OROONOKO; OR
THE ROYAL SLAVE.

By Aphra Behn (1688)

INTRODUCTION.

The tale of Oroonoko, the Royal Slave is indisputedly Mrs. Behn’s masterpiece in prose. Its originality and power have singled it out for a permanence and popularity none of her other works attained. It is vivid, realistic, pregnant with pathos, beauty, and truth, and not only has it so impressed itself upon the readers of more than two centuries, but further, it surely struck a new note in English literature and one which was re-echoed far and wide. It has been said that ‘Oroonoko is the first emancipation novel’, and there is no little acumen in this remark. Certainly we may absolve Mrs. Behn from having directly written with a purpose such as animated Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin; but none the less her sympathy with the oppressed blacks, her deep emotions of pity for outraged humanity, her anger at the cruelties of the slave-driver aye ready with knout or knife, are manifest in every line. Beyond the intense interest of the pure narrative we have passages of a rhythm that is lyric, exquisitely descriptive of the picturesque tropical scenery and exotic vegetations, fragrant and luxuriant; there are intimate accounts of adventuring and primitive life; there are personal touches which lend a colour only personal touches can, as Aphra tells her prose-epic of her Superman, Cæsar the slave, Oroonoko the prince.

EPISTLE DEDICATORY.
My Lord,

Since the World is grown so Nice and Critical upon Dedications, and will Needs be Judging the Book by the Wit of the Patron; we ought, with a great deal of Circumspection to chuse a Person against whom there can be no Exception; and whose Wit and Worth truly Merits all that one is capable of saying upon that Occasion.

The most part of Dedications are charg’d with Flattery; and if the World knows a Man has some Vices, they will not allow one to speak of his Virtues. This, My Lord, is for want of thinking Rightly; if Men wou’d consider with Reason, they wou’d have another sort of Opinion, and Esteem of Dedications; and wou’d believe almost every Great Man has enough to make him Worthy of all that can be said of him there. My Lord, a Picture-drawer, when he intends to make a good Picture, essays the Face many Ways, and in many Lights, before he begins; that he may chuse from the several turns of it, which is most Agreeable and gives it the best Grace; and if there be a Scar, an ungrateful Mole, or any little Defect, they leave it out; and yet make the Picture extreamly like: But he who has the good Fortune to draw a Face that is exactly Charming in all its Parts and Features, what Colours or Agreements can be added to make it Finer? All that he can give is but its due; and Glories in a Piece whose Original alone gives it its Perfection. An ill Hand may diminish, but a good Hand cannot augment its Beauty. A Poet is a Painter in his way; he draws to the Life, but in another kind; we draw the Nobler part, the Soul and Mind; the Pictures of the Pen shall out last those of the Pencil, and even Worlds themselves. ’Tis a short Chronicle of those Lives that possibly wou’d be forgotten by other Historians, or lye neglected there, however deserving an immortal Fame; for Men of eminent Parts are as Exemplary as even Monarchs themselves; and Virtue is a noble Lesson to be learn’d, and ’tis by Comparison we can Judge and Chuse. ’Tis by such illustrious Presidents as your Lordship the World can be Better’d and Refin’d; when a great part of the lazy Nobility shall, with Shame, behold the admirable Accomplishments of a Man so Great, and so Young.

Your Lordship has Read innumerable Volumes of Men and Books, not Vainly for the gust of Novelty, but Knowledge, excellent Knowledge: Like the industrious Bee, from every Flower you return Laden with the precious Dew, which you are sure to turn to the Publick Good. You hoard no one Reflection, but lay it all out in the Glorious Service of your Religion and Country; to both which you are a useful and necessary Honour: They both want such Supporters; and ’tis only Men of so elevated Parts, and fine Knowledge; such noble Principles of Loyalty and Religion this Nation Sighs for. Where shall we find a Man so Young, like St. Augustine, in the midst of all his Youth and Gaiety, Teaching the World Divine Precepts, true Notions of Faith, and Excellent Morality, and, at the same time be also a perfect Pattern of all that accomplish a Great Man? You have, My Lord, all that refin’d Wit that Charms, and the Affability that Obliges; a Generosity that gives a Lustre to your Nobility; that Hospitality, and Greatness of Mind that ingages the World; and that admirable Conduct, that so well Instructs it. Our Nation ought to regret and bemoan their Misfortunes, for not being able to claim the Honour of the Birth of a Man who is so fit to serve his Majesty, and his Kingdoms in all Great and Publick Affairs; And to the Glory of your Nation, be it spoken, it produces more considerable Men, for all fine Sense, Wit, Wisdom, Breeding and Generosity (for the generality of the Nobility) than all other Nations can Boast; and the Fruitfulness of your Virtues sufficiently make amends for the Barrenness of
your Soil: Which however cannot be incommode to your Lordship; since your Quality and the Veneration that the Commonalty naturally pay their Lords creates a flowing Plenty there . . . that makes you Happy. And to compleat your Happiness, my Lord, Heaven has blest you with a Lady, to whom it has given all the Graces, Beauties, and Virtues of her Sex; all the Youth, Sweetness of Nature, of a most illustrious Family; and who is a most rare Example to all Wives of Quality, for her eminent Piety, easiness, and Condescension; and as absolutely merits Respect from all the World as she does that Passion and Resignation she receives from your Lordship; and which is, on her part, with so much Tenderness return’d. Methinks your tranquil Lives are an Image of the new Made and Beautiful Pair in Paradise: And tis the Prayers and Wishes of all, who have the Honour to know you, that it may Eternally so continue with Additions of all the Blessings this World can give you.

My Lord, the Obligations I have to some of the Great Men of your Nation, particularly to your Lordship, gives me an Ambition of making my Acknowledgements by all the Opportunities I can; and such humble Fruits [511] as my Industry produces I lay at your Lordship’s Feet. This is a true Story, of a Man Gallant enough to merit your Protection, and, had he always been so Fortunate, he had not made so Inglorious an end: The Royal Slave I had the Honour to know in my Travels to the other World; and though I had none above me in that Country yet I wanted power to preserve this Great Man. If there be anything that seems Romantick I beseech your Lordship to consider these Countries do, in all things, so far differ from ours that they produce unconceivable Wonders, at least, so they appear to us, because New and Strange. What I have mentioned I have taken care shou’d be Truth, let the Critical Reader judge as he pleases. ’Twill be no Commendation to the Book to assure your Lordship I writ it in a few Hours, though it may serve to Excuse some of its Faults of Connexion, for I never rested my Pen a Moment for Thought: ’Tis purely the Merit of my Slave that must render it worthy of the Honour it begs; and the Author of that of Subscribing herself,

My Lord
Your Lordship’s most oblig’d
and obedient Servant
A. Behn.

THE HISTORY OF
THE ROYAL SLAVE.

I do not pretend, in giving you the History of this ROYAL SLAVE, to entertain my Reader with the Adventures of a feign’d Hero, whose Life and Fortunes Fancy may manage at the Poet’s Pleasure; nor in relating the Truth, design to adorn it with any Accidents, but such as arrived in earnest to him: And it shall come simply into the World, recommended by its own proper Merits, and natural Intrigues; there being enough of Reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the Addition of Invention.

I was myself an Eye-witness to a great Part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be Witness of, I receiv’d from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History, the Hero himself, who gave us the whole Transactions of his Youth: And I shall omit, for Brevity’s Sake, a thousand little Accidents of his Life, which, however pleasant to us, where History was scarce,
and Adventures very rare, yet might prove tedious and heavy to my Reader, in a World where he finds Diversions for every Minute, new and strange. But we who were perfectly charm’d with the Character of this great Man, were curious to gather every Circumstance of his Life.

The Scene of the last Part of his Adventures lies in a Colony in America, called Surinam, in the West-Indies.

