CHAPTER 1

Altering *Oroonoko* and Imoinda in Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Drama

William: Have you left a lover behind you in Africa?
Ada: Only a lover? Much more than a lover! A husband.
William: It is plain you are not European.

— August Von Kotzebue, *The Negro Slaves*, 34

This curious exchange between William, a white European abolitionist, and Ada, a black African slave, appears in the English translation of August von Kotzebue’s unproduced three-act drama, *The Negro Slaves* (1796). Its peculiarity lies in the unusual way William acknowledges that Ada is “not European.” Although his initial question (“Have you left . . .”) clearly reveals his knowledge of Ada’s African roots, his subsequent statement (“It is plain . . .”) confirms that her Otherness is most evident when she makes the distinction between a generic “lover” and a cherished “husband.” Having been abducted from an African village and sold by white slave traders into the Jamaican society where the play takes place, Ada has left her husband, Zameo, long behind her; but she still insists on acknowledging her marriage to him despite a living separation that is, most likely, permanent. It is this serious display of marital fidelity in the face of complete adversity that forms the basis of William’s assertion that Ada is “not European.” Yet, his unusual acknowledgment is, itself, perplexing.

Why would William rely on Ada’s marital disposition more than her obvious African blackness to distinguish her from Europeans in general?

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1. Anonymously translated (London: Cadell, 1796). All subsequent references are to this edition.
By 1796, when the play was first published in England, Roxann Wheeler has confirmed that skin color had already emerged “as the most important component of racial identity in Britain”; so the knowledge of an individual’s blackness would have been sufficient to distinguish her from a European. William’s statement, however, provides a clear, albeit brief, instance from late-eighteenth-century British literature in which skin color was not the most important category of difference used to identify an Other. However, Kotzebue was not the first or only writer to use marital fidelity as a basis on which to distinguish Africans from Europeans. In his own construction of ideal African women in the paradox “That a Black-a-moor Woman is the greatest Beauty; in a Letter to a Lady exceeding Fair” (1707), John Dunton exclaims: “What is there that makes a wife handsomely humor’d, but Industry, Fidelity, Humility and Obedience? And where can Europe show us any thing of these, like what we find in the African Ladies?”

Despite these two examples, however, negative depictions of African wives and women in general appear to be far more prevalent than the motif of African marital virtue. In one instance, readers are warned that an unmarried “African girl” is “possessed of all the address of her sex, and all the cunning of her country”—qualities that other novelists saw fit to develop in novels that feature married African women. For example, in a letter describing his observations of Algerian women to his friend Aaron Monceca, Jacob Brito, the narrator of Marquis d’Argens’s The Jewish Spy (1739), recounts: “An African woman will brave any sort of danger and run any hazard to satiate her passion; and cannot be intimidated even by the fear of death. Examples of this severe punishment are frequently seen; notwithstanding which the married women and maidens are fired with a most violent passion for the Nazarenes,” who are slaves to the Algerians. The African wife’s penchant for base infidelity is also depicted in George Lyttleton’s Persian Letters (1735), a novel that describes Ludovico “tormenting himself for one woman,” while “he gave equal uneasiness to another. His master’s wife saw him often from her window. The African ladies are utter strangers to delicacy and refinement. She made no scruple to acquaint him with her desires, and sent her favourite slave to introduce him by night into her chambers.”

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5. (Dublin: Nelson and Saunders, 1753), 45. Also see the fictionalized account of the African woman Zulima (47–50) as an example of the violence of an African woman’s love. Incidentally, d’Argens might be conflating moor with African here.
Toward the end of the century, these negative, fictionalized depictions of unfaithful, uncommitted, and immoral married African women appear in documents purportedly describing actual women in Africa and on colonial plantations. In his *History of Jamaica* (1774), Edward Long advises his colonial readers that “To allure [European] men from . . . illicit connexions [with African women] we ought to remove the principal obstacles which deter them from marriage. This will be chiefly effected by rendering women of their own complexion more agreeable companions, more frugal, trusty, and faithful friends than can be met with among the African ladies.” In this quote, Long implies that white women should exert themselves more and compete with the “African ladies” by promoting themselves as the indisputable bastions of all the best connubial qualities so that they may counter the white man’s easy sexual access to “African ladies” who, as mistresses, display all of these domestic qualities without expecting any commitment of marriage. This, of course, was a battle that white women could not win. As Catherine Hall notes, “A family was an incumbrance: a mistress more convenient.” It was Long who also proposed that the “amorous intercourse between [Africans and Orangutans] may be frequent,” a preposterous assertion which caused one critic to make this 1788 statement about the consequences of this most unnatural of couplings: “may it not be fairly conjectured, that the female negroes who live wandering in the wilds of Africa, are, there, frequently surprised and deflowered by the owran-outang [sic], or other such brutes; that from thence they become reconciled, as other women who are more civilized easily are, to similar attacks, and continue to cohabit with them?” Grounded as they are in the discourse of factual realism that pervades colonial writings, these depictions of African women and marriage are in direct competition with the ideal impressions of the African marriage and the married African woman that Dunton and Kotzebue create.

If, however, we consider Dunton’s paradox and *The Negro Slaves* as forming two ends of a historical frame that stretches from 1707 to 1796, and thus, bookends these negative portrayals of fictional and actual African women, Kotzebue’s play can be seen as deliberate in its effort to resurrect the positive portrayal of the African marriage plot despite these widely prevailing impressions of extreme and unnatural promiscuity and infidelity that hounded African women. This fictionalized Africanist intervention is, as Toni Morrison points out, not designed to be suggestive of “the larger body

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of knowledge about Africa . . . nor to suggest the varieties and complexities of African people and their descendants who have inhabited Britain. Rather, William’s acknowledgment of Ada’s African marital virtue underscores some anxiety about the European self that the African heroine in Kotzebue’s play is designed to identify and perhaps politicize. His employment of the fictional African woman in this manner has an important precursor in the Oroonokos that were altered during the late 1750s.

This book traces the interventions that fictional African women make into marriage plots in plays and novels from British literature. In its six chapters, I trace these interventions as they shift from the implicit antislavery roots established in Behn’s novella and Southerne’s play to a far more pronounced abolitionist tone in texts produced toward the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This chapter, however, is devoted exclusively to the Hardwicke Marriage Act of 1753, Southerne’s Oroonoko, and three Oroonoko adaptations that make important interventions into the discourses of marriage and slavery in the late 1750s.

When they are historically paired, the Hardwicke Marriage Act and the three adaptations of Southerne’s Oroonoko published during the 1759–60 theater season can be read as a collection of markers illustrating the more serious face that British writers and legislators are putting to the nation’s approaches to slavery and marriage. By radically altering the clandestine manner in which the marriage institution worked and enforcing a host of marital regulations, Hardwicke’s Marriage Act improved the laughable reputation that marriage had prior to 1753. Similarly, John Hawkesworth, Francis Gentleman, and an anonymous author each radically alter Southerne’s Oroonoko by removing the comedic plot involving Charlotte and Lucy Weldon, thereby focusing exclusive attention on the tragedy befalling the African slaves Oroonoko and Imoinda. These legal and dramatic texts suggest that the 1750s are marked by a deliberate tendency toward seriousness on

13. John Hawkesworth, Oroonoko (London: Bathurst, 1759); Francis Gentleman, Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave (Glasgow: Foulis, 1760); Anonymous, Oroonoko A Tragedy (London: Corbett, 1760). All subsequent references refer to these texts. The London Stage (4:1, 378–79) records four performances of a play entitled The Royal Captive, or A Wife For Ye All at Southwark Fair (September 18–24, 1753). This could be the earliest attempt to rewrite Oroonoko during the 1750s. But The London Stage lists no author or playlist, and no manuscript appears to exist. Given the year this play was produced, a double title that establishes a connection between the themes of slavery and marriage, and its performance in the unregulated space of “Southwark Fair,” this lost manuscript could have explored an entirely different avenue for examining the Hardwicke Act’s relationship to slaves and slavery.
the issues of slavery and marriage, a tendency that the lawyer William Blackstone would refer to as “all the rage of modern improvement” in 1759.\footnote{An Analysis of the laws of England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1759), xxvii.}

However, far from simply improving the reputations of marriage and slavery, in this chapter I argue that some of the alterations made in these legal and dramatic texts actually serve to strengthen domestic as well as colonial paternalism, and establish a collective threat of paternal tyranny at home in England and abroad in the colonies. In particular, my reading of Hardwicke’s eighteenth clause suggests that the threat of paternal tyranny that Hardwicke’s act threatened to establish over the marital choices of free minors in England was a reality enjoyed by West Indian masters who ignored the most basic idea of slave unions in order to establish another heinous ideology in its stead. Similarly, although altering Southerne’s \textit{Oroonoko} into a complete tragedy that focuses on the enslavement of its African hero and heroine should, theoretically, be a vehicle for making a more profound anti-slavery statement, the alterations done to the white Imoinda—specifically those made to her religion, dress, and marriage—transform the heroine’s confrontation with paternal tyranny in the colonies in ways that do not always aid the antislavery agenda. I read only one of the three \textit{Oroonoko} adaptations as effective in its attempt to transform Southerne’s drama into a contemporary response to the social injustice of slavery because it alters Imoinda’s characterization in a manner that keeps alive the African spirit of Southerne’s heroine, and it identifies the problem of paternal tyranny as a transatlantic issue rather than a purely colonial one. Ultimately, my examination of the Hardwicke Act alongside these altered \textit{Oroonoko}s starts this book’s quest to reclaim the African Imoinda by beginning to establish how this fictional woman and her marriage plot become actively involved in antislavery intervention. It also provides a foundational moment for positioning the fictional African woman in British literature, offering an explicit date, text, and occasion from which to see what Felicity Nussbaum has called the “spectral presence”\footnote{Limits of the Human (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 188.} of the eighteenth-century black African woman emerging from the shadow of her white African counterpart.

