Creative Aesthetics of Literary Adaptations in Thomas Southerne's Adaptation of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko or the History of the Royal Slave*

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Abstract
Adaptation is re-writing a work that has been previously published in a new form. In this research, Aphrah Behn's narrative work, *Oroonoko* and Thomas Southern's adaptation of the text are read to examine the creative aesthetics of Southern's *Oroonoko* as a literary adaptation. This qualitative research, through comparative and contrastive analysis, argues that Southerne's adaptation of Behn's prose helps to emphasize and escalate Behn's thematic concerns especially the anti-slavery subject matter prominent in the narrative. By extension, Southerne's adaptation also exposes the pretensions of English society, especially the women, through the characters of the Weldonn sisters. In conclusion, this paper asserts that literary adaptations possess creative aesthetics and strongly affirms that the playwright and the prose narrator share the same responsibilities to entertain, criticize or condemn any identified wrong in society.
Keywords: *Aphra Behn, Creative Aesthetics, Literary Adaptation, Deviation, Oroonoko, Thomas Southerne*

Introduction

"Translation, transposition and adaptation have been endemic in European drama: they are how play text [literary texts] have survived the process of history and have become part of a 'great tradition' (which itself is part and parcel of a particular static view of history)." (Etherton 102)

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The adaptation of literary texts, from a novel to a play from a play written in one period to a play of another period or from a written text to a film or movie, is always a tasking effort. No matter how tasking the effort, the adapter can be guided into this uphill task by the aesthetic demands of the genre he is adapting into or of the new medium. The person may as well be guided by the demand for popularity, prestige or by the pressure to create or the monetary benefit he intends to derive or achieve by the adaptation. Adaptation has been an ongoing affair in the history of literary and theatrical studies and these adaptations have been necessitated by the fact that one adaptation challenges others to a kind of interpretative judgement to suit the taste of a new society and the literary genre in vogue.

This paper focuses on the deviation(s) discoverable in adaptations. It argues that deviations are aesthetic and reflect the adapter's ability to be creative in the process of adaptation. In the adaptation of literary texts, the taste of the audience the adapter is working to please and influence may allow for a change in the characters and characterisation of the original work, a twist in its message through which the creative genius of the adapter may become glaring. These changes and the following noted by Etherton may be made to point out the relevance of the adaptation in the dramatist's society or period: 1. the names of the people, places and titles may be changed; 2. the period or the setting may be changed; 3. the framework or context may be changed; 4. the story may be changed; and 5. the themes may be changed (see Etherton 102-103)

Historically, adaptation from play into play is more common than adaptation from prose into play. The following are some examples of plays adapted from other plays: Ola Rotimi adapted Sophocle's *King Oedipus* into *The Gods are Not to Blame*. Fugard, Kani and Ntshona adapted *Antigone* into *The Island*. Wole Soyinka adapted Euripides' *Bacchae* into *the Bacchae of Euripides*. Edward Bond adapted Shakespeare's *King Lear*

into *Lear*. Bertolt Brecht adapted Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* into *Coriolan*. The following are some examples of plays adapted from prose: Wale Ogunyemi adapted D. O. Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumole* into *Langbodo,* Dexter Lyndersay adapted Femi Osofisan's *Kolera Kollege* into *The Play of Kolera Kollege.* Thomas Southerne also adapted Mrs Aphra Behn's *History of the Nun or the Perjured Beauty* into *The Fata Marriage or the Innocent Adultery* and adapted her *Oroonoko or the History of the Royal Slave* into *Oroonoko: A Tragedy*. There have been several other adaptations of Southerne's *Oroonoko: A Tragedy*. These other adaptations, all done during the later Eighteen century when the abolitionist movement became very active in England, are as follows: John Hawkesworth, *Oroonoko, A Tragedy, As it is now Acted at the Theatre-Royal in Drury-Lane... By Thomas Southerne. With Alterations* (Dublin, 1970), Francis Gentleman, *Oroonoko: or the Royal Slave. A tragedy. Altered from Southerne, by Francis Gentleman* (Glasgow 1760). John Ferrier, *the Prince of Angola, A tragedy, Altered from the play of Oroonoko, and Adapted to the circumstances of the Present Times* (Manchester, 1788). And the anonymous, *The Royal Captive* (1767).

