Imoinda's Shade
Dominique, Lyndon J.

Published by The Ohio State University Press

Dominique, Lyndon J.
The Ohio State University Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. muse.jhu.edu/book/24257.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/24257

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=859192
FOR FOUR NIGHTS in December 1759, David Garrick1 put on John Hawkesworth's new adaptation of Thomas Southerne's popular old play *Oroonoko*, and in the process, transformed the contemporary landscape of British theater. As I explain in Chapter One, this updated *Oroonoko* excised all of the comic elements from Southerne's original, and in their stead, Hawkesworth presented the play as a pure tragedy centered on the eponymous hero and his enslaved wife, Imoinda. However, for those who still yearned for a little of the slapstick colonial humor that Charlotte et al. had provided, Garrick didn't disappoint on those four December nights. The spirit of the theatrical afterpiece that followed *Oroonoko* more than compensated for their absence.

---

James Townley’s farce *High Life Below Stairs* had originally introduced “a young West Indian of fortune.” 2 Peregrine Lovel, to the stage on October 31, 1759. But during this premier performance, uproar ensued. Members of the audience roundly “hiss’d” the play. 3 Yet their dissension was brief. The *London Stage* reveals, “The farce [was] not so much hiss’d” 4 during its second performance the very next day, and within five weeks of its ostensibly inauspicious beginning, the afterpiece was paired with well-established tragedies such as *The Mourning Bride*, *Isabella*, or *The Fatal Marriage*, and *Oroonoko*, on its way to becoming one of the most celebrated British farces over the next hundred years. 5

While English spectators would have thoroughly enjoyed a night of West Indian entertainment that paired Hawkesworth’s *Oroonoko* with Townley’s *High Life*, these staged depictions of white Creole tyranny and buffoonery might have offended some white Creoles in the audience because they openly ridiculed and disparaged this figure despite his significant role in establishing Britain’s empire. 6 Edward Long reveals that “most of the old Creole families are allied, by their inter-marriage among their ancestors, before the island was populous settled” 7—a time when, Catherine Hall has observed, “Jamaica was Britain’s ‘Wild West’ of the seventeenth century, a frontier society.” 8 From such an inauspicious beginning, West Indian planters banded together and worked long and hard in difficult climates to make themselves wealthy, and their ultimate “aim . . . was to acquire fortunes to enjoy at home” 9 in England. So wealthy white Jamaicans in the audience must have felt that the assurance of a financially secure homecoming was a testament to their ancestors’ heroic history of taming and conquering this British outpost and transforming it into a wealthy addition to the empire. Once they returned home, Creoles even changed themselves. Hall asserts that “absentee planters liked to present themselves as English property-

---

4. Ibid.
6. For a farce that featured Creole heroism and romance, see the plot outline to Margaret Cheer’s *West Indian Lady’s Arrival in London* (1781) in Richardson Wright’s *Revels in Jamaica 1682–1838* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1937), 155. See also Errol Hill’s *The Jamaican Stage, 1655–1900* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), for more discussion about Cheer and Jamaican theater in general.
9. Ibid., 72.
holders rather than slave-owners, distancing themselves from what went on in the colonies,”\textsuperscript{10} and they also became active participants in British parliament and political life in general, forming what Peter Fryer refers to as the influential “West India Lobby”\textsuperscript{11} in London.

But this history of labor and financial success is not conveyed in \textit{High Life}. Instead of engendering the audience’s admiration, the play depicts the wealthy white Jamaican man coming home to England as an influential figure to ridicule. This tendency—punctuated by the laughter of the English members of the audience—might have been the most painful part of the evening for white Creoles, since it must have brought home to them, in stark terms, that although “they thought of England . . . as home . . . they were no longer English.”\textsuperscript{12} They were different. Perhaps inferior. Wholly Creole.

My brief attempt to imagine the thoughts of Jamaican spectators as they watch white West Indians onstage at the Drury Lane in 1759 reveal that a tension exists between the English perception of the stage Creole and his homecoming and the Creole’s perception of these things. It also raises some intriguing questions about the political and social ramifications of homecoming that will form the basis of the argument I advance in this chapter. When the white West Indian comes home to England, is he still an Englishman as Creoles generally thought, or is he wholly different as Lovel’s onstage persona suggests? Moreover, if English “metropolitans argued . . . that slavery was alien to the free soil and pure air of Britain, repugnant to the spirit and genius of the British constitution and the Christian religion,”\textsuperscript{13} as Cecilia Green attests, then, when a wealthy white West Indian brings home a black slave, does this make him “alien” and less English in “spirit”? And what of the slave? Does mere residence in England make her an English citizen despite her prior legal status as property in the colonies? In short, if Britain’s political position on the issue of domestic slavery is so opposite to the West Indian way of life and being, can slaves and slaveholding figures come home to be recognized as English men and women, or do the attachments to slaves and slavery make these figures homeless presences in English society?

\textbf{THIS CHAPTER} explores representations of West Indian blacks and whites in comedies whose plots feature stage Creoles returning home to England, specifically comedies that employ African characters to reflect on the white

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{11} See \textit{Staying Power}, 44–50, for a great discussion of the West India Lobby and their political influence in London.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Civilising Subjects}, 75.
\textsuperscript{13} Green, “A Civil Inconvenience?” 12.
Creole’s difference from the English. Cecilia Green asserts that although English “metropolitans may have accepted some notion of the settlers as extensions of themselves, they also saw the colonies as whole social formations that were essentially . . . marked by difference, indelibly so in the case of the overwhelming African majorities of the West Indian territories.”

However, where these Creole differences are deliberately effaced in, perhaps, the most popular sentimental comedy of this genre, Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian* (1771)—humor that has been characterized as a comedy of tears—I turn to a series of comedies that exacerbate the white Creole’s difference from the English: Townley’s *High Life Below Stairs*, Isaac Bickerstaff’s *Love in the City* (1766), and William Macready’s *Irishman in London; or, The Happy African* (1793)—farces which this chapter brings under the rubric comedies of pain.

Much of this chapter focuses on the wealthy white West Indians in these farces—Peregrine Lovel, Priscilla Tomboy, and Mr. Frost—because their fish-out-of-water experiences establish a Creole-in-London template, later popularized in *The West Indian*, wherein newly arrived Creoles experience, firsthand, the pain and ridicule of adapting to English metropolitan society. Each farce’s conclusion depends on each author’s ability to relieve the pain and ridicule experienced by these colonial outsiders, and this relief is usually evoked in a climax which signifies that the stage Creole is no longer an outsider but a fully assimilated part of English culture. However, where Cumberland’s sentimental comedy privileges the relief of the white Creole’s pain and establishes him as a reborn and reformed English returnee, the farcical black characters and wordplay present in *High Life*, *Love in the City*, and *Irishman in London* appear to do the opposite: they focus the reader’s attention on African pain in ways that destabilize, rather than affirm, the recognition of wealthy white Creoles as bona fide English men and women.

However, before indiscriminately lauding them as equally progressive antislavery texts for refocusing their emphases on pain from the white Creole to the black African, *High Life* and *Love in the City* are far less progressive in their depictions of the relief from pain that Africans can expect to receive in England. In Chapter Three of this book, I argue that *The Negro Slaves* presents marriage and immigration to a European place of freedom as a radical relief from the pain of slavery for the common black African heroine. Yet

---

of the three farces I consider here, only one of them—Irishman in London; or, The Happy African—uses the homecoming and marriage plot as an abolitionist expression of complete relief for the African’s pain by establishing a female ex-slave as a potentially married British resident.

I argue that, in its attempt “to establish a basis for merging or marrying two unlike entities so that they would become part of a national or imperial whole,” as Mary Jean Corbett writes, The Irishman in London involves the African woman, Cubba, and the white Irish man revered in the farce’s main title in an intriguing and elaborate politics of homecoming that aligns with what Isaac Land calls “street citizenship.” Their interracial relationship is a joint opportunity for members of the empire’s underclass to wed two expressions of activism into one abolitionist whole: complete relief from the pains of colonial slavery in the colonies, and poverty in Ireland. Through this London alliance, Cubba is established as another fictional African woman who expands the parameters of freedom for women under “Imoinda’s shade.”

IN ORDER TO explore the connection between comedy, pain, and what Roxann Wheeler calls categories of difference in England, I want to examine the comedic genre known for making audiences take pleasure in viewing bodies in pain. Thomas Shadwell captured farce’s painful, slapstick side when he described the “putting out of candles, kicking down of tables, falling over joynt stools” as some of its most recognizable qualities. These clumsy physical antics force viewers to focus on actors’ bodies and take pleasure in the actors’ abilities to simulate painful experiences in the exaggerated physical style that farcical humor relies on. However, because it puts pain on display with an emotional detachment that Henri Bergson has called “anaesthesia of the heart,” farce has long been considered the lowest and most base form of comedy especially in relation to high, romantic, or sentimental comedy, all comic art forms that Jessica Milner Davis says engage our “intelligent critical faculties.” “When empathy takes hold,” Davis continues, “then the farcical-type characters begin to display self-consciousness and become more human, the consequences of fooling become more serious, and sentimental or romantic comedy is quickly at hand.” The implication here is that

---

21. Ibid.
farces lack the sophistication witnessed in other comic genres, an idea that Maurice Charney agrees with when he defines farce as “comedy . . . in which anything can happen. The characters are developed by quirks and eccentricities rather than according to any believable, psychological truth.”

Despite generating a “comic alienation from the actions on stage” and nullifying a viewer’s ability to take representations of pain too seriously, farces’ outrageous plots and unbelievable characterizations can still be wholly “diverting” in the memorable stock “types” they reproduce.