\textbf{BEFORE 1753} the institution of marriage was a laughable experience in British life. As David Lemmings notes: “the law of marriage that applied in England had degenerated into a confused and contradictory mess by the early eighteenth century.”\footnote{“Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century: Hardwicke’s Marriage Act of 1753,” \textit{Historical Journal} 39 (1996): 344.} This was because clandestine marriages—irregu-
lar marriages which, most commonly, breached the “church’s rules relating to publicity”\textsuperscript{17}—were a favored approach for a significant number of Britons of every age and rank, especially in major metropolitan areas. These marriages were cheap, discreet, and readily performed by impoverished clerics who supplemented meager incomes by presiding over as many of these ceremonies as they could. Clandestine marriages were also remarkably quick since clerics usually dispensed with the time-consuming practices of banns and licenses, and took advantage of a loophole in the law that deemed a simple exchange of vows before witnesses enough to ratify a marital union.\textsuperscript{18} Such rapidity caused one contemporary commentator to remark, “marriage may be . . . made up in less time than a suit of cloaths.”\textsuperscript{19} After the Glorious Revolution, many attempts were made to regulate clandestine marriages, but to little avail. Outhwaite notes that “English marriage law experienced . . . remarkably few changes before 1753,”\textsuperscript{20} and the clandestine marriage trade continued to thrive as clerics continued marrying Britons in provincial taverns, inns and alehouses, brandy shops and boarding houses. Far from being a solemn act, marriage was, simply, a lucrative business that occupied a wide variety of people of every age, rank, and means.

Ultimately, it was the alarming prospect of wealthy heirs and heiresses being forced or duped into inappropriate marriages that drove Parliament toward a concerted attempt to alter this heretofore laughable institution, force Britons to take it more seriously, and improve the institutional reputation of marriage in general. As its formal title indicates, the 1753 “Act for the better preventing of Clandestine Marriages” was designed to halt the rise of unregulated marriages taking place at alarming rates.\textsuperscript{21} Clerics who performed marriage ceremonies without abiding by Hardwicke’s strict regu-

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  \item \textsuperscript{18} Outhwaite writes: “the medieval church had taken up the position that wedding vows made in the present tense, freely uttered between two people who were legally at liberty to marry, constituted the very essence of marriage. Once the knot was tied by such verbal exchanges it could not be undone: a valid marriage was technically indissoluble.” \textit{Clandestine Marriage}, xiii.
  \item \textsuperscript{19} \textit{A Letter to the Public} (London: Marsh, 1753), 30–31.
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Outhwaite, \textit{Clandestine Marriage}, 19.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} “Wrigley and Schofield have estimated that about 47,500 marriages per annum occurred on average in the years 1750–53. If nearly 6,000 marriages by license were irregular, and there were about an equal number of weddings in the London marriage shops, this would mean that at least a quarter of all weddings taking place were technically clandestine.” Ibid., 48–49.
\end{itemize}
lations concerning banns, licenses, witnesses, age, residence, registration, location, and timing requirements could face serious punishments of fines, transportation, and even death. In this way, the Hardwicke Marriage Act radically transformed the making of marriage in Britain by both regulating and enforcing its contractual terms. Yet for all its presumed interest in promoting the common good of marriage, one political reporter was unsure “whether it would not produce greater mischiefs than it would prevent.” His concern was prophetic.

The passage of the Marriage Act in the Commons after its third reading in 1753 and its eventual implementation in 1754 had significant impacts on some very specific segments of English society. For minors under twenty-one, an age restriction gave parents and guardians considerable control over when and to whom their children or wards betrothed themselves. Eve Tavor Bannet has also shown that women became more socially vulnerable under the new terms of the act. For, after 1753, the simple exchange of vows that had previously served as legitimate legal proof of a woman’s matrimonial claim to a man became null and void, meaning that if a woman copulated with a man on the expectation of marriage but had not legally married according to Hardwicke’s stipulations, the man could refuse to fulfill her matrimonial claim, thereby ruining her reputation and bastardizing her children. Contemporary opponents of the bill, such as Robert Nugent, argued that it “will discourage marriage of the poorer sort . . . by this act they will be prevented from doing it without great deliberation, many will not do it at all,” thereby increasing their perceived propensity for sexual profligacy and the production of bastards. More recently, David Lemmings has even shown that “the Marriage Act was consistently less supportive of the role of mothers in marriage decisions.” For these groups, Hardwicke’s act immediately changed perceptions about a laughable, private act consisting of a simple exchange of vows into a public and legally restrictive one with serious repercussions in terms of losses of power, choice, protection, and access that did not necessarily improve their lives or those of their children.

On the other hand, historians are in complete agreement that one role was strengthened and improved under Hardwicke. Misty Anderson’s book, "Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on

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the London Stage, states that “the act favored the interests of parents over the liberty of children,” and Erica Harth is even more precise in defining the exact type of parent whose interest was improved under Hardwicke when she writes that his act “was to close up loopholes in existing legislation on marriage that allowed minors to marry without parental (read, paternal) consent.” Lemmings develops Harth’s assertion further, claiming that the “rhetoric of M.Ps who promoted the measure and its evolution in parliament provide strong evidence of continuing patriarchal and materialistic instincts. . . . Children and especially daughters . . . remained essential objects of commerce in the accumulation of property that underwrote the power of the male parliamentary elite.” Of course, there was a specific economic rationale behind this interest in improving paternalist power. As Harth notes, “for those in power in 1753, considerations of love and marriage were embedded in those of money and property”; thus, paternal control over whom heirs would marry meant that property and money could be restricted to families within one social, usually aristocratic, class. This type of paternal control over the economics of marriage was, undoubtedly, an infringement on the free choice of the individual child, and, in particular, it had the potential to greatly affect young marriageable women who could be exposed to the threat of making economic rather than affective unions that suited the wills of their fathers. Thus, while the improvements to the lives of English women, minors, mothers, and the poor were questionable under the new marriage act, the improvement that it gave to its English male proponents is, historically, unquestionable.

LEMINGS, HARTH, Outhwaite, and others have considered, at length, this unquestionable paternalist bias present in the Hardwicke Marriage Act, yet they devote hardly any consideration as to whether this bias affects groups outside Britain that were still within the purview of British legal control. In this section, I want to consider the serious implications that the Hardwicke Act had on one of the groups deliberately excluded from its field of influence. Many groups were. In its final condition, British Quakers and Jews gained exemption from Hardwicke’s tenets, as did Scottish residents and the royal family. But another interesting restriction also lies buried in the eight-

31. Outhwaite pays attention to the fact that certain sites in Scotland and the Isle of Mann became havens for elopers, but not much else exists on this issue. Clandestine Marriage, 95.
teenth clause. It states that this law did not extend to the colonies—“to any marriages solemnized beyond the seas.” What were the implications of such a statement for individuals who were married in the West Indian colonies?

Given the paucity of information relating to the parliamentary debates, there is no direct evidence available from which to make a positive assertion that this part of the clause was in any way devised with reference to the colonies. What proves striking, however, is the way in which clause xviii allows colonial masters to skillfully bypass the rigorous intent behind the Hardwicke Act. Even though its wording suggests a profound need to make some kind of legal distinction between the rigorously regulated new marriages that were to be performed and celebrated in England post 1753 and those being performed in British territories during the same period, this distinction did not mean that marriages “solemnized beyond the seas” were legally invalid in England. The lawyer Matthew Bacon states, “It has been laid down at the bar, that a marriage in a foreign country must be governed by the law of that country where the marriage was had,” a fact that leads Lord Sandwich to remark that “marriages solemnized beyond sea . . . are valid and binding here, or within the Kingdom of England, notwithstanding the provisions of the marriage act, so that they be legally solemnized according to the municipal laws of the respective countries where the ceremony is performed.” What clause xviii draws attention to, then, is the liberal underpinnings of Hardwicke’s allegedly rigorous legislation: it acknowledges that, post 1754, when the act goes into effect, England will have changed its approach to marriage, while its colonies will be operating under their own, less rigorous, approaches to it. Erica Harth has pointed out that Hardwicke’s rigorous regulations were primarily designed to keep the stratification rich and poor intact; by controlling marriage, English paternalists could ensure that their rich sons and daughters married within their own rank. Since the Hardwicke Act was designed to accommodate this English paternalist bias, it is worth investigating whether the less rigorous standards pertaining to

32. For a complete list of the Marriage Act’s clauses as they were finally conceived, see Outhwaite’s Appendix 2 in _Clandestine Marriage_ (173–80). In Appendix 1 he also includes the bill that preceded the final act. In this bill, the restriction against marriages “solemnized overseas” does not appear to be one of the things legislators were originally concerned with, thereby suggesting that the restriction developed later as Hardwicke imposed his influence over the final drafting of the act. On Hardwicke’s influence, Outhwaite writes, “Though the 1753 committee of judges did reveal a determination to bring clandestinity under control by the simple device of annulling irregular marriages, events might well have proceeded as in the past but for the intervention of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke. He took control of the Lords’ Bill and refashioned it in his habitual painstaking way” (94).


34. _The Kingston Cause_ (London: Wheble, 1776), 43.

“marriages solemnized beyond the seas” also allowed colonial masters the freedom to control the making of marriage laws and practices in their own way and to their own interest. In short, is the freedom that colonial paternalists had to define and control marriage in the West Indies a bias that is deliberately designed to guarantee the stratification master and slave?

In the West Indian colonies, legal mandates and acts about marriage are remarkably rare. Nothing extensive appears in the acts of assembly passed between 1691 and 1769 in Jamaica or Barbados. In fact, in Jamaica, not one act passed during this period pertained specifically to marriage. Despite this absence, however, marriages between West Indian planter families obviously did take place, presumably in accordance with English law. But masters had no interest in extending slaves legal rights of consent to give and take of each other’s hands in marriage. As Cecilia Green shows: “marriage among slaves had not been the subject of law or of the slave codes because, slaves being legal non-entities, the possibility had no conception in law,” an oversight that William Wilberforce would refer to as “the acknowledged neglect of any attempt to introduce regular marriage among [slaves].” But in the 1750s this “acknowledged neglect” was deliberate, willful, and economically motivated. As Green states: “The planters, for their part, were unshaken in their certitude that the slaves were a species of property, their property no less, and that the idea of any kind of formal marriage among them was preposterous, a great impertinence, an attack on their authority and rights of property, a threat to public safety, and a dangerous intrusion upon the sacrosanctity of European racial exclusivity and superiority.”

