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Shelby Johnson, Vanderbilt University

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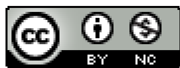

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Rehearsing Imoinda: Bleaching Black Bodies in *Oroonoko* and *The Wanderer*

SHELBY JOHNSON

> "Paul Valery wrote, 'Our memory repeats to us what we haven't understood.' That's almost it. Say instead: 'Our memory repeats to us what we haven't yet come to terms with, with what still haunts us.'"[1]

I

Frances Burney's heroine in *The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties* tests the limits of female self-fashioning. Forced by circumstance to conceal her identity, including her name, Juliet Granville (known through most of the novel under her assumed name of Miss Ellis) is both constricted and defined by the personas she assumes. One of these roles—her forced performance in a private theatrical as *The Provok'd Husband*'s Lady Townly—unavoidably brings her before the notice of general Brighthelmstone society. Although Juliet desperately tries to remain anonymous, her virtuosic performance makes one young lady in particular "nearly extatic" to meet her. As Burney narrates, Lady Barbara Franklin (who, significantly, did not actually see the play) "was wild to see the celebrated Lady Townly" based solely on descriptions of Ellis's acting skill. Burney takes care to assure us that though Barbara "was not quite simple, not quite young enough, to believe that she should literally behold that personage" she was still "unconsciously, so bewildered, between the representation of nature and life, or nature and life themselves, that she had a certain undefined pleasure in the meeting which perplexed, yet bewitched her imagination" (229). By describing Barbara's somewhat naïve enthusiasm for the perceived glamour of Juliet's theatrical presence, Burney represents the tendency of characters in *The Wanderer* to associate performer and performance. Though we may smile at Lady Barbara's "nearly extatic" anticipation of meeting the celebrated "Lady Townly,"

Burney's portrayal of the effect Juliet's performance in *The Provok'd Husband* has on the community becomes much more problematic when seen in the context of Juliet's troubling—because convincing—entrance in the novel disguised in blackface.[2]

Reacting to Juliet's performances as a black woman, as an aristocratic lady in *The Provok'd Husband*, and as the unassuming Miss Ellis, Mrs. Maple, who grudgingly provides Juliet shelter early in the novel, feels called upon to pass the following judgment on Juliet's character: "I was all along sure she was an adventurer and an imposter; with her blacks, and her whites, and her double face!" (251). Lady Barbara's and Mrs. Maple's conflicted reactions, both to Juliet's real identity and to her performances, illustrate Dror Wahrman's contention that the end of the eighteenth century constituted an unstable arena for British conceptions of selfhood. He describes the period as one which saw the movement of the locus of the self from the outside in. Earlier eighteenth-century notions of identity based on mutability and masquerade transformed into more modern understandings that the self remains essential, fixed, and somehow separate from identities assumed during performance which can be read by spectators.[3] In similar ways, Juliet's blackface disguise demonstrates that Wahrman's story of the modern self also encompasses changing notions of race. He suggests that "[f]rom the 1770s onward … race was gradually and haltingly reconceptualized as an essential and immutable category, stamped on the individual" (127). However, *The Wanderer*, published in the nineteenth century, perhaps complicates the arc of Wahrman's story about the changing self. We might say that Juliet inhabits a no man's land, or elusive third category, between the two notions of the self so skillfully rendered by Wahrman because most characters in *The Wanderer*, like Lady Barbara and Mrs. Maple, never completely separate performer from performance and read Juliet's different identities as sometimes staged, sometimes essential. She becomes for them an uneasy object lesson demonstrating that the revelation of a self might be a more dynamic project than characters anticipate. Yet others continue to treat Juliet's self-presentations as external

clues demonstrating features "stamped indelibly" on her person and indicating something central about her mysterious, if fixed, interior self (Wahrman 128). Unlike Lady Barbara's transparently positive response to Juliet's Lady Townly, other characters' nearly univocal reactions to Juliet as a black woman emphasize her essential racial difference. More significantly, their interpretations of Juliet's selfhood rarely change even when reintroduced to Juliet as a white woman who donned blackface for pragmatic purposes—to escape the anarchy of revolutionary France under the "dire reign of the terrific Robespierre" (11). Their responses indicate not only the extent to which racial prejudice had seeped into British society but also the confusion generated by believing Juliet is who she pretends to be.[4]