But before I give you the Story of this Gallant Slave, ’tis fit I tell you the Manner of bringing them to these new Colonies; those they make Use of there, not being Natives of the Place: for those we live with in perfect Amity, without daring to command ’em; but, on the contrary, caress ’em with all the brotherly and friendly Affection in the World; trading with them for their Fish, Venison, Buffaloes Skins, and little Rarities; as Marmosets, a sort of Monkey, as big as a Rat or Weasel, but of a marvellous and delicate Shape, having Face and Hands like a Human Creature; and Cousheries, a little Beast in the Form and Fashion of a Lion, as big as a Kitten, but so exactly made in all Parts like that Noble Beast, that it is it in Miniature: Then for little Paraketoes, great Parrots, Muckaws, and a thousand other Birds and Beasts of wonderful and surprizing Forms, Shapes, and Colours: For Skins of prodigious Snakes, of which there are some three-score Yards in Length; as is the Skin of one that may be seen at his Majesty’s Antiquary’s; where are also some rare Flies, of amazing Forms and Colours, presented to ’em by myself; some as big as my Fist, some less; and all of various Excellencies, such as Art cannot imitate. Then we trade for Feathers, which they order into all Shapes, make themselves little short Habits of ’em, and glorious Wreaths for their Heads, Necks, Arms and Legs, whose Tinctures are unconceivable. I had a Set of these presented to me, and I gave ’em to the King’s Theatre; it was the Dress of the Indian Queen, infinitely admir’d by Persons of Quality; and was inimitable. Besides these, a thousand little Knacks, and Rarities in Nature; and some of Art, as their Baskets, Weapons, Aprons, &c. We dealt with ’em with Beads of all Colours, Knives, Axes, Pins and Needles, which they us’d only as Tools to drill Holes with in their Ears, Noses and Lips, where they hang a great many little Things; as long Beads, Bits of Tin, Brass or Silver beat thin, and any shining Trinket. The Beads they weave into Aprons about a Quarter of an Ell long, and of the same Breadth; working them very prettily in Flowers of several Colours; which Apron they wear just before ’em, as Adam and Eve did the Fig-leaves; the Men wearing a long Stripe of Linen, which they deal with us for. They thread these Beads also on long Cotton-threads, and make Girdles to tie their Aprons to, which come twenty times, or more, about the Waste, and then cross, like a Shoulder-belt, both Ways, and round their Necks, Arms and Legs. This Adornment, with their long black Hair, and the Face painted in little Specks or Flowers here and there, makes ’em a wonderful Figure to behold. Some of the Beauties, which indeed are finely shap’d, as almost all are, and who have pretty Features, are charming and novel; for they have all that is called Beauty, except the Colour, which is a reddish Yellow; or after a new Oiling, which they often use to themselves, they are of the Colour of a new Brick, but smooth, soft and sleek. They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touch’d. And tho’ they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among ’em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance: and being continually us’d to see one another so unadorn’d, so like our first Parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no Wishes, there being nothing to heighten Curiosity: but all you can see, you see at once, and every Moment see; and where there is no Novelty, there can be no Curiosity. Not but I have seen a handsome young Indian, dying for Love of a very beautiful young Indian Maid; but all his Courtship was, to fold his Arms, pursue her with his Eyes, and Sighs were all his Language: While she, as if no such Lover were present, or rather as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her Eyes from beholding him; and never approach’d
him, but she looked down with all the blushing Modesty I have seen in the most Severe and Cautious of our World. And these People represented to me an absolute Idea of the first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and virtuous Mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the World, than all the Inventions of Man: Religion would here but destroy that Tranquillity they possess by Ignorance; and Laws would but teach 'em to know Offences, of which now they have no Notion. They once made Mourning and Fasting for the Death of the English Governor, who had given his Hand to come on such a Day to 'em, and neither came nor sent; believing, when a Man’s Word was past, nothing but Death could or should prevent his keeping it: And when they saw he was not dead, they ask’d him what Name they had for a Man who promis’d a Thing he did not do? The Governor told them, Such a Man was a Lyar, which was a Word of Infamy to a Gentleman. Then one of ’em reply’d, Governor, you are a Lyar, and guilty of that Infamy. They have a native Justice, which knows no Fraud; and they understand no Vice, or Cunning, but when they are taught by the White Men. They have Plurality of Wives; which, when they grow old, serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a Servitude easy and respected; and unless they take Slaves in War, they have no other Attendants.

Those on that Continent where I was, had no King; but the oldest War-Captain was obey’d with great Resignation.

A War-Captain is a Man who has led them on to Battle with Conduct and Success; of whom I shall have Occasion to speak more hereafter, and of some other of their Customs and Manners, as they fall in my Way.

With these People, as I said, we live in perfect Tranquillity, and good Understanding, as it behoves us to do; they knowing all the Places where to seek the best Food of the Country, and the Means of getting it; and for very small and unvaluable Trifles, supplying us with what 'tis almost impossible for us to get; for they do not only in the Woods, and over the Sevana’s, in Hunting, supply the Parts of Hounds, by swiftly scouring throu’ those almost impassable Places, and by the mere Activity of their Feet, run down the nimblest Deer, and other eatable Beasts; but in the Water, one would think they were Gods of the Rivers, or Fellow-Citizens of the Deep; so rare an Art they have in swimming, diving, and almost living in Water; by which they command the less swift Inhabitants of the Floods. And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their Hands, they do with Arrows; and have so admirable an Aim, that they will split almost an Hair, and at any Distance that an Arrow can reach: they will shoot down Oranges, and other Fruit, and only touch the Stalk with the Dart’s Point, that they may not hurt the Fruit. So that they being on all Occasions very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress ’em as Friends, and not to treat ’em as Slaves; nor dare we do otherwise, their Numbers so far surpassing ours in that Continent.

Those then whom we make use of to work in our Plantations of Sugar, are Negroes, Black-Slaves altogether, who are transported thither in this Manner.

Those who want Slaves, make a Bargain with a Master, or a Captain of a Ship, and contract to pay him so much apiece, a Matter of twenty Pound a Head, for as many as he agrees for, and to pay for ’em when they shall be deliver’d on such a Plantation: So that when there arrives a Ship laden with Slaves, they who have so contracted, go aboard, and receive their Number by Lot; and perhaps in one Lot that may be for ten, there may happen to be three or four Men, the rest
Women and Children. Or be there more or less of either Sex, you are obliged to be contented
with your Lot.

Coramantien, a Country of Blacks so called, was one of those Places in which they found the
most advantageous Trading for these Slaves, and thither most of our great Traders in that
Merchandize traffick; for that Nation is very warlike and brave; and having a continual
Campaign, being always in Hostility with one neighbouring Prince or other, they had the Fortune
to take a great many Captives: for all they took in Battle were sold as Slaves; at least those
common Men who could not ransom themselves. Of these Slaves so taken, the General only has
all the Profit; and of these Generals our Captains and Masters of Ships buy all their Freights.

The King of Coramantien was of himself a Man of an hundred and odd Years old, and had no
Son, tho’ he had many beautiful Black Wives: for most certainly there are Beauties that can
charm of that Colour. In his younger Years he had had many gallant Men to his Sons, thirteen of
whom died in Battle, conquering when they fell; and he had only left him for his Successor, one
Grand-child, Son to one of these dead Victors, who, as soon as he could bear a Bow in his Hand,
and a Quiver at his Back, was sent into the Field, to be train’d up by one of the oldest Generals to
War; where, from his natural Inclination to Arms, and the Occasions given him, with the good
Conduct of the old General, he became, at the Age of seventeen, one of the most expert Captains,
and bravest Soldiers that ever saw the Field of Mars: so that he was ador’d as the Wonder of all
that World, and the Darling of the Soldiers. Besides, he was adorn’d with a native Beauty, so
transcending all those of his gloomy Race, that he struck an Awe and Reverence, even into those
that knew not his Quality; as he did into me, who beheld him with Surprize and Wonder, when
afterwards he arrived in our World.

He had scarce arrived at his seventeenth Year, when, fighting by his Side, the General was kill’d
with an Arrow in his Eye, which the Prince Oroonoko (for so was this gallant Moor call’d) very
narrowly avoided; nor had he, if the General who saw the Arrow shot, and perceiving it aimed at
the Prince, had not bow’d his Head between, on Purpose to receive it in his own Body, rather
than it should touch that of the Prince, and so saved him.

