Imoinda's Shade
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CHAPTER 2


Black boy him love Jill Jenkins,
Tink he’ll wed—tink he’ll wed.
His Massa chide him thinking,
Beat him head—beat him head.

—"Possum up a Gum Tree," sung by Tuckey in Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack. A Melodrama (1830), 7.

Jackson is substituted for the husband of Lucy instead of Juba; many people having been scandalized at the idea of a black man marrying a white woman. My father says that gentlemen have horrors upon this subject, and would draw conclusions very unfavorable to a female writer who appeared to recommend such unions: as I do not understand the subject, I trust to his better judgment, and end with,—for Juba, read Jackson.

—Maria Edgeworth, letter to Mrs. Laetitia Barbauld, Edgeworthstown, January 18, 1810.

In Montserrat I have seen a negro man staked to the ground, and cut off bit by bit, because he had been connected with a white woman who was a common prostitute: as if it were no crime in the whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue; but most heinous in a black man only to gratify a passion of nature, where the temptation was offered by one of a different colour, though the most abandoned woman of her species.

—Olaudah Equiano, Interesting Narrative (1794), 134.

I LAUNCH this chapter with three epigrams depicting black men and white women in violently thwarted interracial couplings not simply because this is the familiar arena of interracial love echoed in the Oroonoko play; these couplings also provide a tangential yet critical context for my explorations of
the fictional African women depicted in Maria Edgeworth’s short story *The Grateful Negro*, written in 1802 and included in her collection *Popular Tales* (1804). Kathryn Kirkpatrick, Susan Greenfield, Tim Watson, and a host of other contemporary critics have discussed Edgeworth as one of a number of British female writers of the era who demonstrate how a “domestic” novel that “takes place in England . . . centrally concerns the problem of the West Indies.” In this chapter, I aim to use *The Grateful Negro* to think more about how Edgeworth presents interracial and African couplings outside of England, and, moreover, how those couplings provide a solution to the problem of slavery that strategically and deliberately minimizes the concerns of common black African women on the colonial plantation.

To contextualize this argument, I want to interrogate what appears to be the least violent of the three epigrams. In the second, taken from a letter written to Mrs. Barbauld concerning the 1810 revisions of *Belinda* (1801), Edgeworth claims that the “subject” of interracial marriage is outside the ken of her understanding. Yet, she must have been aware of the presence of such couplings in eighteenth-century British society, for England at this time was teeming with interracial unions, especially in London. A significant percentage of the couples that sailed to the ill-fated Sierra Leone colony in 1787 were composed of black men and white women. Moreover, the popular black abolitionist writers Olaudah Equiano and Ukawsaw Gronniosaw both had white wives. Whether or not Edgeworth knew about these living examples of interracial unions, the British stage that she was certainly well acquainted with was frequently graced with two of the most popular black male–white female marriages in theatrical history: Oroonoko and Imoinda, and Othello and Desdemona. Even *The Dying Negro* (1773), the Thomas Day poem that Edgeworth refers to in *Belinda*, is based on an actual situation involving one such interracial relationship. So the “subject” is definitely something Edgeworth had some kind of literal or imaginative familiarity with.

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2. For more on the Sierra Leone colonial project, see Shyllon’s *Black People in Britain*, 52–55. A contemporary document states that “400” of the black poor “together with 60 Whites chiefly women of the lowest sort, in ill health, and of bad character . . . were sent out at the charge of government to Sierra Leone.” *Substance of the Report of the Court of Directors of the Sierra Leone Company* (London: Philips, 1792), 2.

3. Apart from some isolated instances, *Oroonoko* was performed in the patent theaters throughout the century. The same holds true for *Othello*.

4. See the “Advertisement” to *The Dying Negro*. 
Therefore, the lack of understanding she professes to have in her letter to Barbauld seems strategic. I agree with Alison Harvey’s suggestion that Edgeworth’s “disavowal—‘I do not understand the subject’—seems disingenuous . . . and is difficult to read without hearing in it a level of irony.” Before 1810 Edgeworth might have had a very progressive understanding of the “subject” of interracial coupling because Juba and Lucy distinctly differ in one important respect from other popular depictions of interracial marriage in literature from the era. Where each of the famous interracial unions involving Oroonoko, Othello, and _The Dying Negro_ routinely end with the tragic death of a black man who is, literally, placed outside of English soil (Surinam, Cyprus, the English Channel, respectively), Juba remains alive and well at the end of the 1801 edition of _Belinda_, free to enjoy married life in the heart of the English countryside with his English bride. Because this interracial coupling has the potential to thrive in British society, Edgeworth might well have been using Juba to recognize and validate freedoms of choice not usually available to black male slaves in the colonies as well as market England’s commitment to upholding that freedom for people of all colors within its dominions. If this were the case, she would have been in good company. In a 1788 article written for the London newspaper _Public Advertiser_, Equiano asserts, “Why not establish intermarriages at home, and in our Colonies? And encourage open, free, and generous love, upon Nature’s own wide and extensive plan, subservient only to moral rectitude, without distinction of the colour of skin?”

Edgeworth’s father strongly objected to such views on “intermarriages at home” as well as his daughter’s representation of them. One week before her letter to Barbauld, Edgeworth wrote to her Aunt Ruxton, saying, “Juba the black servant is not allowed to marry the country girl Lucy; because my father has great delicacies and scruples about encouraging such marriages—Therefore one Jackson, a hard-favoured man is Lucy’s bridegroom and poor Juba has only the pleasure of the Banjore and dancing at the wedding.” Making Lucy’s new bridegroom “a hard-favoured man” is, perhaps, Edgeworth’s ironic stab at her father’s “great delicacies and scruples.” She might be making fun of the fact that he’d rather see Lucy with a rough, and presumably violent, white fiancé than a gentle, creative black one.

But a secondhand conversation between two characters in Clara Reeve’s

7. Maria Edgeworth to Mrs. Ruxton, January 9, 1810.
Plans of Education (1792) suggests that Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s “great delicacies and scruples” about interracial unions were shared by other English gentlemen. Well before 1810, the fictional Lord A— tells his wife that emancipated Africans “will flock hither [to England] from all parts, mix with the natives, and spoil the breed of the common people. There cannot be greater degradation than this, of which there are too many proofs already in many towns and villages.”

Clearly, “gentlemen have horrors upon this subject” of interracial coupling because it visually signifies and biologically confirms that uncontrollable freedoms are being extended to black subjects, first in the colonies, and then in England—a “fear of racial amalgamation” that Felicity Nussbaum says “was certainly festering in England from the end of the seventeenth century.” In Lord A—’s imagination, extreme “degredation” is the horrible consequence of such freedoms, and such fears reach the height of hysteria for Richard Edgeworth once the 1807 abolition bill introduced the possibility—however remote—of black men invading Britain and making an indelible biological imprint on the English national identity and culture.

If, in the wake of the abolition bill, Belinda appears to be legitimizing unions that Sarah Scott had forty years earlier described as “indelicate and almost unnatural,” gentlemen who think like Lord A— may be drawn to the “unfavourable” conclusion that this female writer is, perhaps, endorsing these unnatural unions or even exposing her own latent desires for black men now that one significant step on the road to emancipation has been cleared.

To allay such fears, Edgeworth concedes her implicitly favorable stance on interracial marriages with instructions that Barbauld change a name in the 1810 edition—“for Juba, read Jackson.” This act of textual renaming completely erases the interracial union that horrified English gentlemen, appeases their “great delicacies and scruples,” and safeguards Edgeworth’s reputation as a polite female author. However, the zeal with which the Edgeworths police what, in real terms, amounts to an extremely small episode involving two very minor characters in an especially long three-volume novel, and the significance which they think this small change will have on the characters of the novel, the novelist, and the nation reveal how

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10. Here, I depart from Kathryn Kirkpatrick, who believes interracial marriages were objected to because of anxieties over primogeniture. See “‘Gentlemen Have Horrors Upon This Subject,’” 342. I think the primogeniture argument is more effective when it involves the landed and merchant classes as in my discussion of *The Woman of Colour* in Chapter Six of this book. For Juba, the general sense of degredation is enough to cause alarm.
12. Alison Harvey comes to a similar conclusion in “West Indian Obeah,” 3.
completely out of proportion paternalist fears were concerning both inter-
racial couplings and African freedoms, and also how unified a father and
daughter coupling could be in opposing them both.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the staged performances of Oroo-
noko post-1759 provided an opportunity for young English women to visu-
ally identify with Imoinda and connect her victimization under paternal
tyranny with their own experience of victimization under the Hardwicke
Act. My present discussion of Edgeworth’s Belinda and her letter to Bar-
bauld, however, suggests the opposite—a British woman writer initially pro-
moting and then altering her own progressive stance on a black individual’s
freedom to marry interracially, and doing so, specifically, to identify with
an English paternalism that is first recognized as fearful (“Gentlemen have
horrors”) and then extremely tyrannical (“For Juba read Jackson”) on the
“subject.” Whether or not Edgeworth personally identified with paternalist
fears of national degeneration, her altered Belinda, in effect, speaks on behalf
of this group by enacting their desire to curtail even a fictional black man’s
ability to marry freely in England. The textual violence that enables this
tyrrannical behavior should not be downplayed. By writing Juba’s emancipa-
tory story of interracial marriage in England out of existence, Edgeworth’s
alterations are soft textual weapons, quietly quashing a black man’s freedom
to love, wed, and reproduce interracially with as much vigor as the “massa”
beats out of the black boy’s head the “love” he has for “Jill Jenkins” in the
first epigram of this chapter, purely because the black boy has articulated
his desire to “wed” this white woman. Edgeworth’s softer, textual violence
speaks to what Tim Watson calls “an instability at the heart of English real-
ism, unable to follow through on its promise of inclusiveness.” 13 And it is
this “instability” which must be acknowledged in order to understand, and
provide a context for, the even more egregious acts of textual violence that
underpin Edgeworth’s work when she moves out of England to promote
fictional interracial couplings in the West Indian colonies—one of which
reflects on the amelioration of slavery and markets this as a viable antislavery
agenda while minimizing the African woman’s horrific experience of slavery
that Equiano brings out in the third epigram of this chapter.