Critics of *The Wanderer*, when they do address blackness and blackface in the novel,[5] often deviate from focusing on the cultural impact of Juliet's blackface as a performance event and racial practice, choosing instead to relate the critical importance of Juliet's performance to other discrete, bodiless texts. This entails a theoretical approach which focuses on the rhetorical points of convergence between Juliet's blackface with more openly ideologically laden genres such as political treatise and satire (which are all, admittedly, rhetorical registers in which Burney excels). Kimberly Lutz and Sara Salih, for instance, both argue that Juliet's blackface gestures metonymically to these other kinds of discursive modes. Lutz contends that for Burney blackness parallels the position of white females in patriarchal England. Connecting the rhetorical impact of Juliet's visual blackface to early feminist writings and what she calls the "woman as slave" metaphor, Lutz believes Juliet's black skin recalls white feminist liberty narratives. Salih, on the other hand, argues that the novel functions as a satire of British society and that Burney disguises the real target of her satire, which she identifies as francophobia, with negrophobia, going so far as to call Juliet's initial disguise as a black woman a "red herring" (309). While political treatise and satire both inspire and potentially enrich readings of Juliet's blackface, we should redirect our focus to more theatrically based registers of cultural practice. To do this,

we ought to take the characters' crucial initial belief in Juliet's performance as our starting point. Juliet's self is constructed by externally imposed responses to her performance, meaning that she does not "perform" blackness in the sense that her representation is somehow essentially hollow or "evacuated," to borrow a metaphor of Judith Butler's (xv). We will see that Juliet's brief representation as a black woman does indeed mark her community in ways a performance empty of meaning by itself would not provoke.[6] I would also argue that the significance of Juliet's blackface performance does not fully correspond to the generic conventions Lutz and Salih identify—a visual representation of either the subversive woman-as-slave metaphor or conservative francophobia—or that it necessarily parallels discursive debates prevalent in a Britain attempting to rhetorically contain revolutionary discourse across gender, race, and class lines.

Rather, I think we should address Juliet's blackface performance as the embodiment or re-presentation of those consigned to the margins of memory in British society, including black women. Juliet's near silent performance as a black woman pushes the boundaries of disguise in the novel because it illustrates, as Butler reminds us, that "the anticipation of [an] … essence produces that which it posits as outside itself" (xv). In the world of *The Wanderer*, Juliet is read as black by performing in blackface—she becomes by doing—and continues to be associated with blackness throughout the course of the novel. We will see that Juliet's performance very quickly moves beyond the realm of red herrings and metaphors and, instead, performs—and thus makes present—the difficulty of remembering the forgotten in British culture, particularly if we define culture in Joseph Roach's terms as "the social processes of memory and forgetting" (xi). In so doing, *The Wanderer* participates in surrogating, what Roach describes as a process which "reproduces and re-creates" communal practice, a specific performance event in the eighteenth century (2). Juliet's performance rehearses the dramatic bleaching of another heroine, Imoinda, from Aphra Behn's novella of 1688 to Thomas Southerne's staged adaptation a decade later. By

calling attention to the similarity between Behn's and Southerne's representations of Imoinda and Burney's portrayal of Juliet, we may better situate *The Wanderer* as a colonial text concerned with performing and possessing the black female body.

II

Appropriated by contemporaries for diverse and perhaps contradictory ends and situated by critics within a complicated set of rhetorics, *Oroonoko* and *The Wanderer* as colonial texts have come in for their fair share of contextual debates. Throughout the eighteenth century, contemporaries used *Oroonoko*, especially the more popularly known stage version, to speak to their own anxieties about rhetorics of authenticity, often localized in debates about the sincerity and authority of identity, performance, and the colonial project. Behn's original narrative participates in the complicated communal project of surrogation detailed by Roach in *Cities of the Dead*. As others create their own versions of Oroonoko and Imoinda, they elicit anxiety about the authenticity of these reproductions. The re-performed Imoinda, in particular, incites reactions all along the spectrum described by Roach: "The very uncanniness of the process of surrogation, which tends to disturb the complacency of all thoughtful incumbents, may provoke many unbidden emotions, ranging from mildly incontinent sentimentalism to raging paranoia" (2). The representation of Imoinda as a colonial other often served to critique the authenticity of peculiarly British cultural mores.

Continuously performed on British stages either in Southerne's or others' adaptations, Behn's *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave* represents the first British colonial narrative.[7] Although the actress Anne Oldfield lamented in 1743 that "*Imoinda*, *Indiana*, *Belvidera* [three heroines from popular Restoration tragicomedies] no longer please," *Oroonoko* experienced a resurgence in stage popularity at mid-century as well as at its end, especially in other stage adaptations by John Hawkesworth, Francis Gentleman, and John Ferrier.[8] In the original version, Behn narrates the love story between Imoinda and Oroonoko, their eventual betrayal into slavery, and Oroonoko's failed attempt

to lead a slave revolt when confronted with the specter of his unborn child's ultimate enslavement. She sets the narrative both in the exotic African kingdom of Coramantien as well as the brutal colonial landscape of Surinam, including occasional glimpses of primitive, prelapsarian communities formed by the South American natives. Southerne's adaptation of the text makes major changes, perhaps the most interesting the addition of a subplot detailing the adventures of the cross-dressing Charlot Weldon's search for a husband. The most significant change, however, alters Imoinda's skin color from black to white. This performative point of convergence between *Oroonoko* and *The Wanderer* creates a rich space for investigating questions of how colonial narratives shape individual attempts at self-fashioning and communal models of spectatorial perception.

