The Natural Embroidery of Thomas Southerne's Oroonoko

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THE NATURAL EMBROIDERY OF THOMAS SOUTHERNE’S *OROONOKO*

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, I plan to investigate the role of the landscape in Thomas Southerne’s play Oroonoko. Most scholarship on Oroonoko focuses on the relationship between Southerne’s play and Aphra Behn’s novella of the same name. In particular, the scholarly conversation has focused on the way that Southerne white-washed Aphra Behn’s character Imoininda. While this distinction is notable, my research, instead, will focus on the way these bodies—both white and black, colonizer and colonized—are framed by 18th century gardening rhetoric. This rhetoric provided naturally conceived tools for nurturing these bodies. I plan to argue that the language of the natural world used in the play demonstrates the role of landscape in the formation of British national identity.
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Introduction

This project investigates the relationship between landscape design and colonial power during the emergence of the eighteenth-century British Empire. I will walk you through the development of the British garden in order to demonstrate the ways in which the British garden acts as a network of theoretical and physical relationships between bodies—male, female, white, black, British, racialized, human, and natural—and the ways in which these bodies are both designers themselves and designed upon by others. This discussion of bodies and design frames my close reading of Thomas Southerne’s 1688 play *Oroonoko*. My close reading will consider the implications of the relationships between the various bodies, particularly the white female body, and the design of landscapes within the eighteenth-century British Empire. I am particularly interested in examining the way in which Southerne’s theatrical version of *Oroonoko* highlights racial anxiety, signifiers of class, and gender politics within the growing British Empire. In the play, these cultural insecurities are naturalized, transferred across landscapes, and performed for British consumption. The medium of theater encourages eighteenth-century audiences to withhold judgment and enter into a porous performance of race, class, and gender roles. This investigation into the performance of *Oroonoko* destabilizes the binaries of nature and culture; of social performance and natural processes; of a unified British empire and the “other,” non-British cultures in order to uncover the ways in which the British used their natural landscapes as tools of colonial power.

Since this project mends together several seemingly disparate bodies of design, I want to start by examining a couple of eighteenth-century prints that depict these intertwined spaces of design. The following images depict the relationship between white bodies and
garden landscapes (Figure 1, Figure 2). The two prints that I have here were created by the French artist Nicolas de Larmessin (1640-1725) in a series named “Habites des métiers et profession,” which was created circa 1695. The entire series includes about one hundred images of men and women dressed in the tools of a variety of popular professions. Here I have two prints from the series that are relevant to my discussion.

Figure 1: "Habit de Jardinier." Larmessin, 1695. Figure 2: "Habit de Jardinier Fleurist." Larmessin, 1695.

These two prints reveal the different ways in which men and women were socially positioned in relationship to the garden. Figure 1 displays “Habit de Jardinier” or the clothing of the male gardener, who is depicted in a moment of work. His body is constructed from carefully pruned bushes and flowers, his sleeves are pots of plants, and he carries a watering-can, hoes, and shovels as though he is about to go create or tend a section of the garden. He stands above a carefully crafted landscape garden designed in a
knot style\textsuperscript{1}. Groups of people populate the background, walking around the garden, admiring the intricate knot designs and the expansive walkways that were arguably created by this male gardener. Though his outfit is primarily made of natural materials, his hands are free to carry the tools of design.

The corresponding print in Figure 2, “Habit de Jardinere Fleurist” depicts a female dressed as the garden. Her body is not free to work in the garden; instead she is dressed to ornament the garden. Her hands are occupied with plants and her dress is carefully constructed by pruned flowers and bushes. Interestingly, the bodice of her dress is made from a terrace-like construction that mimics the terrace that she stands on. The body of this woman, like the flower garden behind her, is a space of spectacle. The terrace she stands on functions as a sort of theater seating while the garden behind her becomes the stage, a stage that invites the gaze of the viewer and anticipates a performance of practiced social behaviors. Similarly, her body is a microcosm of this space. Her body functions as both an imitation of the constructed garden and an adorning feature of the landscape garden. Unlike the print of the male gardener, the female floriest stands in front of an empty garden. Visitors and observers are not encouraged to interact with her garden space; rather, we, as the viewers of the print, are the visitors and observers, admiring her body as part of the pleasure of the cultivated garden space. While the female body is more obviously designed for display, it is important to consider that both the male gardener and the female florist are not meeting the gaze of the viewer: both of their eyes are shifted to the side of the frame, positioning their bodies, and their garden backgrounds as a spectacle. This underscores the visual pleasure of their work: both

\textsuperscript{1} Knot gardens are distinguished by a square frame, which is filled with intricate maze-like and carefully pruned plant designs. Most simply, a knot garden is a highly manipulated garden construct.
characters work in the garden in order to develop a visual aesthetic. The act of gardening work is a performance. Additionally, the result of garden work creates a space of performance. In this way, we can begin to consider the theatrical representation of female garden work.²

As an object and space of adornment, the female body and the garden become movable emblems of the gardener’s powers of design. In the print, “The Flower Garden” (Figure 3), the already decorative or exaggerated wig of the female is accentuated by the presence of a designed landscape garden. Unlike the female florist, this female figure is entirely on display. Her body is illustrated in profile, making her complicit with the gaze of the viewer. She is further dehumanized by her lack of hands and lower extremities. Her body, instead, is a canvas for the designs of the white male gardener. In fact, a man, presumably the garden designer

² The prints in both Figure 1 and Figure 2 were created by the French artist Nicolas de Larmessin (1640-1725). de Larmessin came from a family of engravers and printers, who worked in France. The two prints that I have depicted in this project are from his series “Habits des métiers et professions” (circa 1695), which includes about one hundred images of men and women dressed in the tools of various popular professions. This series is a parody of the 14th and 15th century series of prints entitled “Dance of Death,” which would depict the bones or ghosts of bodies draped in the clothes and tools of various trades. Though de Larmessin was inspired by this old style of print, his prints do not rely on the suggestion of bodies; instead, his tools of the trade build actual bodies. His clothes are not shaped to suggest the presence of a body, or the way in which death was an inevitable result of work. His clothes present real bodies and real people working, alive, and using the tools of their trade. His prints bring life to the materials of work, suggesting movement and use value through the bodies that were shaped by the tools.
or the estate owner, surveys the garden on top of the wig. The female body is created and ornamented through socially contrived materials that are literally under the gaze of a male designer. The designed pieces of the female wardrobe are made a spectacle within a spectacle. At the end of the designed landscape garden, the male designer gazes on a statue, representing the influence of empirical power over “other” landscapes. The statue is an emblem of an “other” space, and in the garden, it is transformed into a monument of the great expanse of British colonial power. The statue represents the way in which the British would take emblems of other cultures and place them into their gardens. Her wig becomes a decorative space as well as a circumscribed space of design. She becomes a walking signifier for British male empirical power. The designed flower garden on her body displays and ornaments the power of the British Empire.

These prints are reminders of the visual performance of the garden. Gardens are often constructed for visual pleasure. Furthermore the design and experience of the pleasure garden constructs ideas of social norms and provides the space to practice acceptable social behaviors. In this way, I am able to examine British gardening practices in order to investigate the role of natural landscapes in the pursuit of British colonial power. My project is organized into several sections that highlight the various connections between British gardening practices and colonial power in the Caribbean throughout the long eighteenth century. First, I will examine the role and practice of gardening in the British Empire. I will define what I mean by the landscape of the British Empire and then work through the ways in which the British conceptualized and practiced gardening. I will then look at the ways in which the practice of gardening can be understood as a theatrical performance. This theory of a garden performance is applied
to a reading of Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, where I will closely examine the ways in which ideas of landscape and empire were practiced, performed, and absorbed by eighteenth-century British theatergoers. Finally, I will end by suggesting the ways in which the garden becomes a character itself, not anthropomorphized, but a body that is both a part and apart of British culture.

Throughout the project, I will refer to prints from gardening books along with gardening rhetoric from popular eighteenth-century cultural texts, such as Joseph Addison’s *The Spectator*, in order to illustrate and focus my discussion on the theoretical and physical tending of the British garden. Through the mending of bodies of performance, this project aims to deconstruct the binary of nature and culture in order to suggest that the British used garden design to nurture illusions of a fertile transatlantic British empire. Gardens were more than a practical source of income and produce: gardens allowed the British to identify themselves as the Creator, claiming, developing, and using nature to sculpt a unified British Empire.
Chapter 1: Gardening the Eighteenth-Century British Empire

Cultivating “The British” Garden

In order to consider British landscape design at the beginning of the eighteenth century, it is important to consider the variety of landscapes that constitute the British Empire. First, I must qualify what I mean by “The British,” since the British Isles themselves are a conglomeration of different landscapes and cultures: Scotland, Wales, Ireland, and England. The notion of “The British” is an attempt to cultivate a sense of unity despite inherent cultural differences of each of the British Isles. As Linda Colley has argued, the British Empire is a “composite structure forged […] out of different cultures and kingdoms” (312). Fittingly, Colley refers to the notion of “The British” as an “invention” (312). The British refers to a fragmented sense of identity, a makeshift form of selfhood. To claim to be a part of “The British” identity means that one is placed in a nation of interactions, a network that is determined to homogenize the difference of geographical locales. Though citizens of the British Empire resided in a network of identities, they were able to unite because of their shared understanding of “other” landscapes and cultures. The pursuit of a transatlantic empire became a “cause in common” that united the four central geographical locales of the British Isles (312).

Since the British Empire encompassed such a large and diverse network of identities, the invention of “The British” identity was cultivated through cultural texts, such as journals, art, theater, and landscape design. As Colley points out, the sense of an embodied difference of a not-British, or “other,” identity… “was not confined to those who had direct experience of colonial life” (325). These cultural texts where a way to familiarize the British with “other” landscapes and cultures in order to invent a widely understood measure of difference. The distinction of what is different, how it is different,
and where it is different was scripted, depicted, and performed. Difference was not based on embodied experience; instead, difference, similar to the invented unity of the British identity, was a carefully constructed illusion. As Kathleen Wilson asserts in her book “The Island Race,” the British notion of empire “was performed and constituted by the bodies practices, exchanges, and movements of peoples across the globe” (28). As the British traveled across the globe, they created routes of exchange that developed relationships between the British and their desire to claim the spaces of other nations.

A definition of difference became the foundational unity of The British identity. This illusion of nationhood was underscored by a general unfamiliarity with the geographical location of colonized cultures. For example, my case study text, Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, moves the action of the play from the familiarity of London to the “other” location of Suriname in the Caribbean. Though the play text indicates that Suriname is a colony in the West Indies, Suriname is actually located on the northern coast of South America (Figure 4). This indicates the British attitude towards the colonies, an attitude that generalized the location and the use of the colonies. The colonies were a space elsewhere, an “other” landscape, as compared to the measured spaces and cultivated designs of the British gardens. The landscape of these “other spaces” was given authority and worth simply by its inclusion in the performance of British transatlantic power.

Figure 4: Suriname Map (Artwin)
As a result, The British is found within a nexus of always changing relationships. Wilson expands her notions of empire exchange, when she states that “national identity and its disavowal marked various points on a historical continuum of being and becoming for individuals and groups in many different social and geographical locations” (204). The British identity is not dependent on a specific set of qualities; rather, The British identity exists within a fluctuation of relationships between social constructs and geographical locations. This definition also explores the ways in which the British found value in the traditions of other geographical locations. Wilson concludes that “The conditions of possibility for their divergent or collective experiences were firmly rooted in the extended network of communication, diaspora, and culture created by the eighteenth-century British empire” (204). As Wilson notes, the British Empire is a “network,” meaning that the British Empire is not balanced on familiar or related experiences; rather this British network thrives on a divergence of collected experiences of people within movement. As a result, the British Empire is not a fixed script of behavior, circumscribed by location. Rather, the British Empire is a developing network of cultural exchange.