Putting aside questions about slaves and the religious practices that could have prevented them from engaging in formal Christian marriages, it may, at first, seem strange that West Indian planters during the 1750s did not even encourage informal coupling to increase a plantation’s slave workforce by natural reproduction. Although this practice was successfully used to increase slave populations in American plantations, it made very little economic sense to the minds of West Indian planters. “Before the abolition of the slave trade placed a premium on their reproductive capacity,” Green observes, “enslaved African women (like their menfolk) were brought in

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38. The Debate on a Motion for the Abolition of the Slave-Trade, in the House of Commons (London: Woodfall, 1791), 16.

predominantly as estate workhorses or productive laborers," and rather than rearing new slave hands through a lengthy nurturing period as Richard Beckford attempted on his Jamaican plantation, a far greater majority of Beckford’s contemporaries favored what they thought was the most financially expedient method of working existing slave hands to death and replacing them with plentiful supplies coming to the colonies fresh from Africa. This way, planters felt that they avoided the financial costs of maintaining children during the years that they would be all-consuming, nonproducing plantation hands. Slaves were, thus, not required to marry, couple, or procreate to increase a planter’s profits; they need only work to death for their masters.

Of course, such a suicidal ideology was not the method used to extort wealth from the British metropolitan work force. Evoking Adam Smith’s use of hands as a “synecdoche . . . of Enlightenment Political Economy,” Eve Tavor Bannet notes that the 1753 Marriage Act in Britain was essentially a means of forcefully manufacturing British children who would become new working hands for the Empire since Smith and other influential political thinkers had concluded that population increase was essential to a country’s economic prosperity. Encouraging marriage was not only a way to force lower-class populations to procreate so as to provide “a continual supply of industrious and laborious poor,” but, as one contemporary supporter of the Hardwicke Act asserts, “marriage produces the greatest number of mature and valuable members of society,” a comment that includes British workers as valued and prized components of metropolitan society both for their longevity as workers and for their material contributions. Thus, while “England was for families,” as Catherine Hall has asserted in her book Civilising Subjects (2002), “Jamaica was for [African suicide as much as it was about] sex” for colonial whites.

With a political ideology prescribing formal, legal, and Christian marriages as a way to nurture and increase Britain’s population and wealth in blatant opposition to the suicidal ideology that did not even encourage informal coupling for slaves in the colonies, the practice of slavery and the ideal of marriage in the 1750s are completely antithetical yet working toward the same ends: the construction of the Great British Empire in a way that

40. Ibid., 44.
43. A Letter to the Public containing the substance of what hath been offered in the late Debates upon the subject of the Act of Parliament for the better preventing of clandestine marriages (London: Marsh, 1753), 21.
44. Hall, Civilising Subjects, 72.
continues the paternalist dominance and control of white men at home and abroad. By legally restricting Britain’s newly emerging idea of marriage to British shores, the Hardwicke Act maintained paternal power and control of the making of marriage for individuals at home; but its restrictive clause xviii also had a profound effect on West Indian slaves, not because they were going to be governed by Hardwicke’s mandates. Rather, it shows that colonial paternalists have the legal freedom to willfully ignore even the most basic idea of slave coupling out of their own economic self-interest. I am suggesting that the legal latitude to buy slaves rather than breed them through coupling was just as important to the maintenance of paternal power and money as well as the perpetuation of the master–slave dynamic in the colonies as the making of marriage was for the maintenance of aristocratic paternalist power in England. It is the freedom that the Hardwicke Act and its clause xviii gave to paternalists at home and abroad over the making of marriage and the disregard for slave coupling, then, that allows for this rigorous enforcement of a distinction between dying slave hands and living British ones—all working toward the financial improvement of members of the landed classes and the interests of Empire.

To be sure, the economic benefits behind this paternalist freedom to control the making of marriage were not lost on the makers of the Hardwicke Act. But there is also an implicit suggestion that these same lawmakers were also aware of the economic benefits of allowing masters to disregard the idea of slave couplings in the colonies. For it is, certainly, no coincidence that Lord Hardwicke, the magistrate whose name is synonymous with fashioning and influencing the act, was by real name Philip Yorke, the Attorney General who, in 1729 during an after-dinner speech at an inn of court with the Solicitor-General, Charles Talbot, issued the infamous “Yorke–Talbot decision.” Their informal decision determined that slaves did not confer freedom on themselves either by becoming Christians or by arriving in England from the colonies.45 Now, as Lord Chancellor responsible for a bill that Lawrence Stone describes as “a triumph of cunning draftsmanship,”46 Hardwicke saw that his power and legal influence were greatly enlarged. His Marriage Act and its bias toward paternalists’ interests have a direct connection to this earlier Yorke–Talbot decision. With its tacit acknowledgment that the colonial approach to marriage can legally exclude slaves and enforce a working suicide for them, clause xviii of the Hardwicke Marriage Act reinforced the policy that had been informally ratified by the Yorke–Talbot decision:

46. See Outhwaite, Clandestine Marriage, 95.
masters’ property rights and the freedom to safeguard them always supersedes slaves’ rights to humanity.\textsuperscript{47} Lemmings supports this assertion when he identifies this bias at the heart of Hardwicke’s marriage act: “For the lord chancellor and for the majority of both houses of parliament in 1753 . . . individual happiness had to take second place when weighted in the scale against the patriarchal family.”\textsuperscript{48} In other words, minors in England must put their father’s family interests before their own matrimonial inclinations. In the colonies, working slaves must do the same for the enslaver.

At its core, then, the Hardwicke Act has a tangibly insidious bias in favor of the paternalist that affects far more than just the white women, minors, wives, and the poor on English shores; its very existence implicates both British law and the lawmakers who sought to standardize metropolitan mores about marriage in the practice of creating conditions that gave paternalists at home and abroad the same economic and social advantage, allowing them the freedom to impose the paternalist ideologies in which the subjection of both enslaved and free individuals in the 1750s festered.\textsuperscript{49} Perhaps in anticipation of this potentiality, opponents of the Hardwicke marriage bill discussed the fear of “establishing . . . a tyrannical power in the father.”\textsuperscript{50} That fear was, certainly, true in the West Indian colonies, and it expressed itself openly in the 1750s adaptations of Southerne’s \textit{Oroonoko}.

\textbf{THIS IS} the legal, political, and social landscape in which altered \textit{Oroonoko} make their entrances in the 1759–60 theater season—a landscape in which the making and not-making of marriage is controlled by paternalists at home and abroad, and marriage itself is seen as antithetical to the material interests and progress of slavery, irrelevant in the lives of slaves in the British colonies, yet essential to the economic, social, and moral progress of Britons and Britain itself.

Contemporary events made the 1750s a ripe opportunity for transforming the tragic and comedic marriage plots of Southerne’s \textit{Oroonoko} into a more focused political text. Although \textit{Oroonoko} had been an annual staple throughout the early eighteenth century, the \textit{London Stage} reveals that it

\textsuperscript{47} Green acknowledges this connection in her work on Stephen. See “‘A Civil Inconvenience’?” 24.

\textsuperscript{48} Lemmings, “Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century,” 349. See also notes 34 and 37 in Lemming’s essay.

\textsuperscript{49} Jamaican slave laws, for example, were not standardized until 1781. Before this, it was generally left up to each planter to mandate his plantation’s code of conduct. This desire to publicly regulate the slave codes must be seen as a response to what the planters believed to be an attack on their rights during the 1770s, especially with the 1772 Mansfield Judgment.

\textsuperscript{50} Lemmings, “Marriage and the Law in the Eighteenth Century,” 349. Also see notes 34 and 37 in this chapter.
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went through a seasonal drought in one of the patent theaters at the end of the 1740s, when *Oroonoko* "was not acted these last five years." The play’s resounding revival at Drury Lane in 1751, with eleven performances that season, seems indirectly influenced by the circulation of well-documented cases involving African princes unjustly abducted into slavery. The 1749 and 1750 editions of the popular periodical the *Gentleman’s Magazine* make much of the busts and narratives of two of them—Jon Ben Soloman and William Ansah Sessarakoo—sold into slavery but ultimately rescued. These princes and their narratives obviously coincide with the experience of Southerne’s hero except for their more fortunate outcomes. The fact that the same popular periodical mentions another African princely abduction on May 9, 1759, roughly seven months before the first altered *Oroonoko* appears on the Drury Lane stage, suggests that, after a significant lull in the 1740s, the revival of interest in, as well as the subsequent alteration of, Southerne’s *Oroonoko* in the 1750s may both be closely tied to the circulation of narratives about the real experiences of enslaved African princes. The recognition that Southerne’s play is a theatrical experience that encapsulates, critiques, or, at the very least, comments on the real tyranny befalling African princes in contemporary Britain may have made *Oroonoko* the politically charged expression of social injustice to see during this period.

As a contemporary expression of paternal tyranny and social injustice, however, Southerne’s play needed to be updated, and a 1752 *Gentleman’s Magazine* article had already suggested how this could be done. In it, an anonymous critic calls for “the first gallant attempt” from a writer “who will first have courage enough to deviate from the beaten track” and institute new scenes in place of the comic ones, thereby transforming Southerne’s *Oroonoko* into an “intire tragedy” of five acts associated with all great classical tragedies. Three writers take up this challenge.

51. *London Stage* (4:I, 267–68). Notes for the Wednesday 23 performance state that *Oroonoko* “was acted but once these five years.” This refers only to the Drury Lane theater, since the play was performed intermittently at Covent Garden during the late 1740s. In the 1750s, performances of *Oroonoko* were chiefly held at Drury Lane under Garrick’s management. J. R. Oldfield, in “‘The Ties Of soft Humanity’: Slavery and Race in British Drama, 1760–1800,” states that, “despite the early success of Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, by 1750 the play was clearly losing its appeal” (*Huntington Library Quarterly* 56 [1993]: 2). I argue that contemporary references to African princes made interest in the play pick up during the decade.