’Twas then, afflicted as Oroonoko was, that he was proclaimed General in the old Man’s Place:
and then it was, at the finishing of that War, which had continu’d for two Years, that the Prince
came to Court, where he had hardly been a Month together, from the Time of his fifth Year to
that of seventeen: and ’twas amazing to imagine where it was he learn’d so much Humanity; or
to give his Accomplishments a juster Name, where ’twas he got that real Greatness of Soul, those
refined Notions of true Honour, that absolute Generosity, and that Softness, that was capable of
the highest Passions of Love and Gallantry, whose Objects were almost continually fighting
Men, or those mangled or dead, who heard no Sounds but those of War and Groans. Some Part
of it we may attribute to the Care of a Frenchman of Wit and Learning, who finding it turn to a
very good Account to be a sort of Royal Tutor to this young Black, and perceiving him very
ready, apt, and quick of Apprehension, took a great Pleasure to teach him Morals, Language and
Science; and was for it extremely belov’d and valu’d by him. Another Reason was, he lov’d
when he came from War, to see all the English Gentlemen that traded thither; and did not only
learn their Language, but that of the Spaniard also, with whom he traded afterwards for Slaves.

I have often seen and conversed with this Great Man, and been a Witness to many of his mighty
Actions; and do assure my Reader, the most illustrious Courts could not have produced a braver
Man, both for Greatness of Courage and Mind, a Judgment more solid, a Wit more quick, and a
Conversation more sweet and diverting. He knew almost as much as if he had read much: He had heard of and admired the Romans: He had heard of the late Civil Wars in England, and the deplorable Death of our great Monarch; and would discourse of it with all the Sense and Abhorrence of the Injustice imaginable. He had an extreme good and graceful Mien, and all the Civility of a well-bred Great Man. He had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature, but in all Points address’d himself as if his Education had been in some European Court.

This great and just Character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme Curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke French and English, and that I could talk with him. But tho’ I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprized when I saw him, as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all Report I found him. He came into the Room, and addressed himself to me, and some other Women, with the best Grace in the World. He was pretty tall, but of a Shape the most exact that can be fancy’d: The most famous Statuary could not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn’d from Head to Foot. His Face was not of that brown rusty Black which most of that Nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or polished Jet. His Eyes were the most aweful that could be seen, and very piercing; the White of ’em being like Snow, as were his Teeth. His Nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat: His Mouth the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turn’d Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole Proportion and Air of his Face was so nobly and exactly form’d, that bating his Colour, there could be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. There was no one Grace wanting, that bears the Standard of true Beauty. His Hair came down to his Shoulders, by the Aids of Art, which was by pulling it out with a Quill, and keeping it comb’d; of which he took particular Care. Nor did the Perfections of his Mind come short of those of his Person; for his Discourse was admirable upon almost any Subject: and whoever had heard him speak, would have been convinced of their Errors, that all fine Wit is confined to the white Men, especially to those of Christendom; and would have confess’d that Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a Soul, as politic Maxims, and was as sensible of Power, as any Prince civiliz’d in the most refined Schools of Humanity and Learning, or the most illustrious Courts.

This Prince, such as I have describ’d him, whose Soul and Body were so admirably adorned, was (while yet he was in the Court of his Grandfather, as I said) as capable of Love, as ’twas possible for a brave and gallant Man to be; and in saying that, I have named the highest Degree of Love: for sure great Souls are most capable of that Passion.

I have already said, the old General was kill’d by the Shot of an Arrow, by the Side of this Prince, in Battle; and that Oroonoko was made General. This old dead Hero had one only Daughter left of his Race, a Beauty, that to describe her truly, one need say only, she was Female to the noble Male; the beautiful Black Venus to our young Mars; as charming in her Person as he, and of delicate Virtues. I have seen a hundred White Men sighing after her, and making a thousand Vows at her Feet, all in vain and unsuccessful. And she was indeed too great for any but a Prince of her own Nation to adore.

Oroonoko coming from the Wars (which were now ended) after he had made his Court to his Grandfather, he thought in Honour he ought to make a Visit to Imoinda, the Daughter of his Foster-father, the dead General; and to make some Excuses to her, because his Preservation was the Occasion of her Father’s Death; and to present her with those Slaves that had been taken in this last Battle, as the Trophies of her Father’s Victories. When he came, attended by all the young Soldiers of any Merit, he was infinitely surpriz’d at the Beauty of this fair Queen of Night,
whose Face and Person were so exceeding all he had ever beheld, that lovely Modesty with
which she receiv’d him, that Softness in her Look and Sighs, upon the melancholy Occasion of
this Honour that was done by so great a Man as Oroonoko, and a Prince of whom she had heard
such admirable Things; the Awfulness wherewith she receiv’d him, and the Sweetness of her
Words and Behaviour while he stay’d, gain’d a perfect Conquest over his fierce Heart, and made
him feel, the Victor could be subdu’d. So that having made his first Compliments, and presented
her an hundred and fifty Slaves in Fetters, he told her with his Eyes, that he was not insensible of
her Charms; while Imoinda, who wish’d for nothing more than so glorious a Conquest, was
pleas’d to believe, she understood that silent Language of new-born Love; and, from that
Moment, put on all her Additions to Beauty.

The Prince return’d to Court with quite another Humour than before; and tho’ he did not speak
much of the fair Imoinda, he had the Pleasure to hear all his Followers speak of nothing but the
Charms of that Maid, insomuch, that, even in the Presence of the old King, they were extolling
her, and heightening, if possible, the Beauties they had found in her: so that nothing else was
talk’d of, no other Sound was heard in every Corner where there were Whisperers, but Imoinda!

’Twill be imagin’d Oroonoko stay’d not long before he made his second Visit; nor, considering
his Quality, not much longer before he told her, he ador’d her. I have often heard him say, that he
admir’d by what strange Inspiration he came to talk Things so soft, and so passionate, who never
knew Love, nor was us’d to the Conversation of Women; but (to use his own Words) he said,
‘Most happily, some new, and, till then, unknown Power instructed his Heart and Tongue in the
Language of Love; and at the same Time, in Favour of him, inspir’d Imoinda with a Sense of his
Passion.’ She was touch’d with what he said, and return’d it all in such Answers as went to his
very Heart, with a Pleasure unknown before. Nor did he use those Obligations ill, that Love had
done him, but turn’d all his happy Moments to the best Advantage; and as he knew no Vice, his
Flame aim’d at nothing but Honour, if such a Distinction may be made in Love; and especially in
that Country, where Men take to themselves as many as they can maintain; and where the only
Crime and Sin against a Woman, is, to turn her off, to abandon her to Want, Shame and Misery:
such ill Morals are only practis’d in Christian Countries, where they prefer the bare Name of
Religion; and, without Virtue or Morality, think that sufficient. But Oroonoko was none of those
Professors; but as he had right Notions of Honour, so he made her such Propositions as were not
only and barely such; but, contrary to the Custom of his Country, he made her Vows, she should
be the only Woman he would possess while he liv’d; that no Age or Wrinkles should incline him
to change: for her Soul would be always fine, and always young; and he should have an eternal
Idea in his Mind of the Charms she now bore; and should look into his Heart for that Idea, when
he could find it no longer in her Face.

After a thousand Assurances of his lasting Flame, and her eternal Empire over him, she
condescended to receive him for her Husband; or rather, receive him, as the greatest Honour the
Gods could do her.