This nexus of interactions creates a limitless amount of opportunities for exploring the ideology and practices of The British in the eighteenth century. I have chosen to explore the geographic exchanges that establish the implied boundaries of The British identity. Geographic exchanges highlight the importance of place-making, thus bringing together cultural and environmental factors that mitigate interactions (and potential interactions) with the natural aspects of a geographic locale. Accordingly, I will examine the ways in which the British interact with the natural materials of empire.
building, specifically through the creation, design, and maintenance of British landscape gardens. I examine the ways in which the British used landscape design, specifically gardens, as a space to perform a naturalized definition of the “us” and “them” binary. This invented binary, however, is undone by the natural materials that are used to design it.

**Gardening as Empire Building**

The notion of the British Empire as a network of cultural exchange can be explored through an examination of the eighteenth-century British garden. John Dixon Hunt, a garden historian, who has done extensive research on the development of the eighteenth century British garden, asserts that the etymology of the garden “strongly hints at the fashion in which the garden summarizes many activities, all of which share a basic human need for protective reassurance” (What on Earth is a Garden 20). The garden is associated with some sense of control and containment. The British garden is a spatial opportunity for the British to imagine and design their exchanges with other cultural and geographic locales. As Hunt notes, even the word garden alludes to a kind of culturally controlled enclosure. The garden, then, is a space for the British to safely explore the possibilities of exchange within the fluctuations of a developing empire. The garden space is a microcosm of the potential for empire.

In the garden, the British can assert the power of design in order to contemplate, consider, and imagine their ideals within carefully enclosed and protected landscapes. Hunt expands his definition of gardens by asserting that “Gardens, in short, are both entities within themselves and a focus of human speculations, propositions, and negotiations” (6). Hunt explains that the act of creating a garden is similar to the creation of any other consumable cultural text. As cultural texts, the garden is no longer enclosed
by the British mainland; rather, the material make-up of the garden reflects as well as
develops a tangible, public network of British ideals that both reach deep into historical
foundations of British identity formation as well as grow into a redeveloping, British-
centered world.

During the eighteenth century, gardens become a normal feature of the British
landscape. In fact, some historians, such as John Dixon Hunt and Keith Thomas, refer to
this period as the “Gardening Revolution,” which coincided with the other wars,
revolutions, and cultural expansion of the time period. During the Gardening Revolution,
gardening as a profession became more prestigious; gardening books became
increasingly popular and widespread; and garden illustration become a typical pastime.
The British became obsessed with enclosing, owning, and defining their landscapes.
Gardens were a space of creative ownership: a space that, through its design, asserts the
aesthetic power of the owner. Gardens, thus, were an example of a cultural landscape
more than a natural landscape. Peirce Lewis defines cultural landscape as “everything
that humans do to the natural earth for whatever purpose most commonly for material
profit, aesthetic pleasure, spiritual fulfillment, personal comfort, and communal safety
(“Common Landscapes as Historic Documents” 116). A garden is an enclosed space
designed with natural materials to represent the cultural ideals of the owner. Cultural
landscapes are spaces that are apart from nature, even though they are founded on and
shaped through natural materials. Cultural landscapes focus on the becoming of human
design in these spaces rather than on the quality of the original space. In this way, both
the plants as well as the act of tending the garden become useful lenses for analyzing the
ways that the British have worked their power into other locations in the world.
The British became obsessed with envisioning their gardens as emblems of a growing empire. As an emblem of empire, the garden was a domestic space that was created with “other” flora and relics from colonized locales. The “other” materials of the garden allowed for the illusion of controlled cultural landscapes. Accordingly, the garden transformed into a representation of the global network of British colonial power. As the garden historian John Dixon Hunt suggests in his essay *What is a Garden Anyway*, gardens refer to “a world beyond its own confines. Garden enclosures both define their spaces and appeal across boundaries—by way of representation, imitation, and allusion—to a world dispersed elsewhere” (20). Hunt argues that gardens function as a symbol of a British global identity—an identity that conflates designs of the natural world with the expansive potential of British power. Thus, the British garden symbolizes control within the British homeland as well as dominance over colonial landscapes. Gardens, therefore, are in the act of “place-making,” which means that the act of enclosing the natural world is always in process. Another way to conceive of this transitive “place-making” garden is to consider the garden as a place in performance. The garden is an interaction between the earth, the gardener, and the fluctuation of social and cultural ideals. The garden is a space of variation, of possible interactions.

Most commonly, British gardens have been studied for their aesthetic beauty. In the essay “Gardens and Society in Eighteenth-Century England,” Thomas Williamson articulates that “gardens, like large houses and other elite artifacts in eighteenth-century England, are usually studied by art historians. They are typically analyzed as a separate area of human activity, and few attempts have been made to examine their development within a wider social and economic context” (94). He goes on to look at the stylistic
development of gardens in the long eighteenth century. Williamson has called for a reconsideration of the role of the garden in the development of empire in the eighteenth-century Britain; however, he limits this study to a consideration of the garden as artifact, a cultural material to be studied as an aesthetic object. Williamson describes gardens as separate from landscape, geography, and the Natural World. Instead, gardens are artifacts: a human creation, an historical document, which records human development. While gardens are a sort of artifact, gardens are also a negotiation between human and natural materials. Gardens are a tangible and natural history of place as told by the landscape and the people that occupy that landscape.

It is important to note that while gardens are representative of human behaviors, these human behaviors are predicated on the use of already available natural materials. Gardens are embedded in landscapes that can be manipulated to represent cultural ideals, but are ultimately a source of power that is separate from the designs of culture. As Hunt argues, “gardens are hospitable to a cluster of archetypal human needs and behaviors” (“What on Earth is a Garden” 7). Gardens are created out of the binary between nature and culture. In most cases, natural materials and man-made materials are melded together to develop the garden space. Arguably, the natural materials are colonized by the gardener and enclosed in the garden space in order to serve an aesthetic and personal purpose. The garden demonstrates the social, economic, and political control of the garden owner. The garden provides a safe, confined space to enjoy the beauty of nature and to assert the parameters of man’s relationship with this nature.

British gardens represent particular aesthetic ideologies; however, British gardens are also created from natural materials, and thus can be studied as a concentrated space of
natural processes. The garden is a controlled space, but it is a space that must always be worked and reworked. It is a space with human expectations, but subject to conditions and processes outside of human, and most importantly British, control. As Hunt notes, “Above all, it is useful to think of the garden as typically a place of paradox, being the work of men and women yet created from elements of nature, the two held in some precious and precarious tension” (6). In defining the cultural implications of the garden space, he notes the difference between “work” and “creation” in the development of the garden. Men and women who occupy and enjoy the garden employ themselves in tending the garden—the work of gardens. However, the garden is a natural “creation.” Ultimately, the men and women, who tend the garden, are dependent upon the creation as source materials and a repository for their work. A garden is developed through the tension of human design and natural materials. A garden is a combative space that is never static—“a precious and precarious tension” (6). The garden is always in negotiation, always growing towards some purpose, whether contrived by humans or developed naturally. Gardens are a mix of natural materials and human tools. Moreover, gardens are spaces to imagine the connections between environments, spaces, and the design of identities within the tension of nature and culture. In other words, gardens must be considered as a reworking of an always already landscape, not the creation of a new space.

**Inheriting the Work of the Garden Empire**

The garden as an already created space is embedded in the British understanding of the biblical Garden of Eden. In considering the British garden as rooted in God’s first garden, the British were placing themselves within a divine inheritance of landscape creation and design. The British considered themselves fulfilling God’s purpose by
manipulating their landscapes. In his book *Man and The Natural World*, Keith Thomas argues that during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the preaching of the Genesis story led the British to believe that “Man’s authority over the natural world was thus virtually unlimited (21). Man, or more specifically the British, believed that the Bible dictated complete human control over the natural world. This belief, however, ignores the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden. Importantly, throughout the narrative of the Garden of Eden, man is conflated with the materials of the garden. As Genesis 2:7 describes, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (KJV). Here, man is conflated with the materials of the garden: man was created from the earth, “the dust of the ground. Man, then, is created from the same materials as the garden. Man is a part of the garden.

Though man was made from the dust—the foundational, fertile soil of the garden—God created the Garden of Eden for man’s work and pleasure. Man is an active transformation of the materials of the garden. As Genesis 2:8-19 describes, “And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil” (KJV). Similar to man, the garden is created “out of the ground.” God, however, plants the garden in a particular place. Unlike man who is formed from a combination of an earthly foundation and the active breath of God, the garden is merely created from the materials of the ground. This close attention to the biblical materials of creation demonstrates Christianity’s anthropocentric relationship
with the natural world. Man receives active breath, while the garden is merely a repository of the breath of active creativity.

Though God plants the garden, he invites Man into the creative profession of garden work. In Genesis 1:29, God declares: “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat” (KJV). The Christian bible describes the garden in terms of use value. God has created the garden for pleasure as well as sustenance. The garden does not just exist for itself; rather, the garden exists for the purpose of Man. While this seems to further the anthropocentric tendencies of Christianity, the garden also becomes a place for Man to connect with other elements of creation. As Genesis describes, God did not simply place Man in the garden, God “put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it” (KJV, Genesis 2:15). The garden is God’s purpose for Man: Man’s active articulation of God’s creation is the work of the garden. The garden sustains man’s life through the tending of the materials of creation. Man is called to find pleasure in the materials of creation in addition to maintaining and perfecting the materials.

Though the Garden of Eden was intentionally created as the profession of Man, the Fall of mankind, also known as sin, tainted the use and productivity of the Garden of Eden. Genesis 3:18-24 describes God’s transformation of the Garden after Adam and Eve’s sin: “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou art return” (KJV). Once man sinned, the garden was no longer producing just for humans. Sin freed the garden
from the dressing and keeping of mankind. In sin, the garden no longer serves an anthropocentric purpose. The garden, rather, grows and produces outside of the design of Man. The garden is no longer just a place of maintenance; rather the garden is a place of combative necessity. Man must work in the garden for sustenance, but the garden is no longer obliged to produce for the needs of Man. The garden can now grow, nurture, and produce plants that are both useful and hurtful to mankind. Interestingly, God uses the moment of sin to remind Adam of his relationship to the materials of the Garden: “for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.” Though Man misused his gift of God’s breath, Man still is a transformation of gardening materials. Man’s physical body is ultimately another material of the soil, something actively created and intentionally planted in the earth.

This Biblical foundation of gardening practices influenced the British relationship with their landscape in the eighteenth century. As Keith Thomas discusses in his book *Man and the Natural World*, the practice of gardening was ultimately a practice of spirituality for the British. Thomas urges that, as the British understood the scriptures, “gardening was the one form of labour which was necessary even before the Fall” (236). For the British, gardens were understood as means of re-establishing their relationship with God: through gardening, the British were participating in an ancient, spiritual practice that connected them with the ultimate Creator. Gardening was the first use of the earth and was the call for man in the world. The British focus on the freedom of garden design, privileging the garden’s “thorns and thistles” in order to find pleasure in the garden as a creation, a reflection of the British creator. As a result, the British tended to downplay the consequences of the Fall, “the decay of nature,” in favor of nature’s
“benevolent design” (Thomas 20). This benevolent design was celebrated because of the manipulative work of the British. Nature is a malleable repository of British creation.

**Designing the Work of the Garden Empire**

In an attempt to focus on design rather than materials, especially the human body as garden material, the British often planned their gardens to mimic spiritual experiences. Therefore, the garden was created for human pleasure and fulfillment. Most British landscape gardens contained a section named Paradise. This section was set aside to represent the perfection found in man’s manipulation of nature. This focus on man’s ability to recreate God’s earthly paradise of Eden is evidenced in the gardening books of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. As Thomas notes, “The idea that it would be possible to return to a state of pre-lapsarian grace by the cultivation of the soil was heavily evidenced in the title of gardening books: Paradise Retrieved; Paradise Regained; Paradise in Sole” (236). For the British, gardening was very much a divine practice, a fulfillment of God’s purpose, as well as a way for the British to mimic the actions of God as Creator. The British, therefore, framed the act of gardening with theoretical language in order to distance their physical bodies from the natural materials of the garden.