52. *Gentleman’s Magazine* 19 (1749): 89–90 and 20 (1750): 272–73. In the article we are told, “Job Ben Soloman was a person of great distinction in his own country’ and William Ansa Sessarakoo has an even more illustrious history as ‘son of John Bannishee, Corrantee Chinee of Anamaboe and of Euuobab, Daughter of Ansah Sessarakoo, King of Aquamboe and niece to Quishadoe King of Akroan.’ Also, the *London Stage* (4:I, 95) states that the “mainpiece” *Oroonoko* was presented “for the entertainment of two young Africans” on February 2, 1749, one of whom was Sessarakoo.

53. Ibid., 29 (1759): 240.

Significant differences between these writers begin to emerge when we consider how they acknowledge themselves as Southerne’s “editors.” On his title page (Figure 1), John Hawkesworth appears very circumspect about the extent of his alterations. He does not include his name despite being publicly identified as the editor,\(^5\) and he even gives the impression that his editorial role is minor when he announces that the play is “by Thomas Southerne,” “with alterations” in smaller capitals. Gentleman includes his name on his title page (figure 2), but even he does not draw attention to his two major alterations (new characters Massingano and Zinzo) until the dramatis personae. By contrast, the anonymous author’s title page boasts of adding “near six hundred lines in place of the comic scenes. Together with the addition of two new characters” (figure 3).

Where Hawkesworth and Gentleman’s circumspection about their alterations suggest both modesty and a desire to make sure Southerne’s own artistic authenticity live on through his altered text, the anonymous writer deliberately draws attention to the originator’s absence, addressing him as “the late Thomas Southerne.” In boldly advertising and quantifying the alterations while also reminding us of the author’s death—all on the first page—the anonymous author seems intent on being recognized as Oroonoko’s consummate “editor” in a way that Gentleman and Hawkesworth are not.

A possible reason for these different editorial approaches appears the more closely we examine these title pages. Gentleman’s version represents Oroonoko “as it was performed at the Theatre in Edinburgh with universal applause,” while Hawkesworth’s captures Oroonoko “as it is now acted at the Theatre at Drury Lane.” Publishing their texts after, or during, successful metropolitan runs, these writers are merely recreating, for the reader, performances that they have already viewed or are able to see in each specific locale, a practice of play publication that Peter Holland traces back to the Restoration period.\(^6\) No specific location is mentioned for the anonymous tragedy. It is only randomly “intended for one of the theatres.” But the anonymous author directly addresses this text’s preface “to the reader,” establishing that this tragedy is aimed at a readership irrespective of a viewership. Thus, the anonymous author appears to radically alter Oroonoko for a readership that may never see it performed, while Gentleman and Hawkesworth give the appearance that they are resisting altering Oroonoko not only out of deference to Southerne, but also because their readers may have already seen it in performance.

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\(^5\) “great alterations in Oroonoko by Dr. Hawkesworth—Garr” (Garrick), London Stage (4:II, 759).

\(^6\) The Ornament of Action (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 99.
OROONOKO,
A TRAGEDY,
As it is now Acted at the
THEATRE-ROYAL
In DRURY-LANE.
BY
His MAJESTY'S SERVANTS.

By THOMAS SOUTHERN.
With Alterations.

—Quo fata trahunt, virtus secura sequetur.
Lucan. lib. 2. v. 287.

Virtus, recludens immeritus mori
Caelum, negat a tentas iter viá.
Hor. Od. 2. lib. 3.

LONDON:
Printed for C. BATHURST, at the Cross-Keys, in Fleet-Street; and the rest of the PROPRIETORS.
MDCCLIX.
Oroonoko: or the Royal Slave. A Tragedy. Altered from Southern, by Francis Gentleman. As it was Performed at the Theatre in Edinburgh, with universal Applause.

Glasgow: Printed by Robert and Andrew Foulis M.DCC.LX.
Oroonoko.
A Tragedy.

Altered from the original play of that name,

written by the late Thomas Southern, Esq.;

to which

the editor has added near six hundred lines, in place of the comic scenes.

together

with an addition of two new characters.

intended for one of the theatres.

London:
Printed for A. and C. Corbett, in Fleet-street.
M DCC IX.
(Price One Shilling.)
In the decade where the *Oroonoko* drama appears to speak to the real contemporary problem of tyranny and social injustice, I point out the extent of each author’s desire to be known as an “editor” of Southerne’s *Oroonoko* because it leads to a question: what is the best way to update a play that has been in circulation for over sixty years so that it captures the decade’s serious mood on tyranny and social injustice? Obviously, Hawkesworth’s and Gentleman’s tragedies can lay claim to dispersing a far-reaching message. Their tragedies are performed in legitimate theaters with what seem to be minor alterations of Southerne’s work that, most importantly, speak to contemporary metropolitan audiences, making the populace more aware of, and open to, the antislavery rhetoric and themes already present in Southerne’s text. By contrast, the heavily altered, anonymous *Oroonoko* never gets a viewing. However, the author’s address “to the reader” suggests that it wasn’t intended to. Perhaps these three *Oroonokos*, in attempting to reach two different audiences—a viewing one and a reading one—were trying to update *Oroonoko* in two very different ways. J. R. Oldfield, in what is, to my knowledge, the only existing examination of these three *Oroonokos* simultaneously, suggests that they should be read in a hierarchy of antislavery affect beginning with Hawkesworth’s as the least inflammatory and ending with the anonymous author’s as the most.  

While I agree with this general interpretation, I would add that the differences noticed in the title pages and prefaces of these three *Oroonokos* provide a clear example of what Peter Holland calls “the distinction between reading and seeing, between the two modes of consumption of the text.” The effectiveness of each text’s response to the contemporary tyranny and social injustice of slavery, therefore, may depend on each author’s understanding of whether his “intire tragedy” about African slavery was meant to be seen or to be read during the 1759–60 theatrical season.

THOMAS SOUTHERNE was, in fact, the first dramatist to make “the distinction between reading and seeing, between the two modes of consumption of the [Oroonoko] text.” It was he who changed the genre of the story from Behn’s novella and popularized it in a stage drama; it was he who took out the African and middle passage sections of the story and made the action take place solely in Surinam; it was he who also introduced brand new char-

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57. I extract this idea implicitly from the order in which Oldfield discusses these texts as well as his statement that the anonymous *Oroonoko* “addressed slavery most directly,” “The Ties Of soft Humanity,” 5. See also the first chapter of his *Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery* (Manchester, UK: St. Martin’s Press, 1994), 7–41.

acters, Aboan and Blandford, as well as the brand new comic plot involving the Welldon sisters. However, one of his alterations had the most profound effect on the difference between seeing and reading *Oroonoko*: he makes his Imoinda white where Behn’s is black. Usually, no distinction is made between Southerne’s textual and staged white heroine. Critics think of them as the same. However, I want to contend that there are, in fact, two white Imoindas that Southerne creates. One for the stage, the other for the pages of his published text.

Novak and Rhodes indicate that *Oroonoko* was “attractive to the ladies in the audience” and they assume that Southerne’s skill at “pathetic tragedy” was the basis of this attraction; yet the hero’s tragic demise was not the only thing that made this play “the Favourite of the Ladies.” Obviously, by radically altering the skin color of the heroine and presenting a white Imoinda on the stage instead of the black woman that Behn created, Southerne encouraged the women in his audience to visually identify with a white-skinned, virtuous heroine. At least “Mr. Ryan, on the first Time of his playing the part of Oroooko [sic]” thought fit to tell them as much: “If Southerne’s Imoinda’s chaste and beauteous too,” he remarks in his prologue, “That Copy, Ladies, he transcrib’d from you.” Ryan’s soliloquy offers a contemporary explanation for Southerne’s radical presentation of a white Imoinda: she is designed to flatter the English female audience who watch her, and much of the criticism about Imoinda’s whiteness has been written from this visual perspective. For instance, Joyce Green Macdonald’s thoughtful essay, “The Disappearing African Woman: Imoinda in *Oroonoko* after Behn,” provides a valid and convincing argument that demonstrates how Southerne’s white heroine eclipses black female representations and appropriates a cloak of antislavery, which, surreptitiously, creates more sympathy for oppressed white feminism than African slavery. For Macdonald, Southerne’s Imoinda is not seen as an African. But if this is true, then how was she seen?

The frontispieces that appear at the beginnings of some of the published versions of Southerne’s play provide a glimpse of how Imoinda was seen onstage. Many of these illustrations are contained in Felicity Nussbaum’s *Limits of the Human* (2003), and in the vast majority of these, Imoinda’s

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60. Ibid.
whiteness is visually and unambiguously self-evident, and, perhaps, underscored even more by the obvious contrast between her white skin color and Oroonoko’s blackness. However, Nussbaum includes one frontispiece, “Mrs. S. Kemble as Imoinda” (figure 4), in which the heroine is depicted without Oroonoko, and by a clearly identified living actress. Even though Nussbaum does not include them in her book, there are other frontispieces of this kind from the period featuring Harriet Litchfield (figure 5), Elizabeth Hartley (figure 6), and Sarah Smith (figure 7), each one depicted as standing alone in the character of Imoinda. Altogether, these types of independent illustrations depicting how Imoinda actually appeared onstage offer an opportunity to see how female audiences actually viewed her without the presence of Oroonoko’s blackness standing in relief to define her.