Creative Adaptation of Plot Structure

Mrs Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* has two beginnings: an introductory part that almost resembles the 'opening formula' in oral narratives, and the beginning of the story proper. Between these two parts is a deviation from the description of the Indians in Surinam and their way of life. The reason for this deviation may be to give the setting of the story, the sense of a place. This part of the work is successful in drawing a contrast between "primitivism" (seen as a virtue associated with innocence) and "civilization" (seen as a vice associated with corruption). Comparing the Indians to the Africans, we will discover what they share, in terms of innocence or primitivism, a lot in common. So, this part introduces the reader to the idea of the noble savage. This idea became popular in the

Eighteenth Century and Mrs. Behn is acclaimed for being the first to portray it in English Literature.

As said previously, the introductory part of the work is concerned with establishing the story's historical basis. The story of Oroonoko begins in Coramantien. There, Oroonoko, the grandson of the king of Coramantien falls in love with the beautiful Imoinda, daughter of his late old general who died protecting him. The old king gets to know of Imoinda's beauty and falls in love with her. There is a conflict between grand-father and grand-son over who marries Imoinda. Though the grandfather as king succeeds in getting her into his *otan* Oroonoko owns her heart. Through Onahal's ploy, he succeeds in ravishing her even in the king's *otan*. The king gets to know of this and orders that Imoinda and Onahal be sold into slavery. Oroonoko is deceived into believing that Imoinda is dead. The introduction of the captain into the plot prepares the reader for another phase of the story. Through the captain's treachery, Oroonoko and his followers are deceived into slavery. In a recent adaptation done by Biyi Bandele, as commissioned by the Royal Shakespeare Company, Bandele aesthetically enhances this part of the story. Reviewing his adaptation, Anne F. Widmayer identifies that Bandele's adaptation's success could be linked to its "evoking the African culture of Coramantien through song, dance, and mythology" (189).

The middle of the story can be said to begin with Oroonoko's arrival in Surinam. His meeting with Trefry and his reunion with Imoinda are key events in this part. His heroic deeds in the company of the narrator and some others especially, their visits to the Indians are necessary deviations for suspense. His decision to lead the slave revolt marks the end of this part of the story. The last part of the story can be said to begin with Oroonoko's involvement in the slave revolt. This involvement can be viewed as a cause with effects on both the Lt Governor Byam and Oroonoko. Its effects lead to the resolution of the conflict in the novella

in violence. The story ends with the cruel execution of Oroonoko by the order of the Lt Governor.

Despite the deviations in it, the Oroonoko story can be said to have a unified plot. Its events are well arranged and fit the technical description of a plot given by Adeleke when he noted that a typical plot opens with a scene of exposition, introduces the conflict either during or immediately after the exposition, reaches the crisis after adding both major and minor conflicts, and gets to the resolution of the conflict after other action following the crisis. In the cause of the exposition of the story, the first conflict is introduced. The conflict between grand-father and grand-son over Imoinda leads to her sale into slavery. The captain's treachery leads to Oroonoko's deceit into slavery. Oroonoko and Imoinda's reunion in slavery brings in another conflict. He is a prince. He is also a slave. Their unborn child will be a slave if nothing is done about their status; hence, the slave revolt and the final resolution through the killing of Imoinda by Oroonoko and his cruel execution.

Unlike the novelist who has to produce what looks like novelty, the dramatist may take his plot ready-made from fiction or biography, a form of “theft” sanctioned by Shakespeare (Britannica 126). The plot of Southerne’s Oroonoko can be said to have been taken, ready-made from Behn’s *Oroonoko* but not verbatim. The dramatic mode (heroic tragedy) Thomas Southerne wrote demands his ability to select only the needful parts for his work to succeed as a play. This he succeeded in doing. He even went a step further by introducing into the work, a sub-plot which is well woven into the tragic plot.

Southerne’s *Oroonoko* has two plots. The major plot is the tragic story of Oroonoko. The minor plot is the Welldon Sisters husband hunting comic plot. Though these two plots seem parallel, the success of Thomas Southerne in their commingling solves this problem. It also serves his purpose of creating a work that will both purge the emotions of its

intended audience as well as make them laugh at the sexual adventures of their age.