Similarly, the British wanted to define their gardens as separate from the garden methods already popular in other places in Europe. Gardening books, such as the ones mentioned above, as well as cultural papers, such as *The Spectator*, took up the task of theorizing British gardening practices, which both elevated the work of the garden and differentiated British gardening from other styles of gardening on the European continent. In 1712, Joseph Addison defined the emerging British aesthetic of gardening:
“On this account our English gardens are not so entertaining to the fancy as those in France and Italy, where we see a large extent of ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of garden and forest, which represent everywhere an artificial rudeness much more charming than that neatness and elegance which we meet with in those of our own country” (The Spectator, No. 414, June 25 1712).

Addison calls attention to the difference between British gardens and those in France and Italy. The most significant difference is aesthetic. The European gardens are noted for their “artificial rudeness,” meaning their ability to meld contrived garden experiences—groomed hedges and mazes—with wild spaces, such as forests, in order to create the allusion of a unique, unmediated encounter with nature. Conversely, the British focused on asserting human design—neatness and elegance—which emphasized man as Creator, an obvious and unapologetic ability to control Nature.

For the British, gardens ultimately serve a human purpose. Gardens are a way to redeem nature and create a benevolent landscape for the benefit of future generations. The British understood the garden as a way to cultivate and eternally mark the earth with their undeniable presence. In 1714, Joseph Addison discussed the importance of gardening for future generations:

But I think Men are inexcusable, who fail in a Duty of this Nature, since it is so easily discharged. When a Man considers that the putting of a few Twigs into the Ground, is doing good to one who will make his appearance in the World about Fifty Years hence, or that he is perhaps making one of his own Descendant easy to rich, by so inconsiderable an Expence, if he finds himself averse to it, he must conclude that he has a poor and base Heart, void of all generous Principles and Love to Mankind. (The Spectator No. 583, Friday August 20 1714)

According to Addison, cultivating a garden plot was considered a “Duty of this Nature,” the response to a human life. Addison describes the act of gardening as a simplistic action that demonstrates a consideration for the future, especially for the material gains of the
future. Importantly, the garden itself is not the source of future riches; rather, the garden
is merely an easily accessible tool leading to future material wealth. Addison also equates
cultivation of the land with Love to Mankind. Addison’s definition of gardening is
entirely anthropocentric: gardening is the work, pleasure, and inheritance of Mankind.

**Theories of Garden Design**

Since the British interacted with the gardens as materials for human design,
gardens were understood as an art form—studied, mastered, and perfected—similar to
European landscape paintings also popular during the long eighteenth century. As a
learned practice, the art of British gardening had its own theoretical gardening tools that
dictated the way that the British interacted with their soil. In considering the garden as an
inherited mark of English presence, the British were obsessed with defining a
recognizable style of British gardening. At first, the British mimicked the highly
manipulated gardens of Europe, especially those in Italy in France. However, throughout
the eighteenth century, the highly symbolic and formulaic garden knots and pruned
shrubs gave way to an appreciation for the “natural” state of the garden. Interestingly, this
“natural” state of the garden was only considered “natural” through the lens of classical
education, especially with financial access to The Grand Tour, a trip through the
continent of Europe for young, wealthy British men. While Addison urges that gardening
is the call of all of Mankind, an understanding of the act of gardening was only accessible
to the highly educated. Keith Thomas describes the transition from knot gardens to more
“natural” gardens as “the new taste for wild nature” (265). But this “wild nature” was not
“an intuitive affair” (265): “But the self-conscious appreciation of rural scenery which
developed so spectacularly during the eighteenth century was a different matter, for it
depended upon prior acquaintance with the tradition of European painting” (265).
Although the garden was appealing to non-aristocrats and the uneducated, it was theoretically inaccessible to them. They could only mimic the imaginative designs of their aristocratic overseers. Importantly, this appreciation for the garden was not grounded in actual materials of the earth; rather this appreciation for wild nature was grounded in the already recreated garden: the garden translated in to the art of European painting. As Thomas articulates, the British appreciation for “wild” nature was “self-conscious,” meaning that unaltered landscapes were an acquired taste. The wild garden is only considered aesthetically pleasing when framed through an education of art.

The garden as art form allowed for the creation of theoretical gardening tools. These linguistic tools act as the framework that structures the conversations and the fluctuating conceptions of garden design throughout the eighteenth century in Britain. I primarily draw these tools from Joseph Addison’s commentary on gardening from *The Spectator*, as it was a widely read paper during the early eighteenth century. ³In *The Spectator*, Addison frequently participates in the conversation surrounding the use value and physical manipulation of the British landscape: the need to define space, to discover beauty, and to imagine the potential of British power, both theoretical and material power. Throughout *The Spectator*, he reiterates and comments on the debate concerning a confined ordered Nature and the desired variety of unmitigated, unaltered “wild” space. Most broadly, Addison articulates this debate within the confines of three theoretical, and

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³ I have decided to use the Spectator as my guide for gardening rhetoric because of its popularity at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The Spectator was founded by Addison and Steele in 1711, and it circulated under the direction of the two men until 1712. Each issue, also called a “paper” or “number,” was approximately 2500 words long and contained literary criticism on popular texts and philosophical concepts under discussion at that time in British history. Though the Spectator seemed to have a small amount of subscribers—approximately 3000—Addison estimated that about sixty thousand Londoners read his paper because of the amount of coffeehouses that also subscribed. Modern historians agree with Addison’s speculations, especially because the tone of the paper addresses the immersing middle class of England in particular.
perhaps practical, gardening tools: imagination, variety, and imitation. In *The Spectator*, Addison defines these terms in order to describe the work of the British garden.

As a recreated space, the British garden existed in an endless amount of iterations within the gardener’s imagination. In this way, the garden was not a physical location; rather the garden is an aesthetic pleasure inspired by the presence and availability of material objects. As Addison describes,

> By greatness, I do not only mean the bulk of any single object, but the largeness of a whole view, considered as one entire piece. Such as the prospects of an open champaign country, a vast uncultivated desert, of huge heaps of mountains, high rocks precipices, or a wide expanse of waters, where we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight, but with that rude kind of magnificence which appears in many of these stupendous works of nature. Our imagination loves to be filled with an object, or to grasp at anything that is too big for its capacity (*The Spectator* No. 412, Monday June 21 1712).

As Addison describes it, the garden is not valued for its physicality, but for the effect that this physicality has on the mind of the visitor or observer. The materials of the garden only have value through the way that the visitor or observer transforms these materials in their mind: “we are not struck with the novelty or beauty of the sight.” The garden has value in the way that it inspires and influences human imagination. The garden is a curated source of inspiration that expands and grows with possibility within the human imagination. The garden was meant to conjure up a scene for the individual that transcended the physical space. The garden is the object of the human gaze.

Though Addison emphasizes the artfulness of nature, the human imagination is dependent upon natural materials for the inspiration to transform landscapes and create

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4 While the Spectator was written at a later time than the debut of *Oroonoko*, the play was still staged in its original form and widely popular amongst eighteenth-century audiences. The debates that are sketched in the Spectator—emergence of a middle class, curiosity surrounding colonial power, and debates of landownership—were all fragments of social conversations in this cultural moment in England.
art. Addison notes that art cannot adequately capture the full experience of nature for the individual. He states that “If we consider the works of nature and art, as they are qualified to entertain the imagination, we shall find the last very defective in comparison of the former” (The Spectator No. 414, Wednesday June 25 1712). If nature is fixated on its ability to be art, it becomes confined to human imagination. Imagination needs inspiration in order to continue creating. Addison describes the relationship between imagination and natural inspiration:

The beautifies of the most stately garden or palace lie in a narrow compass, the imagination immediately runs them down without confinement, and is fed with an infinite variety of images without any certain stint or number. For this reason, we always find the poet in love with a country life, where nature appears in the greatest perfection, and furnishes out all those scenes that are most apt to delight the imagination. (The Spectator, No. 414, Wednesday June 25 1712).

Addison recognizes the ways in which garden construction encloses the garden into particular spaces, but through the imagination, mankind is not limited to their landscape. The landscape, rather, remains in a perpetual state of recreation through the imagination of the garden designer. Despite the imagination of the designer, the designer needs inspiration in order to continue creating. This inspiration comes from a nature that is not confined or enclosed. The inspiration comes from the variety of a wild nature: the country life where nature is not enclosed by manmade constructions.

As a result, the natural world is also valued for its variety of landscapes that inspire the endless possibilities of the human imagination. The “natural” variety of nature is integral to the designer’s ability to design. As Addison describes,

It is this that recommends variety, where the mind is every instant called off to something new, and the attention not suffered to dwell too long and waste itself on any particular object. It is this, likewise, that improves what
The human imagination is dependent upon the possibilities of design that nature presents in order to create new garden spaces. The human imagination is confined to the human mind; however, through the openness of a “wild” nature, the human imagination is inspired to move. Importantly, Addison names this inspiration as entertainment. The natural world serves the creation of human culture in the way that it grows, develops, and moves for human consumption. As Addison states “the attention not suffered to dwell to long and waste itself on any particular object.” The natural world, again, is not valued for any one particular object—if one object was too beautiful, it would cause the human mind to dwell, and therefore, curtail any further imaginative creations. The natural world, rather, is valued for the way in which each particular object works together, constantly engaging and battling with one another in order to create a collage of possible designs. The natural world is not complete in itself; it is a source of inspiration alerting the human mind to the endless variety of design possibilities for humans to imitate, cultivate, and improve.

Addison describes the way in which imagination and variety culminate in the designer’s ability to imitate nature in the art. The variety of natural spaces is run through with imaginative designs, which result in imitative landscapes:

But though there are several of these wild scenes that are more delightful than any artificial shows, yet we find the works of nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of art; for in this case our pleasure rises from a double principle, from the agreeableness of the objects to the eye, and from the similitude to other objects: we are pleased as well with comparing their beauties as with surveying them, and can represent them to our minds either as copies or originals. (The Spectator No 414 Wednesday June 25 1712).
Addison argues that pleasure comes from similitude and familiarity, in the desire to mimic and the realization that mimicry is never precise. The desire to mimic, as opposed to copy, allows each designer to be inspired by the variety that they perceive in each landscape without the pressure to produce an exact replica. Gardens, then, are one possible imitation of nature, one possible transformation of natural materials. Artful garden designs result in pleasure. A garden resides within the binary of copy and original: a balance of natural creation and human recreation.

Through imitating nature, mankind becomes closer to the natural world. Addison compares gardening to creating, not recreating, but creating. Interestingly, Addison describes this act of creating as “delight in a prospect” (The Spectator, Wednesday June 25 1712). Addison describes the way that nature as inspiration becomes a part of cultural landscapes:

Hence it is that we take delight in a prospect which is laid out, and diversified with fields and meadows, woods and river; in those accidental landscapes of trees, clouds, and cities that are sometimes found in the veins of marble; in the curious fretwork of rocks and grottoes; and in a word, in anything that hath such a variety or regularity as may seem the effect of design in what we call the works of chance. (The Spectator Wednesday June 25 1712).

The natural world is a space of possibilities of human design. Through human creation, these prospects are imitated in human architecture. Addison believes that humans are creators in the way that they respect and maintain the integrity of the natural materials. Nature is a “work of chance,” a variety of possible designs, which inspires the human imagination to imitate the integrity of “wild” landscapes through the transformation of natural materials.
As the theoretical tools demonstrate, enclosure of landscape is not merely possible through physical materials, but also through intangible tools, such as language. As Gottlieb and Shields argue, the long eighteenth-century imagined enclosure through “an aesthetic homogenization of the countryside” (5). Poets and writers, such as Joseph Addison, designed landscapes through an expressive vocabulary of words that contained the possibilities of garden design to the British imagination. The landscape, thus, did not entirely exist in physical form; rather the landscape was considered a repository of human language and ideas. The garden was a way for the British to use nature as a linguistic tool, communicating their culture, their wealth, and their power. The garden demonstrated a fluency in both human pleasure and natural design that familiarized landscapes for British consumption.

Accordingly, the British used these theoretical tools to cultivate real landscapes. Gardens were not merely an imaginative space; rather gardens became lived locations that the British could own, construct, and tend. The theoretical tools found practicality in gardening books, which described and depicted patterns for constructing...
landscape gardens. For example, Batty Langley explains the principles of design for landscape gardens through the engravings in his 1728 gardening book entitled: New Principles of Gardening, or, the laying out and planting parteeres, groves, wildernesses, labyrinths, avenues, parks, &c (Figure 5-7). The book contains twenty-eight engravings of garden designs, which are accompanied by descriptions of the geometrical patterns that should be used to arrange the gardens in rural settings (Collection Highlight).