“Talking of the Farce of ‘High Life below Stairs,’” Samuel Johnson “said, ‘Here is a Farce, which is really very diverting when you see it acted; and yet one may read it, and not know that one has been reading anything at all.’” Here, Johnson confirms the critical understanding that farces are quick and light yet visually impressionable theatrical experiences. Farce is always understood and privileged from this visual perspective even though, as Johnson himself reveals, eighteen-century farceurs also made their work readily available to readers at the same time as, or shortly after, its performance on the stage. In 1759, *High Life Below Stairs* went through at least five editions, all within two months of its premiere (figure 11); *Love in the City* went through two editions in London and Dublin in 1767 (figure 12), the year of its premier; and although it first appeared in English theaters in 1792, *Irishman in London* went through two printings in London and one in Dublin in 1793 (figure 13). Although Johnson doesn’t find “anything at all” in the farcical text, the fact that they are circulating at the same time as farcical performances forces me to revisit the argument that I originally established in Chapter One that underscored the difference between seeing the role of an African performed onstage by white actors and reading about African-ness on the published pages of the *Oroonoko* text. In that chapter, I followed Peter Holland’s *The Ornament of Action* to argue that there is an essential difference between the reader’s and the viewer’s experience of Imoinda’s African-ness. The published text privileges marriage, dress, and religion as categories of difference that contextualize Imoinda’s African-ness on the pages of the *Oroonoko* text, whereas the actresses’ whiteness, dress, and celebrity are privileged in staged depictions of Imoinda, making this character seem more English to the viewer than African. I want to extend this prior argument about the importance of reading African-ness to my current examination of Africans in eighteenth-century farces.

24. Ibid.
HIGH LIFE BELOW STAIRS.
A FARCE OF TWO ACTS.

As it is performed at the
THEATRE-ROYAL IN Drury-Lane.

O imitatores, Servum pecus! Hor.

The Third Edition.

LONDON:
Printed for J. Newbery, at the Bible and Sun in St. Paul's
Church-Yard; R. Baily, at Litchfield; J. Leake
and W. Frederick, at Bath; B. Collins, at Salis
bury; and S. Stabler at York.
MDCCCLIX.
[Price One Shilling.] 3.
Love in the City;
A
COMIC OPERA.
As it is Performed at the
THEATRE ROYAL
IN
COVENT-GARDEN.

The Words Written, and the Music Compiled
By the Author of
LOVE IN A VILLAGE.

THE SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
Printed for W. GRIFFIN, in Catharine-Street,
in the Strand.
MDCCLXVII.

[P. 35. 8d.]

Figure 12.
Title page, Love in the City, 1767, Isaac Bickerstaff (1735–1812)
THE

IRISHMAN IN LONDON;

OR,

THE HAPPY AFRICAN.

A FARCE.

IN TWO ACTS.

WRITTEN BY

MR. WILLIAM MACREADY.

PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL,

COVENT-GARDEN.

DUBLIN:

PRINTED BY C. PERRY.
For the Company of Book-sellers.

1792.

Figure 13.
Title page, The Irishman in London; or, The Happy African, 1792, William Macready (d. 1829)
I contend that readers of farces are not always intended to be as emotionally detached from the African bodies in pain they read about on the pages of published farces as viewers accustomed to laughing at bodies in pain were expected to be. After all, in this era of the slave trade where skin color eventually becomes the predominant category of difference, African bodies in pain appear with undoubted frequency in numerous printed media. Poems such as Thomas Day’s *The Dying Negro* (1773), Hannah More’s *The Black Slave Trade* (1788), John Jamieson’s *The Sorrows of Slavery* (1789), and the anonymous “The African’s Complaint Aboard a slave Ship” (1793) make serious work of the black body in pain, and they are joined in their efforts by other genres: political propaganda such as Thomas Clarkson’s *Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species, Particularly the African* (1786), religious tracts such as John Wesley’s *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774),26 and illustrations such as those in John Gabriel Stedman’s *Narrative of a Five Years’ Expedition, Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796) (Figures 14 and 15).27

Even proslavery advocates were obliged to account for the black body in pain. Whether it was to profess knowledge of a more cruel experience of pain in Africa as the Antiguan planter, Samuel Martin, attempts in *An Essay Upon Plantership* (1750),28 or to claim to have “never known, and rarely heard, of any cruelty either practiced or tolerated by [Creole gentlemen] over their Negroes,”29 as Edward Long does in his *History of Jamaica*, late-eighteenth-century readers were literally bombarded with the black body in pain. As such, I want to consider black characters that appear in farces at this time as operating under a dialogic plane: they are at once, and simultaneously, deemphasizing the African’s pain by allowing English viewers to laugh at black bodies onstage, but in the reader’s mind, they are also part of an extended body of printed media that draws attention to the African body experiencing the pain of slavery. It is this dialogic perspective that this chapter addresses.

Isaac Bickerstaff’s dialect-speaking stage black, Mungo, claims, “E’en from my tongue some heart felt truths may fall,”30 indicating that even his humorous broken vernacular is designed to create a little disturbance about slaves and slavery within the plot of the play, and, by extension, within the mind of the reader in a way that had the potential to be lost on viewers distracted, as they constantly were, by laughter, hissing, people-watching,

---
27. (London: Johnson, 1796).
30. Epilogue from Isaac Bickerstaff’s *The Padlock*. 
Figure 14.
A Female Negro Slave, with a Weight chained to her Ankle,
John Gabriel Stedman (1744–97) in his Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (1796)
Figure 15.
A Negro Hung alive by the Ribs to a Gallows, John Gabriel Stedman (1744–97) in his Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam (1796)
conversations, interruptions, and audience comings-and-goings that regularly took place in the theater, reducing the dramatic force of what was occurring and being said onstage. As Janet Todd points out, “By modern standards [eighteenth-century] spectators were still rowdy . . . and there was much complaint by theatre people about inattention.”31 The same cannot be said for readers. In fact, William Hogarth’s inclusion of blacks in farcical scenes of everyday British life, such as “Noon” in the *Time of Day* (1736) series (figure 16), visually illustrates that the process of reading blackness in eighteenth-century narratives demands attention in order to fully understand and appreciate the social commentary being made, as David Dabydeen has demonstrated in *Hogarth’s Blacks* (1987). By reading the Africans in *High Life Below Stairs, Love in the City*, and *The Irishman in London; or, The Happy African* with a serious Hogarthian eye of social commentary and critique, I will demonstrate that buffoonery was a significant part but not the whole of the African’s function within farce. When African-ness is actively imagined rather than merely reproduced cosmetically on the bodies of the white actors and actresses onstage, the farcical African is read as a dramatic “type” whose blackness offers some commentary about slaves and/or slavery as the contemporary writer saw it. In the absence of evidence that speaks to each dramatist’s particular stance on the issue, staging, dialogue, and wordplay offer another way to determine if and how the dramatist’s construction of African-ness was designed to establish some sort of emotional connection to the slew of printed media outside the theater that were collectively responsible for influencing Britons and politicizing the experiences of black bodies in pain.

I AM ARGUING, then, that humorous depictions of blacks onstage that also claim a reader’s attention to this mournful theme of African slavery on the pages of their published editions are sometimes designed to be at the root of a British viewer’s comedic pleasure as well as provide the British reader with an opportunity to reflect on the pain that the British Empire exacts. This dialogic plane is completely avoided, however, in one of the most famous comic representations of a white stage Creole in England: Richard Cumberland’s *The West Indian*.

As his French-sounding name implies, Belcour, the West Indian of Cumberland’s title, has a ‘good heart’ (Belle Coeur), but he also has an impetuous, extravagant manner that Wylie Sypher identifies as a trait commonly

Figure 16.
“Noon,” 1736, from *The Four Times of Day*,
William Hogarth (1697–1764)
applied to literary depictions of wealthy white West Indians. To see the full extent of this personality, Stockwell, a prosperous English merchant and Belcour’s long-lost father, decides to postpone revealing his paternity to his son until he has time to observe this son’s “disposition: this can only be done by letting his spirit take its course without restraint” (I.i). Belcour’s “spirit” of impetuosity, however, involves the “outlandish spark” in a violent altercation upon his arrival at the London port. Before he makes his “passage from the riverside” (I.v) to the town for his introduction to Stockwell, Belcour became “out of patience with the whole tribe of custom house extortioners, boatmen, tide-waiters and water bailiffs, that beset [him] on all sides,” and he “proceeded a little too roughly to brush them away with [his] rattan” (I.v). Being “accustomed to a land of slaves” (I.v)—subordinates who, he implies, would never dare to question and plague a man of his class with restrictions and costs associated with citizenship—the West Indian violently attacks all the pesky English functionaries who have the temerity to “beset” him, impeding his smooth transition into this society. His violence toward them, however, meets with equal force. “A furious scuffle ensued; in the course of which, [Belcour’s] person and apparel suffered so much that [he] was obliged to step into the first tavern to refit” (I.v) before arriving for his first meeting with Stockwell. Recounting this whole incident in the town office of the man he does not yet know to be his father, the white West Indian says he still feels “the effects of it in every bone of my skin” (I.v).

In London, Belcour’s body is in pain—pain resulting from an incident in which his old colonial assumptions about class clash with the resistant forces of a new metropolitan society where his rank, privilege, and citizenship status are not as assured as he thought. If he is to avoid further cultural clashes of this kind and alleviate the pain of his arrival, Belcour must learn not only to temper his wild West Indian ways but also to transform them into moderate English ones. The imagery surrounding his arrival attests as

---

32. For a specific examination of this white West Indian stock character, see Wylie Sypher’s “The West-Indian as a ‘Character’ in the Eighteenth Century,” *Studies in Philology* 36 (1939): 503–20. For a broader examination of the West Indian’s relationship to slavery and abolition see his *Guinea’s Captive Kings*.

33. My use of this term is informed both by Kristina Straub’s “Bodies in Pain: The Subjection of Players,” in *Sexual Suspects* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 151–73; and the introduction to Elaine Scarry’s *The Body in Pain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3–23. Where Straub skillfully discusses the pains of players/actors in the eighteenth century, I restrict my analysis to the pains that drama itself, and Farce, in particular, seeks to convey as it relates to the West Indian and slavery. This chapter is an attempt to refute Scarry’s “complaint” (taken from Virginia Woolf) “about the absence (or what should be designated the ‘near absence’) of literary representations of pain” (10). As I will argue, farcical humor, in general, has many depictions of bodies experiencing pain. And when those bodies are from the West Indies, I contend that this literary discourse surrounding bodies in pain sometimes revolves around antislavery and even abolition.
much. Making his way from the amniotic security of privileged citizenship that both the West Indian island and ship provide him, through the stifling experience of the vaginal “passage from the riverside” to the town where he must fight his way through perceived impositions and impediments to arrive, newly attired, into the arms of the English father he has never before seen, the body of Cumberland’s Creole experiences a violent rebirth in London. This is only the beginning of his redevelopment, however. Belcour’s survival in his new metropolitan environment depends on his ability to learn and adopt the well-stocked, “temperate and restrained authority” that his English father, Stockwell, exemplifies. After he has thus re-formed himself, the community at the end of The West Indian rewards Belcour with marriage to Louisa Dudley, a virtuous English woman.