Apart from a generalized exoticizing that is sometimes evoked through a well-placed feather as in Kemble’s and Litchfield’s cases, a bow and arrow as seen in Hartley’s portrayal, or the sarilike sash and turban that appear in the majority of these frontispieces, there is nothing about any of these actresses or their costumes that explicitly spells out Imoinda’s African origins. The closest attempts to Africanize Imoinda are, perhaps, made in two of the illustrations. In Hartley’s, an animal-print pattern overwhelms her elaborate sash and a significant part of her bodice and sleeves, and this exoticizing effect is accompanied by what appear to be feathers and/or other pelts of animals in her hair and on her sleeves, sash, and petticoat. Although this type of costuming creates the visual impression that Hartley is fully adorned in the natural dress of a wild country, these accoutrements do not explicitly Africanize her, nor do they essentially differentiate her elaborate dress from one that a rich, white woman in the audience might wear. In her portrayal of Imoinda, Hartley displays herself as a rich English woman would if she had the economic means to embellish herself with the spoils of empire, and certainly not as a female slave who has spent most of her life in Africa as the play’s narrative actually demands. In the second potentially Africanizing depiction, involving Sarah Smith, the actress’s skin appears to have been cosmetically darkened. If this is not the case, the alabaster whiteness of Smith’s dress and shawl contrast so much with her skin color that it creates the overall impression that she may be a racially indistinct Other, rather than a purely white, Imoinda. But even in this onstage depiction of a dark-skinned Imoinda, nothing specifically ties her cosmetic darkness to Africa, and moreover, Smith’s white muslin dress is so completely bereft of any other exotic accoutrements that its plainness forcefully associates the actress with the outfit most recognizable to, and associated with, the everyday English woman. In both of these potentially Africanizing depictions, then, costuming and cosmetic devices do not explicitly convey African-ness in the manner
Figure 4.
Mrs. S. Kemble as Imoinda, 1791. Elizabeth Kemble (1763?–1841)
Figure 5.
Harriet Litchfield (1777–1854) as Imoinda, 1807
Figure 6.
Mrs. Hartley in the character of Imoinda, 1777. Elizabeth Hartley (1750?–1824)
Figure 7.
Miss Smith as Imoinda, 1806. Sarah Smith (1783–1850)
that the frontispiece to Thomas Bellamy’s *The Benevolent Planters* (1787) does with its depiction of the black stage-heroine, Selima, who despite having the actress’s customary white dress and exotic feather in her hair also has black skin and African hair, as well as what seems to be an actual animal fur rather than an animal-print style fabric draped over her shoulders (Figure 8). Despite whatever exotic accoutrements adorn their white bodies, English actresses are still able to connect and identify with English female audiences of any rank because of their familiarity of dress.

These staged representations of familiar white women in an African role are nothing like the illustration of familiar yet distinct female African-ness in Jane Barker’s novel, *Exilius* (1715). The Numidian, Princess Galecia,

was a Lady of a masculine spirit, and undervalu’d the little delicacies of her sex, making the study of philosophy and the laws of her country, her chief business. . . . Her person was extreamly agreeable; for though she was very tall of stature, and somewhat of an African complexion, nevertheless the exact symmetry of parts, and fine features, render’d her equal to the most compleat European beauty.

In *Limits of the Human*, Nussbaum analyzes a masculinized illustration of Imoinda from 1816 that almost equals this depiction of Galecia, but Nussbaum’s illustration is clearly an artist’s rendering of a scene from the play produced over 100 years after Barker’s novel rather than a staged representation of a living actress in the role. In the frontispieces that I present here, none of the actresses come close to conveying the uncanny impression that Galecia embodies as an African woman who is temperamentally and physically distinct yet equal to her European peers. Instead, the white actresses who play Imoinda onstage are as temperamentally familiar to an English female spectator as their skin color and costumes are. Imoinda’s onstage temperament can be detected in the differences between the frontispiece actresses. Kemble, Smith, and Litchfield look well and have fine costumes, but their portrayals of Imoinda are much less gaudy than Hartley’s: where they all have turbans, Hartley’s wig is swept up in an elaborate bun that cascades down to her shoulders; where they all have relatively flattering petticoats and modestly printed sashes, or a plain white shawl in Smith’s case, Hartley’s circle petticoat most emphasizes the shapeliness of her figure, giving it the illusion of an extremely narrow waist, and her animal-print pattern dominates most of

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64. This is, clearly, not an actual depiction of a white woman cosmetically altered. It is, rather, an artist’s rendering of the scene.

65. (London: Curll, 1715), 32.

THE
BENEVOLENT PLANTERS.
A Dramatic Piece,
as performed at the
Theatre Royal, Haymarket.
WITTEN BY THOMAS BELLAMY.

So 2. For Owen is only no more.

LONDON.
printed for J. Dibdill opposite Burlington House
Piccadilly, 1789.

Title page, The Benevolent Planters, 1789, Thomas Bellamy (1745–1800)
her costume; where the other actresses appear full-frontal with their hands outstretched in a gesture of emotive appeal, Hartley’s Imoinda is, defiantly, in profile, her outstretched arms grasping a bow, her intent stare implying that she is taking aim at an intended target (the Deputy Governor, perhaps?). These costume differences capture Hartley and the other actresses who perform the role at different stages in the play and encourage spectators to see Imoinda’s onstage temperament as either defiantly rich and awe-inspiring or lovingly simple and sympathetic. But none of them encourage viewers to see her as markedly different in temperament from English women or as far outside the bounds of English femininity as the African princess Galecia is in Exilus.

The celebrity of the actresses who perform the Imoinda role also make the female viewer’s identification with Imoinda that much stronger. Sarah Kemble, Harriet Litchfield, Sarah Smith, and Elizabeth Hartley were all well known in their own right, and female audiences were drawn to the theater as much to see what these known stars were wearing and how beautiful they looked performing Imoinda than out of a need to see each actress’s portrayal of African slavery in Surinam. Despite some exotic visual cues and vague attempts to Otherize her persona, then, Imoinda is not clearly defined as African onstage; she is, in fact, celebrated as remarkably familiar to English women viewers in terms of temperament, appearance, and dress. The act of seeing Imoinda on the eighteenth-century stage is, thus, an experience that English women of any rank could readily identify with. In the final evaluation of her frontispieces, Nussbaum stresses, conclusively, that Oroonoko’s presence and Imoinda’s appearance had little bearing on the way audiences saw Imoinda. Despite these exoticizing visual cues, “Imoinda remains white.” In my examinations of the independent illustrations of actresses in the role of Imoinda, the visual effect is even more specific. Onstage, the supposedly African Imoinda is actually seen as white and familiarly English by female spectators. Macdonald is right. The African woman does disappear on Southerne’s stage. An English woman replaces her.

However, in the many published editions of Oroonoko that do not contain frontispieces, the female reader’s identification and familiarity with Imoinda is not made as easily as it is between female spectators and the actresses who perform the role. In fact, although much is made of Imoinda’s beauty throughout the play, whiteness, when it is explicitly mentioned, is not even directly evoked in relation to her character. During the second scene of

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67. Ibid., 182.
68. Macdonald argues that “an African woman would interfere too greatly with white women’s identificatory spectatorship of Oroonoko’s racial tragedy.” “Race, Women and the Sentimental in Thomas Southerne’s Oroonoko,” 559.
the second act, Oroonoko explains to Blandford, “There was a stranger in my father’s court, valu’d and honor’d much: he was a white, the first I ever saw of your complexion” (II.ii.38). Here, it is Imoinda’s father’s difference that is marked by a unique white complexion and the designation “stranger,” not Imoinda’s. His original nationality is not even mentioned at this point or elsewhere within the text. Within the same speech, Oroonoko immediately establishes that, whatever his past nationality was, this white man who was “valu’d and honor’d much” while still a “stranger” in the African court had long since established a more important connection to Angolan society that transformed his status within it: he “chang’d his God for ours and so grew great.” Whiteness, then, clearly did not preclude this man’s ability to be “valu’d and honor’d much” in this African society, but Oroonoko implies that this white man’s religious conversion guaranteed his social advancement and complete acceptance in Angolan society. Whiteness is, thus, an important category of difference in the published and read version of Oroonoko, but it is not the predominant one defining Imoinda’s father’s identity as overwhelmingly as it defined Imoinda in the frontispieces and stages that produced Oroonoko. Religion is, clearly, far more definitive for understanding the impression that he makes in Africa, and moreover, the way he is understood by the English Christian reader. Roxann Wheeler’s *Complexion of Race* (2000) has proved, persuasively, that religion and clothing were more important categories of difference than skin color in the early part of the eighteenth century for understanding how individuals distinguished themselves from each other. So we must read this apparently minor reference to her father’s act of religious conversion with the major importance that contemporary readers would have given to it irrespective of the white skin color held by the convert.

The suggestion that this white man of unknown national origins would give up his presumably Christian religion for a heathen one distinguishes him more as different from the English reader than similar to them merely because “he was a white.” Given this white man’s complete conversion and identification with African culture, there is every reason to believe that the “only daughter, whom he brought an infant to Angola” followed in her father’s footsteps and became even more assimilated to the African culture that their white skin colors indicate they were not born into because this African life is all that she has ever known. In the published text, Imoinda’s paganism is suggestively evoked by her father’s act of conversion, and like his, it is clearly a mark of her cultural identification with Africa. In addition, the “bow and quiver” (IV.ii) that Southerne’s text makes a point of emphasizing as the only identifiable part of her costume offers another reminder both of her African-ness, since it recreates the capacity for the aggressive
action that Behn’s original black heroine first displayed when she attacked the Governor with her own bow and poisoned arrows, and as a testament to her father’s heroism, since he is a war general killed by a bow in battle. Both of these clothing and religious categories of difference suggest that, on the written page, Southerne is deliberately constructing Imoinda with the heathen, savage, martial, and heroic propensities, not out of fear of a fertile black woman, as Lynda Boose believes was common for male writers at this time, but as a specific homage to the temperaments of both the black African heroine depicted in Behn’s novella and the white African father evoked but not present in Southerne’s own text. Southerne’s textual Imoinda is, thus, martially, religiously, temperamentally, and heroically a complete white African.

I am arguing that religion and dress are important signifiers of Imoinda’s African disposition in the read versions of Southerne’s text. They are far more important categories of difference than skin color because they draw out the full import of Imoinda’s identity and underscore how different she is from the Christian English reader, whereas the English temperament, dress, and white skin color seen in the performances of Oroonoko allow female spectators to readily identify with Imoinda. To put this distinction plainly, in performances of Oroonoko, Imoinda is seen as English and familiar; in the read versions of the play, she is understood to be African and different.