I WANT TO explore further examples of Edgeworth’s soft textual violence
and her interest in interracial couplings by examining how they both influ-
ence a text that holds her most pronounced intervention into the political
discourse of slavery. In The Grateful Negro, Edgeworth pairs the black slave,

13. Caribbean Culture, 12.
Caesar, with his white master, Mr. Edwards, and she uses this symbolic, nonsexual, interracial coupling to market the appeal of colonial paternalism and to endorse the policy on slavery taken by colonial legislators in the 1798 Amelioration Act. *The Grateful Negro* is a prime illustration of what Tim Watson calls “Creole Realism,” that is, “the attempt to narrate the story of the British colonies from the point of view of a planter class defined by their qualities of reasonableness and enterprise.”

However, a pointed critique of Edgeworth’s “Creole realism” appears when some of *The Grateful Negro*’s intertextual influences are taken into account. The short story was completed within one year of *Belinda*’s initial publication, but four other literary and historical texts have an even greater influence on it. Edgeworth acknowledges two of them—August von Kotzebue’s *The Negro Slaves* (1796) and Bryan Edwards’s *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793)—but elements of the other two—*Oroonoko*, and an anonymously published tale also called “The Grateful Negro” (1800)—appear openly within the text itself but are not explicitly cited by the author. I contend that when Edgeworth chooses to refer to or ignore these literary and historical texts she deliberately undermines the characterization of the African woman, Clara, and her coupling with Caesar because the appeal of their African romance poses the greatest threat to the idealized interracial coupling between Caesar and Mr. Edwards—the coupling that her ameliorative text is designed to privilege. *The Grateful Negro*, then, “operates as an elaborate romance,” as Sharon Murphy has pointed out, but not merely the plantocratic one that Murphy identifies; rather, it is an elaborate competition between the “plantocratic romance” and the African romance—an ideological battle in which Edgeworth commits acts of soft textual violence—acts that I call ‘creative defamation’—which deliberately and strategically tip the Romance scales in the plantocrats’ favor.

Edgeworth’s interest in African and interracial couplings and her acts of creative defamation extend to *The Grateful Negro*’s other black and white female characters—Esther, Hector’s wife, and Mrs. Jeffries—who are also designed to bolster the plantocrats’ appeal. Collectively, these creatively defamed female representations point out the “instability” at the heart of Edgeworth’s Creole Realism: this knowingly skewed promotion of slavery under benevolent paternalism is built upon an extremely dubious ideology if

15. All subsequent references to this text are parenthetical and are drawn from Maria Edgeworth’s *Tales and Novels*, vol. 2, *Popular Tales*.
17. Ibid., 113.
“pro-slavery reformism”\textsuperscript{18} can only come about at the expense of the author’s deliberate attempts to silence the “horrible instances of cruelty”\textsuperscript{19} that she is aware black African women endure under slavery.

My exposure of the infelicity and instability at the heart of \textit{The Grateful Negro} is not simply designed to undermine the ameliorationist tag that George Bouloukos and others have associated with Edgeworth’s position on slavery. Having already exposed Edgeworth’s willingness to voice and alleviate her father’s and other English gentlemen’s interracial concerns in her altered \textit{Belinda}, this chapter also foregrounds the concerns of black African women by revealing how \textit{The Grateful Negro} eclipses their interests while voicing those of colonial paternalists. By doing so, \textit{The Grateful Negro} commits a crime that Equiano abhors: it softly and strategically speaks the virtues of benevolent paternalism as “if it were no crime in the whites to rob an innocent African girl of her virtue.” As a soft, strategic voice of paternal tyranny, \textit{The Grateful Negro} is not only implicated in maintaining the double standard of violence against African women that Equiano draws attention to, its willful ignorance of the fictional and actual African woman’s experience of rape on the plantation—an experience brought out in Behn’s \textit{Oroonoko} but magnified in Southerne’s—also indicates its involvement in strategically eclipsing Imoinda’s force in British literature as a figure capable of articulating this concern.

KATHRYN KIRKPATRICK’S fine job of exploring the intratextual differences between the 1801, 1802, and 1810 editions of \textit{Belinda} have been invaluable in establishing how Edgeworth’s position on race changed prior to, and immediately after, the abolition of the British slave trade.\textsuperscript{20} And other critics have also made intertextual connections between \textit{The Grateful Negro}, the Edgeworths’ Anglo-Irish background, and the history of the 1798 rebellion in Ireland.\textsuperscript{21} Along these lines, Edgeworth acknowledges her own debt to intertextuality when she admits to having “adopted—not stolen” (400) ideas from Bryan Edwards’s \textit{History of the West Indies} to use in \textit{The Grateful Negro}. Clearly, intertextual readings are useful ways to understand the autho-

\textsuperscript{18} Srinivas Aravamudan describes Edgeworth’s position as “within the context of paternalistic and sentimentalist proslavery reformism” in \textit{Obi; or, The History of Three Fingered Jack}, 43.

\textsuperscript{19} August Von Kotzebue, \textit{The Negro Slaves} (1796), “Dedication.”

\textsuperscript{20} Curiously, Kirkpatrick doesn’t actually make this point in “‘Gentlemen Have Horrors.” In an intertextual move of her own, Kirkpatrick reads \textit{Belinda} using the stock characterization of a Creole garnered from Richard Cumberland’s play, \textit{The West Indian} (1771). While this is a perfectly acceptable way of getting at the characterization of Mr. Vincent, it says nothing about Juba. This chapter is, in part, an attempt to excavate the texts that informed both Caesar and Juba.

\textsuperscript{21} Elizabeth S. Kim’s article “Maria Edgeworth’s \textit{The Grateful Negro}: A Site for Rewriting Rebellion,” \textit{Eighteenth Century Fiction} 16 (2003): 103–26 offers the most recent example of this sort.
rial, political, and racial dynamics at work in *The Grateful Negro*. Because of this, I want to examine more of the immediate yet unheralded intertextual sources that lie within the story itself.22

One of them, “The Grateful Negro,”23 is the first in a collection of short stories titled *Rewards for Attentive Studies; or Stories Moral and Entertaining*, published anonymously in 1800.24 Appearing two years before Edgeworth’s own short story of the same name, the similarity of titles alone suggests that Edgeworth knew it, but its influence on her own text is palpably discerned by the similarities between their plots.25

The grateful Negro in the anonymous version begins as a disembodied voice overheard as two English girls, Louisa Dorvile and Charlotte, are walking through an English field on their way to make a social visit to a Miss Benson: “‘No money—no friends—no country—no home!’ sobbed out a little Negro boy, who was sitting under a hedge by the side of a public road” (5) with “hardly a rag to cover him” (7). “Me cry all day, me never laugh,” he tells Louisa, “because me no friends here—poor massar dead—and me no get home!” (7). “He absolutely makes me sick” (7), exclaims Charlotte, and she refuses to provide him aid since to do so would be “to degrade [herself] so much as to think a Negro deserves to be called my fellow creature.” ‘I cannot help what you think;’ replied Louisa, ‘but I know that a Negro is mine: and I am persuaded if my mamma knew how unfortunate he was, she would immediately take him under her care’” (8). At this point in the story, the girls reach a symbolic crossroads in their relationship, and while “Charlotte paid a visit of ceremony [to Miss Benson],” “Louisa practiced humanity and benevolence” by returning home and informing her mother of “the African’s misfortunes” (9). Mrs. Dorvile

sent immediately to the captain of the ship in which he had come to England, and finding that his account agreed with the boy’s, she engaged him.

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22. Frances R. Botkin’s “Questioning the ‘Necessary Order of things’: Maria Edgeworth’s ‘The Grateful Negro,’ Plantation Slavery and the Abolition of the Slave Trade” briefly discusses many of the intertextual references that I refer to in this chapter but she arrives at a completely different conclusion: “I contend that Edgeworth tells a story that encourages the eradication rather than the preservation of slavery” (206). While I find her recourse to intertextuality extremely apropos for understanding this text, I have found nothing in Edgeworth’s intertextual references to support such a strong antislavery position. *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition*, ed. Brycchan Carey, Markman Ellis, and Sara Salih (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave, 2004), 194–208.

23. This appears to be an exciting new find since none of the critics I have read refer to this seminal story. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to this anonymous text as “The Grateful Negro” and to Edgeworth’s version as *The Grateful Negro*.

24. (London: Cundee, 1800). All subsequent page numbers are in parentheses.

25. George Boulokos’s *The Grateful Slave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) offers the best and most extensive account of this tradition of grateful Africans.
to wait upon Louisa, and herself. In this situation he behaved with the
greatest fidelity, and remained in the family many years; and was as much
admired for the rectitude of his principles, as for the grateful feelings of
his heart. (9–10)

This grateful Negro has an opportunity to pay his debt of gratitude. “One
evening as Louisa was walking in a little paddock that adjoined the house,”
she is accosted by “a mad dog” (10):

[Louisa’s] screams roused the Negro from his work. Like lightning he flew
to her assistance, and just as the animal had caught hold of her gown,
struck him with a rake he had in his hand, and repeated the blows, until he
stretched him dead at her feet. “Oh, my deliverer,” said the agitated Louisa,
“I owe you more than I can ever pay!” “No, missee, no you owe me not at
all; but me owe you for every bliss of life.”