Southerne's white Imoinda enabled a critique of the perceived failures of urban feminine values (often implicated in Britain's growing expansion as a colonial power) because she remained reassuringly white and British. Adopting a persona of cosmopolitan world-weariness, William Congreve, for example, contrasts Imoinda's native sensibility and artlessness with the artificial (female) performances of moral laxity and artificiality he pointedly locates within London urban spaces:

> If Virtue in a Heathen be a fault,
> Then Damn the Heathen-School where she [Imoinda] was taught,
> She might have learned to Cuckold, Jilt, and Sham,
> Had *Covent-Garden* been in *Surinam*. (969–70)

What makes Congreve's juxtaposition so interesting is its revelation of how Southerne's white Imoinda represents *both* the moral sensibility associated with British discourses of proper feminism and the supposed "genuine" simplicity of primitive others. Southerne's white Imoinda then functions both as an ideal representative of (native) British feminism and as a critique of actual values circulating in London's commercial and newly colonizing society (Nussbaum, *Torrid Zones* 1–2).

On the other hand, the memory of Imoinda's former blackness and the desire and anxiety her exotic appeal as partner

in a mixed-race amour engenders in the audience made her a fascinating, troubling stage heroine. James Arbuckle appropriates the white Imoinda's dual, unstable meanings to focus his satiric portrait of the historical artificiality of the theater. The joke has an elaborate set-up of course. Put briefly, after leaving a London playhouse, the speaker is so critical of current theater practice he dreams he journeys to "Pluto's Dominions" and meets the *actual* historical characters impersonated on stage. These dead heroes and heroines complain before Pluto that they are represented by actors and in costumes ill-suited to their stories. The ladies are particularly grieved by the voluminous petticoats required by their roles which constrict their movement, most seriously in moments requiring swooning or dying. Pluto, as narrated by the speaker, would be inclined to laugh had "*Imoinda* … not advanc'd [and] represented to *Pluto*, that this was no Subject of Merriment to any of those who were daily killed at the Theater" (285). She laments that once an actress performing her almost fell and that if the actor playing Oroonoko had not had the presence of mind to step on her petticoat "that ten to one she would never have been able to get up again" (285). Imoinda especially desires that no "young Fop in the Pit" may see the color of her garters, explaining that the shape of her skirt tends to force her to fall backward, allowing the audience to see up her skirt (285). Amusing and inconsequential as this anecdote may appear, Arbuckle's story illuminates several troubling aspects of Imoinda's representation in the eighteenth century. The first and most obvious point is that Imoinda serves as the butt of Arbuckle's theatrical joke about the "reality" of performance. In a play so tangled with rhetorics of colonial oppression, this feels like a further instance of Imoinda's subjugation. Yet, Arbuckle's larger satiric object—the gap between the historicity of a character and his/her representation on stage—asks us to consider in what ways a staged Imoinda might be rendered an artificial shadow next to her "real" referent.

In surveying the presence of the whitened Imoinda in writings about the theater we are left with certain inescapable questions raised by theater-goers and those who wrote about

the theater. In what ways is the effaced black Imoinda of Behn's novella recalled by the white Imoinda on stage? What is the relationship between the two representations of Imoinda? And finally, in what ways does the whitened, staged Imoinda challenge narratives of British cultural authenticity? In the same way, the relationship between Juliet's performance in blackface and the authentic identity Burney depicts for her provokes us to ask if Burney reveals an "authentic" interiority for Juliet somehow separate from her blackface. What is the relationship between Burney's depiction of an opaque interiority alongside a representation of racial difference? In examining some of the ways in which *Oroonoko* has been situated and surrogated within theatrical rhetorics of authenticity—ranging from Congreve's utilization of Imoinda to critique the artificiality of British morals to James Arbuckle's baroque anxiety over the relationship between historical accuracy and artificiality in stage productions—we can see how representations of Imoinda straddle the unstable boundary between cultures encountering each other. Because even the white Imoinda encodes within her memories of her blackened prototype, particularly through her representation as a white slave, Imoinda becomes an important reoccurring preoccupation for those concerned with Britain's colonial and theatrical projects. In exploring the relationship between *Oroonoko* and *The Wanderer*, we can see how Imoinda's black skin is dramatically recovered in Juliet—only to be lost again—and how that loss functions as a crucial reminder for the ways in which black experience is lost and effaced, only to re-appear in other guises in other narratives across the eighteenth century. By noting the relationship between Imoinda and Juliet, we can see that Imoinda in some ways becomes a complicated figure of obsession and serves to remind us of Roach's contention that "the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible" because "the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred" (4).