Langley describes the patterns used to create beautiful and Natural landscapes, which are based off of the designs for gardens at Versailles. As indicated in the dedication of his book, the book contains “plans” for containing an “embellish’d” space, a space that both highlights Nature and shapes it to fit with the desired “nobel Antiquites” copied from older patterns of Garden design from other countries. In this way, the garden was a microcosm of the world for the gardeners of Britain. It was a way to construct ownership and control over Nature. The landscape garden is a space of opposition. It is a space for a primitive Wilderness and the contrived patterns of theoretical ideas.

5 While the British did want to establish their own recognizable Garden design, their gardening designs are inspired by the trends in Europe. Most specifically, the Gardening Revolution began with inspiration from the Europeans experiences of British rulers, Charles II and William of Orange. Their exposure to French and Dutch gardening designs is apparent in the royal gardens of London and the mimicked in other garden designs through Britain.
In addition to Langley’s garden instructions, I have also included some illustrated garden plans. In particular, Figure 8 is a garden illustration of the Longleat estate gardens (circa 1700) by Kip and Knyff, well-known garden illustrators. The drawing depicts the way in which the designed landscapes extended the size of the estate. The house itself is only a small section of the entire landscape. The gardens are designed in a highly manipulated form: knot gardens surround the sides of the estate as the large walkways guide garden visitors through fountains, shrubbery, and mazes. The large walkway leads the garden visitors into a wilderness area in the back of the garden, and the paths in the wilderness extend the garden into the surrounding plantations and fields that hem in and accentuate the designed gardens of the estate. The house itself is overwhelmed by the cultivated landscape, only a small section in the landscape garden.

Figure 8: “Longleat House and Gardens.” Kipp and Knyff, c1700.
Gardens, then, were a visual pleasure experienced by movement through the estate. In the conclusion to his chapter in the book *World of Gardens*, Hunt describes the garden as a practice of negotiation: “In landscape we live by and in the process of this tripartite experience: we find or change upon a site, we see it in perambulation, and we absorb its significance, an inner movement of the mind like that of the feet. A sequence of site, sight, and insight” (345). He argues that this “process” of sight is difficult to imagine or imitate when we are only examining garden plans and looking at gardening images. Instead, the process of sight is understood as the experience of the garden. Due to the highly intentional construction of the garden, each garden experience is a scripted experience, a performed interaction with the natural world. In this way, the work of gardens becomes a theatrical production of the relationship between nature and culture.
Chapter 2: The Performance of Gardening in the Eighteenth-Century Theater

Up to this point, I have discussed the ways in which the garden is a natural space that has been enclosed by the British desire to simultaneously imagine and imitate the world around them. For the British, the garden is a microcosm of the world, and tangentially, their desire for power over the landscapes of the world. Since the garden becomes a manipulated world landscape, it also is a space where the British can practice their performance of British-ness in a global context. Joseph Addison makes a similar remark in *The Spectator* in 1712. He describes the experience of a designed garden as: “a particular Smell or Colour is able to fill the Mind, on a sudden, with the Picture of Fields or Garden, where we first met with it, and to bring up into View all of Variety of images that once attend it. Our imagination takes the Hint, and leads us unexpectedly into Cities or Theaters, Plains or Meadows.” Addison describes sensory experiences that carry the individual on an imaginative journey into nature, where the individual gains access to an unlimited amount of experiences that occur within the freedom of nature. The imagination imitates this unlimited association of experiences and is able to travel to and design new spaces. As a result, nature transforms into a theatrical experience: a spectacle of pleasure as well as a performance of work.

This intersection between gardens and theaters began in the late sixteenth century, and it continued evolving through the end of the long eighteenth century (Hunt “Garden as Theater” 147). John Dixon Hunt describes the long eighteenth century as a time “when garden-makers were also theatrical designers and vice versa, when gardens became sites of performance before true theaters with prosceniums established themselves, when gardens and pastoral settings were a favourite décor for masques and operas, and where
gardens themselves took the form of amphitheatres and exedras” (“Garden as Theater” 147). As Hunt argues, gardens were a sort of staged performance, simultaneously a performance of human design as well as a space for enacting performances of human behavior. In considering gardens as theaters and vice versa, it is important to consider the garden as a character—or a body—in its own right. This does not mean that the garden becomes a repository of human behaviors; rather, the garden must be recognized as its own entity, possessing and asserting its own behaviors. These behaviors demand recognition from the bodies that inhabit the garden. Similarly, the garden itself must negotiate the performance of the bodies inhabiting the garden space, both actors and spectators.

The relationship between gardens and theatre was regularly performed throughout the eighteenth century. For example, Susanna Centlivre’s “The Busie-Body” (1709), John Burgoyne’s “The Maid of the Oaks” (1774), and Hannah Brand’s “Adelinda” (1798) either allude to garden architecture or stage scenes in a garden. Though these plays were not necessarily staged in an actual garden, the characters in these plays mention the garden, usually in the context of a place to escape, a place to meet, or a place to share secrets. The garden, thus, is a familiar place for eighteenth-century British audiences, and the characters can successfully allude to particular garden spaces, in order to conjure a shared image and experience of a natural space. As a result, a vocabulary of garden architecture acts as a form of spatial communication between the actors and the audience.

Interestingly, all of the business conducted in the garden is failed business: escapes are thwarted, meetings are interrupted, and secrets are overheard. The garden is not a safe, controlled space. The garden is a site of anxiety. The characters are
preoccupied with their ability to manipulate and improve the garden. Accordingly, the garden becomes a physical extension of the characters as they plant their secrets and nurture both their public and private personas in the soil of garden. The garden becomes a site of interaction between Nature, (the shrubs and trees), and artifice (the garden gates and alcoves). It is a site of interaction between the real and the contrived, between truths and lies. The garden is a physically manipulated identity, a backdrop of disguise.

If the garden is only performed through allusion, the theatrical event of performing the garden can only distance the spectators from the natural world. The natural world must be experienced through the contrived script of the garden, which limits the spectator’s ability to encounter the natural world on his or her own terms. The natural world is used as a sort of drapery of Britain—a fashionable countryside is determined by the design of the garden, the embroidery to the estates. As a result, when the garden is situated on the theatrical stage, it must be considered as a space between: the proscenium arch ⁶ marks the architectural difference between here and there; between city and country; between the cultured and the wild; between the performance and the reality. In his chapter “Performing the Wild,” Sweetings professes that the audience only observes representations of the wild, which removes the theatrical aesthetic of nature from lived experiences in the natural world. The theatrical experience of the natural world is better understood as one imitation of the imagined variety of the natural world: an accidental landscape found in the curves and fissures of human architecture. The

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⁶ The proscenium arch is a theater term borrowed from Greek and Roman theatrics, which describes the frame of the stage. The proscenium arch usually encompasses the curtain as well as the stage on which the actors perform. Under the proscenium arch, the action of the play takes place. In 1696, E. Phillips defined “proscenium” as “the forepart of the Scene: an Edifice as high as the last Portico of the Theater, whose Face or Front was adorned with many ranges of Pillars” (New World of Words, ed. 5, from the OED).
theater creates a natural aesthetic, an imaginative experience of a tangible, untouched nature.

As a result, particularly the wilderness sections of gardens, are defined through social constructions. Sweetings argues that both theatrical and wilderness spaces “employ a rhetoric of space that naturalizes what is seen and heard and that disregards the structures of performance that shape perception” (326). The wilderness is made separate from other natural spaces because of the act of distinguishing it as different. The wilderness has been separated and therefore made a spectacle, a space where we expect to encounter the performances of wild nature. Anything that happens in the wilderness is wild by its very placement in that socially contrived space. Our understanding and encounters in the wilderness are pre-determined as wild. Spectators of the garden do little work other than to watch and to absorb the performance.

Though the space of the garden is a performative space, the act of designing and scripting this garden is done through materials that can never be possessed by Man. The performance of the wild means that garden makers, and by extension theatrical designers, are creating with and in spaces that are not initially manmade: they merely use the materials, the dirt, the foundation of the world’s first garden. Though the theatrical designers use theoretical gardening tools—imagination, variety, and imitation—the garden designers create with materials that do not originally belong to man. Instead, the theater establishes a meeting place between nature and culture, performances that expose the relationship between British identity and the recreation of natural landscapes. The proscenium arch of the theater establishes a hybrid space, a performance of both nature and culture. Human encounters with the performance space of the natural world are
fostered by the materials that define the visit. Space is constituted by the performed interactions between the human and the natural world.

In considering the garden as a space of exposed performances, the plays that occur in these hybrid spaces can be understood as cultural preparedness practices that determine the experience of the wild for eighteenth-century theater-goers. Cultural preparedness practices means that theatergoers are able to enter the performative space, the cultural landscape, of the garden and practice his or her performance of social behaviors. In the garden, the visitors expect a “natural,” “untamed” experience and are, therefore, freed from prescribed social behaviors of race, class, and gender that define identities within the social landscape of Britain. Theatergoers are safe to practice the various scripts of identity that are available under the wild space of the proscenium arch. Additionally, plays that consciously use the wild develop a theatrical design of experience that cultivates “nature appreciation” (Sweetings “Performing the Wild” 330).

Sweetings asserts that the hybrid space of theater and wild is activated by performance. The wild and the theater are engaged in a process of definition—a process, meaning that the relationship between humans and the natural world is in the act of becoming. The performance of wilderness demands that the audience reconsider the binary between nature and culture. Similarly, theatergoers are called to question the relationship between social behaviors and embodied experiences. Sweetings suggests that eighteenth-century theater scholars must expand their vocabulary in order to consider the ways in which the wilderness is staged as a character—a body—rather than simply a space of performance. It is important to note that during the performance, the wilderness is enclosed under the culturally defined proscenium arch. The act of staging an already staged space, such as a
garden, invites a sort of curated domestic tourism, a way for the British to visit, explore, and experience the landscapes of their empire.

Sweetings attempts to circumvent this spatial understanding of the wild as a performance space. He, instead, suggests that the performance of the wild does not occur in a particular space, rather, the performance of the wild occurs during time, a process that unravels the binary relationship between nature and culture, between the theater and the wild, between Britain and the colonies. Sweetings asserts that

Undoubtedly, for example, something we call the wild endures across time for us to point to, but we must become aware that it is representation rhetoric of our pointing that obscures from us the particular dance we do with the more than human world. We should not ask “when are we in the wild?” but rather “how are we in the wild at any given moment?” (“Performing the Wild” 334).

The performance of the wild suggests that space unfolds before the audience as the audience interacts with this space. Characters become realized and relatable through their movements tracked through time, not necessarily tracked across the spaces that they occupy. The bodies of the characters—the natural world, the actors, and the spectators—grow and develop through the duration of the play. As Gertrude Stein asserts in her essay entitled “Plays,” a play is a particular landscape that is introduced and explored through time frame and perspective (Sweetings 332). The audience participates in the space making process. The time aspect of performative spaces allows audiences to critically examine the juxtapositions of social behaviors and natural spaces as they unfold. As a result, the domestic tour of the wilderness is not confined or static; rather,

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7 Though Stein is referring to nineteenth century theater, her commentary on the construction of theater experiences is still useful in considering the ways in which audiences consume art, plays, and literature. Her ideas are especially relevant to my larger argument because Southerne’s Oroonoko was staged numerous times with numerous casts throughout the eighteenth century. Additionally, Southerne’s Oroonoko is already a revisioning of Aphra Behn’s novella, which translates the context of the play across time and genre. The porous nature of the text allows me to pull on later theory to consider the transformations of the play, the ways in which performance is continually evolving.
the domestic tour of the wild is a process of unraveling the ever-occurring interactions between nature and culture.