“The Grateful Negro” seems, itself, to be a regendered iteration of
“the grateful black” (332) episode in Thomas Day’s Sandford and Merton
(1783).26 The second volume of that novel ends with this “poor half-naked
black” (329) humbly imploring the charity of the little gentry with Master
Merton:

He had served, he told them, on board an English vessel, and even shewed
them the scars of several wounds he had received; but now he was dis-
charged, and without friends, without assistance, he could scarcely find
food to support his wretched life, or clothes to cover him from the wintry
wind. Some of the young gentry, who from a bad education had been little
taught to feel or pity the distress of others, were base enough to attempt to
jest upon his dusky colour and foreign accent; but . . . the unfortunate black
approached the place where Harry stood, holding out the tattered remains
of his hat and imploring charity. Harry had not much to give, but he took
six-pence out of his pocket, which was all his riches, and gave it with the
kindest look of compassion; saying, Here, poor man, this is all I have; if I
had more, it should be at your service. He had no time to add more, for
at that instant, three fierce dogs rushed upon [a] bull at once, and by their
joint attacks rendered him almost mad. (329–30)

Harry is accosted by the enraged bull:

26. The History of Sandford and Merton, vol. 2 (Dublin: Byrne, 1787).
But, in that instant, the grateful black rushed on like lightening to assist him, and assailing the bull with a weighty stick which he held in his hand, compelled him to turn his rage upon a new object. The bull indeed attacked him with all the impetuosity of revenge, but the black jumped nimbly aside and eluded his fury. Not contented with this, he wheeled round his fierce antagonist, and seizing him by the tail, began to batter his sides with an unexpected storm of blows. In vain did the enraged animal bellow and writhe himself about in all the convulsions of madness; his intrepid foe, without ever quitting his hold, suffered himself to be dragged about the field, still continuing his discipline, till the creature was almost spent with the fatigue of his own violent agitations. (332)

Since Edgeworth referred to Day’s *Dying Negro* in *Belinda* and her father knew him personally, there is every reason to believe that she was aware of this “grateful black” incident in *Sandford and Merton*. Even if she was not, the more than coincidental repetition of “The Grateful Negro” title indicates that she knew the anonymous tale, and was, thus, indirectly channeling Day’s episode by evoking it.

These ‘grateful Negro’ texts appear to impart to young readers the simple precept one good turn deserves another. But they use racialized characters to strategically market and politicize this message for adult readers. The initial meetings between these Negroes and their patrons occur while the latter are engaged in polite and impolite pleasures far removed from pecuniary benevolence (visiting a friend, bull baiting). The black male interrupts these pleasures, offering an instant opportunity to test the white patron’s sensibility, morality, and benevolence. The male’s black skin color should, itself, be an instant appeal to the white patron’s pity because of its connection to slavery; but his tattered clothing and tale of abandonment in England, not to mention the deliberate withholding of his name, are all indications that these stories seek to present representative African males as the collective embodiment of the black poor who were a significant presence in England, particularly on the streets of London. With such an immediately recognizable object of pity before them, the adult reader is expected to partake of, and affirm, the white patron’s desire to act immediately in each black man’s favor. In turn, the grateful Negroes repay their debts to their benevolent patrons with the same immediacy by putting their lives on the line and averting the patrons’ deaths from the random, impetuous violence that

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27. While not referring to this text specifically, Marilyn Butler does refer to Edgeworth’s “many borrowings from Day,” a statement that leads me to believe that The Grateful Negro moniker may be another such. “Edgeworth’s Stern Father: Escaping Thomas Day, 1795–1801,” in *Tradition in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 87.
occurs in nature. Each story spends time detailing how swiftly (“like lightning”) each grateful Negro both offers assistance and completely extirpates the problem of the mad dog and the enraged bull in order to distinguish the black men’s well-directed energies toward deserving fellow humans from the unregulated ones of beasts who do indiscriminate harm. The unnamed Negro’s capacity to feel so intently for the existence of a fellow creature who also happens to be a kind patron is the quality that is meant to distinguish all blacks from the animalistic stigmas that supporters of the institution of slavery try to impose on them. Here, the Negroes’ extreme acts of gratitude are the direct results of the extreme kindnesses that Harry and Louisa dispense, and this dynamic reciprocity is what the texts want to encourage in young and old white readers, bringing them to consider blacks as “fellow creatures” separated from their patrons only by rank not by species.

Thus, for English adults, these stories are making the case that poor black males must be involved in the dynamic reciprocity on which the harmony of the British domestic class system depends. Because they take this stance, these stories are also making a profound intervention into British domestic policy about the black poor in England. When Harry invites his “grateful black” to go home with him, and Louisa acknowledges her “grateful negro” as a “fellow creature” who is employed to wait on the Dorvile women, these texts are attempting to do more than just domesticate Africans. Giving a poor black male a home and employment in England can be read as a political act of nonsexual, interracial coupling that flies in the face of the policy and practice that the English administration took toward the black poor in the period leading up to, and after, the fiasco of the Sierra Leone colonial expedition. As English efforts continued to both establish the colony and get rid of a sight painted by the Sierra Leone report of “the streets of London swarming with a number of Blacks in the most distressed situation, who had no prospect of subsisting in this country but by depredations on the public, or by common charity,” 28 the English government was intent on rounding up the black poor, and cajoling them, by force or bribery, to board the ship bound for the African colony. By finding a domestic home for the black men in Sandford and Merton and “The Grateful Negro,” the authors of these texts are legitimizing the Africans’ right to receive financial assistance to remain on English shores, a move that presents domestic inclusion as an alternative to an English practice and policy of deliberate removal. These ‘grateful Negro’ stories voice the sentimental hopes and dreams of an enlightened English society following through on its “promise of inclusiveness.” More-

over, because the ‘grateful Negroes’ that Harry and Louisa help are male, their legitimized presence offers a tacit reminder of the freedoms that Richard Edgeworth and Lord A— fear black men will receive in England.

IN HER *Grateful Negro*, Edgeworth also presents and politicizes the simple “one good turn” precept in a racialized Jamaican plot wherein a Negro slave, Caesar, avoids being sold away from his lover, Clara, by a benevolent master, Mr. Edwards, who buys the couple from their owner, Mr. Jeffries. For this act of kindness, Caesar repays Mr. Edwards by notifying him of a murderous slave rebellion led by Hector, another of Jeffries’s slaves. But where interracial coupling in the earlier texts is a nonsexual attempt to forge a connection between black and white people in England who will, together, reproduce a dynamically reciprocal and mutually supportive society dedicated to freedom, interracial coupling in *The Grateful Negro* is read as part of a political allegory about creating a society dedicated to colonial slavery in a text meant for “different ages, sexes and situations in life” (preface to *Popular Tales*). To market her support for this society, Edgeworth designs two types of interracial couplings for her adult readers to consider—one rational, the other emotional.

Edgeworth’s sources for “the ruling passion of Hector,” a belligerent slave who “would sacrifice his life to extirpate an enemy” (406), come from the illustrations of the mad dog and the enraged bull that kill indiscriminately in the earlier ‘grateful Negro’ stories. Hector’s animalistic compulsion to satiate his passions even at the expense of his own life shows a self-centeredness that is also present in his master, Mr. Jeffries, a character whose “thoughtless and extravagant temper” (399) almost leads to the sale of his most productive slave, Caesar, in order to cover his debts. Hector and Mr. Jeffries are connected by the fact that the force of their intemperate emotions leads to the same end: extreme violence and destruction on the plantation. Jeffries’s financial extravagance is sustained by the work of slaves like Hector who are routinely beaten by the overseer, Durant; and Hector’s emotional intemperance against such conditions leads to a rebellion and murderous rampage against whites like Jeffries. In comparison to the simple precept that the earlier ‘grateful Negro’ stories politicized, Jeffries and Hector offer indications that no good emotional turns by the master produce no good emotional returns from the slave, and the violence, disharmony, and destruction that they collectively reproduce in Jamaica indicate that this nonsexual, interracial coupling of colonial intemperance is a dynamic failure of reciprocity.

The contrast to this all-feeling, unthinking interracial coupling comes from Caesar and Mr. Edwards and their reasonable approach to slavery.
Unlike the foundational ‘grateful Negro’ texts where pecuniary assistance was immediately provided to the African, Mr. Edwards does not take as instant a reaction to the distressing sight of Caesar and Clara’s separation by sale. We are told, “[he] was moved by [Caesar and Clara’s] entreaties, but he left them without declaring his intentions [to buy them both]” (402), and he only does so after he has discussed their situation with Mr. Jeffries. Similarly, Caesar’s decision to act on his new master’s behalf and reveal Hector’s plan to kill whites during the rebellion occurs only after three separate deliberations concerning his allegiance to Hector, his Koromantyn tribe, and Clara. Thus, well-reasoned acts by the master produce well-reasoned responses from the slave that take into account the best interests of the whole Jamaican society.

By aligning Hector’s animalistic passion with Jeffries’s equally destructive indifference, and contrasting these negative examples of emotion with Caesar’s and Mr. Edwards’s abilities to temper their emotional reactions to slavery with reason, Edgeworth shows that her *Grateful Negro* isn’t interested in using nonsexual, interracial coupling to market a message about the collective humanity of blacks and whites as detected in her literary forebears. Instead, she wants her readers to develop a preference for, and recognize the legitimacy of, reasonable acts performed by black and white men from unreasoned and emotionally self-centered ones performed by men of the same colors. The former coupling produces the dynamic reciprocity that is necessary for collective societal happiness, while the latter does not.

