Imoinda's Shade
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“‘What!’ cried the delighted mulatto, ‘are we going to prosecu massa?’”

Adeline Mowbray’s
*Distinguished Complexion of Abolition*

Liberty by the English law depends not upon the complexion; and what was said even in the time of queen Elizabeth, is now substantially true, that the air of England is too pure for a slave to breathe in.


**THE BLACK SHADE** of a mulatto woman’s complexion makes a dramatic entrance midway through *Adeline Mowbray* (1805),¹ Amelia Opie’s third long-prose fiction. At this point in the tale, Opie’s eponymous heroine has become a pariah in English society for steadfastly refusing to marry her domestic partner, Frederic Glenmurray. She believes that a “pure and honourable union” (I, 77) will naturally form between them without the need of an official ceremony, and she lives by this principle despite the fact that it does not provide her with legal recognition or social respect. Adeline’s family and friends are outraged. They ignore her principled stance and ostracize her for leading what they perceive to be a life of brazen infamy. At this same time, the couple’s finances abruptly dwindle, and Glenmurray’s terminal illness noticeably worsens. It is while they are, thus, poised on the brink of imminent disaster that a curious and apparently trivial incident occurs—an incident that transforms the tale’s political scope: Glenmurray exhibits an

¹. (New York: Woodstock Books, 1995). This is a reproduction of the 1805 edition. All subsequent references refer to this edition.
insatiable craving for a pineapple. To appease his whimsical appetite, the cash-strapped Adeline pawns her veil in order to buy the sweet treat. But en route to the “fruiterer’s” (II, 154) she happens upon, and becomes embroiled in, another incident wherein a mulatto woman makes a dramatic entrance into the narrative and her black complexion compels Adeline to forgo her primary objective.

Assembled at the door of a “mean-looking house” (II, 154), a crowd watches the mulatto woman’s sick husband, William, being dragged to prison for debt while Savanna, the equally ill mulatto woman, tries, unsuccessfully, to prevent his arrest.

A surly-looking man, who was the creditor himself, forcing a passage through the crowd, said, “why, bring him along and have done with it; here is a fuss to make indeed about that idle dog and that ugly black b—h!”

Adeline till then had not recollected that she was a mulatto; and this speech, reflecting so brutally on her colour,—a circumstance which made her an object of greater interest to Adeline,—urged her to step forward to their joint relief with an almost irresistible impulse. . . . (II, 157)

Up until this point, Opie’s narrative had only concerned itself with Adeline’s activism as a virtuous proponent for the abolition of marriage. But Adeline’s urge “to step forward” clearly introduces a new discussion about activism on behalf of people of African descent. While it is possible to discuss, individually, either of these modes of activism in the text, the fact that Adeline defends Savanna from the creditor’s harsh racial epithet (“ugly black b—h!”) at the same time that she is defending herself for stepping forward as a virtuous proponent for the abolition of marriage implies that Opie is actively merging these modes of activism for a specific end. In this chapter, I propose that Opie consciously unites, yet ultimately distinguishes between, Adeline and Savanna and the activist discourses that they inspire in Adeline Mowbray, and by doing so, provides another way to consider its theme of abolition—a reading that offers an especially triumphant view of one of these women’s complexions.

CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS of Opie’s tale missed the resonance of the Adeline and Savanna union as well as the tale’s discourse of abolition.² As M. O. Grenby attests: “Adeline Mowbray . . . could only have been interpreted by

². Contemporary reviews of the novel make no reference to this as an antislavery/abolitionist tale, and very few make any reference to Savanna at all.
contemporaries as an inquest into both the practicalities and morality of cohabitation and childbearing without marriage.” In exploring this theme, modern critics such as Roxanne Eberle and Gary Kelly have brought out the tale’s biographical foundations both as a “roman à clef about Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin” (who were known by, and friendly with, the author), and as an illustration of Opie’s political ideology after her marriage to the painter John Opie and before her conversion to Quakerism.

Recently, however, Eberle and others have also taken more notice of Savanna’s role in order to further probe the tale’s abolitionist politics. To this end, Eberle reads _Adeline Mowbray_ as a novel that “explicitly addressed many ‘Jacobin’ concerns: free love, free speech and abolition,” ultimately ending in a “powerful ‘world of obligation’ which brings together women of different races.” But at the end of her essay, Eberle is skeptical of this exclusively female “world of obligation,” asking whether it is “an entirely positive alternative to inherently flawed heterosexual union.” Carol Howard offers more skepticism about the novel’s liberating potential. In her perceptive and persuasive reading, she also recognizes the scene that opens this chapter (she calls it “The Story of the Pineapple”) as an important barometer for understanding Savanna; however, she interprets Adeline’s “step forward” as a gesture that may liberate Savanna from debt, but in the process, reinforces the mulatto woman’s containment since the money that Adeline pays to settle the couple’s debt allegorically simulates a white mistress stepping forward to purchase a mulatto woman’s fierce allegiance and unlimited service for a paltry price, much as a slave master might do. Howard also expresses skepticism about Savanna’s maternal role and liberation in the tale, a concern shared by Susan Greenfield, who reads Savanna as “the ultimate representative of the dark underclass, the servant [who] provides a point of contrast against which Adeline’s superior status can be distinguished.” Reading Savanna only as a foil, Greenfield concludes that although the novel “derides slavery . . . it also sentimentalizes a maternal servitude grounded in racial difference,” making “the political outcome . . . ambiguous.”

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6. Ibid., 22.
8. Ibid., 10.
10. Ibid., 128.
Persuasive as these critical stances are, I want to challenge their collective skepticism about Savanna’s social, political, and maternal roles as well as her liberation within the text by proposing alternative readings of both Savanna’s characterization and the tale’s abolitionist discourse—readings that take into account the important role that Imoinda’s Shade has been ascribing to a fictional line of African women that are actively involved in promoting progressive antislavery and abolitionist positions in British literature by intervening in marriage plots.

In Chapter Three, I outlined the manner in which the fictional African saint-mother and rebel-wife that originated in Behn’s characterization of Imoinda challenged the institution of slavery by being the focuses of radical alternatives to ending it through immigration to a free European territory (as Ada demonstrates during one of the endings of Kotzebue’s The Negro Slaves) or active gynecological rebellion (as Amri demonstrates through literal and narrative acts of maternalism in Obi). Chapter Four shows the imaginative manner in which the African heroine, Cubba, builds upon these radical foundations by relocating the antislavery battle to English shores and uniting two activist appeals for the relief of pain on behalf of the oppressed black and white underclasses who live in Irish and West Indian homes. Irishman in London also demonstrates that the African can experience complete relief, in the form of the abolition of pain, not simply through interracial marriage, but through the opportunities to enjoy freedoms of speech, citizenship, residence, activism, and inclusion in Britain that Cubba’s impending marriage to Delany signifies.

Given this trajectory, I want to propose that Savanna is the latest in this line of fictional African women who fall under “Imoinda’s shade.” Her depiction as a free woman, wife and mother in England builds upon Ada’s, Amri’s and Cubba’s representations by presenting England not as a potential haven of freedom for an African female slave, but more so, this woman’s already established homesite of affirmed residence. Savanna threatens to politicize interracial marriage even more than the African woman in London because interraciality refers not merely to her marriage with her white husband, William, but also to their son, the Tawny boy, as well as to Savanna’s own identity as a mulatto. My discussion of Maria Edgeworth’s 1810 Belinda has already shown that even the most trivial representation of a fictional interracial relationship between an African man and English woman was treated as an alarming threat that needed to be contained. So the idea of an interracial woman, couple, and family making England their already established homesite is, undoubtedly, emblematic of the horrors about interracial marriage and African freedom that men such as Richard Edgeworth are becoming increasingly anxious about by 1805.
Adeline Mowbray could have, quite easily, united the threat of Savanna’s degenerative influence as a mulatto woman, wife, and mother in English society with the degeneration of morals that Adeline signifies as a proponent for the abolition of marriage and pandered to those contemporary fears. But instead, its white and mulatto women meet as mutual victims of harsh societal forces (the creditor and society itself) that seek to subdue them. Such moments of confrontation are customary for all the fictional African women discussed in Imoinda’s Shade: Ada’s confrontation with John, Amri’s with Harrop, Clara’s African romance competing with Mr. Edwards’s plantocratic one, Cubba’s marriage to Delany—all of these are derivations of Imoinda’s confrontation with the Deputy Governor on the battle field of Surinam, fighting for a future of freedom. Although this moment of confrontation did not end victoriously for Behn’s Imoinda, another big black lady from Behn’s literary oeuvre experiences a far more successful outcome to her own confrontation with the tyrants that attempt to subdue her. But this Imoinda-esque confrontation takes place in a site far removed from Surinam, and because it does, it resonates with Opie’s Adeline Mowbray.

The Adventure of the Black Lady (1697) was published in a posthumous collection of Behn’s work years after her death in 1689; however, Margaret Ferguson believes that it was actually written in 1688, the same year as the publication of Oroonoko. In this novel, Behn introduces the heroine Bellamora, a young, middle-class white woman who travels to London from Hampshire, eight months pregnant, unmarried, and in desperate search of her cousin, Madam Brightly. “Unacquainted with the neat practices of this fine city” (492), the naïve heroine promptly loses her trunk containing all her valuables when she asks a “strange porter” (492) to deliver her goods to Brightly’s lodgings on Bridges-Street, a place Ferguson identifies as a “notorious haunt for prostitutes.” Brightly does not live at the Bridges-Street address, however, and no one has any concrete knowledge of her present whereabouts. This leaves Bellamora in a bind. Homeless, destitute, and impoverished, all within a few hours of coming to town, not to mention unmarried and heavily pregnant, Bellamora is brought face-to-face with a certain and imminent demise in the big city. Until, that is, an unnamed landlady described as a “good, discreet, ancient Gentlewoman” (493) takes an interest in her situation, and along with another unnamed lady (who

11. See Chapter Three, 111.
Part Two, Chapter 5

turns out to be Bellamora’s seducer’s sister) they contrive to get Bellamora’s valuables back as well as to orchestrate her marriage to her seducer, Fond-love, the imminent child’s biological father.