III

Does Burney reveal an "authentic" interiority for Juliet

somehow separate from her blackface? Or from her performances more broadly? In contrast to Evelina's self-revealing letters, or Camilla's agonized analysis of social faults committed, we get very few details of Juliet's inner life. Given the nature of Juliet's presentation in the novel, and the necessary mystery surrounding her identity and history (kept secret even from the reader), Burney focuses to a large extent on the ways external details indicate Juliet's interiority, particularly in detailing characters' reactions to Juliet's body. Characters display an enormous amount of interest in—even obsession for—Juliet's transforming, troubling, disordered body, especially her skin. As with Imoinda, Juliet's changing skin color and her ability to blush perform necessary narrative functions as mediations of Juliet's character as an "other" to be colonized. One reason why many of the characters respond to Juliet in this manner is that prior to her transformation, all the characters in the text believe her blackface performance. No one in the first chapter of the novel doubts that Juliet is anything but *black*. More significantly, Burney also emphasizes Juliet's solitary position during her transformation. As with Imoinda's extra-textual, off-stage transformation from black to white between Behn's and Southerne's texts, Juliet's metamorphosis from a black to a white woman is witnessed by none of the characters. For the first time in the novel, the meaning of Juliet's self-representation relies less on her audiences' hermeneutical control of her status and story, making her transformation that much more troubling. *The Wanderer* thus raises the problem of confronting both the black woman and the actress in blackface as a substantial question rather than a simple matter of theatrical performance that can be distinguished from "real" life.

In Juliet, Burney gestures towards theatrical representations of non-European women in British theater. Playwrights of early modern British dramas sometimes included a white heroine using blackface in order to protect herself or enact revenge, such as in Philip Massinger's *The Parliament of Love* and Richard Brome's *The English Moor*. In *The Parliament of Love*, for example, Beaupre recovers her husband's love by

disguising herself as a Moorish slave named Calista and uses a bed trick to get her husband to sleep with her. Virginia Mason Vaughan suggests that the discovery of a white heroine beneath the blackface often defined the comedic reversal in these early modern dramas: "The sudden creation of whiteness out of blackness provides the miraculous theatrical spectacle required to resolve the complicated plot of tragicomedy" (117). Vaughan argues further that these blackened heroines created for the audience a double consciousness because the audience *knows* they are seeing a white actor playing a white character disguised as black in the play. The presence of a black female character is thus transferred several steps away from reality, which negotiates an ironic space for the audience between an actual black body, the performed white body, and the doubly-performed blackface body. The double consciousness Vaughan describes supports Wahrman's contentions that the eighteenth century originally conceived of selfhood and race as theatrical and changeable. Yet in *The Wanderer* readers do not get the chance to develop the same ironic distance from Juliet's performance. Burney refrains from revealing to the reader that her heroine is not really black until the window shutters are thrown back to reveal her "dazzling" white skin (42–43). As readers, we become part of Burney's created audience, and we respond, along with the other characters in the novel, with surprise and shock to the revelation of Juliet's whiteness.

Even if an audience was able to develop distance from blackface performances through knowledge of a female white character being in disguise, Imoinda and Juliet rarely allow for this level of detachment. Imoinda, in particular, excited anxiety because the representation operated at one step closer to reality. Instead of a white actress portraying a white character in blackface, the white actress would portray a black character through the medium of black make-up. The problem of how psychologically and culturally to contain such a black female body on stage contributed to the disquiet felt by audiences when confronted with the spectacle of a white actress in blackface. Critics have provided various reasons for why a staged black

Imoinda might have caused this unease. Most often, we remind ourselves that actresses' bodies represented Western ideals of sexuality and beauty, what Charmaine Nelson identifies as "the Eurocentric assumption of true Womanhood as always already white" (2). An actress in blackface risked diminishing her discursive power on stage by veiling one of her fundamental claims to beauty—her white skin. White skin, in particular, was one of the most fundamental indexes revealing female virtue. Spectators could "read" moral qualities in the skin, such as embarrassment, sorrow, and anger, through the activity of female blushing. Blushing became a cultural shorthand for indicating female virtue in the eighteenth century, and thus one reason why Southerne's Imoinda became white, as Felicity Nussbaum observes: "Southerne's decision to make Imoinda white and red, a fair woman capable of blushing and of having those blushes perceived on her white skin, is repeated in numerous versions produced on stage throughout the century" (*Limits* 157). Burney, not able to directly reveal Juliet's virtue, can only gesture towards it by her ability to blush, even through her certain performance obstacles, such as make-up. When Juliet is in blackface, Burney narrates: "A crimson of the deepest hue forced its way through her dark complexion: her very eyes reddened with blushes" (33). Later, during the private production of *The Provok'd Husband*, spectators note of Juliet's performance: "the rouge, put on for the occasion, was paler than the blushes which burnt though it on her cheeks" (96).