There is a certain Ceremony in these Cases to be observ’d, which I forgot to ask how ’twas
perform’d; but ’twas concluded on both Sides, that in Obedience to him, the Grandfather was to
be first made acquainted with the Design: For they pay a most absolute Resignation to the
Monarch, especially when he is a Parent also.
On the other Side, the old King, who had many Wives, and many Concubines, wanted not Court-Flatterers to insinuate into his Heart a thousand tender Thoughts for this young Beauty; and who represented her to his Fancy, as the most charming he had ever possess’d in all the long Race of his numerous Years. At this Character, his old Heart, like an extinquish’d Brand, most apt to take Fire, felt new Sparks of Love, and began to kindle; and now grown to his second Childhood, long’d with Impatience to behold this gay Thing, with whom, alas! he could but innocently play. But how he should be confirm’d she was this Wonder, before he us’d his Power to call her to Court, (where Maidens never came, unless for the King’s private Use) he was next to consider; and while he was so doing, he had Intelligence brought him, that Imoinda was most certainly Mistress to the Prince Oronoko. This gave him some Chagrine: however, it gave him also an Opportunity, one Day, when the Prince was a hunting, to wait on a Man of Quality, as his Slave and Attendant, who should go and make a Present to Imoinda, as from the Prince: he should then, unknown, see this fair Maid, and have an Opportunity to hear what Message she would return the Prince for his Present, and thence gather the State of her Heart, and Degree of her Inclination. This was put in Execution, and the old Monarch saw, and burn’d: He found her all he had heard, and would not delay his Happiness, but found he should have some Obstacle to overcome her Heart; for she express’d her Sense of the Present the Prince had sent her, in Terms so sweet, so soft and pretty, with an Air of Love and Joy that could not be dissembled, inomuch that ’twas past Doubt whether she lov’d Oronoko entirely. This gave the old King some Affliction; but he salv’d it with this, that the Obedience the People pay their King, was not at all inferior to what they paid their Gods; and what Love woul not oblige Imoinda to do, Duty would compel her to.

He was therefore no sooner got into his Apartment, but he sent the Royal Veil to Imoinda; that is the Ceremony of Invitation: He sends the Lady he has a Mind to honour with his Bed, a Veil, with which she is covered, and secur’d for the King’s Use; and ’tis Death to disobey; besides, held a most impious Disobedience.

’Tis not to be imagin’d the Surprize and Grief that seiz’d the lovely Maid at this News and Sight. However, as Delays in these Cases are dangerous, and Pleading worse than Treason; trembling, and almost fainting, she was oblig’d to suffer herself to be cover’d, and led away.

They brought her thus to Court; and the King, who had caus’d a very rich Bath to be prepar’d, was led into it, where he sat under a Canopy, in State, to receive this long’d-for Virgin; whom he having commanded to be brought to him, they (after disrobing her) led her to the Bath, and making fast the Doors, left her to descend. The King, without more Courtship, bad her throw off her Mantle, and come to his Arms. But Imoinda, all in Tears, threw herself on the Marble, on the Brink of the Bath, and besought him to hear her. She told him, as she was a Maid, how proud of the Divine Glory she should have been, of having it in her Power to oblige her King; but as by the Laws he could not, and from his Royal Goodness would not take from any Man his wedded Wife; so she believ’d she should be the occasion of making him commit a great Sin, if she did not reveal her State and Condition; and tell him she was another’s, and could not be so happy to be his.

The King, enrag’d at this Delay, hastily demanded the Name of the bold Man, that had married a Woman of her Degree, without his Consent. Imoinda seeing his Eyes fierce, and his Hands tremble, (whether with Age or Anger, I know not, but she fancy’d the last) almost repented she had said so much, for now she fear’d the Storm would fall on the Prince; she therefore said a thousand Things to appease the raging of his Flame, and to prepare him to hear who it was with
Calmness: but before she spoke, he imagin’d who she meant, but would not seem to do so, but commanded her to lay aside her Mantle, and suffer herself to receive his Caresses, or, by his Gods he swore, that happy Man whom she was going to name should die, tho’ it was even Oroonoko himself. Therefore (said he) deny this Marriage, and swear thyself a Maid. That (reply’d Imoinda) by all our Powers I do; for I am not yet known to my Husband. ’Tis enough (said the King) ’tis enough both to satisfy my Conscience and my Heart. And rising from his Seat, he went and led her into the Bath; it being in vain for her to resist.

In this Time, the Prince, who was return’d from Hunting, went to visit his Imoinda, but found her gone; and not only so, but heard she had receiv’d the Royal Veil. This rais’d him to a Storm; and in his Madness, they had much ado to save him from laying violent Hands on himself. Force first prevail’d, and then Reason: They urg’d all to him, that might oppose his Rage; but nothing weigh’d so greatly with him as the King’s old Age, incapable of injuring him with Imoinda. He would give Way to that Hope, because it pleas’d him most, and flatter’d best his Heart. Yet this serv’d not altogether to make him cease his different Passions, which sometimes rag’d within him, and soften’d into Showers. ’Twas not enough to appease him, to tell him, his Grandfather was old, and could not that Way injure him, while he retain’d that awful Duty which the young Men are us’d there to pay to their grave Relations. He could not be convinc’d he had no Cause to sigh and mourn for the Loss of a Mistress, he could not with all his Strength and Courage retrieve, and he would often cry, ‘Oh, my Friends! were she in wall’d Cities, or confin’d from me in Fortifications of the greatest Strength; did Inchantments or Monsters detain her from me; I would venture thro’ any Hazard to free her; But here, in the Arms of a feeble old Man, my Youth, my violent Love, my Trade in Arms, and all my vast Desire of Glory, avail me nothing. Imoinda is as irrecoverably lost to me, as if she were snatch’d by the cold Arms of Death: Oh! she is never to be retrieved. If I would wait tedious Years; till Fate should bow the old King to his Grave, even that would not leave me Imoinda free; but still that Custom that makes it so vile a Crime for a Son to marry his Father’s Wives or Mistresses, would hinder my Happiness; unless I would either ignobly set an ill Precedent to my Successors, or abandon my Country, and fly with her to some unknown World who never heard our Story.’

But it was objected to him, That his Case was not the same: for Imoinda being his lawful Wife by solemn Contract, ’twas he was the injur’d Man, and might, if he so pleas’d, take Imoinda back, the Breach of the Law being on his Grandfather’s Side; and that if he could circumvent him, and redeem her from the Otan, which is the Palace of the King’s Women, a sort of Seraglio, it was both just and lawful for him so to do.

This Reasoning had some Force upon him, and he should have been entirely comforted, but for the Thought that she was possess’d by his Grandfather. However, he lov’d her so well, that he was resolv’d to believe what most favour’d his Hope, and to endeavour to learn from Imoinda’s own Mouth, what only she could satisfy him in, whether she was robb’d of that Blessing which was only due to his Faith and Love. But as it was very hard to get a Sight of the Women, (for no Men ever enter’d into the Otan but when the King went to entertain himself with some one of his Wives or Mistresses; and ’twas Death, at any other Time, for any other to go in) so he knew not how to contrive to get a Sight of her.

While Oroonoko felt all the Agonies of Love, and suffer’d under a Torment the most painful in the World, the old King was not exempted from his Share of Affliction. He was troubled, for having been forc’d, by an irresistible Passion, to rob his Son of a Treasure, he knew, could not but be extremely dear to him; since she was the most beautiful that ever had been seen, and had
besides, all the Sweetness and Innocence of Youth and Modesty, with a Charm of Wit surpassing all. He found, that however she was forc’d to expose her lovely Person to his wither’d Arms, she could only sigh and weep there, and think of Oroonoko; and oftentimes could not forbear speaking of him, tho’ her Life were, by Custom, forfeited by owning her Passion. But she spoke not of a Lover only, but of a Prince dear to him to whom she spoke; and of the Praises of a Man, who, ’till now, fill’d the old Man’s Soul with Joy at every Recital of his Bravery, or even his Name. And ’twas this Dotage on our young Hero, that gave Imoinda a thousand Privileges to speak of him without offending; and this Condescension in the old King, that made her take the Satisfaction of speaking of him so very often.