The outlines of Behn’s plot establish it as a narrative forebear of William Hogarth’s *A Harlot’s Progress* (1731–32) (figure 17). Like Hogarth, Behn is clearly interested in exploring a naïve woman’s confrontation with, and negotiation of, big city life. But whereas Hogarth’s first plate goes to great lengths to visually emphasize Moll’s purity and innocence by depicting her with a demure, downcast look, a plain white country dress, closed bonnet, and useful sewing implements, the use of blackness in Behn’s suggestive title has the opposite effect, immediately casting the “black lady” it refers to in a negative stereotypical light. Roxann Wheeler’s discussion of *Spectator* 262 shows that “Addison . . . refers to a wicked man” when he writes: “If I write any thing on a black Man, I run over in my Mind all the eminent Persons in the Nation who are of that Complection”; Behn appears to do the same in her construction of her “black-haired lady” (500). Beauty may be implied in the heroine’s name, “Bellamora,” an Italianized reference to a beautiful Moor (Bella Moor-a); however, Anthony Barthelemy’s work on Shakespeare’s *Othello* identifies religious difference, evilness, licentiousness, and foreignness as stereotypically Moorish traits. A beautiful “black-haired lady” making a surreptitious and hasty dash to London while pregnant and unmarried is a seemingly blatant indictment of vice that the ‘mora’ part of her name confirms. At least the London authorities think so. Once they hear that an unmarried, pregnant “young black-haired lady (for so was Bellamora) . . . was either brought to bed, or just ready to lie down” (499–500) within their parish, they aggressively seek her out, presumably to make an example of her as a model of infamy. It is here, writ large, that Behn sets up an English-based moment of confrontation between a big black woman and the forces that seek to subdue her.

Behn, however, resolves this confrontation in the “big” black woman’s favor. Referring to the authorities, derisively, as “The vermin of the Parish (I mean, the overseers of the poor who eat the Bread from ‘em)” (499), she identifies them as tyrants and ensures that the “good, discreet, ancient” landlady thwarts them in their witch hunt. This landlady feigns ignorance about Bellamora and presents the authorities with a black cat that had lately littered as the presumed pregnant “black lady” that they seek. Her humorous sleight of hand here clearly undermines the intentions of the parish authorities, but it also stigmatizes her because the “ancient” adjective used

16. See chapter one of his *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987).
Figure 17.
Plate 1 of *A Harlot’s Progress*, 1732, William Hogarth (1697–1764)
to describe her, coupled with the textual implication that she has the power to make Bellamora disappear and reappear as a black cat, connect her to witchery. In addition, Ferguson has pointed out that the landlady’s ability to reach back to that “strange porter” to demand the return of Bellamora’s valuables shows that she is a well-established member of the illicit group of black-market traders in London. The woman connected to powerful black practices of magic and crime is, thus, the most active participant in the black lady’s vindication and victory over the societal forces that seek to subdue her.

In this moment of confrontation between pregnant and powerful black English women joined in opposition to tyrannical parish authorities, Behn orchestrates a pointed moral victory for socially stigmatized women. The parish authorities that seek Bellamora out and use their power to establish her as a model of infamy are themselves morally suspect, since they are more concerned with seizing easy opportunities to make their exploitative livings off the poor and vulnerable, like “vermin,” rather than truly exposing social immorality. If they were sincere about this issue, they would have taken the time to find out, as the landlady does, that the young and “foolish” (493) Bellamora has fallen pregnant more out of a naivety about sex than a vice-ridden attraction to it. The landlady’s black power, then, provides a “good, discrete,” and morally just way to assist Bellamora, preventing this naïve innocent from becoming a fallen woman as lost in London as Madam Brightly, and their joint triumph also lays bare the hypocrisy of societal forces that are intent on subduing vulnerable women without accounting for the self-interest of their intentions.

My analysis of Behn’s *Adventure of the Black Lady* contextualizes this chapter’s discussion of *Adeline Mowbray* in two ways. First, Behn’s novel reveals that the stigma of blackness functions actively and metaphorically as a trope in the lives of white English women. Opie also uses blackness as a gendered trope in her English tale; however, she uses it literally as well as metaphorically in her representations of Savanna and Adeline. Second, Behn involves Bellamora in an English-based moment of confrontation with paternalist forces that differs from the experiences of the other fictional African women who fall under “Imoinda’s shade” in one important respect: the big “black lady” is liberated from the stigma of sexual infamy that the parish authorities are determined to assign her. By the efforts of two creative storytellers (Behn and the landlady), Bellamora emerges the victor in her confrontation with tyranny. Similarly, *Adeline Mowbray* involves its literal and metaphorically blackened women in English-based moments of confrontation with tyrannical forces that seek to subdue them. But only one of these women emerges from this battle triumphant.

17. Ferguson, “Conning the Overseer.”
THIS CHAPTER proposes that Adeline Mowbray’s primary focus on Adeline and the abolition of marriage is challenged by another discussion about abolition that takes into account Savanna’s role as a free yet impoverished woman, wife, and mother in England. These two abolitionist discourses are structured around Opie’s deft use of literal and figurative blackness in the lives of both female characters. For the most part, the tale uses blackness as a gendered trope that focuses on two types of transgression, social and sexual: as a mulatto woman in England Savanna represents the former, and Adeline the latter as a virtuous proponent for the abolition of marriage. Like Bellamora and Imoinda before them, Savanna and Adeline are involved in orchestrated moments of confrontation with English tyrants who seek to stigmatize and subdue socially and sexually transgressive women. Where colonial tyrants are usually constructed as planters or slaveholders, tyranny in England appears in other guises: a creditor, an English gentleman, a fruiterer, a libertine, and even a kept mistress. The confrontations that these tyrants have with stigmatized women generate discussions about extending sexual and social freedoms to blacks and women in England. But Opie presents the principles behind each of the social and sexual transgressions that Savanna and Adeline stand for as worthy. The fugitive slave, Savanna, has a natural mulatto complexion that can be read as England’s commitment to the abolition of prejudice and poverty within its borders, and the equally fugitive fallen woman, Adeline, can be seen as a radical yet virtuous woman petitioning for the right to abolish marriage and champion a rational heterosexual union free from the legal ties that Sarah Chapone and Mary Astell had long identified as enslaving for women.\(^\text{18}\)

But rather than equalizing these two intersecting black female quests for liberation, Opie brings their abolitionist discourses and experiences together in England to distinguish them and their activist agendas from one another. This difference is also illustrated through the deft manner in which the tale distinguishes the legal implications of each woman’s black complexion. Where the novel looks with complete legal disdain on the blackness that Adeline signifies as a sexual transgressor, it looks much more favorably on the legal establishment of Savanna’s mulatto complexion within British society. In other words, despite metaphorically intersecting the abolitions of prejudice, poverty, and marriage in Savanna’s and Adeline’s black complexions, Adeline Mowbray claims the legal right of a foreign black woman to be free and British while denying the legal right of a radical English woman to be free and black. This distinguishes Savanna’s complexion as the only viably acceptable measure of freedom for a female transgressor in the novel because

\(^\text{18}\) Sarah Chapone, *The Hardships of the Laws in Relation to Wives* (1735); and Mary Astell, *Some Reflections Upon Marriage* (1700).
it privileges the legal conditions of freedom available to blacks in Britain from those not available to white women. The most privileged example of an African woman's negotiation of freedom occurs when Savanna advocates for the legal prosecution of Adeline's tyrannical and errant husband, Berrendale. I argue that Savanna's desire to “prosecu massa” (III, 155) not only offers the most viable “step forward” in confronting Berrendale's brutal behavior to her and Adeline, it also represents the most triumphant outcome that the African women of “Imoinda’s shade” could have against the tyrannical forces that seek to subdue them in England.

IN THE SCENE from Adeline Mowbray that I reproduce at the beginning of this chapter, Opie presents blackness in three ways. Literally, it refers to the racial victimization that people of African descent experience in England with the creditor's dehumanizing reference to Savanna and her color clearly bringing this out. In addition, as I mentioned earlier, Adeline's “greater interest” in a poor mulatto woman's experience of prejudice at a time when she, herself, is an impoverished victim of prejudice establishes a metaphorical connection between victimized people of African descent and radical English women. But Adeline also puts her scant resources where her feelings are, escapes the Mandevillian charge that sympathy is a loud-sounding nothing, and saves Savanna's white husband from being arrested. As such, the scene idealizes a favorable response to victimized people of black and white complexions and both genders. And, as a way of emphasizing this fact, I will henceforth refer to it as ‘the arresting scene,’ a phrase that not only describes with accuracy what the “creditor” intends to do to William but also refers to the way the scene draws the reader's sympathetic attention to all victimized people who fall under the legal and social judgment of England and its laws.

Alongside the facts that blackness in the arresting scene is an umbrella term for blacks, stigmatized women and the victimized poor in general, Savanna's specific type of blackness—her mulatto-ness—brings up another signification about interracialism in England. Instead of fulfilling Glenmurray's request for the pineapple, Adeline steps forward to help not simply a biracial woman, but an interracial couple, and a multiracial family. Such behavior raises a question. Do the combined needs of this interracial collective in England deserve to outweigh those of an English gentleman, a terminally ill one at that? Maria Edgeworth would definitely answer ‘no.’ In Chapter Two, I discussed the manner in which she expunges the interracial marriage between Juba and Lucy from Belinda to satisfy her father's “great delicacies and scruples” about such marriages. For these kinds of English gentlemen, interracial couplings represent social degeneration, and thus do
not deserve to be validated. But what of the interracial people themselves? Do their needs deserve recognition and validation in England, as Adeline’s behavior seems to suggest?