The play is structurally made up of five acts. The first and third acts are made up of two scenes each, and the fifth act is four scenes. The first scene of the first act introduces us to the husband-hunting comic subplot (the story of the Weldon sisters who have come to Surinam from London to find husbands for themselves). The second scene of this act introduces us to the main plot (the story of Oroonoko). The first act of the play then can be seen as the exposition. Oroonoko and Imoinda's reunion in the second act of the play introduces the conflict to be resolved in the play. The first of these conflicts is that the Lt. Governor is in love with Imoinda and her reunion with her husband does not kill his desire for her. The second of them is that Imoinda is pregnant and being a slave, Oroonoko's first child will be born a slave. The seriousness of this does not become glaring to Oroonoko until Aboan, trying to persuade him to lead the slave revolt, echoes and emphasizes it. This spurs him to action. This and his convincing address to the slaves make up the third act. The peak of the story is the slave revolt in the fourth act. Its failure draws the story to its catastrophe in the fifth act. The conflicts are resolved in violence at the end of the play. Aboan stabs himself to death. Imoinda assists Oroonoko in stabbing her to death. Oroonoko kills the Lt. Governor before he stabs himself and dies on the body of his Imoinda.

The comic sub-plot, like the tragedy, progresses from its exposition in the first act into its denouement in the fifth act. At its denouement, which comes before that of Oroonoko's story, the sisters find husbands for themselves (Lucia in Daniel, the window's nincompoop son and Charlotte in Stanmore). Even widow Lackitt finds one in Jack Stanmore. The success of Southerne's play in the commingling of plots can be seen in the fusing of the comic subplot with the tragic one in the fifth act. The women and others in the comic plot join Blanford in support of Oroonoko.

They are all present when the final knot of the story is untied. The play begins in the first act and through the second act gets to the middle in the third act. The fourth act is the peak of the story. The story ends in the fifth act. As for complexity, the two plots of the play are complex. Elements of surprise and suspense keep the reader or audience on the very edge of their seat till the final knot is untied. Mrs Behn in her novella has the introductory part where she attempts to establish the historical basis of her story. This is followed by events in the story that took place in Coramantien. All these except the conflict over Imoinda, have been completely omitted from the adaptation.

Thomas Southerne begins his story with the slaves' purchase and allotment scene. This scene shows that the play begins *in media res*. This scene can be viewed as a dramatisation of the introductory paragraph to Behn's Oroonoko story, a paragraph dealing with how slaves are purchased from captains of ships. This scene also technically links the comic subplot to the tragic main plot. As part of this scene, the part of Behn's story dealing with how Oroonoko is deceived into slavery by the English captain is reduced and given as part of the dialogue by Captain Driver.

Southerne in his play concentrated on aspects of the novella relevant to the major tragic events and omitted events irrelevant to it. Oroonoko's heroic deeds such as the killing of the tiger and the other things he did in the novella while with the narrator and others were all omitted from the play including the visit to the Indians. Taking a cue from this visit, Southerne introduces into his play the war against the Indians in which Oroonoko fights on the English side despite his distrust of the treacherous Captain Driver and some planters. His winning this war, viewed interpretatively, means his winning back Imoinda. The Lt Governor who has been in love with her since she came to Surinam could not rescue her from the hands of the Indians. The reunion of Oroonoko with Imoinda in the play is completely different from the one in the

novella. While the one in the novella can be seen as a childish coincidence, the one in the play is technically planned. The childish nature of the original could have been the reason for this change.

Also, Southerne introduced into his plot an aspect not present in the novella. In his play, the Lt-Governor falls in love with Imoinda and attempts to rape her in the fifth act though he did not succeed because of Blanford's intrusion. There are clues in the novella that can be said to have prompted Southerne in this regard. Mrs. Behn said of Trefy through the narrator thus, "... for his part, he had done nothing but sigh for her ever since she came, and that all the white beauties he had seen never charmed him so absolutely as this fine creature had done..." (188). For theatrical effects, Southerne reduced some parts of the original story that could not be completely omitted. Oroonoko and his grandfather's conflict over Imoinda in Coramantien was not only reduced to dialogues to be said by Oroonoko but changed. The conflict is no longer that between grandfather and grandson as depicted in the novella but that between father and son in Angola.