The solution to the spectacle of the black woman seems to have been either to silence her or to bleach her black skin, both attempts at racial forgetting. In Behn's novella, for instance, the problem of Imoinda's silencing has remained a critical dilemma.[9] In one dramatic moment of silencing, Imoinda is called to the king's harem, the invitation consisting of a veil designed to signal her new narrative function as a placeholder for male power: "He was therefore no sooner got to 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 secured for the king's use; and it is death

to disobey, besides, held a most impious disobedience" (19). As Ros Ballaster, Joyce Green MacDonald, and others have noted, Imoinda's story itself is silenced—or veiled—in the novel because of its necessary mediation through Behn, who labors to narrate a complicated critique/justification of rising British colonialism. MacDonald argues, for instance, that Behn's relationship to Imoinda serves to naturalize English racial superiority, while Ballaster reminds us that the theatrical, fiction-making Behn with her insistently invoked "Female pen" contrasts sharply with the alternative gender position indicated by the passive Imoinda, whom Behn rarely allows space to speak directly in the text (MacDonald 112, Ballaster 293). Candy B. K. Schille takes a moment to imagine Behn's story as real, and wonders if Imoinda *could* have related her story to Behn or anyone else, noting that Behn never indicates Imoinda can speak English at all (15). Susan Andrade concludes, furthermore, that Imoinda "is absolutely necessary to the ideology of the text. She first prevents the white woman from committing miscegenation, and then becomes the willing martyr whose death protects the narrator from the fate of Desdemona" (206). Given the passivity of Imoinda's representation in *Oroonoko*, and the seeming necessity for Behn to mediate the black woman's story, MacDonald suggests that Behn herself began Imoinda's transformation into an almost entirely silenced, "bleached" heroine in Southerne's play (112).

Indeed, in Southerne's dramatic adaptation, this instinct to efface Imoinda has important performance implications. Imoinda has so few lines in Southerne's version of the story that one actress preparing for the part had to be given careful instructions on how to make each line count. In 1733, poet and theater critic Aaron Hill advised an actress, a Miss Holliday,[10] to modulate her voice, and "raise it a little higher" (139). The necessity of speaking louder and higher in order to force attention to Imoinda's lines, however, could result in voice exhaustion. To counteract this and to bring further emphasis to Imoinda's lines, Hill instructs the actress to "make use of *pauses*," explaining, "The actor who pauses judiciously, will be sure to appear in earnest, like the conceiver of what he utters; whereas, without pausing,

the words, arising too fast for the thought, demonstrate him but a repeater of what he would seem to invent, before he expresses it" (139, 140). Because Hill is concerned primarily with avoiding any trace of artificiality in Miss Holliday's portrayal of Imoinda, he also suggests, in a curious detail, that the actress keep her eyes on the person with whom she is speaking, rather than directing her words towards the audience (and thereby allowing them to see her beautiful visage) (141–42). Hill's highly specific advice on movement, his emphatic belief that the audience should see Imoinda's face and the play of emotions across her face, demonstrates the way Southerne's play relied on the audience responding with a crescendo of emotional sentimentality to the specter of the (beautiful) white female slave. The complicated acting instructions indicate to us the ways in which the figure of the white female slave trivialized the impact of black experience by displacing enflaming emotions, emotions which might not result in reciprocal engagement with the trauma of actual black experience. Indeed, Hill suggests that Imoinda (even the beautiful white version of Imoinda) should be strangely evacuated of an interior, emotional life. He pinpoints the impact such a relatively natural style of acting should have on the audience: "your voice should not *express* [emotion], but *affect* it" (141). By giving these suggestions, Hill acknowledges that the dramatic impact of Imoinda's narrative meaning in Southerne's drama is defined by how well she can induce specific emotional responses in the audience and thus demonstrates how the recognition of what we might call an "enslaved subjectivity" (or recognition of a self in a state of slavery) was refigured as an emotional response in the spectators of those subjectivities.[11]