This marriage does more than provide a harmonious conclusion to Cumberland’s comedy; it also relieves the stage Creole from the stigma of colonial incongruity that initially plagued him. Belcourt becomes part of a dynamic of assimilation in which his marriage to an Englishwoman as well as his reunion with his biological father are the remedies that complete his transformation from outlandish Creole to refined English resident. This transformation also reveals a potent strand of nationalism lying at the heart of Cumberland’s text. Belcourt minimizes the distance between the Creole onstage and the English spectator by transforming into the ideal representation of the figure audiences know well—a reformed “Christian Englishman” (I.ii) as well-stocked in English morality and respectability as his English father, Stockwell. Stockwell’s biological recognition of, and reunion with, his son is, then, mimicked by the English spectator’s recognition of Belcourt at the end of the play. Because of his reformed values, both recognize Belcourt as their own and welcome him back home to the English fold.

However, the relief from the pain of colonial incongruity that Belcourt’s successful act of homecoming affords him at the end of the play elides a contentious relationship that contemporary white Creoles, in general, had with the experience of pain itself. Throughout the course of the play, The West Indian does not include any direct scene and only the most indirect reference to the pain that the Creole had previously inflicted on Africans during his time as a West Indian slaveholder. Although they are as much associated with the West Indies as any white Creole, Africans have no speaking parts in The West Indian and are only tacitly evoked onstage once: “A Sailor enters, ushering in several black Servants, carrying portmanteaux, trunks etc.” and delivers an inventory of Belcourt’s goods; these include “two green monkeys, a pair of grey parrots, a Jamaican sow and pigs, and a Mangrove dog” (I.ii). Lumped together with the animals, the “black Servants” are implicitly animalized themselves, and as such, their presence lends little
to understanding Belcour's character or the play's plot; they are, merely, additional examples of Belcour's excessive exoticism and wealth—trinkets that attest to his circumstance and locate his origins in an exotic Caribbean clime. Cumberland's strict avoidance of black characters onstage seems all the more deliberate considering contemporary precedent had already made the African in England a viable comedic presence on the British stage. For instance, only three years before The West Indian, Isaac Bickerstaff's extremely popular comic opera The Padlock (1768) became a sensation largely because of its representation of the black male, Mungo.34

In light of Bickerstaff's evident success with this figure, Cumberland's refusal to privilege blacks in his own popular West Indian play suggests that another dynamic may be at work in this text—one that works in tandem with its dynamic of assimilation—a dynamic of denial. The West Indian denies the significance of the humans that Belcour depends on for his existence as "a young West Indian of fortune" in an effort to distance him from them—slave master from slaves—as the Creole goes about the business of emotionally connecting with the British audience and transforming himself into a reformed and refined Englishman. And this distancing is not only visually reinforced onstage. Cumberland's use of the euphemism "Servants" rather than slaves in the play's stage directions to refer to Belcour's blacks offers a brief yet potent linguistic indication that he intends to deflect overt discussions of slaves and slavery away from his published text as well.35 This deliberate distancing of black slaves and slavery from the visual and textual dynamics of The West Indian and from direct association with the white Creole hero encourages both British viewers and readers to gloss over the dark vices of the man "accustomed to a land of slaves" and, instead, to focus solely on the way in which his painful introduction to England is ultimately relieved through marriage and paternal recognition. However, their delight in Belcour only comes about because the dramatist has expedited the Creole's appeal and obviated the potentially repugnant view of his character by deliberately minimizing the existence of black pain.

Cumberland's redemptive literary and social work on behalf of the white stage Creole is replicated much later in his play The Jew (1794), another

34. Thomas Davies writes, "The Padlock is a pleasing musical performance. . . . The music was composed by Mr. Dibdin, who played the part of Mungo with much satisfaction of the audience." Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, vol. 2 (London, 1780), 164. Errol Hill also points out that The Padlock was popular in Jamaica during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (The Jamaican Stage, 78).

35. Another interesting scene of this nature occurs in The Woman of Colour when the heroine, Olivia Fairfield, defends her black servant, Dido, to a little boy named George and tells him that "her father and her mother were slaves, or, as you would call them, servants to [Olivia's father]" (80). Here, the biracial woman articulates the polite difference between "servants" and "slaves."
popular sentimental comedy that, in this instance, aimed at redeeming the social reputation of the religious figure that Shakespeare’s Shylock (among others) had turned into an accepted site of public scorn.36 But in 1771, the year that Belcour first appears on a London stage, *The West Indian* might have deployed its dynamics of assimilation and denial for a very specific political purpose. During this year, the white slaveholding Creole class in England was the target of significant reproach and condemnation from the Englishmen Granville Sharp and Francis Hargrave, who banded together to legally challenge Charles Stewart’s attempts to regain control of his former slave, James Somerset, two years after Somerset had left his master’s service. If he legally regained ownership, Stewart aimed to transport Somerset and have him resold there. His efforts, however, were unsuccessful. Rather than being remanded to the Caribbean, Somerset was discharged in the 1772 ruling that came to be known as the Mansfield Judgment. It is unknown whether Cumberland’s efforts at shielding Belcour from the stigmas of slaves and slavery were deliberately designed to garner public support for slaveholding men such as Stewart as opinion against them mounted during the year leading up to Mansfield’s judgment in the Somerset case. However, his sentimental comedy made some things very evident to his contemporaries: *The West Indian* is designed to court favor for the white Creole in England, soften the portrayal of this proslavery figure, and encourage his continued improvement by divorcing him from the practice, the people, the place, and the pains that threaten to define him as unscrupulously harsh, and by marrying him to a virtuous Englishwoman, an act that endears him in the hearts of the English viewers and establishes this character as a national symbol of pride. In short, in the pre–Mansfield Judgment environment in which *The West Indian* appeared, Cumberland reveals that the Creole can come home again and be ultimately recognized as an Englishman, but only if the playwright is able to navigate an elaborate politics of homecoming that maximizes the redemptive Creole’s process of assimilation in England while minimizing, or even denying, the existence of black pain.

WHEN CUMBERLAND’S sentimental comedy is considered alongside the farces *High Life Below Stairs* and *Love in the City*, the emphases on the white Creole’s colonial incongruity, domestic pain, transformation, and assimilation are pronounced even more forcefully. *High Life*’s action takes place, primarily, within the domestic underworld of Lovel’s home—the kitchen—

where the servants exhibit astoundingly egregious behavior. The head house-servants, Philip and Kitty, organize a party to take place while their master is away, and they are joined by Lady Bab's and Lady Charlotte's maids, and Sir Harry's and the Duke's man-servants—domestics who “have the honour to serve the Nobility” (I.ii) and think of themselves so far “above the common forms” (I.ii) that they all adopt the airs, graces, and even the names of their employers. During the party, these servants aim to enjoy the full bounty of Lovel's wine cellar, accompanied by the best musical entertainment his money can provide. But this night of extreme revelry is only the latest depredatory act. Kitty tells Philip that he should “set up a chocolate house” “with the five hundred pounds which [he has] already saved in this extravagant fellow's family” (I.iii), and she and Philip “cheat him wherever [they] can lay [their] fingers” (II.i); Cook disposes of some of her master's “perquisites” to the tallow chandler; and Coachman and Kingston, the black male servant, raid the wine cellar to drink “their master's good journey” (I.iii) as soon as he ostensibly departs for Devonshire. With these depredatory domestic goings-on it's little wonder that Lovel's “expenses often made [him] stare” (I.i)! Without regulation, his servants take pains to help themselves to everything at their disposal, consuming or disposing of his goods with a reckless abandon that threatens to financially destroy him while their noble guests affect the manners of their employers. “High life” in terms of extravagant living, rank impersonation, and general revelry is literally being had with all abandon “below stairs.”

These domestics are not the most egregious transgressors of rank, respectability, and temperance in the domestic society Townley creates onstage, however. Lovel's contrasts with his English friend, the older gentleman, Charles Freeman, reveal how thoroughly this West Indian man clashes with the ideals of responsible rank and respectable English masculinity. As soon as he enters the play, Lovel displays all of the negative traits that Wylie Sypher has identified as typical of the eighteenth-century stock West Indian. Oustentatious displays of wealth and luxury enthrall him; Freeman recounts, “You Gentry of the Western Isles . . . love Pomp and Parade—I have seen it delight your Soul, when the People in the Street have stared at your Equipage; especially if they whispered loud enough to be heard, ‘That is Squire Lovel, the great West Indian’” (I.i). Exposing his excessive love of vanity and superficiality, Freeman puts Lovel in contrast and warns him that his typical West Indian passion for self-indulgence will eventually take as peremptory and premature a physical toll on him as it has on all his race: “you [West Indians] consume so fast that not one in twenty of you live to be fifty years old” (I.i). Freeman's perceptive critiques indicate that Lovel is completely oblivious to the way the extreme passions of his own soul delights yet imperils his body.
Indeed, Lovel is oblivious to the pain he inflicts on his own body, because he is intoxicated with conspicuous acts of consumption and displays of wealth. His name—an obvious wordplay on the phrase ‘love all’—emphasizes just how completely overconsumption defines him. From the beginning, *High Life* establishes that this wild West Indian is painfully at odds with a critical, sober, experienced, and enlightened English Freeman.

Assembling an amalgam of domestics who transgress rank and temperance in the home of a Creole man whose name and body epitomizes both these acts of transgression, Townley not only makes Lovel’s domestic household reflect the pains of which Lovel’s own body suffers, he also blames the West Indian for allowing his colonial sensibilities to take hold in the metropolis, creating a space for domestics to mindlessly inflict a multitude of pains on him, themselves, their profession and the respectability accorded to notions of rank. For so egregiously transgressing the mores of rank and respectability in the metropolis, the Creole in London is recognized as a dangerously destabilizing presence who threatens to inspire pain and dis-ease at every level of British society. However, *The West Indian* reminds us that this wild man is capable of being reformed in England if the distance between his behavior and that of a representative Englishman can be breached. For this to happen, Lovel’s home and body must be both reborn and reformed in London.