The pointed historical names that Edgeworth gives to these examples of gratitude, revenge, thoughtlessness, and benevolence appear to reinforce her desire to market the appeal and legitimacy of a certain type of male leadership. The name ‘Jeffries’ evokes the memory of George Jeffreys, a figure of injustice long connected to, and reviled for his association with, rebellion. In *The History of England from the Revolution to the Present Time*, Catherine Macaulay admonishes “the execrable Jeffries” as a “detestable citizen,” after Smollett had already called him “inhuman” in his own *Complete History of England*. The reasons for such enmity arise from Jeffreys’s behavior after the Monmouth Rebellion in 1685 when, as Lord Chancellor, his impartiality as a judge was put in doubt after he personally organized the executions of hundreds during the Bloody Assizes. This illegitimate paternalist, thoughtless to anyone else’s advancement but his own, is emotionally paired with the rebellious slave, ‘Hector,’ whose name refers to the greatest Trojan warrior prince. Like his namesake, who donned Achilles’ armor and thought himself indestructible, Edgeworth’s Hector uses obeah as a means to both protect

29. Vol. 2 (Bath: Cruttwell, 1778), 11–12.
30. Vol. 3 (London: Rivington and Fletcher, 1762), 507.
himself and enable his destruction of his white enemies. However, Hector’s downfall comes about when obeah, like Achilles’ armor, is exposed as flawed. Thus, emotional overconfidence and invincibility affect the leadership styles of these historical figures. This is not the case for the most recent historical figure Edgeworth evokes. As many critics have already observed, ‘Edwards’ is Edgeworth’s open homage to Bryan Edwards, who died in 1800 but had been an important part of the colonial assembly in Jamaica, the administration charged to judge the rules and practices of the country. The evocation of his name only two years after his death might be Edgeworth’s attempts to keep his ideas about amelioration alive. He is paired with ‘Caesar,’ a name that recalls the great military tactician and political dictator who played a critical role in transforming the Roman Republic into the Roman Empire.

These historical names reinforce the didacticism of Edgeworth’s political allegory. For adult readers, *The Grateful Negro* is an exercise in distinguishing between the dynamic reciprocity of leaders recognized for their improvements to society from the dynamic disparity of leaders who, though arguably great, have flaws in their abilities to lead. Under the right black and white leadership, Jamaican society will be preparing itself for the experience of freedom that Britons of all colors ostensibly enjoy in England. This is how “*The Grateful Negro*” markets the amelioration of slavery, or what Aravamudan calls “proslavery reformism,” as a legitimate antislavery position:31 it is against slavery as it is currently practiced, but instead of emancipating slaves, the text offers reasonable leadership as the immediate solution to problems of slavery experienced by slaves.

*The Grateful Negro*’s positions on amelioration and colonial leadership make for an interesting contrast with the Leeward Islands Amelioration Act of 1798. Its official title—“An Act more effectually to provide for the support, and to extend certain regulations for the protection of slaves . . .”—articulates its humanitarian goals very clearly. Under it, slaves had specific entitlements to clothes, food, and even an elementary education, and they were to be financially compensated for work. The act also advocated for slaves’ moral improvement by promoting marriage, but it prohibited them from observing the Christian marriage ceremony.32

Despite articulating these goals, however, the colonial leaders who cre-

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31. In 1802, the amelioration of slavery in the colonies would be considered a valid antislavery position, since early abolitionist societies such as the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade (1787) were committed to the abolition of the trade and would have considered amelioration part of a long-term goal.

ated the Amelioration Act appear to have been inspired more by political maneuvering than by humanitarian aid. Prompted by “forced and abrupt” efforts in England to abolish the slave trade, members of the General Council and Assembly of the Leeward Islands appear to have acted out of the fear that the English metropole was taking control of the situation, and their efforts in the Amelioration Act were geared toward taking that control back to their advantage. In his wonderfully precise work on the act, David Barry Gaspar reveals that this advantage was “to modify or improve the conditions under which slaves lived in order to promote natural increase and reduce reliance on the slave trade.” The reproduction of slaves by “natural increase” “emerged as the overriding concern of the General Council and Assembly,” and “managerial efforts shifted slowly from ‘buying’ to ‘breeding’ as a labour supply strategy.” Concerns about natural reproduction were timely since Hilary Beckles and Trevor Burnard both show infant mortality rates were high and birth rates low throughout the century. Colonial legislators couched their policy as one that would improve the future lives of slaves who would then improve their own lives through the reproduction of family units, thereby providing a prime illustration of the dynamic reciprocity demonstrated in “The Grateful Negro” and Sandford and Merton that a society needs to thrive. Black African women were, implicitly, the backbone of this policy since it was only through their successful reproductive efforts that this ameliorative society could succeed.

Although “natural increase” appears to be the hallmark of ameliorative efforts undertaken by colonial leaders in the 1798 act, The Grateful Negro shows no interest in it when marketing its own ameliorative position. Biological pregnancy and motherhood are remarkably absent in the depictions of Esther, Clara, Hector’s Wife, and Mrs. Jeffries. Instead, the text articulates and markets as natural the reproductive appeal of a harmonious society dedicated to slavery under black and white male leadership. This difference between the reproductive positioning of the Amelioration Act and The Grateful Negro opens up an important question about Edgeworth’s text: if it is arguing that Jamaica’s stability, continued improvement—indeed its very existence—depends, exclusively, on the reproductive efforts of a reasonable, and dynamically reciprocal, interracial coupling of black and white male leaders rather than the efforts of black women, what role does the black

34. Hilary Beckles, Centering Woman (Kingston: Ian Rand, 1999), 159.
36. A slave boy is mentioned in the text, but he is not biologically connected to any of the named characters, his father being one of the anonymous slaves beaten by Jeffries’s overseer, Durant.
African woman play in the ameliorative slave society that Edgeworth imagines and markets in her text?

Rather than a biologically reproductive role within *The Grateful Negro*, the African woman plays an ideological one that begins to take shape when we examine two of Edgeworth’s important literary and editorial forebears. According to Sharon Murphy, Edgeworth’s “writing is hugely influenced by the ideological formulations, or cultural romances, with which the late-eighteenth-and-early-nineteenth century British nation tried to (re)negotiate its relationship to slavery,” and Murphy turns to Behn’s *Oroonoko* as a structural source for Edgeworth’s reading of the master–slave relationship. Given its long history and literary notoriety as one of the first modern novels and one of the most popular plays ever in British literary history, *Oroonoko* is, undoubtedly, the most representative text about African characters and slavery in the eighteenth-century British canon. So Murphy is right to choose it as a foundation for Edgeworth’s thoughts on slavery. Edgeworth must have known both the drama and novel versions of this story, but she refers explicitly to Behn’s version in *The Grateful Negro* when she names her Koromantyn hero ‘Caesar,’ a pointed reference to Behn’s ‘Coramantien’ hero, Oroonoko, whose name changes to ‘Caesar’ in Surinam.

A 1777 edition of Behn’s *Oroonoko* edited by Mrs. Griffith leads me to further contend that Edgeworth was not only well acquainted with Behn’s novella but that she also sought to improve upon this female author’s ideological and fictional response to the problem of slavery. Griffith’s edition of *Oroonoko* includes a preamble on Oroonoko’s character in which she states: “yet I should hope, for the honour of human nature in general, and of our countrymen in particular, that the author has a good deal exaggerated the cruelties which she reports to have been exercised upon the gallant Moor who is the subject of the piece.” This “hope” sounds remarkably similar to Edgeworth’s own in the first footnote of *The Grateful Negro* in which she, first, praises August Von Kotzebue’s *The Negro Slaves* as a “fine drama” and then questions its credibility with this comment: “It is hoped that such horrible instances of cruelty are not now to be found in nature” (399). Given that another edition of Griffith’s *Oroonoko* appears in 1800, Edgeworth might well have known it. Indeed, the echo of Griffith’s “hope”

37. *Maria Edgeworth and Romance*, 110.
in Edgeworth’s footnote implies that the younger female writer might well have been inspired by Griffith’s editorial license to expurgate the “horrible instances of cruelty” in *Oroonoko*, and used this as a model for *The Grateful Negro* and its attempt to rewrite the “horrible instances of cruelty” Edgeworth witnessed in *The Negro Slaves* (a drama which is written in the *Oroonoko* tradition).

The “hope,” then, of marketing a British colonial society that is less barbarous at present than in the past is the emotion by which Griffith and Edgeworth convince themselves of the propriety of editing scenes of violence in slave literature. With this license, Griffith tones down the massacre of Oroonoko at the end of the novella, and makes no mention of his “members” being cut off first. Edgeworth’s acts of censorship involve improving upon the characterization of Behn’s hero by having her own Caesar embody all the virtues that were invested in Behn’s original, except two: the desire for revenge and rebellion against colonial leaders. As I have already shown, these emotional qualities are reserved for Caesar’s tribesman, Hector. By demonstrating a Koromantyn’s ability to shirk off emotional temptations to commit violence in Jamaica, and instead, commit to a reasonable course of action on slavery, Edgeworth’s Caesar transforms into what Edward Long would call a “Creole Black”—a de-Africanized African in the colonies.

Because Edgeworth makes such obvious attempts to present her Caesar as an improvement upon Behn’s, it seems natural to assume that Caesar’s betrothed, Clara, is a refined reinterpretation of Behn’s Imoinda. Initially, it appears that these African women share many of the same fundamental characteristics. Clara is “a young and beautiful female negro” (401), an image that has parallels with Imoinda’s youthful representation as a “beautiful Black Venus” (14). The Latinate origins of Clara’s name connote words like ‘famous,’ ‘brilliant,’ ‘clear,’ ‘bright,’ and ‘luminous’—words that could equally apply to Imoinda’s dazzling celebrity in the African King’s court, where “nothing else was talked of, no other sound was heard in every corner where there were whisperers, but Imoinda! Imoinda!” (15). The implied celebrity of these women, however, seems to belie their significance in each text. They are not mentioned in either title—*The Grateful Negro*’s pointed gesture to only one admirable male figure—Caesar—reminding us of Behn’s title and its exclusive focus on Oroonoko. Moreover, the bodies of each text contain only fleeting glimpses of these African women. Behn’s most descriptive comment about Imoinda says more about her bloodline than her body: she is “delicately Cut and Rac’d all over the fore-part of . . . [her body] . . . that it looks as if it were Japan’d” (40), a process that announces Imoinda’s noble birth among the Coramantien tribe, and in turn, her distinction from ordinary female slaves in Surinam. For her heroine, Edgeworth
provides her own distinguishing detail. We are told, “Clara was an Eboe” (404) (Igbo in modern parlance), an African from Benin.40

If, as I have been arguing, Edgeworth not only knew Behn’s *Oroonoko* but also improved upon its ideological representations of African male heroism, then this brief evocation of Clara’s Eboe-ness is jarring. What does it mean that Clara is “an Eboe” and Caesar is not? Why does Edgeworth choose to construct a heroine from the sinews of *Oroonoko* only to disassociate her from the impression that “Koromantyns are frank, fearless, martial, and heroic” (404)—qualities that Imoinda had embodied for over one hundred years? Since her efforts on Caesar’s part are clearly designed to improve upon Behn’s portrayal of Oroonoko, is Clara’s Eboe identity an improvement of Behn’s Imoinda, or not?