This process of unraveling exposes the work of constructing performative spaces. For Stein, the theater is a stage of perceptive possibilities, in the progression of each act of the play through time, both literally and figuratively. Stein argues that the variations in time, actors, and audience are part of the performance of the play, demonstrating the ways in which a performance is always in process and spaces are always under construction. A completed design only exists in the realm of the imaginary. In this way, a play script is simply an architectural design of time and space, a suggested relationship between culture and nature that is continually in negotiation between imagination and material. However, if we understand space as an unfolding of time, we are freed from the cultural enclosures of landscape design. The landscape is called into the imagination of the audience so that each audience member can contribute their own variety of experience and aesthetic on to the landscape.

Similar to the stage, the borders of the garden are constructed, produced, and experienced in process. The gardens are a performance of human interaction with nature, demonstrating and alluding to the possibilities of garden construction. The possibilities of garden construction and performance are not limited to the actual natural space; rather the possibilities are exponentially expanded by the people who perform within and interact with these spaces. The wild and the actors—nature and culture—become bodies engaged in a conversation. In his chapter “The Once and Future Garden,” John Dixon Hunt describes that “any stage or hunt of amphitheater invites the dual activity of people watching people watching people. But there are many other, more subtle ways in which
we instinctively respond to theatrical opportunities” (343). Hunt describes how people become engaged in an experience with nature, most specifically the garden. Importantly, this is an engagement with the garden, not an engagement in the garden. To be with the garden means that people are simultaneously surveying the garden and intimately a part of the imitation of the garden. The actors are bodies on a stage just as the garden is a body of land, performing a script of imaginative, possible interactions. Importantly, engagement with the garden also includes theatergoers in the process of performance. As the theatergoers gaze on to the stage, they also imagine possible interactions and outcomes of the play script as it unfolds. Theatergoers are not passive consumers of performance; rather theatergoers are active creators of prospective performances.

This process of performing the garden is displayed in garden illustration. For example, Figure 9 is a frontispiece to “A Trip to Vaux-Hall, or a general satyre on the times by Hercules Mac-Scurdy” (1737). This frontispiece is meant to make fun of typical illustrations of Pleasure gardens, which were basically public gardens full of all forms of entertainment, including dining areas, walkways, and theaters. In particular, the Vaux-Hall garden was considered a heavily wooded garden, which created a secluded, romantic environment. In the wooded areas, the garden included features such as concert spaces, dining areas, and paintings of others garden scenes in order to further the depth of field and the artful, contrived experience of the pleasure garden. This depiction of Vaux-Hall garden calls attention to the ways in which people moved through the garden as both actors and spectators. As the viewing stand in the middle implies, the garden was a space for performing and for watching. The pleasure garden is heavily patrolled by the gaze of both the actor and the spectator.
An experience in a garden, then, is always a scripted interaction, regardless of whether or not it is part of a staged performance. Hunt describes that the appeal of the eighteenth-century garden was the way in which the bodies of the visitors and the bodies of the natural world interacted: “the experience of a garden was part of a visit, and its visitors are usually seen in front of some significant episode of a garden, to which they are reacting (“The Once and Future Garden” 155). As a result, the way that visitors move through the garden follows the script of performance created by the garden designer—the walkways and attractions are meant to dictate the visitor’s experience: an experience in process. Hunt describes these moments as “composed moments of landscape experience (158). Hunt furthers Sweetings definition of the garden as a performing body by stating that the garden as body is also a location of encounters. Hunt argues that the architecture
of gardens determines a particular experience, a series of encounters, between nature and culture. In other words, the ways in which the materials of the garden are manipulated dictates the ways in which visiting bodies experience and interact with the garden body. These materials are both natural, such as shrubs, trees, and flowers, and man-made, such as alcoves, walks, and mazes. The garden is meant to be experienced through movement. As people saunter through the garden, they experience particular materials—plants, alcoves, shrubs, gates, fields, periods of sunlight, animals, statues—in a pre-mediated fashion. Though each person has his or her own pacing through the garden, the garden is nonetheless experienced through the curated installation of natural and cultural materials.

It is still, however, important to consider the way with which individuals encounter the curated garden. In W.J.T. Mitchell’s introduction to his book *Landscape and Power*, he investigates that ways in which culture inhabits landscapes. He argues that “landscape as a cultural medium thus has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site” (2). Here, Mitchell distinguishes the British landscape as two different spaces of spectacle. First, the landscape is given authority simply because of the fact that it takes up space: it is a space to visit, to move in, and to inhabit. Secondly, the landscape is diminished in power through its reception of the gaze. The landscape is a spectacle, a space where man can place his designs, were man can find himself, where man can manipulate nature (as Addison so aptly argued in several papers in The Spectator).

Importantly, Mitchell argues that the landscape also absorbs the people who inhabit it. In
this way, any person walking through designing, or tending the garden becomes a part of this negotiation between sight and site: a location and a spectacle. Landscape is not just a receptacle of human design, rather the landscape becomes a verb—a space to do and be. Landscape is a process in which visitors are also spectators, both losing and finding themselves in a perpetually redesigned space.

If landscape is a cultural medium, it holds a powerful position for British empirical desires. The garden translates natural materials into social constructions. In this way, the natural world and the people and cultures that inhabit these natural spaces are cultural defined as natural materials. Therefore, positions of power are not determined through socially contrived means; rather, positions of power are understood as outside of human control, a natural, God-ordained phenomenon. Empirical power is a result of space rather than a result of social design. For the British, landscape has authority in the way that it nurtures human power. As Sweetings notes “both wilderness zones and naturalist theater divide space into a clear “here” and equally obvious “there” in order to establish the conditions of our gaze” (327). Landscape and the people in the landscape our objects of design, objects that act as projections of socially defined and contrived expectations. Interestingly this position asks people to envision landscapes as their own entity, outside of cultural control. People enter into predetermined landscapes that introduce specific props or materials to dictate the particular performance of that space. However, when landscapes are predetermined as “wild” and therefore “not culture,” a landscape is defined as free of human manipulation. As a result, any manipulation done in the natural world is simultaneously made natural by the very fact that the manipulation occurs in a natural space with natural materials.
Even though British landscapes are simultaneously natural and social, the landscape is still under the control of time. A landscape is not a static space; rather a landscape is a dynamic space encountered through time. The garden grows into itself. A landscape is future oriented. At the end of his chapter, Sweetings argues that “If the wild is a process in which human beings participate, we are in theory never away from it, just as we are potentially never outside places of social performance” (337). Though human perceptions of time our culturally constructed, any temporal interactions with the natural world are a process of participation that can never be exited. Referring back to the earlier frontispiece image of Vaux-Hill garden (Figure 9), the people in the image are forever a part of that particular experience of the garden. Their presence in the garden makes them a contributing feature in the British garden. For both us as spectators and the spectators in the image of the garden, the people who populate the garden space are a part of a shared memory of Vaux-Hill garden. This process of participation is most evident in theatrical performances of the garden. As Lisa Freeman states “the eighteenth-century stage could enact the ‘crisis of character’ by staging it precisely as a competition in which actions, words, figure, and reputation, could all be weighed against one another” (27). I would add that the landscapes of British colonial power are also placed in this “crisis of character.” The wild space under the proscenium arch invites an unlimited amount of interactions. Garden visitors and theatergoers expect to confront difference on the stage.
Chapter 3: Working in Oroonoko’s Garden

Patterns of the British Female Body: Ornaments of Empire

As a literary text, Southerne’s *Oroonoko* provides a context for contemporary readers and theatergoers to explore the global implications of the eighteenth-century British gardening practices. Most scholarship on Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko* (1695) analyzes the relationship between Southerne’s play and Aphra Behn’s novella (1688) of the same name. In particular, the scholarly conversation has focused on the way that Southerne has white-washed Aphra Behn’s character Imoinda. Only a few scholars have addressed the issue of Imoinda’s color in addition to her gender. For example, in the essay “Race, Gender, and the Sentimental in Thomas Southerne’s *Oroonoko*,” Joyce Greene MacDonald asserts that “the black Imoinda’s disappearance into whiteness is not the only way in which Southerne re-visions women in his *Oroonoko*” (555). MacDonald argues that Imoinda’s whiteness represents Southerne’s understanding of the female body rather than just illuminating his views on race. However, Imoinda’s whiteness represents a one-dimensional vision of the female body. The female body is only distinguished by her outward appearance. This outward appearance is determined by the way in which Imoinda, as well as the other female characters in the play, interact with her lived environments, most specifically the natural elements of her lived environment.

In *Oroonoko*, Southerne dramatizes the way white British women work in and between natural environments, which demonstrates that the soil offers opportunities for women to rework their identities. In the eighteenth century, women were largely viewed as symbolically moveable entities. As Kathleen Wilson describes,

Real-life women’s superior capacities for civility, refinement, and sensibility were put to work within public and private arenas of sociability and philanthropy, even as their actual and symbolic propensities for
excessive consumption (of goods, men, fashion) and luxury means that they had to be well regulated and kept from unnatural exercises of authority. Further, constructions of female identity played innovative roles in articulating contending relationships between Britain and the colonies. (19)

Though Wilson is describing representations of women from later in the century, this description also works with women who were living at the beginning of the long eighteenth century. Women were ornaments of the wealth and power of eighteenth-century men; by creating families and connecting generation, their bodies established relationships between men. Additionally, the female body was used to display material goods. Women were understood as consumers of the luxury goods and fashions created by men. The female body was a cultural signifier. As a result, the female body was a useful tool for men, working to display wealth, status, and potential relationships between men and their nations. The female body could be moved, designed, discarded, and redesigned in order to envision the potential of male power within the British Empire.

Here, I want to return to the print “The Flower Garden” (Figure 3) that I described in the Introduction to this project. “The Flower Garden” demonstrates the way in which the female body is used for display. In the print, the woman’s body is shown in profile, indicating that her body is for perusal: she is complicit with the gaze. Depicted with no hands, she even lacks the agency to suggest a direction for the gaze on her body. The title of the print itself denies the woman any agency: her body is taken for granted as a canvas for a flower garden. As a result, her body is a fertile, British landscape, an ornament of natural design, and an emblem of empirical power. Her body is a tool for designing masculine British power.
Within the context of *Oroonoko*, the ornamental female body is demonstrated through a typical Restoration marriage plot, which is accelerated by Charlotte and Lucy. At the beginning of the play, both women recall their journey from England to the colony of Suriname, where they hope to be able to revitalize their public personas and cultivate a husband for themselves. These women are merely stock characters, symbolic of a contrived British presence in the colonies. In fact, many scholars have argued that the Restoration plot distracts from the more interesting tragedy of the forbidden love between Oroonoko and Imoinda. The marriage plot was not a part of Aphra Behn’s original novella, *Oroonoko*. Southerne added the plot for his rendition of Behn’s narrative. In Southerne’s rendition, Charlotte and Lucy are presented as ornaments of British power, an emblem of British Empire super-imposed on the Caribbean colonies. Importantly, the movement of their bodies, their journey from England to Suriname, is encouraged by their need for male appreciation.

The first scene of the play calls attention to the place of the white female body in the landscape garden of the British mainland. The play begins with a conversation between Charlotte and Lucy, who transplanted themselves from England to Suriname. Charlotte explains that she and Lucy were displaced from London: “The young fellows, you know, the dearest part of the Town and without whom London had been a wilderness to you and me, had forsaken us a great while” (I.i.17-20). The two women needed to escape the “wilderness” of London because they were no longer able to pattern their bodies into new Creations, into emblems of the young fellow’s power. Charlotte confesses that the young fellows overlooked her and her sister when they were in London. According to Charlotte, the young fellows organized the wilderness of London, transforming it into a habitable
space. However, the young fellows have ignored both women. Their bodies were discarded, a sort of weed in the fashionable British landscape.