West Indian historians and commentators are mostly responsible for popularizing impressions of interracial people from the British colonies. “Among the tribes which are derived from an intermixture of the Whites with the Negroes, the first are the Mulattos,” writes Bryan Edwards; his History continues: “the descendants of Negroes by White people, entitled by birth to all the rights and liberties of White subjects in the full extent, are such as are above three steps removed in lineal digression from the Negro venter. All below this, whether called in common parlance Mestizes, Quadrons, or Mulattoes, are deemed by law Mulattoes.”19 Edwards presents mulattos as one undifferentiated mass of people of color who encompass a wide range of biological connections to whiteness. Other writers’ observations about class and gender, however, distinguish the mulattos within Edwards’s large group. Edward Long sarcastically comments on the way in which the “tawney breed” of upper-class mulattos transgress social boundaries when they return to Jamaica after being educated in England. One example is a mulatto “Miss [who] faints at the sight of her relations, especially when papa tells her that black Quasheba is her own mother.”20 Long believes that “a well educated Mulatta must lead a very unpleasant kind of life”21 in Jamaica because her wealth and education makes her ill-reconciled to the fact that, despite all her efforts, she will never be accepted among refined, white Jamaican society. He also makes an alarming claim about mulattas’ reputations for licentiousness, suggesting that “the major part, nay almost the whole number, with very few exceptions, have been filles de joie before they became wives.”22 J. B. Moreton adds to this impression by berating “Mongrel women” for being “extremely proud, vain and ignorant,” and “though the daughters of rich men, and though possessed of slaves and estates, they never think of marriage; their delicacy is such . . . that they despise men of their own colour; and though they have their amorous desires abundantly gratified by them and black men secretly, they will not avow these connections.”23 “As for the lower rank, the issue of casual fruition,” Long remarks, “they, for the most part remain in the same slavish condition as their mother; they are fellow-labourers with the Blacks and are not regarded in the least as their superiors. . . . The lower classes of these

19. The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies, 17–18.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 337.
mixtures, who remain in the island, are a hardy race, capable of undergoing equal fatigue with the Blacks. . . .”24

In the West Indies, a female mulatto such as Savanna had to contend with all of these aspersions of sexual and rank transgression. But Adeline’s triumphant action on the couple’s behalf and the generally favorable response to Savanna and William’s relationship suggest that Adeline Mowbray attempts to counter negative impressions about both mulattos and interracial coupling in England. Despite Sander Gilman’s belief that common contemporary prejudice stigmatized all black women as naturally promiscuous and degenerate,25 Opie appears to be actively undermining the licentious stigma that Long and Moreton promote about mulatto women by deliberately underplaying them in Savanna. As Howard asserts: “despite the potency of such colonial myths, the dominant discourses of the novel actually work to suppress the discourse of black (or mixed raced) women’s sexuality.”26

However, where the mulatto woman’s sexual threat to England is downplayed in the novel as a whole, the social threat attributed to ex-slaves in England is played up significantly in the arresting scene. By making Savanna’s black color and the depressed financial state of her interracial relationship and family equal parts of Adeline’s cause célèbre, Adeline Mowbray puts a black face to the domestic problem of poverty as well as prejudice. This problem concerned blacks and whites equally; yet it became politically tethered to blacks at the end of the century after black ex-slaves from the colonies, black ex-sailors out of work, and black ex-soldiers who had fought for the British in the American War of Independence appeared on the streets of London, visibly racializing the sight of poverty. Action was taken to address this issue. During the lead-up to the 1787 Sierra Leone colonial experiment, the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor was responsible for providing financial assistance to blacks living on London streets, and their financial payouts were ultimately part of an ill-fated scheme to encourage black people to willingly move to Africa and establish a new colony on its west coast. Isaac Land has shown that “the black poor were simply defined by their common ‘black’ color, and their presence in London was treated as an aberration in need of correction.”27 In other words, philanthropy was merely

a mask for prejudicial attempts to get rid of people whose complexions as well as their poverty made them figures of social transgression. Widespread skepticism about this scheme ensured that many of the black poor did not board the ship to Sierra Leone and remained on the streets of London, continuing to be “treated as an aberration” and seen as a most visible instance of social transgression in England.

Adeline’s philanthropy, inspired as it is by Davis’s brutal reference to Savanna’s blackness, can be read as a private pecuniary response to this public history of British philanthropic help in combating the problem of black poverty. But where the efforts of the Committee were designed merely to rid the country of poor blacks, Adeline’s intention in financially assisting Savanna is the opposite. She offers Savanna domestic assistance to reestablish her footing at home in England, and this assistance also makes some kind of atonement for the skin-color prejudice she experiences from the creditor. In effect, Adeline liberates Savanna from the stigmas of poverty and prejudice that forces like the Committee and the creditor enact. Savanna’s mulatto-ness has a dual social purpose, then. It, at once, connects her to the generic “black poor,” but it is also a specific reminder that, as a part white woman, she is also connected to the English nation. This connection is made even more evident with her marriage to William. Just as he and other poor white vulnerables like him need assistance, Savanna’s mulatto-ness is a specific reminder that the black poor in England are also equally deserving of some kind of liberation from poverty as well as skin-color prejudice that allows them to regain their footing at home rather than abroad.

With this understanding, Adeline Mowbray seems much more aware of, and involved in, a discourse that is best discovered by adjusting the historical lens to look backward in English abolitionist history. If, as I am arguing, Opie’s focus on mulatto-ness in English society is a part of a specific contemporary discussion about British activism in favor of the abolition of prejudice against the poor in general but specifically the black poor who chose to remain on English shores, then a pivotal event in this history comes in the form of the Yorke–Talbot decision of 1729, which essentially established blacks as property in England and denied them rights to citizenship by baptism or residence there. The first legally documented attempt to counter this prejudice appears in Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England. By reading the first two editions of these Commentaries alongside the legal and commercial dynamics Opie stresses in the arresting scene, the next section argues that there is an English ambivalence about citizenship rights for poor slaves in England that Opie wants to identify and correct in her novel.
IN 1706, magistrate John Holt28 asserted that the English air liberated slaves. But my discussion of Kingston and Cloe’s nebulous position at the end of Townley’s High Life Below Stairs demonstrates that this pronouncement was not necessarily true in 1759.29 Prior to 1772, J. C. Oldham contends that popular knowledge of laws on this issue did not receive wide publication until the first edition of Blackstone’s Commentaries (1765).30 In it, we are told:

And the spirit of liberty is so deeply implanted in our constitution, and rooted even in our very soil, that a slave or a Negro, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws, and with regard to all natural rights becomes eo instanti a freeman.

Blackstone uses the phrase “a slave or a Negro” in this first edition as shorthand for acknowledging black slaves and slaves of any other complexion.31 The law protects this racially amorphous slave with regard to all “natural rights” presumably enjoyed by Caucasian English people at large. Thus, Blackstone’s representation of English law in 1765 recognizes the humanity of all individuals petitioning before it, and it especially acknowledges slaves of any color as the epitome of its avowal that one’s racial and class designations are immaterial in establishing these inalienable “natural rights” to freedom.

However, in the second edition of Blackstone’s Commentaries published the following year, the term “natural rights” is replaced with a new phrase:

And the spirit of liberty is so deeply implanted in our constitution, and rooted even in our very soil, that a slave or a Negro, the moment he lands in England, falls under the protection of the laws, and so far becomes a freeman; though the master’s right to his service may possibly still continue.32

29. See Chapter Four, 169–73.
31. See Jonathan A. Bush’s “The First Slave (and Why He Matters),” Cardozo Law Review 18 (1996): 599. Bush shows that the phrase “England was too pure an air for slaves to breathe in” comes from this 1567 case of “One Cartwright brought a slave from Russia.” So legal antislavery challenges in England were initially conceived with a white and not a black complexion in mind.
32. These passages are both taken from Oldham’s discussion of this inconsistency in his “New Light” essay (60–61). He demonstrates that Blackstone was prompted to clarify the 1765 position not as a complete reversal on his part but possibly after consultation with Mansfield himself. But
Appending the fact that a “master’s right” to the “service” of “a slave or a Negro” “may possibly” outweigh their “natural rights” to freedom in England, the law changes its stance on domestic slavery. It diminishes its concern with recognizing the “natural rights” to humanity and freedom for slaves of any complexion as soon as it acknowledges a colonial master’s continued rights within the metropolis. Black complexions actually motivate this shift from the absolute to the tepid support of the racially amorphous slave’s freedom because property rights—specifically the rights to use and dispose of black slaves’ “service”—become a hotly contested issue that the law was increasingly called upon to deal with. As Lord Mansfield himself pointed out: “The setting 14 or 15,000 men at once loose by a solemn opinion, is very disagreeable in the effects it threatens.” Those “very disagreeable” and threatening “effects” are none other than the loss of millions of pounds in property.

In one year, then, the British paternalist palate for lucre reveals itself in the complexion of English law. Black people go from being read legally as on a par with Britons of other complexions in Blackstone’s first edition to being distinguished as different in the second because of the legal privileging of the master’s right to property. This legal shift with regard to black complexions creates a number of questions that reverberate as part of the discussion about black people in Britain toward the latter end of the eighteenth century. Should black slaves purchased outside the metropolis and brought to Britain have a moral right to freedom, or not? And what are the financial and social implications of having “natural (human) rights” that outweigh a “master’s (legal) right” to property, and vice versa?

In the arresting scene, Opie stages this discussion through the moral and commercial questions that Glenmurray and Mr. Davis generate. Within the scene, she appears, at first, to support a “master’s (legal) right” to property over “natural (human) rights” to freedom when we consider the terms with which she legitimates the property claims that these English men are entitled to. For not taking William’s obvious illness into account as he mercilessly sets about sending him to debtors prison for a “trifling” six pounds, Mr. Davis is called “a hard-hearted, wicked wretch” (II, 156). This impression is supported further by his false gesture of benevolence mentioned by the same anonymous crowd member: “if they will pay half he will wait for the rest, but then he knows they could as well pay all as half” (II, 157). Another

surely his need to clarify was made so that the law wouldn’t be misconstrued as granting immediate freedom to slaves. Therefore, although the liberal spirit of the 1765 edition may have been unintentional, it is still evident as a legal possibility. And, moreover, Hargrave (chief advocate for Somerset) invoked the 1765 argument of immediate freedom on his client’s behalf.

33. Oldham, Mansfield Manuscripts, 1223.
crowd member predicts the inevitable outcome for Savanna and William if Davis succeeds in getting him jailed: “He'll die, and she'll die, and then what will become of their poor little boy?” (II, 156). Yet amidst all of these sentimental concerns and dire predictions, Opie includes the fact that Davis has an indisputable right to seek legal recourse against William for defaulting on the couple's debt repayments: “not but what it is his due, I cannot say but it is” (II, 156), another crowd member states. This combination of sentimental and legitimating crowd opinions puts this English creditor's character in context. He is clearly a tyrant, yet the law gives him a legitimate right to act in this way.

Opie's specific use of the term “creditor” further legitimates Davis's right to claim his money because it can be directly connected to a proslavery, biblical validation made at the same time of the novel's publication. In an era in which the validity of slavery was a hotly contested issue, the contemporary proslavery movement in England sought to extend and legitimize creditors' indisputable property rights with scripture. For instance, William Cobbett's “Slave Trade” in the Political Register (1802) uses the Old Testament to argue “that the selling of the debtor and his family to satisfy the creditor, is a very ancient usage.” With this use of a biblical-historical substantiation, Cobbett validates the legitimacy of a creditor's right to property, and his use of the term also involves Opie's own “creditor” in this proslavery rhetoric as he sets about sending William to debtors' prison. Opie's Mr. Davis, then, can be read as one with Cobbett's colonial creditors: they all feel divinely and legally entitled to trade in human flesh for their own financial needs. Moreover, because he makes no attempt to specify the race of “the debtor and his family,” Cobbett's interpretation of scripture allows creditor Davis to legitimately extend his influence so far as to sell individuals of any complexion in order to “satisfy” all debts owed to him. Tyranny, it appears, can be legally as well as biblically legitimated in England as well as the colonies.