Other changes made by Southerne include: (a) Captain Driver instead of moving on to London as the novella depicts stays behind in Surinam in the play; (b) In the novella, Imoinda gets pregnant after her reunion with Oroonoko. In the play she is pregnant even before she gets to the plantation (see 2.2. 98 and 100); (c) Aboan persuades Oroonoko to lead the slave revolt in the play. Oroonoko is the innovator of the revolt in the novella; (d) Oroonoko kills Captain Driver in the slave revolt. This is different from Imoinda shooting Byam with a poisoned arrow in the novella. In addition, a significant change in the plot of the novella executed in the play comes at the end of the play. The horror and fearful spectacle of Oroonoko's and Imoinda's death in Behn is replaced by a pathetic spectacle where Oroonoko has to be persuaded by Imoinda to kill them both to vindicate the honour and innocence of their love. His

hands have to be held in hers to guide the knife into her body. In addition to this, Behn's Oroonoko does not succeed in his revenge plan. His monstrous killing of Imoinda occurs deep in the forest while his death is made a public spectacle. Southerne's Oroonoko triumphs in death. He succeeds in killing the Lt- Governor before himself. Thus, he succeeds in sending the Lt-Governor before him to the land of the dead to "be a witness of that happiness in the next world which he denied us here" (5.4.303-304).

Creative Adaptation and Language

Mrs Behn wrote in prose and this granted her freedom to express herself fully with language. She had the freedom not only to tell her story but also to show the readers, her characters through their dialogues in the form of a series of direct speeches. She did this with much success. Her description of the Indians in Surinam, their (stock of) trade, and their innocence (comparable to the state of man before the fall of Adam) shows this. Her description of Oroonoko as

> pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancyd: The most famous statuary cou'd not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown rusty black which most of that nation are, but of perfect ebony, or polished jelt. His eyes were the most awful 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... (154)

is vivid. And of Imoinda she writes: "... 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 behold..." an extract which shows her elegance in the use of language.

Behn's style of expression and elegant use of words deserve commendation. She wrote as if she was addressing a sympathetic audience. The story is told with a confidence that shows that she had a reflection of the beginning and end of the story firmly in her mind. She told the story using the internal (a participant's) point of view - naturally

bringing Oroonoko's situation closer to the reader through the perspective shown and the amount and quality of information given.

> We realise the crucial role of words when we make the simple reflection that every single idea, fact or viewpoint in a play has to be spoken aloud. The dialogue is all the language of a play: the author cannot intrude with explanatory, evaluative or descriptive passages of comment as the novelist may, his dialogue must further the plot, illuminate character, create an appropriate atmosphere or tone and enable the audience to grasp the underlying theme or moral idea of the play, and do all these things simultaneously. (Watson 13)

Noticeable in Southerne's Oroonoko is the language of prose and verse. In areas where the dramatist uses the language of prose, it is presented in a conversational mode. This aspect of the play brings it very close to the contemporary audience of the seventeenth century the play was written. Though this aspect of the play is prosaic and conversational, Southerne still achieves the economy of words expected of a person writing for the theatre. Throughout the comic subplot and some instances in the main plot, the dialogues are cast in this mode. Blanford, the Lt. Governor, Holtman and the comic characters, even when they feature in the tragic plot, all speak in prose. The tragic plot, especially dialogues by the major characters, is cast in verse. This stems from the dramatist's need to write in a language that is explicit and specific. Moreover, a verse often has detail, the structure of sight and sound. Oroonoko throughout the play speaks in verse. This goes a long way to reveal details about his personality as a prince. Aboan speaks in verse when he tries to convince Oroonoko to lead the slave revolt. This aspect shows the motivating effects of verse on characters of great personalities. The use of prose and verse in the play has two effects on the audience. While the prose is closer to the audience and allows it to laugh at the sexual adventures of the age, the verse forces it back into the intensity of the serious situation on stage. It transports it imaginatively into the realm of the heroic Oroonoko. The

use of verse in the play enables Southerne to focus with great clarity on the essential issue of his play.