Charlotte continues her description of the wilderness of London by focusing on the artificial, material make-up of the urban environment. Charlotte recognizes that both she and Lucy were not forsaken because of their white female bodies; rather, they were forsaken because of the materials that constructed their white female bodies. Charlotte emphasizes the role of material design, or fashion: “[the young fellows] neglected us, no longer designed upon us, they were tired of us. Women in London are like the rich silks: they are out of fashion as a great while before they wear out” (I.i.23-26). Women are assimilated to fabric: a material used in the construction of fashion. Women, therefore, are not physical bodies. Women are artifice, a spectacle for male pleasure—a material possession. Accordingly, London is only understood as an orderly environment as long as the “rich silks” of femininity are in fashion. Importantly, the women were not in control of the designs for their bodies. As Charlotte notes, the young fellows “designed upon us.” As a result, the white female body absorbs the young fellow’s wealth and political power. According to Charlotte, women in London must “give the Town a pattern of her person and beauty and not stay in it so long to have the whole piece worn out” (I.i.38-41). As “rich silks,” the white female body is conceived as a material possession designed by the young fellows. Without the continued redesign by the young fellows, the white female body is discarded.

It is important to note that Charlotte uses gardening terminology to describe the material design and material use of the white female body. In particular, she uses the wilderness to describe the materials that construct the young fellow’s design of the white
female body. Interestingly, the wilderness, a seemingly natural space, is actually a distinct section of the cultivated landscape gardens on the British mainland. The wilderness was a natural space of creation, a space that simultaneously liberated and confined Nature, so that it could grow in an unorganized, yet specific space. According to Anthony Ashley Cooper’s book *The Moralists*, the garden was made beautiful through the “natural” state of the cultivated landscape:

> I shall no longer resist the passion in me for things of a natural kind; where neither Art, nor the Conceit or Caprice of Man has spoil’d their genuine Order by breaking in upon the Primitive State. Even the rude Rocks, the mossy Caverns, the irregular unwrought Grotto’s and broken Falls of waters, with all the horrid graces of the Wilderness itself, as representing NATURE more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a magnificence beyond mockery of princely gardens. (qtd in Hussey 28-29)

Cooper argues that the garden needs a space that is separate from the contrived beauty of Man. He argues that the artful designs of man distract from the “genuine Order” of the garden; they separate and detract the garden from its full potential as an untouched, authentic space. The wilderness, then, is a space of Natural perfection, intentionally uncultivated. Interestingly, the wilderness is described as both a “genuine Order” and as “representing NATURE.” It is authentic; however, it is merely a representation of a garden that is, arguably, the authentic garden, the original garden—The Garden of Eden. The wilderness can never be an “original,” authentic space. The young fellows maintained a wilderness to connect themselves to some sort of greater “Truth,” something “primitive” and “genuine”; however, the wilderness only represented these principles. It is important to note that the wilderness also resided in a space between

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8 Written in 1710; a Platonic Dialogue between a “cultivated country gentleman and a sceptic.” The text concludes that Goodness and Beauty are the same principles, and both are discovered through an intimate relationship with the Natural World (Hussey 28).
horror and grace: an untouched Nature represented “the horrid graces of the Wilderness” (29). The wilderness was both deplorable and divine, a terror and a virtue.

Illustrations of the wilderness demonstrate the hybrid state and location of the wilderness gardens. For example, Figure 5 is another Kip and Knyff garden illustration, depicting Chatworth estate circa 1700. Similar to the other Kip and Knyff garden illustration, this garden is divided into distinct sections: knot gardens, mazes, meadows, farmland, and a wilderness. Each section is connected by a grand promenade lined by trees, which walks garden visitors through a variety of natural experiences. As a visitor walks through the garden, he or she moves from highly manipulated sections to a “wild” experience. Despite the variety of experiences, each part of the garden is still contained within the staged confines of the landscape garden. Joseph Addison condones this highly constructed garden design. In a 1712 paper in The Spectator, Addison states that

Why not a whole estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations? They would be as profitable as pleasant to the owner; fields of corn made a delightful view, and if the paths were a little tended, the natural embroidery of the meadows helped a little by art, the hedgerows set off with trees, a man might make a pretty Landskip of his own Possessions. (qtd. in Hussey 29-30)

Plantations are described as a way to profit from the natural use of the land. The plantations are concurrently beautiful, profitable, natural, and a possession. The plantation is also referred to as “the natural embroidery” of the meadows. Accordingly, the meadows are characterized as a natural, uncultivated space—a sort of wilderness—in the British landscape garden (29). A plantation, thus, is simply an embellishment to the visage of the landscape garden. In the illustration of the Chatworth garden estate (Figure 10), the plantations are the fields that outline the parameters of the landscape garden. The plantation distinguishes the boundaries of the garden and it accentuates the highly
manipulated construction of the garden. The wilderness space at the back of the Chatworth garden fades into the open fields of the plantation, which invites the plantations into the design of the estate. A plantation is an artificial design in the intentionally uncultivated wilderness. In this way, the plantation of Suriname is simply an extension of the young fellow’s patterns of design.

Figure 10: “Chastworth.” Kip and Knyff, c1700.

The plantations, thus, act as a means to renew human relationships with the land, to rejuvenate the soil rather than to allow it to decay. As Addison describes in the Spectator, plantations “have one Advantage in them which is not to be found in most other Works, as they give a Pleasure of a more lasting Date, and continually improve in the Eye of the Planter” (No. 583, Friday August 20 1714). Addison believes that plantations are a continually changing space, a landscape of constant redesign that is
always in a state of becoming. He differentiates plantations from other contrived landscapes or material objects that have been inspired by the natural world:

When you have finished Building or any other Undertaking of the like Nature, it immediately decays upon your Hands; you see it brought to its utmost Point of Perfection, and from that time hastening to its Ruin. On the contrary, when you have finished your Plantations, they are still arriving at greater Degrees of Perfection as long as you live, and appear more delightful in every succeeding Year that they did in the foregoing. (No. 583, Friday August 20 1714).

Though man is designing and working the plantation—or for our purposes, a garden—the garden is continually in the process of recreating itself. The design of the gardener is always in a state of redevelopment or redemption. Gardening provides a designer with a forgiving space, a landscape that is coming into perfection. The garden is future oriented—never finished through design; rather, the garden is “still arriving at greater Degrees of Perfection,” a temporal process of transformation.

As Addison addresses, this process of transformation is enabled by the work of the designer, the white male body. In this way, the white male body connects the potential of the British landscape to the transformation of the soil in the British colonies. On the British mainland, the white males practiced their power by creating ornate landscape gardens. These landscape gardens were accentuated by the white female body, as Charlotte and Lucy explain in their opening dialogue in Oroonoko. The white female body did not “work” within the land; rather the white female body worked as an excess of design, an ornament in the garden. In The Spectator, Addison argues that the garden is a recreational space for white women:

What a delightful Entertainment must it be to the Fair Sex, whom their native Modesty, and the Tenderness of Men towards them, exempts from publick Business, to pass their Hours in imitating Fruits and Flowers, and transplanting all the Beauties of Nature into their own Dress, or raising a
new Creation in their Closets and Apartments. How pleasing is the Amusement of walking among the Shades and Groves planted by themselves… (quoted from Bell 475).

The white female body replicates the garden through her beauty and her fashion. She becomes an extension of the landscape gardens—a body that imitates, transplants, and nurtures Natural beauty within the social networks of aristocratic British society. The beauty of the gardens is recreated in the fashion that encases the white female body. Through the patterns of the landscape garden, she inhabits a “new Creation” of her body.

As a “new Creation,” the white female body transforms into a decoration for the white male landscape garden. The landscape garden was understood as a space of design which “indicated a new eighteenth-century aristocratic masculinity,” a masculinity that was dependent upon decorative displays of wealth and political power (Bell 472). As a new Creation, “women of these [aristocratic] families, for reasons of inherent personal interest, as well as their position in the hierarchy of gender, exhibited an almost entirely decorative role” (472). The white female body is a decorative sign of masculine, colonial power, an embellishment to the designed gardens. The white female body becomes conflated with the land. It is a moveable signifier of land ownership, a decorative pattern of the wealth and political power of the white male garden, which can be transplanted across the globe. In Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, the white female bodies move between the cultivated landscapes of Britain and the colonial landscapes of Suriname. Through this transplantation, the women have the opportunity to work between the two landscapes, nurturing new designs for the white female body.

Within Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, Charlotte describes the way that the white female body moves between the wilderness of London and the plantations of Suriname.
Charlotte and Lucy’s bodies decay into the natural embroidery of the contrived wilderness. The planation is positioned as the repository of decaying beauty, a space of potential renewal. Charlotte concludes her description of the “rich silks” of design, asserting that “Therefore, for the good of the public [the young fellows] would have a draught made once a quarter, send the decaying beauties for breeders into the country to make room for new faces to appear, to countenance the pleasures of the town” (I.i.43-49). The white female body is conflated with “beauties,” or rather, “decaying beauties.” As a decaying beauty, the white female body is absorbed by nature. Beauty becomes a sort of cultivation, a plot of land that needs rested in order to be profitable. In Suriname, both Charlotte and Lucy are transplanted to the plantations of British colonial power. While they have escaped the wilderness of London, they still remain within the cultivated plots of aristocratic masculine power. In this way, the designed landscapes of London are always designed from a new pattern of beauty, a new creation of the white female body. The pattern of her person is absorbed into the material—the soil—of nature. The landscape garden, thus, is a space of opposition. It is a space for a primitive wilderness and the contrived pattern of the young fellow’s designs.

As a combination of opposites, the plantation of Suriname offers a space of fluidity. As the women plant their bodies in the plantations, they are able to nurture opportunities, both for social growth as well as personal identity. For example, since Charlotte and Lucy are decaying in the plantation of Suriname, Charlotte has the ability to remake herself as a himself. In the space of contradiction, Charlotte transforms into Weldon in order to seek marriage opportunities for both Charlotte and Lucy. Charlotte describes her transition into Weldon, explaining to Lucy that “I pass for your brother; one
of the richest planters here happening to die just as we landed, I have claimed kindred with him…We live in reputation, have the best acquaintance of the place, and we shall see our account in’t, I warrant you” (I.i.99-106). Though Charlotte envisions her new masculine identity as a freedom from the patterns of the wilderness, Charlotte is still operating within the artifice of the wilderness. She transforms herself into a man in order to find a man, in order to confine herself in marriage. Though Charlotte acts as a sort of landowner, the architect of her own landscape garden, she is still confined by the reputations of the recently deceased planter. She constructs her identity in the soils of his plantation.

Though Charlotte can construct a masculine self, she is still confined to the patterns of the young fellows. This trope of confinement and liberation is expressed through Lucy’s observations about marriage. She remarks that: “I don’t know what confinement marriage may be to the men, but I’m sure the women have no liberty without it. I am for anything that will deliver me from the care of reputation, which I begin to find impossible to preserve” (II.i.84-88). Lucy explains that women are only able to find liberty through confinement. Women are shaped, patterned, and designed through their relationship with men. Women are free to embellish; however, they are embellishing the designs that the young fellows have already created.

Though the women are still confined to the planter’s soil, the women have the ability to redesign the soil, to recreate the planter’s original designs. Women have access to the power of redesign by reusing the scraps of decaying beauty to construct new patterns of their person. Most notably, the Widow demonstrates her power as a re-designer, when she reconstructs her son Daniel to please his new wife Lucy. The Widow
wants the marriage between Daniel and Lucy to last, so she redesigns her son so that
Lucy can use him and rely on him as a proper husband. The Widow constructs Daniel as
a glove, a material object that can be used and discarded as Lucy wishes: “So, Mrs. Lucy,
I have brought him about again, I have chastised him, I have made him as supple as a
glove for your wearing, to pull on or throw off at your pleasure” (V.i.99-101). Here, the
Widow demonstrates her power of design. She acknowledges that design has value in its
use. The Widow constructs her own rich silk through her desire to design Daniel as a
husband. Daniel, thus, becomes synonymous with the rich silks, with the decaying
beauties of Suriname.

As a glove, Daniel also represents a disposable piece of clothing, non-essential. As
the Widow remarks, Lucy can take Daniel on and off as she pleases. She then proceeds to
direct Daniel’s gaze and direct the movements of his body: “Will you ever rebel again?
Will you sirrah? But come, come down on your marrowbones and ask her for her
forgiveness” (V.i.103-105). As the stage directions prompt, Daniel obliges, kneeling
before Lucy and begging for forgiveness. Daniel’s body is an embellishment to Lucy’s
body. Importantly, as Lucy noted earlier, she needs this embellishment. She needs the
confinement of marriage to define her freedom. She needs Daniel, the embroidery of her
character, in order to have choice, to know what choices she has: to put on or take off.
Daniel becomes the embroidery to Lucy’s new creation, decorating her character while
also defining the limitations of her role as a woman. Lucy is still patterned by masculine
designs.