Opie also legitimizes the actions of the other Englishman, Glenmurray, who is not physically present in the arresting scene but whose influence is evoked through his connection to the pineapple. Glenmurray, we are told, “was a man of family, and of a small independent estate” (I, 52), and as a member of the landed gentry and, moreover, a nobleman with a reputation for “active virtue,” courteous manners,” and “blamelessness of . . . life” (I, 53), Glenmurray has earned a legitimate right to consume the best that this

34. A couple's debts were always incurred against the man in a married relationship.
35. Preface taken from Cobbett's essay reprinted in Slavery, Abolition, Emancipation, 373. He is probably referring to II Kings 4:1–2. Incidentally, in his proslavery article, Cobbett also refers to the Mansfield Judgment, showing that the issue of slavery in England was still contemporaneous in 1802 while Opie is writing Adeline Mowbray.
English society has to offer because of his superior conduct as an English gentleman. Yet, his right to consume in the novel is presented as more than a mere reiteration of Bernard Mandeville’s belief that the private consumption of colonial produce creates the public benefits of trade and industry. Opie raises the tenor of Mandeville’s self-interested consumer position by imbuing a private and whimsical consumer impulse with sentimental credibility. Glenmurray doesn’t simply want a pineapple, he is shown to deserve one. Having already demonstrated that she is able to “please the capricious appetite of decay” (I, 24) during her grandmother’s terminal illness, Adeline feels equally compelled to accommodate the pineapple given Glenmurray’s own terminally ill condition, and people of African descent are as intimately involved in his desires being met as Adeline. Opie’s specific use of a pineapple, a fruit grown and cultivated by workers of color in the Caribbean that Carol Howard calls a “symbol of nobility, decadence and the unusual” for its elite status among sweet luxury goods in England, not only answers his capricious appetite, it also stands as a testament of his status as a good English gentleman savoring the sweet taste of his privileged, noble, and virtuous life as death imminently consumes him.

Thus, legal, biblical, sentimental, and rank justifications are used to invest Glenmurray’s and Davis’s business and consumer rights with credibility as well as to acknowledge the institutions that are designed to put a respectable face on Britain’s involvement in trade. For if all ‘Williams’ did not pay their debts, and all ‘Savannas’ were liberated from the colonial lands of the English gentry, then English paternalists such as Davis and Glenmurray would not only suffer, they would also be deprived of money and goods that they are legitimately entitled to. Moreover, the country’s involvement in trade would crumble. Justifications such as these are designed to keep ‘Williams’ and ‘Savannas’ bound to support the master’s commercial activities ahead of their own. This reading of the commercial and moral dynamics contained in the arresting scene shows a clear connection with the ethos contained in the second edition of Blackstone’s Commentaries: a master’s legitimate right should always trump the natural sentimental rights of individuals in England.

Instead of completely justifying these masters’ rights, however, Opie makes her readers view them with skepticism when the appetites that drive

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36. Charlotte Sussman’s Consuming Anxieties (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) reveals the importance attached to consumer rights such as those expressed by Glenmurray. In fact, according to Bernard Mandeville’s Fable of the Bees, Glenmurray has a duty to consume because his consumerist tastes support business interests in the country without requiring him to engage in the dirty business himself.

the English gentleman and the creditor are exposed as too egregious and tyrannical for Britons to admire. In the arresting scene, Opie explicitly connects Glenmurray’s “appetite” for the pineapple with the oppression of slavery. For his attraction to the pineapple’s sweetness, after expressing “a sort of distaste” (II, 152) for the grapes that Adeline initially buys for him, implies that Glenmurray is a “slave”\(^{38} (II, 162)\) to a “diseased appetite” that will be appeased only by “the gratification of eating one” (II, 152).\(^{39} \) Charlotte Sussman’s book *Consuming Anxieties* describes English abolitionists leading successful boycotts of colonial sugar through popularizing the macabre impression that consuming sugar in tea was akin to drinking the blood of slaves involved in producing the sweet flavor. Thus, Glenmurray’s insatiable attachment to the pineapple’s reproduces this “diseased appetite” for slave blood—an immoral craving far removed from the biblical blood suggested in the presence of Adeline’s grapes. Through the evocation of Glenmurray’s diseased appetite, Opie exposes the English consumer’s tyrannical taste for sweetness.

Opie’s examination of Mr. Davis’s appetite is metaphorical. Cobbett’s “Slave Trade” has already exposed him as a thinly veiled cousin to the colonial slave master. A “creditor,” like a slave master, buys interest in an individual’s life, and his financial investment grants him the right to legally dispose of them, or his interest in them, if they financially default or personally displease him. William has done both. Aside from the unpaid debt, someone in the crowd also reveals that Davis also owes William a “grudge” (II, 156) over an unspecified incident. It is this “grudge,” perhaps, that explains Davis’s insatiable appetite for revenge toward the couple and his aggressive pursuit of a sick man over a “trifling . . . six pounds” (II, 156–57). When “another man” in the crowd canonizes the couple as “hard-working, deserving persons” (II, 158), it is Davis’s “grudge” that elicits a brutal parody of this man’s opinion: he delivers a caninization of William and Savanna as “that idle dog and that ugly black b—h.”

Davis’s caninization calls to mind two different kinds of prejudice. First, it reflects the way in which financially solvent Londoners continued to see and despise the black poor and the London poor in general, a tension that is clearly understood by Edward Long, who states: “history evinces, that, in

\(^{38}\) We’re also told that Lawyer Langley “was formed to be the slave of women” (III, 109). Interestingly, Savanna is never actually called a slave and is only obliquely referred to as escaping slavery very late in the third volume (III, 102). By resisting the definition of slave for Savanna and bestowing it on two English men, Opie associates slavery with unquestioning subservience to powerful visceral forces (sweet foods / loose women) that can completely master the senses.

\(^{39}\) See Sussman’s introduction to *Consuming Anxieties* for discussions about the ways consumption of certain products (sugar, tea, etc.) was viewed as drinking the blood of slaves who were forced to produce them.
all ages . . . the rich are the natural enemies of the poor; and the poor, the rich; like the ingredients of a boiling cauldron, they seem to be in perpetual warfare, and struggle which shall be uppermost.” Davis’s caninization of the couple suggests that poverty marks blacks and their white counterparts equally as figures of a degeneracy that is unattractive and lackadaisical. In effect, he seeks to elevate his own humanity by denigrating theirs. His prejudice may also be due to the fact that he thinks William’s marital association with a mulatto woman is “indelicate and almost unnatural,” like Sarah Scott’s Sir George Ellison. Indeed, his response to the interracial couple is a dynamic reversal of the English-based ‘grateful Negro’ scenes that I discussed in Chapter Two, wherein Thomas Day and an anonymous author sought to acknowledge the humanity of slaves in England by distinguishing them from the wild beasts that sought to destroy white benefactors. Davis’s canine references connect him with men such as Maria Edgeworth’s Jamaican slave-holder, Mr. Jeffries, who considers African slaves “a race of beings naturally inferior,” as well as J. B. Moreton, who describes all mulattos as “mongrels.” Like them, he is a legitimate middle-class benevolent tyrant who dominates a diverse group of working poor people in England whom he thinks of, collectively, with the enmity and superiority that white Creoles held over black slaves and mulattos.

Pitting Glenmurray’s craving for sweetness alongside Davis’s bitterness toward the poor interracial family, Opie shows how the colonial taste for tyranny coalesces on the palates of metropolitan paternalists who revel in their own diseased appetites to exploit the poor and people of African descent for their own personal needs. The forcefulness and brutality of these appetites—Glenmurray’s insatiable desire for the pineapple, Davis’s merciless desire to send William to jail for a trifling debt—is challenged by Adeline’s “irresistible impulse” to “step forward” prompted by the reference to Savanna’s complexion, at the expense of her prior commitment to Glenmurray, and in opposition to Davis. Adeline’s philanthropy enacts a literal triumph over the forces that seek to subdue Savanna by openly questioning the moral legitimacy of English commercial practices and nullifying the tyranny of a domestic “creditor” and domestic partner. With Adeline’s action, Opie suggests that no matter how respectable and legitimate commercial practices look at face value, English paternalist rights should not be akin to those that colonial paternalists enjoy in which humans are treated like dogs for money. In the spirit of the law granting “natural rights” to humans of all

41. The History of Sir George Ellison, 139.
42. See Chapter Two, 79–81.
43. Maria Edgeworth, The Grateful Negro, 404.
complexions in the 1765 *Commentaries.* Opie appears to believe that “in England [everyone should] have the enjoyment of our benevolent, liberal and impartial legislation, without regard to men’s complexions,” and the triumph she orchestrates for Savanna and William suggests that, for the deserving poor of any color, inalienable “natural rights” to freedom are in the national interest ahead of commercial concerns.

MY READING of the arresting scene aligns Savanna’s experience with Bellamora’s in *The Adventure of the Black Lady.* In Opie’s text, a stigmatized woman (Adeline) confronts the tyrannical forces (Glenmurray’s and Davis’s appetites) that seek to subdue a black woman (Savanna), and she uses the means at her disposal to liberate this vulnerable black woman from the exploitation of those paternal forces. This is, undoubtedly, a triumphant act. After Adeline pays their debt, Savanna and William improve in health and looks, obtain jobs for themselves, and a situation for their son, and they begin to thrive. The abolition of poverty and prejudice put into action by Adeline’s philanthropy eschews the impression of social degeneracy that their poverty represented and allows this interracial couple to be seen, triumphantly, as productive members of English society.

The arresting scene also enacts a vindication of the original stigmatized woman just as Behn did for the landlady in her text. This second confrontation involves the white heroine and another tyrannical figure. On her initial trip to the “fruiterer’s,” the mistress of the shop (unbeknownst to Adeline) says to her maid that she should have “asked another person only a guinea [for the pineapple]; but as those sort of women [referring to Adeline] never mind what they give, I asked two, and I dare say she will come back for it” (II, 151; my emphasis). Given that Adeline’s reputation as a kept woman ultimately stretches into continental Europe, it is probable that the “fruiterer” knows about her relationship with Glenmurray and responds to Adeline as if the shade of ill repute is inscribed on her body. She feels entitled to exact the extra “guinea” from Adeline because of presumed extravagant spending habits of women who are kept by English gentlemen.