**IN CLARA,** Edgeworth puts her heroine’s tribal identity to a different ideological use than her hero’s. To unearth these ideological ends we must turn to the authoritative text about Africans in the West Indies from which she “adopted” many of her ideas. Bryan Edwards’s descriptions of Koromantyns in his *History* provided Edgeworth with a source for the admirable traits of her hero,41 but his description of “Eboes” is far less complimentary. He states that Eboes

In complexion . . . are much yellower than the Gold Coast and Whidah negroes; but it is a sickly hue, and their eyes appear as if suffused with bile, even when they are in perfect health. I cannot help observing too, that the conformation of the face, in a great majority of them, very much resembles that of a baboon. I believe indeed there is, in most of the nations of Africa, a greater elongation of the lower jaw, than among people of Europe; but this distinction I think is more visible among the Eboes, than in any other Africans.42

40. Here, Edgeworth departs radically from Behn’s Imoinda, who we assume is from Coramantien since her father fought as a subject of Oroonoko’s grandfather’s court.
41. Edwards distinguishes “the Koromantyn, or Gold coast negroes, from all others, [for their] firmness both of body and mind; a ferociousness of disposition; but withal, activity, courage, and a stubbornness, or what an ancient Roman would have deemed an elevation of soul, which prompts them to enterprises of difficulty and danger.” *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies*, vol. 2 (London: Stockdale, 1793), 63.
42. Ibid., 73–74. To his credit, Edwards does add this qualifier to this description: “I mean not however to draw any conclusion of natural inferiority in these people to the rest of the human race, from a circumstance which perhaps is purely accidental, and no more to be considered as a proof of degradation, than the red hair and high cheek bones of the natives of the north of Europe,” 74.
Olaudah Equiano, himself an Eboe, had already refuted these pejorative descriptions of his people in his *Interesting Narrative* (1789), published four years before Edwards’s *History*:

Deformity is indeed unknown amongst us, I mean that of shape. Numbers of the natives of Eboe, now in London, might be brought in support of this assertion; for, in regard to complexion, ideas of beauty are wholly relative. . . . Our women too were, in my eyes at least, uncommonly graceful, alert, and modest to a degree of bashfulness; nor do I remember to have ever heard of an instance of incontinence amongst them before marriage.43

Though Edgeworth does not cite Equiano’s text as a source, her description of the “young and beautiful” Clara is similar in its intent to redeem the virulence of what Equiano implies are widely dispersed reports of the Eboes’ physical inferiority. But the brief, nominal way that Clara’s beauty is evoked—without any of Equiano’s passionate vindication or Behn’s pointed parallels (Imoinda as “the beautiful Black Venus”)—indicates that Edgeworth’s aim is not to cement her black heroine’s beauty for her readers as these writers have done. Rather, she creates the spectacle of a “yellower” Eboe Clara set against a darker “Gold Coast” Caesar—impressions which, in skin color, present this couple as an intertribal version of the interracial and intratribal Africans seen in dramatic and novel versions of *Oroonoko*. I have already pointed out how Caesar is an improved and appealing Oroonoko; yet, the impression that Clara’s “yellower” Eboe complexion has a “sickly hue” implies that Eboe beauty is much less appealing than Behn’s beautiful black, and Southerne’s beautiful white, Coramantien beauties. This impression of Eboe inferiority is calculated and deliberate.

I want to contend that Edgeworth is being strategic about constructing Clara as a reflection of, yet a departure from, the ideal African heroine, Imoinda, especially Behn’s version of this character. For instance, once Imoinda arrives in Surinam, Janet Todd reveals that the Latinate foundations of her new name, ‘Clemene,’ connote gentleness.44 In Jamaica, Clara displays the ‘Clemene’ temperament: Edgeworth writes that “Eboes are soft, languishing, and timid” (404). However, “constitutional timidity” is “The great objection to the Eboes as slaves,” Bryan Edwards reports, since “They require . . . the gentlest and mildest treatment to reconcile them to their

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43. Equiano, *Interesting Narrative* (Norwich, 1794), 14–15. This narrative was first published in 1789.

44. In her edition of *Oroonoko* (London: Penguin, 2003), Todd writes, “The name is possibly derived from the Latin *Clementia*, meaning ‘clemency’ or ‘gentleness’” (87, note 73).
situation.”

Since gentleness is Clara’s overriding—indeed, from Edwards’s perspective, her most dominant—characteristic under slavery, it offers a way to transform her into a black Creole slave who poses no physical threat to the society. In Surinam, Behn’s Imoinda is the complete opposite in this respect. Armed with her bow and poisoned arrows, Imoinda represents an active threat to both the Deputy Governor and the institution of slavery when she fires this weapon and almost kills him. Moreover, the fact that the name ‘Clemene’ is hardly used in the Surinam section of Behn’s text leads Todd to conclude that Imoinda resists being assimilated to European culture in a way that Behn’s ‘Caesar’ does not. By making Clara an Eboe whose temperament adheres to the gentle spirit of the creolized black woman but eschews the active spirit of rebellion, aggression, and resistance that formed an important part of Imoinda’s original identity, Edgeworth constructs Clara as a reflection of, yet a departure from, the idealized temperament of the popular African heroine.

Edgeworth continues to differentiate Clara from Imoinda by drawing directly from the tone that Edwards’s *History* conveys toward Eboe religious practices. He writes: “Of the religious opinions and modes of worship of the Eboes, we know but little; except that . . . they pay adoration to certain reptiles, of which the guana (a species of lizard) is in the highest estimation” (282). Edwards’s attention to the “little” that is known about Eboe religion implies that ridicule should be shown to all Eboes absurd enough to pay “adoration” and “the highest estimation” to “a species of lizard.” Similarly, Edgeworth decries religious superstition in *The Grateful Negro*, as seen in the disparaging tone with which she describes “The enlightened inhabitants of Europe” smiling “at the superstitious credulity of the negroes, who regard those ignorant beings called Obeah people with the most profound respect and dread” (403). Clara is one of these “superstitious . . . negroes” who thoroughly believes in the power of the obeah woman, Esther. For paying such homage, Edgeworth involves Clara in the ridicule that Edwards implies should be shown to all such superstitious Eboes. She ridicules this Eboe woman at a time where Equiano has already made suggestive religious parallels “between the Eboan Africans and the modern Jews” and without any attempt to underscore her potential civilization through religious conversion as Behn’s narrator does to Imoinda, entertaining her with “Stories of Nuns . . . endeavouring to bring her to the knowledge of the true God” (41).

45. *History*, vol. 2, 74.


Edwards points out another Eboe trait that connects yet distinguishes Clara from Imoinda when he reveals that the Eboes’ “despondency of mind [is] so great as to occasion them very frequently to seek, in a voluntary death, a refuge from their own melancholy reflections.” This propensity for depression and suicide brings to mind Trefry’s description of Clemene as she “languish’d” (38) for Oroonoko in Surinam as well as Imoinda’s own honor killing where she is “faster pleading for death than [Oroonoko] was to propose it” (60). Because it is an Eboe propensity, depression and suicide also provides a new understanding of what Clara means when she asserts that she will “Never! Never” (407) be the wife of anyone but Caesar: if they are separated, she’ll kill herself. But whereas Imoinda’s depression and suicide are both badges of African female honor, Clara’s has an inauspicious claim to fame that Edwards draws attention to:

The depression of spirits which these people seem to be under, on their first arrival in the West Indies, gives them an air of softness and submission. . . . Nevertheless, the Eboes are in fact more truly savage than any nation of the Gold coast, inasmuch as many tribes among them . . . have been, without doubt, accustomed to the shocking practice of feeding on human flesh.

From this historical understanding, Clara’s “soft, languishing, and timid” air is due to a “depression of spirits” about being in Jamaica, but it should not be mistaken for female sensitivity because beneath it lies the cannibalistic savagery that is endemic to Clara’s tribe.

Thus, Edgeworth uses Clara’s Eboe-ness—her “air of softness and submission”—to form, in Edwards’s words, “a striking contrast to the frank and fearless temper of the Koromantyn negroes.” Within this contrast, Clara embodies none of the exemplary reason and virtue displayed by her Koromantyn partner, none of the heroism associated with the Coramantien, Imoinda, and many of the perceived Eboe vices documented in Edwards’s

48. History, vol. 2, 74. William Beckford confirms Edwards’s point when he writes: “The Eboe negroes are particularly addicted to suicide, and a very trifling anticipation of misery will make them rush, almost by families at once into eternity.” Remarks upon the situation of negroes in Jamaica (London: Egerton, 1788), 23.

49. Edwards is at great pains to attest to the veracity of this point, claiming, “This circumstance I have had attested beyond the possibility of dispute, by an intelligent trust-worthy domestic of the Ebo nation, who acknowledged to me, though with evident shame and reluctance (having lived many years among whites), that he had himself, in his youth, frequently regaled on this horrid banquet.” History, vol. 2, 75.