Townley begins outlining Lovel’s rebirth once the master pretends to leave his London house for Devonshire, only to return to it cleverly disguised as a “country boy” named “Jemmy” who is seeking to be trained up in service. With country clothes, a coarse carrot-red wig, and a rustic accent, Lovel infiltrates the ranks of the servant class on the night of their party to find out, firsthand, whether his own domestics are cozening him. His rebirth in London occurs literally and painfully at the hands of one of the servants whom Lovel is convinced “is a rogue among my folks . . . that surly Dog Tom” (I.i). Prior to the party, the more perceptive Freeman observes that Tom “has a good deal of surly honesty about him” (I.i; my emphasis). “Jemmy” aims to put Tom’s honesty and Freeman’s perception to the test. A stage direction states that “Jemmy” “[Goes up to Tom]” (II.i) in a threatening posture accompanied by the pilferers, Philip and Kitty, in order to find out where Tom’s allegiances lie. “What do you know?” (II.i) they each ask Tom in turn. “I know that you two are in Fee with every tradesman belonging to the House,” Tom snaps at Philip and Kitty, “and that you, Mr. Clodpole, are in a fair Way to be hang’d. [Strikes Lovel]” (II.i). Assured of Tom’s honesty by his angry retort and the indignation he expresses about the servants’ depredatory behavior, Lovel calls Tom’s strike “an honest blow” (II.i), a particularly resonant phrase. “An honest blow” refers to a strike from an honest
man, a blow that hits a target directly, or a well-deserved reprimand. When applied to newborns, “an honest blow” is also the crucial slap that brings them into life. All of these connotations relate to Lovel as he immediately disabuses himself of his initial assumption and cries, “the fellow I thought a rogue is the only honest servant in my house” (II.i). Repeating the word “honest” twice to refer to Tom after Freeman has already used it in relation to this servant confirms that Lovel not only begins to see his own household through Freeman’s eyes but also to see how painfully at odds he had been in relation to this perceptive Englishman. His rebirth in the metropolis has commenced. Next up, the reformation of his home and his body.

After Lovel receives Tom’s “honest blow” and begins to see the error of his ways, his reformation depends on his active attempts to reestablish the boundaries he has allowed to be so freely transgressed. This message is also brought out by Townley’s skillful use of wordplay at the end of the farce. During the party “Jemmy” becomes “free of the cellar” (II.i) when Philip gives “him a smack of every sort of wine from humble port to imperial Tokay” (II.i). “Yes, I am free—I am very free” (II.i), Lovel remarks after drinking the wine, his repetition a performative way of signaling “Jemmy’s” apparent drunkenness from having imbibed these fine wines. Lovel’s use of this emancipatory phrase also resonates, somberly, throughout the remainder of the farce, however. “Jemmy” frees himself from the party only to reappear, moments later, reclothed as Lovel pretending to have returned home from Devonshire, very early and completely drunk. Where the old vice-ridden Lovel entered his home disguised as the naïf, “Jemmy,” and discovered how easy it is to become “free of the cellar,” a new, completely sober and enlightened Lovel returns to the flagrant site of transgression disguised as his old vice-ridden self and reveals how easy it is to become free of these intoxicating forces. He divests himself of all vestiges of vice when he discharges the ringleaders, Philip and Kitty, and expels the noble domestics from his home. With these acts of closure, Lovel restores order to his household and his body; he alleviates his own pain and ridicule by getting rid of the domestics who illustrate the extreme West Indian vices that put him so painfully at odds with the sober English Freeman. Lovel’s decision to reenter his home initially pretending to be drunk but ultimately showing himself completely sober and enlightened has a greater significance, however, because it is an act of homecoming that attests to the transformation of his soul and, in turn, his national identity. He has freed not only his house of vice but also his body of the intoxicating delights of consumption that had, heretofore, corroded it. Onstage, this reformed and liberated West Indian has returned to his London home and remade himself—mind, body, and spirit—into another appealing, critical, sober, and enlightened English free man.
WHERE THESE climactic acts of homecoming and identification with the older paternal surrogate relieve the West Indian from the stigmas of his Creole identity and allow him to be recognized onstage as a completely reformed Englishman, the domestic sphere takes on a decidedly economic air in the staging of Isaac Bickerstaff’s comic opera *Love in the City*. It opens with two women, “Priscilla and Penelope: one seated, and holding a skein of silk, while the other winds it off on a ball.” This genteel work is not taking place within the “back parlor” of a house, as viewers would expect, but “nearer the front” of “a grocer’s shop with a compting house” owned by Penelope’s brother and Priscilla’s cousin, Young Walter Cockney, who sells “tea, sugar and other things” there. In a clear effort to merge the circulation of exotic colonial goods with women marketing the domestic talents that will make them profitable in the marriage trade, Bickerstaff’s farce perhaps anticipates Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (1776) and its argument that societies benefit more from free market economies. Bickerstaff, however, sets the farcical tone for his play by focusing on the pain of homecoming as it relates to a Creole female recently liberated from the confines of both a West Indian colony and an English school.

As its title suggests, Bickerstaff’s drama can be read as an eighteenth-century rendition of the hugely popular Home Box Office (HBO) comedy *Sex and the City*, wherein four single white women from different backgrounds—in this case, one French woman, one West Indian woman, and two Englishwomen (one young, the other older)—are looking for love amidst the hustle and bustle of a major metropolitan city. London is their home, and it is hailed in song as the “noblest mart on earth, / Unrival’d still in commerce reign” (I.i). But instead of viewing Londoners purely as the “nation of shopkeepers” that Smith would eventually envisage, Bickerstaff presents them as a diverse nation of social climbers who use love and marriage to trade themselves up in English society.

The Creole, Priscilla Tomboy, is the richest and most independent of this London-based foursome, but also the most in need of elevation because of her volatility. She has been “sent to England for [her] education” (I.ii). Yet she seems totally incapable of being formally educated in the traditional manner of an English lady, a point underscored by Walter, Priscilla’s

---

37. For more on Bickerstaff, see Bell’s *British Theatre. Consisting of the most Esteemed English plays* (London, 1797), 8; Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, “Isaac Bickerstaff’s Copyrights—And a Biographical Discovery,” *Philological Quarterly* 83 (2004): 259-73.

38. *Love in the City*, 9.


40. Bickerstaff defined his work as “Comic Opera,” but I include it within the field of Farce because it contains the same slapstick humor and basic characterizations with the added benefit of music.
cousin and potential suitor, who reveals that she “was turned out of Hackney boarding-school for beating the governess” (I.i). Priscilla’s impatience with English functionaries and her penchant for retaliatory violence toward them brings to mind Belcour’s violent behavior at the English wharf because he is a West Indian “accustomed to a land of slaves.” Walter believes that her violence derives from the same source: “the breeding [she] got in the plantations.” This was a common view taken of Creoles. Only two years earlier, the English physician John Fothergill had described them as “bred for the most part at the Breast of a Negro slave; surrounded in their Infancy with a numerous Retinue of these dark attendants, they are habituated by Precept and Example, to Sensuality, Selfishness, and Despotism.”

The privilege of complete ascendancy over slaves in the West Indies allows Creoles such as Priscilla to be “free to act as they pleased towards blacks,” as Trevor Burnard has asserted, and it is this history of despotic ascendancy that explains Priscilla’s penchant for violence in England. To increase the comic effect of this West Indian girl going wild on the British stage, Bickerstaff also includes a verbal dimension to Priscilla’s violence. She announces that she would rather “spit in [the] face” of the man her guardian, Uncle Barnacle, “has a mind to marry [her] to” than “kiss him” (I.ii). And when she pretends to imagine domestic bliss with Walter she tells him, “If you come to Jamaica with me, I’ll raise the Negers for us—It’s only giving them a few yams and licking them” (II.iv).

Violence is, clearly, Priscilla’s defining characteristic, and its emphasis indicates not only her colonial incongruity in London but also that she is in desperate need of a finishing education in feminine refinement before she is forever set down as a “romp,” the term Samuel Johnson uses to define as “a rude, awkward, boisterous, untaught girl.” Indeed, Walter emphasizes her need for change when he remarks, “I believe you think you have got among your blackamoors. But you are not got among your blackamoors now Miss” (I.i). Implying that she is too accustomed to savagery, Walter insinuates that Priscilla must be civilized now that she is no longer living in the colonies. The classroom has failed to produce this transformation into a refined white femininity. But Bickerstaff’s title and wordplay indicate that another transformative process is available to Priscilla. Her surname, “Tomboy,” implies that the penchant for violence which so completely defines her is, actually, only an awkward intermediary phase in her female development—the growing pains of a female adolescent used to an unregulated West Indian life. Actively getting rid of this name provides a way to relieve these adolescent

---

41. Considerations relative to the North American colonies (London: Kent, 1765), 41–42.
42. Trevor Burnard, Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire, 32.
43. In fact, Love in the City was actually altered and retitled The Romp in 1786.
growing pains, and as the title of the play suggests, love, marriage, and the
prospect of a London home and husband’s surname are vehicles by which the
female growing pains of Miss “Tomboy” will be reborn and reformed into a
refined example of English femininity.

Despite her adolescence, Priscilla is a most aggressive marriage negotiator.
She tells her cousin, Penelope, “I am neither in leading strings, nor hang-
ing sleeves. Why should not I please myself?” (I.ii), clearly indicating that,
relieved of the physical trappings of infancy and childhood, she is aware of,
and intent on using, her mature body for her own pleasurable ends. These
pleasurable ends involve social elevation by marriage: “why should I marry
a tradesman,” she tells Penelope, “when I can have a gentleman?” (I.ii). Her
preference for an independent man of wealth indicates that she intends to
exchange her considerable West Indian wealth for the prestige accorded to
rank and respectability in England. To this end, she rejects the wealthy gro-
cer, Walter, and sets her sights on Mr. Sightly, “the sweetest, prettiest gentle-
man you ever set your eyes on” (I.ii). Where bodily self-indulgences expressed
by the Creole men in *High Life* and *The West Indian* illustrated the vices that
Lovel and Belcour must eschew in order to move forward with their transfor-
mations into refined Englishmen, Priscilla’s self-indulgent quest to find love
in the city with this English gentleman not only drives the premise behind
the plot but also underscores her own active intent on being transformed
from the wild adolescent “Tomboy” that she is into “the sweetest, prettiest
[gentlewoman] you ever set your eyes on.”