While Daniel can be “used” by Lucy as a non-essential rich silk, he still maintains
the power to redesign his role as the embroidery to Lucy’s character. Lucy attempts to
maintain control by announcing her own iterations of Daniel’s name. He responds by exclaiming, “She may call me hermaphrodite, if she will, for I hardly know whether I’m a boy or girl” (IV.i.200-201). As a hermaphrodite, Daniel does not belong to the young fellow category of designers or the decaying beauties of Suriname. Daniel works between both spaces of design; however, Daniel has no relationship with the land, with the soil of the plantations. Daniel, rather, is constructed through fabrics, through rich silks. Similar to the white female body, Daniel’s body is created from scraps of design: he is a glove designed for the white female body. He is an embellishment to the landscape. It is important to note that Lucy calls Daniel a hermaphrodite. She is the character to notice and name Daniel’s fluid gender roles in the play. Daniel, however, is prompted to give Lucy permission to use this fluid title. Lucy does not have access to design any part of Daniel’s character without his permission. Daniel, perhaps, functions to highlight the importance of design in shaping male and female characters. The white male body must create designs while the white female body must be the imitation or the embellishment of these designs. In defining himself as a hermaphrodite, Daniel exists as a possibility, neither male nor female, neither fabricated nor natural. Arguably, Daniel embodies cultural conceptions of the land itself: a space of possibility, a repository of human design, and a reflection of divine potential.

If the land is understood as a hermaphrodite, then the decaying beauties, the white female body, nurtures the possibility of a redesigned nature, a new creation. The land, and consequentially the white female body, is space of contradiction as well as a space of potential re-patterning. As Kathleen Wilson has described, “identity results from the negotiation between where one is placed and where one places oneself within social
networks, working through what is possible as well as what is forbidden” (3). Wilson defines identity formation as negation between spaces: a social space, a natural space, the embodied space. Importantly, Wilson argues that part of identity formation is realizing this compilation of places that makes up an identity. The embodied place, “where one places oneself,” is in conversation with the social space, where one is placed beyond his or her control. While an individual may not be able to choose his or her surroundings, he or she can at least design an embodied, personal self within these surroundings. The natural and social environment of a place is not merely backdrop, dictating the rules and behaviors of a specific self. Environments, rather, provide the space and tools for individuals to design his or her character. The environment itself is part of the narrative unfolding of interactions in and between spaces. The negotiation of people, culture, and spaces offers possibilities of designing: an always becoming social and embodied self.

Patterns of the Racialized Body: Monuments of Empire

In this section, I will continue to examine the role of the female body in *Oroonoko* by considering the racialized female body in the natural world of Southerne’s Suriname. In particular, I will look at the way that Imoinda is described by other characters, in particular Oroonoko’s descriptions of Imoinda, as another racialized and enslaved body. Importantly, her body is not equated to nature as a way to represent her body as an “earth other,” as a naturalized body under the domain of man. Rather, Imoinda retains her name and works in partnership with nature, planting her body, looking for freedom of self through her return to the enclosed soil of Suriname’s culturally scripted garden.

Imoinda’s whiteness has dominated the present-day scholarly conversation; however, an eighteenth-century audience would not have received her change to whiteness with as much shock and controversy. In the eighteenth century, skin color was
not a primary indicator of different races and cultures. As Felicity Nessbaum explains, “Blackness in the eighteenth century was [...] used to characterize persons from the Indies, the Americas, Africa, or the South Pacific; it was also applied to the Irish as a mark of their Celtic origins, and more generally to the laboring classes, especially coalminers and chimneysweeps” (Limits of the Human 151). “Blackness” was used as an indicator of class, not race. “Blackness” referred to manual labor with natural materials: an association with dirt and dust rather than an inherited skin color. As a result, Imoinda’s whiteness separates her from manual work. Her whiteness marks her as “clean.”

Though “blackness” was associated with class position, skin color was still used to distinguish difference. However, this difference was only significant when it was paired with other cultural practices. Kathleen Wilson suggests that “In the eighteenth century, ‘race’ as a line of descent or group was identified and signified through religion, custom, language, climate, aesthetics, and historical time as much as physiognomy and skin color” (12). Skin color as a racial indicator was not a static condition; rather, skin color acted merely as an outward signifier of embodied movement around the globe as a consequence of the British pursuit of power. Imoinda’s whiteness, or lack there of, did not make her either British or not-British. Her skin color merely identified her as an alternate iteration of British-ness, a testament to the power and expansiveness of British empirical power.

In order to better understand the role of racialized, enslaved bodies in the colonies, we must consider all of the bodies in the play: white, black, male, female, British, racialized, social, and natural. As an “other” landscape, Suriname was colonized
and divided into plantations for British sugar production (Amussan 227). To ensure profitable production, the owners of the plantations imported men and women from Africa to work the land (227). On the island, the Africans were identified by their different language and customs as well as their dark skin, a physical marker that distinguished them from the white plantation owner (287). This identity marker also distinguished white women from black women on the plantations, particularly in the way that the darker bodies worked in the landscape (228). As Susan Amussen notes in her book *Caribbean Exchanges: Slavery and the Transformation of English Society, 1640-1700*,

One of the distinctions between white women and black women [in the Caribbean] was that there was a large difference between the work of the white women and white men, while there was relatively little difference between the work of black women and black men. Over time, white women were seen as ‘not working’ in the Caribbean. (228)

White women were removed from a relationship with the land while black women were intimately engaged with the soil of the plantations. This relationship with the soil also developed a relationship between black women and black men. The land was a space for black women and black men to connect. Importantly, the land also acted as a distinguishing mark of identity within a system of British power. The land was a creator as well as a repository of British colonial power. While white women were distinguished from black women, black women were considered workers along side black men. Black women and black men were not distinguished by the sort of work that they did; rather black men and women were united by the similar ways in which they used and worked the soil of the plantations. As a result, it is important to distinguish between the work of
male and female slaves in the Caribbean in order to consider the possible differences in the way that they interacted with and affected the plantation soils of the British Empire.

In *Oroonoko*, the white and black signifiers of work in the soil are made problematic through Imoinda’s whiteness. Though her character was first perceived as a black slave in Aphra Behn’s version of *Oroonoko*, theatergoers encountered Imoinda as a white character, and therefore, she is more closely associated with the ornamental work of Charlotte and Lucy rather than the emblematic work of the black slaves. However, her whiteness as ornament is disregarded simply because of the fact that she originates from Angola, an environment outside of British control. Though both Charlotte and Lucy use the fertile potential of the plantation of Suriname to design marriages for themselves, the plantation of Suriname also offers the potential for a redesigned white female body, outside of white male design. The landscape garden allows for the possibility of the two narratives. An alternative white female body, Imoinda, is introduced as “fair Clemene” (II.iii.2). Here, she is renamed in order to distinguish her body as the property of the Lieutenant Governor. She is also defined as “fair”: Imoinda is a white slave. She, therefore, exists in the contradictory space of enslaved property and a white female body. Perhaps her body and her name suggest that the white female body is always already enslaved by the designs of the young fellows. Regardless, in Southerne’s *Oroonoko*, Imoinda uses her contradiction to re-design the use of her body within the plantations of Suriname.

Accordingly, she is often conflated with the land that surrounds her. In a scene on the plantation, the Lieutenant Governor confesses his affection for Imoinda:

> And I will listen to your mournful song,
> Sweet as the soft complaining nightingales,
While every note calls out my trembling soul
And leaves me silent as the midnight groves,
Only to shelter you. Sing, sing, again,
And let me wonder at the many ways
You have to ravish me. (II.iii.3-9)

The Lieutenant Governor describes the way that Imoinda’s voice harmonizes with Nature. Her voice mingles with the nightingales and echoes through the groves of the imagined landscape garden. Importantly, Imoinda’s body is not described as a physical presence; rather, her body is described in terms of her voice, a voice that both entrances the Lieutenant Governor and protects Imoinda’s physical body from the power of his designs. Though she is disembodied, she dictates the design and use of her body within the Lieutenant Governor’s plantation. Unlike Charlotte and Lucy, Imoinda is not defined through her reflection of the natural world in her rich silks; instead, Imoinda is given a voice through nature. She is able to express her mourning through the natural world. The natural world speaks with her, for her, and through her. Her white female body is defined through its porous relationship with nature.

Imoinda has the ability to design her identity in the land. As a result, she is conflated with the black male body, which also works in the land. Imoinda’s identity is nurtured through her relationship with the landscape as well as through the other characters that work in this same landscape. Most significantly, Imoinda’s identity is defined through Oroonoko’s work in the landscapes of Angola, his originating landscape, and Suriname, his current landscape. Oroonoko iterates a narrative of empirical power when he explains his relationship to Imoinda. He confesses to Blanford that

There was a stranger in my father’s court,
Valued and honored much. He was a white,
The first I ever saw of your complexion.
He changed his gods for ours and so grew great;
Of many virtues, and so famed in arms
He still commanded all of my father’s wars.
I was bred under him. (II.ii.76-83).

Oroonoko explains his connection to Imoinda. He also demonstrates the way in which empire is not built on domination but on a transcultural experience: “He changed his gods for ours and so grew great” (II.ii.79). As Oroonoko notes, in order to become great, one must revoke their old culture and adapt to a new culture. Race is not defined by skin color, but by the adoption and practice of particular customs within a specific landscape. The stranger, Imoinda’s father, was able to raise Oroonoko in the tradition of Oroonok’s father’s court because of his willingness to learn new customs. Power, then, is cultivated through a recognition, appreciation, and adoption of other cultural traditions. Cultural norms are valued for the ways in which they can cultivate power in various landscapes, regardless of geographic location.

Since cultural power is defined by the particular landscape in which that culture originates, cultural power is not transferable through movement. When Oroonoko is captured by the British Captain, he is brought to a new landscape where the Captain has the cultural power. In speaking about Oroonoko, the Captain states that “I did design to carry him to England to have showed him there, but I found him troublesome upon my hands, and I’m glad I’m rid of him.” (I.ii.166-167). The Captain talks about the ways in which Oroonoko would have been used as a spectacle in England, put on display, an ornament of the Captains power (see Figure 7 for example). It is important to note that the Captain embodies the role of designer. He planned to show Oroonoko in England in order to ornament his own power, to use Oroonoko’s body as a spectacle of his own ability to capture and colonize. According to the Captain, Oroonoko’s body is redeemed
through his designs: Oroonoko’s body functions symbolically to indicate British power in Angola. Oroonoko is an item of curiosity, a body of display, which oraments the Captains colonial power.

In this way, the stage acts as a place to practice positions of power. The stage displays different positions of power, placing both those in power and those under power as spectacles to be admired and critiqued by an audience. This role of design and spectacle is furthered through the commands of the Captain and of the Lieutenant Governor as they are presented on stage. After the Captain explains his previous desire to show-off his Oroonoko as a royal slave, he asks for his other slaves to enter and parade across the stage. The stage directions indicate that “black slaves—men, women, and children—pass across the stage by two and two” (I.ii.170-171). The stage itself becomes a self-conscious space of spectacle for the audience. Their bodies are identified as “different” because of the way in which the bodies are working within the scene in Suriname. The black bodies, both male and female, are being shown off. Their bodies are not valued for their individuality, but rather for their association with the Captain. Importantly, Oroonoko is the only slave who is recognized as an individual. During the parade, the Captain urges the Governor to “pray observe [Oroonoko]” (I.ii.182). Though Oroonoko is grouped with the other black bodies, his body is distinguished from the rest because of the power that he had in Angola, his originating landscape.