The “fruiterer’s” prejudice toward Adeline’s reputation as a kept woman is strikingly similar to the “creditor” and his justification for persecuting

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44. In this, Opie agrees with Mary Wollstonecraft: “There is one rule relative to behaviour that, I think, ought to regulate every other; and it is simply to cherish such an habitual respect for mankind as may prevent us from disgusting a fellow creature for the sake of a present indulgence.” *Vindication of the Rights of Women,* 248.

45. *Morning Herald,* January 2, 1787.
Savanna for a “trifling . . . six pounds” because of his prejudice against the working poor. In other words, women of both complexions face financial exploitation because Adeline’s reputation signifies sexual transgression while Savanna’s complexion signifies a prejudicial response to the social transgression of poverty. The syllabic, rhythmic, and rhyming assonance of “fruiterer” and “creditor” signifies how harmoniously aligned Opie thinks these professional business people are. Like the parish vermin from Behn’s *Adventure of the Black Lady*, commercial traders enjoy powerful opportunities to financially exploit vulnerable women with stigmatized reputations and complexions.

Adeline’s “step forward,” then, can be read not merely as a reaction to the prejudice that Davis holds over members of the working poor. By not returning for the pineapple and using the money for social philanthropy, Adeline escapes the charge that would indelibly mark her as this common “sort” of sexual transgressor who frequents the fruiterer’s business, undermines the fruiterer’s physical assessment of the “sort” of woman she is, and challenges the stigma that the fruiterer attributes to her reputation. She unknowingly saves her own reputation by confirming that she is not the “sort” of spendthrift sexual transgressor that the fruiterer expected, but another kind of transgressor—a virtuous advocate for the abolition of marriage whose actions are separate from the notorious “sort” of kept lady commonly known to the fruiterer. Mixing two pro-abolitionist discourses within the same action in the arresting scene, Adeline’s “step forward” triumphantly defends her own position as a sexual transgressor while consciously and triumphantly acting on behalf of Savanna’s position as an impoverished social transgressor in English society.

Adeline, however, does not act for their “joint relief” until Davis blasts Savanna’s blackness; until then, “Adeline . . . had not recollected that she was a mulatto.” In this sentence, Adeline recollects that Savanna’s blackness carries with it an oppressive stigma about poverty which her “step forward” determinedly challenges. Yet the suggestive, and I would add deliberately confusing, pronoun also includes the possibility that Adeline does not remember that “she [too] was a mulatto.” Of course, Adeline is, undeniably, Caucasian. But I think Opie’s delightfully suggestive syntax presents the possibility that this virtuous English woman’s sexually ambiguous position as an advocate for the notorious idea of abolishing marriage is metaphorically hybrid at the same time that she presents Savanna as a literal one. Indeed, the impression of her as a metaphorical mulatto is strengthened by the fact

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46. Susan Greenfield has found another important instance of this syntactic ambiguity in her chapter “Mother, Daughter and Mulatto: Women’s Exchange in Adeline Mowbray,” thereby suggesting that this is not an isolated case but a deliberate literary device employed by Opie.
that she is read with the same sexual stigmas that Long and Moreton leveled at West Indian mulatto women.

Because the “creditor” and “fruiterer” both react physically and with exactly the same financially exploitative prejudice toward Adeline and Savanna, Opie gives the impression that these metaphorical and literal mulatto women intersect in, to borrow Mary Louise Pratt’s term, the “contact zone”47 of conjoined exploitation under commercial oppressors as their stigmatized bodies circulate in England. However, despite both of their triumphs over the tyrannical forces that seek to exploit or subdue them, Adeline and Savanna inhabit mulatto space dialogically. Adeline’s “greater interest” in remembering and reacting to the social stigmas associated with Savanna’s complexion offers her an excuse to focus on philanthropy while ignoring the stigmas implicit in her own morally ambiguous stance against marriage—a stigma tangibly witnessed in the fruiterer’s physical and negative reaction to her reputation. Hence, Adeline’s philanthropy on behalf of the poor occurs at a time that she recollects and acts against the social stigmas surrounding Savanna’s blackness and poverty but forgets, or at least fails to acknowledge, that her own reputation carries stigmas of a mulatto complexion. Savanna, however, is brutally reminded of her connection to stigmatized blackness when Davis blasts her complexion. In other words, while Savanna knows that she is a literal mulatto consigned to the stigmatized space that has been designated for people of her color and rank, Adeline does not recollect that she is a metaphorical one whose actions place her in the same sexual space of infamy as the literal mulatto women from Long’s and Moreton’s West Indian texts. In *Adeline Mowbray*, then, the mulatto contact zone that each woman inhabits is distinguished by the level of awareness each woman has about the understanding of the blackness she embodies. Interrogating the difference between Savanna’s conscious position as a literal mulatto and Adeline’s unknowing metaphorical one leads to a dialogic understanding of Opie’s use of the term “mulatto,” the shade of blackness so unjustly victimized by English commercial interests because of a prejudged association with sexual and social transgression in England.

IN ORDER TO contextualize the sexual and social transgressions that are literally and metaphorically inscribed in Savanna’s and Adeline’s mulatto complexions, it is necessary, first, to examine the way social and sexual transgressions are reflected in the complexions of the novel’s English men and

47. “‘Contact zone’ is an attempt to invoke the spatial and temporal copresence of subjects previously separated by geographic and historic disjunctures, and whose trajectories now intersect.” Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 7.
women as a whole. Two scenes involving males provide the first examples of the ways in which Opie links complexion with a discussion about sexual and social transgression in England. The first scene occurs in Lisbon, Portugal, where Adeline flees with Glenmurray after her stepfather, Sir Patrick O’Carrol, attempts to rape her. While “sitting on a bench in one of the public walks” (I, 189), the unmarried couple happen upon Mr. Maynard, an old acquaintance of Glenmurray’s who is vacationing there with his sisters. Mr. Maynard has a “sun-burnt complexion” from having “gone to seek his fortune in India” (I, 189), and he returns to England a “Nabob” (I, 189)—a title that, in conjunction with his complexion, identifies him as cultural transgressor against Englishness. “Certainly by the turn of the century, nabobs were widely being censured,” writes M. O. Grenby. “The idea of the nabob, the lowly man who had gone away to India . . . only to return with a fortune, possibly got by means the most nefarious, was a very serviceable figure for novelists wishing to show the dangers of new and unmerited social standing.”

The second scene occurs after Adeline and Glenmurray return home to England and settle in Richmond. While out walking and admiring the scenery, Adeline happens upon “some well-dressed boys at play” and she begins “darkly brooding over the imagined fate of her own offspring” (II, 133). One boy, in particular, catches her attention: “she saw [him] standing at a little distance from the group, and apparently looking at it with an eye of envy” (II, 134). The other boys have rejected this one because he is an illegitimate child—a “little bastard”—whose “sunburnt neck and hands” are so “very very clean” (II, 135) but still not socially clean enough to allow him access to the playgroup composed of his upper-class peers. Even though he is “better dressed than the rest” (II, 134), the expensive clothing that his mother buys for him is like another layer of stigmatized skin visually confirming that she is not the social equal to the parents of the other boys but one of “those sort of women [who] never mind what they give” (II, 151) for commodities. Maynard’s and the rejected playmate’s sunburned complexions both suggest that English culture and morality are threatened by “Nabobs” and rich “little bastards” whose wealth mistakenly places them in a class that should epitomize sexual and cultural propriety.

The complexions of two women are presented in a way that identifies them as sexual and social transgressors of a different kind. The first, an unnamed woman described only as the “very showy woman” (III, 35), is the mistress of an eminent lawyer, Mr. Langley, “celebrated for his abilities as a chamber counselor” (III, 30), and the man whom Adeline consults

after Glenmurray’s death to try obtain a nearly three-hundred-pound inheritance that Glenmurray had bequeathed to her in his will. Mary Warner is initially introduced to the novel as Adeline’s servant, but after Adeline fires her for insolence and she loses another job with the Quaker, Mrs. Pemerton, Mary becomes Langley’s second kept mistress. She and the “very showy woman” both display artificially colored complexions: the very showy woman’s “highly rouged” (III, 35) face parallels Mary, near the end of the novel, “rouged like a French countess of the ancien regime” (III, 108). Rouge obviously attempts to replicate the blooming complexion of the contemporary English Rose ideal of beauty. But Opie critiques these women, not so much for their use, but their overuse of it. Excessively coloring themselves, Mary and the very showy woman physically adulterate the English Rose idea of beauty and, in turn, ideologically contaminate the virtuous ideals embodied in this characteristic representation of English femininity. Mary’s foreign, regal, and anachronistic appearance speaks particularly to this adulteration as rouge replaces any wholesome impressions she may have as an English “village” (III, 1) inhabitant with the stamp of despotic, artificial, and alien femininity. This is, surely, Opie’s critique of Jacobin politics and its radical way of breaking down hierarchies, leading people such as Mary to believe that they are equal to aristocrats. But with bodies trapped “in the extremity of fashion” (III, 35), Mary and the “very showy woman” are only marked as theatrically tyrannical women who so alarm Opie that she stages them in a tyrannical guise that is familiar yet unusual for these “rouged” women. Because they make such gross exhibitions of ordering the eminent lawyer Langley about, Opie concludes, “he was formed to be the slave of women” (III, 109); and with this pointed reference to their aggressive and dominant personalities, Adeline Mowbray’s “rouged” women are unexpectedly aligned with colonial tyrants, and, as such, are threats to traditional ideals of English femininity.

Thus, the complexions of English men and women in the novel are used to code Opie’s views on social and sexual transgression in England. The “sunburn” accounts for Maynard’s role as a “Nabob” and the rejected playmate’s position as a “bastard,” while rouge brands the theatrically tyrannical

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49. For a definition of the “English Rose,” see Fenja Gunn’s The Artificial Face (Worcester: Trinity Press, 1973), 110.

