlarged prisons, where the poor labouring part of the population are no better than slaves to oppression, being subject to overseers who have no more compassion than the negro drivers in the *West Indies*". (1) In this passage the work-discipline to which wage-earners were increasingly subjected is compared to the coercion used on colonial plantations. The comparison is extended to the condition of economic exploitation: the "stern employer", like the colonial planter, "saps the juice of [workers'] labour, and rolls in all the wanton streams of sensual delights". (2) The image of the planter as an irresponsible sensualist was common-place at the time, and as the description of the employer follows on from Butler's comparison between the overseer and the slave-driver, Butler almost certainly implies that the employer is like a planter.

But Butler does more than just assert the existence of similarities between British manufacturing districts and West Indian plantations. In that he describes workers as "no better than slaves to oppression", as well as making the above worker-slave comparison, he, like Oswald, changes the inflection of the

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(1) Claeys, *Political Writings*, III, 385.

(2) ibid., III, 385.

word _slavery_. Perhaps he does so in a more far-reaching way than
Oswald, since it may be averred that what colonial slaves had
most in common with the majority of Britons was that both were
producers labouring under conditions of harsh discipline and
intense exploitation.

The plebeian radicals Butler and Oswald differ from the Whig
professionals Mackintosh and Stuart, in that the former extend
the comparison between British subjects and colonial slaves
beyond the sphere of political representation: their comparisons
include ones between the economic conditions of slaves and
workers. Also, in asserting, while at the same time comparing
workers to slaves, that workers are a kind of slave, they, unlike
the Whig professionals, turn the political term _slavery_ into a
colonial slavery metaphor. But Oswald and Butler also differ
starkly from each other in their uses of the discourses of
colonial slavery. Both utilise anti-abolitionist discourse; yet,
though Oswald appropriates such discourse while remaining opposed
to colonial slavery, Butler, at the same time as he makes
unfavourable comparisons between Britons and slaves, makes his
anti-abolitionist views quite evident.

When Oswald compares disfranchised Britons to colonial
slaves, he mentions in parenthesis, that "as we are told by the
advocates" of the slave trade, the slaves are "_almost_ as wretched
as the labouring poor of England". (1) Despite this appropriat-
ion of anti-abolitionist discourse, he makes his abolitionist
position clear in his pamphlet: he complains that the "business

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(1) Claeys, _Political Writings_, III, 422.

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of making laws is committed" to an elite which includes "slave-merchants", and thus "every barbarous prejudice and ferocious usurpation are defended in that House". (1)

Butler, on the other hand, when attacking military impressment, asks "[w]hat barbarian slavery can equal it? Are merchants, who traffic in the black flesh of African slaves, half so barbarous as those who traffic in the purple blood of Christians? Are the black negroes, who are bought and sold like oxen to be compared to the white captive slaves on board a man of war?" His answer is "[n]o; the former have their lives lengthened and preserved by this traffic, wretched as it may appear, but the latter are at once fixed in the wretched stalls of those human slaughter houses, where life cannot be insured one moment after another". (2)

Butler borrows wholesale the anti-abolitionist arguments used in slave trade debates in parliament and press. He continues by condemning "the late long Parliament of England which concluded in the year 1790, who were very industriously voting away the property of individuals, in order to restore liberty to a set of West-Indian slaves, to the ruin of many thousand families, and the loss of our plantations". He then adds the question "[w]ould it not be more conducive to the public weal to adopt some method to avoid a practice so inhuman as that of pressing?" (3)

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(1) Claeys, _Political Writings_, III, 426.

(2) ibid., III, 376.

(3) Claeys, loc.cit.

These arguments might echo those of the anti-abolitionist
M.P. Colonel Tarleton who, on the 4 February 1791, had declared
"[i]f gentlemen were anxious to exercise their philanthropy,
there were a variety of other objects to display it upon. He
should suppose the poor laws would afford them sufficient scope
for their humanity, or the state of our infant settlement in New
South Wales". He added that, in his opinion, "gentlemen might
better apply their benificence than in prejudicing a trade of
great importance to the country". (1) It is to opinions such as
these that Butler appeals, not to any solidarity felt by ordinary
Britons towards slaves.

Some radicals make no comparisons whatsoever between Britons
and slaves, while apparently expressing far from abolitionist
views. Joseph Gerrard, like Yorke a creole and an L.C.S. member,
is a case in point. In A Convention the Only Means of Saving us
from Ruin (1774) he accuses Britain's oligarchy of having offered
the American colonies no choice "but SLAVERY or DEATH". (2)
Gerrard condemns Britain's policy of inciting "domestic
insurrections among slaves, whose price of freedom, was the
murder of their masters". The slaves, along with natives, are
described in a way that seems racist, certainly without the
sympathy shown them by Paine in Common Sense. Gerrard writes
"[w]herever these barbarians marched their route was marked with
blood" (3) - the bizarre picture of a war against (political)
slavery in which (chattel) slaves fight on the side of the
(political) enslavers.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVIII, 331.

(2) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 169).

(3) ibid., IV, 170.

Also in A Convention Gerrard seems to ignore recent history:

the struggle of abolitionists like Sharp in the late 1760s and

early 1770s, and, and despite their struggle, the continuing

presence of black slavery in Britain. He insists that "personal

slavery has long ceased in England". By "personal slavery"

Gerrard seems to refer not to black chattel slavery but to the

"lazzi" and "villeins" of the middle ages. (1) In A Convention

at any rate, despite the fact that Gerrard addresses a

predominately artisan audience, the colonial slave disappears

from view or appears only as a barbarian intruder.

Even Yorke, despite his abolitionist views, at times clearly

expressed, sometimes betrays a disparaging attitude to colonial

slaves. When, in Thoughts on Civil Government, Yorke compares

the disfranchished nation to colonial slaves he adds that they

can be compared also to "the cattle in their fields". (2) Since,

no doubt, Yorke holds out no plan to emancipate livestock, his

placing of black slaves on a par with cattle hardly dignifies the

slaves. He appears to imply that Britons should not be like

black slaves and cattle, rather than that disfranchisement is as

much an abuse as the slave trade.

Yorke's attitude here to colonial slaves is consistent with

opinions of "slavery in general" he gives elsewhere. Earlier in

Thoughts he declares "[i]t is not... from the servility of

nations already enslaved, that we must form our judgement of the

natural disposition of Mankind either for or against slavery, but

rather from the prodigious efforts of every free People to

prevent oppression." In his Reason Urged against Precedent

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 196.

(2) ibid., IV, 259.

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(1793) he browbeats his audience to sign an address: "[i]f there be any man who dissents from it, he is a SLAVE, than which there cannot be a more despicable name, and he deserves more my pity than my contempt." (1)

Yorke's occasionally negative attitude to slaves, whatever sort he means, perhaps stems from discourse he utilises other than that of antislavery. This would be particularly so considering that, as will emerge, Yorke's abolitionist ideology is not of the moderate brand found in Wilberforce's speeches or Thelwall's writings. One of these other discourses is classical republicanism: in <u>Thoughts</u> he presents the "heroes of antient Rome" as a model for modern patriots; attacking the aristocracy, who corrupt the people, he claims that "when virtue is destroyed, independence is lost" (2)

Even Oswald, who claimed the productive classes were enslaved, presents a negative view of slaves who he implicitly contrasts with his audience. In his <u>Review of the Constitution of Great Britain</u>, soon after comparing the abuses suffered by his audience to those endured by black slaves, he exclaims "[w]ould to God that... reducing us to the mere automaton state of slavery, they would save us from the soul-sinking shame of being in any respect accessory to things which, either to act or to suffer, are alike disgraceful to human nature!" (3) Here Oswald represents slaves as deprived of "free-will" and, therefore, of moral consciousness. However, by implication, slaves are less to be disparaged than the (nominally) free who earn "ignominy" from

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(1) Claeys, <u>Political Writings</u>, IV, 233, 82.

(2) ibid., IV, 264.

(3) ibid., III, 427.

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a "seeming consent" to "enormities". (1) This image of slaves,

as lacking moral consciousness, is by no means inconsistent with

abolitionist discourse. In Parliament abolitionist spokesmen

constantly denied enslaved Africans moral agency: in 1791

Wilberforce claimed "their minds were unformed, and their moral

characters were altogether debased". (2)

Oswald's view of slaves is less disparaging than Yorke's,

and more compatible with abolitionist discourse which, even in

its less radical varieties, never represented black slaves as

servile or despicable. He also voices more protests against

colonial slavery than does Yorke, makes more frequent use of

comparisons between British subjects and colonial slaves, and

more often refers to Britons as slaves at the same time as he

makes such comparisons. The fact that Oswald makes no obvious

use of classical republicanism may assist him in his

appropriation of the discourses of colonial slavery.

Where Oswald does utilise the traditions constituting

political discourse, he utilises either that of the "Norman Yoke"

or biblical republicanism: he describes the productive classes as

a "Sampson" who has been shaved, blinded and "bound in chains of

brass" by the "Lords of the earth", but who may (if reform is not

forthcoming) destroy both his oppressors and himself. (3)

Biblical republicanism is perhaps more compatible than classical

republicanism with radical abolitionism: in the previous chapter

I showed that Cugoano made much use of biblical republicanism.

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, III, 427.

(2) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 216.

(3) Claeys, Political Writings, III, 440-41.

Yet as radicals are more often equipped with a theory of
slave psychology derived from classical republicanism, it is not
surprising that colonial slaves are sometimes used as _contrasts_
with oppressed Britons. One example is Stuart's objection:
"[w]hile we are attempting to make freemen of the blacks in the
West Indies, shall we meanly suffer to be proved slaves
ourselves". (1) There is a contrast between spirited Britons,
who are insulted with the name of slaves and are not slaves, and
black slaves passively awaiting liberation at their hands.

It is possible that Gerrard's classical republicanism may
constrain him from giving the term _slavery_, as do Oswald and
Thelwall, a new slant. However, it may just as easily be the
case that his choice of classical republicanism reflects anti-
pathy to abolitionist opinion. Whichever way, his _A Convention
the Only Means of Saving us from Ruin_ is influenced by the
classical republicanism of the American revolution (perhaps due
to his 1784-88 residence in Pennsylvania). He claims that in the
United States "baneful luxury is unknown", and Americans "have no
wants but such as nature gives". (2)

At one point in _A Convention_ Gerrard hymns the new American
republic:

> the poor are not broken down by taxes to support the
> expensive trappings of royalty, or to pamper the luxury of an
> insolent nobility.... The community is not there divided into
> an oppressed peasntry and an overgrown aristocracy, the one
> whom lives by the plunder of the state, while the others are
> compelled to be the objects of it. Plenty is the lot of all,
> superfluity of none... (3)

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(1) Claeys, _Political Writings_, IV, 321-22.

(2) ibid., IV, 191.

(3) ibid., IV, 190.

Reading this lengthy encomium one might object that "the lot of all" does not include the lot of black slaves labouring on the plantations of many American States: once again the black slave is ushered away from view. Of course Gerrard, who resided in Pennsylvania where slavery was abolished, may never have seen an American slave. But he would have seen black slaves in the West Indies where he was raised, and the invisibility of this kind of slave in his writings may derive more from the fact that he had been innured to the presence of slavery of this type than from its literal invisibility.

Certainly none of this applies to Yorke, but then Yorke may be a special case. Or, alternatively, Gerrard's use of American revolutionary discourse a few years after the writing of the United States' Constitution (similarly silent on the subject of black slavery) may to some extent render the black slave an embarrassing intrusion. American revolutionary discourse, and references to the United States, were more respectable than a French revolutionary discourse and references to the French Republic — particularly in the context of the Jacobin Terror of the same year as the publication of Gerrard's A Convention.

Gerrard seeks to draw a parallel between the military actions of the British oligarchy against America, widely held to have been unjust, and its present involvement in counter-revoluionary war in Europe. However, Gerrard's fulmination against Britain's mobilisation of black slaves against the American patriots cannot be ignored — particularly when it is the French Republic which now uses this very strategy against the British, having decreed the emancipation of all slaves in the West Indies early in the year in which Gerrard published his pamphlet.

Perhaps the British oligarchy's loud objection, heard in the slave trade debates of that year, to the French strategy of stirring up slave revolts in British colonies, prompts Gerrard to remind the oligarchy of its own past actions. But to describe the self-liberating action of a slave as "murder", as does Gerrard, is an extreme position, especially in the light of some abolitionist polemics of the time (like the defence of the St. Domingue slaves written by Clarkson, a writer less radical than Gerrard). So perhaps Gerrard shows proslavery inclinations; perhaps he masks the present, superimposing over its picture a reverse image drawn from past history.

No doubt an important factor here is the social position or ideology of the polemicist, and also, since "the word is oriented towards an addressee", the "social purview" of his polemic — whether or not the polemicist shares the purview of his audience. (1) Yet the use of abolitionist discourse in the debate over the constitution is not confined to polemics whose social purview is artisanal, nor even to ones which are radical. Cocks and Hamilton who are both members of the social elite and loyalists utilise abolitionist discourse for domestic political purposes.

Obviously the strategy of comparing British subjects to colonial slaves is mainly confined to radical polemics. As a general strategy it is found in the polemics of solidly middle-class Whig reformers like Mackintosh and in those of orators addressing an audience of artisans such as Thelwall. Those with a working-class audience, or those of humble origins like Oswald and Butler, are more likely to extend such a strategy beyond the

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(1) Vološinov, Marxism, p. 85.

question of political representation, even to focus specifically on the economic sphere of relations of production or worker's material conditions (e.g. poor-houses). But such worker-slave comparisons do not necessarily come part and parcel with the appropriation of abolitionist discourse. As we see in the case of Thelwall and Oswald there can be both an appropriation of abolitionist and anti-abolitionist discourse. As we see in the case of Butler a radical can compare workers to slaves while avowing opposition to the abolition of the slave trade. Yet Butler is an unusual case: though of humble status and a hunted man, he was (by marriage) a city freeman and also, at the time when he wrote the pamphlet I have discussed, a staunch member of the Church of England and an avowed monarchist. (1)

Gerrard also seems anti-abolitionist, when he mentions colonial slavery at all, despite belonging to the same organization as that to which Thelwall belongs and addressing the same audience as Thelwall often addresses. The expressions of L.C.S. Secretary Thomas Hardy and the resolution of Sheffield journeymen cutlers, which I cited in the previous chapter, suggest that many radical artisans felt solidarity with slaves and felt abolition (even emancipation) was part of their platform. Yet Gerrard does not tap into this feeling, perhaps because he does not share it - or, like Thelwall, is alarmed by black Jacobinism rampant by 1794.

The quotation from Vološinov which I used for the title of this section can be reinterpreted. The radical polemics of the 1790s show a diverse response to colonial slavery: a response ranging from an energetic and imaginative use of its discourses

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, III, 353, 355.

to a virtual silence, from radical abolitionism to staunch anti-abolitionism. There is a clash of interpretations, though these interpretations in their turn clash with some polemics which register the impact of colonial slavery like a tree registers a kick. A clash of live and dead social accents might have made a better title for this section.

There is no <u>necessary</u> connection between working-class radicalism and the utilisation of abolitionist discourse in protests against political or economic conditions in Britain; nor between such radicalism and the comparison of British workers to colonial slaves. Nevertheless, there is a <u>strong correlation</u> between popular radicalism and such utilisation and comparisons. There is also a strong correlation between radicalism in general and the utilisation of abolitionist discourse for domestic political purposes, and comparisons of the disfranchised classes in Britain to slaves in the colonies.

The last point I made in the previous paragraph applies (in different degrees) to all the polemics I have explored in this chapter with the exception of Gerrard's. The point also, of course, applies to polemics in vindication of the rights of those oppressed because of gender as well as because of social class: Wollstonecraft's feminist polemic is as much an example of the appropriation of abolitionist discourse, and of comparisons between oppressed Britains and colonial slaves, as Thelwall's polemics on behalf of the working classes.

CONCLUSION

What appears absent from the polemics explored in this

chapter are clear comparisons between radical Britons and rebel

slaves and maroons. I know of only two isolated examples of

radicals comparing their audience, or those with whom they

sympathise, to a gang of maroon slaves. I have argued that Yorke

sometimes speaks disparagingly of slaves, and uses abolitionist

protests and the analogising strategy less than some other

radicals. But, in his 1793 Reason Urged Against Precedent, slave

rebellion appears in an unusually positive light and is compared

to revolution and radicalism in Europe. Towards the end of this

pamphlet Yorke launches into a radical abolitionist diatribe,

concluding "[r]elinquish your colonies, - and leave the Planters

to compromise with their slaves (if it be possible to make any

composition with tyrants)". (1) Later in the same passage he

asserts that

> [t]he Slave who breaks his chains, in whatsoever country he
> be, resists oppression: he resumes his spoliated rights, and
> cannot be inculpated by any but a Despot or a Tyrant. With a
> tyrant, nature and all mankind are at war. If therefore, to
> liberate himself, the Slave be constrained to destroy his
> oppressor, he exercises his RIGHT. (2)

Yet here Yorke is not speaking merely of the colonial slave. He

has already equated colonial and political slavery:

> it is not the Slave Trade only, that ought to be
> abolished; you should strike at the root of the evil, and

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 77.

(2) ibid., IV, 78.

exterminate SLAVERY itself. Throughout every nation of the earth, let the oppressed awaken from their drunken sleep; - let the African, the Asiatic, the European, burst assunder their chains and raise a pious war against tyranny. (1)

At this moment in 1790s radical polemic the resistance of slaves and other oppressed classes become closely identified.

But this is only an envisioned (even rhetorical) resistance. Yorke makes no mention of the war actually and currently waged by self-emancipated slaves in St. Domingue. And a year later when the French have emancipated the slaves, and slave wars are raging in the British West Indies, the verbal incendiary device used in Reason Urged against Precedent is not used again. In Yorke's 1794 Thoughts on Civil Government slaves are grouped together with cattle - creatures hardly noted for concerted and united action against their exploiters.

In 1796 William Williams, an attorney and member of the L.C.S., recommends the "glorious" role of patriot to the British people, a role which extends beyond his own country and involves fraternity with the "starving negro" toiling in the plantation and efforts to emancipate him. Yet, Williams concedes, in the context of State repression such as the Two Acts passed the year before, the role of patriot brings with it persecution: "[l]ike the wretched Maroons he [the patriot] is hunted to death, and torn limb from limb by aristocratic bloodhounds." (2) Thus

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(1) Claeys, Political Writings, IV, 77-78.

(2) L.C.S., The Moral and Political Magazine of the London Corresponding Society, 2 vols. (London: John Ashley, 1796), I, 155, 154-55.