While in Behn's novella, Imoinda's story is always mediated (to the point that we wonder if Imoinda can even speak English), and in Southerne's play actresses had to speak in such a way as to make every line count, *The Wanderer* reveals a similar interest in the means by which others intervene in the telling of Juliet's story. The mystery of Juliet's identity creates a narrative void, which other characters (and readers) attempt to fill with explanations of Juliet's past and her present character. To that

end, Burney focuses less on what Juliet says than on how her body is perceived. She seems particularly interested in signaling Juliet's audience's obsession with her black skin by slowing her disclosure of her heroine's identity through the course of the entire first chapter. At the beginning of the novel Juliet figures only as a linguistic presence, a French voice calling in the night, pleading for shelter on a ship sailing for England away from revolutionary France. At first, this voice is even gender neutral, and the characters are content to ignore the voice calling from the shore. Only when the passengers realize the voice crying for aid is a female voice, do two passengers, whom we discover later to be Harleigh and Admiral Powel, appeal on her behalf: "Nay, since she is but a woman," the Admiral argues, "and in distress, save her, pilot, in God's name! … A woman, a child, and a fallen enemy, are three persons that every true Briton should scorn to misuse" (12). That the Admiral has to invoke British ethical superiority in order to aid the pleading Frenchwoman despite almost all the others characters' resistance contributes to the barbed nature of Burney's satire. After Juliet comes aboard, we see nothing but her costume (which Elinor declares "vulgar"), but she is wrapped too tightly against the cold to make her skin color readily apparent. After it becomes evident that Juliet does know English (although characters continue to assume she is a Frenchwoman until later), Burney carefully reveals only parts of Juliet's body. At first, it is only her hands: "Just then the stranger, having taken off her gloves, to arrange an old shawl, in which she was wrapt, exhibited hands and arms of so dark a colour, that they might rather be styled black than brown" (19). The agonizingly slow pace of Juliet's self-disclosure finally ends when her face becomes clear: "The wind just then blowing back the prominent borders of a French night-cap, which had almost concealed all her features, displayed a large black patch, that covered half her left cheek, and a broad black ribbon, which bound a bandage of cloth over the right side of her forehead" (20). Like Imoinda's veil, the thick bandages crossing Juliet's black face signal that the black body is always already fragmented and split in the world of the novel. The bandages also hint that the details of Juliet's identity,

continually overdetermined by skin color, remain concealed, inchoate, marked by a violent history.

Yet Burney buries the revelation of Juliet's white skin to a paragraph at the end of another chapter. When Juliet's blackface fades, for instance, Burney focuses both on the lack of audience for Juliet's transformation, and then on the spectacle of its revelation:

> This was the manifest alteration in the complexion of her attendant, which, from a regular and equally dark hue, appeared, on the second morning, to be smeared and streaked; and on the third, to be of a dusky white … When, however, on the fourth day, the shutters of the chamber, which, to give it a more sickly character, had hitherto been closed, were suffered to admit the sunbeams of a cheerful winter's morning, Mrs. Ireton was directed, by their rays, to a full and marvelous view, of a skin changed from a tint nearly black, to the brightest, whitest, and most dazzling fairness. (42–43)

The theatrical elements to this scene—especially the dramatic opening of the window shutter—almost appears parodic compared to the slow and serious revelation of Juliet's black skin earlier in the novel. Indeed, Mrs. Ireton's response is to sardonically question the limits of Juliet's bodily boundaries, especially her embodiment as a (white) woman of a certain height and skin color:

> You have been bruised and beaten; and dirty and clean; and ragged and whole; and wounded and healed; and a European and a Creole, in less than a week. I suppose, next, you will dwindle into a dwarf; and then, perhaps, find some surprising contrivance to shoot up into a giantess. There is nothing than cannot be too much to expect from so great an adept in metamorphosis. (46)

Mrs. Ireton sarcastically indicates an ironic truth—that the material limits of Juliet's subjectivity are more ontologically stable when disguised than when she reveals a prior "reality" of selfhood, metonymically signaled by her "dazzling" white skin. As

we have seen, Juliet's transformations crucially rehearse Imoinda's change from black heroine to a white European with "dazzling" white skin. Burney's focus on Juliet's spectacular revelation parallels the obsession for Imoinda demonstrated by characters in Behn's novella and Southerne's play. Like Juliet, Imoinda is "constituted entirely through her body" (Andrade 205).

The elements of Juliet's body—from the darkness of her skin to the structure of her nose—only serve to catalyze gossip and conjecture on the part of the English passengers, as they participate in a parody of a traditional method of disclosing identity in older narratives—the blazon. Ireton, for instance, says, "She wants a little bleaching, to be sure; but she has not bad eyes; nor a bad nose, neither" (27). Ireton's description is implicitly violent both in the way it fragments and reduces Juliet's face to certain characteristics and in the way it recommends that her skin ought to be caustically blanched in order for her body to matter in the society in which Juliet finds herself. Ireton's remark, however much he may have meant it in jest, threatens to erase Juliet's black body from British society. In this way, Juliet's "bleaching" constitutes *The Wanderer*'s clearest performative event. It highlights race as both culturally constructed and ontologically meaningful within the confines of the Juliet's performance within this local community. Juliet therefore demonstrates the cultural impact of female blackface performance on Brighthelmstone society: "What we take to be an 'internal' feature of ourselves is one that we anticipate and produce through certain bodily acts" (Butler xv). Juliet's "certain bodily acts" destabilize ontological categories of gender and race while simultaneously representing an essential black presence erased or "bleached" from British performative events and memory.[12]