Generally speaking, Southerne's language is rich both in prose and in verse. His words are well-selected and combined. This added greatly to the success of the play. Apart from the comic subplot introduced into the play, Southerne's *Oroonoko* still has some of its parts distinct from Behn's. Some parts of the original plot have been omitted completely from it and some new parts introduced into it. Some parts have been reduced for theatrical reasons and some changed.

Comparing the language of both texts, as has been noted, Behn's *Oroonoko* is written in prose. This allowed her the freedom to both tell and show, using descriptive details and dialogue in inverted commas. Southerne's *Oroonoko's* main plot is written in verse mode. A play is limited by the demands of its genre. Thus, in his adaptation of the language of a novella for his play, Thomas Southerne is conscious of the demands of drama. Most of what he does in the play is to show the audience through the highly reduced language of the dialogues, the pathetic story of Oroonoko. Even in areas where he had adapted what Mrs Aphra Behn presented in her novella as a direct speech, he made the language more poetic and laced with passion. An example can be seen in the manner he adapted the following speech in Behn's novella:

> Tuscan, who bowing at the feet of Ceaser, cry'd, "My Lord, we have listen'd with joy and attention to what you have said; and, were we only Men, would follow so great a leader through the world. But O! Consider we are Husbands and Parents too, and have Things more dearly to us than life; our Wives and Children, unfit for travel in those impassable Woods, Mountains and Bogs. We have not only difficult Lands to overcome, but Rivers to wade, and Mountains to encounter; ravenous Beasts of Prey." (207)

His adaptation in his *Oroonoko* reads thus:

> Slave: Great sir, we have attended all you said,
> With silent joy and admiration:
> And, were we only men, would follow such,

So great a leader through the untried world.
But, Oh! Consider we have other names,
Husbands and fathers, have things more dear
To us than life, our children and wives
unfit for such an expedition:
What must become of them? (3.4.9.17)

As can be seen from the above extracts, the language of the play is dramatic, is specific and highly poetic. It is reduced or less verbose than the language of the novella.

Creative Adaptation and Thematic Choices

On the one hand, what is often said to be the central theme of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* is the theme of slavery. The novella though does not openly talk against slavery but the ill-treatment of slaves. This and especially the circumstance of Oroonoko himself can be said to consist of the elements that make the novella not only anti-slavery but also anti-racialism. Thus, Behn's *Oroonoko* became "the first writing on the discredit of racialism and the horror of buying and selling our kind." (Tibble 117). It is this horror of slavery that Oroonoko rejects outrightly at the end of the novella. He would kill himself, his wife and his unborn child rather than see them live as slaves.

Apart from discrediting racialism and slavery, Behn's *Oroonoko* also has several other themes and the theme of treachery is one of them. The captain's deceit of Oroonoko is the first trace of this treachery. Lt-Governor Byam's failure to keep to his words (but deceitfully plan Oroonoko's execution) serves as extra evidence of this. But, looking at the way this theme is treated, does it mean that when those in power are involved in treacherous acts, they always go scot-free? This question is relevant here as both the captain and to a great extent, the Lt Governor are never brought to book for their treacherous acts. This seems to give a picture of what is happening in our local community, in the national community and in the world community or the world as a global village. Men with either political or economic power or both seem to deceitfully

use men without any of these powers to achieve their ends or make wealth. This is also true of our so-called super-power nations. They made their wealth using deceitfully the third world nations. Today, they still deceitfully use these nations to achieve their selfish ends.

The theme of cowardice is also one of these other themes. The reaction of the black slaves when the slave revolt failed shows an example of this. But this cowardice can be seen as the way Europe views Africa and Africans. This view is not only of Africans as cowards but also as savages, cannibals, and inferiors. This has always been the picture painted by European writers before and after Behn. The picture of the African as inferior and barbarous is that which is painted by William Shakespeare in his *Othello*. According to S.E. Ogude, "the play abounds in the vocabulary of abuse... Othello is an 'old black ram,' he is the 'devil,' 'an abuser of the world'..." (23). Daniel Defoe in *Robinson Crusoe* paints a picture of Africans who are cannibals and savages, inferior to Caucasians. Man Friday, in the novel, is first a cannibal, then a savage and because of his inferiority, a slave to Robinson Crusoe. The view of Africans as barbarous by Europe can be seen as the reason why Mrs. Behn paints a picture of a hero who when pushed to the wall dumps civility and fully displays the savageness the African has always been known to portray. This view of Africans as less human has not to date completely changed. Hence, Ogude claims in *Genius in Bondage*, and rightly true at that:

> It is true, of course, that in spite of centuries of contact, and in spite of the civilising missions of Europeans to Africa, the white man, in his prejudice and bigotry, has come to regard savagery as peculiarly African as the black skin. (7)

The novella can also be said to talk about the religion of humanity. The novella portrays that there are two religions in the human community: the religion based on the principles of pretension and the religion based on the principles of truth, reality and virtue. The first of these religions is the religion of Europe. The second is the religion of Oroonoko and

Imoinda, a religion that requires that your word be as good as your bond, a religion of nobility. This perhaps can be regarded as the religion of the true African. As an African, to the European, Oroonoko is perceived as a savage. But as a practitioner of the religion of nobility, he is a noble savage. Hence, Mrs Aphra Behn is the first European writer to portray that some savages can be noble. She is the first to paint the picture of a noble savage in English literature.

The theme of avarice is also present in Behn's *Oroonoko*. This theme is highlighted through the actions of the planters. Their major concern in the novella is how to increase their wealth and not the welfare of the slaves who labour in the sugar cane plantations that produce that wealth. This theme is one of the anti-slavery themes in the novella.

On the other hand, the central theme of Southerne's *Oroonoko* is the circumstances of slavery. This is the circumstance Oroonoko and Imoinda find themselves. Oroonoko's case is a pathetic one. He is a prince who has been deceived into slavery. In his father's kingdom in Angola, he is of the ruling class but as a result of slavery, he has been pushed down the rung of the ladder. He is now a slave; he was once a seller of slaves. The slave revolt scene portraying him chained to the floor further emphasizes his pathetic circumstance as a slave. The trade in slaves is not seen as a bad enterprise for even Oroonoko himself, before agreeing to lead the slave revolt, proclaims the need for slaves who have been purchased properly to be loyal to their masters.

The themes of love and marriage also abound in the play. These themes are closely linked. The comic sub-plot is centred on these themes. The tragic plot is also built on them. For marriage and per-adventure love, the Welldon sisters leave London for Surinam. For the same purpose, Charlotte disguises herself almost throughout the play as a man. To sustain their love and marriage, Oroonoko and Imoinda have to face

death. Imoinda has to persuade her husband to kill them both. These themes of love and marriage are closely linked with the duties of Oroonoko and Imoinda as soon-to-be parents to save their would-be children from the scourge of slavery.

Also present in the play is the theme of fate. The tragedy of Oroonoko and his Imoinda can be seen to portray the place of fate in human existence. Thus, Oroonoko in the play sighs that he and his wife "were born to suffer" (5.4.157). It can then be said that it is their fate that they become slaves. In their bid to change this fate and perhaps also save their would-be children from that fate, violence became inevitable. This violence, of course, results in their death. But in death, they triumphed over fate.

The theme of treachery in the play is treated in such a way as to show that for every labour, there is a wage. The reward for treachery in the play is death. Hence, for his treachery, Captain Driver is killed in the slave revolt and the Lt-Governor has to die before Oroonoko triumphs in death. Thus, it is glaring that poetic justice is brought into play in Southerne's *Oroonoko*. The theme of avarice is also treated in the play in such a way as to show that what matters in social wealth is the creation of wealth and not how wealth is s created. That Captain Driver created wealth, though by deceiving Oroonoko into slavery, is what matters; not the vice of treachery or deceit. This is a picture of Europe during the slave trade, after the slave trade and till date. Avarice is not a trait only of Europe but also America. It is a trait of almost all nations.

The inter-racial marriage in the play creates room for a look at the interpretative implication of the relationship between Imoinda and Oroonoko. Being a white person, it is assumed that she has betrayed her race by marrying below her racial class that is, outside her race. This may explain the Lt-Governor's insistence on having her despite knowing that she is married. This may also explain why he attempts to rape her. It is almost unlikely that a white person would be held as a slave, even in

those days. This particular aspect of the play seems to have been placed there to prepare society for the colouration of the world as a global village.