Williams compares the true radical to the maroon, making valid

for once Burke's snipe at radical language. He does so in the

context of events in the Caribbean: the Trelawney Town maroons of

Jamaica conducted a guerilla campaign against the British

military from the Summer of 1795, were overwhelmed by them in the

Spring of 1796 and hunted down with bloodhounds. (1) But the

comparison appears in the context not of the maroons' fierce

resistance, which some abolitionists would have portrayed in

primitivist terms, but of their defeat and destruction. Perhaps

there is also a <u>contrast</u> between warlike maroons and peaceful

reformers who should be treated differently, though this is less

likely since Williams appears to view the maroons with pity.

As I showed in the previous chapter a heroic representation

of colonial slaves had been produced by abolitionists such as

Day, Cugoano, Clarkson and Blake. Yet, while in comparing

popular radicals to maroons Williams does not utilise the

pathetic representation of the kneeling slave, he does not (or,

because of State repression, cannot) utilise the heroic one of

the negro revenged either. The heroic patriot is compared not to

maroons who are heroic or even, as in Blake's engravings for

Stedman's <u>Narrative</u>, who are stoic, but to ones who are

"wretched". Yet again the comparison is grounded on the idea of

victimisation rather than of assertiveness, and the "glorious"

essence of the patriot remains sealed, in one way at least, in

its classical urn.

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(1) Michael Duffy, "War, Revolution and the Crisis of the
     British Empire", in <u>The French Revolution and British
     Popular Politics</u>, ed. Mark Philp (CUP, 1991), pp. 133-34,
     p. 136.

CHAPTER 4

"ENSLAVD HUMANITY":

COLONIAL SLAVERY AND ROMANTIC POETRY IN THE 1790S

Studies of poetry in a historical and political context have

often confined themselves to poetry's content. It was a great

weakness of much Marxist literary criticism for most of this

century that, while seeking to show the impact on poetry of class

inequality and struggle (and not necessarily reducing the poem to

mere relection or ideology), it tended to ignore the poetic form.

A subversive form of criticism seemed to assume and replicate a

dominant view that, however the poet might always remain a member

of a (class) society, his/her medium existed in some

transhistorical sphere.

This dominant <u>romantic</u> view has been formulated, and to some

extent parodied, by Seamus Heaney decribing "the government of

the tongue": "[i]n this dispensation, the tongue (representing

the poet's gift of utterance and the common resources of the

language itself) has been granted the right to govern. The poetic

art is credited with an authority of its own." Yet ironically

the romantic poets themselves, even in days of "apostacy" and

lyric purity, subjected their poetry to the "government of the

tongue" in Heaney's second sense of obedience to external

objectives, as well as giving their tongues free rein. However,

there is some truth in Heaney's assertion that "no matter how

much a poet may concede to the corrective pressures of social,

moral, political and historical reality, the ultimate fidelity

must be to the demands and promise of the artistic event." (1)

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(1) Seamus Heaney, <u>The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings</u>, (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 92, p. 96, p. 101.

The poet is a maker (poiétés), not a mirror of society or mouthpiece of a social class, whose material is both the world in which s/he lives and the resources of language as adapted by poets in the form of mode, metre and metaphor. Historical and political criticism must confront poetry in its specificity as language and making. It is both issues I have just raised, the historical and political context of poetic form and the linguistic creativity often ascribed to poets, that makes a study of the impact of colonial slavery on poetic language an exciting and worthwhile project for me.

I confine this study of poetry to the works of those major poets - Wordworth, Coleridge and Blake - who are usually referred to as the first-generation Romantics. Therefore I exclude from it minor and pedestrian poets such as "Lover of Freedom" (who received a mention at the beginning of the third chapter) however relevant to the general subject. I justify this canonical closure by the expectation that in the poetic language of major first-generation Romantics one might find that supposed inventiveness that marks off the poem from the pamphlet. Since poetic languague is my focus it is to its "masters" I turn.

The study is also confined to the period of the early and mid-1790s, before these poets had withdrawn from the movement for radical reform, and while abolitionist and (despite the efforts of Pitt's government and Reeves' associations) radical discourse was in currency. The language of radical pamphlets was, I shall suggest, influential on the language of some of these poets. Southey, though not a "major" romantic, I also include since he was part of this cadre of "Jacobin poets"; I also include him, as will emerge, as a kind of experimental control.

I take the quotation in the title of this chapter from

Blake's _The Four Zoas_. (1) The phrase "enslavd humanity" is

appropriate because, among early and mid 1790s radicals, there

was a new vision of liberation transcending nation and race, and

an emerging concern about economic inequality and exploitation. A

new idea may require a new means of expression; however, the use

of Wilkite discourse by "English Jacobins" does not always result

in a mishap, as old wine-skins often prove quite supple or

patchable. Notwithstanding it is also the occasional rupturing

of discourse that I am concerned with in this chapter.

In his 1788 _Poems Chiefly on Slavery and Oppression_ Hugh

Mulligan included four eclogues in which he made a "connection

between Irish oppression, British imperialism, and the

enslavement of Africa." (2) However, he did not go as far as to

use colonial slavery as a metaphor for the opppression of

colonised people. (3) It is in the radical poetry of the 1790s,

in the period when Paine's _Rights of Man_ and other pamphlets made

their impact on the minds of both poets and poetry-readers, that

such colonial slavery metaphors are to be found. Yet the

appropriation of the colonial slavery discourse by poets does not

amount to an imitation of the rhetoric of the radical pamphlet.

Poetry has its own resources and its own contribution to make to

the liberation of "enslav'd humanity".

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(1) William Blake, _The Complete Poetry and Prose of William
     Blake_, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary Harold Bloom (New
     York: Doubleday, 1965, rpt [with revisions] 1988), p. 336;
     IV: 203-204.

(2) Stuart Curran, _Poetic Form and British Romanticism_, (OUP,
     1986), p. 97.

(3) Hugh Mulligan, _Poems Chiefly on Slavery and Oppression_
     (London: W. Lowndes, 1788).

1. A "SILENT LINK"?: EARLY WORDSWORTH AND COLONIAL SLAVERY

I take the quotation in this section's title from Wordsworth's early and radical poem Salisbury Plain (1793-94). In the fiftieth stanza, one that I shall discuss in more detail later, Wordsworth writes of European nations who pursue a foreign policy of aggression and colonisation, while "at home" they are "in bonds". When he refers to "each link" that binds these political slaves as "silent", he perhaps means that their subordination is a complex, subtle, even mental one. (1) My use of "silent link" alludes to the possible relation between Wordsworth's poetic language in the early 1790s and colonial slavery, a relation less audible than that found in Coleridge and Blake who I discuss later in this chapter. The question mark with which I follow the phrase signifies that this relation is, as I will show, only a possible one and open to interrogation.

Because the link is only conjectural, and to avoid making connections too tenuous for words, I will pass over many poems and passages with little or no comment. The only poems I will discuss in detail are the only ones on which can be based some argument of a positive relation: Wordsworth's Descriptive Sketches and Salisbury Plain, and, at the end of the section, as both a contrast and a comparison with Wordworth, Southey's Joan of Arc and Botany Bay Ecloques. Yet even a negative relation between slavery and poetry is interesting, raising questions of the relation between commitment and creativity,

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(1) William Wordsworth, The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth, The Cornell Wordsworth, ed. and introd. Stephen Gill (Ithaca, New York: Cornell Univ. Press; Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975), p. 36; 11. 446-450.

Wordsworth's early works, _Descriptive Sketches_ (1791-92) and
Salisbury Plain, could be expected to offer the student of the
impact of colonial slavery on poetic language a fruitful field.
These works were written in the radical enthusiasm of Wordworth's
youth, and thus might show signs of his having read the "master
pamphlets of the day". (1) The appropriation of the discourses
of colonial slavery, found in such pamphlets as _Rights of Man_,
might have been translated if not developed further in the poetic
language of Wordworth's radical years.

However, in spite of Wordsworth's studies in radical
expression and the linguistic creativity often ascribed to major
poets, the utilisation of the discourses of colonial slavery that
I will show in the cases of Coleridge and Blake seems absent from
the poems of young Wordsworth. Wordsworth's poetic language in
Descriptive Sketches, and the even more original and accomplished
Salisbury Plain, includes a radical re-interpretation of
eighteenth-century domestic political discourse. Yet apparently
such language is affected little if at all by a major aspect of
the changing social environment - the critical issue of colonial
slavery.

Recent critics have commented on the old-fashioned nature
not only of Wordsworth's political ideas but also of the
political terminology employed by him in _Descriptive Sketches_ and
Salisbury Plain. I would take issue with these critics over
their claims about the constraining effect of such discourse on
Wordsworth's response to the French Revolution - Paine and

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(1) William Wordsworth, _The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850_, Norton
     Critical Editions, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams and
     Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979), p. 316;
     1805, IX: 96-97.

Thelwall adapted to their purposes some very old discourses.
However, if these critics have ignored the malleability of
political discourse (and perhaps the archaic nature of the
discourse employed by the French Jacobins themselves), their
critiques of constraint might perhaps be applied more relevantly
to Wordsworth's poetic language. At points in my discussion of
Wordsworth I will ask whether or not such a critique can be
adapted to his poetic language. Yet there is a way in which
Wordsworth's ideology does govern his use of such terms as
slavery, as I will soon come to discuss.

John Williams, in his reading of Descriptive Sketches, finds
evidence of a determining discourse stemming from "the dissident
Whigs and Commonwealthmen of the late seventeenth and early
eighteenth centuries". (1) Anne Janowitz sees the ideological
content of Salisbury Plain as influenced by an "oppositional
patriotism" emerging in the seventeenth century and later the
platform of both country Tories and Wilkites. (2) Wordsworth's
Letter to the Bishop of Landaff (1793) is, in John Turner's view,
"expressed in the paternalist manner of middle-class dissent
rather than with the popular appeal of Paine"; (3) and by this
account we might expect to find this manner of expression in
Wordsworth's poems of the time.

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(1) John Williams, Wordsworth: Romantic Poetry and Revolution
     Politics (Manchester and New York: Manchester Univ. Press,
     1989), p. 5, p. 18.

(2) Anne Janowitz, "A Night on Salisbury Plain: 'a Dreadful
     Ruined Nature'" in Revolution in English Romanticism:
     Politics and Rhetoric, ed. Keith Hanley and Raman Selden
     (Hemel Hempstead and New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf and St.
     Martin Press, 1990), p. 231.

(3) John Turner, Wordsworth: Play and Politics, a Study of
     Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1800 (Houndmills and London:
     Macmillan, 1986), p. 31, p. 33.

The extent to which Wordsworth's poetic language is
determined by old discourses, such as classical and biblical
republicanism, is an issue I wish to discuss. Yet (as I have
intimated) because human beings live in a world in which agency
exists as well as structure, his poetic language would also be
determined by his own determination of discourse - by his own, so
to speak, determination to employ certain discourses. There is a
degree of evidence that he may not have felt much enthusiasm as
regards the appropriation of the discourses of colonial slavery.

   In the 1805 Prelude Wordsworth admits that, when in the
autumn of 1792 he returned to London from revolutionary France
(the completed Descriptive Sketches no doubt in his luggage), he
was not much stirred by the echo of the spring parliamentary
debate resulting in an abortive bill for the gradual abolition of
the slave trade:

                          For me that strife had ne'er
        Fastened on my affections, nor did now
        Its unsuccessful issue much excite
        My sorrow, having laid this faith to heart,
        That if France prospered good men would not long
        Pay fruitless worship to humanity,
        And this most rotten branch of human shame
        (Object, as seemed, of superfluous pains)
        Would fall together with its parent tree. (1)

   Wordsworth, like many other radicals, believed that only the
success of the French Revolution and a radical reform of
Parliament could end the slave trade. Yet other radicals who
believed this, Thelwall for instance, still made persistent
protests against colonial slavery and appropriated its discourses
for domestic political purposes.

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(1) Prelude, p. 370; 1805, X: 218-226.

I think we can even ignore the 1805 account of a younger

Wordsworth's republican self-justification for ignoring the issue

of the slave trade, and, for the crux of the above passage, go

straight to its beginning: "For me that strife had ne'er/

Fastened on my affections". It seems Wordworth's coolness to the

abolitionist cause stems from personal as much as political

reasons, and one might briefly speculate on these reasons.

A career in the Church was a prospect repugnant to

Wordsworth but expected of him by his guardians. Since

Wilberforce was a friend of Wordsworth's uncle, and could have

opened doors to such a career, it is possible that Wilberforce

himself had not fastened on Wordsworth's affections. (1)

Therefore the enthusiasm for Wilberforce and his abolition bills,

and disappointment at the outcome of the April 1792 debate,

expressed by Wordsworth's sister Dorothy in three letters to Jane

Pollard, may not have been sentiments shared by Wordworth. (2)

Acquaintance with an abolitionist who posed a threat to his

poetic aspiration, and who was hardly a role model for a young

radical, may have diluted Wordsworth's antipathy towards the

slave trade. However, no lack of abolitionist fervour is evident

in his 1807 sonnet "To Thomas Clarkson", nor his 1802 sonnet "To

Toussaint l'Ouverture", and one might conclude from these poems

that Wordsworth was always at heart an abolitionist — only his

abolitionism was more radical than that of his uncle's friend.

But such a conclusion would, I think, be too hasty.

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(1)   Stephen Gill, William Wordsworth: A Life Oxford Lives (OUP,
       1989), pp. 40-41.

(2)   William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Letters of William and
       Dorothy Wordworth, 8 vols., ed. Ernest De Selincourt,
       revised Chester L. Shaver (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967-1993),
       I, 26, 54, 75.

In the early 1790s Wordsworth knew Wilberforce but had not

yet met and befriended Clarkson, an abolitionist perhaps closer

to his heart. (1) Yet his relationship with Clarkson, and the

abolitionist fervour expressed in his sonnet praising Clarkson on

the occasion of the 1807 abolition act, belong to a later period,

a period in which Wordsworth had become hostile to the French

Revolution and was committed to the parliamentary road to change.

(2) It is important not to read into the Wordsworth of the early

1790s the Wordsworth of a decade later.

Nicholas Roe points out that, when in France in December

1791, Wordsworth was admitted to the Legislative Assembly when it

was debating about St. Domingue; Roe suggests this has some

bearing on Wordsworth's later sonnet praising Toussaint L'

Ouverture. (3) But the sonnet was written at a time when

abolitionist and anti-French opinion conjoined: Napoleon had re-

imposed colonial slavery and the abolitionist movement was

reviving. Abolitionism was, by 1803 when the sonnet was

published, part of Britain's war effort. Also, in 1791,

Wordsworth may have heard that many rebel slaves were fighting

alongside the royalists; and Brissot, the revolutionary leader he

admired, while leader of the weak Amis des noirs, never called

for slaves' emancipation - let alone their self-emancipation. (4)

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(1) Wylie Sypher, Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery
     Literature of the XVIIIth Century (New York: Octagon Books,
     1969), p. 215.

(2) William Wordsworth, The Poems, 2 vols., ed. John O. Hayden
     (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), I, 736, 577, 995.

(3) Nicholas Roe, Wordsworth and Coleridge: the Radical Years
     Oxford English Monographs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988),
     pp. 43-44.

(4) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, pp. 251-52,
     pp. 193-94, p. 206.

Descriptive Sketches was composed in this brief period when
Wordsworth was in France, between December 1791 and autumn
1792. For much of the poem's picturesque and sublime material,
particularly that of the Swiss Alps, Wordsworth drew on an
earlier visit to the Continent in 1790. (1) But the landscape of
which he writes is illuminated by the fires of revolution - a
revolutionary sublime invades the ancient places; and it is to
his growing republican commitment of 1791 and 1792 that the poem
owes a great deal of its content, its musings upon human
despondency and hope, political liberty and political slavery.

Lured by hope to France only to be shocked and confused by
the revolutionaries', sacking of the Grand Chartreuse, Wordsworth
find refuge amid the picturesque scenes of Lake Como in Italy.
Yet here he finds the hedonistic happiness to which he has turned
is illusion and servitude, so he bids farewell to Como:

    - Thy fragrant gales and lute-resounding streams,
    Breathe o'er the failing soul voluptuous dreams;
    While Slavery, forcing the sunk mind to dwell
    On joys that might disgrace the captive's cell,
    Her shameless timbrel shakes along thy marge,
    And winds between thine isles the vocal barge. (2)

This Como passage is framed within the tradition of
classical republicanism, with its opposition of virtue to
corruption and slavery. Italian peasants, subjects of the
Austrian empire, are represented as having lost that civic virtue
which, later in the poem, is exemplified by the Swiss peasant.

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(1) William Wordsworth, Descriptive Sketches, The Cornell
       Wordsworth, ed. and introd. Eric Birdsall (Ithaca and
       London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 7-8, pp. 5-7.

(2) ibid., p. 54; ll. 156-161.

However, while political slavery was traditionally presented as caused by the corruption of the people by their rulers, Wordsworth reverses this idea and describes corruption as the result of political slavery. In this reversal of classical-republican categories Wordsworth is not dissimilar to those abolitionists who, themselves utilising such a tradition, testified to the corrupting effect of colonial slavery on Africans. Wilberforce, for instance, had asserted that the slave trade had "enslaved their minds", and had "sunk them"- no doubt to the state of sensuality that he elsewhere condemned. Burke, in his abolitionist days, had averred that "it was impossible to make a happy slave except out of a degraded man... A slave was incapable of looking before or after" (1)

Also, the pastoral mode which Wordsworth utilises in the Como passage, had been appropriated by slaveholders-cum-poets: Grainger, in his 1764 The Sugar Cane, had represented black slaves as swains leading "the choral dance". (2) But, as John Williams suggests, the pastoral mode had long been allied to a whiggish political discourse in which the term slavery was embedded. (3) And though Wordsworth (like Burke) describes happy slaves whose minds have become enslaved, the Como passage by itself yields no textual evidence that he compares the peasant or narrator to the black slave. The impact of colonial slavery on Wordsworth's Italian pastoral sounds faintly enough.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 147, 157.

(2) Paula Burnett, ed. and introd., The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), p. 105, p. xliv.

(3) Wordsworth, p. 5.

Yet personified "Slavery" shaking her "shameless timbrel" might remind the reader of Wordsworth of an image from book seven of Wordsworth's 1805 Prelude in which he recalls his stay in London early in 1791. Amid the pandemonium of the London crowd he catches sight of "The silver-collared negro with his timbrel". In the next paragraph, in which Wordsworth ponders on the confusion and degradation he sees, he speaks of the crowd as "The slaves [my emphasis] unrespited of low pursuits". (1)

The silver collar seems to mark the "negro" as a chattel slave: black slaves, as Fryer describes, "were customarily obliged to wear metal collars rivetted round their necks. Made of brass, copper, or silver, the collar was generally inscribed with the owner's name, initials, coat of arms, or other symbol." (2) We can choose to see the "silver-collared negro" as an emblem of the London crowd ("the slaves unrespited of low persuits"), that his physical slavery to a white master serves to represent and emphasise the mental slavery to sensuality of which, as his timbrel shows, he is part.