In short, Priscilla’s impending marriage means that she is destined to
become a Mrs. “Sightly,” as in, worth seeing, English woman—as poten-
tially worthy an example of marital admiration as her cousin, Penelope,
whose name is an explicit evocation of Odysseus’s faithful wife and whose
engagement to “a [poor] young mercer, just set up in business” (I.iii), is
a testament of her lack of materialism and her true feeling. In his *History
of Jamaica* (1774), Edward Long comments on the potential benefits of a
Creole woman’s transformation into an Englishwoman when he observes
that “The [Creole] ladies . . . who live in and about the town, being often
in the company with Europeans, and others brought up in Great Britain,
copy imperceptibly their manner and address; and become better qualified
to fill the honourable station of a wife.”

---

44. Ann Morse Earle writes, “The use of the word hanging sleeves in common speech and in
literature is most interesting. It had a figurative meaning; it symbolized youth and innocence. This
meaning was acquired, of course, from the wear for centuries of hanging sleeves by little children,
both boys and girls.” *Two Centuries of Costume in America, MDCXX–MDCCCXX* (New York: Mac-
millan, 1903), 286.

45. In Homer’s *Odyssey*, during her husband’s long absence, Penelope kept suitors at bay.

Priscilla seeks to relieve the growing pains of colonial incongruity that plagued her in London, and this act of closure transforms her, onstage, into as striking a domestic copy of the admirable, English, faithful wife, Penelope, as High Life’s stage transforms Lovel into another English free man.

HIGH LIFE and Love in the City introduce the Creole template that The West Indian popularized wherein a white stage Creole is reformed and relieved of pain through a process of rebirth and reformation that sees the Creole change into an appealing copy of the comedy’s idealized English character who has served as the Creole’s more respectable foil at home in the English metropolis; however, these farces challenge, rather than reproduce, the politics of homecoming detected in The West Indian by exacerbating, rather than occluding, the African’s experience of pain for readers.

Although Edward Long “rendered all due praise to the Creole ladies for their many amiable qualities”\(^47\) in his History of Jamaica, and Thomas Atwood claimed in his History of Dominica (1791) that “the English white women in the West Indies are as lovely as in any part of the world besides, make as good wives, tender mothers, and as agreeable companions,”\(^48\) factual and literary accounts often distinguished between two types of white Creole women. J. B. Moreton’s West India Customs and Manners (1793) attests that white Creole women “who are educated properly from their infancy are as chaste and well bred women as any in the world” but, like Fothergill, Moreton distinguishes these “chaste” ones from those “who receive their education amongst negro wenches, and imbibe great part of their dialect, principles, manners and customs.”\(^49\) Helena Wells echoes Moreton’s distinction when she describes her eponymous heroine’s education in Constantia Neville, or the West Indian (1800): “The pains taken to keep Constantia from the negroes (Mrs. Neville always having an English women in her nursery) added to the society in which she was permitted to mix in her father’s house, gave her at twelve years old a fluency of speech, and correctness of language, which many of her seniors would have been proud to possess.”\(^50\)

In contrast to such prodigies, Creole women who associated with blacks offered British writers opportunities to creatively explore white female degeneracy. Before Priscilla marries Mr. Sightly, her aggressive method of pursuing him—becoming acquainted with him in Miss La Blond’s shop, writing to him, and offering to run away with him—suggests that Fothergill

\(^{47}\) Ibid., 276.
\(^{48}\) History of Dominica (London: Johnson, 1791), 211.
\(^{49}\) West India Manners and Customs (London: Parsons, 1793), 121.
\(^{50}\) Vol. 1 (London: Whittingham, 1800), 77.
and Moreton were right: associating with “blackamoors” has made Priscilla into as sexually rapacious a Creole woman as Thomas Dibdin’s Lady Selina Sugarcane from *Family Quarrels* (1802)—a Creole woman with a black maid (Betty Lily) who “made a tour of the whole village, Crossed two ploughed fields, and, after wandering in the church-yard . . . overtook [Charles Supplejack]” (II.iii) in her own aggressive sexual pursuit of her intended suitor.51

However, it is emotional intemperance and degeneracy that most defines the fictional Creole woman connected to blacks. I have already discussed how Mrs. Jeffries from Edgeworth’s *The Grateful Negro* severely chastised Hector’s wife in a fit of pique over a torn dress. This type of emotionally extreme and extremely unfeeling behavior is also displayed by the first Mrs. George Ellison in Sarah Scott’s historical novel of that name, whose outpouring of sympathy for an injured lapdog exceeds the level of compassion she shows for a whipped slave. But Bickerstaff’s stage visually reinforces these textual impressions of the female Creole’s emotional intemperance and degeneracy when Priscilla becomes extremely abrasive to her black maid, Quasheba, ordering her to “bring down my catgut. Why don’t you make haste? See how she lets it fall: take it up again—Here threadle my needle—where are you going now? Stand behind my back” (I.ii). Priscilla’s aggressive manipulation of Quasheba’s body is humorous onstage because her rapid sequence of orders prevents the maid from doing any of them correctly. One can imagine her black body flailing from task to task in a frantic silence, making viewers laugh at her exaggerated physical responses to Priscilla’s rapid sequence of commands. But in the published version of the text, the reader’s focus is drawn more to two serious acts of extreme immobilization that Priscilla enforces over her black maid: “stand behind my back,” she commands, and “if ever I hear, hussy, that you mention a word of what I am going to say to any one else in the house, I will have you horse-whipp’d till there is not a bit of flesh left on your bones” (I.ii). Where Quasheba’s silence onstage was a way to focus on her farcical body movements, the silence and immobilization that Priscilla enforces on the pages of the published text with the threat of extreme bodily pain if Quasheba transgresses is read as an example of the white Creole’s despotic and malevolent nature which Fothergill, Moreton, Wells, and others reviled. By identifying, within the same scene, the despotic environment under which the silenced black body exists as well as this silenced black body’s humorous potential, *Love in the City* exposes the dialogic plane under which it functions, and it makes an active connection to other print media that identified the African experience of pain even as it

encourages viewers to laugh at this abused black woman. Bickerstaff’s textual critique of Priscilla does not stop there, however.

“Oh, poor creature!” Penelope exclaims, incensed and alarmed at Priscilla’s brutality toward Quasheba. The Creole woman answers dismissively,

PRIS. Psha,—what is she but a Neger? If she was at home at our plantations she would find the difference, we make no account of them there at all: if I had a fancy for one of their skins I should not think much of taking it.

PEN. I suppose then you imagine they have no feeling?

PRIS. Oh! We never consider that there. (I, ii)

Penelope’s sensitivity toward Quasheba is hardly extensive. She never makes any overt gesture to end or relieve the black woman’s pain; yet, the idea that this English woman imagines slaves in the colonies with “feeling” similar to her own shows that she is capable of narrowing the emotional distance between the colonial slave and herself. Not so Priscilla, who issues three astoundingly extreme examples of her emotional distance from the pain of African slaves: “we make no account of [Negers] there at all”; “I should not think much of taking [a Neger’s skin]”; “we never consider that [Negers have feelings] there.” On the issue of pain, her pronouns indicate that she speaks for the entire white Creole nation.

It is this complete lack of tempered humanity and empathy for the African’s pain that ultimately undermines Priscilla’s transformation in English society. Instead of transforming from Miss “Tomboy” to Mrs. “Sightly”—a copy of English femininity worth seeing—the intent behind the textual wordplay of Priscilla’s surnames before and after marriage suggests more the unchanging transformation she makes from one ghastly, intemperate spectacle of femininity to another. Despite the onstage spectacle of her intended marriage, at the play’s end, Priscilla is exposed as a textual failure of transformation—a Mrs. “Sightly” who will be as garish a wife as she was an adolescent “Tomboy.” On paper, this Creole woman is, essentially, unchanged in London.

WORDPLAY IS the specific device Bickerstaff uses to present Priscilla’s faux transformation, thereby establishing her as one who is not and cannot be reborn or reformed in the metropolis because physical intemperance and emotional degeneracy toward Quasheba disqualify her from being recognized as English. Although Townley employs the same device to the same end in *High Life Below Stairs*, it operates on a different dialogic plane.
During the humorous onstage climax where the “sober” Lovel symbolically purged and “punish’d the bad” servants, rewarded “the good,” honest one (II.i), and is recognized as a reformed English man, the reader recognizes that Lovel is anything but a free man because his black servants, Kingston and Cloe, remain with him. They have also participated extensively in the abuse of Lovel’s home, yet they are noticeably missing during the climax, an absence that implies they have somehow escaped punishment. But I want to suggest that, of all Lovel’s domestics, it is most important that Kingston and Cloe face punishment because of what the farce implies that they and their blackness represent.

At the beginning of the play, Lovel’s confident and unequivocal assertion that “I will swear for [the integrity of] my blacks” (I.i) suggests that a high level of familiarity exists between him and the slaves he has brought with him from his Jamaican plantation. But disguised as “Jemmy” during the servants’ party, Lovel finds out their real identities: Kingston is a drunk and Cloe is a whore—both examples of the kinds of delightful yet imperiling consumption that Freeman has previously critiqued in Lovel. During the course of the play, Lovel does administer some admonishments to his black servants when “Jemmy” roughly handles Kingston by his nose to wake him up from his drunken stupor and ridicules Cloe’s beauty and sexual worth with the implication that her interest in him is far from “A very pretty Amour” (I.iii). Yet such punishments are too mild for blacks whose sexual and bacchanalian tendencies reflect the immoral urges inherent in Lovel’s own West Indian body and soul, and threaten not merely the financial, but also the moral tenor of his home. Without a doubt, Kingston and Cloe must be dismissed with the other major ringleaders so that Lovel can remake himself into another English free man. Indeed, his complete reformation depends on their dismissal. And yet, High Life resists showing this particular act of purging blackness because it is an act of closure that the text is unable to countenance in 1759.