Being an adaptation of Behn's *Oroonoko*, Southerne's version seems to have inherited almost all the themes in the novella. However, the way some of the inherited themes are treated in the play is slightly different from the way they are treated in the novella. Starting from the theme of treachery, the way it is treated by Thomas Southerne in his play is quite different from the way Mrs Aphra Behn treated it in her novella. For, in Behn's *Oroonoko*, there is no poetic justice. Those who indulge in treachery in the novella seem to go unpunished, creating the impression that some people are above natural justice. This is not the case in Southerne's *Oroonoko*. He modifies this theme in his play and ensures there is poetic justice, creating the impression that no one is above natural justice. The Lt-Governor and Captain Driver have to pay for their treachery with their lives.

The changing of Imoinda's race by Southerne in his play changes the intra-racial marriage depicted in Behn's novella to an inter-racial one. As has been noted earlier, the change in Imoinda's race explains the Lt-Governor's behaviour towards her in the play. In Behn's novella, this is not present. This is Southerne's invention. Apart from this, this race unwriting creates also an explanation for Oroonoko's delay in carrying out the killing of Imoinda. He is a Blackman and by the assumption of the whites, inferior. A Blackman killing a white woman, whatever position she occupies in society, would have caused the audience to frown. So, to solve this problem, Southerne makes Imoinda hold Oroonoko's hands in hers and guide the knife into her stomach. In addition, the audience would have frowned if a white man is made to fall in love with a black woman or behave towards a black woman the way the Lt-Governor behaves toward Imoinda. Thus, we can also say that Southerne changes Imoinda's race to be able to introduce into the play the aspect of the play

that deals with the Lt-Governor falling in love with Imoinda. And of course, it must not be forgotten that Imoinda is presented as a slave and the Lt-Governor as a slave owner. Thus, it can also be said that the playwright, in this aspect, actually brings to the fore, the behaviour of most slave owners towards their female slaves. They often have forced illicit affairs with them and people on their plantations with mulattos.

Similar, in both books, is the way the theme of slavery is treated. Both authors being Europeans did not directly decry the slave trade. They tried to evade a direct attack. But they can still be applauded for the way they both handled the ill-treatment of slaves and for either intentionally or unintentionally cleverly leaving traces of elements that can form the thesis for anti-slavery literature in their books.

Conclusion

That Southerne's adaptation of Behn's Oroonoko displays his creativity leaving little or no room for questioning. The changes in the plot of the novella carried out in the play confirm that it does. The new parts introduced into the play and the "whitening" of Imoinda's skin in the play especially confirm it. In his adaptation, Southerne takes into cognizance his society. This allows him to change the plot of the original story to meet the theatrical preferences of his society. This accounts for the distortion in not only the character of Imoinda but also in that of Oroonoko. Thus, one can say that his success in achieving this feat goes a long way to show his prowess in creativity. Southerne's Oroonoko has a life of its own. It is distinct in the way it handled its themes, providing answers to questions Behn raised in her novella but to which, because of the way she handled her themes, could not provide adequate answers. It is unique in its compactness and unity. This later achievement can be linked with Southerne's displayed ability to properly prune the original story, re-writing only relevant parts and modifying the parts that needed modification. Southerne can erase the horror in Mrs Behn's *Oroonoko* by creating instead, a pathetic tragedy. His individuality is displayed in this

regard. He succeeded in giving life to Behn's already lively story. The comic subplot in the play is entirely Southerne's creation. He does not only bring in this sub-plot to create a contrast to the tragic story of Oroonoko but also weaves it artistically into the fabric of his play, bringing the two plots that to many adaptors after him, seem parallel bed-fellows, together to become one like man and wife, like Oroonoko and Imoinda. Based on the above, we can safely conclude that one of the reasons why Southerne adapted Behn's *Oroonoko* into a play was to display his creative ability. His adaptation stands as a sample of a successful adaptation and demonstrates the creative aesthetics of literary adaptations.

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