Given this clear difference between an English Imoinda onstage and an African one on the pages of Oroonoko, contemporary critical understandings of Imoinda’s effect in Southerne’s play demand the ability to make a distinction between seeing her onstage and reading about her on the page, a move that Macdonald does not make when she refers to Imoinda as a “disappearing African”—disappearing itself a practice that, by its very nature, relies more on seeing the African woman than reading about her. Far from disappearing, then, in published versions of Southerne’s Oroonoko the African presence is marked and fluid enough to incorporate Imoinda’s whiteness as much as it does Oroonoko’s blackness since they both are shown to have African dispositions. The larger ramifications of this fact are, themselves, very substantial. For, unlike Othello and Desdemona, whose Moorish and Venetian differences form the basis of their marriage and Othello’s tension, the read versions of Southerne’s play lead to the conclusion that Oroonoko is not really an interracial play. It is an intratribal one, since Oroonoko’s and Imoinda’s dispositions are, undoubtedly, more alike in the published text than their
black and white skin colors immediately suggest onstage. Moreover, the idea of African-ness itself is also revealed to be as fluid a racial concept as Wheeler has indicated phenotype was in the early eighteenth century, but only when the categories of difference identifying Africans are read about and emphasized in a published text and not presented on the stage.

Thus, once we understand the ways in which, and the reasons why, Imoinda’s whiteness is emphasized on the stage (to appease English actresses, attract female audiences, and connect with them), and completely deemphasized on the page of the published text (to stay true to the essence of the original African heroine and show how different she is from the English female reader), it becomes clear that while published versions of Southerne’s *Oroonoko* have two different white complexions at work—Charlotte’s European one as well as Imoinda’s African one—Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, as it was seen on the stage, presents the two white heroines, Charlotte and Imoinda, as almost identically English and familiar because they have the same ability to completely connect with the female English viewer. Acknowledging this last point, Aravamudan notes that “Restoration spectators may have found an Imoinda standing behind Charlotte as a failed similarity”71—failed because her ultimate fate (death) is less appealing than Charlotte’s (marriage). Yet, in this section, my discussion has shown that this visual impression of Imoinda’s failure would not necessarily be true for Restoration readers of Southerne’s play who may have recognized Imoinda as not merely a popular manifestation of African-ness, but also as an expression of the marital fidelity that Behn created in *Oroonoko*, and that Dunton and Kotzebue would later reinforce in their own works.

I AM ARGUING that Southerne’s text promotes Imoinda as an African woman while his staged play promotes her English female celebrity, and this argument provides a context for distinguishing how Hawkesworth’s, Gentleman’s, and the anonymous *Oroonokos* function in addressing contemporary anxieties about tyranny and social injustice in the 1750s.

In his adaptation, Hawkesworth makes what may seem to be small changes to Southerne’s text; however, these alterations make his Imoinda markedly different from the one that Southerne created. Even though Southerne’s original reference to Imoinda’s father’s conversion is very brief in the original version, Hawkesworth’s draws out its importance in his preface, which states: “Oroonoko, when he mentions the father of Imoinda to Blandford, calls him ‘a man of many virtues,’ yet says he chang’d Christianity for

paganism; a sentiment, of which the evil tendency is too manifest to be proved” (ix). Sixty-four years after Oroonoko first appeared, Hawkesworth implies that a Christian man’s conversion to paganism is an “evil tendency” that puts in doubt the veracity of that man’s claim to having “many virtues.” Therefore, in order to make Imoinda’s father, and, by extension, Imoinda, unproblematically virtuous, he alters Southerne’s original intent and completely strikes out the brief but loaded reference to this important act of conversion. With this small alteration, Hawkesworth transforms how contemporary English readers assess Imoinda. Hawkesworth’s omission of one of the categories of difference that defined her as African in Southerne’s original text transforms Imoinda into a presumed white Christian whose father never converted—a very different textual impression from that which Southerne intended for his heroine and his contemporary reader.

To further de-Africanize her, Hawkesworth also strikes from the published version of his play the stage direction that describes Imoinda costumed and armed with “bow and quiver,” thereby removing the other important category of difference that defined her as African in Southerne’s original. Add to these clothing and religious alterations of Imoinda’s character the fact that all the other English women—Charlotte, Lucy, the Widow Lackitt—and their marital indecencies are expunged from the text so that they are no longer available to appear as foils embellishing Imoinda’s ideal African-ness, and the complete effect of Hawkesworth’s alteration to Imoinda’s characterization becomes apparent. In the absence of the characters and categories of difference that had Africanized the white Imoinda who appeared within the pages of Southerne’s text and clearly defined her as different from Southerne’s reader, Hawkesworth’s Imoinda is transformed into a white woman that an English reader can readily identify with in his altered version of the play.72

Hawkesworth’s alteration of Imoinda’s complexion has even larger repercussions with respect to the African ideal of marriage. I have already indicated that Southerne’s African couple are more alike, temperamentally, than their skin colors immediately suggest; however, when he makes Imoinda a white Christian woman distinct from her black heathen husband, Hawkesworth places a greater emphasis on the couple’s dissimilarity. Because his published version of the play makes such a point of removing the categories of difference that make Imoinda appear savage, African, and Other to the reader, Imoinda’s skin color now becomes the only observable, and therefore predominant, category of difference that enunciates her identity as a European Christian, just as blackness inscribes Oroonoko’s African heathenism.

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72. Her implied Christianity is also the specific means by which oppressed white English women readily identify with her, as Joyce Green Macdonald convincingly argues.
By making this couple’s differences so pronounced, the published version of Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* is exposed as an interracial text in which skin color rigidly inscribes an interracial couple’s cultural dissimilarity without the intratribal identity politics that, in Southerne’s text, made them both Africans who were culturally more alike than their different complexions outwardly convey. This important point is worth reiterating: with its predominant emphasis on the differences between Oroonoko and Imoinda’s skin colors rather than the similarity of their African dispositions, it is Hawkesworth’s and not Southerne’s *Oroonoko* that actually gives birth to an interracial reading of the play.

Reading Hawkesworth’s interracial relationship can potentially do more work instigating British prejudices than promoting a more pronounced anti-slavery message. For Southerne’s drama that was originally about how slavery affected two types of heathen Africans—a black indigenous one as well as an assimilated white one—is transformed into a tragedy about an interracial couple from culturally dissimilar backgrounds whose suicidal deaths can be viewed as dangerous confirmations of Sir George Ellison’s idea that interracial relationships are “indelicate and almost unnatural” unions that should not have occurred in the first place.

WITH HIS ostensibly minor alterations to the published text, Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* has a major effect on Imoinda, essentially de-Africanizing her into a white woman that contemporary readers identify with. And as a consequence, this affects the manner in which his play functions as a visual signifier of tyranny and social injustice onstage. When Hawkesworth removes the comic marriage plot and focuses exclusively on the slave couple whose marriage suffers because of the tyranny of the Deputy Governor, he is not only able to tap into the injustices experienced by captured African princes documented in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, he is also able to show a contemporary British audience exactly how their freedoms to marry in England differ from their slave counterparts in the colonies. He manages to achieve this effect with almost no effort on his part since the elements for Britons to evaluate their freedoms to marry alongside the restrictions imposed on colonial slaves were already present in the comic sections of Southerne’s original text. But on December 1, 1759, when Hawkesworth’s Europeanized Imoinda makes her debut appearance onstage, a British audience’s evaluation of the freedom to marry might have been seen under a new light.

In a discussion with Blandford, Oroonoko recounts the circumstances of his clandestine marriage to Imoinda—clandestine because the King, Oroonoko’s father, has not heard about their wedding when he orders Imoinda brought to court to be one of his own brides. The newly married couple have already consummated their relationship, however, for Imoinda “grew with child,” and is “forc’d to own herself [Oroonoko’s] wife” (II.i) in front of the King. This chaotic scenario is indicative of the ensuing confusion surrounding clandestine marriages. For having the temerity to choose Oroonoko without his consent and against his self-interest, the supreme African paternalist consigns Imoinda to slavery. In Surinam, Imoinda is, legally, the property of another paternalist figure, the absent Governor; but even when she eventually reunites with Oroonoko, she cannot consolidate her marriage to him without this absent paternalist’s consent.

In Africa and Surinam, active and passive paternalism is a palpable and somewhat tyrannical obstacle to minors who demonstrate serious affective commitments to marriage. In Surinam, Imoinda would rather languish over the loss of her African husband than accept the romantic advances of the highest-ranking colonial official. During her marriage to Oroonoko, he declared himself monogamous when he had the cultural license to be polygamous, and after he thinks she is dead, he refuses to marry another woman. They are both committed to the ideal of constancy in marriage even beyond death. Hence, Stanmore is right when he states that Oroonoko “deserves” (II. iii) her as she does him. They are both admired for their abilities to uphold serious ideals of marriage amidst great adversity. Yet, even though they prove their worth, honor, and commitment to each other, they still cannot make any legal claim to own each other even under the most basic idea of marriage without paternal consent.

By focusing the viewer’s attention on a tragedy where two young individuals represent serious ideals about marriage but are denied the freedom to marry according to their choice, Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* produces a message onstage that would resonate offstage. The play exposes the lack of control minors have over the disposal of their own bodies in the marriage market under the Hardwicke Act and points out that a paternalist’s interests always outweigh the individual’s. These kinds of impressions might have resonated in the late 1750s, especially with English female spectators who, I have already shown, identify with the onstage Imoinda through the devices of dress, skin color, and celebrity. These female spectators might be more easily encouraged to see *Oroonoko* as a commentary on the paternalist bias present in the Hardwicke Act that carefully lays out the circumstances of their own situation under it, thereby providing another unexpected reason why *Oroonoko* was “a favourite of the ladies.” It spoke to their situation under
the decade’s new and serious marriage law. But by encouraging this type of viewing, Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* visually explores more about English women’s problems with Hardwicke than the African woman’s problems with slavery.