The Wanderer complicates historical efforts to neutralize the revolutionary narrative potential of the black woman by rendering the transformation from black to white not as a dialogue between texts but as an event within a single text, even within a single paragraph. Indeed, Juliet's transformation is constantly retold and remembered in the narrative by other characters determined to categorize Juliet. Once black, Juliet

cannot be "re-racialized" as white, no matter how "dazzling" her skin becomes. Her story will continue to become tangled with wider narratives of revolution and empire, which often requires the silencing of other voices. A black Imoinda had to be literally written out of the story before *Oroonoko* could be represented on stage. Juliet's silencing parallels Imoinda's story in that her speech, while narrated, is not often verbalized in the novel. One critic calls Juliet's proficiency at containing the telling of her story her "epistemological control," and like Imoinda, Juliet is more often than not defined by her silence and her *refusal* to represent her story verbally (Anderson 424). Burney, for instance, focuses on Juliet's non-verbal expressions and silence in her final confrontation with her husband, describing the "speechless agony" in Juliet's eyes and repeatedly referencing her muteness (727–29). All this despite Harleigh's insistence that she "'Speak, Madam, speak! Utter but a syllable!—Deign only to turn towards me!—Pronounce but with your eyes that he has no legal claim, and I will instantly secure your liberty,—even from myself!—even from all mankind!—Speak!—turn!—look but a moment this way!—One word! one single word!'" (729). Juliet still remains silent, and in that silence we see Juliet's deliberate refusal to hand over her "self," perhaps a more radical narrative move than even Burney's representation of Juliet's unstable, changing identity as read by others around her.

VI

While some victimization is obviously implied by Juliet's and Imoinda's dramatic silences and performative bleaching, Juliet's deferred self-disclosures may ultimately represent constructive acts of reviving historical memories repressed by the trauma of colonialism, specifically the act of cultural forgetting signified by the bleaching of both Imoinda's and Juliet's black skin. Juliet's temporary presence as a black woman in the text does signal, rather pointedly, the trauma a community faces when it attempts to erase cultural Others from its memories and narratives. Southerne evidently thought he was reversing at least some aspects of cultural forgetting by transferring Behn's

representation of Oroonoko to the stage. He says of Behn:

> She had a great Command of the Stage; and I have often wonder'd that she would bury her Favourite Hero in a *Novel*, when she might have reviv'd him in the Scene. She thought either that no Actor could represent him; or she could not bear him represented: And I believe the last, when I remember what I have heard from a Friend of hers, That she always told his Story, more feelingly, than she writ it. (8)

Although probably written as a barbed jest at Behn's rumored amour with the royal slave, "his choice of words—remember, revive, bury—also suggests that Southerne interprets Behn's repeated acts of storytelling as acts of remembrance, as memorial exhumations, as elegies for her dead friend" (Rivero 447). In the same way, Juliet's repeated, ritualized donning of disguise in *The Wanderer* may also function as acts of remembrance, not just of "female difficulties," but of the difficulties encountered by those on the margin of memory. In whatever disguise, Juliet shares "the lot of the low, the outcast, the forgotten" (Doody 360).

Burney challenges binary oppositions of class and race by creating a heroine notoriously difficult to pin down in the narrative. The sheer audacity of Burney's choice for Juliet's initial disguise (why *this* disguise and not some other?) ought to catapult *The Wanderer* to a central place in scholarly inquiry as we expand our understanding of how non-white bodies were constructed at the periphery of eighteenth-century memory and history, especially in light of Felicity Nussbaum's reminder that "the eighteenth century is uniquely characterized by colour-shifting fictive figures" ("Women and Race" 74). Instead, *The Wanderer*, Burney's "least-liked, least-known, and most difficult novel," is often just as ostracized as Burney's heroine (Salih 301). Juliet's representation of blackness should not remain "buried in a novel," but take center stage in critical discussions of race, identity, and performativity in the long eighteenth century. It would be a pity, after all, to remain like Mrs. Maple, who is teased by Elinor for failing to recognize the newly white Juliet: "Who, Aunt? Why your memory is shorter than ever! Don't you recollect our dingy

French companion, that you took such a mighty fancy to?" (57).

NOTES

[1] Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995: 184.