One might also conclude that "Slavery" with her timbrel owes something to this experience of Wordsworth's, one occuring (ostensibly) before his second visit to the Continent, and that in Descriptive Sketches, therefore, it is colonial slavery that is a metaphor for slavery to the senses. Certainly in both passages, one on the revels of Italian peasants and the other on the riot of the London crowd, there is a somewhat puritanical recoil from vulgar pleasure and this recoil gives rise to a denunciation of lower-class leisure as a kind of slavery.

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(1) Prelude, p. 262, p. 264; 1. 677, 1. 701.

(2) Fryer, Staying Power, p. 22.

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The possible connection between the Como passage and the description of the London crowd in the _Prelude_ has some credibility. However, there are problems with this interpretation. While it is probable that there were still black slaves in London at the time of Wordsworth's 1791 visit, the black wearing a collar was a stock figure in eighteenth-century literature. (1) It may be that Wordsworth, when he came to write the 1805 _Prelude_, drew the image of "the silver-collared negro" from his literary progenitors rather than from an actual experience which could also have influenced the Como passage.

The probability that "the silver-collared negro with his timbrel" is partly or wholely fictional is indicated by the fact that black street musicians were not likely to be slaves; the "St. Giles black birds", as they were known, were often unemployed sailors or discharged servicemen. (2) Metal collars may have been theatrical props for free but mendicant black performers. Furthermore one cannot rely much on recollections in literature, particularly in poetry; even if Wordsworth indeed saw a black slave with a timbrel, such an experience may have occurred long after he wrote the Como passage.

Yet one could argue that the passage on "Slavery" at Como involves an appropriation of the language of the parliamentary slave trade debates. Introducing his first abolition motion, Wilberforce had ridiculed the evidence of a proslavery witness that blacks on board slave ships were inclined to dance and sing. Having parodied this claim he continued: "[t]he truth is, that for the sake of exercise, these miserable wretches, loaded with

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(1) Fryer, _Staying Power_, p. 23.

(2) ibid., pp. 231-32.

chains, oppressed with disease and wretchedness, are _forced_ [my

emphasis] to dance by the terror of the lash, and sometimes by

the actual use of it." (1)

There are apparent similarities between Wilberforce's speech

and Wordsworth's poem: in Wordsworth "Slavery" is depicted as

"forcing" the mind (not the body alone) into a hedonistic

degradation; also, in a preceding passage, the peasants' hedonism

is displayed in "Lip-dewing Song and ringlet-tossing Dance". (2)

Wilberforce made his speech on the 8 May 1789 at a time when

Wordsworth was at Cambridge University; Cambridge was an

institution receptive to abolitionist ideas, so this 1789 debate

may well have been reported and discussed there. On 18 April

1791, while Wordsworth was in London and attending debates in the

House of Commons, (3) Wilberforce once again referred to black

slaves "dancing in fetters" and their forced "singing". (4)

Wilberforce's second abolition motion was defeated, and Dorothy

Wordsworth lamented this fact in a June 1791 letter to Jane

Pollard. (5)

Despite the fact that Wordsworth was probably less zealous

about slave trade abolition, and less reverential towards

Wilberforce, than his sister at this time, the M.P.'s words may

still have been heard or read, remembered and alluded to by the

poet. However, the significance of Wilberforce's abolitionist

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXVI, 135.

(2) Descriptive Sketches, p. 48; 1. 99.

(3) Mary Moorman, William Wordsworth, A Biography. The Early
    Years 1770-1803 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), p. 158.
    See also Prelude, pp. 252-54; 1805, VII: 517-543.

(4) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 195.

(5) Letters, I, 54.

speech to Wordsworth's Como passage would be crucial only were Wordsworth to describe "Slavery" as forcing the peasants, like Wilberforce's black slaves, to dance and sing - but as I will now show the speech and the poetry diverge considerably.

In the Como passage slavery's effect is not to force the mind to partake in sensuality but to "dwell" on it: Wordsworth refers more to his own seduction by Como, his passive absorption in the peasants' activities, than to such activities themselves (ones in which he does not participate). Undoubtedly "Slavery" imposes itself on the subjects of Austria, but chiefly it imposes itself on the English poet. No doubt Wordsworth, cheated by aristocracy of his inheritance and disfranchised, felt himself the victim of "Slavery". (1) Having driven him from his native land in search of liberty, "Slavery" now re-imposes itself upon him in another form.

An explanation of the figurative language of the Como passage I find at least no less convincing than one in which the "vocal barge" connotes a slave ship loud with whip-punctuated singing, or "Slavery" a black slave musician, is that the passage's central figure is one of galley slavery. Such a galley slavery figure would involve a satirical down-sizing, a movement from the sublime to the ridiculous almost, in which the galley drum is sensualised by being converted into a timbrel and the galley itself, similarly sensualised, into a pleasure-boat. (2)

A galley slavery figure would be no less "live" than a colonial slavery one, since galley slavery still existed in 1792 in parts of ancien regime Europe, notably in another part of

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(1) Gill, William Wordsworth, pp. 34-35.

(2) For this idea I am indebted to Professor John Barrell.

Italy — Venice. (1) Also such a figure would be particularly

appropriate in a denunciation of the effects of Austrian dominat-

ion, since galleys were repressive tools of the Austrian empire.

The galley slavery figure was not foreign to whiggish

political discourse, as indicated by Bolingbroke's comparison of

the subjects of arbitrary governments to galley slaves. (2) The

strong possibility of a galley slavery figure in the Como passage

forces my mind, so to speak, to contemplate a classical-republic-

can performance by Wordsworth. Yet Wordsworth radically re-

interprets whiggish political discourse, reversing classical-

republican categories. Also, he seems to poetically transform

the bald simile of the kind found in Bolingbroke into a submerged

metaphor with what is probably a more disturbing effect.

At the centre of Descriptive Sketches there is a paean to

the Swiss peasant, the "slave to none", in a style coinciding

with that of abolitionist primitivism. (3) This passage, with

its allusions to Rousseau and Milton, is framed within discourses

of primitivism of both classical- and biblical-republican kinds.

The Swiss peasant with his "book" anticipates a bible-toting

Swiss peasant in Wordsworth's Letter to the Bishop of Landaff

(1793), a pamphlet influenced by classical- and biblical-

republican traditions but not by abolitionist discourse. (4)

Indeed these framing discourses also saturated abolitionist

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(1) The Encyclopaedia Britannica; or, a Dictionary of Arts,
     Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature, 4th ed., (Edinburgh:
     Archibald Constable, 1810), under GALLEY.

(2) Dissertation upon Parties, pp. xxiv-xxv.

(3) Descriptive Sketches, p. 90; ll. 526-535.

(4) William Wordsworth, The Prose Works of William Wordsworth,
     2 vols., ed. William Knight (London: Macmillan, 1896), I,
     13-14.

polemics; but unlike the Swiss "slave to none" the noble African, for all his virtue and spirituality, is precisely one liable to enslavement. Thus it is extremely unlikely this passage contains even a submerged comparison of the Swiss peasant to a noble African.

Leaving Switzerland the narrator once more enters the world of ancient despotism. In Savoy he sorrows over the condition of man under old governments:

> At such an hour I heav'd the human sigh,
> When roar'd the sullen Arve in anger by,
> That not for thee, delicious vale! unfold
> Thy reddening orchards, and thy fields of gold;
> That thou, the slave of slaves, art doom'd to pine,
> While no Italian arts their charms combine
> To teach the skirt of thy dark clouds to shine;
> For thy poor babes that, hurrying from the door,
> With pale blue hands, and eyes that fix'd implore,
> Dead muttering lips, and hair of hungry white,
> Besiege the traveller whom they half affright. (1)

The phrase slave of slaves, used to describe Savoy's subjection to the ancien regime of Austria, is not one I have come across in abolitionist pamphlets and speeches. However, "slaves of slaves" appears in a history of the West Indies by the anti-abolitionist Bryan Edwards: Edwards, describes "a most unnatural relation, which sometimes takes place in the sugar plantations", one in which young slaves are placed "in a sort of apprenticeship" to old slaves; as to this power of slaves over slaves he observes with indignation "the harshness with which these people enforce their authority". (2)

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(1) Wordsworth, Descriptive Sketches, p. 108; 11. 702-712.

(2) Bryan Edwards, The History, Civil and Commercial, of the
     British Colonies in the West Indies, 3 vols., 3rd ed.
     (London: John Stockdale, 1801), II, 94-95.

But, before deciding that Wordsworth appropriates the discourses of colonial slavery, one should look back far into the history of eighteenth-century writing. The phrase slaves of slaves can be found in book I of Thomson's Liberty written in 1735: Thomson describes not blacks apprenticed to blacks but, like Wordsworth, a nation under Austrian domination. Contrasting the modern people of Italy with their more virtuous ancestors, he writes "behold them now/ A thin despairing number, all subdued,/ The slaves of slaves, by superstition fooled,/ By vice unmanned and a licentious rule". (1)

Thomson's Liberty is probably the source for the phrase in Wordsworth's poem, and the phrase in Edwards' history. Once again Wordsworth is borrowing from the library of whiggish and classical-republican writings. However, his use of the idea of slaves of slaves differs from Thomson's, in that Thomson uses the idea in connection with vice and corruption. But the slavery of Savoy does not, as does slavery at Como, exist in this context.

Rather the slavery of Savoy is a matter of economic exploitation and immiseration. The food that the Savoyard peasants produce is not for their own tables but for those of their Austrian masters; as a consequence their starving children beg in the streets of their villages. (2) So the phrase slave of slaves, while appropriated from classical republican discourse, is used in a manner outside the conceptual perimeter of that discourse. It is used in the manner that, say, Thelwall uses the term slave when he compares the condition of British workers to those of colonial blacks.

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(1) Complete Poetical Works, p. 318; ll. 220-223.

(2) Descriptive Sketches, p. 108; ll. 704-705, ll. 709-712.

As I discussed in chapter 2, abolitionists often emphasised the slave's experience of intensive labour-exploitation and resultant hunger. Yet Wordsworth, while identifying the slavery of Savoy with the experience of exploitation and poverty, does not appear to draw on abolitionist discourse. The economic nature of Savoyard slavery might have given a more abolitionist poet scope to compare Savoyard peasants with colonial slaves. But this does not seem to happen in the case of Wordsworth with his apparent lack of interest in the issue of the slave trade.

What does take place in the Savoy passage is a radical re-interpretation of classical republicanism, in which the Savoyards become the economic slaves of Austrian political slaves. One might ask if the means of expression is sufficient to the matter Wordsworth seeks to express; and one might suggest that colonial slavery, involving the most intensive form of exploitation known in the 1790s, could have provided an explorative metaphor capable of fully conveying the immiseration of the Savoyard peasants. However, it might be that Wordsworth's graphic and probably first-hand account needs no such metaphor.

And it is important to emphasise the radical significance that Thomson's Liberty acquired in the 1790s, when it was converted from a Whig bible to an incendiary device in the hands of radicals. In alluding to the poem Wordsworth is by no means ideologically constrained, an old-fashioned opposition Whig, and nor is he being merely derivative. The Savoy passage involves a form of linguistic creativity, in which Wordsworth forces classical republicanism beyond its old confines and gives a familiar phrase new life and meaning.

Wordsworth's _Salisbury Plain_, or _A Night on Salisbury Plain_ as it is also called, seems to have been composed between the summer of 1793 and spring of 1794. The poem was extensively revised between 1795 and 1799 and renamed _Adventures on Salisbury Plain_. It is the earlier version (_Salisbury Plain_) that I will discuss, a version that contains Wordsworth's initial fierce dismay at Britain's war against the French Republic, and at the callousness and hardship he saw as the consequence. Though set at the time of the American war, _Salisbury Plain_ is really a protest at the policies of the Pitt government of the 1790s.

John Williams sees, in this first version, evidence of an abandonment of Painite and French ideas, and he again asserts that "the rhetoric takes us back to Thomson's _Liberty_, and confirms how closely the young poet had read Thomson, Brooke, Akenside and Beattie." (1) However, I do not think the use of old political discourse amounts to a rejection of a more modern one (itself involving a revamping of older discourse). What I wish to explore is the possibility that Wordsworth, in addition to radically re-interpreting whiggish discourse, appropriates more current discourses — those of colonial slavery.

Salisbury Plain begins with a description of the hardships and dangers facing the "unhouzed" savage. This savage is a formal contrast to the poem's protagonists, the traveller and the female vagrant. He is more fortunate than they because they have known "happier days" than they know now, and because they, no doubt, should expect to fare better in the civilised society to which they belong. (2) Yet later in the poem there is apparently

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(1) _Wordsworth_, p. 75.

(2) _Salisbury Plain Poems_, p. 21; 11. 1-18.

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another formal contrast between the primitive and the civilised, in which the former is presented as innocent and the latter, in Rousseauist vein, as corrupt and enslaved.

Towards the end of <u>Salisbury Plain</u> South American natives are depicted as living in a prelapsarian environment and hailing the rising sun. This state is abruptly ended when from the east come the rapacious forces of the Conquistadors whose violence Wordsworth evokes with these words: "the throng/ Of Furies and grim death by Avarice lashed along." (1)

The natives, with their healthy worship of nature contrast with a civilisd "slave" who "on his naked knees/ Weeps tears of fear at Superstition's nod". The stanza describing the "slave" follows on from the stanza depicting the Andean natives, and he is shown to be as cruel as he is submissive: he rises "a monster Tyrant and o'er seas/ And mountains" stretches "far his cruel rod/ To bruise meek nature in her lone abode." (2) Therefore it might be assumed that this "slave" is a Spaniard. However, it may be that the "slave" has a more general significance, and refers to the civilised people of Europe as a whole.

This more general significance is suggested by the beginning of the next stanza.in which "the Hindoo" is pictured as having "strayed" through a "paradise" before Britain's colonialist incursion into India. (3) It is also suggested by Wordsworth's description, preceding the depiction of the Andean natives, of the peoples of Europe:

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(1) <u>Salisbury Plain Poems</u>, p.36; ll. 451-59.

(2) ibid., p. 36; ll. 460-64.

(3) ibid., p. 37; ll. 469-472.

The nations, though at home in bonds they drink
                    The dregs of wretchedness, for empire strain,
                    And crushed by their own fetters helpless sink,
                    Move their galled limbs in fear and eye each silent link. (1)

Thus there seems to be an overall contrast between primitive

happiness and civilised slavery.

The stanza in which "the Hindoo" is pictured breaks off

after the fourth line, and thereafter thirty-one lines are

missing from Wordsworth's notebook. One could conjecture that,

in the light of Wordsworth's condemnations of Spanish and British

colonialism, these missing lines contained a protest against the

plunder of Africa by European slave traders or against the

brutality of the slave colonies in the West Indies.

Were this so then civilised "slaves" would be contrasted

with, as well as other native peoples, African victims of the

slave trade. Such a contrast would have a figurative quality.

Yet all that can be asserted with confidence is a contrast

between the primitive and the civilised at the beginning and end

of the poem. As well as the fact that a figurative contrast is

conjecture, one consideration goes against such an interpretat-

ion: since the the slave trade was begun by the Spanish, one

might expect abolitionist protest _after_ the denunciation of the

conquistadors _not_ after that of British imperialists.

Yet, as I will show, these stanzas and Salisbury Plain as a

whole bear a close resemblance to a speech made by Pitt in the 2

April 1792 Commons debate on the slave trade, as reported in

The Parliamentary History. Pitt, defending Africans against

accusations of human sacrifice, remarked that "both the trade in

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(1) Salisbury Plain Poems, p. 36; ll. 446-450.

slaves, and the still more savage custom of offering up human
sacrifices, obtained in former periods, throughout many of those
nations which now, by the blessing of providence, are advanced
farthest in civilisation". "There was a time, Sir," he added,
"when even human sacrifices are said to have been offered in this
island." (1)

But Britain was now, according to Pitt, "established in all
the blessings of civil society"; for Britons "are in possession
of peace, of happiness, and of liberty: we are under the guidance
of a mild and benificent religion; and we are protected by
impartial laws, and the purest administration of justice; we are
living under a system·of government which has become the
admiration of the world". He continued "[w]e, who are enjoying
the blessings of a British civilisation, of British laws and
British liberty, might at this hour, have been little superior to
the rude inhabitants of the coast of Guinea." (2)

Salisbury Plain is a poem replete with images of the ancient
human sacrifice to which Pitt refers. A grim disembodied voice
warns the traveller to avoid Stonehenge:

> For oft at dead of night, when dreadful fire
> Reveals that powerful circle's reddening stones,
> 'Mid priests and spectres grim and idols dire,
> Far heard the great flame utters human moans... (3)

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(1) John Wright, ed., The Parliamentary History of England from
    the Earliest Period to the Year 1803, 23 vols. (London:
    Longman & Co., 1812-20), XXIX, 1154-55.

(2) ibid., XXIX, 1156.

(3) Salisbury Plain Poems, p. 24; 11. 91-93.

And an old peasant tells the female vagrant that the monument is "the sacrificial altar fed/ With living men." (1) In the poem Stonehenge may symbolise the human sacrifice inflicted on Britain and the Continent by the likes of Pitt. (2)

It might also be that the military immolation of recruits and their families - "a poor devoted crew" (3) - is a bitter reply to Pitt's complacent remark that there was once a time when human sacrifice was practiced even in Britain. In stanzas 48 to 58 Wordsworth seeks to show that even though sacrificial victims are no longer burned alive in wicker men, modern men and women are starved to death, debased by toil, slaughtered in war or judicially murdered.' (4) This latter-day druid, Wordsworth seems to say, is hardly the person who should be rejoicing at the abolition of savage customs. In contradiction to Pitt Britons are in possession not of war, happiness and liberty but of war, poverty and repression; Britons are under the guidance of a religion which sanctioned war and sermonised on the wisdom of God in making both rich and poor; Britons are protected by laws that criminalise radicals, and offer no protection to the victims of protected privilege -the father and daughter evicted from their cottage as in the poem, (5) or the son cheated by a big landowner of his inheritance as in the poet; Britons live under a system of

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(1) <u>Salisbury Plain Poems</u>, p. 27; ll. 184-85.

(2) Stephen Gill, "The Original <u>Salisbury Plain</u>: Introduction and Text", in <u>Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies: In Memory of John Alban Finch</u>, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), p. 144, p. 148, p. 149.