50. This theatrical threat is very real, as Gunn reveals in this 1770 act of Parliament, taken from The Artificial Face: “All women of whatever age, rank, profession, or degree, whether virgins, maids, or widows, that shall, from and after such Act, impose upon, seduce, and betray into matrimony, any of his Majesty’s subjects, by the scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes and bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the law in force against witchcraft and like misdemeanours and that the marriage, upon conviction, shall stand null and void” (124).
women whores. All of them are depicted as grossly contaminating upstanding notions of Englishness and destabilizing two important foundations of English society: social hierarchy and sexual propriety. However, the consequences of their behavior are quite different.

In Mr. Maynard’s description, Opie stresses his “irreproachable character” (II, 189); despite his “Nabob” complexion, his reputation is impeccable. The same can be said about the rich “little bastard.” Adeline asks his peers,

“Is he ill-natured?”
“No.”
“Does he not play fair?”
“Yes”
“Don’t you like him?”
“Yes.” (II, 136)

Reputations for irreproachableness, fairness, good nature, and likeableness are all commendatory, and the scrupulousness of the rich little bastard’s expensive clothing and Mr. Maynard’s character suggest that they are both trying hard to fit in despite the stigmas that define them. Sir Egerton Brydges’s preface to his novel Arthur Fitz-Albini (1798) offers a clear condemnation of transgressive figures such as Mr. Maynard and the rich “little bastard”:

So long as mere wealth, without consideration by what means it was acquired, or regard to the birth, or education, of the possessor, shall be an introduction into all society, and all places of trust and respect, the ties of harmony and goodwill, by which a government is supported, must every day be growing looser; subordination must become insufferable to its natural defenders; morals must daily deturpate.51

Yet Opie’s transgressive males represent a decidedly different societal outcome from Brydges’s dire predictions of societal decay. Her use of the sunburn suggests that the commendatory reputations of these men, will, in due time, be relieved of the stigmas associated with their sexual and social transgressions once they become more acclimatized to the society that their finances allow them access to, and when that society becomes so accustomed to them that it excuses their slight deficiencies and allows them to blend in. Opie uses the sunburn, then, to exonerate as well as label the sexual and social transgressions English men perform.

Exoneration is not the point of order for “rouged” women, however. The natural, possibly permanent, yet excusable discoloration belonging to these “sunburned” men of color contrasts obviously with the unnatural, temporary, and inexcusable overcoloration of the “rouged” women of color. Generally, cosmetics and costumes are applied with the intention of improving a woman’s physical appearance, but Mary employs both of them as a means of social mobility. Her emphasis on showiness arises out of pique over a comment she had overheard Adeline make about how “plain” (III, 110) looking she was as a servant. “I suppose you are quite surprised to see how smart I am!” (III, 110; my emphasis), she triumphs to Adeline, reveling in her transformation from plain servant to “French countess.” The double meaning of “smart” indicates not only Mary’s belief that she has physically improved by becoming Langley’s mistress but also that she has been clever enough to exploit herself in this way. Consequently, Opie associates extreme makeup with a misguided female intent to radically improve her financial and social appearance through independent and intellectual initiative. But cosmetic excesses only establish Mary’s and the very showy woman’s infamous reputations.

Clearly, a social double standard is reinforced through the complexions of these men and women of color. Where sunburned men such as Maynard and the rich “little bastard” will eventually be allowed to participate in society despite their reputations for social and sexual impropriety, rouged women cannot expect to do the same because, as Mary shows, they are performing the aristocratic role with such excessive failure. At least the males naturally look and act the part of the class that they aspire to be. Mary and the “very showy woman” are only farcically performing it.

IT IS COLORED female complexions in Adeline Mowbray, then, that are most indicative of the extreme kind of social and sexual chaos apparent in England, and it is from this general discussion of complexion in the text that Adeline’s reputation as a metaphorical mulatto must be read. On three occasions, English women explicitly make her up as a black sexual transgressor akin to Behn’s Bellamora and as licentious as one of Long’s colonial mulattos. The first blackening reference comes indirectly from Mrs. Mowbray. When her young, “penniless profligate” husband, Sir Patrick O’Carrol, abscends with her fortune, Mrs. Mowbray exculpates her own recklessness of marrying him without “writings or settlements . . . drawn up” (I, 135) by accusing

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52. Although Eberle reads Opie’s novel as a vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft, I read Adeline Mowbray as a blatant albeit sympathetic denouncement of Wollstonecraft that emerges in Mary Warner’s first name, initials, and her representation as a harlot with “smart” pretensions.
Adeline Mowbray of seducing him away from her. Dr. Norberry, a family friend of the Mowbrays, incensed by Mrs. Mowbray’s scapegoating, renounces his friendship with her, telling Adeline: “when she whitewashed herself [she] blackened you” (II, 77). Dr. Norberry’s colored analogy would only appear incidental if direct attempts to sexually stigmatize Adeline as a black female transgressor were not made by both of lawyer Langley’s mistresses. “Is not that black mawkin gone yet?” (III, 37) the “very showy woman” jealously asks Langley, piqued by his attentions to Adeline as he escorts her to the downstairs door of his office. This woman views Adeline as Mrs. Mowbray does: a sexual intermediary who threatens her relationship with a man. By contrast, Mary views Adeline as a black intermediary who facilitates her relationship with Langley, legitimizing it with an air of intellectual respectability, and it is from her that the most damaging blackening reference comes. “You taught me that marriage was all nonsense,” she tells Adeline, “and so thought I, miss Mowbray is a learned lady, she must know best . . . so I followed your example” (III, 111). She tries to credit Adeline’s principled stance against marriage as the facilitating factor in her vice-ridden decision to become a kept mistress, and she makes a concerted effort to imply that she and Adeline share the same ideological view against marriage by using the popular black analogy “Twas the kettle . . . calling the pot” (III, 110). In short, when Mary utilizes Adeline’s reputation as a “learned lady” to validate her own “smart” decision to be a woman of ill repute for financial gain, she confirms Adeline’s position as a metaphorical mulatto—a virtuous advocate for a seemingly immoral act. Like a literal mulatto, Mary, the fruiterer, and the society at large see only the immoral and physical side of Adeline’s stance against marriage and ignore the virtuous principle within it.

The “Nabob,” the rich “little bastard,” and the “rouged” women all confirm that characters with colored complexions are, in Opie’s mind, intimately connected with contaminating some aspect of English culture. And while men may escape censure for this contamination, women with notoriously colored reputations—even virtuous ones such as Adeline—do not. This point is emphasized in two of the novel’s pivotal confrontations involving Adeline and Mary.

The first confrontation aligns Mary with the creditor, Davis. Mary’s aggression and dominance over Mr. Langley has already identified her as an exploitative tyrant of Davis’s ilk. Prior to her appearance in Langley’s office, she also reenacts many of his other vices. When she is employed as Adeline’s servant, Mary harbors a grudge toward her mistress for calling her “plain”

53. One contemporary critic fears that this will be the effect produced by throwing appealing colors over Adeline’s character.
that turns into an insolence that gets her discharged, and later, develops into an unbridled desire to persecute Adeline, especially when her former mistress opens a school in Mary’s native village. “So much was she piqued at the disbelief which she met with” (III, 2) when she calls Adeline a “kept” lady that Mary demands the right to expose Adeline at church in as aggressive an act of public persecution as Savanna experienced under Davis. Mary, “proud of her success” (III, 4) at exposing Adeline, uses the church setting to legitimize her social position in her native society by sullying Adeline: she “looked triumphantly at [the crowd], and was resolved to pursue the advantage which she had gained” (III, 4). Once again, Opie draws attention to a tyrant’s right to oppress a stigmatized woman, but in Adeline’s case, a “rouged” woman rather than a male “creditor” exercises this right. Yet in this confrontation, the tyrant is thwarted from pursuing her moral “advantage” when an anonymous man hastily “stepped forward” (III, 5) to offer Adeline assistance, thereby liberating Adeline from Mary’s tyranny as Adeline herself had liberated Savanna from the creditor. Adeline’s second confrontation with Mary does not end as triumphantly.

Where the church setting of their first confrontation illustrated Adeline’s moral victory over Mary, Opie constructs their second one in another symbolic space. After Glenmurray’s death, Adeline marries his cousin, Berrendale, and they have a daughter, Editha. But Berrendale leaves his family for the West Indies, forcing Adeline to take steps to prove herself Berrendale’s legal wife and “substantiate Editha’s claim to his property” (III, 104). So she consults with the “very great lawyer” (III, 104), Mr. Langley, who had behaved terribly to her when he thought she was Glenmurray’s mistress and continues to do so now that he thinks she belongs to Berrendale. It is in his law office that she meets Mary dressed like a “French countess.” Within this space, it is Mary, not Langley, who dominates. She claims an ideological affinity with Adeline, telling her former mistress, “no ceremony, you know, among friends and equals” (III, 109), and she berates Langley when he attempts to silence her. But Mary’s composure is momentarily shattered when news is brought that her son has perished of smallpox. To comfort her, Adeline embraces Mary until she realizes that she is endangering her own child with a potential smallpox infection. When she attempts to end this dangerous embrace, Mary “kept her arms closely clasped round Adeline’s waist” (III, 116), “hugged her the closer,” and “was the more eager to hold her fast.” Adeline, then, forcefully “endeavoured to break free from the arms of her tormentor” (III, 117), but Mary is formidable: “she parried all Adeline’s endeavours to break from her” (III, 118). Despite Adeline’s “strength of phrensy and despair . . . a fatal control [is irrevocably] exercised over her” (III, 118) by Mary.
Opie presents this physically violent and sexually charged confrontation with tyranny in lawyer Langley’s office—a presumed hall of judgment and justice. In the arresting scene, Adeline’s step forward resulted in a financial triumph over tyranny for the poor in England. Outside the village church, an anonymous man stepped forward to enact a moral triumph over tyranny during Mary’s first confrontation with Adeline. However, in Langley’s law office, it is noticeable that the only one capable of stepping forward to protect Adeline from Mary’s violence is lawyer Langley, who, we’re told, “was formed to be the slave of women, and had not the courage to protect another from the insolence to which he tamely yielded” (III,109). Langley’s sexually suspect behavior with women identifies him as a weak judge of character and an ineffective defender of virtue. Whether they are rouged or metaphorically mulattoed, he views all colored women as equally stigmatized in his office and judges them accordingly.