[2] For discussions of performance and theater more generally in *The Wanderer*, see Francesca Saggini's "Miss Ellis and The Actress: For a Theatrical Reading of *The Wanderer*," in *A Celebration of Frances Burney*, Sara Salih's "*Camilla* and *The Wanderer*" in the *Cambridge Companion to Frances Burney*, Catherine Craft-Fairchild's *Masquerade and Gender: Disguise and Female Identity in Eighteenth-Century Fiction*, and Kathleen Anderson's "Frances Burney's *The Wanderer*: The Actress as Virtuous Deceiver" in the *European Romantic Review.*

[3] He suggests that by the end of the century it "became much harder for people to imagine identities as mutable, assumable, divisible, or actively malleable … Nothing illustrated the difficulty in imagining all these better than the rapidly narrowing range of reactions with which contemporaries … greeted such possibilities: impatience, irritation, incomprehension, dismissiveness, incredulity, laughter, and disgust" (275). Such responses correspond to the reactions generated by Juliet's disguises in the insular world of England.

[4] The extent to which we could consider British society racist at the end of the eighteenth century has been the source of research and debate the past few decades. Certainly eighteenth-century understandings of race differed from Victorian scientific racism. Representing a certain amount of scholarly consensus, Roxann Wheeler suggests, "The assurance that skin color was the primary signifier of human difference was not a dominant conception until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and even then individuals responded variously to nonwhite skin color" (7).

[5] Most critics have noted the uniqueness of *The Wanderer*'s presentation of blackened heroine, but rarely with anything

approaching sustained commentary. Sara Salih's seminal 1999 article, "'Her Blacks, Her Whites, Her Double Face!': Altering Alterity in *The Wanderer*," inaugurated current interest in the subject, while research continues primarily in dissertations, theses and conference papers. Judy Ann Olsen's 1992 dissertation, for instance, addresses blackness in *The Wanderer* in the context of wider structures of power oppressing the heroine. Kimberly Lutz's 2000 dissertation discusses *The Wanderer* alongside Victorian uses of blackface in novels by Charles Kingsley and Wilkie Collins. Tara Elizabeth Czechowski, in a brilliant 2009 dissertation, moves more deeply into the subject of race and blackface in the novel, arguing that Juliet's brief assumption of blackness continually haunts her, as other characters persist in associating her with black poverty and crime.

[6] I am drawing on J. L. Austin's notion of the instrumental purpose of performance as working through "performatives," or statements which effect action, as a useful entry point for discussing the way Juliet's performance impacts and changes the community which perceives it.

[7] On average, *Oroonoko* was performed once a year on the British stage between 1695 and 1815, although performances decreased in regularity across the eighteenth century. Arthur Nichols suggests that *Oroonoko* demanded a declamatory style of acting more suited to practices of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century stage (190–91). More broadly, however, *Oroonoko* had a problematic relationship with the Abolition movement as it was used by both sides to illustrate different positions on colonial slavery. Susan B. Iwanisziw's *Oroonoko: Adaptations and Offshoots* offers a detailed history of *Oroonoko*'s life on stage in Southerne's and others' adaptations.

[8] See Susan B. Iwanisziw's *Oroonoko: Adaptations and Offshoots* for a detailed history of these adaptations.

[9] Srinivas Aravamudan argues in *Tropicopolitans* that criticism of *Oroonoko* is fractured along the lines of interpretative possibility Oroonoko and Imoinda represent in the text. If Oroonoko in some ways represents the capacity of a Western writer to imagine a black other, then Imoinda's depiction in the

novel reveals the opposite impulse. Any attempt to interpret Oroonoko then must fall, to some extent, into "oroonokoism" and "imoindaism"; as he explains, "Imoindaism can be seen as a negative theology that mourns the absences created by colonialist representation, just as much as oroonokoism fetishizes the presence of the colonial object" (58).

[10] Elizabeth Holliday (Mrs. William Mills II) acted on the London stage in the 1730s. She first performed Imoinda 7 December 1733 (Highfill, et al. 257–58).

[11] It appears that, despite Hill's advice (he even went so far as to send an annotated copy of the script with detailed instructions on pauses, gestures, and movement), Miss Holliday was not successful in the role: "I can't say, she answered the hopes, I had conceiv'd of her; she spoke too low, and faint a voice; and *look'd* and *mov'd*, with too little force" (146).

[12] Again, it is useful to refer to Dror Wahrman's historicized account of British conceptions of identity in the eighteenth century. Wahrman contends that what he calls the *ancien régime* of identity did not provoke an existential crisis. Yet, as older notions of fluid, mutable identities receded in favor of more modern understandings of a stable, fixed self, the prospect of suffering an existential crisis became more real (198). Juliet, in her unapologetic assumption of troubling disguises, seems to provoke these crises in the characters who encounter her.

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