(3) <u>Salisbury Plain Poems</u>, p. 31; l. 306.

(4) ibid., pp. 35-37, ll. 424-522.

(5) ibid., p. 29; ll. 255-261.

government discredited by its refusal to reform itself, and outshone by republicanism in France. Britain is, in contrast to Pitt's claim, more savage than any uncivilised society.

If there is indeed a connection between the poem and Pitt's speech, then it would strengthen the argument of a contrast between civilised slaves and noble primitives <u>including</u> <u>the</u> <u>African</u> whose continent has, as a consequence of the slave trade rather than El Dorado, been ravaged. Also, in the light of Wordsworth's possible analogy between the rites of the druids and the policies of the Pitt government, the slave of superstition seems to refer not only to the Spanish but also to all the war-like and colonialist."nations" of Europe who Wordsworth describes as in "fetters". This slave of supersition would, in addition, be a figurative contrast to black slaves were there indeed a link between Pitt's speech and Wordsworth's poem.

One objection to this link is the fact that Wordsworth was absent from Britain at the time of the speech. Another objection is that Pitt, despite being a ruthless warrior for his class, is actually making a speech in favour of abolishing the slave trade. Against these objections it may be argued that accounts of the slave trade debates were published in pamphlets and newspapers which Wordsworth could have read on his return to Britain. Also it may be argued that many radical abolitionists, William Fox for example, expressed skepticism regarding Pitt's motives for espousing slave trade abolition, even regarding the truth of his commitment to this policy. And Pitt's abolitionist scruples were seen by radicals such as Thelwall not only as bogus but also hypocritical in the light of Pitt's avowal of press-gang, cannon-fodder and gallows.

It is interesting that Thomson's _Liberty_, which John
Williams sees as an influence on the language of _Salisbury_ _Plain_,
contained a figurative contrast between the victims of the slave
trade and the "slaves" of corruption in Britain: "O far superior
Afric's sable sons/ By merchants pilfered to these willing
slaves!" (1) Yet it is more likely that Thomson's lines
influenced Coleridge, in his condemnation of "willing slaves"
that I will discuss in the next section, than Wordsworth who
during the 1790s, unlike Coleridge, wrote neither an essay nor
poems which condemned the slave trade.

Also it seems more likely that it was Thomson's condemnat-
ions of imperial Rome - "Oh, to well-earned chains,/ Devoted
race" - that prompted Wordsworth's description of fettered
nations straining for empire. And Wordsworth's depiction of the
slave to superstition might owe something to Thomson's assertion
that "yielded reason speaks the soul a slave". (2) In Words-
worth's _Salisbury_ _Plain_ the African slave exists as an absence,
like the absent lines of verse, that only conjecture can fill.

One can conjecture a link between Wordsworth's poetic
language in the early 1790s and colonial slavery. I have shown,
for instance, resemblances between the language of _Descriptive_
Sketches and _Salisbury_ _Plain_ and abolitionist speeches in the
House of Commons. It may be that the link is silent in the sense
of unconscious (silent to Wordsworth at least). Yet this
sociolinguistic link, if it exists, is hardly audible compared
with that in the writings of many of his contemporaries.

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(1) _Complete_ _Poetical_ _Works_, p. 398; 11. 196-97.

(2) ibid., p. 352, p. 326; 11. 436-37, 11. 56-60.

Nonetheless, it would not be true to say that _Salisbury_ _Plain_ is a derivative poem, one written by a poet not engaged in the actual language of men in his time. That Wordsworth may appropriate the language of the writer of nationalist passages in _Liberty_ and also of _Rule Britannia_ in order to condemn British belligerence and expansionism, and turn what had once been anti-Catholic discourse (slaves of superstition) into an attack on counter-revolutionary war, would indicate a radical re-interpretation of Whig discourse taking place within the medium of poetry.

Although a prolific and accomplished writer, Robert Southey is not perhaps a poet one would consider to be a major renovator of language. He was, however, a radical abolitionist who wrote several poems against the slave trade, and condemned the trade in his 1796 _Joan of Arc_. It might be, then, that Southey's works would indicate whether it is chiefly linguistic creativity or abolitionist fervour that determines the figurative use of colonial slavery in poetry of this period.

Southey wrote a series of poems against the slave trade published in his _Poems 1797_ (which came out in December 1796). These poems, including six sonnets and a final ode, not only condemn the slavery of Africans in the West Indies but also celebrate and advocate their resistance to oppression at a time of defeat for the parliamentary abolition campaign in Britain and of slave revolution and resistance in the Caribbean. (1)

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(1) Robert Southey, _Poems 1797_, Revolution and Romanticism 1789-1834, ed. and introd. Jonathan Wordsworth (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), p. 37, pp. 42-43, p. 32.

It might be expected that Southey, who expressed hatred of both colonial slavery and domestic oppression, and praised the rebellion both of African slaves and oppressed Europeans, would be likely to use colonial slavery as a metaphor in radical poems such as _Robespierre_, _Wat Tyler_, _Joan of Arc_ and _The Botany Bay Eclogues_. The figurative use of colonial slavery is, as I will show, evident in the poetry of Coleridge and Blake, who share with Southey abolitionist fervour as well as radical opinions; in the early poems of Wordsworth, with his lack of such fervour, such figurative use is not clearly apparent.

The _Fall of Robespierre: an Historical Drama_ (1794), Southey's and Coleridge's collaborative effort, imitates the "highly figurative language of the French orators"; (1) yet such figurative language does not seem to include colonial slavery figures, and the play's language is purely classical-republican. Southey's _Wat Tyler_ (1794) condemns slavery in an economic as well as political sense; however, the analogy Southey employs is not between colonial slaves and exploited peasants but between medieval slaves (i.e. serfs) and modern producers. (2)

Southey's epic poem _Joan of Arc_ is more fruitful - even ignoring those passages contributed by Coleridge that became the bulk of _The Destiny of Nations_ (a poem I explore later in this chapter). It might be argued that in _Joan of Arc_, metaphors of internal slavery are set against the literal enslavement of

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(1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, _The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge: Including Poems and Versions of Poems now Published for the First Time_, 2 vols., ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), II, 494.

(2) Robert Southey, _Wat Tyler 1817, Revolution and Romanticism 1789-1834_, ed. and introd. Jonathan Wordsworth (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1989), pp. ii-iii.

Africans by Europeans in the same kind of figurative contrast that I will discuss in the case of Coleridge. In book nine, when Joan descends into purgatory, she is shown by an angel a number of victims of vice: there are the "liveried slaves" of "Honor", "Mammon's slaves", "the wretched slaves of appetite", and bad poets who are "soul-polluted slaves". (1) Such phrases, involving a notion of internal slavery, typify poetic, religious and philosophical discourse of the time, and have a classical origin. However, in the midst of these sinners are those under the tutelage of "CRUELTY", which include slave traders:

>   the traffickers
> In human flesh here too are disciplin'd
> Till by their sufferings they have equall'd all
> The miseries they inflicted, all the mass
> Of wretchedness caused by the wars they waged,
> The towns they burnt, (for they who bribe to war
> Are guilty of the blood) the widows left
> In want, the slave or led to suicide,
> Or murdered by the foul infected air
> Of his close dungeon, or more sad than all,
> His virtue lost, his very soul enslav'd,
> And driven by woe to wickedness. (2)

Yet the possibility of a figurative contrast between the slaves of vice and the victims of the slave trade is weakened by the fact that, unlike those under the tutelage of honour and other vices, the souls "taught by CRUELTY" are not described as slaves of cruelty. If such a contrast was intended the slave traders, and other cruel souls, would probably be called slaves. Also, those who obey honour are referred to as "liveried slaves"

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(1)   Robert Southey, Joan of Arc: An Epic Poem (Bristol, 1796), p. 335, p. 337, p. 340, p. 350; IX, 397-405 , 442-45, 491-92, 679-685.

(2)   ibid., pp. 347-48; IX, 630-646.

[my emphasis], which suggests the influence of an anti-feudal discourse appropriate to the historical setting of _Joan of Arc_ and to the parallel Southey implictly draws between Britain's war with France in the 1790s and her medieval invasion of that nation. In the rest of the poem such terms as slavery appear purely in the context of classical- and biblical-republican traditions.

In Southey's _The Botany Bay Eclogues_, composed in 1794, (1) there is one possible example of a figurative use of colonial slavery. In the fourth eclogue the transported convict Frederic refers to himself as "poor outcast slave/ Stampt with the brand of Vice and Infamy". (2) Slaves from Africa were branded; however galley slaves, still suffering penal servitude in parts of Europe, were also branded; and in late eighteenth-century Britain criminals were branded on the hand as as a sign of their vice and infamy.

Despite Southey's protest against oppression and his praise of rebellion in his _Poems on the Slave Trade_, with two possible exceptions, such radical abolitionist views do not seem to effect his poetic language in poems in which domestic oppression and rebellion are the subjects. Instead of drawing analogies between Europe and her slave colonies, Southey tends to draw analogies between the 1790s and the middle ages. And rather than appropriating the discourses of colonial slavery, Southey generally does no more than utilise traditions such as classical

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(1) Robert Southey, _New Letters of Robert Southey_, 2 vols., ed. Kenneth Curry (New York and London: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965), I, 58, 80 and 80n.

(2) _Poems 1797_, pp. 99-100.

republicanism and, in one work, imitate French revolutionary discourse. As in the case of Wordsworth the link between colonial slavery and poetic language is hardly audible if it exists at all.

Thus Wordsworth and Southey, however unalike they may be in their degree of poetic ability and of orientation towards the abolitionist movement, are similar in that they seem to make little if any figurative use of colonial slavery. Wordsworth, despite his linguistic creativity, appears too cool towards the issue of colonial slavery for it to have distinct impact on his poetic language. And it might be argued that Southey, for all his abolitionist fervour, lacks the linguistic innovativeness that may be required to turn colonial slavery into figurative language as do Blake and Coleridge.

And it is to Coleridge and Blake that I now turn: to two poets in whom both poetic ability and strong abolitionist views are evident, and on whose poetic language colonial slavery can be shown to have had a significant impact. It is likely, as I will conclude, that it is at least partly to this combination of artistic and ideological factors that we can attribute the significant impact of colonial slavery on some instances of poetic language in the 1790s.

2. "THE WORST OF SLAVES": COLERIDGE'S RADICAL POEMS

Coleridge, in his radical prose of 1795 and 1796 (his religious and political lectures and _Watchman_ essays), uses such terms as slave and slavery in a traditional way albeit with new "Jacobin" connotations. There is no attempt in such prose to appropriate abolitionist discourse and, thus, to give such terms as slave a colonial slavery inflection. In his 1795 lecture, _The Plot Discovered_, Coleridge imagines the result of the Two Acts of that year, laws restricting free speech and assembly: "[o]ur assemblies will resemble a silent and sullen mob of discontented slaves who have surrounded the palace of some eastern tyrant." (1)

In his _Watchman_ essay, _Historical Sketch of the Manners and Religion of the Ancient Germans_, Coleridge, probably drawing a parallel between classical antiquity and war-torn Europe of 1796, avers that "the contest could not long be doubtful between a free nation, fierce in the enthusiasm of a warlike superstition, and the timid slaves of Rome, accustomed to crouch beneath every libertine or tyrant that oppressed them." (2) In the first example he utilises an idea of oriental despotism that had been utilised by Bolingbroke, (3) in the second he employs classical republicanism. In Coleridge's radical prose terms like slaves either refer literally to the victims of the slave trade, or appear in the context of traditional political discourse.

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(1) _Lectures 1795_, p. 313.

(2) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, _The Watchman_, ed. Lewis Patton, Bollingen Series LXXV (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), p. 89.

(3) _Miscellaneous Works_, IV, 203

That, in his prose at any rate, Coleridge does not draw
parallels between Europe's oppressed and colonial slaves, and
thereby alter the inflection of political slavery, is perhaps
surprising given his abolitionist fervour expressed both in a
lecture and an essay on the slave trade. It is also curious
given his admiration at the time of John Thelwall. Coleridge's
own lectures had been inspired by those of Thelwall, and by the
end of 1796 Coleridge and Thelwall were corresponding together.
(1) As I have shown in the previous chapter this strategy
ommitted by Coleridge was precisely that employed by Thelwall in
his political lectures.

However, in Coleridge's 1796 collection, a collection he
presented to Thelwall, precisely such a strategy is utilised in
some radical poems. Coleridge appears to have begun utilising
this strategy in poetic composition towards the end of 1794 when
he began writing Religious Musings. (2) Yet in another "Jacobin"
poem of that time, his sonnet or effusion La Fayette, published
in the Morning Chronicle on December 15th 1794, the strategy is
as absent as in his prose. The term slavery appears as part of a
French revolutionary rhetoric, as the antithesis to the rising
sun of Enlightenment: "For lo! the morning struggles into day,/
And Slavery's spectre's shriek amd vanish from the ray!" (3)

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(1) Richard Holmes, Coleridge: Early Visions (Harmondsworth:
     Penguin, 1990), p. 92, p. 112.

(2) ibid., p. 112, p. 78.

(3) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poems, selec., ed., and introd.
     John Beer (London: Dent, 1963, rpt [with new introduction]
     1974, rpt [with new appendices] 1986), p. 39; ll. 13-14.

Coleridge's appropriation of abolitionist discourse for domestic political purposes has been noted by Carl Woodring in the case of Coleridge's France: an Ode of 1798. Woodring coins the term "figurative contrast" to describe the way Coleridge juxtaposes the victims of the slave trade with the self-enslaved French people. (1) Woodring's term is appropriate given an ommitted stanza on the slave trade and Pitt' ministry, and the fact that Coleridge describes French "Slaves" as (spiritually) "Dark", thereby extending the connotation of the term slaves beyond its traditional political perameters: it ceases to become a catch-word and becomes a metaphor. (2)

An exploration of the figurative and radical use of slavery terminology in Coleridge's earlier poems will form the bulk of this chapter section. But first I will discuss France, and Woodring's contribution to our understanding of the poem (and disagreements I have with his reading of it), as an introduction to Coleridge's use of figurative contrast and comparison in the earlier poetry.

The now missing penultimate stanza and the still existing lines that began the ultimate stanza, involved a deliberate use of abolitionist discourse for domestic political purposes, one which changed the implication of describing the French as "Slaves". The still existing but ommitted lines, which continue the attack on Pitt and supporters and on the slave trade, are as follows:

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(1) Carl R. Woodring, Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1961), p. 59.

(2) Poems, p. 215; 1. 85.

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> Shall I with _these_ my patriot zeal combine?
> No, Afric, no! they stand beyond my ken
> Loath'd as th' Hyaenas, that in murky den
> Whine o'er their prey and mangle while they whine,
> Divinest Liberty! with vain endeavour. (1)

These lines, following the lost penultimate stanza, formed the first lines of the final stanza, and immediately preceded the following lines:

> The Sensual and the Dark rebel in vain,
> Slaves by their own compulsion! In mad game
> They burst their mannacles and wear the name
> Of Freedom, graven on a heavier chain! (2)

So Coleridge, as Woodring asserts, makes a figurative contrast between the slave trade's victims and the self-enslaved French. Yet, as well as an appropriation of abolitionist discourse for anti-revolutionary purposes, the contrast also involves an appropriation of anti-abolitionist discourse.

Edward Long had described Africans as "bestial", and as having "no moral sensation" and "no taste but for women; gormandising, and drinking to excess". (3) This racist strategy was utilised by anti-abolitionists in the parliamentary slave trade debates of the 1790s. On the 2 April 1792 debate Benjamin Vaughan had attributed the high mortality of slaves not to cruelty but to their 'dissoluteness", and on 19 April the previous year Colonel Phipps had described African societies as

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(1) <u>Complete Poetical Works</u>, I, 247.

(2) <u>Poems</u>, p. 215; ll 85-88.

(3) <u>History of Jamaica</u>, II, pp. 353-54.

invariably despotisms in which the entire people were slaves to their princes. (1)

It is such denunciations of Africans as morally inferior by nature and naturally inclined to slavery that Coleridge utilises in his attack on the "Sensual" and self-enslaved French. And, of course, like slaves from Africa the French "Slaves" are "Dark" — only the darkness of the French is internal and therefore more true than the skin-deep darkness of colonial slaves with whom they are contrasted as moral beings. The combined adjectives "Sensual" and "Dark" suggest the French are truly deserving of the denigration to which the slave trade's victims are subject.

The likelihood that Coleridge employs such anti-abolitionist discourse in his denigration of the French is strengthened by lines in his Ode to Tranquillity published in the Morning Post on 4 December 1801: "What fancy-figures, and what name/ Half-thinking, sensual France, a natural slave,/ On those ne'er broken Chains, her self-forg'd chains, will grave." (2) The notion that black people were deficient in intellect and moral qualities, that they were (in Aristotlean terms) "natural slaves", was precisely a weapon used by the slavery interest to defend its beleaguered position. In Coleridge's ode the weapon is turned against French "atheism".

Yet as well as appropriating the discourses of colonial slavery, in the concluding stanzas of France, Coleridge may also utilise traditional connotations of the term slaves. Woodring points out that Coleridge, in another place, commented that "[a]t Genoa the word, Liberty, is engraved on the chains of the galley-

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXXII, 195; XXIX, 287.

(2) Complete Poetical Works, I, 360.

slaves, and the doors of the prisons." (1) Contrasts between Britons and the subjects of the Austrian empire, or comparisons between oppressed or corrupt Britons and galley-slaves, were part-and-parcel of Whig discourse throughout the eighteenth century. It could be that, in _France_, Coleridge combines and juxtaposes Whig implications of the term _slaves_ with more current connotations.

Woodring confines his interpretation of a figurative contrast to Coleridge's denunciation of the French. However, Coleridge uses slavery terminology elsewhere in _France_ - in his denunciation of the ministry and its supporters. In the second stanza he describes himself praising the French Revolution though surrounded by loyalism: "my lofty gratulation/ Unawed I sang, amid a slavish band". (2)

In the ode's final stanza Coleridge attacks simultaneously the French and those who support established churches including, no doubt, British Tories: "Priestcraft's harpy minions,/ And factious Blasphemy's obscener slaves". (3) The adjective "obscener" could imply that Catholic and Anglican fanatics are, like Jacobin "atheists", slaves. These additional uses of slavery terminology suggest that the figurative contrast extends to ancien regimes and Church-and-King intolerance. This possibility appears stronger in the light of the cancelled lines combining protest against the slave trade with denunciation of Pitt and his supporters.

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(1) _Politics_, p. 184.

(2) _Poems_, p. 213; 11. 26-27.

(3) ibid., p. 215; 11. 96-97.