In that year, British law had not yet settled on a definitive statement about the legal status of slaves brought to Britain by their West Indian masters, and thus, the informal Yorke–Talbot decision of 1729 was the accepted practice on this issue: baptism and residence in England did not alter a colonial slave’s enslaved status. So in 1759, there is high degree of uncertainty as to the citizenship status of Kingston and Cloe, who inhabit the nebulous position between slaves and servants in England. The assurance behind Lovel’s transformation into an English free man hits a roadblock at the end of the play because of this uncertainty, one that is more evident to a reader attuned to Yorke–Talbot than to a viewer dazzled by the farce’s climactic act

52. Shyllon, Black People in Britain, 20.
of purging. If Lovel merely dismisses Kingston and Cloe from his home and employ, he wouldn’t be punishing these blacks; technically, he’d be freeing them as well as granting them de facto citizenship status by allowing them to hunt for jobs elsewhere in England. In fact, the only punishment this white Creole slaveholder can enact on his slaves is to send them back to Jamaica and to slavery, an act that *Staying Power* (1984), Peter Fryer’s marvelous history of black people in Britain, shows was not unprecedented. However, the prospect of reenslavement might have been too extreme a punishment for an English audience to take pleasure in, especially with *Oroonoko* as this farce’s backdrop. So Townley’s farce avoids detailing Lovel’s judgment over the black servants who illustrate the worst of his own faults by not having them return during the climax. Yet their absence is a palpable and serious textual moment. The continued presence of Kingston and Cloe in Lovel’s home and life that the published text draws attention to reveals Lovel’s homecoming as a sham. Until he discharges Kingston and Cloe, the reader recognizes that Lovel can never be recognized as another sober English free man because his connection to slaves and slavery still defines him and maintains a presence within his home and identity in England. This will forever make him different, perhaps inferior, wholly Creole, and never English.

Thus, despite humorous climaxes involving marriage and the divestment of vice-ridden employees that, together, create impressions, onstage, that Priscilla and Lovel have transformed into refined English residents, textual wordplay coupled with the palpable presence or absence of black pain in *High Life* and *Love in the City* serve to reinforce the unchanging nature of the white stage Creole and confirm for English readers of these farces that Lovel is no English Freeman and Priscilla is no English Penelope. Creoles ultimately lack the humane feeling, action, and sensibility that is a mark of true Englishness; their homecomings in these farces are not welcoming acts of national recognition and reception but politicized acts of national distinction that combine English xenophobia with antislavery criticism. These farces privilege the purity of the English spirit of freedom by excluding Creoles from legitimate English recognition because of their either emotional attachment to or emotional detachment from slaves and slavery. Farces are able to make a subtle political protest against white Creoles, on behalf of slaves, and against slavery by highlighting the Creoles’ exclusion from the spirit of Englishness.

But what of the farcical stage Africans themselves? Does either farce make any conscious effort to relieve the pain of Africans by incorporating them in this spirit of English freedom?

---

53. See Fryer’s discussion of “the profligate Duchess of Kingston” and her black servant Sambo. *Staying Power*, 73.
PRIOR TO 1772, “from about the middle of the eighteenth century,” Peter Fryer states, “there is evidence of cohesion, solidarity, and mutual help among black people in Britain.” Fryer’s work, alongside that of Folarin Shyllon, Nancy Myers, and Gretchen Gerzina, shows that there was already a thriving community of black people who had made a home in eighteenth-century England and had done so since as early as 1505. The majority were young, working-class metropolitan Africans employed in the domestic trade. They had their own societies and, as Myers shows, were frequently recorded among the nation’s birth, death, marriage, baptism, and criminal records. Inclusion in the day-to-day documents and activities of life in London indicates that England was already a home for black people and a place that relieved them from the pain of slavery, to a certain degree, by allowing them to freely intermingle and marry among themselves as well as whites of their respective classes. This made England, and London in particular, an ostensibly welcoming place for black slaves who came there from the slave colonies.

However, this progressive view of England as a home and potential haven for a new community of Africans from the West Indies cannot be detected in either *High Life* or *Love in the City*. The African characters in these farces make their presences felt in ways that undermine the Creole’s English transformation, but they are never seen as integral parts of the social fabric that coheres at the end of each farce since their lives as slaves are not transformed in any of the finales. For instance, although all of Bickerstaff’s white characters—male and female—are trying to find love in a London society where marriage is a strategic opportunity for social and financial advancement, Bickerstaff never makes the “Black Girl,” Quasheba, involved in this business. He is prepared to use Quasheba’s silenced black body to provide slapstick humor onstage, and to emphasize Priscilla’s despotic Creoleness on the pages of the published text. But he shows no interest in using “Christian marriage” as a vehicle for imagining Quasheba’s freedom in England even though a black or white husband would have freed her from Priscilla’s despotic clutches, thereby establishing this version of the marriage plot as a politicized recourse to freedom for the African in England. His decision to include her in his text but not explore the political ramifications of an African woman seeking “love in the city” draws attention to the limits of the dialogic plane on which his text operates. Because it, ultimately, shows no interest in relieving the despotism under which Quasheba’s silenced body exists by giving her the freedom to be exchanged or negotiated for on her own terms in the manner that the four white women in the text enjoy, *Love*

54. Ibid., 67.
in the City is noticeably silent on the relief of African woman’s pain even as the text actively exposes it.

As a pair of formerly enslaved blacks now living in England, Kingston and Cloe might appear to offer up the idea of an intraracial marriage in England as a symbol of freedom along the lines of Ignatius and Anne Sancho. But High Life is aggressive in its refusal to involve its black characters in an emancipating marriage plot because it garners more laughs by involving them in a hypersexual one. In one of his most revealing stage directions, “[Kingston kisses Cloe heartily]” after being her partner during a dance scene, causing Philip to exclaim, “See how the Devils kiss!” (II.i). Philip’s comment draws attention to, exaggerates, and marks as diabolic the blacks’ excessive sexual exuberance even though all the other white servants are involved in the “[kissing round]” (II.i). But Townley does not stop there. Black sexual exuberance is grossly intemperate. In a drunken stupor, Kingston and Coachman refuse to allow Cook to help them to bed:

COACHMAN: She shan’t see us to bed—we’ll see ourselves to bed
KINGSTON: We got drunk together, and we’ll go to bed together. (I.iii)

Kingston’s earlier enthusiasm for Cloe is matched, here, with a suggestive homoerotic enthusiasm to “go to bed together” with Coachman. And Cloe shows a similarly untoward enthusiasm for interracial sex. Enraptured by the “pretty boy” “Jemmy,” she brazenly offers herself to him, openly asserting that he “shall be in love with me by and by” (I.iii). Townley makes rampant heterosexual, implicit homoerotic, and potential interracial sex the overriding functions of his black characters. Their hypersexualized bodies provide bawdy, titillating physical humor that typical farce relies on. However, because they are only read as hypersexual, and because Quasheba’s marital desires are not read at all, these Africans in England continue to suffer the pain not only of slavery under their respective masters, but also of exclusion from the spirit of English freedom that permeates each text.

Relief for the African’s painful exclusion from a harmonious London life does come in the shape of William Macready’s Irishman in London; or, The Happy African. This farce premiered at Covent Garden on April 21, 1792, the same year that the House of Commons voted to gradually abolish the slave trade within four years. This was also the year in which the Irish politician Hercules Langrishe introduced an act in parliament that allowed Catholics

---

55. Ignatius Sancho was a celebrated eighteenth-century black man of letters who corresponded with a wide variety of people, including Lawrence Sterne. His collected letters were published posthumously in 1782. He married Anne Osborne, a black woman of West Indian origin, on December 17, 1758, in St. Margaret’s Church, Westminster.
to practice law in England for the first time.\textsuperscript{56} Langrishe also supported the 1793 Catholic Relief Act that gave Catholics the right to vote as well as hold most civil and military offices. Thus, Macready’s play comes out in a year in which it appeared that English politicians were making some real progress in jointly relieving the pains experienced by both Irish Catholics and slaves.

In contrast to \textit{High Life} and \textit{Love in the City}, however, \textit{Irishman in London}’s plot takes a multiple approach to homecoming by combining the metropolitan experiences of different colonial types who all meet in London. In Macready’s plot, Mr. Frost, an English-Jamaican Creole, returns to England with his daughter, Caroline, and her black maid, Cubba, in an attempt to sever her relationship with the army captain, Seymour, and to arrange her marriage to a rich Irishman, Patrick Colloony. Colloony arrives in London to meet his intended bride, and his servant, Murtoch Delany, accompanies him. In a London street, however, Frost unexpectedly runs into Seymour, who learns of the Creole’s intention to marry his daughter to the Irishman she has never met. Acting as an intermediary, Seymour’s valet, Edward, finds out that Caroline still loves Seymour and will refuse the Irishman. But Caroline’s fears about being forced to marry Colloony prove groundless. On the two occasions that Colloony meets with Frost’s family, he mistakenly takes the Englishwoman, Louisa, Caroline’s impoverished and orphaned friend, for his intended bride. Frost, himself, has actually made an offer of marriage to Louisa, but his advances are characterized as untoward because he is of an age where he should be acting as Louisa’s surrogate father and not her lover (Frost rather ambiguously refers to his age as “fifty or so” [I.i]). The play ends with Frost blessing Caroline’s marriage to Seymour, and renouncing his claim to Louisa, freeing her to marry Colloony. In this way, the old Creole assumes a role in aiding the happiness of young lovers rather than impeding it.

Macready’s play, then, brings another type of Creole—an old lecherous one—to London in an effort to reform his attitude to romance and restrain his untoward and outdated libido. But even though \textit{Irishman} follows the template witnessed in other farces and transforms the stage Creole into a responsible English patriarch, the title indicates that he is certainly not Macready’s main focus. The question of who the focus is becomes complicated by the fact that there are two Irish men in London—Colloony and his Irish servant, Delany. By referring to a singular “Irishman” in his title, however, Macready appears to privilege one Irish man’s experience in London over the other. But which one, and why does he privilege it?

\textsuperscript{56} The parliamentary vote was 230 to 85. It was nullified a year later by the Commons’s refusal to take the bill up again after it was turned down in the House of Lords. Langrishe issued his act on January 25, 1792.
Christopher Flynn’s wonderful work on this text answers this question by identifying one Irish man’s “ability to see others and himself” as the factor that determines “the Irishman of the play’s title.”\textsuperscript{57} However, his essay privileges this particular Irishman as the exclusive “spokesman for cultures . . . that served as a unified challenge to Englishness by their common exclusion from the marketplace” even though the African woman, Cubba, is just as much of a dominant spokesperson within the drama. To provide some balance, then, as well as expand the political activism that Flynn identifies in the text, the remaining two sections of this chapter will not only identify this Irishman but also reveal how the wordplay evoked by him and the African mentioned in the play’s subtitle operates on a dialogic plane that provides, as well as politcizes, comic relief.