50. Ibid. In Practical Education, the Edgeworths use this exact quote to describe Africans who have not been inured to slavery. I believe that Caesar is Edgeworth’s attempt to create a creolized Negro who can also develop a “frank and fearless temper” while being inured to the slave institution (212).
History. As a fully realized ‘Clemene’—a passive African Creole who, in temperament and character, is also the complete opposite of her Koromantyn lover—Edgeworth achieves a strategic act of refinement in her construction of the African heroine in *The Grateful Negro*: the ‘creative defamation’ of Clara’s role as heroine.

I may be the first to use such a term in relation to Edgeworth but I am not the first to accuse her of this kind of strategic prejudice leveled at a particular type of fictional character. In a letter dated August 7, 1815, Edgeworth’s contemporary Rachel Mordecai genteelly compliments “the good sense and candor of Miss Edgeworth,” but nonetheless, proceeds to chide the author about her fictional representations of Jews:

> How can it be that she, who on all other subjects shows such justice and liberality, should on one alone appear biased by prejudice: should even instill that prejudice into the minds of youth! Can my allusion be mistaken? It is to the species of character which whenever a Jew is introduced is invariably attached to him. Can it be believed that this race of men are by nature mean, avaricious, and unprincipled? Forbid it, mercy.  

Although Julie Nash has written that Edgeworth “had a number of prejudices” common to her class, Susan Manly locates the specific nexus of Mordecai’s critique “in the anti-Jewish stereotypes deployed in stories meant for children.” Mordecai is aghast at the way in which Edgeworth connects the “nature” of Jewish men with all villainy, thereby denying the fact that Jewish men are actually “in most instances liberally educated, many following the honourable professions of the Law, and Physick, with credit and ability, and associating with the best society our country affords.” In her American community Mordecai views Jewish men as societal heroes, and she is affronted by Edgeworth’s creative efforts to defame them in didactic tales that confirm the prejudices of Edgeworth’s class and nation, and reproduce these prejudices as justifiable modes of behavior for minors to believe and be influenced by. Mordecai’s gentle critique has a creative effect. *Harrington* (1817) is Edgeworth’s adult response to the charge of prejudice in tales for children, and her attempt to atone for her textual bias against Jews.

53. Harrington, 8.
54. Ibid., “Appendix A,” 298.
In *The Grateful Negro*, Edgeworth encourages readings of her African hero and heroine within the realm of the *Oroonoko* legend; but she, deliberately, moves Clara away from the appealing role of heroism that Imoinda had evoked for over a century in order to disparage a particular type of colonial African. In Behn’s *Oroonoko*, Imoinda’s African-ness is indisputably appealing, dynamic and heroic in Surinam. She is Oroonoko’s equal: the “beautiful Black Venus to . . . young Mars” (14)—the woman warrior who, with the flash of an eye, conquers the hearts of men, black and white, young and old, and casts the most valiant blows against slavery when she wounds the Deputy Governor with her bow and arrow, and willingly accepts her own death. In Clara, however, African-ness is astoundingly unthreatening, horribly savage, and superstitiously irrational—in all, completely unheroic. And this impression is not only established in relation to the Coramantien, Imoinda.

In Edgeworth’s text there are at least two types of Africans in Jamaica, and they are ideologically distinct. Clara’s Eboe-ness with its attachments to superstition, savagery, and passivity corresponds to static African primitivism—one that confirms Edwards’s belief that “West Indian Eboes . . . in general . . . appear to be the lowest and most wretched of all the nations of Africa.” 55 Caesar’s Koromantyn identity with its attachment to reason and commitment to nonviolence represents the dynamic potential that Edward Long identifies when he asserts: “Creole Blacks differ much from the Africans, not only in manner, but in beauty of shape, feature, and complexion. They hold the Africans in the utmost contempt . . . but value themselves on their own pedigree, which is reckoned the more honourable, the further it removes from an African, or transmarine ancestor.” 56 By creatively defaming Clara’s African-ness and establishing Caesar as an African figure of black Creole refinement, Edgeworth reinforces division in this African romance and identifies this couple as dynamically disparate.

*THE GRATEFUL NEGRO* reinforces the primacy and the appeal of the “plantocratic romance” not only by contrasting it with a dynamically disparate African romance; Edgeworth also uses the discourse of marriage to tip the scales in the black and white male Creoles’ favor during three distinct textual moments.

In the first, Clara embodies the ideal of fidelity with zeal. At the beginning of the text, Durant tells Mr. Edwards, “They [Caesar and Clara] were

55. *History*, vol. 2, 73.
to be married; but we’ll find Clara another husband . . . and she’ll get the better of her grief, you know, sir, as I tell her, in time.’” “‘Never! Never!’” (401) an incensed Clara exclaims, indicating her steadfast fidelity to Caesar with the same enthusiasm that Ada expressed in Chapter One.57 Clara’s unyielding attachment is, ostensibly, a refutation of Edwards’s assertion that Negroes have “an almost promiscuous intercourse with the other sex; or at least in temporary connection, which they form without ceremony, and dissolve without reluctance.”58

However, the “plantocratic romance” trumps the African one by the power of its fidelity. Although Mr. Edwards “Willingly paid several dollars more than the market price for the two slaves” (404), appearing to endorse their fidelity with hard cash, Edgeworth makes it clear that he buys them for practical rather than sentimental purposes. He “had often admired [Caesar’s] industry” (401), and when he

took his new slaves home with him, desired Bayley, his overseer, to mark out a provision-ground for Caesar, and to give him a cottage . . .

“Now, my good friend,” said he to Caesar, “You may work for yourself, without fear that what you earn may be taken from you; or that you should ever be sold to pay your master’s debts.”

In other words, if Caesar vows to work hard on Mr. Edwards’s plantation, Mr. Edwards vows to ensure that Caesar can provide for himself and not be sold away from the woman he loves. Given this dynamic exchange of vows, Clara’s expression of fidelity (“‘Never! Never!’”) is sentimentally meaningless since it is vow based only in feeling, and thus, has no power to achieve anything pragmatic, where Mr. Edwards fulfils the role that colonial masters were required to play under the Amelioration Act. As Gaspar notes,

To improve morals, they enacted that within two months of the publication of the amelioration act . . . planters should assemble their slaves to determine which were linked as husband and wife. Slaves having more than one mate were to be persuaded to choose one. The choice was to be recorded; and once a year the planter should read out the list of who was connected to whom before the assembled slaves, praising those who behaved well and censuring those who did not. Masters were required to do their best to keep husbands and wives together. . . .59

57. See Chapter One, 27.
In this description, the colonial master is responsible for reinforcing slave fidelity by persuasion, record, annual declaration, praise, and censure. These sustained psychological efforts attempt to ensure the continuance of African fidelity as well as a plantation’s productivity. In *The Grateful Negro*, Edgeworth privileges this idea of fidelity as a pragmatic achievement orchestrated by white men rather than a romantic emotion expressed by African women.

In addition to privileging the fidelity of the white Creole master, Edgeworth also privileges his version of love over the African expression of it. On the question of a slave’s capacity to feel love, Edwards states, “The poor negro has no leisure in a state of slavery to indulge a passion which, however descended, is nourished by idleness.” By this definition, Clara is fully dedicated to love. Her love “idleness” appears on Mr. Edwards’s plantation when she becomes distracted by the thought that the obeah woman, Esther, will do harm to Caesar, and thus, “seemed to take no interest in anything” else, while “Caesar was indefatigable in his exertions to cultivate and embellish the ground near his cottage, in hopes of making it an agreeable habitation for her” (410). Here, Caesar’s enthusiasm and Clara’s apathy even goes against Edwards’s idea that “The females of this [Eboe] nation are better labourers than the men.” Edgeworth’s deliberate act of polarizing her African couple shows that she favors the greater love Caesar has for the society at large because his industrious efforts to improve the land on Clara’s behalf are in line with his master’s efforts to establish a cohesive society. Their selfless care of the land marks them as the leaders she intends for readers to recognize, just as she means for Clara’s romantic love—an idleness that puts her own emotional needs above those of the society she lives in—to be seen as unproductive.

Last, the “plantocratic romance” tops the African one in terms of legal ratification. Edgeworth is aware that a West Indian society cannot survive on the reproductive ideologies of reasonable black and white men. As the Amelioration Act commands, it must be peopled by the next generation of slaves such as Caesar. To achieve this, African coupling must be encouraged. Along those lines, Clara’s coupling with Caesar—to “Never! Never!” marry anyone but him—is a clear improvement over Edwards’s idea of slaves governed by “visions of romance” (75), and “licentiousness and dissolute manners.” He continues, “Any attempt to restrain [this], by introducing the marriage ceremony among them, as is strenuously recommended by many persons in Great Britain, would be utterly impractical to any good purpose.”

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60. *History*, vol. 2, 80.
61. Ibid., 74.
62. Ibid., 81.
Porteous, Bishop of Chester, was one of those strenuous recommenders. His *Sermons on Several Subjects* (1783) remarks,

If ever then we hope to make any considerable progress in our benevolent purpose of communicating to our Negroes the benefits and the blessing of religion, we must first give them some of the blessing of society and of civil government . . . inform their minds, correct their morals, accustom them to the restraints of legal marriage . . . and even allow a certain number of the most deserving to work out their freedom by degrees.63

*The Grateful Negro* tries to strike a balance between these two positions in its depiction of the African romance.

Edgeworth encourages Clara’s “visions of romance” for Caesar—visions that suggest the successful reproductive future of a stable slave-family unit because Clara will not randomly reproduce a family “with anyone but him.” However, her text still keeps alive the spirit of Edwards’s legal opinion against formal Christian marriages for real slaves by deliberately resisting any reference to formal marriage at the very end of the text even though, as a romance, readers are led to expect it. Amidst all the other climactic retributive judgments—Esther’s capture, Durant’s murder, Caesar’s stabbing, Clara’s awakening, Mr. Jeffries’s bankruptcy—Edgeworth never actually acknowledges the act of consummation for her African couple that centuries of romantic conventions demand for the type of story that she has written about them: Caesar’s marriage to Clara as a just reward for his service to Mr. Edwards. Her resistance to marriage at the end of *The Grateful Negro* is strategic. With the 1798 Amelioration Act’s prohibition against formal Christianized slave marriages as a backdrop, Edgeworth deliberately fails to reproduce the happy-nuptial ending that her African romance demands in order to market what she believes to be a more important message: Caesar’s deference to Mr. Edwards is ratified in an ameliorative policy in which his relationship with Clara is not.