As Woodring observes, the lines about French political "Slaves" who are "Sensual and "Dark" owe not only their "existence" but their "excellence" to the ommitted lines. However, I do not altogether agree with him that Coleridge's reason for ommitting the stanza on the slave trade was merely artistic, that it was because "Jacobins who follow reason slavishly are 'Dark' enough, and self-compelled." (1) It is very likely that Coleridge's reason for ommitting a stanza that attacked Pitt and his supporters was political (2), given the increase in censorship during the mid-1790s.

Also, I wish to go further than Woodring in exploring exactly how the traditional political terminology of slavery becomes figurative in Coleridge's political poetry. Also France, published in the Morning Post on April 16 1798, while not an anti-Jacobin poem, is a poem chiefly about disillusionment in the French Revolution and the search for liberty beyond the sphere of political commitment. In earlier poems, those from between the years 1794 and 1796, Coleridge uses figurative contrasts, and indeed figurative comparisons, in expressions of support for the French Republic and of attacks on the war-mongering and repressive government of Pitt.

Whether or not the figurative contrast in France includes the alliance and Pitt's ministry, in earlier poems by Coleridge there are contrasts between the slave trade's victims and the culpable "slaves" of the British oligarchy and continental powers. In Coleridge's Religious Musings, written between

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(1) Politics, p. 184.

(2) Barbara Paul-Emile, "Slavery and the English Romantic Poets: Coleridge, Wordsworth and Southey", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Colorado, 1971, p. 33.

1794 and 1796, both figurative contrast and comparison are

employed not against French republicans but in support of them,

and in a polemic against their enemies.

Woodring has little to say on these strategies in Religious

Musings; he does make one point on this subject which is both

helpful and in need of further discussion:

> The figurative uses of enslavement in [Coleridge's] poetry
> can be clustered separately around two moral poles: (1)
> condemnation of the enslaver as tyrant, in a historical
> situation where the royal family he did not love supported
> the Continental despots and the trade in African slaves; and
> (2) condemnation of the enslaved, as a corollary implied in
> the maxim that only the virtuous can be free. The poet often
> draws the two vices paradoxically together. (1)

Woodring's claim that Coleridge's "uses of enslavement" in

Religious Musings are "figurative" is open to interrogatation. In

my first chapter I tended to the conclusion that the use of such

terms as slave, in the case of both "moral poles" that Woodring

mentions, was far from figurative (at least for most of the

eighteenth century); it was part of the common vocabulary of

political argument. Neither moral pole is uniquely Coleridgean

(at first sight); for instance, the "condemnation of the slaves,

as a corollary of the maxim that only the virtuous can be free"

is an old classical-republican acorn.

However, it can be shown that, in the specific context of

the poem in question (indeed in the context of "English Jacobin"

discourse often enough), both these uses of enslavement are

figurative. Cases of figurative contrast, which Woodring does

not mention in the case of Religious Musings, can be shown to be

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(1) Politics, p. 55.

Coleridge's almost unique contribution to the radical discourse

of the 1790s. One could perhaps go further and assert that this

polemical strategy was poetry's unique contribution to such

discourse.

In the ninth paragraph of _Religious Musings_ Coleridge

launches into a diatribe against superstition:

> O Fiends of SUPERSTITION! not that oft
> Your pitiless rites have floated with man's blood
> The skull-pil'd Temple, not for this shall wrath
> Thunder against you from the Holy One!
> But (whether ye th' unclimbing Bigot mock
> With secondary Gods, or if more pleas'd
> Ye petrify th' imbrothell'd Atheist's heart,
> The Atheist your worst slave) I o'er some plain
> Peopled with Death, and to the silent Sun
> Steaming with tyrant-murdered multitudes;
> Or where with groans and shrieks loud-laughing TRADE
> More hideous packs his bales of living anguish;
> I will raise up a mourning, O ye Fiends! (1)

That Coleridge uses the word _superstition_ in a distinct way,

stressing more a ruling-class ideology of mercantilism and

realpolitic than the word's usual sense, is made clear by a

footnote appended in his 1797 _Poems_:

> If to make aught but the Supreme Reality the object of final
> pursuit, be Superstition; if the attributing of sublime
> properties to things or persons, which those things or
> persons neither do or can possess, be Superstition; then
> Avarice and Ambition are Superstitions; and he who wishes to
> estimate the evils of Superstition, should transport himself,
> not to the temple of the Mexican Deities, but to the plains
> of Flanders, or the coast of Africa... (2)

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(1) _Poems_, p. 68; 11. 144-156.

(2) ibid., p. 68.

What is also made clear by the footnote is that Coleridge combines denunciations of the war against the French Republic and the slave trade in a way which places the victims of both crimes on a par with each other - as had John Oswald and other radical pamphleteers. However, Coleridge does not, as had these writers, refer to the victims of the war as slaves. Instead he refers to, denounces in fact, the atheist as the "worst slave". Thus he does not employ a comparison, amounting to a metaphor, between the slaves of plantations and the "slaves" of war; but, rather, he makes a contrast between the innocent victims of the slave trade and the contemptible atheist "slave".

But by atheist Coleridge is not referring to free thinkers like Godwin and Thelwall, which would be rather out of keeping with the anti-ministerial tone of the above lines of poetry. What he means by atheist is suggested not only by the note on superstition but also by subsequent passages in the poem and his 1795 slave trade lecture. The following paragraph contains these lines against the oligarchy's justification of war with France and repression at home:

> Even now
> (Black Hell laughs horrible- to hear the scoff!)
> THEE to defend, meek Galilaean! THEE
> And thy mild laws of Love unutterable,
> Mistrust and Enmity have burst the bands
> Of social Peace and listn'ing Treachery lurks
> With pious fraud to snare a brother's life;
> And childless widows o'er the groaning land
> Wail numberless; and orphans weep for bread!
> THEE to defend, dear Saviour of Mankind! (1)

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(1) Poems, p. 69; ll. 173-182.

In the 1797 edition an explanatory footnote expands on the poetry:

> January 21st 1794, in the debate on the Address to his
> Majesty, on the speech from the Throne, the Earl of
> Guildford (sic) moved an Amendment to the following effect:-
> 'That the House hoped his Majesty would sieze the earliest
> opportunity to conclude a peace with France,' &c. This
> motion was opposed by the Duke of Portland, who 'considered
> the war to be merely grounded on one principle- the
> preservation of the CHRISTIAN RELIGION'... (1)

This footnote suggests that by "Atheist" Coleridge means not

freethinkers in France and Britain but cynical manipulators of

religiosity in high places.

One might be further convinced that "Atheist" means

hypocrite by Coleridges's apocalyptic passage, in which Babylon —

the Established Church — spawns forth "mitred ATHEISM". (2) So

atheism, while it might include radical freethinkers and Jacobin

worshippers of Reason (given Coleridge's dissenting piety), is

really the philosophy of those who place wealth and power above

God - even if they feign to be followers of Christ. Coleridge's

1795 <u>Lecture</u> <u>on</u> <u>the</u> <u>Slave</u> <u>Trade</u> gives additional evidence that

this is what Coleridge means by atheist.

In his slave trade lecture, having denounced the Duke of

Clarence (the King's nephew) for making an anti-abolitionist

maiden speech, Coleridge protests that while "[e]normities at

which a Caligula might have turned pale, are authorised by our

Legislature, and jocosely defended by our Princes... yet (O

Shame! where is thy Blush) we have the impudence to call the

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(1) <u>Poems</u>, p. 69.

(2) ibid., p. 73 (1796 footnote), p. 74.

French a Nation of <u>Atheists</u>!" (1) The French had, of course,

early the previous year (and many months before Coleridge

contrasted the atheist "slave" with the slave trade's victims)

emancipated all the black slaves in their colonies.

Furthermore, the figurative contrast between atheistic and

colonial slaves is perhaps extended in the same paragraph:

'Thro courts and cities the smooth Savage roams
Feeling himself, his own low Self the whole,
When he by sacred sympathy might make
The whole ONE SELF! SELF that no alien knows! (2)

While these lines may involve some contrast with Rousseau's noble

savage, in the context of the atheist slave and the slave trade's

victims they bear a different interpretation. African slaves

were often referred to as savages in the slave trade debates.

The passage also contains a play on words. As well as being

called savages, slaves from Africa were also "aliens" in the

sense of foreigners, and their foreignness was occasionally an

argument for their enslavement or mistreatment. The aristocratic

or plutocratic "savage" is also an alien, but in another sense:

that of being alienated from humankind's true home — God or the

"ONE SELF". So Coleridge appropriates from the realm of slave

trade debate, from (usually) anti-abolitionist discourse, in

order to denigrate his political enemies.

Coleridge's use of the word <u>atheist</u> is radical both

politically and linguistically, and so the figurative contrast in

<u>Religious Musings</u> differs markedly from that in <u>France</u>. The

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(1) <u>Lectures 1795</u>, pp. 244-45.

(2) <u>Poems</u>, p. 68; ll. 165-68.

later "slaves" are the Jacobin worshippers of Reason ("factious

Blasphemy's obscener slaves"); the earlier "slaves" are those who

place self-advancement above the "ONE SELF". Of course, both

"slaves" might be accused of placing purely worldly objectives

above spiritual ones, but the point is that this would be

Coleridge's view in 1798 not in the years 1794 to 1796.

So the passage about superstition gives one example of

figurative contrast used to radical effect. Yet there is another

example in <u>Religious Musings</u>, not only of figurative contrast but

also of figurative comparison between Europeans and colonial

slaves. In the following paragraph Coleridge fulminates against

the powers leagued against France:

> Each petty German Princeling, nursed in gore!
> Soul-harden'd barterers of human blood!
> Death's prime Slave-merchants! Scorpion-whips of Fate!
> Not least in savagery of holy zeal,
> Apt for the yoke, the race degenerate,
> Whom Britain erst had blush'd to call her sons! (1)

To these lines Coleridge appends an explanatory note: "[t]he

Father of the present Prince of Hesse Cassell supported himself

and his strumpets at Paris by the vast sums which he received

from the British government during the American War <u>for the flesh</u>

<u>of his subjects</u> [my emphasis]". (2) Coleridge is clearly

utilising metaphor, comparing the Hessian rulers to slave

merchants. In this he follows a similar strategy to John

Osborne in his 1792 <u>Review of the Constitution of Great Britain</u>

which I discussed in the previous chapter.

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(1) <u>Poems</u>, p. 69; 11. 193-98.

(2) Coleridge, loc.cit.

The difference between Oswald's polemic and that of
Coleridge is that in the former a _similarity_ between war-
mongering royalty and slave traders is posed, while in the latter
case an _identity is imagined_. Poetic language allows, much more
than polemical prose, for the rulers to be represented as if they
actually _were_ slave traders. So there is a certain leap here
into the domain of metaphor, only achieved in pamphlets when the
"slaves" of Europe are compared to the slaves of the colonies.

But there is also, in Coleridge's poem, an implied
comparison between the victims of war and the victims of the
slave trade. War's victims, in the case of recruits, are the
"human blood" which is bartered and the "flesh" which is sold by
these German princes who are, in poetic utterance, "Slave-
merchants". It could be argued that the implicitness, the
suggestive language used to put the idea across, actually
strengthens the identification between soldiers and slaves that
is more clearly but also perhaps more weakly stated in the
pamphlets.

But while these lines show a figurative comparison which
reaches metaphor, they also exemplify the figurative _contrast_
which I have discussed in the case of the earlier passage and
later poem. Unlike Africans, though as the slavery lobby would
say of Africans, the German people are "apt for the yoke, the
race degenerate". A line which, if found elsewhere, could pass
as a standard classical republican performance, has more striking
implications given the slave trade imagery (slave-merchants,
whips, bartered blood). It is drawn from classical republican-
ism, with its denigration of mercenaries, but, at the same time,
from the currently raging debates on the slave trade. In the

above lines Coleridge again employs anti-abolitionist (as well as
abolitionist) discourse to yoke together an "enslaved" people
with their "slave-trading" princes.

Religious Musings is not an anti-slavery poem, nor is it
merely a radical poem with a protest against the slave trade
thrown in for good measure. In Coleridge's poem there is a
concerted attempt, utilising poetic language (metaphor and
antithesis), to link different kinds of subjection existing in a
corrupt world and to turn the discursive weapons of the
oppressors against those oppressors. This poem, begun on
Christmas Eve 1794, (1) indicates, in its language, an advance
from the perhaps hackneyed use of the slavery image in the
slightly earlier La Fayette.

At the end of December 1796 Coleridge wrote Ode to the
Departing Year, another poem in which he employed a contrast
between his political enemies and colonial slaves. The version
published in the Cambridge Intelligencer on the 31 December,
makes clearer his attempt to link various forms of social crime
(including slavery) for which he blames the oligarchy and its
adherents. (2) In 1796 the following lines were included:

        For ever shall the bloody island scowl?
        For ever shall her vast and iron bow
        Shoot Famine's evil arrows o'er the world,
        Hark! how wide nature joins her groans below:
        Rise God of Mercy, rise! why sleep thy bolts unhurl'd? (3)

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(1)   Roe, Wordsworth and Coleridge, p.96.

(2)   Complete Poetical Works, I, 160.

(3)   ibid., I, 165; ll. 94-102.

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Earlier in this stanza Coleridge had written: "By Belgium's
corse-impeded flood,/ By Vendee streaming Brother's blood". (1)
These lines refer to the counter-revolutionary assault of 1793
(France had annexed Belgium by 1795); also to the royalist
guerilla war funded by Pitt still being fought in La Vendee in
the west of France. (2) Thus, in his invocation of an avenging
God, Coleridge blames Britain's government for the slaughter in
Europe.

This invocation culminates in a furious protest against the
slave trade:

          But chief by Afric's wrongs,
          Strange, horrible, and foul!
          By what deep guilt belongs
          To the deaf Synod, 'full of gifts and lies!'
          By Wealth's insensate laugh! by Torture's howl!
          Avenger, rise! (3)

Thus Coleridge, in his invocation, connects the war against
France with the slave trade (now the Commons had broken its
abolitionist pledge of 1792). With these he joins other social
crimes: such as the economic hardship Britain's selfish and
belligerent rulers inflicted on the nation's poor: "Hunger's
bosom to the frost-winds bared!" (4)

Also included in the _Cambridge Intelligencer_ was a footnote
explaining the whole passage. The footnote was as follows:

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(1) _Complete Poetical Works_, I, 165.

(2) E.J. Hobsbawm, _The Age of Revolution 1789-1848_ (London:
     Cardinal, 1973), p. 90, p.107.

(3) _Poems_, p. 95; 11. 88-93.

(4) Coleridge, loc.cit; 11. 87.

In Europe the smoking village of Flanders and the putrified
fields of La Vendee- from Africa the unnumbered victims of a
detestable Slave-Trade. In Asia the desolated plains of
Indostan, and the millions who a rice-contracting Governor
caused to perish. In America the recent enormities of the
Scalp-merchants. The four quarters of the globe groan
beneath the intolerable iniquity of the nation. (1)

In other words the war against France, the slave trade, the

Warren Hastings scandal, and the earlier military action against

the American Revolution, are all linked together and laid at the

door of Britain's rulers and a complicit loyalist majority. What

is most important is that these crimes are linked together. Yet

Coleridge does not explicitly link together the victims, nor go

further by referring to them as slaves. Instead he refers to the

guilty British nation as threatened with slavery or, in one

version of the ode, doomed to be enslaved.

The original version of the ode contained these lines: "Not

yet enslaved, not wholly vile,/ O Albion! O my mother Isle!" (2)

In a 1797 version Coleridge altered these lines, making them much

sterner: "O doom'd to fall, enslav'd and vile". (3) In both 1797

and 1796 versions the idea of Britain's impending enslavement is

directly related to the protest against the slave trade.

Enslavement constitutes poetic justice in the case of a nation

that has itself been an enslaver.

Yet the strategy of threatening the enslaver with enslave-

ment is not Coleridge's invention. It is as old as the

abolitionist tract. In 1776 Sharp, warning of the consequences

of the slave trade, had appealed to the precedent of God's

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(1) Complete Poetical Works, I, 165-166.

(2) Poems, p. 96; ll. 121-22.

(3) Complete Poetical Works, I, 166.

punishment of the ancient Hebrews, though it was the oppression
of the poor rather than slave-trading that had resulted in their
captivity. (1) More recently, on 26 February 1795, Wilberforce
had warned the Commons not to "provoke the indignation of the
Supreme Being" in time of war, for "if ever there was a national
sin, the slave trade was surely of that description." (2)

Coleridge's contribution is to appropriate this abolitionist
strategy, and alter its application. Slavery becomes the
punishment not for slave-trading alone (though this is the
"chief" crime), but for all the crimes of the oligarchs and their
loyalist supporters - including counter-revolutionary war and
widespread poverty. Thus Coleridge does not, as does Wilberforce
whose policies were moving ever closer to Pitt's, condemn the
slave trade as Britain's sole "national sin"; he views it as part
of a structure of evil at whose base stands "mad Avarice" -
Britain's "guide" as he writes in the ode's eighth stanza. (3)

To the 1797 version of the eighth stanza was appended a
footnote explaining that, despite Britain's "insular situation"
having protected her from the ravages of war, her crime of
inflicting "these horrors over nations less happily situated"
will not "pass unpunished" by God. There then follows a
quotation from Scripture (Nahum iii) about the fate of "'populous
No... that had the waters round about it'": "'she was carried
away, she went into captivity: and they cast lots for her
honourable men, and all her great men were bound in chains'". (4)

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(1) Law of Retribution, p. 171, p. 177.

(2) Parliamentary Register, ILI, 8.

(3) Poems, p. 96; 1. 135.

(4) Complete Poetical Works, I, 167.

Like early abolitionists, such as Sharp, Coleridge couches his denunciation in biblical terms. Yet warnings of divine punishment on unjust rulers had long been a strategy employed by radical dissenters castigating Britain's oligarchy; and, as a radical dissenter as well as an abolitionist, Coleridge has two (not wholly separate) sources for the prophetic style of his harangue. The fact that abolitionist and radical discourse overlaps in this way provides him with an empowering language with which to warn of national slavery as a consequence of the combined sins of slave trading and belligerence.

In 1796 Coleridge wrote another poem containing both a condemnation of slavery in the colonies and castigation of slaves at home. The Destiny of Nations was composed after most of Religious Musings but before Ode to the Departing Year. As its composition date lay between those of these two poems, one might perhaps expect that Coleridge would employ the device of a contrast (figurative or otherwise) between the slave trade's victims and those enslaved in another sense. Yet, as I will show, the poem does not readily yield evidence of this strategy.