WHERE HAWKESWORTH’S alterations of Imoinda refocus attention on the English rather than the African woman, the focus of Gentleman’s alterations is entirely pro-African. He finds no reason to omit Imoinda’s father’s conversion to heathenism, especially since this religious practice offers such an exemplary illustration of honorable African behavior. The “Princely Pagan” (V, 87), Oroonoko, may worship, as the “resplendent ruler of the earth,” the sun that Christians deem but a “lamp of light” (IV, 61). But his ignorance about the existence of a Christian God does not diminish the exemplary sense of honor that, Gentleman asserts, nature bestows on all African people. His Oroonoko comes from “Those unletter’d shores” of Angola that “claim brighter virtues far than art e’er taught.” In this world of the noble savage, “Learning and fraud are equally unknown” (I, 19).

While Gentleman’s text in no way advocates a Christian’s conversion to heathenism, he does use heathens as moral touchstones whose naturally honorable African exemplarity contrasts with the depiction of Christian colonies where “Christian frauds” (III, 57) are bred, who act with the “Christian lure of fair faced smiles where lurks deceit in friendship’s borrow’d guise” (I, 17). Yet, with all these attacks on white colonial Christians it is revealing that Gentleman’s Oroonoko levels his most blistering attack of this religion at Massingano, a countryman of his own color whom he deems “worse, if possible, than [a] Christian traitor” (IV, 63). A famed Angolan warrior in his own right, Massingano vows to kill Oroonoko out of revenge because Oroonoko had earlier killed Massingano’s brother in battle. But the poisoned dart/javelin that Massingano aims at Oroonoko kills Imoinda’s father instead, enabling Oroonoko to go on and defeat Massingano’s tribe. After this war ends, Oroonoko spares Massingano’s life, only to sell him into slavery in Surinam, where he becomes so physically changed by the experience that one of his fellow countrymen, Zinzo, does not recognize him when he also finds himself a slave newly arrived in the colony. “I must be chang’d indeed when thou forget’st,” Massingano tells Zinzo, “Captivity has grasp’d with iron hand / And thus deform’d the image of thy friend” (I, 21). The lack of physical recognition between Massingano and Zinzo describes these two African men at different stages of enslavement. While Zinzo, fresh from Angola, is still a typical African heathen of Oroonoko’s ilk complete with a “fraudless bosom,” Massingano’s physical deterioration, when coupled with
his own admission that he “must become a Christian in [his] scheme” (I, 25) to get revenge on Oroonoko for his brother’s death and his own enslavement, highlights the deformation of an honorable African heathen into a seasoned “black Creole”—one of those de-Africanized Africans that Edward Long referred to in his *History of Jamaica* (1774). Christianity, then, is not exclusively a mark of white deviousness; it is used ironically to mark the moral degeneration that generally occurs to people in the colonies.

Massingano, however, is not the only Creole figure Christianized into an unrecognizable manifestation of his former self, and he is certainly not the most powerful. When he works “by stratagem, to gain an end” (I, 25) in which he seeks to overthrow Oroonoko, Massingano is only a less influential black replica of the white Deputy Governor who also works by stratagem to “have the stubborn fair” (IV, 71) Imoinda. In his plan, Imoinda’s husband

shall be taken off—if not
By bare-faced pow’r, by secret means.
This Blandford, too, with whom I must keep fair,
Should he still stand a bar to cross my love,
Must share the husband’s fate. (IV, 71–72)

Clearly, this uncontrolled white Creole advocates the disposal of all Christian and heathen men in order to satiate his lust for Imoinda in the same way that the black Creole, Massingano, wants to satiate his revenge against Oroonoko. Together, these unrestrained examples of Christianized Creole destruction represent the deformations of their former honorable heathen and Christian countries. But because he places a pronounced emphasis on the villainous, colonially deformed Creole figures, Massingano and the Deputy Governor, strategically destroying Oroonoko and Imoinda’s marriage, the visual effect that Gentleman’s *Oroonoko* generates aligns with Hawkesworth’s staged version.

Following Oroonoko’s reunion with Imoinda, Hawkesworth’s Deputy Governor reveals that he has no intentions of renouncing his amorous pursuit. Stanmore asks him, “Where’s your mistress now, Governor?” joking with the colonial administrator about the fact that his long-held passion for Imoinda must now come to an end because of Oroonoko’s prior marital claim. The Governor replies, “Why, where most men’s mistresses are forced to be sometimes, with her husband it seems. (Aside.) But I won’t lose her so” (II.iii). His overwhelming desire to violate the sanctity of the slave marriage by deliberate machinations, as his aside foreshadows, is another example of the lack of restraint that was to become one of many definitive characteris-
tics both of the stage and the novelistic West Indian— one that separates him from the level-headed Englishmen, Blandford and Heartfree, who both preach temperance in love, and even the enraged African King, Oroonoko’s father, who does not dare to commit “incest” in marrying his son’s wife.

Because they focus so assiduously on Creoles’ emotional intemperance, Hawkesworth’s and Gentleman’s *Oroonoko* blind British spectators to their nation’s own legal complicity in creating the paternalist conditions that have allowed slavery and subjection to fester in the first place. Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* allows female spectators to visualize the problem of paternal tyranny but not identify how close to home its source lies. And one can detect the same political agenda at work in the staged and textual versions of Gentleman’s *Oroonoko*, the only difference being that black as well as white Creoles are demonized in ways that exonerate Britons, British Christianity, and British paternalists of all involvement in creating this decidedly unchristian climate of paternal tyranny and social injustice.

The textual and staged versions of Hawkesworth’s and Gentleman’s *Oroonoko* are, therefore, at odds with antislavery activism. While they both, ostensibly, focus on the problem of slavery, they do so by altering Imoinda and exaggerating Creole intemperance, actions that refocus the problem of social injustice on the white English woman’s experience under Hardwicke and appear to absolve British paternalists of all tyranny despite their legal involvement in legislating tyrannical behavior.

The anonymous *Oroonoko* proves to be very different in all these respects. This exclusively read dramatic text goes about antislavery work with an intertextual awareness that relies most heavily on knowledge of Southerne’s original text despite a title page that purports to radically alter *Oroonoko* in Southerne’s absence. The anonymous author immediately establishes indebtedness to Southerne, beginning the altered text with “the original preface” and ending it with “the original epilogue, written by Mr. Congreve, and spoken by Mrs. Verbruggen.” These editorial decisions would be incidental but for the fact that “Mrs. Verbruggen,” the famous early-eighteenth-century comic actress who excelled in britches parts, had died in 1703, and thus, could not have “spoken” the part in 1760. Moreover, as I have already indicated, the character that she played and originated in the 1695 inaugural

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75. See Novak and Rodes’s *Oroonoko* (8–9) for further discussion of Verbruggen and other players in the premier production of Southerne’s play.
performance of Southerne’s play—Charlotte Welldon—had been expunged from this text altogether. Both the actress’s and the epilogue’s inclusion in this anonymous Oroonoko, then, appear to be glaring editorial errors that Hawkesworth and Gentleman do not make.

But the anonymous author’s decision to include her after Hawkesworth and Gentleman had omitted her role also provides an opportunity to see how the anonymous Oroonoko makes a deliberate attempt to differentiate Africans from Europeans as Southerne’s Oroonoko intended. In Congreve’s epilogue, Charlotte Welldon, shorn of the britches she has worn for a majority of the drama and suitably attired in women’s clothes, soliloquizes directly to an audience of her sexually emancipated peers—those “happy London wives” who “love at large each day / Yet keep [their] lives”—and in a series of bawdy analogies and double entendres she contrasts the freedom these women have to pursue extramarital pleasures with the tragic fate of the African couple, Oroonoko and Imoinda, who so “make a conscience of their vows” that they would rather commit suicide than break them. Indeed, the thought of actually killing oneself, as Imoinda does, to uphold a principle of marital fidelity to an African man so alarms Charlotte that she exclaims on behalf of her peer group, “save us from a spouse of Oroonoko’s nations!” Yet even as she belittles Imoinda’s poignant fidelity to her African husband and extols the frivolity English women enjoy with theirs, Charlotte’s soliloquy conveys a clear satirical message that Congreve has designed to be as reprehensible as it is amusing. Between guffaws, Congreve wants Charlotte’s audience to question her flippancy and to recognize that while English sexual freedoms may be more delightful than African marital restraints, they are certainly not more honorable, virtuous, or commendable—a point Srinivas Aravamudan underscores when he writes, “Imoinda’s badly done romance against the Welldon successes is one that many spectators may find reprehensible.”76

When Gentleman and Hawkesworth expunge Charlotte completely from their texts and identify tyranny as a Creole trait rather than a British one, these two acts essentially succeed in absolving England of immorality. However, when the anonymous author resurrects Charlotte’s character in the exclusively read version of Oroonoko, he or she reinstall the critique of English immorality that was leveled at her in Southerne’s original text. Her reappearance counters Gentleman’s and Hawkesworth’s tendencies to assign the blame for slavery to the unrestrained passions of Creoles because her soliloquy and its satirical homage to marital infidelity remind Britons that their own free and unrestrained passions are just as immoral as those unrestrained Creole villains when compared with the play’s African couple.

76. Tropicopolitans, 57.
As Southerne does in his textual version, the anonymous author also allows his readers to evaluate two distinct types of white femininity. In this anonymous *Oroonoko*, Imoinda still has her African temperament. The author mentions, verbatim, both her father’s conversion and her “bow and quiver,” the latter of which even Gentleman avoids in his African version. The anonymous author also accentuates Imoinda’s African-ness further when the Englishwoman, Maria, asks her “t’aid my Fancy, in the ornaments befit a Bridal state” (I.i). Imoinda replies, “*my* Fancy long, has lost its force—At best weak—And in the modes which Europe hold, wholly unknowing” (I.i). Her “wholly unknowing” ignorance as to European dress and finery confirms that this author is building upon the category of difference emphasized in the original text and developing it to acknowledge Imoinda as the type of fully assimilated white African that Southerne intended. As such, Imoinda contrasts with the Englishwoman, Maria, who is undergoing her own assimilation to Creole culture, an act that is reflected, initially, by her attachment to her brother, the Deputy Governor of the colony, but more profoundly through her impending marriage to Blandford. Because he is recognized as the temperate colonial authority that replaces the Deputy Governor after his death, Maria’s marriage to him and her friendly association with Imoinda represents more of her integration into a new Creole society sympathetic to the injustices of slavery. With this second, influential and futuristic type of Creole whiteness that Maria embodies, the anonymous author develops Southerne’s original use of female whiteness in his *Oroonoko*. Where Southerne’s text distinguished between Imoinda’s exemplary white African virtue and Charlotte’s white European vice, the anonymous author also uses the categories of difference relating to dress, marriage, and religion to establish a distinction between Imoinda’s African whiteness and Maria’s Creole whiteness; however, despite their differences, these women are also united in their oppositions to social injustice and paternal tyranny.