In lawyer Langley’s office, then, in the absence of an effective legal defense and in the presence of the domineering tyrant, Mary, Opie renders defeat on Adeline’s idea of abolishing marriage with a smallpox disease that permeates Adeline’s body and irreversibly ravages her English Rose complexion. Mary’s infection ultimately ends Adeline’s life. But before it does, Adeline realizes something about herself that she had been oblivious to earlier. The mulatto reputation that she upholds, metaphorically, by her virtuous adherence to the infamous principle of abolishing marriage only serves to embolden infamous women such as Mary while it weakens the influence of principled ones such as Adeline. The ease and swiftness with which Mary’s infection eviscerates Adeline stands as a metaphor for the way in which Adeline’s principle is easily corrupted; and because the beauty of her principle lay in its purity, Opie kills off her heroine. She does not want Adeline to live as the face of a hybrid principle, cosmetically enhancing her blighted reputation as contemporaries infected by smallpox scars routinely did with red and black patches. Adeline’s facial disfigurement and physical demise symbolize the ultimate fate facing women who champion hybrid principles that provide them with no defense before the law. Savanna’s mulatto complexion, however, is viewed differently in the novel, largely because of the law.

THE LEGAL ambivalence surrounding the status of black slaves in England witnessed in Blackstone’s two interpretations was, ostensibly, reconciled by Lord Chief Justice Mansfield’s 1772 ruling in the Somerset case that mas-

54. Gunn’s *The Artificial Face* (110–14) discusses the way that women wore red and black patches over pockmark scars in the eighteenth century.
ters could not forcibly send ex-slaves who arrived in England back to the colonies. But Mansfield’s judgment was a narrowly defined ruling with a practical application that left a lot to be desired since it failed to conclusively pronounce or even safeguard the abolition of slavery in England. After the Mansfield Judgment, Folarin Shyllon, Peter Fryer, and Gretchen Gerzina have convincingly proved, slaves were frequently bought and sold in English newspapers well into the 1820s. In popular print culture, slavery within England was an all too common reality for an extended period after Mansfield’s judgment.

However, despite its insufficiency in guaranteeing freedom, the principle behind the Mansfield Judgment found an outlet in English literature and culture at large. In the wake of Mansfield’s judgment a myth is produced—a myth of the supposed freedom of black slaves in Britain—a Mansfield myth that Shyllon calls “quite untrue.” Maria Edgeworth’s Juba in Belinda (1801) is part of a strong contemporary literary movement popularizing it after 1772. Thomas Day’s “The Dying Negro” (1774) encourages sympathetic support for the Mansfield semblance of freedom by harshly portraying the real-life impressment of a male Negro slave from Bristol in 1773 and his subsequent suicide to avoid being sold in the colonies. More explicitly, William Cowper proclaims, “We have no Slaves at home” in The Task (1785), and Archibald MacLaren’s one-act drama The Negro Slaves (1799) has a Jamaican slave, Quako, tell his African bride, Sela, “Then we shall go to England, and be free Britons” (I.v.23). Immigration to a free European nation is also the radical solution to the problem of slavery proposed as one of the endings to Kotzebue’s The Negro Slaves. Opie evokes the Mansfield myth herself in “The Negro Boy’s Tale,” published three years before Adeline Mowbray. Zambo, the poem’s enslaved Jamaican protagonist, imagines England as a “sweet land / . . . Vere, soon as on de shore he stand, / De helpless Negro slave be free” (54).

Zambo’s fictionalized idea of immediate freedom was even a lived reality

56. See Shyllon’s Black People in Britain and Gerzina’s Black London.
57. Shyllon, Black People, 25.
for some blacks in Britain. In a letter to Charles Stewart written three weeks after the Mansfield Judgment was passed, John Riddell writes:

But I am disappointed by Mr. Dublin who has run away. He told the servants that he had rec’d a letter from his Uncle Sommerset acquainting him that Lord Mansfield had given them their freedom & he was determined to leave me as soon as I returned from London which he did without even speaking to me.60

Publicly acknowledging Mansfield as his excuse to “run away,” Dublin evokes the myth of instantaneous freedom and leaves Riddell’s establishment “without even speaking to” his former master, presumably to prevent the myth of indigenous freedom that he relates to the other servants from being refuted.

So from all of these literal and fiction evocations of freedom under the Mansfield myth, it would seem that the fictional Savanna, who “had escaped early in life . . . to England” (II, 110), should realize Zambo’s vision of immediate emancipation once she arrives there. Yet her determination to stay with and serve Adeline years after the Mansfield Judgment seems so much like a domestic form of benevolent enslavement that Cubba privileged in the Larpent manuscript of *Irishman in London*.61 She willingly accepts a life of servitude under Adeline when she makes a determined vow to serve her for a subsistence of “nothing but my meat and drink” (II, 175) out of gratitude for the three guineas’ worth of kindness meted out during the arresting scene. And Adeline apparently consolidates Savanna’s reenslavement when she refers to her as “my property” (III, 84) and bequeaths Savanna to her mother in her will—language and gestures expected more from slave-holders such as Riddell or even tyrants such as Davis. The fact that this woman liberated under the Mansfield myth would willingly choose to attach herself to Adeline in a relationship that appears to mimic benevolent slavery presents a level of skepticism about the text’s position on the mulatto woman’s freedom. If Savanna’s emancipation in England is not the novel’s aim, what does her dependence on Adeline mean, and how does it affect the novel’s abolitionist stance?

I want to suggest that the myth of freedom popularized by the Mansfield Judgment informs Opie’s depiction of Savanna and offers another way to think about how Opie’s novel attempts to promote the liberty of Africans in England as a triumph over tyranny. Although Eleanor Ty concludes, “Opie’s novel eschews radical solutions,”62 her conclusion does not take into account the radical idea of granting citizenship status to poor black ex-slaves at a time

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60. Quoted in Oldham, “New Light on Mansfield and Slavery,” 65–66; my emphasis.
61. See Chapter Four, 179.
in British history when organizations such as the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor were viewing poor blacks as foreigners and actively working to get rid of them. My earlier reading of the arresting scene argued that Opie shows support for the black poor who choose to remain on English shores when she distinguishes between natural and commercial rights. All Britons, irrespective of color, should have access to the former. Specific support of citizenship status for Savanna emerges when Opie states that Adeline “had not recollected that [Savanna] was a mulatto” until Davis berates her blackness. This is, perhaps, Opie’s tacit way of saying that one should see Savanna as Adeline does, first and foremost, as a free British woman, and only secondarily as black. This kind of reading is supported in other areas of the novel.

Carol Howard reads Savanna and Adeline’s relationship within “the nostalgic language of fealty”—a sentimental pledge of allegiance—and this perspective proves helpful in reexamining the novel’s abolitionist politics. By accepting a subservient role in British society, Savanna is seen as upholding the feudal order. Her deference to Adeline is an articulation of the conservative response to authority that Edmund Burke valorized in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Yet, if this is the case—if Savanna is an illustration of the kind of ennobling deference to authority that, Burke suggests, distinguishes the British from the French—then her deference to Adeline is a patriotic act that adheres to British principles, and, thus, distinguishes her admirably when viewed alongside the foreignness embodied in figures such as the “French Countess” Mary Warner, the nabob Mr. Maynard, Adeline’s sexually abusive stepfather, the Irish peer, Sir Patrick O’Carrol, and other contemporaries such as the rich “little bastard” who are intent on knocking down British society by their socially and sexually transgressive behavior. Savanna’s willing act of deference is a performative act of patriotism—one that identifies her as another of Isaac Land’s “street citizens.” Of these individuals, Land writes: “The reward for patriotic service was a rough-and-ready inclusiveness around the edges of the conveniently undefined category of ‘Briton.’” In a society of individuals who continually misread Adeline’s principle as vice, Savanna’s deference to Adeline, both when she is unmarried to Glenmurray and when she is legally married to Berrendale, shows that she is able to recognize, and is prepared to attach herself to, the ideal British principle of virtue that Adeline stands for in a way that other Britons are not. In the spirited attachment to Adeline and the principle of pure virtue, then, Opie identifies Savanna as a pure British subject.

64. Howard, “‘The Story of the Pineapple,’” 367.
There are other reasons for considering Savanna as a black British street citizen in the novel. Contemporary proslavery critics falsely claimed that the Mansfield Judgment had created this poor black problem when bondsmen such as Dublin peremptorily absconded from their masters without subsequently securing other means of subsistence.  

This was a false claim. But after 1772, a black slave's abrupt determination to leave a former master was not necessarily the most pragmatic solution to the problem of poverty for the black working class in England. As Felicity Nussbaum observes: “Lord Mansfield . . . extended the protection of habeas corpus . . . to the slave James Somerset in 1772, and thus to all black people in England—though he did not extend that privilege to grant them wages or poor law relief.” Neither the Mansfield Judgment nor the myth surrounding it guaranteed black people job security or state protection if they asserted their freedom under them. And as Gretchen Gerzina’s Black London points out, of the black men who had fought alongside the British during the American War of Independence in return for the promise of freedom and assistance in England, “most were still penniless slaves . . . highly visible on English streets” and very few of them actually received financial remuneration for the loyalty they showed to the British during the war.

Hence, one must consider Savanna’s relationship with Adeline as a negotiation of the precarious consequentiality of asserting freedom in a society that cared little for the subsequent protection of the lives of the black poor who chose to remain in England after the 1787 Sierra Leone expedition. Viewed within this context, Savanna’s allegiance to Adeline can be read as a reflection of the type of assistance that Britain should have provided for the black poor who had demonstrated their loyalty to support and fight for British principles. Serving Adeline allows Savanna to aspire within English society. “But, lady,” Savanna explains to Adeline, “you break my heart . . . if you not take my service. My William and me too poor to live togedder of some year perhaps” (II, 177). Aside from the grateful appeal from her “heart” to repay Adeline for her kindness, Savanna underscores a practical need for subsistence because William cannot afford to support them both. It is noticeable that she makes no comment about being forced into poor-law assistance, perhaps knowing that her foreign black complexion excludes her from it. But in pursuing work under Adeline, Savanna displays “a determined enthusiasm of manner” (II, 178) that is in the service of being self-sufficient.

66. Ibid., 118–19.
69. Shyllon, Black People, 117–58.
even if it is ostensibly utilized with the intention of staying with, and repaying, Adeline. Savanna is, thus, an indication that the opportunity to work is what the black poor need, and Adeline is the principled British subject who provides it.