\textbf{FROM THE VERY beginning of Macready’s play, experiences of pleasure and pain in London serve to distinguish the two Irish men politically. Colloony, “an elegant young fellow from Ireland” “with a fine fortune” (I.i), enters in Act One marveling and apostrophizing about the metropolis: “Oh London, London, dear London as Ercher says; had I millions I’d spend it all there—it’s the mert for enjoyment” (I.i). Delany enters immediately after Colloony, singing a song: “We Irishmen both high and low, we are both neat and handy / The ladies everywhere we go allow we are the dandy” (I.i). The difference is revealing. Colloony’s soliloquy describes him taking personal pleasure in the attractions of the metropolis; as a “mert for enjoyment,” London relieves all his possible pains. Indeed, he finds “everything so captivating” that he exclaims, “I wish from my heart I may never leave it” (I.i). Delany’s song, on the other hand, takes pleasure in all Irish male bodies, “both high and low,” as international attractions themselves, and he unequivocally believes that Ireland is “the sweetest little place in the world” (I.i), telling Colloony “worrow do, sir, send me home” (I.i). Politically, then, the wealthy Irishman enters the play happily announcing himself as an avowed assimilationist, whereas his servant-countryman takes pleasure in his identity as a staunch Irish loyalist.

This difference is underscored more forcefully in another humorous yet politicized scene. After enquiring about their journey from the riverside to the town, the Creole, Frost, asks his prospective Irish son-in-law: “But . . . are not the towns through which you came worthy of observation?” Colloony replies: “Certainly sir your manufacturies are so astonishingly greet, they prove at once the wonderful industry and wealth of your nation” (II.i).

Part Two, Chapter 4

Delany, however, thinks otherwise: “I could see three times as much as maister Pat . . . and the devil a manufactory I saw equal to our own. Och! If you could only look at the oyster beds in pooibeg, the Foundling of the Lying-in Hospital at Dublin, they are the right sort of manufactrys” (II.i). The conflation of “oyster beds” and orphanages as “the right sort of manufactrys” is enough to make readers and viewers as well as the other characters laugh at Delany’s absurdity while they all critique him as uncouth for deriding his English host’s country, especially when contrasted with Colloony’s complimentary response. But Delany defends himself against this laughter and critique with the surprising retort “there can’t be better manufactories in the world, than those that provide comfortable lodgings, and every sort of bread and meat for poor creaturs that can’t provide for themselves” (II.i). Where Colloony sees London as a “mert for [his own individual] enjoyment” as well as the place where his marriage to a Creole heiress will continue to provide him even more means to enjoy life there, Delany uses his voice in London for an aggressive type of Irish activism. He articulates a need for alleviating Irish poverty by remembering the pains of the helpless people he has left behind. While an audience would laugh at his brogue, rabid nationalism, tendency to exaggerate, and refusal to ingratiate himself to the English, the concern he expresses toward the Irish Catholic poor differentiates him, politically, from the obviously self-centered Colloony.

Aspects of Delany’s characterization call to mind the political platform held by the United Irishmen. Founded in 1791 and grounded in what Jill Marie Bradbury and David Valone call “commonwealth principles of limited monarchical rule, equal rights for all men, and religious toleration,” the United Irishmen were actually a radical offshoot of the Volunteer movement, a group that became actively involved in political reform in Ireland in the early 1780s. However, the issue of Catholic emancipation caused the United Irishmen to splinter from this original group: “Fundamentally, the language and platform of the Volunteers assumed the continuance of Protestant political and social dominance,” whereas the spokesmen for the United Irishmen issued a “bold call for the equal treatment of ‘all sects and denominations of Irishmen’ in political, legal, and social structures.” With this political schism providing a contemporary context, it appears that Delany and Colloony confirm Flynn’s belief that “Macready’s play depicts Irishness as a divided identity, or as a set of interdependent but distinct identities.”

In their connection to, or disconnect from, Irish pain and pleasure, these Irishmen embody the debate over whether the future of Catholic relief in

59. Ibid., 19.
Britain will be achieved through the attachment to an Irish national identity as Delany embodies, or in the submission to a metropolitan force as Colloony represents.

Ultimately, textual wordplay reveals the political position that *Irishman in London* privileges for its readers. Colloony’s name is not simply a reference to an Irish town; it is also, presumably, a play on “colony,” a word Samuel Johnson defines as “a body of people drawn from the mother-country to inhabit some distant place.” Johnson’s reproductive image conveys the idea that a colony produces a new individual, and the metonymic phrase “body of people” suggests that anyone can be a part of a colony. In short, a colonist is, simply, anyone of any class who inhabits any distant locale connected to a metropolitan realm. But as an avowed assimilationist who not only praises London but also wishes to “never leave it,” Colloony belies Johnson’s understanding of a colonist as one who “inhabits some distant place” because of his preference for a metropolitan home. Macready’s negative attitude toward this Irishman surfaces in the word “Loon” that transforms colony into Colloony. According to Johnson, a “loon” is “a sorry fellow; a scoundrel; a rogue.” By combining these two Johnsonian expressions, Macready gives the impression that the wealthy Irishman is “a sorry fellow; a scoundrel; a rogue” for transforming from a new Irish representative of a colony to a sycophantic Colloony in London, attracted more to the bodily pleasures he can selfishly experience there rather than using his wealth to relieve the pains of other Irish colonists at home. Remember, had he millions, Colloony says he would spend it *all* in the metropolis.

The textual wordplay involving Delany’s experience of being renamed in London further substantiates this negative impression of Colloony. When Colloony calls him “Dill,” an epithet describing a simpleton or fool, Delany retorts: “Don’t be calling me Dill, myself can’t bear it, it’s making so little of one. My name is Murtoch Delany” (II.i). He also chastises Colloony for critiquing Ireland (II.i). “Och! Maister Pat,” Delany exclaims, “don’t be running down oer country: myself can’t bear it” (II.i). Delany “can’t bear” Colloony demeaning either himself or his home country. Both acts pain him. And because he feels and articulates the pains of his home in a way that Colloony does not, Macready aligns Delany’s farcical body with a distinct political agenda.

Colloony may “wish to prove by actions instead of words that Ireland is the soul of virtue not vice to flourish in” (I.i), but his affected “actions” onstage are those of a flatterer willing to pander to, and merge himself with, the Protestant majority. Delany’s “words,” on the other hand, when read on the published pages of Macready’s text, identify his commitment to promoting and defending Ireland and the people most commonly defined by it: the
Irish Catholic underclass. His characterization reveals that the complete relief of pain for oppressed colonial bodies will not come about through the assimilation of the wealthy Irish male body in the English metropolis, as the absentee landlord, Colloony, represents. Instead, *Irishman in London* reveals a level of skepticism about Catholic relief acts such as those in 1792 and 1793 that enable Catholics of a particular class to openly participate in British political and social life but do nothing for the Irish underclass at home. As Bradbury and Valone state: “The Relief Act . . . failed to bring real emancipation or to redistribute social and political power . . . since the act depended on the willingness of Protestant gentry and corporations to grant life leases to Catholic tenants, open guilds to Catholic members, and accept Catholics as jurors.”

With Colloony more inclined to side with Protestants for his own pleasure than to advocate for the relief of the Catholic poor like Delany, *Irishman in London* critiques the contemporary steps forward on behalf of Catholic relief as entirely insufficient. In reminding readers of the literal pains of poverty experienced by the Irish underclass, Delany pushes for a more expansive approach to complete relief at home in Ireland. This leads me to the same conclusion as Flynn but from a different source. Of the two Irishmen in London, Delany is the *Irishman* whose metropolitan experience Macready privileges in his title. He is an Irish hero because he represents the pains as well as the humor of his home country and its people.

**IF THERE IS** some confusion about the Irish man privileged in Macready’s main title, there is none concerning the identity of the figure mentioned in his subtitle. Without a doubt, *The Happy African* refers to Caroline Frost’s maid, Cubba, the play’s only African character, who asks her employer, “why everybody no be happy like me?” (I.ii). Given my earlier discussion of print media’s obsession with black bodies in pain, this textual interest in privileging an African’s happiness is extremely anomalous. What is the nature of Cubba’s happiness in London? How has her pain been relieved there?

Cubba’s condensed slave narrative articulates her own history of pain and happiness under slavery:

*CUBBA:* me only so many year old (*holding up her fingers*) when cross Bochro man catch me—me going walk one day, did take me from all my friend—me shall never see dem again—but missee so good since she buy me, me no wish to go back, though my fader great king. (II.i)

61. This idea is complicated even more by the fact that Macready played the part of Colloony himself.

Unlike Phillis Wheatley’s speaker in “On Being Brought From Africa to America,” who attributes her relief from the pain of the middle passage to God’s “Mercy,” the mere act of being purchased by Caroline relieves the pain of Cubba’s initial enslavement, and for this act of kindness she expresses the kind of gratitude that Oran displays in Thomas Bellamy’s *Benevolent Planters* (1787) when he proclaims that “Slavery is but a name” under the subjection of a benevolent planter. In fact, Flynn has revealed that this was exactly how Macready originally conceived her:

When asked why she won’t accept freedom in England, she explains—or would have if the official censor, John Larpent, hadn’t banned this part of her self-representation: “No; den me great slave, if missa forsake me—every body use me ill, me beg—Now, when me hungry—dry—missa feed me—give me drink—Cloaths—every thing me wish—me be very happy—no want free.”

In this purged speech, Cubba’s happiness is an infantilized expression of dependence that can be easily read and dismissed as textual approval for the policy of amelioration and even support for the African’s continued enslavement in England.

However, in the actual published version of the farce, Cubba’s happy African-ness is as dialogically politicized for readers as Delany’s humorous yet politicized expression of Irishness. Like his, Cubba’s role is seen as farcical, but it is read with serious implications about the home and people she has left behind in the West Indies. “Nobody ought to be merry when missee frettee” (I.ii), she tells Mr. Frost, completely identifying with the pains of her mistress, Caroline, in a broken English akin more to doggerel than true feeling. But this humorous identification with the white woman’s romantic pain does not prevent Cubba from privileging the actual pain experienced by African slaves at home in the colonies. When Caroline evokes pity for Colloony, Cubba interjects with the incredulous assertion, “Misse, you pity great man? He no good—me pity poor black, he no do good—run away—he get whip and chain” (I.iii). By distinguishing between the sentimentalized pain of a “no good” absentee landlord and the physical pain experienced by enslaved black men, the happy African uses her humorous voice in the metropolis to contextualize and visualize rather than elide or ignore the colonial vice of which West Indians such as Belcour, Lovel, and Tomboy are all guilty. Rather than using the metropolis as these white Creoles do, to satisfy their own

63. (London: Debrett, 1789), I.iii.
pleasures and progressions into English men and women, Cubba uses London as a powerful opportunity for the type of political activism that she would not have had at home in the colonies—activism that absentee landlords such as Priscilla, Lovel, Belcour, and Colloony are completely opposed to. Part of Cubba’s happiness, then, involves the pleasure of being able to articulate and validate to others in England the existence of black colonial pain that white Creoles, selfishly consumed with their own pains and pleasures, routinely elide.  