Towards the end of the poem Coleridge envisions the Apollo Belvedere descending from heaven with the following consequences:

> Shriek'd Ambition's giant throng,
> And with them hissed the locust fiends that crawled
> And glittered in Corruption's slimy track.
> Great was their wrath, for short they knew their reign;
> And such commotion made they, and uproar,
> As when the mad Tornado bellows through
> The guilty islands of the western main,
> What time departing form their native shores,
> Eboe, or Koromantyn's plain of palms,
> The infuriate spirits of the murdered make
> Fierce merriment, and vengeance ask of Heaven. (1)

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(1) Poems, p. 107; 11. 437-447.

Coleridge provides a footnote to this indirect protest
against the slave trade: "[t]he Slaves in the West India Islands
consider Death as a passport to their native country." (1)
The footnote also contains an extract (with literal translation)
from his 1792 Greek prize-winning Ode on the Slave Trade. The
lengthy footnote indicates the poem's reference to the slave
trade is not there merely for effect. The description of
"Ambition" and "Corruption" leads naturally onto the subject of
the slave trade, the chief result of such national vices.

Near the beginning of The Destiny of Nations Coleridge had
written of slaves of another description:

> But some there are who deem themselves most free
> When they within this gross and visible sphere
> Chain down the winged thought, scoffing ascent,
> Proud in their meanness: and themselves they cheat
> With noisy emptiness of learned phrase,
> Their subtle fluids, impacts, essences,
> Self-working tools, uncaused effects, and all
> Those blind Omniscients, those Almighty Slaves,
> Untenanting Creation of its God. (2)

That "Almighty Slaves" refers to the materialists who deem
themselves free, rather than to "[t]heir subtle fluids", seems
borne out by the language: "blind Omniscients" and "Almighty
Slaves" is less likely to refer to things than persons. It seems
Coleridge attacks a different atheism than in Religious Musings,
one more philosophical. A footnote in Southey's Joan of Arc,
which included the above lines, suggest they criticise Newton and
Hartley whose thought tended to lead to atheism. (3)

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(1) Poems, p. 107.

(2) ibid., p. 98; ll. 26-35.

(3) Joan of Arc, pp. 40-41.

In a letter to Thelwall on the 17 December 1796, in which the completion of The Destiny of Nations is announced, Coleridge good-naturedly takes Thelwall to task for his atheism and also announces his own conversion to Berkleian philosophy. Thus Coleridge has now rejected the materialist philosophy of Hartley and Priestley eulogised in Religious Musings. (1)

The above passage about what constitutes the ultimate slavery leads on from one which defines freedom in religious and idealist terms:

> But what is Freedom, but the unfettered use
> Of all the powers which God for use had given?
> But chiefly this, him First, him Last to view
> Through meaner powers and secondary things
> Effulgent, as through clouds that veil his blaze. (2)

This in turn follows on lines in classical-republican vein: "Sieze then, my soul! from Freedom's trophied dome/ The Harp which hangeth high between the Shields/ Of Brutus and Leonidas!" (3)

Coleridge's strategy, in the above passages on freedom and slavery, is to appropriate classical republicanism and convert it into an attack on mechanico-corpuscular theory; he is producing, so to speak, a neo-platonist classical republicanism critical of the scientific materialism of his age. But it is hard to see how these materialist slaves can serve as a contrast to the enslaved innocents of the West Indies — unlike the politicking "atheist"

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(1) Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Selected Letters, Oxford Letters and Memoirs, ed. H.J. Jackson (OUP, 1988), pp. 38-48, p. 280.

(2) Poems, p. 97; ll. 13-21.

(3) Coleridge, loc.cit.; ll. 8-10.

in Religious Musings, whose machinations have contributed

directly towards the slave trade and the metaphorical man-trade

providing victims for the battlefields of Europe.

However, an argument could be made against a discontinuity,

in The Destiny of Nations, between Coleridge's protest against

the slave trade and his criticism of slavish materialists. Such

an argument would rest on Coleridge's clear use of the idea of

primitives, with their mythopoeic consciousness, as a contrast

with materialists. Immediately after the paragraph about

"Almighty Slaves" follows one containing an approving description

of the shamanic beliefs of the Laplander. (1)

This description of shamanism leads to a comment on the

value of man's most primitive way of viewing the world:

> For Fancy is the power
> That first unsensualizes the dark mind,
> Giving it new delights; and bids it swell
> With wild activity; and peopling air,
> By obscure fears of Beings invisible,
> Emancipates it from the grosser thrall
> Of the present impulse, teaching Self-control,
> Till Superstition with unconscious hand
> Seat Reason on her throne. (2)

Here 'Fancy' (mythopoeic consciousness) is represented as an

emancipator from the thralldom of nature.

A direct contrast between the enslaved materialist and the

emancipated primitive seems implied. And this is of significance

to an argument that there is a contrast between the Almighty

Slaves and the victims of the guilty islands of the western

main . For colonial slaves were, to the eighteenth-century mind,

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(1   Poems, pp. 98-99; ll. 60-80.

2   ibid., p. 99; ll. 80-88.

primitives; and it is their superstition about the soul's return to Africa on which Coleridge fastens. If the black slave, like the Laplander, has a mind emancipated by "Fancy", perhaps such a slave also serves as a contrast to the materialist – particularly in the context of the appellation "Almighty Slaves".

However, this argument is made problematic by the lack of proximity between the two passages (the passage on "Almighty Slaves" appearing near the poem's beginning, and the one on the "guilty islands" near its end). One might argue a rhetorical mirroring of end and beginning, but it is still hard to put a strong case for a figurative contrast. This is especially so since The Destiny of Nations is a poem that seems to spurn formal unity, and has been referred to by Richard Holmes as a huge ragbag anthology. (1) But the case can be argued more confidently with reference to Religious Musings and Ode to the Departing Year.

Thus Coleridge's use of the term slaves (and its cognates) in his 1794 to 1796 poetry varies markedly. At times a contrast is utilised; at others there appears to be no attempt at this. At times contrasts are joined by comparisons, and a figurative use of slavery becomes evident, but at others the language is baldly literal. In Coleridge's radical poetry as a whole there seems to be no continuous effort to utilise and develop such devices. And here perhaps the poem manifests its contrast with the pamphlet in which a few polemical strategies are best repeated till the point is bludgeoned home, no matter how blunted such strategies become.

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(1) Coleridge, p. 91.

One could hardly expect Coleridge to adopt slavishly the strategies of his fellow radicals whose line was in pamphlets. Each of his poems is a unique feat of language, and of course a lot more could be said about the figurative achievements of a poem like, say, Ode to the Departing Year (my discussion of the poem's language being necessarily limited to the subject of slavery). Yet it is curious that Coleridge does employ overt strategies similar to those of radical pamphleteers in his poetry, albeit sparingly and with more inventiveness, while his own political prose seems to spurn such resources. Perhaps, in contrast to Thelwall, Coleridge's linguistic creativity manifested itself more in poetry than in prose.

Also curious is the fact that, while in his radical poetry, Coleridge employs the term slaves in its political sense, he does not seem to use the term slaves in the case of the Africans he defends. Political slaves are compared or (more usually contrasted) with those referred to as, for instance, "bales of living anguish". It is as though he uses all his poetic resources to impart the suffering involved in the slave trade, while revitalising the political catchword by bringing it into contact with that suffering.

In the field of poetry, particularly in Religious Musings, Coleridge makes a contribution to the new connotation of the political term slavery. In his poetry slavery, in a classical-republican context, is placed in contrast with the bondage of Africans in the West Indies. His contribution, while not wholly original when one considers the contrast between political slaves and the slave trade's victims in Thomson's Liberty, involves a more sustained development of what in Liberty is an isolated instance. His figurative use of colonial slavery is illuminated

by a letter he wrote to Southey on November 3 1794: in it,

perhaps alluding to Thomson's _Liberty_, he declared "A WILLING

slave is the worst of slaves. His soul is a slave." (1)

This "worst of slaves", one that is "WILLING", is the

antithesis of the African forced into bondage. So, in

Coleridge's radical poetry of 1794 to 1796, the classical-

republican epitome of the citizen corrupted by vice is brought

into a creative collision (which is at the same time a

conjunction) with the reality of human imolation brought home by

the abolitionist campaign. Self-inflicted degradation is brought

face to face with the degradation it has inflicted. And the

worst enslaver is, at the same time, "the worst of slaves".

3. "FREE BORN JOY": BLAKE'S AFRICAN

Blake's poetry represents a different case to that of

Coleridge, in that to the figurative device is added the more

complex and flexible mythopoeic symbol. Also, while Coleridge

views the African chiefly as a victim, for Blake the African

serves not only as the epitome of the oppressed but also as the

type of the spirit of liberty, critical intelligence in the face

of repressive institutions and ideology, and desire struggling

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(1)   Eva Beatrice Dykes, _The Negro in English Romantic Thought:_
      Or a Study in Sympathy for the Oppressed (Washington DC:
      Associated Publishers Inc., 1942), pp. 76-77.

against the restraints of such institutions and ideology. Blake, therefore, accords the African a special place in his poetic vision of resistance and liberation.

Blake's privileging of the African can be found towards the end of his The Four Zoas (begun in 1797). In an apocalyptic passage, in which is presaged the liberation of the slaves of "Mystery", "All the Slaves from every Earth in the wide Universe" sing a "New Song"; this hymn to joy is "Composed by an African Black from the little Earth of Sotha". Earlier in the poem Blake protested at "slaves in myriads in ship loads" which probably refers to the middle passage. (1) The African is, no doubt, the main beneficiary of universal liberation, but is also accorded a leading role in the celebration of this historic event.

In Blake's 1792-1793 illustrations for Stedman's Narrative (which I discussed in my second chapter) rebel slaves undergoing tortures exemplify primitive virtue, and their representation may owe something to Renaissance portrayals of martyred saints. In their heroic poses they constitute a marked contrast to the rather patronising representation of the African, docile and dependent, that was the emblem of mainstream abolitionism. Blake's image of the black suggests less an accessory of white philanthropy than an autonomous force of resistance.

In "A Song of Liberty", the revolutionary hymn that concludes The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-93), the "black African" is numbered, with the "citizen of London" and the "Jew", as a candidate for the rise in consciousness necessary for world

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(1) Complete Poetry and Prose, pp. 402-403, p. 361; IX: 658-685, VII: 331.

revolution. (1) The Orcion fire is falling, the millennium is at

hand, and preparedness is necessary.

Blake's appeal "go. winged thought widen his [the African's]

forehead" might suggest an assumption of black mental inferior-

ity. (2) But in an earlier poem, "The Little Black Boy" of The

Songs of Innocence, a black speaker manifests a critical

intelligence dissolving the vicious hierarchy of white over

black. Alan Richardson writes of an attempt in the poem's final

stanzas "to move beyond the binary oppositions governing the

lyric up to this point by collapsing blackness and whiteness

together as parallel kinds of 'cloud' and by unsettling the

hierarchical relation of the black child and his white

counterpart." (3)

If "The Little Black Boy", in David Erdman's words, "assists

the philanthropic agitation" of the Abolition Society (4), it

also departs from and even challenges the predominant mode of

representing blacks. Instead of a docile dependent waiting

patiently for a deliverance suggesting redemption by a white

Jesus, Blake presents an active though (inexperienced) mind

questioning a racial subordination that might well be accepted

not only by the slavery interest by also by many a sentimental

abolitionist. Blake's African is virtuous, spirited and (if

Blake would allow such a term as a compliment) rational.

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(1) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 44.

(2) Blake, loc.cit.

(3) Alan Richardson, Literature, Education, and Romanticism:
     Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832, Cambridge Studies in
     Romanticism (CUP, 1994), pp. 161-162.

(4) Blake, p. 132.

This positive idea of the African informs Blake's revolutionary symbolism in three prophecies of the early 1790s: <u>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</u>, <u>America</u> and <u>Europe</u>; though, as I will show, in two of these the impact of the slave trade debates seems deadened by other problems and considerations.

The influence of the slave trade debates on Blake's 1793 <u>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</u> has been discussed by Erdman. He also sees the influence of Stedman's <u>Narrative</u> which Blake illustrated while composing <u>Visions</u>. Erdman identifies Bromion as a slave trader because of his reference to branding — "Stampt with my signet are the swarthy children of the sun" (1) — and he suggests Bromion rapes Oothoon as pregnancy will enhance her slave-market price. Erdman also notices that one of the prophesy's illustrations depicts a stricken black slave. (2)

In a more recent work Steven Vine relates Blake's <u>Visions</u> to Wollstonecraft's <u>Vindication of the Rights of Woman</u>, particularly in the case of her use of colonial slavery as an analogy for women's oppression. However, as Vine asserts, while adopting this strategy of Wollstonecraft Blake also <u>adapts</u> it, subjecting her rationalist assumptions to a critique. While "Wollstonecraft locates woman's enslavement in the body, sensibility and desire, Blake's <u>Visions</u> seems to politicise desire in the opposite direction." (3) One could assert further that, while still slaves to sense, Blake's daughters of Albion are also enslaved by reason.

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(1) Blake, <u>Complete Poetry and Prose</u>, p. 46; I: 20.

(2) <u>Blake</u>, pp. 230-33, p. 236, p. 237.

(3) "'That Mild Beam'", p. 47.

While wholly "Enslav'd" (the first word of _Visions_) the

daughters of Albion "sigh towards America", Oothoon, the "soft

soul of America", is a different case. While enslaved by a

complex of repressive institutions (the plantation system,

marriage and the moral code), Oothoon embodies a spirit of

freedom and radical sexual desire struggling against such

institutions. While I find rather odd Erdman's sugestion that

when she plucks Leutha's (France's) flower she is inspired by the

ugly though necessary St Domingue revolution, I agree that she is

probably adopting French principles. (1)

The parliamentary debates on the slave trade provide ample

evidence that anti-abolitionists and official abolitionists alike

feared that colonial slaves would adopt Jacobin ideas. On 11

April 1793 Lord Abingdon, attacking the abolition bill sent up

from the Commons at the end of the previous year, attributed the

St Domingue revolution to the ideas of "liberty and equality" and

"the rights of man". On 16 February 1796, stressing the urgent

need for an end to the slave trade, Wilberforce would speak of

the danger of newly-imported slaves being "influenced by French

principles". (2)

It is in the context of Wilberforce's argument that I find a

throw-away suggestion of Erdman's rather fruitful. Erdman's main

argument is that Oothoon's estranged lover, Theotormon, can be

identified with Stedman - who was married to a slave yet defended

slavery both ideologically and physically. Yet at one point

Erdman links Theotormon's "paralysis" and his estrangement from

Oothoon with the "trimming" policy of the Abolitionist Society,

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(1) _Blake_, pp. 236-37.

(2) _Parliamentary Register_, XXXVI, 155; ILV, 63.

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committed to ending the slave trade but not slavery itself, and
with Wilberforce's Anti-Jacobinism and leadership of the Society
for the Suppression of Vice. (1)

Erdman has referred to Wilberforce's "attempt to carry water
on both shoulders: to be known as a great friend of the slaves
yet as an abhorrer of 'democratical principles'". (2)
Wilberforce celebrated neither the St Domingo revolution nor the
earlier revolt in the British colony of Dominica; in the case of
the Dominica revolt he rejoiced, in the 8 April 1791 Commons
debate on the slave trade, that the revolt had been crushed. (3)
The idea that slaves should liberate themselves was an anathema
to him. His view was that, like the kneeling slave on the
medallion, they should wait patiently for the improvement in
their situation that would supposedly result from the abolition
of the slave trade.

Theotormon, who rejects Oothoon after her rape, is described
by Erdman as "the theology-tormented man". (4) As well as
leading parliamentary abolitionist Wilberforce was a prominent
member of the Clapham Sect, an evangelical tendency within the
Established Church. His arguments against the slave trade are
suffused not only with humanitarian concern for the slaves'
welfare but also with a puritanical disgust at their moral
degeneracy — which he ascribed to their masters neglecting to
provide them with religious instruction.

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(1)   Blake, pp. 234-35.

(2)   Erdman, loc.cit.

(3)   Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 65

(4)   Blake, p. 233.

In the 8 April 1791 slave trade debate Wilberforce expressed horror at the slaves' lack of "religion and morality" and of "marriage", and at their "promiscuous intercourse". A year later, denying that he sought the slaves' emancipation, he "was exceedingly sensible that [the slaves] were in a state far from being prepared for the reception of such an enjoyment. Liberty he considered as the child of reason". Later in his speech he opines that the way to help slaves was to make them "attached" to those in authority. (1) Like Theotormon's religious-cum-political ideology Wilberforce's is repressive and authoritarian.

It seems that, for Wilberforce, a modified form of slavery (at least for the time being) might serve subject Africans as a civilising discipline. Such a paternalistic view — a benign subordination raising savage man to a rational, moral and obedient subject — is not unlike that implicit in his moral crusade at home. E.P. Thompson has linked evangelicalism to the need of the ruling class for a disciplined workforce under emerging industrial capitalism, and he sees Blake's poetry as expressing opposition to this kind of social conditioning. (2)

More immediately evangelicalism played an ideological part in the loyalist (and, later, anti-Jacobin) reaction that followed the publication of Paine's Rights of Man and Wollstonecraft s Vindication of the Rights of Woman. Britain's rulers felt it necessary to reinforce traditional morality, in a climate in which a number of men and women were plucking flowers from

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXIX, 199; XXXII, 157, 161.

(2) The Making, pp. 60-61, p. 411.

Leutha's grove - particularly in the light of divorce rights and rights for illegitimate children brought in by the French Republic the same year that Blake wrote his <u>Visions</u>. (1)

In Blake's <u>Visions</u> Oothoon cries out against Urizen who is responsible for the oppression of women:

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        she who burns with youth. and knows no fixed lot; is bound
In spells of law to one she loaths: and must she drag the chain
Of life, in weary lust! must chilling murderous thoughts. obscure
The clear heaven of her eternal spring? to bear the wintry rage
Of a harsh terror driv'n to madness, bound to hold a rod
Over her shrinking shoulders all the day; & all the night
To turn the wheel of false desire: and longings that awake her
                                                           womb
To the abhorred birth of cherubs in the human form
That live a pestilence & die a meteor & are no more.
Till the child dwell with one he hates. and do the deed he loaths
And the impure scourge force his seed into its unripe birth
E'er yet his eyelids can behold the arrows of the day. (2)
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Firstly, Oothoon addresses her polemic to Urizen, Blake's symbol of reason and morality - at least in the form in which Theotormon and Wilberforce understand them. Secondly, her polemic focusses on the institution of marriage, and on child-birth within marriage. Thirdly the language of her polemic (with its reference to a "chain", a "scourge", and what seems to be a treadmill) is suffused with the imagery of colonial slavery.