Besides, he many times enquir’d how the Prince bore himself: And those of whom he ask’d, being entirely Slaves to the Merits and Virtues of the Prince, still answer’d what they thought conduc’d best to his Service; which was, to make the old King fancy that the Prince had no more Interest in Imoinda, and had resign’d her willingly to the Pleasure of the King; that he divert’d himself with his Mathematicians, his Fortifications, his Officers, and his Hunting. This pleas’d the old Lover, who fail’d not to report these Things again to Imoinda, that she might, by the Example of her young Lover, withdraw her Heart, and rest better contented in his Arms. But, however she was forc’d to receive this unwelcome News, in all Appearance, with Unconcern and Content; her Heart was bursting within, and she was only happy when she could get alone, to vent her Griefs and Moans with Sighs and Tears.

What Reports of the Prince’s Conduct were made to the King, he thought good to justify, as far as possibly he could, by his Actions; and when he appear’d in the Presence of the King, he shew’d a Face not at all betraying his Heart: so that in a little Time, the old Man, being entirely convinc’d that he was no longer a Lover of Imoinda he carry’d him with him in his Train to the Otan, often to banquet with his Mistresses. But as soon as he enter’d, one Day, into the Apartment of Imoinda, with the King, at the first Glance from her Eyes, notwithstanding all his determined Resolution, he was ready to sink in the Place where he stood; and had certainly done so, but for the Support of Aboan, a young Man who was next to him; which, with his Change of Countenance, had betray’d him, had the King chanc’d to look that Way. And I have observ’d, ’tis a very great Error in those who laugh when one says, A Negro can change Colour: for I have seen ’em as frequently blush, and look pale, and that as visibly as ever I saw in the most beautiful White. And ’tis certain, that both these Changes were evident, this Day, in both these Lovers. And Imoinda, who saw with some Joy the Change in the Prince’s Face, and found it in her own, strove to divert the King from beholding either, by a forc’d Caress, with which she met him; which was a new Wound in the Heart of the poor dying Prince. But as soon as the King was busy’d in looking on some fine Thing of Imoinda’s making, she had Time to tell the Prince, with her angry, but Love-darting Eyes, that she resented his Coldness, and bemoan’d her own miserable Captivity. Nor were his Eyes silent, but answer’d her’s again, as much as Eyes could do, instructed by the most tender and most passionate Heart that ever lov’d: And they spoke so well, and so effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted but she was the only Delight and Darling of that Soul she found pleading in ’em its Right of Love, which none was more willing to resign than she. And ’twas this powerful Language alone that in an Instant convey’d all the Thoughts of their Souls to each other; that they both found there wanted but Opportunity to make them both entirely happy. But when he saw another Door open’d by Onahal (a former old Wife of the King’s, who now had Charge of Imoinda) and saw the Prospect of a Bed of State made ready, with Sweets and Flowers for the Dalliance of the King, who immediately led the trembling
Victim from his Sight, into that prepar’d Repose; what Rage! what wild Frenzies seiz’d his Heart! which forcing to keep within Bounds, and to suffer without Noise, it became the more insupportable, and rent his Soul with ten thousand Pains. He was forc’d to retire to vent his Groans, where he fell down on a Carpet, and lay struggling a long Time, and only breathing now and then—Oh Imoinda! When Onahal had finished her necessary Affair within, shutting the Door, she came forth, to wait till the King called; and hearing some one sighing in the other Room, she pass’d on, and found the Prince in that deplorable Condition, which she thought needed her Aid. She gave him Cordials, but all in vain; till finding the Nature of his Disease, by his Sighs, and naming Imoinda, she told him he had not so much Cause as he imagined to afflict himself: for if he knew the King so well as she did, he would not lose a Moment in Jealousy; and that she was confident that Imoinda bore, at this Minute, Part in his Affliction. Aboan was of the same Opinion, and both together persuaded him to re-assume his Courage; and all sitting down on the Carpet, the Prince said so many obliging Things to Onahal, that he half-persuaded her to be of his Party: and she promised him, she would thus far comply with his just Desires, that she would let Imoinda know how faithful he was, what he suffer’d, and what he said.

This Discourse lasted till the King called, which gave Oroonoko a certain Satisfaction; and with the Hope Onahal had made him conceive, he assumed a Look as gay as ’twas possible a Man in his Circumstances could do: and presently after, he was call’d in with the rest who waited without. The King commanded Musick to be brought, and several of his young Wives and Mistresses came all together by his Command, to dance before him; where Imoinda perform’d her Part with an Air and Grace so surpassing all the rest, as her Beauty was above ’em, and received the Present ordained as a Prize. The Prince was every Moment more charmed with the new Beauties and Graces he beheld in this Fair-One; and while he gazed, and she danc’d, Onahal was retired to a Window with Aboan.

This Onahal, as I said, was one of the Cast-Mistresses of the old King; and ’twas these (now past their Beauty) that were made Guardians or Governantes to the new and the young ones, and whose Business it was to teach them all those wanton Arts of Love, with which they prevail’d and charm’d heretofore in their Turn; and who now treated the triumphing Happy-ones with all the Severity, as to Liberty and Freedom, that was possible, in Revenge of the Honours they rob them of; envying them those Satisfactions, those Gallantries and Presents, that were once made to themselves, while Youth and Beauty lasted, and which they now saw pass, as it were regardless by, and paid only to the Bloomings. And certainly, nothing is more afflicting to a decay’d Beauty, than to behold in itself declining Charms, that were once ador’d; and to find those Caresses paid to new Beauties, to which once she laid Claim; to hear them whisper, as she passes by, that once was a delicate Woman. Those abandon’d ladies therefore endeavour to revenge all the Despights and Decays of Time, on these flourishing Happy-ones. And ’twas this Severity that gave Oroonoko a thousand Fears he should never prevail with Onahal to see Imoinda. But, as I said, she was now retir’d to a Window with Aboan.

This young Man was not only one of the best Quality, but a Man extremely well made, and beautiful; and coming often to attend the King to the Otan, he had subdu’d the Heart of the antiquated Onahal, which had not forgot how pleasant it was to be in love. And tho’ she had some Decays in her Face, she had none in her Sense and Wit; she was there agreeable still, even to Aboan’s Youth: so that he took Pleasure in entertaining her with Discourses of Love. He knew also, that to make his Court to these She-favourites, was the Way to be great; these being the Persons that do all Affairs and Business at Court. He had also observed, that she had given him
Glances more tender and inviting than she had done to others of his Quality. And now, when he saw that her Favour could so absolutely oblige the Prince, he fail’d not to sigh in her Ear, and look with Eyes all soft upon her, and gave her Hope that she had made some Impressions on his Heart. He found her pleas’d at this, and making a thousand Advances to him: but the Ceremony ending, and the King departing, broke up the Company for that Day, and his Conversation.

Aboan fail’d not that Night to tell the Prince of his Success, and how advantageous the Service of Onahal might be to his Amour with Imoinda. The Prince was overjoy’d with this good News, and besought him, if it were possible, to caress her so, as to engage her entirely, which he could not fail to do, if he comply’d with her Desires: For then (said the Prince) her Life lying at your Mercy, she must grant you the Request you make in my Behalf. Aboan understood him, and assur’d him he would make Love so effectually, that he would defy the most expert Mistress of the Art, to find out whether he dissembled it, or had it really. And ’twas with Impatience they waited the next Opportunity of going to the Otan.

The Wars came on, the Time of taking the Field approached; and ’twas impossible for the Prince to delay his going at the Head of his Army to encounter the Enemy; so that every Day seem’d a tedious Year, till he saw his Imoinda: for he believed he could not live, if he were forced away without being so happy. ’Twas with Impatience therefore that he expected the next Visit the King would make; and, according to his Wish, it was not long.

The Parley of the Eyes of these two Lovers had not pass’d so secretly, but an old jealous Lover could spy it; or rather, he wanted not Flatterers who told him they observ’d it: so that the Prince was hasten’d to the Camp, and this was the last Visit he found he should make to the Otan; he therefore urged Aboan to make the best of this last Effort, and to explain himself so to Onahal, that she deferring her Enjoyment of her young Lover no longer, might make Way for the Prince to speak to Imoinda.