Cubba’s West Indian language is, thus, a dialogically politicized expression of activism in London. Like Delany’s raw Irish brogue, Jamaican English is the basis of Cubba’s inferior, farcical voice in the play since it distinguishes her from all the other characters that speak Standard English. But unlike the silenced Quasheba, Cubba gets to speak extensively, and her broken form of English achieves the same humorous yet politically progressive effect of Delany’s Irish brogue. Just as his farcical comments about “manufactories” draw serious attention to Irish bodies in pain, Cubba’s Jamaican English also makes serious political interventions on behalf of African slaves when she says:

CUBBA: Good, bad, all colors.—Bochro read great big book, tell him how he can be good—for all dat, some do very bad—poor black no understand read—how they know good from bad, when them massa no show them good zample? (I.ii)

This is a black Creole reevaluation of Lovel’s speech at the end of High Life:

LOVEL: If persons of rank would act up to their standard, it would be impossible that their servants could ape them—But when they affect everything that is ridiculous, it will be in the power of any low Creature to follow their example. (II.i)

Rather than simply blaming “ridiculous” “persons of rank” for being poor role models, Cubba refashions Lovel’s critique by calling out the Creole tyrants who “read great big book” of religious words—the Bible—but do not perform its moral acts: men who speak with the soft, strategic voice of paternal tyranny. Cubba’s critique is a distinctly antislavery call for planters to either be more responsible role models or educate slaves so that they can learn to be responsible to a higher authority. The ability to convey this pro-
found message in her own tongue and not that of an assimilated Englishman offers another reason for Cubba's happiness: the broken English she excels in conveys as active—if not more powerful—a message for relieving the problem of slavery as any other standard form of speech.

Cubba's African-ness is also dialogically politicized by its location. Frost tells “her every hour that she is in a blessed land of liberty, that she is her own mistress, Free as air in hopes of getting rid of her; but she won't stir—no she sticks like bird lime” (I.ii). Referring to the Mansfield Judgment and its presumption of freedom for slaves as soon as they arrived on British soil, Frost reveals that Cubba is legally emancipated in a way that Kingston, Cloe, and Quasheba were not. But why would he be “in hopes of getting rid of” a free labor source faithfully devoted to his daughter? One possible answer? Money. Under Mansfield’s judgment, Frost knows that he must pay Cubba a salary; perhaps he resents the fact that she enforces this by sticking with this family like “bird lime”—the sticky substance that hunters use to ensnare birds in trees. Clearly unflattering and definitely intended to be humorous, Frost’s use of the simile places agency solidly in Cubba’s hands now that she is an English resident. For it implies that Cubba fully understands her freedom but uses her fidelity to Caroline as the emotional currency that ensures her employment, employment that financially entraps Frost. This proves to be a remarkable reversal of the entrapment that initially brought her from Africa to Jamaica. At the ends of their respective texts, Kingston, Cloe, and Quasheba are all trapped within their masters’ respective households, and they have no choice over where and with whom they stay since they are completely at the whim of masters who bring them to England and can just as easily whisk them back to the colonies again. By contrast, Macready politicizes Cubba’s stubborn choice to stay in the Frost home; she is an African in the happy position of being able to choose to give financial pain to a white Creole master in London, where Africans like her have only formerly received it with no pay from Creole tyrants in the colonies.

The dialogically politicized language, speech, and actions of the Irishman and the African, then, prove crucial to understanding how Macready’s text changes the popular farcical template about colonial figures being transformed into pure English men and women in the metropolis. By using a main title and a subtitle that, together, draw more attention to the empire’s underclass than to its wealthy, in a genre that purports to be just another quick and light look at how funny outlandish colonial figures can be when they exhibit behavior that makes them painfully at odds with English notions of rank and respectability, Delany and Cubba are revealed as the hero and heroine of a dialogically politicized comedy—one that presents lower-class figures of empire actively identifying themselves as much more than comic
relief in the metropolis. They do not selfishly advance or pleasure themselves as their wealthier colonial counterparts do onstage; on the pages of the published text, the African and the Irishman avoid the pains of colonial incongruity that plague wealthy white colonials in the metropolis because they revel in the presumed inferiority of their national difference. Instead of experiencing the embarrassing pains of rebirth and reformation that their Creole and Irish upper-class counterparts do as they seek to transform into English residents, Cubba and Delany are incapable of making this kind a transformation as their speech, actions, and mannerisms make patently clear. They are unchangeably African and Irish. But unlike that of the white stage Creole whose unchanging West Indian-ness heralded his/her exclusion from England, Cubba and Delany's unchangeable identities are patriotic expressions of abolitionism.

With their unchangeable identities firmly fixed in their raw languages, these lower-class figures of empire are driven by, and are articulating desires of, a more progressive, political nature, and their articulation of these desires is the key to their inclusiveness within British society. By uniting the Irish Catholic underclass with the African slave in the titles and the main performances of his farce, Macready presents them both as activists who use their metropolitan voices to demand the complete abolition of pain for their respective peoples. In essence, he redefines the politics of homecoming involving colonials in London from being concerned with the transformation of the colonial individual to being concerned with the transformations of the oppressed figures of empire. In coming to London and articulating the pains experienced by the people they have left behind, Cubba and Delany are identifying themselves as part of a politics that Isaac Land has termed "street citizenship." In his reading of the black street entertainer Joseph Johnson, who "sang patriotic songs in the streets of London with a model ship bound to his head,"66 Land shows that "Britishness, was not beyond [the] reach" of common blacks who "engaged in what might be called citizenship from the bottom up"67 when, like Johnson, they made concerted attempts to identify themselves with the country. "Wearing a ship," Land believes, "served as a comprehensive statement of who Johnson was [a seaman on a merchant vessel], where he was from, what he had done, where he belonged."68 In short, Johnson confirms that "Britishness was about behavior, not birthplace or bloodline."69 Street citizenship, then,

---

67. Ibid.
68. Ibid., 100.
69. Ibid., 90.
is “an approach which recognizes the power of ordinary people to contest and reshape society’s assumptions about who people are and who belongs where.”

In the published versions of Macready’s play, Cubba and Delany are also actively contesting and reshaping readers’ assumptions about African slaves and the Catholic underclass by presenting them as humorous activists who, in using the metropolis to petition for the complete abolitions of pain for the oppressed people of empire, are claiming a right, as Britons, to speak freely on behalf of these Other underprivileged people who claim the British Empire as home.

MACREADY’S PLAY encourages readers to accept this couple as British street citizens during a comic resolution that brings the Irishman in London and the happy African together in an interracial union. Delany has romantic aspirations: “I wish I had something to do . . . or a fine young lady would fall in love with me or any diverting incident of that nater” (II.i), he remarks, and Cubba answers his call, saying, “you want speak a wi me?” (II.i). Macready appears to make the idea of interracial marriage seem taboo with Delany proclaiming to Cubba, “Honey, it won’t do—now don’t think of it,” and Cubba telling him “me no want you love me—dat be very bad thing—your face white, me poor Negro” (II.i). But despite these objections, “the milk of compassion rises within [Delany] for poor Cubbagh,” (II.i) and Cubba tells him, “Me love a you dearly,” and she asks him to “tell a . . . fine story about your country, me like to hear” (II.i). Her interest in Delany as the person and Ireland as the place that could both potentially give her pleasure implies that she is being silently seduced by an imagined future of domestic happiness away from the Frosts.

In drama, the marriage of the hero and heroine symbolizes a harmonious relief from any former pains that the play, itself, has generated, and Macready’s play is no different in this respect. Just as Frost is about to give Caroline’s hand to Colloony in marriage:

[Edward takes Cubba’s hand, slips Caroline’s gently away, and puts Cubba’s in its place under Frost’s arm.]

MURTOCH: Arrah! Is it my own little daffy down dilly you want, Maister Pat, to bring home! O thunder! Arrah be asy. (II.ii)

---

70. Ibid., 104.
71. “An Irishman said, he was very fond of the women in general; but that an African girl, with whom he got acquainted upon the gold coast, pleased him better than all the rest of the fair sex together.” Garrick’s Complete Jester (London: Oxlade, 1779), 13.
With Cubba mistakenly presented as Colloony’s bride, Murtoch Delany claims ownership of his “own little daffy down dilly,” and his “Arrah” is an indignant warning to Maister Pat not to encroach on his chosen partner and future bride. Amidst the humor, then, Macready clearly invites Cubba and Delany to partake of a harmonious London life where two other wealthy colonial marriages are openly ratified, and the West Indian, Mr. Frost, who ratifies all of these climactic marriages, confirms the validity of this interracial coupling. Frost has stated that Cubba is entirely free in this land of liberty. Unlike his farcical Creole forebears, he has completely renounced slavery in England and, thus, completely reformed himself into a true English patriarch. If Cubba wants to marry, then, she has the complete freedom to do it. It’s her choice. *Irishman in London; or, The Happy African* concludes with this suggestion that the pain of this formerly enslaved black woman can, and almost definitely will, be completely relieved by the happiness of an interracial marriage and a great British home.

RATHER THAN the “horrors” of social degeneration imagined by Richard Edgeworth and other English gentlemen of his ilk, Macready’s play presents interracial marriage in England as a positive, politicized articulation of underclassed peoples of empire banding together as activists. His efforts mark a turning point in our approach to the fictional women of “Imoinda’s shade.” Where the Imoinda-esque heroines in the colonies were employed by British writers in colonial texts to literally fight tyranny with their bodies, Cubba indicates that the African woman becomes involved in a different type of activism in fictions set in England: that of merging with other oppressed groups and articulating their joint oppression as a means of attaining abolitionist relief for all. Unity also forms the basis for understanding the black woman’s activism in *Adeline Mowbray* (1805).

72. “Arrah” is only used as an expression of surprise or excitement.