Oothoon's protest challenges the assumptions of Theotormon, who seems more outraged at the fact that Oothoon manifests an independent sexuality than that Bromion has raped her. Theotormon has punished them both by binding them back to back, a situation which suggests the mutual degradation of the master-

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(1) Paul McGarr and Alex Callinicos, <u>Marxism and the Great French Revolution</u> (London: International Socialism, 1993), p. 68.

(2) <u>Complete Poetry and Prose</u>, p. 49; V: 21-32.

slave relationship stressed by many abolitionists. His grieving

is accompanied by "The voice of slaves beneath the sun, and

children bought with money./ That shiver in religious caves

beneath the burning fires/ Of lust, that belch incessant from the

summits of the earth" (1)

Thus Theotormon is explictly associated with colonial

slavery (and child labour in Britain). Yet it is not the

physical coercion involved in slavery with which he is linked,

but with injection into such institutions of the repressive

sexual morality of official religion. It is as though Bromion

represents slavery's commodification of and violence towards the

human body, while Theotormon represents the attempt to sanitise

slavery in spite of the sexual domination inevitably involved in

it. It is the fact of such domination that Theotormon ignores in

his obsessional aversion to sexuality per se.

So Theotormon refuses to liberate Oothoon, in fact enforces

her submission to Bromion, as long as she remains sexually

liberated. Far from this happening, though, Oothoon moves from

suppliance towards Theotormon to a defiance. In the frontispiece

of _Visions_, in which Oothoon and Bromion are bound back to back,

Oothoon is represented in a kneeling posture. (2)

In the kneeling aspect of her posture she is rather like the

sanitised black slave on the abolitionist medallion - however,

her hands are not lifted in prayer, nor does she gaze up

appealingly to Theotormon as liberator. The real situation is

that having failed to live up to his ideal she is rejected, and

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(1) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 46; II: 8-10).

(2) William Blake, _William Blake's Writings_, 2 vols, ed. G.E.
    Bentley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), I, 100.

as long as she places hope in "the theology-tormented man" she has no hope. In the prophecy's ninth plate, one of the plates that accompanies her later defiant speeches, she is portrayed free of bonds and Bromion, but grief-stricken at the sight of Theotormon piously scourging himself. (1)

By this time Oothoon, while she cannot avoid being the slave-trader's "harlot", as Bromion calls her, she refuses to be "the crafty slave of selfish holiness." (2) In other words she refuses to be Theotormon's virtuous slave who endures the physical restraints of slavery while restraining her own desire. Though victim of racial and sexual domination she defends her right, when "wearied with work", to "Sit on the bank and draw the pleasures of this free born joy". (3)

While Bromion offers the slavery of the plantations, Theotormon offers another kind of slavery - the slavery of religious morality. His "hypocrite modesty" results in the practice of denigrating healthy libido and corrupting it into a marketable commodity, a practice that seems to be described in terms of the slave trade: "to catch virgin joy/ And brand it with the name of whore and sell it in the night". (4) His religious ideology is one like Wilberforce's, which is to be imposed on the population, but particularly on women, and particularly working-class and black women.

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(1)   William Blake's Writings, I, 113.

(2)   Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 46, p. 50; II: 1, VI: 20.

(3)   ibid., p. 50; VII: 1-2.

(4)   ibid., p. 49; VI: 11-12.

Theotormon is depicted sitting on the "threshold" and on the
"margind ocean". (1)   Likewise Wilberforce is, to use a current
term, a _marginal_ liberator who, while seeking to end the slave
trade, wishes to subject the workers on plantation and in
workshop to a restrictive morality. He offers liberation at a
price: the liberated must conform to an ideal not her own, must
"reflect" the "image" of her pious liberator. (2)

In the case of the colonial slave the image is that of the
abolitionist medallion with its devotional provenance; in the
case of both the colonial slave and the oppressed Briton this
imitatio constitutes self-mutilation - Oothoon calls on eagles to
rend away her defiled breast. (3) However, Oothoon moves away
from a fruitless position of suppliance and self-immolation to
one of agency and resistance, as shown by her powerful defiant
speeches towards the end of the prophecy.

Oothoon, as well as an inspiring protagonist, is a symbol
coalescing colonial slavery, woman's oppression and Blakean
radicalism. She serves to criticise what Blake sees as
deficiencies both in Wollstonecraft's feminism and Wilberforce's
abolitionism. In his late prophecy _Jerusalem_ Blake attributes
the abolition of the slave trade not only to the "friends" of
"Africa" but also to _Africans_ who "Rose" against their slavery
(4) - Blake's abolitionism did not deny political agency to the
slaves, nor seek to enforce self-denial on them.

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(1) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 47, p.51; II: 21, VIII: 12.

(2) ibid., p. 46; II; 14-15.

(3) Blake, loc.cit.

(4) Erdman, _Blake_, p. 429; Blake, _Complete Poetry and Prose_,
     p. 187; IV: 19-21.

As Erdman suggests Theotormon bears some resemblance to Stedman the weak lover of the slave Joanna. But in his role of imposer of moral strictures on slaves, women, and the oppressed in general, he may owe much to Wilberforce. Theotormon cannot be completely identified with Wilberforce, yet neither can be be completely identified with Stedman. Theotormon is not the portrait of an actual person, but rather a symbol that draws life from persons and forces in late eighteenth-century society. Such persons and forces may include Wilberforce and evangelicalism.

Oothoon, similarly, is not the portrait of a colonial slave; she is a complex symbol with a number of resonances. Yet her defiant speeches are lit by the actual resistance of Africans to slavery, a resistance that usually did not involve eruptions of violence, but (as shown by studies of slave culture such as Eugene Genovese's _Roll, Jordan, Roll: the World the Slaves Made_) more often the day-to-day preference of "free born joy" to grinding labour and absolute submission.

The same year that Blake printed his _Visions_ he produced another prophesy: _America_ recalls, in the context of the present revolution in France, the earlier explosion of the liberating impulse in the American colonies. _America_ is filled with images of enslavement; but, as I will demonstrate, it is only in the prophecy's "Preludium" that there is clear evidence of an appropriation of the discourses of colonial slavery. A curious rift appears to grow in the text, cutting off the idea of enslavement in the "Preludium" from ideas of slavery thereafter, a rift which invites exploration.

Ronald Paulson has related the myth contained in the "Preludium" of America - Orc's captivity, escape and copulation with the "shadowy daughter of Urthona" - to events and anxieties

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respecting colonial slavery. Paulson relates the myth to the

violence of the St Domingue Revolution, and other slave uprisings

in which white women were raped by slaves, and to fears

concerning "the strong sexuality of male slaves" reflected in the

judicial castration of intractable slaves. Therefore he sees in

the myth "the rebellion which consists of the slave changing

place with the master and taking his wife-daughter." (1)

That Orc in _America_ owes something to a black Jacobin is

evidenced by Erdman. He draws attention to the female's

recognition of Orc as "the image of God who dwells in darkness of

Africa", (2) and he notes that "Orc is chained in the position of

the crucified rebel African" in Blake's illustrations to

Stedman's _Narrative_. (3) Erdman adds that the Surinam revolt

described by Stedman, and other slave revolts, occurred shortly

before the American Revolution. I find Erdman's evidence

convincing and compelling.

Obviously the Orc symbol has other resonances: for instance,

mankind's deliverer Prometheus bound to a rock then liberated,

or Milton's Satan. Yet, as I showed in chapter 2, the idea of a

"black Prometheus" had emerged in radical representation by 1793

in the context of St Domingue. Also Africans had traditionally

been associated with the Devil; bearing in mind his "Satanist"

reading of Milton Blake may invert this racist idea, making the

African a heroic Satan rebelling against authoritarian religion.

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(1)   Ronald Paulson, _Representations of Revolution (1789-1820)_
      (New Haven and London: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 93-94,
      p. 88.

(2)   Blake, _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 52; II: 8.

(3)   _Blake_, p. 259.

However, there are a number of problems in Paulson's interpretation of the Orc myth in _America_. There is the fact that Blake repeatedly describes the female as "dark" even "black" - an odd shade of complexion for a slave-holder's wife or daughter. (1) However, remembering the flexibility of Blake's symbolism, and the fact that Orc is described in the text as "red" and portrayed in the illustration as white, this is not perhaps an important objection. (2)

More significantly the daughter is not, as Paulson seems to think, a female member of the household of Urizen; she is the daughter of Urthona. Urthona does not seem to be an entirely Urizenic figure in Blake's early prophesies. S. Foster Damon identifies Urthona with the human spirit, with imagination (Los) before the Fall. (3) Erdman, a more historical critic than Damon, interprets Urthona as "the people" or the "productive labourer". In his reading of America Erdman identifies the female with "fallen nature" and with Oothoon "in her American Indian form". (4)

Perhaps it would not be too literal to see the female as the daughter of the productive classes in Britain and America. I consider, I think with good reason, there is more justification for this conclusion than for accepting Paulson's idea of black rapists storming the colonial mansion. Besides, the idea of rape in the "Preludium" is rather problematic. Even Paulson seems

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(1) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, pp. 51-52; I: 11 and 16, II: 5.

(2) ibid., p. 51; I: 1.

(3) S. Foster Damon, _William Blake: his Philosophy and Symbolism_ (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1958), p. 67.

(4) _Blake_, p. 267, p. 305, p. 259.

aware of this since he states, in a rather contradictory fashion, that Orc "rapes her (or rather she allows him)." (1)

It is clear from the text that Orc does not rape the "shadowy daughter of Urthona" but that, despite his somewhat over-eager approach, she copulates with him of her own free will: her womb "joyd: she put aside her clouds & smiled her first-born smile" - hardly the reaction of one (even mythically) raped. (2) No doubt some planter women had affairs with male slaves, but these were covert and not characteristic of slave revolts. Paulson's interpretation is more reminiscent of the romantic novel of today than of a historical reading of a romantic poet of the late eighteenth century.

As Walvin notes affairs and marriages between working-class white women and blacks were, however, not uncommon in late eighteenth-century Britain - particularly in London where Blake lived. Equiano, Cugoano and Ignatius Sancho married white women. Such relationships were noted with disgust by racists like Long. While in the West Indies white men had sex with black women (often rape), in Britain there were sexual relationships between black men and white women. Discussing this fact Walvin writes "[b]lacks in England were actively turning the planters' world upside down." (3)

Blake also turns this world upside down with his myth that may include the resonance of a sexual encounter between a working-class white woman and black man. For the white woman this experience is a liberating one: "Thou art the image of God

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(1) Representations, p. 88.

(2) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 52; II: 4.

(3) England, Slaves and Freedom, p. 48, p. 51.

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who dwells in darkness of Africa/ And art fall'n to give me life

in regions of dark death." (1)   The primitive spirit of liberty

enlightens the women subjugated by the moral code; also she,

"dark" in the sense of oppressed, senses her affinity with God's

image in the black slave.

The significance of this resonance is the common interest of

both black and white producers to shake off oppression, one

recognised by Hardy and Equiano (as I described in chapter 2) as

well as by Blake. Blake, who took part in the Gordon Riots of

1780, may have known of the leading role played by London blacks

in that disturbance, and generally of the contribution made by

those who had experienced colonial slavery (and were perhaps

still experiencing slavery) towards London's popular radical

culture. (2)

It remains to be asked why Urthona, the female's "father

stern abhorr'd", "Rivets [Orc's] tenfold chains". (3) Until

Sharp's campaigns on behalf of London blacks, contemporary with

the struggles leading up to the Declaration of Independence,

there had been overwhelming support among all classes for

colonial slavery. During the colonial struggles solidarity had

developed between white and black workers in the North American

ports; white workers had combined opposition to British colonial

rule with antagonism to black slavery. (4)

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(1)   Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 52; II: 8-9.

(2)   Peter Linebaugh, The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society
      in the Eighteenth Century (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991),
      p. 348.

(3)   Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 51; I: 11-12.

(4)   Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 92.

In Britain, at least in London, artisans had rallied to the cause of James Somerset. (1) Blake may be expressing the altered consciousness of a new generation of the people in Britain and America, as well as emphasising the revolutionary potential of the black slave, which had first been manifested, during the American revolutionary period, in such slave revolts as the one in Surinam.   However, it must be added that, while many free blacks joined the American cause, many of the colonists' slaves had revolted at the instigation of Britain. This fact (and not this fact alone) hangs as a question mark over following passages of _America_ with their images of slavery.

Following the "Preludium" of _America_ there is a passage in which American revolutionary leaders confront "Albion's Angel". The passage contains a speech by Washington which seems replete with images of black slavery:

> Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea;
> A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain
> Descends link by link from Albion's cliffs across the sea to bind
> Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;
> Heads deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands work-bruis'd,
> Feet bleeding in sultry sands, and the furrows of the whip
> Descend to generations that in future time forget. (2)

Harold Bloom, in his commentary, identifies "Albion's Angel" with "the King of England, a dragon form even as Pharaoh is identified with a dragon by Ezekiel." (3) The biblical allusion, and the "sand" on which the slaves toil, appears to identify the

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(1) Blackburn, _Overthrow of Colonial Slavery_, p. 100.

(2) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 52; III: 6-12.

(3) ibid., p. 902.

Americans' slavery with the bondage of the Hebrews in the land of
Egypt. But, of course, popular abolitionists such as Cugoano had
identified colonial slavery with this bondage, and in April, the
year before Blake printed America, Charles James Fox had referred
to "Egyptian bondage" in a speech against the slave trade. (1)

So the biblical allusion need not exclude a colonial slavery
connotation from this description of American servitude. Indeed
American revolutionaries often compared political slavery to the
slavery of blacks. In Crevecoeur's Letters from an American
Farmer, the narrator encounters a slave gibbetted alive for
murdering an overseer. (2) According to Doreen Alvarez Saar,
Crevecoeur uses the tortured black slave as a symbol for
political slavery - because his suffering stems from the British-
induced corruption of South Carolina. (3) And, as I have noted
in chapter 1, Washington compared the oppression suffered by
white Americans to that endured by their slaves. But I say their
slaves: for many American revolutionaries were slave-holders;
and, while Paine (who is one of the heroes of America) was an
opponent of the slave trade, Washington, in whose mouth Blake
places the above protest, was a slaveholder. This fact, along
with the fact that "their slaves" assisted British colonialism,
makes problematic my earlier suggestion about the passage's
connotation.

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(1) Parliamentary Register, XXXII, 242.

(2) J. Hector St. John Crevecoeur, Letters from an American
    Farmer (New York: Doubleday, 1961), pp. 176-78.

(3) Doreen Alvarez Saar, "Crevecoeur's 'Thoughts on Slavery':
    Letters from an American Farmer and Whig Rhetoric, Early
    American Literature, 22:2 (1987), 192-203.

It is unlikely that, given abolitionist and radical object-
ions to revolutionary slave-holders, Blake was unaware of
Washington's source of income, nor is it likely he would find it
acceptable. I now suggest that the reason Blake shifts from an
imagery of colonial slavery to an imagery of biblical bondage is
precisely because of such a shameful fact. A rupture has
appeared in the text, and henceforth the resonance of colonial
slavery seems to disappear, replaced by slavery in the context of
discourses older than radical abolitionist discourse, and Orc
becomes a much more mythologised and spiritualised figure.

The idea of slavery reappears, now that the liberated Orc
rises blazing into heaven to terrify Albion's Angel, (1) but in
the context of seventeenth- century biblical republican and anti-
feudal discourse:

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their
                                                    stations;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;
Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:
Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air... (2)

Allusions to the Bible, to Milton's Samson Agonistes, and to
feudal dues, are more clearly visible than allusions to colonial
slavery. Yet the reference to a freed prisoner's wife and
children escaping the 'oppressors scourge' may connote colonial
slavery. (3) Also, as well as feudal serfs in the middle ages

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(1) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 53; IV: 7-12.

2   Blake, loc.cit.; VI: 1-7.

(3   Blake, loc.cit.; VI: 8-11.

and cotton workers during Blake's life, black slaves worked in
the master's mill. (1) And, while the story of Samson was not
the kind of biblical material utilised by abolitionists, the idea
of "redeemed captives", with its ancient Egyptian and Babylonian
context, can be found in abolitionist pamphlets. But,
nevertheless, does Blake represent such redeemed captives as
endebted to deliverers who are scourging parallel slaves in
another quarter of the globe? - this would hardly be a very
Blakean vision.

Of course it is to Orc, the pure spirit of revolution that
the captives are endebted, not to more tangible and imperfect
revolutionaries. Yet Orc has begun to change shape, first
resembling the red planet with its Greek mythological
significance, (2) then becoming identified with the biblical and
Miltonic serpent:

The terror: answered I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree:
The times are ended; shadows pass the morning gins to break;
The fiery joy that Urizen perverted to ten commands
What night he led the starry host thro' the wide wilderness
That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad...
(3)

The "female spirits of the dead pining in bonds of religion"
strongly resemble the daughters of Albion. But their champion,
the slave Oothoon, has dropped out of the picture and does not
re-emerge till the 1794 prophecy Europe. The female spirits are
liberated by Orc, and "Run from their fetters reddening" as they

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(1) Blackburn, Overthrow of Colonial Slavery, p. 8

(2) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 53; V: 1-5.

(3) ibid., p. 54; VIII: 1-5.

become incandescent with revolutionary desire, but the imagery of the passage yields no evidence that it is the image of God from Africa that frees them from the slavery of marriage. (1)

The females' liberation is effected by the flight of "reptile" priests from "the fires of Orc". (2) In whatever terms abolitionists denounced their opponents it was not in terms of reptiles, so these lines do not seem to involve a reference to abolitionist discourse. The lines may involve an extension of the prophetic symbol of the dragon, the priests being miniature versions of their master Pharoah or (in the book of Revelations) the Devil. The females' bonds owe more to the Pauline "bondage of the Law", with its antinomian interpretation, than to the fetters of slave ships.

The illustration linked to this passage also contains no resonance of colonial slavery (though, according to G.E. Bentley, it recalls two of the plates of Visions): it includes women enveloped in flame and ascending, a women and child climbing a tree and, seated beneath a tree, a bowed figure. (3) While by 1793 the words bonds and fetters might be inextricably linked with the slave trade, and particularly in a prophecy which began with an African Orc enchained and chain-breaking, the idea of colonial slavery is not foregrounded here in the same way as it was in the "Preludium".

Blackburn identifies the "Atlantean mountains" in America with that region, including the West Indies and southern states of America, in which colonial slavery was practiced. He claims

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(1) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 57; XV: 23-26.

(2) Blake, loc.cit.; XV: 19-20

(3) William Blake's Writings, I, 134, 149.

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these mountains "tremble", because of the antislavery

reverberations of the American Revolution both in America and

Britain. (1) While these mountains are of obvious strategic

importance to the colonial power, (2) I have been unable to

locate the description of them trembling, which I will put down

to some error on Blackburn's part (or mine) rather than to his

wishful thinking.