The whole Affair being agreed on between the Prince and Aboan, they attended the King, as the Custom was, to the Otan; where, while the whole Company was taken up in beholding the Dancing, and Antick Postures the Women-Royal made to divert the King, Onahal singled out Aboan, whom she found most pliable to her Wish. When she had him where she believed she could not be heard, she sigh’d to him, and softly cry’d, ’Ah, Aboan! when will you be sensible of my Passion? I confess it with my Mouth, because I would not give my Eyes the Lye; and you have but too much already perceived they have confess’d my Flame: nor would I have you believe, that because I am the abandon’d Mistress of a King, I esteem myself altogether divested of Charms: No, Aboan; I have still a Rest of Beauty enough engaging, and have learn’d to please too well, not to be desirable. I can have Lovers still, but will have none but Aboan. Madam, (reply’d the half-feigning Youth) you have already, by my Eyes, found you can still conquer; and I believe ’tis in pity of me you condescend to this kind Confession. But, Madam, Words are used to be so small a Part of our Country-Courtship, that ’tis rare one can get so happy an Opportunity as to tell one’s Heart; and those few Minutes we have, are forced to be snatch’d for more certain Proofs of Love than speaking and sighing: and such I languish for.’

He spoke this with such a Tone, that she hoped it true, and could not forbear believing it; and being wholly transported with Joy for having subdued the finest of all the King’s Subjects to her Desires, she took from her Ears two large Pearls, and commanded him to wear ’em in his. He would have refused ’em, crying, Madam these are not the Proofs of our Love that I expect; ’tis Opportunity, ’tis a Lone-Hour only, that can make me happy. But forcing the Pearls into his
Hand, she whisper’d softly to him; **Oh! do not fear a Woman’s Invention, when Love sets her a thinking.** And pressing his Hand, she cry’d, **This Night you shall be happy. Come to the Gate of the Orange-Grove, behind the Otan, and I will be ready about midnight to receive you.** ’Twas thus agreed, and she left him, that no Notice might be taken of their speaking together.

The Ladies were still dancing, and the King, laid on a Carpet, with a great deal of Pleasure was beholding them, especially **Imoinda**, who that Day appeared more lovely than ever, being enlivened with the good Tidings **Onahal** had brought her, of the constant Passion the Prince had for her. The Prince was laid on another Carpet at the other End of the Room, with his Eyes fixed on the Object of his Soul; and as she turned or moved, so did they; and she alone gave his Eyes and Soul their Motions. Nor did **Imoinda** employ her Eyes to any other use, than in beholding with infinite Pleasure the Joy she produced in those of the Prince. But while she was more regarding him than the Steps she took, she chanced to fall, and so near him, as that leaping with extreme Force from the Carpet, he caught her in his Arms as she fell; and ’twas visible to the whole Presence, the Joy wherewith he received her. He clasped her close to his Bosom, and quite forgot that Reverence that was due to the Mistress of a King, and that Punishment that is the Reward of a Boldness of this Nature. And had not the Presence of Mind of **Imoinda** (fonder of his Safety than her own) befriended him, in making her spring from his Arms, and fall into her Dance again, he had at that Instant met his Death; for the old King, jealous to the last Degree, rose up in Rage, broke all the Diversion, and led **Imoinda** to her Apartment, and sent out Word to the Prince, to go immediately to the Camp; and that if he were found another Night in Court, he should suffer the Death ordained for disobedient Offenders.

You may imagine how welcome this News was to **Oroonoko**, whose unseasonable Transport and Caress of **Imoinda** was blamed by all Men that loved him: and now he perceived his Fault, yet cry’d, **That for such another Moment he would be content to die.**

All the **Otan** was in Disorder about this Accident; and **Onahal** was particularly concern’d, because on the Prince’s Stay depended her Happiness; for she could no longer expect that of **Aboan**. So that e’er they departed, they contrived it so, that the Prince and he should both come that Night to the Grove of the **Otan**, which was all of Oranges and Citrons, and that there they would wait her Orders.

They parted thus with Grief enough ’till Night, leaving the King in Possession of the lovely Maid. But nothing could appease the Jealousy of the old Lover; he would not be imposed on, but would have it, that **Imoinda** made a false Step on Purpose to fall into **Oroonoko**’s Bosom, and that all things looked like a Design on both Sides; and ’twas in vain she protested her Innocence: He was old and obstinate, and left her, more than half assur’d that his Fear was true.

The King going to his Apartment, sent to know where the Prince was, and if he intended to obey his Command. The Messenger return’d, and told him, he found the Prince pensive, and altogether unprepar’d for the Campaign; that he lay negligently on the Ground, and answer’d very little. This confirmed the Jealousy of the King, and he commanded that they should very narrowly and privately watch his Motions; and that he should not stir from his Apartment, but one Spy or other should be employ’d to watch him: So that the Hour approaching, wherein he was to go to the Citron-Grove; and taking only **Aboan** along with him, he leaves his Apartment, and was watched to the very Gate of the **Otan**; where he was seen to enter, and where they left him, to carry back the Tidings to the King.
Oroonoko and Aboan were no sooner enter’d, but Onahal led the Prince to the Apartment of Imoinda; who, not knowing any thing of her Happiness, was laid in Bed. But Onahal only left him in her Chamber, to make the best of his Opportunity, and took her dear Aboan to her own; where he shewed the Height of Complaisance for his Prince, when, to give him an Opportunity, he suffered himself to be caressed in Bed by Onahal.

The Prince softly waken’d Imoinda, who was not a little surpriz’d with Joy to find him there; and yet she trembled with a thousand Fears. I believe he omitted saying nothing to this young Maid, that might persuade her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the Rights of Love. And I believe she was not long resisting those Arms where she so longed to be; and having Opportunity, Night, and Silence, Youth, Love, and Desire, he soon prevail’d, and ravished in a Moment what his old Grandfather had been endeavouring for so many Months.

’Tis not to be imagined the Satisfaction of these two young Lovers; nor the Vows she made him, that she remained a spotless Maid till that Night, and that what she did with his Grandfather had robb’d him of no Part of her Virgin-Honour; the Gods, in Mercy and Justice, having reserved that for her plighted Lord, to whom of Right it belonged. And ’tis impossible to express the Transports he suffer’d, while he listen’d to a Discourse so charming from her loved Lips; and clasped that Body in his Arms, for whom he had so long languished; and nothing now afflicted him, but his sudden Departure from her; for he told her the Necessity, and his Commands, but should depart satisfy’d in this, That since the old King had hitherto not been able to deprive him of those Enjoyments which only belonged to him, he believed for the future he would be less able to injure him; so that, abating the Scandal of the Veil, which was no otherwise so, than that she was Wife to another, he believed her safe, even in the Arms of the King, and innocent; yet would he have ventur’d at the Conquest of the World, and have given it all to have had her avoided that Honour of receiving the Royal Veil. ’Twas thus, between a thousand Caresses, that both bemoan’d the hard Fate of Youth and Beauty, so liable to that cruel Promotion: ’Twas a Glory that could well have been spared here, tho’ desired and aim’d at by all the young Females of that Kingdom.

But while they were thus fondly employ’d, forgetting how Time ran on, and that the Dawn must conduct him far away from his only Happiness, they heard a great Noise in the Otan, and unusual Voices of Men; at which the Prince, starting from the Arms of the frighted Imoinda, ran to a little Battle-Ax he used to wear by his Side; and having not so much Leisure as to put on his Habit, he opposed himself against some who were already opening the Door: which they did with so much Violence, that Oroonoko was not able to defend it; but was forced to cry out with a commanding Voice, ‘Whoever ye are that have the Boldness to attempt to approach this Apartment thus rudely; know, that I, the Prince Oroonoko, will revenge it with the certain Death of him that first enters: Therefore stand back, and know, this Place is sacred to Love and Me this Night; To-morrow ’tis the King’s.’