Thus, the appeal of amelioration in *The Grateful Negro* depends on Edgeworth’s ability to construct an African romance that defies romantic conventions, and instead, voices a political one. Instead of promoting Clara and formalizing her values of fidelity and love in a recognized marriage to Caesar, Edgeworth privileges these values in Caesar’s relationship with Mr. Edwards and presents them in *The Grateful Negro* as a fictionalized idealization of the Amelioration Act. To put this point in context, where the *Oroonokos* I discussed in Chapter One showed a gap in legislation capable of protecting

63. “Sermon XVII” from *Sermons on Several Subjects* (London: Payne, 1783), 398.
slaves in the colonies, Edgeworth shows colonial paternalists—benevolent men such as Mr. Edwards, his namesake Bryan Edwards, and the legislators on the Council and Assembly of the Leeward Islands—filling that legal gap by providing a plan of stability that will allow all African couples of any tribe to create coupling conditions so that they may love freely with almost the same protections of marriage, but without any of its legal complications that are so ill-suited to the lives of slaves and so not in the interests of masters or the societies in which they live. In effect, she has solved the legal problem about slave couplings that I exposed in Chapter One. Where the absence of a legal policy regarding slave couplings gave colonial masters the freedom to impose, in its stead, a suicidal practice that saw slaves working to death, Edgeworth’s *The Grateful Negro* provides an ideological template, not for the making of legal slave marriages but for slave couplings that mimic but do not replicate the Christian types of marriage favored in England. In this way, *The Grateful Negro* and the Amelioration Act both offer themselves up as romanticized, colonial versions of the Hardwicke Marriage Act, since both are bereft of this act’s legal rigor and its Christian and contractual regulations yet both present slaves’ lives and couplings as wholly dependent on the good will and trust of the benevolent paternalist. But how trustworthy is this figure?

**Edgeworth** makes two moves in her first footnote that attempt to contextualize the benevolent paternalist’s trustworthiness. First, she points to “The Negro Slaves—a fine drama, by Kotzebue” (399) to establish a context for the worst type of violence on the plantation; then she qualifies this violence with this statement (as if a generation and not 6–7 years separates Kotzebue’s text and her own64): “It is to be hoped that such horrible instances of cruelty are not now to be found in nature. Bryan Edwards, in his *History of Jamaica*, says that most of the planters are humane; but he allows that some acts can be cited in contradiction of this assertion” (399). Edgeworth uses contemporary history to qualify contemporary fiction’s representation of plantation violence, minimizing the planters’ involvement in it by reducing violence to either the colony’s uncivilized past (“It is . . . hoped . . . that . . . instances of cruelty are not now to be found”) or to an uncivilized minority (“most of the planters are humane”; only a few, aren’t) as reported by the historical expert on the subject. All this effort is designed to convey the idea that planters are, generally, trustworthy.

And yet, both of Edgeworth’s sources were skeptical about this trust-

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64. If she read it in the German original it would have been about 12–13 years.
worthiness, especially as it related to white men and black women. Edwards explains that women of color “are over all the West Indian islands maintained as kept mistresses to white men. But if we examine the situation of these unfortunate women, we shall find much more reason to blame the cruelty of the keepers, in inviting them to this disgraceful life, than of their imprudence in accepting the offer.”65 A white male planter’s sexual and psychological tyranny over four black African women marks the essence of the plot in Kotzebue’s play. John brags about his torture of one of them, stating: “I once made a wild girl tame . . . [by having] her whole body pricked with needles; then cotton dipped in oil was twisted round her fingers, and lighted—Three days after she loved me most tenderly” (I.ii). This open declaration of cruelty presents an ominous foreshadowing for the heroine, Ada, who is introduced in the first act, “working at a cotton gin” (I.i), essentially producing the instrument of torture involved in her own potential sexual violation. Violence on John’s plantation also influences the psychological and emotional decline of the two other black slave women: Lilli, who, in the beginning, uses humor as a defense against the violence of slavery, but by the end, has been reduced to tears because of the horrible instance of cruelty that John threatens to enact on Ada; and an African woman, referred to only as the “Negro Woman,” who enters the stage carrying a dead baby in her arms and delivers an affecting soliloquy in which she recounts her experiences of miscarriages, being sold, forcibly married, and also her reasons for putting a nail into her dead baby’s heart.

With such vivid depictions foregrounded in the historical and literary sources that Edgeworth acknowledges that she read and admired, “horrible instances of cruelty” against black women could not have escaped her attention. Yet, despite reading about them, she felt no desire to respond to, or acknowledge, a black woman’s experience of sexual violation in either the heroine’s characterization or the plot of The Grateful Negro.66 Given her footnote’s inclination to veer on the side of promoting the benevolence rather than the malevolence of the planter class, this approach is, certainly, expected. The inclusion of sexual violations against black women would have exposed the less than humane behavior of real planters in the colonies and sullied the appeal of her ameliorationist stance in the text. This is the kind of pointed critique that will eventually finds its way into The Horrors of Slavery (1824), in which the biracial radical Robert Wedderburn expresses

65. History of the West Indies (Abridged) (London: Crosby, 1798), 133.

66. Incidentally, another edition of Kotzebue’s Negro Slaves appears in 1800 alongside Mrs. Griffiths’s edition of Behn’s Oroonoko and the anonymous version of “The Grateful Negro,” a good indication that Edgeworth’s views about colonial slavery were being established by these particular texts at this time.
“abhorrence and indignation at the conduct of [his] father” and reveals: “By him my mother was made the object of his brutal lust, then insulted, abused, and abandoned.” But Edgeworth’s footnote and its attempts to redeem a planter class that Edwards, Kotzebue, and (later) Wedderburn are interested in exposing for the violent and cruel ways they treat black women, is particularly disingenuous, not because she simply ignores Edwards’s and Kotzebue’s representations of violated black women; its infelicity lies in the fact that she turns their victimized figures into her victimizers by involving them in the most extreme acts of violence on the plantation. As a final covert attempt to shield the male plantocracy from all associations with sexual and physical acts of violence, Edgeworth pairs black and white women in African and interracial couplings which strategically divert attention from the paternalists’ violent role on the plantation.

The first indication of this strategy appears in Edgeworth’s deliberate construction of a female interracial coupling. It involves the violation performed on the body of a black woman by a villainous white woman, a significant departure from Edwards and Kotzebue, who focus on white men in this tyrannical, usually sexual role. Marietta Morrissey calls this “A lore . . . that European women, bored and jealous, were more cruel to their slaves than white men,” and Edgeworth provides an episode that illustrates it. When a slave woman was “taking out one of the gowns” that had “just arrived from London” in a large chest, “it caught on a nail in the lid, and was torn. [Mrs. Jeffries], roused from her natural indolence by the disappointment to her vanity, instantly ordered that the unfortunate female slave should be severely chastised. The woman was the wife of Hector” (414–15). The severe chastisement that Mrs. Jeffries enacts on Hector’s wife over such a trivial incident ostensibly shows Edgeworth taking a nuanced and gendered approach to the cruelty witnessed in Kotzebue’s play, pointing out that white women of the planter class are just as implicated as, if not more than, white men in the physical violation and torture of black women.

However, before lauding Edgeworth for casting a discerning eye on the domestic acts of violence that affected black women on the plantation in the manner that Morrissey discusses in *Slave Women in the New World* (1989), her representation of the African woman’s experience of violence is shockingly vague and unsympathetic. The act of being “severely chastised” implies that Hector’s wife experiences some kind of extreme punishment. But what kind of punishment exactly? Physical? Verbal? Both? Neither? And how severe? Vagueness pervades another important facet of this African woman’s characterization. For instance, it is not unusual that a slave woman does not

68. *Slave Women in the New World* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1989), 149.
have a last name despite being a “wife” since slaves routinely did not have surnames, and if they did, they usually assumed their master’s last name. But Edgeworth does not even personalize this African woman’s identity by giving her a first name; instead, referring to her as “the wife of Hector,” a phrasing that places more emphasis on this character’s marital status than on her spouse’s possession of her. Since I have already argued that Edgeworth and Edwards are averse to the idea of formal Christian slave marriages, this emphasis on “wife” could be pointing to a dangerous level of attachment between Hector and his spouse which competes with, and threatens to supersede, the influence of their master, and therefore creates instability within the slave society. But the vagueness surrounding the depiction of this African female victim of slavery makes one thing clear: if Edgeworth’s aim in *The Grateful Negro* is to creatively defame African-ness, the African heroine, and the African romance as I have been arguing in relation to Clara, then this victimized African woman’s vague characterization also contributes to all of these goals.

Hector’s wife’s experience of violence and her relationship with her African husband are far less important than her involvement in another kind of strategic coupling. The fact that Edgeworth only refers to her and Mrs. Jeffries by their marital designations indicates that Hector’s wife and Mrs. Jeffries are a female iteration of the male interracial coupling that I discussed earlier in this chapter which illustrated the emotional selfishness, the failure of dynamic reciprocity, and the resultant societal destruction that Hector and Mr. Jeffries reproduce. In these areas, these women are even more influential than their husbands. Once Hector’s wife is “severely chastised” on Mrs. Jeffries’s orders, “this fresh injury worked up [Hector’s] temper, naturally vindictive, to the highest point. He ardently longed for the moment when he might satiate his vengeance” (415). The severe chastisement Mrs. Jeffries sanctions for Hector’s wife proves to be the tipping point for rebellion. Edgeworth associates these married women with instigating extreme violence in *The Grateful Negro*, thereby taking off the fictional spotlight that Kotzebue shines on the tyrannical male planter class who, in real life, are directly responsible for instigating plantation violence in general, and violence against the black women in particular.