The description of the plague unleashed by Albion's Angel

turning back and afflicting first Bristol then London, (3)

probably refers to widespread support of America expressed in

both these cities rather than to retribution on the profiteers of

the slave trade. (4) Bristol and London were willing to oppose

the oppression of America but, as shown by William Beckford, not

always black slavery. Hoping to find an extension throughout the

prophesy of the "Preludium"'s symbolism of colonial slavery, I

appear to draw a blank.

Clearly there were antislavery repercussions to the American

Revolution. But the text of America is not evidence of these.

The revolt of the African Orc in the "Preludium" precedes that of

the colonists. It is as though Blake sees in the African the

pure spirit of liberty, then comes closer to earth and describes

the actual events of revolution. But from that description the

difficult facts of revolutionary slave-holders and pro-British

slave revolts have been ommitted.

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(1) Robin Blackburn, "Anti-Slavery and the French Revolution",
     History Today (November 1991), p.19, p. 20.

(2) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 55; X: 5-12.

(3) ibid., pp. 56-57; XIV: 1-23.

(4) Blake, pp. 60-61.

Blake concludes his "Preludium" to _America_ with the following lines:

[The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song; enrag'd he swung
His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd his shining frame against
A ruin'd pillar in glittring fragments; silent he turn'd away,
And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings.] ,
(1)

Erdman reads these lines as an expression of Blake's disgust at the loyalist and repressive climate of Britain in 1793 when he printed _America_. (2) But, in the light of my view of the prophesy, they might bear another interpretation.

Perhaps, as he moves from his glowing description of the African Orc to Washington's patriotic speech, Blake is moved to disgust at the outcome of the War of Independence and his unconditional support for it: the revolution swept away political slavery, but in America's southern states the African slave was left enchained. "In 1792 South Carolina resumed the slave trade, as the Constitutional settlement permitted it to do" Blackburn notes grimly. (3) In one sense it was the revolutionaries themselves who had managed "to stem the fires of Orc". (4)

In Blake's 1794 prophesy _Europe_ there is a re-emergence of the slave trade imagery encountered in _Visions_. In _Europe_'s "Preludium" a "nameless shadowy female" appeals to "mother Enitharmon" on behalf of Orc:

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(1) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 52; II: 18-21.

(2) _Blake_, pp. 285-85.

(3) Blackburn, "Anti-Slavery", p. 20.

(4) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 58; XVI: 21.

Stamp not with solid form this vig'rous progeny of fires.
I bring forth from my teeming bosom myriads of flames.
And thou dost stamp them with a signet, then they roam abroad
And leave me void as death:
Ah! I am drowned in shady woe, and visionary joy.

And who whall bind the infinite with an eternal band?
To compass it with swaddling bands? and who shall cherish it
With milk and honey? (1)

Erdman compares Enitharmon's signet with that of the slave
trader Bromion in Visions, a signet which signifies the branding
of black slaves. Erdman also identifies the "nameless shadowy
female" with nature, and also with Oothoon of the earlier
prophesy. (2) Following Erdman's suggestion that the "Preludium"
of Europe continues the myth of the "Preludium" of America, one
can emphasise the probability that she is the same figure as the
daughter of Urthona, also described as nameless and shadowy, who
conjoined joyfully and tumultuously with the self-liberated
African slave Orc.

In my reading this would mean she represents the women of
the present generation of the productive classes. Erdman sees
the "myriads of flames" as revolutionary apostates and exiles
(such as Fayette, Mirabeau and Orleans) who are "bought and sold"
or "compelled to roam abroad". (3) However, Fryer has written
about the commercial significance of the branding of slaves:
"[t]he Liverpool brand, D D, burnt with red hot irons into the
living flesh of African men, women and children, was famous among
West Indian planters as a guarantee of prime quality." (4)

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(1)   Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 60, p. 61; I: 1, II: 7-15.

(2)   Blake, p. 265, p. 254.

(3)   ibid., p. 265.

(4)   Staying Power, p. 53.

I suggest the "myriads of flames" may be the next generation of

the productive classes now born as potential revolutionaries but

quickly converted into commodified labour (metaphorically

branded) and uprooted by the market forces of capitalism -

whether this involves continental or more local migration.

This reading seems to be borne out by close similarity

between the above lines - "And who shall bind the infinite... To

compass it in swaddling bands" - and Blake's "Infant Sorrow" from

the 1794 Songs of Experience. The song is as follows:

My mother groand! my father wept
Into the dangerous world I leapt:
Helpless, naked, piping loud;
Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

Struggling in my fathers hands:
Striving against my swaddling bands:
Bound and weary I thought best
To sulk upon my mothers breast. (1)

The infant is a miniature Orc ("a fiend hid in a cloud")

and, like Orc, the infant is bound - though with swaddling bands

instead of "tenfold chains". While the infant is potentially

Orcian, it may not be correct to identify it with "great"

historical figures like Fayette. Rather the infant may be every

infant, particularly the child born to ordinary mothers,

daughters of Urthona. The infant, focussed on individually in

"Infant Sorrow", may become more general as the myriad flames in

Europe. I feel that, in this case, Erdman's historical reading

resembles too much a telescope.

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(1) Complete Poetry and Prose, p. 28.

While the questions about swaddling bonds in _Europe_ refer to Orc, they may also include the myriads of tiny Orcs subjected to an identical (and more concrete) enslavement whereby children are turned into marketable objects and constrained by material conditions and capitalist ideology (Enitharmon). Erdman identifies Enitharmon with Queen Charlotte, and I think he may be correct in the case of specific lines, (1) but a more traditional view of Enitharmon as goddess of nature may be helpful here. She may represent economic conditions and the belief that these are "natural", eternal and omnipotent.

Blake's apparent optimism expressed in the questions "who shall bind..?" etc. may not refer solely to Orc's inevitable bond-bursting, though Erdman seems to think this. (2) It may well be that Blake questions that, in the end, all generations can be irrevocably degraded and subjugated. In the case of the African Orc symbol the "Preludium" of _Europe_ suggests that, as the pure spirit of liberty, he should not be and cannot be brought too much into contact with sordid reality (stamped with solid form) — in _America_ the spirit of liberty takes the solid form of Washington with rather dubious implications.

As in _America_ Blake does not extend his appropriation of the discourses of colonial slavery throughout the 1794 prophesy. The estranged Oothoon and Theotormon make another appearance towards the end of _Europe_. Enitharmon sings a song which contains the following lines:

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(1) _Blake_, pp. 220-21.

(2) ibid., p. 265.

I hear the soft Oothoon in Enitharmons tents:
Why wilt thou give up woman's secresy my melancholy child?
Between two moments bliss is ripe:
O Theotormon robb'd of joy, I see thy salt tears flow
Down the steps of my crystal house. (1)

In spite of the song's tone of triumphal repression Oothoon

appears to remain defiant.

Moreover Enitharmon's triumph is thwarted because Orc

refuses to be subdued by her song, and he descends to "the red

vineyards of France" where the revolution is in its fullest

force. (2) Orc, once again, shifts shape and becomes a Jacobin.

Perhaps he does not entirely lose his African purity in the

process. But by 1795, ·the year in which a bourgeois dictatorship

crushed the popular democratism of Paris and instituted a

republic of property-holders. (3) Orc ceases to be the hero of

Blake's prophesies and is supplanted by the artistic Los.

What Erdman reads, perhaps too literally, as a description

in _Europe_ of the consequences of the 1792 "Royal Proclamation

against Seditious Writings", (4) might involve a utilisation of

the discourses of colonial slavery:

Every house a den, every man bound: the shadows are filld
With spectres, and the windows wove over with curses of iron:
Over the doors Thou shalt not; & over the chimneys Fear is
                                                      written:
With bands of iron round their necks fasten'd into the walls
The citizens: in leaden gyves the inhabitants of suburbs
Walk heavy: soft and bent are the bones of villagers (5)

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(1) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 66; XIV: 21-25.

(2) Blake, loc.cit.; XIV: 36, XV: 1-3.

(3) McGarr and Callinicos, _Marxism_, pp. 79-81.

(4) _Blake_, p. 221.

(5) _Complete Poetry and Prose_, p. 64; XII: 25-31.

It might be that Blake is identifying the citizens fastened to walls with Africans on board slave-ships, the suburbanites with fettered blacks led to the slave-market, the villagers with the starving inhabitants of West Indian slave cabins. However, the above description, though undoubtedly metaphorical, may not involve colonial slavery metaphors. The imagery seems to be drawn from the practices of Britain's penal system rather than those of colonial slavery. The threat of imprisonment hung over radicals in the year _Europe_ was printed. Even an obscure figure like Blake was not safe: in 1803 he was fortunate to be acquitted on a charge of sedition.

In 1793 several popular radicals (e.g. Gerrard) - had been imprisoned in Scotland under charges of sedition (five were transported). In 1794 Thelwall, Hardy, Tooke and many others languished in jail awaiting the outcome of a trial for treason. Yorke was locked up for several years. (1) Obviously the majority of people, many of whom had been won over by the Reevite Associations, were not liable to be held on political charges. Nevertheless the repression directed at prominent radicals does not leave them untouched, and their loyalism or fear amount to a kind of imprisonment.

By the year 1794 popular abolitionist fervour had died down considerably, due to the damp squib of the 1792 gradual abolition bill or to fear of Jacobinism white and black. (2) Many popular radicals, probably Blake among them, saw the abolition of slavery as dependent on the triumph of the French Revolution, which had emancipated the slaves early in 1794, and on the overthrow of

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(1) Goodwin, _Friends of Liberty_, pp. 305-306, pp. 332-33.

(2) Blackburn, _Overthrow of Colonial Slavery_, pp. 146-48.

Britain's oligarchy which had failed to abolish the slave trade.
(1) News of the repercussions of emancipation in the Caribbean
had perhaps not reached Britain when _Europe_ was composed.

In _Europe_ Orc is now translated to France; Pitt and Burke
have become the reactionary Rintrah and Palambron instead of the
slaves' champions. The climate of repression and threat of
convict chains are probably a more pressing concern for Blake
than slavery in the colonies, and it seems an imagery of
imprisonment serves, to some extent, to displace that of slavery.
So in this prophesy the symbol and metaphor of colonial slavery
play only a minor role compared to _Visions_ or even the
"Preludium" of _America_. They appear in _Europe_ almost as oblique
references to the other two prophecies.

In all three prophesies, however, the African stands as an
epitome of unrestrained desire, of radical criticism of
repressive institutions, and of the spirit of freedom. The
African is an important association coalesced into the revolut-
ionary symbols of Oothoon and Orc. Colonial slavery is employed
as a metaphor for all repressive institutions including orthodox
religion, marriage and the capitalist market. Yet _Visions_ is the
only prophesy in which primitivist and abolitionist discourse is
utilised throughout the work as a whole; in _America_ and _Europe_
such utilisation is confined largely to preludiums.

I have suggested that the textual discontinuity in _America_
is an effect of to the American Revolution's failure to liberate
the black slaves in the Southern states, and of the meaning of
slave revolts in that revolution. There is an attempt to cement
the rift by biblical-republican and anti-feudal discourses (of

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(1) Blackburn, _Overthrow of Colonial Slavery_, p. 147.

mid seventeenth-century provenance) which contain the term

slavery in a different sense than in the discourse of

abolitionism. In Europe the relative absence of an imagery and

symbolism of colonial slavery is perhaps due to more pressing

concerns of the day - the heightening revolution in Europe and

increasing repression in Britain.

In the three prophecies discussed in this section I find

that the impact of colonial slavery on Blake's poetic language

differs from that on Coleridge's as much as both depart from the

prose of Thelwall and Oswald. While in Blake's poetry, as in

Coleridge's, the reality of colonial slavery is turned into

political metaphor, it is also injected into a symbolism with

multiple resonances. Also the figurative contrast found in

Coleridge, and related to his use of classical-republican

discourse, is absent from Blake in whose poetry discourses such

as biblical republicanism have a stronger presence. In such

discourses slaves are "captives" worthy of redemption.

Blake utilises slavery metaphors in a way different to

Coleridge. While Coleridge identifies the victims of war with

those of the slave trade, in Blake it is the victims of marriage,

the moral law and the market who are metaphorised as colonial

slaves. And in Coleridge the ground of comparison always

involves victimhood; yet in Blake there is a sense in which those

who as symbols contain the association of colonial slavery, rise

above victimhood and become self-liberated even the liberators of

others. The African element in Blake's symbolism is that which

is still capable of experiencing "free born joy".

This chapter demonstrates that social realities, such as colonial slavery, and the most emphemeral prose, the pamphlets of rabble-rousers and speeches of politicians espousing slave trade abolition, can indeed have an impact on that most refined of phenomena — poetic language. That impact is, nevertheless, mediated by the specificity of poetry, and rather than a crude transference of political discourse to poems (a metrical version of prose), this impact is registered in the figurative language which is particularly part of poetry's domain.

There have been attempts to explain how poetic language relates to and differs from prose. Jan Mukařovský has claimed that, while "standard language" is the "background" of a poem, the poet "foregrounds" the "act of expression" at the expense of "communication". (1) What he seems to mean is that poetry, while still "making sense", involves a celebration of language for its own sake rather than an attempt to convey meaning in the barest possible way. However, I for one, who did not read Wordworth's Prelude mainly for its expressive blank verse and evocative imagery, find Mukarovsky's theory flawed.

A theory which I believe is an improvement on Mukařovský's formalism is that of the Italian Marxist Galvano Della Lope. He argues that, while both prose and poetry are able to accurately convey reality in their own specific ways, prose is "univocal"

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(1) Jan Mukařovský, "Standard Language and Poetic Language", in A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style (Washington DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1964), p. 17, p. 19.

while poetry is "polysemic". (1)   While I do not accept that

prose cannot be polysemic or that poetry is always so, the

polysemic tendency of poetic language is evident in Blake's

Oothoon, at once an enslaved African and an oppressed woman, and

in Coleridge's Hessians who are both the victims of metaphorical

slave traders and vitiated political slaves. It can be asserted

that in poetry the polysemic aspect of language is, to use

Mukarovsky's metaphor, foregrounded.

Another aspect of language which may be foregrounded in the

most valuable poems is its "explorative function", in the sense

of figures which can reveal to people realities hitherto unknown.

Of course this does not mean that prose is devoid of "explorat-

ive" figures nor that poetry is without "normative" ones (those

concerned with what we already know). (2)   But certainly the

figurative aspect of language is foregrounded in poetry and, in

that figures can be explorative and in that poets produce new

examples of figures, perhaps it is through this foregrounding

that poetry makes its main contribution to human knowledge.

It may well be that figurative language, with its

explorative function, can dissolve old ways of looking at the

world, the spectacles of literal language (itself largely

constituted by ossified figures with a purely normative

function), and produce a new vision of social existence. An

example of this explorative function is Blake's use of the

metaphor of slave-branding for the commodification of labour:

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(1)   Galvano Della Lope, Critique of Taste, trans. M. Caesar
      (London: NLB, 1978), pp. 173-74.

(2)   Hawkes, Metaphor, p. 88.

this figurative use of colonial slavery extends the understanding of domestic oppression beyond the sphere of political exclusion into the sphere of economic domination.

Another example is Coleridge's figurative comparison of war-mongering rulers to slave merchants. His metaphor disrupts the oligarchy's attempt to clean up its image by means of abolition-ist gestures; and, by tapping into popular feeling that the slave trade is unacceptable, Coleridge makes war _too_ appear unaccept-able. Thereby he undermines anti-French propaganda and ruling ideology in general. Thus by different poetic means – metaphor and figurative contrast, or mythic symbol and metaphor – Blake and Coleridge seek not only to poetically express an altered social reality but to actively alter people's perception.

The flexible and condensed nature of poetic language perhaps allows such language to reveal certain aspects of reality in a way more complete than prose is able to do. Far more than in the pamphlet, with its bald even over-stated analogies, the figurative resources at the poet's disposal enable a complete identification between different aspects of oppression referred to in almost distinct discourses as slavery.

Radical pampleteers also, in their way, attempted to produce an effect on people's minds, and probably had a much larger readership than poets. And it seems that it was the radical pampleteers of the 1790s who first began to appropriate the discourses of colonial slavery, and it is partly to their influence that I would attribute the figurative uses of colonial slavery in the poetry of that time. But it may be that, in the case of those with access to poetry, poetic language would have had, if not a greater impact, a more moving effect than would the polemical style of the pamphleteers.

Yet even so gifted a poet as Wordsworth shows, in this respect, less linguistic innovativeness than the obscure and ephemeral pamphleteer John Butler. So it might be that linguistic innovativeness has little to do with the figurative use of colonial slavery and that, rather, it is the degree of abolitionist opinion (or in Butler's case anti-abolitionist) held by the writer that is the determining factor. After all it is not Wordsworth but Coleridge and Blake, with their abolitionist fervour, who so clearly make figurative use of colonial slavery.

However, Southey with his radical abolitionist views does not seem to utilise colonial slavery figures any more than does the more poetically gifted Wordsworth. And Blake's radical abolitionist views, less paternalist and more emancipationist than Coleridge's, does not mean he makes more figurative use of colonial slavery than Coleridge makes. Blake and Coleridge both, in different ways and to different purposes, utilise such figurative language. It may well be that their figurative use of colonial slavery depends on a combination of two factors: the linguistic creativity of the poet and the poet's orientation towards the abolitionist movement.

Another factor influencing such use of colonial slavery is discourses other than those of colonial slavery that are employed by the poet. In Religious Musings classical republicanism enables Coleridge to employ a figurative contrast between the willing slave and the slave trade's victim. Blake, with his anti-classical and hebraist proclivities, tends more than Coleridge to figuratively compare oppressed Britons to colonial slaves (as he seems to do in Visions and Europe).

The fact that political discourse becomes the material of poetry, in itself shows that poetic language does not inhabit an ethereal plane above the sordid communications and relations of society. Nevertheless, however adaptable political discourse may be when made to serve the ends of new combatants on the field of class struggle, its old and established nature allows expression more habitual than those afforded by the fresher discourse of abolitionism which emerged less than a generation before the French Revolution.

Of course abolitionist discourse is itself, to a large extent, constituted by such political discourse. It is this fact, but more importantly the linguistic inventiveness of the poets, that gives rise to the bricolage found in Blake and Coleridge - in which the discourses of colonial slavery and those of domestic politics are merged. Even when colonial slavery discourse seems excluded from poetry, as in the case of early Wordsworth, there are attempts to adapt the old political discourses to new concerns: the discourse of the patrician republican serves the cause of "enslav'd humanity".

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