This he spoke with a Voice so resolv’d and assur’d, that they soon retired from the Door; but cry’d, ‘ ’Tis by the King’s Command we are come; and being satisfy’d by thy Voice, O Prince, as much as if we had enter’d, we can report to the King the Truth of all his Fears, and leave thee to provide for thy own Safety, as thou art advis’d by thy Friends.’

At these Words they departed, and left the Prince to take a short and sad Leave of his Imoinda; who, trusting in the Strength of her Charms, believed she should appease the Fury of a jealous King, by saying, she was surprized, and that it was by Force of Arms he got into her Apartment.
All her Concern now was for his Life, and therefore she hasten’d him to the Camp, and with much ado prevail’d on him to go. Nor was it she alone that prevail’d; Aboan and Onahal both pleaded, and both assured him of a Lye that should be well enough contrived to secure Imoinda. So that at last, with a Heart sad as Death, dying Eyes, and sighing Soul, Oroonoko departed, and took his way to the Camp.

It was not long after, the King in Person came to the Otan; where beholding Imoinda, with Rage in his Eyes, he upbraided her Wickedness, and Perfidy; and threatening her Royal Lover, she fell on her Face at his Feet, bedewing the Floor with her Tears, and imploring his Pardon for a Fault which she had not with her Will committed; as Onahal, who was also prostrate with her, could testify: That, unknown to her, he had broke into her Apartment, and ravished her. She spoke this much against her Conscience; but to save her own Life, ’twas absolutely necessary she should feign this Falsity. She knew it could not injure the Prince, he being fled to an Army that would stand by him, against any Injuries that should assault him. However, this last Thought of Imoinda’s being ravished, changed the Measures of his Revenge; and whereas before he designed to be himself her Executioner, he now resolved she should not die. But as it is the greatest Crime in Nature amongst them, to touch a Woman after having been possess’d by a Son, a Father, or a Brother, so now he looked on Imoinda as a polluted thing wholly unfit for his Embrace; nor would he resign her to his Grandson, because she had received the Royal Veil: He therefore removes her from the Otan, with Onahal; whom he put into safe Hands, with Order they should be both sold off as Slaves to another Country, either Christian or Heathen, ’twas no Matter where.

This cruel Sentence, worse than Death, they implor’d might be reversed; but their Prayers were vain, and it was put in Execution accordingly, and that with so much Secrecy, that none, either without or within the Otan, knew any thing of their Absence, or their Destiny.

The old King nevertheless executed this with a great deal of Reluctancy; but he believed he had made a very great Conquest over himself, when he had once resolved, and had perform’d what he resolved. He believed now, that his Love had been unjust; and that he could not expect the Gods, or Captain of the Clouds (as they call the unknown Power) would suffer a better Consequence from so ill a Cause. He now begins to hold Oroonoko excused; and to say, he had reason for what he did. And now every body could assure the King how passionately Imoinda was beloved by the Prince; even those confess’d it now, who said the contrary before his Flame was not abated. So that the King being old, and not able to defend himself in War, and having no Sons of all his Race remaining alive, but only this, to maintain him on his Throne; and looking on this as a man disobliged, first by the Rape of his Mistress, or rather Wife, and now by depriving him wholly of her, he fear’d, might make him desperate, and do some cruel thing, either to himself or his old Grandfather the Offender, he began to repent him extremely of the Contempt he had, in his Rage, put on Imoinda. Besides, he consider’d he ought in Honour to have killed her for this Offence, if it had been one. He ought to have had so much Value and Consideration for a Maid of her Quality, as to have nobly put her to Death, and not to have sold her like a common Slave; the greatest Revenge, and the most disgraceful of any, and to which they a thousand times prefer Death, and implore it; as Imoinda did, but could not obtain that Honour. Seeing therefore it was certain that Oroonoko would highly resent this Affront, he thought good to make some Excuse for his Rashness to him; and to that End, he sent a Messenger to the Camp, with Orders to treat with him about the Matter, to gain his Pardon, and
endeavour to mitigate his Grief: but that by no Means he should tell him she was sold, but secretly put to Death; for he knew he should never obtain his Pardon for the other.

When the Messenger came, he found the Prince upon the Point of engaging with the Enemy; but as soon as he heard of the Arrival of the Messenger, he commanded him to his Tent, where he embraced him, and received him with Joy; which was soon abated by the down-cast Looks of the Messenger, who was instantly demanded the Cause by Oroonoko; who, impatient of Delay, ask’d a thousand Questions in a Breath, and all concerning Imoinda. But there needed little Return; for he could almost answer himself of all he demanded, from his Sight and Eyes. At last the Messenger casting himself at the Prince’s Feet, and kissing them with all the Submission of a Man that had something to implore which he dreaded to utter, besought him to hear with Calmness what he had to deliver to him, and to call up all his noble and heroick Courage, to encounter with his Words, and defend himself against the ungrateful Things he had to relate. Oroonoko reply’d, with a deep Sigh, and a languishing Voice,—I am armed against their worst Efforts—For I know they will tell me, Imoinda is no more—And after that, you may spare the rest. Then, commanding him to rise, he laid himself on a Carpet, under a rich Pavilion, and remained a good while silent, and was hardly heard to sigh. When he was come a little to himself, the Messenger asked him Leave to deliver that Part of his Embassy which the Prince had not yet divin’d: And the Prince cry’d, I permit thee—Then he told him the Affliction the old King was in, for the Rashness he had committed in his Cruelty to Imoinda; and how he deign’d to ask Pardon for his Offence, and to implore the Prince would not suffer that Loss to touch his Heart too sensibly, which now all the Gods could not restore him, but might recompense him in Glory, which he begged he would pursue; and that Death, that common Revenger of all Injuries, would soon even the Account between him and a feeble old Man.

Oroonoko bade him return his Duty to his Lord and Master; and to assure him, there was no Account of Revenge to be adjudged between them; If there was, he was the Aggressor, and that Death would be just, and, maugre his Age, would see him righted; and he was contented to leave his Share of Glory to Youths more fortunate and worthy of that Favour from the Gods: That henceforth he would never lift a Weapon, or draw a Bow, but abandon the small Remains of his Life to Sighs and Tears, and the continual Thoughts of what his Lord and Grandfather had thought good to send out of the World, with all that Youth, that Innocence and Beauty.

After having spoken this, whatever his greatest Officers and Men of the best Rank could do, they could not raise him from the Carpet, or persuade him to Action, and Resolutions of Life; but commanding all to retire, he shut himself into his Pavilion all that Day, while the Enemy was ready to engage: and wondring at the Delay, the whole Body of the chief of the Army then address’d themselves to him, and to whom they had much ado to get Admittance. They fell on their Faces at the Foot of his Carpet, where they lay, and besought him with earnest Prayers and Tears to lead them forth to Battle, and not let the Enemy take Advantages of them; and implored him to have Regard to his Glory, and to the World, that depended on his Courage and Conduct. But he made no other Reply to all their Supplications than this, That he had now no more Business for Glory; and for the World, it was a Trifle not worth his Care: Go, (continued he, sighing) and divide it amongst you, and reap with Joy what you so vainly prize, and leave me to my more welcome Destiny.

They then demanded what they should do, and whom he would constitute in his Room, that the Confusion of ambitious Youth and Power might not ruin their Order, and make them a Prey to the Enemy. He reply’d, he would not give himself that Trouble—but wished ‘em to chuse the
bravest Man amongst ’em, let his Quality or Birth be what it would: ‘For, Oh my Friends! (says he) it is not Titles make Men Brave or Good; or Birth that bestows Courage and Generosity, or makes the Owner Happy. Believe this, when you behold Oroonoko the most wretched, and abandoned by Fortune, of all the Creation of the Gods.’ So turning himself about, he would make no more Reply to all they could urge or implore.