Savanna’s dedication to the principle of marriage accompanies her dedication to the principle of work and reflects more on her Britishness. “I should have let [Glenmurray] go to prison, before disappoint my William” (II, 176), she states, revealing that an unswerving determination to satisfy her husband in the face of Adeline’s distress would not have caused her to aide Adeline and forgo her prior commitment to him. Savanna is obviously committed to her husband; however, Howard skeptically cites the fact that they only meet once in the novel as an indication that their relationship takes second place to Savanna and Adeline’s. In actuality, Savanna’s determination to see and nurse William once he falls ill while working in Jamaica offers an instance of her marital fidelity. Despite her vow of allegiance to Adeline, Savanna secures a free passage to Jamaica one full day before she secures her employer’s permission to leave: “[A ship’s captain] tell me yesterday that he let me go for noting” (III, 86–87), she tells Adeline, indicating that she has already explored a viable way of seeing William and she has the means to potentially use it whether or not Adeline agrees to her departure. The fact that she travels to Jamaica after having “escaped, early in life, with her first husband” (III, 102), to nurse William as any wife would do, without any fear of the consequences as to her status, suggests that she has established a free mind-set as a British woman. Savanna’s initial escape to England “early in life, with her first husband” offers just enough information to suggest that she has been breathing the pure air of English liberty for a while—perhaps, breathing it so much that she has imbibed the principle of freedom and forgets the fact that outside of England she is still perceived as a slave.

The reader, socially attuned to the legal and moral legitimacy of the text’s view on indigenous freedom for people of all complexions, is expected to view and accept Savanna’s capacity for pure British working-class virtue despite her black, fugitive, and socially transgressive skin because she embodies the British principles of rank deference, industry, constancy in marriage, and dedications to virtue and freedom. Where Adeline’s ideological hybridity as a virtuous proponent of an immoral act completely destroyed her good reputation, Savanna’s literal complexion effects the opposite. Opie constructs Savanna as an intriguing and perhaps shocking illustration of the idea that a street citizen does not have to have an English Rose complexion to live up

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to the reputation of ideal British femininity. As Land puts it: “British-ness was about behavior not birthplace or bloodline.”

I HAVE BEEN arguing that the abolitionist discourse in Adeline Mowbray is not about liberating people of African descent from slavery. In England, the Mansfield myth had ostensibly established that. Rather, Opie’s portrayal of Savanna shows that the abolition of prejudice and poverty leveled at the black poor allows them the freedom to be seen as pure black British citizens.

The most triumphant instance of Savanna’s use of her citizenship status comes in a comment she makes as she and Adeline contemplate legally confronting a colonial tyrant. Ever since his tryst with a house-servant, Savanna resolves to “thwart” (III, 54) the villainous Berrendale for his tyrannical treatment of Adeline. But this determination is never more so apparent than when she returns from Jamaica. The most revealing instance of Savanna’s dedication to the pursuit of freedom from her position as Adeline’s employee appears when she escapes from the enslavement that Berrendale returns her to and travels back to England to inform Adeline of his bigamous marriage to a West Indian heiress. Adeline “desired [Savanna] to proceed to business” (III, 155). Incrédulously interpreting “business” as a call to arms protected by rights of habeas corpus, “the delighted mulatto” cries, “‘What! . . . are we going to prosecu massa?’” (III, 155; my emphasis). Adeline, however, comes to a determination to take no legal steps in this affair, but leave Mr. Berrendale to the reproaches of his own conscience.”

“A fiddle’s end!” replied Savanna, “he have no conscience, or he no leave you: better get him hang; if you can den you marry de colonel.”

“I had better hang the father of my child, had I, Savanna?”

“Oh! no, no, no, no,—me forget dat.” (III, 155–56; my emphasis)

In this scene, Opie provides another of those pivotal moments of confrontation between a woman of African descent and a colonial tyrant. But in this moment, Savanna is more defensive in her actions. One asks, what exactly is the fugitive slave remembering as she proceeds to determine the expediency of not only prosecuting Adeline’s errant husband but hanging him too?

Clearly, from her response, she remembers that Berrendale has abandoned his wife; but is that all? Does she recall her own reenslavement because of him? Does she also recall his ubiquitous position as a “massa” like Davis—a businessman involved in the exploitation and oppression of mulatto women

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like herself as well as Adeline? The “delighted” way she invokes the all-inclusive pronoun “we” suggests that she does. For Savanna knows Adeline will get material justice and perhaps a new husband from Berrendale’s legal demise, but including herself in the prosecution process underscores the vindication she also expects to receive under English law because of his behavior toward her. Adeline, reluctant to take any further action “which might injure her reputation” (III, 155), is determined to take no “legal steps” in this affair. She abandons both of her assertive abolitionist positions taken during the arresting scene now that Mary has made her understand the negative consequences of her actions. But Savanna’s desire to “prosecu massa” reveals her understanding of, and hidden determination to use, the “legal steps” forward established by Mansfield’s 1772 decision. In a gesture that purports to exclusively aide Adeline, Savanna wants to take “legal steps” that also “prosecu massa” Berrendale for forcibly returning her back into Jamaican slavery, an act that she seems to recollect would be her “business” to prosecute under the Mansfield Judgment if perpetrated in England. And from her vantage point as a black British employee, she tries to utilize Adeline to achieve this end.

Proposing, justifying, and including herself in “legal steps” forward using the English courts, Savanna alone presents a way to tangibly provide “joint relief” from the unjust commercial oppressions that sexually and socially stigmatized women of all complexions experience in England. Committing bigamy in Jamaica purely for profit and returning Savanna to slavery purely to protect it, Berrendale violates Savanna’s freedom and Adeline’s nuptial vow by exploiting the former’s black complexion and the latter’s notorious reputation. Such behavior associates him with the fruiterer, the kept mistress, Mary, and the creditor, Davis. In fact, given his impending marriage to a Creole heiresses, Berrendale is the literal embodiment of the colonial tyrant from which these indigenous characters are derived. Hence, Savanna’s desire to “prosecu massa” Berrendale strikes at the heart of actions that need to be taken collectively against him, and all tyrants like him.

Taking “legal steps” to “prosecu massa” Berrendale relates, then, to all confrontational scenes where powerful displays of bigotry and exploitation are aimed exclusively and unfairly against “mulatto” women with stigmatized (black) complexions. It calls for a legal reevaluation of the moral foundations underlying the commercial rights displayed in the arresting scene, where the creditor and the fruiterer persecute Savanna and Adeline over a pineapple and a “trifling . . . six pounds” with powerful displays of bigotry and exploitation because of a prejudged association with sexual and social transgression. It also relates to Mary’s position in Langley’s office, calling for the strengthening of laws that counter the kept mistress’s reign as the advocate
for the abolition of marriage. In effect, Savanna’s question retaliates against all unjust persecutions and prosecutions of unjustly stigmatized women of all complexions by proposing the following to Adeline: ‘aren’t we going about the “business” of avenging the creditors/fruiterers/kept mistresses’ abilities to exploit us because of our ‘black’ complexions? Aren’t you and I—“we” (mulatto women)—going to use the morally legitimate principle of “natural rights” to legally “thwart” these tyrants?’ In paraphrasing the implications behind Savanna’s desire to “prosecu massa,” I am suggesting that her desire to take “legal steps” forward provides the most pragmatic solution to address the violations against freedom and marriage that Berrendale and other tyrants such as the prostitute, the creditor, and the fruiterer commit. But she lacks the assistance of her benevolent benefactor to make these prosecutions happen. In my last chapter, The Woman of Colour offers a chance to see if such an empowering representation of black femininity by a rich mulatto advocate for the abolition of slavery can actually come to fruition in England. But from her limited position as a scantily waged but fully protected black British employee, Savanna’s articulation of legal steps forward against English tyrants has a triumphant effect on English society, identifying the main legal avenue by which the black poor in England can protect their freedom to be British.

**THIS CHAPTER** resitutes the current skeptical approach to abolition in Opie’s work. She encourages a favorable response to the discussion about the legal status of black people in England popularized under the Mansfield myth when she vindicates one woman’s form of blackness while pointing out the vice of the other. She is at least one British author who counters Moira Ferguson’s claim that eighteenth-century British women writers “misrepresented the very African-Caribbean slaves whose freedom they advocated.” By producing a text that imagines the Mansfield Judgment as a legal reality that promotes a woman of color’s freedom to be British, Adeline Mowbray evokes the spirit of the most abolitionist of English abolitionist tales. Its vindication of the rights of a woman of African descent’s entitlement to fall under English laws and legal protections shows the level of assistance that was denied Imoinda in Surinam. Thus, the spirit of “Imoinda’s shade” extends from the wilds of Surinam to shake the foundations of England’s judicial system with Savanna’s attempt to “prosecu massa.”

In presenting Savanna as a free British woman who is, ultimately, left to the “joint care” of Mrs. Pemberton, the Quaker, and Mrs. Mowbray, the landed widow—women with the religious and financial weight to continue

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the protracted fight against tyranny in England—Opie ends the novel by conveying the spirit of the natural. Natural rights for all English people are ostensibly contained in Blackstone’s 1765 *Commentaries* and reinforced in *Adeline Mowbray*. The Mansfield myth purportedly allows black slaves to naturally join the ranks of the English working classes. And Savanna’s natural complexion is purged of any sexual and social stigmas and welcomed into the Rosevalley estate—a place where a diverse group of individuals live together, each having lost a spouse to death by natural causes. Rosevalley is also the place where the future reputation of English Rose femininity, Editha Berrendale—Adeline’s daughter—resides. Editha’s future reputation in England depends upon a more socially successful nurturing of her femininity there than her mother experienced, and she has a balanced cadre of people capable of making this happen. Dr. Norberry, the man of feeling, caters to her physical well-being while Mrs. Pemberton, the highly principled Quaker woman, caters to her spiritual salvation and Mrs. Mowbray, the propertied landowner, her material wealth. However, the mulatto woman’s role in Editha’s nurturing is not immediately clear. Of the four, Savanna has been the only one consistently present in the child’s life. She is also the only living reminder of Adeline herself—her complexion the living remembrance of Adeline’s unfortunate demise as a women’s rights activist as well as an example of another way of championing freedom in England that elevates an advocate’s reputation without losing her station in the world. Savanna’s shade of complexion is, then, a warning to as well as an outlet for Editha’s burgeoning femininity at Rosevalley, the place where English Roses like herself and her mother bloom and die, and bloom again. With the demise of the advocate for the abolition of marriage, the aftermath of the text makes one thing sure about the mulatto woman’s influence in Editha’s life: the nurturing of enlightened English femininity—the future English Rose that blossoms in this retired landscape depends entirely upon the way it and the pure English soil of liberty at Rosevalley negotiate the natural presence of Savanna.