Maria’s opposition to social injustice and paternal tyranny is displayed in her relationship with her brother, the Deputy Governor. In this text, the Deputy Governor’s uncontrolled passion does not solely interfere with Imoinda and Oroonoko’s marriage; his actions also interfere with his sister’s marriage to Blandford. At the beginning of the play, Blandford enters rejoicing to Maria that ships have just arrived in port bringing with them “credentials . . . to obviate th’ impediment thy brother threw between [his] ardent wishes and Maria’s charms” (I.i). The Deputy Governor initially welcomes this news and their impending marriage. But when Blandford interferes with his pursuit of Imoinda, and Maria refuses to aid him in his scheme to “perpetrate / Th’ violation of [Oroonoko and Imoinda’s] Royal bed” (III.i), the Deputy Governor “pronounc’d his firm immoveable resolve” that Maria
should be instantly convey’d on board the ship
Now waiting for a wind, to sail for England
Anulling [sic] thus, the solemn, firm
Engagement, ratified with Blandford—
—and sworn before the Throne of Heaven,
Tho’ yet unhallowed by the sacred priest. (III.i)

In this speech, Maria does more than articulate the fraternal villainy阻碍ing her marriage. The Deputy Governor’s interference in both Maria’s and Imoinda’s marriages shows not only his capacity to violate the marriage of royal slaves, but also his refusal to ratify a marital union with the ecclesiastical ceremony that the Hardwicke Act, itself, advocates. It is this all-consuming paternal tyranny that is capable of jeopardizing the marital unions of both African and white women in the colony that makes the anonymous Oroonoko’s Deputy Governor so much more insidious than his forebears in Gentleman and Hawkesworth, and it makes the anonymous Oroonoko so much more effective in its attack on paternal tyranny in general because it shows how all women—slave and free, English and African—are affected by it.

Imoinda expresses her opposition to social injustice and paternal tyranny when she tells her mistress,

I have heard, Maria, the Isle which gave
Thee birth,
Is marked for hospitable Deeds, humane
Benevolence, Extended charities—
With ev’ry social virtue—Is’t Possible?
A Nation thus distinguished, by the Ties,
Of soft Humanity, Should give its Sanction,
To its dependant States, to exercise,
This more than savage right, of their
Disposing, like th’ marketable Brute, their
Fellow creature’s blood? (I.i)

In this marked attack on the British metropolis, Imoinda articulates the critique missing from Gentleman’s and Hawkesworth’s versions of the play. She explicitly blames Britain for sanctioning its “dependent states” to “exercise” savage rights against slaves. Although she does not refer to marriage law directly, Imoinda does so implicitly when she places the blame for the perpetuation of slavery not simply on the colonial practices of Creoles, but on a hypocritical British metropolis that, despite being “marked” for its capacity for all sorts of benevolent and humane action, deliberately and systematically allows the inhumanity of slavery to fester through the unregulated work of
insidious colonials who dispose, “like th’ marketable Brute, their / Fellow creature’s blood.” This reference comments not only on the slaves readily disposed by planters in the 1750s suicidal plantation economy, but also on Imoinda’s and Maria’s disposals under a Deputy Governor who has been given the power to just as easily ship his sister back to England on a whim as he can easily dispose of Oroonoko in order to violate Oroonoko’s wife. In this way, the anonymous author creates two distinct types of white femininity—African and Creole—but instead of using them, as Southerne does, to distinguish African virtue from European vice, this anonymous author shows these different white women united in their oppositions to paternal tyrannies of the Deputy Governor and British legislators. For this reason, this exclusively read version of the Oroonoko text reveals itself as the most progressive antislavery Oroonoko of its day.

ALTHOUGH THE anonymous Oroonoko delivers this pronounced antislavery message using its simultaneous African and white Creole marriage plots to implicate and expose Britain’s legal “sanction” in allowing paternal tyranny and colonial slavery to fester, its commitment to freedom is tempered once we compare the African marriage with its Creole counterpart—in the end, the appealing Creole underplot threatens to overshadow the African one. The anonymous author attempts to transform the sting of the tragic African marriage plot by including a happy, futuristic Creole one wherein Maria is free to marry Blandford once Oroonoko murders the man who has stood between their union, the Deputy Governor. With his death, the play implies that this Creole couple, who were so actively involved in protecting Oroonoko and Imoinda, will be at the forefront of creating a new colonial society sympathetic to the plight of the remaining slaves entrusted to their care; sympathetic, certainly, but definitely not abolitionist.

Maria and Blandford do not question too rigorously the tenets upon which their authority in the colony is built. Although Maria agrees that Imoinda levels “too just [a] charge” at Britain, she also softens the critique with the statement that she is,

Well persuwaded [sic]—the justice, Equity,  
With Wisdom blended, of the sage rulers  
Of my parent country, Cou’d furnish forth  
Fit argument, and with humanity  
Conjoined, to authorize an Act [that] has much alarm’d [me]. (I.i)

77. Mr. Edwards in Maria Edgeworth’s The Grateful Negro made a similar argument. See Maria Edgeworth’s Tales and Novels, vol. 2, Popular Tales (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 400.
Blandford provides one such “argument”:

There are those who say, this practice carries mercy
Since in th’ wars, they wage, each with the other—
Were not this channel of commercial intercourse
Kept open, the prisoners taken would exchange
This slavery for cruel and tormenting deaths. (IV.i)

With these kinds of arguments, Maria and Blandford countenance prolonging an institution that, as I have already asserted, is, in 1760, primarily interested in working slaves to death. Moreover, they also downplay their own self-interested economic motives for prolonging slavery. Those ambiguous “credentials” that increase Blandford’s status, drive his social ascent in the colony, and allow him to marry Maria could be based on the labor of his slaves or the money made from selling them. The anonymous *Oroonoko*, however, does not represent this illustration of Creole advancement negatively; rather, it establishes itself as a literary precursor to the texts that Markman Ellis identifies, whose arena of interest is “humanist but not humanitarian, interested in amelioration but not emancipation or abolition, and concerned, above all, with the hyperbolically asymmetrical power relation of slavery—in other words, sentimentalist.” 78 Maria and Blandford “want to transform a social system based on violence into one based on trust.” 79 This is the text’s contemporary solution to the problem of tyranny and social injustice. But as my next chapter will show, trust in the benevolent paternalist is not always in the African woman’s interest.

Of immediate interest in my quest to reclaim the African Imoinda, however, is the fact that the ameliorationist message in the anonymous *Oroonoko* relies heavily on the author’s ability to use Southerne’s original conception of African-ness in his *Oroonoko* as a touchstone from which to effectively update Imoinda’s characterization for a contemporary readership. The anonymous author builds on this spirit of Southerne’s white African Imoinda by altering Imoinda’s disposition in a completely different manner than Hawkesworth’s and Gentleman’s versions of *Oroonoko*. Instead of whitening, Christianizing, and civilizing her, the anonymous author maintains and embellishes the categories of difference that originally defined her as African, thereby allowing the focus of the play to remain on Africans despite Imoinda’s white skin color; instead of only demonizing Creoles and Creole paternalists, the anonymous author allows Maria to critique her own Creole brother’s paternal

79. Ibid.
tyranny in the colonies and Imoinda to critique English paternalist practices with respect to slavery, thereby providing a more expansive attack of the source as well as the problem of paternal tyranny; instead of focusing on stage performances that allow white female viewers to connect with Imoinda and see *Oroonoko* as an allegory that identifies the potential for paternal tyranny under the Hardwicke Act but misdirects the blame for this problem, the anonymous author’s exclusive focus on reading *Oroonoko* creates categories of difference that Africanize Imoinda and distinguish her from the English reader, thereby forcing these readers to confront the issue of African slavery and female oppression under tyrannical paternalists simultaneously. Because it does all of this work, the exclusively read play keeps alive the spirit of the ideal African marriage and the ideal African woman involved in it, and uses these things to effectively attack the prevailing practice of tyranny and social injustice in a progressive, if conservative, manner.

Ultimately, the fact that a white African woman in an exclusively read British drama articulates a direct attack against Britain’s involvement in slavery in a way that builds upon the efforts of Behn and Southerne not only provides us with an example of what a progressive antislavery drama begins to be in 1760, it also gives us our first incarnation of what “Imoinda’s shade” might have meant to contemporaries when Capel Lofft first used the phrase.\(^8^0\) By presenting Imoinda as the white African woman South- erne’s *Oroonoko* originally intended his readers to recognize, the anonymous Imoinda delivers her antislavery message not only on behalf of contemporary African women, but also on behalf of the black Imoinda whose novella remains in her shadows. In 1760, a black African woman speaks against slavery from the shadows of the white African-nesses who embody her spirit in Southerne’s *Oroonoko* and its anonymously altered version. But in 1760, even the most progressive alteration to the *Oroonoko* legend does not change the perception that slaves should be able to live and enjoy both ownership of themselves and ownership of each other in marriage. Such a radical notion won’t appear until we consider August von Kotzebue’s *The Negro Slaves*, a text in which “Imoinda’s shade” is revealed as a space from which the African woman gets to not only critique slavery but also articulate a unique call for freedom. Before we get there, however, we must examine what it means for the fictional African woman to be put in “Imoinda’s shade” when the Imoinda towering over her is not white.

\(^{80}\) See Introduction, 8.