The Army beholding their Officers return unsuccessful, with sad Faces and ominous Looks, that presaged no good Luck, suffer’d a thousand Fears to take Possession of their Hearts, and the Enemy to come even upon them before they could provide for their Safety by any Defence: and tho’ they were assured by some who had a Mind to animate them, that they should be immediately headed by the Prince; and that in the mean time Aboan had Orders to command as General; yet they were so dismay’d for want of that great Example of Bravery, that they could make but a very feeble Resistance; and, at last, down-right fled before the Enemy, who pursued ’em to the very Tents, killing ’em: Nor could all Aboan’s Courage, which that Day gained him immortal Glory, shame ’em into a manly Defence of themselves. The Guards that were left behind about the Prince’s Tent, seeing the Soldiers flee before the Enemy, and scatter themselves all over the Plain, in great Disorder, made such Out-cries, as rouz’d the Prince from his amorous Slumber, in which he had remained buried for two Days, without permitting any Sustenance to approach him. But, in Spite of all his Resolutions, he had not the Constancy of Grief to that Degree, as to make him insensible of the Danger of his Army; and in that Instant he leaped from his Couch, and cry’d—‘Come, if we must die, let us meet Death the noblest Way; and ’twill be more like Oroonoko to encounter him at an Army’s Head, opposing the Torrent of a conquering Foe, than lazily on a Couch, to wait his lingering Pleasure, and die every Moment by a thousand racking Thoughts; or be tamely taken by an Enemy, and led a whining, love-sick Slave to adorn the Triumphs of Jamoan, that young Victor, who already is enter’d beyond the Limits I have prescrib’d him.’

While he was speaking, he suffer’d his People to dress him for the Field; and sallying out of his Pavilion, with more Life and Vigour in his Countenance than ever he shew’d, he appear’d like some Divine Power descended to save his Country from Destruction: And his People had purposely put him on all Things that might make him shine with most Splendor, to strike a reverend Awe into the Beholders. He flew into the thickest of those that were pursuing his Men; and being animated with Despair, he fought as if he came on Purpose to die, and did such Things as will not be believed that human Strength could perform; and such, as soon inspir’d all the rest with new Courage, and new Ardor. And now it was that they began to fight indeed; and so, as if they would not be out-done even by their ador’d Hero; who turning the Tide of the Victory, changing absolutely the Fate of the Day, gain’d an entire Conquest: And Oroonoko having the good Fortune to single out Jamoan, he took him Prisoner with his own Hand, having wounded him almost to Death.

This Jamoan afterwards became very dear to him, being a Man very Gallant, and of excellent Graces, and fine Parts; so that he never put him amongst the Rank of Captives as they used to do, without Distinction, for the common Sale, or Market, but kept him in his own Court, where he retain’d nothing of the Prisoner but the Name, and returned no more into his own Country; so great an Affection he took for Oroonoko, and by a thousand Tales and Adventures of Love and Gallantry, flatter’d his Disease of Melancholy and Languishment; which I have often heard him say, had certainly kill’d him, but for the Conversation of this Prince and Aboan, and the French Governor he had from his Childhood, of whom I have spoken before, and who was a Man of
admirable Wit, great Ingenuity and Learning; all which he had infused into his young Pupil. This Frenchman was banished out of his own Country for some Heretical Notions he held; and tho’ he was a Man of very little Religion, yet he had admirable Morals, and a brave Soul.

After the total Defeat of Jamoan’s Army, which all fled, or were left dead upon the Place, they spent some Time in the Camp; Oroonoko chusing rather to remain a While there in his Tents, than to enter into a Palace, or live in a Court where he had so lately suffer’d so great a Loss, the Officers therefore, who saw and knew his Cause of Discontent, invented all sorts of Diversions and Sports to entertain their Prince: So that what with those Amusements abroad, and others at home, that is, within their Tents, with the Persuasions, Arguments, and Care of his Friends and Servants that he more peculiarly priz’d, he wore off in Time a great Part of that Chagrin, and Torture of Despair, which the first Efforts of Imoinda’s Death had given him; insomuch, as having received a thousand kind Embassies from the King, and Invitation to return to Court, he obey’d, tho’ with no little Reluctancy; and when he did so, there was a visible Change in him, and for a long Time he was much more melancholy than before. But Time lessens all Extremes, and reduces ’em to Mediums, and Unconcern; but no Motives of Beauties, tho’ all endeavour’d it, could engage him in any sort of Amour, tho’ he had all the Invitations to it, both from his own Youth, and other Ambitions and Designs.

Oroonoko was no sooner return’d from this last Conquest, and receiv’d at Court with all the Joy and Magnificence that could be express’d to a young Victor, who was not only return’d Triumphant, but belov’d like a Deity, than there arriv’d in the Port an English Ship.

The Master of it had often before been in these Countries, and was very well known to Oroonoko, with whom he had traffick’d for Slaves, and had us’d to do the same with his Predecessors.

This Commander was a Man of a finer sort of Address and Conversation, better bred, and more engaging, than most of that sort of Men are; so that he seem’d rather never to have been bred out of a Court, than almost all his Life at Sea. This Captain therefore was always better receiv’d at Court, than most of the Traders to those Countries were; and especially by Oroonoko, who was more civiliz’d, according to the European Mode, than any other had been, and took more Delight in the White Nations; and, above all, Men of Parts and Wit. To this Captain he sold abundance of his Slaves; and for the Favour and Esteem he had for him, made him many Presents, and oblig’d him to stay at Court as long as possibly he could. Which the Captain seem’d to take as a very great Honour done him, entertaining the Prince every Day with Globes and Maps, and Mathematical Discourses and Instruments; eating, drinking, hunting, and living with him with so much Familiarity, that it was not to be doubted but he had gain’d very greatly upon the Heart of this gallant young Man. And the Captain, in Return of all these mighty Favours, besought the Prince to honour his Vessel with his Presence some Day or other at Dinner, before he should set sail; which he condescended to accept, and appointed his Day. The Captain, on his Part, fail’d not to have all Things in a Readiness, in the most magnificent Order he could possibly: And the Day being come, the Captain, in his Boat, richly adorn’d with Carpets and Velvet Cushions, rowed to the Shore, to receive the Prince; with another Long-boat, where was plac’d all his Musick and Trumpets, with which Oroonoko was extremely delighted; who met him on the Shore, attended by his French Governor, Jamoan, Aboan, and about an Hundred of the noblest of the Youths of the Court: And after they had first carried the Prince on Board, the Boats fetch’d the rest off; where they found a very splendid Treat, with all Sorts of fine Wines; and were as well entertain’d, as ’twas possible in such a Place to be.
The Prince having drank hard of Punch, and several Sorts of Wine, as did all the rest, (for great Care was taken they should want nothing of that Part of the Entertainment) was very merry, and in great Admiration of the Ship, for he had never been in one before; so that he was curious of beholding every Place where he decently might descend. The rest, no less curious, who were not quite overcome with drinking, rambled at their Pleasure Fore and Aft, as their Fancies guided ’em: So that the Captain, who had well laid his Design before, gave the Word, and seiz’d on all his Guests; they clapping great Irons suddenly on the Prince, when he was leap’d down into the Hold, to view that Part of the Vessel; and locking him fast down, secur’d him. The same Treachery was used to all the rest; and all in one Instant, in several Places of the Ship, were lash’d fast in Irons, and betray’d to Slavery. That great Design over, they set all Hands at Work to hoist Sail; and with as treacherous as fair a Wind they made from the Shore with this innocent and glorious Prize, who thought of nothing less than such an Entertainment.

Some have commended this Act, as brave in the Captain; but I will spare my Sense of it, and leave it to my Reader to judge as he pleases. It may be easily guess’d, in what Manner the Prince resented this Indignity, who may be best resembled to a Lion taken in a Toil; so he raged, so he struggled for Liberty, but all in vain: And they had so wisely managed his Fetters, that he could not use a Hand in his Defence, to quit himself of a Life that would by no Means endure Slavery; nor could he move from the Place where he was ty’d, to any solid Part of the Ship, against which he might have beat his Head, and have finish’d his Disgrace that Way. So that being deprived of all other Means, he resolv’d to perish for want of Food; and pleas’d at last with that Thought, and toil’d and tir’d by Rage and Indignation, he laid himself down, and sullenly resolv’d upon dying, and refused all Things that were brought him.