Where Edgeworth’s representation of Hector’s wife is riddled with strategic vagueness, her representation of the obeah woman, Esther, is strategically specific yet equally distracting. Her proper name is the first indication of this specificity; the third, and extremely extensive, footnote that describes Esther’s practice of obeah in Jamaica is another. Although Edgeworth may have been influenced by other accounts, her footnote includes references

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69. John Fawcett’s pantomime *Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack*, for instance, a theatrical sensation.
to obeah people from Edwards’s *History*, among them, “an old Koromantyn negro” whom Edwards identifies as “the chief instigator” (408–9) in a 1760 Jamaican uprising known as Tacky’s Rebellion. Edwards reveals that this “old Koromantyn negro . . . was fortunately apprehended, convicted, and hung up with all his feathers and trumperies about him” (408–9; my emphasis). Edgeworth reiterates Edwards’s language when she refers to Esther as “the chief instigator of the intended rebellion” (410). By doing so, she regenders the role of “chief instigator,” establishing Esther in the violent role associated with the male African who opposed the ameliorationist society of Jamaica. Esther’s influence is confirmed when we are told: “It was she who had stimulated the revengeful temper of Hector almost to frenzy” (410).

Esther and Mrs. Jeffries are, thus, identified as another important female interracial coupling since they are both directly responsible for stimulating Hector. As chief instigators of the rebellion that he leads, Esther and Mrs. Jeffries represent an ideological attempt to gender the causes of violence. Their characterizations lead us to assume that violence is caused by primal feminized emotions (materialism) and primitive masculinized beliefs (obeah), none of which account for the master’s direct involvement in the act of causing violence. Creating these women as the chief instigators of Hector’s violence is a gendered act of distraction in *The Grateful Negro* designed to create a buffer between the slave and the real causer of violence: the colonial master.

While Edgeworth’s female interracial couplings distract her readers from imagining the white male acts of violence usually associated with plantation life, her pairing of the African women, Clara and Esther, also has an important distracting effect of its own to play in the text. When Clara tells Caesar to “avert the wrath of the sorceress, by obeying her commands, whatever they might be,” Caesar responds, “[Esther] shall not succeed, even though she speaks with the voice of Clara” (411), literally marking his lover as the mouthpiece for Esther’s violence. Esther’s ventriloquism is physically reinforced in a scene in which she gives Clara “a preparation of deadly nightshade” and displays her “stretched on the ground, apparently a corpse”:

> Caesar, in a transport of rage, seized [Esther] by the throat: but his fury was soon checked.
> “Destroy me,” said the fiend, “and you destroy your Clara.” (416)

The vocal and physical coupling of this Koromantyn woman and her Eboe during the summer of 1800.

70. See Srinivas Aravamudan’s “Introduction” and Appendix B of *Obi; or, the History of Three Fingered Jack* for more information on Tacky’s Rebellion.
counterpart presents them as a feminized version of the African coupling between Caesar and Clara. These women appear to act with one voice and body controlled by Esther and dedicated to aims that she is quite clear about: “victory, wealth, freedom and revenge” (417). Curiously missing from this list, however, is any explicit acknowledgement of sexual violence as a specific reason for female involvement in rebellion. In yet another creative act of distraction, Edgeworth makes her composite African woman speak with one voice articulating a list of ideals that generalize a slave’s desire for freedom but this figure does not respond to the specific acts of sexual violence that African women experience under colonial white men.

Collectively, then, the female interracial and African couplings in The Grateful Negro appear to provide gendered and emotional distractions that take the text’s focus away from the violence performed by colonial tyrants and that experienced by African women on the plantation. The need for these types of distractions speaks to the instability at the heart of the “Creole Realism” that Edgeworth attempts to construct in The Grateful Negro. In order to make sure that benevolent paternalism and its corollary—the Amelioration Act—appear in as strong and appealing a light as possible, Edgeworth shows she is quite prepared to not only market Caesar’s submissive Creole heroism and his relationship with Edwards, but also creatively defame Clara’s African-ness, subvert her role as heroine and her romantic compatibility with Caesar, regender and overdramatize Esther’s involvement in violence, and unsympathetically diminish Hector’s wife experience of it. By denying her African women any kind of sympathetic role as objects of Creole paternalist violence and illustrating them primarily as major instigators of violence equal to a white female counterpart rather than the violated victims who were, more often, victimized by male and female members of the white planter class, Edgeworth does not merely contradict Kotzebue and his attempts to court sympathy for the African female victims of slavery in The Negro Slaves. She also presents these African women with a power to incite violence that belies their actual historical experience on the plantation.

I make this point in full recognition of the fact that actual black women negotiated power on and off the Jamaican plantation. Thomas Thistlewood’s voluminous diaries detailing his life as a plantation owner provide clear evidence that the black bondswoman, Phibba, wielded considerable influence over him, and Jenny Sharpe has written persuasively about Nanny and her legendary powers as “the most celebrated woman from the era of slavery in Jamaica” and leader of a band of maroon slaves. But Sharpe also notes that “Nanny is relatively unknown in Britain,” and the same is true for Phibba.

71. Ghosts of Slavery, xvi–xvii.
72. Ibid.
Unlike the Jamaican folk hero Jack Mansong, no pantomime, melodrama, newspaper reports, and novel popularized the existence of these women or lionized their heroism in Britain. So it is more than likely that Edgeworth did not encounter them in her research and use them to inform her representation of the African woman. But in relation to the African women she did encounter—Imoinda, Ada, the “Negro Woman,” Lilli, the woman tortured with cotton—her representations of the African women Clara, Esther, and Hector’s wife are so far removed from these earlier expressions of African heroism and victimization that one can only conclude that *The Grateful Negro* creatively defames African women’s experiences on the plantation in the service of benevolent paternalism and the “plantocratic romance.”

IN THIS CHAPTER, I have shown that Edgeworth’s literary work has a tendency to favor the racial interests of paternalists far earlier than her 1810 letter to Barbauld and alterations to *Belinda* reveal. The strategic authorial attempts to distract and defame, market and privilege in *The Grateful Negro* lead to the conclusion that this is a text that speaks with a particularly resonant voice—a soft, strategic voice of paternal tyranny. Its ameliorative call censors the “horrible instances of cruelty” that black women experience on the plantation, and eclipses the African woman’s concern about rape privileged for over a century in Southerne’s *Oroonoko*. Edgeworth’s text even appears to eclipse Behn’s Imoinda in its depiction of Mr. Edwards.

In the first days after Caesar has been bought by Mr. Edwards and given his plot of land to work, Caesar returns from his morning’s work to find “his master pruning the branches of a tamarind tree that overhung the thatch.”

“How comes it, Caesar,” said [Mr. Edwards], “that you have not pruned these branches?”

Caesar had no knife. “Here is mine for you,” said Mr. Edwards. “It is very sharp,” added he, smiling; “but I am not one of those masters who are afraid to trust their negroes with sharp knives.”

These words were spoken with perfect simplicity. . . . (412)

Handing Caesar a weapon that could, potentially, result in his own death is a suicidal gesture that brings to mind a scene from Behn’s *Oroonoko* that also involves a Caesar, a knife, a romantic coupling, a potential death by suicide, and a smile pregnant with meaning. Behn writes: “[Caesar] drew his Knife to Kill [Imoinda,] this Treasure of his Soul, this Pleasure of his Eyes; while Tears trickled down his Cheeks, hers were Smiling with Joy she should die by so noble a Hand” (60); and when he “gave the final stroke” and severed
“her yet smiling face from that delicate body, pregnant as it was with the 
fruits of tenderest love” (61), Imoinda falls dead, a death “the Heroick wife 
[was] faster pleading for . . . than he was to propose it” (60).

When the smiling, ascendant figures in these two romantic scenes are 
juxtaposed in this manner, the larger implications of Edgeworth’s acts of 
textual violence become clear. The smiles from these figures represent two 
dichotomous futures: Imoinda’s, the morbid and sentimental appeal of a 
free life beyond the grave; Mr. Edwards’s, the rational and pragmatic appeal 
of an enslaved life in Jamaica. The smile on Mr. Edwards’s face and the 
benignity of his ameliorative call offer so bright and appealing a future that 
readers and critics are quite easily led to forget the violent tyranny against 
black women enacted by other presumably benevolent men within slave 
societies that would make suicide a preferable future—men such as Thomas 
Thistlewood. Of his relationship with his black “wife,” Phibba, Hilary Beck-
les writes, “while her family life with Thistlewood was set within the frames 
of an authoritarian, but flexible white patriarchy . . . she knew, and was 
often reminded by Thistlewood, of the limits slavery placed upon it.”73 In 
other words, Thistlewood’s acknowledgment of Phibba as his “wife” did not 
in any way contradict the sexual permissiveness that slavery allowed him to 
openly negate the marriage bond and frequently engage in consensual and 
forced sex with other slave women under his authority. While his journals 
indicate that he felt perfectly free and entitled to do this under the institu-
tion of slavery and still maintain a reputation for being a good master and 
“husband,” enslavement meant that Phibba and the other African women 
under Thistlewood’s influence had to accept and could only mildly protest 
his sexual tyranny. Thus, certain in the belief of their own goodness despite 
the tyrannical actions that they and their peers are responsible for, men such 
as Thistlewood and Mr. Edwards present a life under slavery that eclipses not 
only the interests of the enslaved African women who share her violent expe-
rience on the plantation but also the luster of Imoinda’s “yet smiling face” as 
she gracefully makes the ultimate sacrifice. But fictional African women can 
be heard speaking out against this colonial tyranny despite literary attempts 
to overshadow their experience. To witness this, we must turn to The Negro 
Slaves and to William Earle’s Obi.

73. Beckles, Centering Woman, 57.