Oroonoko is distinguished from the other black bodies on the stage by his previous status as a slave owner. Oroonoko’s black body is not an indication of his insufficiency or difference from the landowners; his black skin is simply a mark of his association with a different landscape. As Blanford, a plantation owner in Suriname
observes: “Most of ‘em know no better: they were born so and only change their masters. But a prince, born only to command, betrayed, and sold! My heart drops blood for him” (I.ii.178-181). Oroonoko may ornament British power, but he is also a monument to his previous power. Blanford indicates that the master/slave dialogue is not unique to British empirical power; rather, the master/slave dialogue is a universal language of power. Though Oroonoko is black, he is still revered for the power that he had in his previous landscape. His status as Prince is only recognized nominally within the British empire. Arguably, Oroonoko becomes a character to cultivate sympathy for the condition of slavery. He represents the failure of the transfer of power across different landscapes. Perhaps, his condition is also propaganda, demonstrating the necessity for the British to claim and design landscapes across the globe in order to maintain command everywhere. Oroonoko’s transition from Prince to slave demonstrates the importance of transferable customs within the British Empire.

Though Oroonoko’s power is not actively recognized in Suriname, Imoinda explains the way in which the master/slave dialogue is a universal condition. Imoinda occupies a space of design for both the Lieutenant Governor and the black slave Oroonoko. As Imoinda confronts her status as a slave, she announces that

I’m tossed about by my tempestuous fate
And nowhere must have rest. Indians or English!
Whoever has me, I am still a slave.
No matter whose I am, since I am not more
My royal master’s,
since I’m his no more.
Oh! I was happy! Nay, I will be happy
In the dear thought that I am still his wife,
Though far divided from him. (II.iv. 51-58).
Imoinda has resigned to the fact that she does not own her body. Similar to Charlotte and Lucy, Imoinda’s body is property, having value in its relationship to men. Imoinda declares that she is both a slave to Indians who may capture her in Suriname or a slave to the English, who captured her body in Angola. Interestingly, Imoinda does not recognize that she is also slave to Oroonoko, even though she uses the language of enslavement, calling Oroonoko “my royal master.” She uses the rhetoric of ownership when describing their relationship. In this description, Imoinda recognizes her inability to work outside of a slave system, but her ability to choose her master. Though Imoinda is confined to a system where the female body is an ornament to male power, she has agency in this system to name her master and to choose the master that has her allegiance.

Oroonoko uses Imoinda’s allegiance to his power in order to re-establish his power in a new landscape. Her body acts as a way for Oroonoko to redefine empire apart from just landscape. His power can be represented through the female body as an ornament to his potential for empire. When Oroonoko first encounters Imoinda in Suriname, he exclaims

Hah! She faints!
Nay, then it must be she: it is Imoinda!
My heart confesses her and leaps for joy
To welcome her to her own empire here.
I feel her all, in every part of me.
Oh! Let me press her in my eager arms,
Wake her to life, and with this kindling kiss
Give back that soul she only lent to me. (II.iv. 106-112).

Oroonoko describes a physical response and connection when he sees Imoinda in Suriname. Imoinda is recognized as his because of her physical response: she faints, “nay then it must be she: it is Imoinda” (II.iv.105). Accordingly, Oroonoko also has a physical response. He describes how he feels her presence all over his body and the ways in which
he wants to bring her close to his body: “Let me press her in my eager arms…”

(II.iv.111). Interestingly, Oroonoko describes his body as an empire, and he defines
Imoinda’s body in the way that she is a part of this empire. She is not necessarily an
intimate part of Oroonoko’s body as empire; rather, she is accessory to his empire, a body
that he invites and welcomes into his empire. And Imoinda, as a fainted body, becomes
the spectacle of Oroonoko’s adoration, the embodied extent of Oroonoko’s power of
design. Imoinda’s body becomes a way in which Oroonoko can invision the landscapes
of his empirical power. Through her body, Oroonoko can shape Suriname into a place for
his control. He literally invites Imoinda into his body: “I feel her all, in every part of
me./Oh! Let me press her in my eager arms.” Since Imoinda has fainted, Oroonoko is
able to position and shape her body to fulfill his designs for empire.

Despite Oroonoko’s obsession with Imoinda as an extension of his body as
empire, he also describes her physical presence in terms of the landscape of Suriname. In
surveying her body, Oroonoko expresses that

The little spot of earth you stand upon
Is more to me than the extended plains
Of my great father’s kingdom. Here I reign
In full delights, in joys to pow’r unknown:
Your love my empire, and your heart my throne. (II.iv.183-190)

Imoinda’s body is a new creation of Oroonoko’s power in the colony of Suriname.
Through her white female body, he has power. Her physical presence has reinstated his
ability to reign and dictate the work of other bodies. Her body is a tool for Oroonoko’s
power. Importantly, Oroonoko recognizes that he had power in Angola, “…the extended
plains/Of my great Father’s kingdom” (II.iv.184-185); however, through Imoinda,
Oroonoko has found empirical power in Suriname. His ability to use her body and see her
body in the landscape of Suriname has increased the value of Suriname for him. Though Oroonoko has discovered that he can reinstate his power through Imoinda’s body, Imoinda remains silent. She has become a repository of power—the power of the black male body. Though she has expressed that she is happy to be with him and to see him again (II.iv.105), she does not have the same power that he does through their reunion.

As noted earlier, the stage directions indicate that when Imoinda sees Oroonoko, “She looks upon him and falls into a swoon; he runs to her” (II.iv.106). Her body is rendered incapable when she sees him. Her love for Oroonoko disables her body, and Oroonoko must run to her, to save her, to use his power to design the movements of her body. Imoinda’s white female body is the expansive plains of Oroonoko’s self-proclaimed kingdom.

As Oroonoko reinstates his power through Imoinda’s body, he is able to envision a slave revolt through which he can claim and design the landscape of Suriname. Empire is decided on the way in which bodies work together with the landscape, both cultural and natural. Hottman, a black slave in Suriname who was also Oroonoko’s slave in Angola, wishes for freedom through a slave revolt. In speaking with Aboan, another black slave, about his desire to start a slave revolt, Hottman recognizes the role of a physical bodies in the movement and development of power:

I cannot conjure to raise the spirits of other men;
I am but one. Oh! For a soul of fire,
To warm and animate our common cause,
And make a body of us.” (II.iv. 180-182).

Hottman recognizes that his individual desire for freedom is not enough. He needs the desires of many, a common cause, to create a powerful body. Oroonoko takes control of this slave revolt. He understands himself as the leader of this revolt and he describes the
ways in which he can redesign the plantations of Suriname to receive his power. Through his reunion with Imoinda, Oroonoko is reminded of his previous power and the limitless potential of his power within the new landscape in the Caribbean.

The Natural world becomes a tool with which the slaves rely on to find liberty. In his speech to his fellow slaves before their revolt, Oroonoko announces:

Impossible! Nothing’s impossible.  
We know our strength only by being tired.  
If you object the mountains, rivers, woods  
Unpassable that lie before our march,  
Woods we set on fire; we swim by nature.  
What can oppose us, then, but we may tame?  
All things submit to virtuous industry.  
That we can carry with us, that is ours. (III.iv.1-9).

Oroonoko declares that the slaves can summon power through their ability to “tame” nature. The slaves must “tame” nature in order to find their own liberty. Liberty cannot be understood without confinement: an enslaved natural world allows for a liberated people. Interestingly, Oroonoko also recognizes the need to work for this liberty: “All things submit to virtuous industry.” In other words, hard work leads to favorable outcomes. This favorable outcome, however, relies on an uneven power dynamic. Oroonoko believes that in order to be defined as fully human, in order to be defined as a powerful body, he must name, cultivate, and tame the landscape. His definition of power relies on the material signifiers of power: “That we can carry with us what is ours.”

Oroonoko is perhaps not a corrective for British Empire; instead he provides a vocabulary for understanding the role of environment in using and dispersing power. As he commands the slaves to tame nature in order to overpower their British oppressors, Oroonoko describes his role in the revolt. He plans “To lead our march down to the sea, and plant/A colony where, in our native innocence,/We shall live free” (III.iv.26-29).
Though Oroonoko is himself a slave, he seems to essentialize the conditions of slavery, believing that the racialized body, “in our native innocence,” is closer to nature. In introducing his new empire, Oroonoko proclaims:

…My father’s kingdom  
Shall open her wide arms to take you in  
And nurse you for her own, adopt you all,  
All who will follow me…  
There I can give you all liberty. (IV.i125-127, 129).

Interestingly, though Oroonoko is describing the creation of a temporary empire in Suriname, he recognizes that he has inherited his power to have empire. The proposed empire in Suriname is a branch of his father’s kingdom in Angola. Oroonoko also defines his empire in terms of a body, a female body. The female body nurtures his power, it unites his people, and provides freedom. Though the place of Oroonoko’s empire is feminized, this place of empire is restorative. The female body is the formative material of empirical male power.

Though Oroonoko makes these lavish claims of empire to his fellow Angolan slaves, his empire has a physical, material presence in Imoinda’s female body. Oroonoko asserts that he has the power to reign over Imoinda’s body; however, her body fertilizes the possibility of a shared future. Imoinda is pregnant with Oroonoko’s baby. Her body is literally a fertile space of possibility and inheritance. She, however, describes her fertile body as “the fountain of flowing miseries,” “this pois’nous spring,/that swells so fast to overwhelm us” (III.ii.181-185). Though she has demonstrated her relationship with Nature, she emphasizes her inability to control the pattern. She mourns that the baby is growing and developing too quickly within her body. Importantly, Imoinda indicates that her swelling body is not just overwhelming her, it is overwhelming “us”—Imoinda and
Oroonoko. Her fertile body cannot be controlled by their human powers of design; rather, Nature designs a new space between their two bodies.

As a result, Imoinda’s white female body is not a decoration of the young fellow’s garden or the space of Oroonoko’s kingdom; rather, her body swells with the possibilities of the landscape. In an attempt to harness some sort of power, Oroonoko and Imoinda attempt to design the possibility for their bodies. Oroonoko exclaims:

Methinks I see the babe with infant hands
Pleasing for life and begging to be born.
Shall I forbid his birth? Deny him light,
And make the womb the dungeon of his death,
His bleeding mother his sad monument?
These are the calls of Nature, that call loud (IV.ii.170-175)

Imoinda’s body is both a dungeon and a monument. Oroonoko confines the space of her body: he describes her body symbolically, despite the material, living growth that is changing her body. Her white female body fertilizes future potential, nurturing the inheritor of Oroonoko’s power. Her swelling body is a reminder of the overwhelming power of Nature. She nurtures the power of a continued race. The female body is a marker of inheritance, a sort of monument of human design, perhaps even a monument to the designer himself. As a monument, her body is a memory of the past designed for the future. Importantly, as a space of human design, the female body also becomes a space of communion. The baby is a record of the relationship between Imoinda and Oroonoko. Her body is a living memory of the future.

Conceptions of nation and race are formed through a network of relationships. Kathleen Wilson uses the term “transculture” to describe this relationship. Transculture is a term created by Fernando Ortiz in order to describe the loss and transformation of Carribbean life as a result of colonization. Wilson understands “transculture” as greater
than hybridity, Homi K. Bhabah’s term for the degenerative integration of cultural experience as a result of encounter during colonization. Wilson suggests that transculture has more positive associations than hybridity: transculture is a dynamic process of creative confrontation between cultures. Rather than focusing on the loss of one culture over another, transculture emphasizes the creation of a new culture. Therefore, transculture is not homogenization or a forced adoption of customs; rather, transculture is a distillation of both cultures, a grafting of British and Caribbean cultural ideas. Empire resides within variability rather than domination.

Conceptions of power were continually transformed across landscapes, providing fresh opportunities to rework, refine, and cultivate varieties of Britishness. Within British Empire, the process of transcultural meant that

national and regional boundaries were easily transgressed by the systematic, if not systematic nature of empire itself. Despite the lack of coherence in the central policy, the eighteenth-century ‘empire of the sea’ and the wars that threatened, maintained, and extended it created a network that, halting and imperfect, was also remarkably efficient in allowing people, gossip, connections, ideas, and identity to travel and be transformed. (16)

Wilson describes a new creation as a “local translation of wider imperial circuit” (16). Wilson describes the importance of a local place within empire. For the British, the white female body became a local space that could be moved and reworked. The movement and the variety of embodied experiences of the white female body allowed for the continued expansion of British Empire. That empire allows for a transformation of materials through movement. Importantly this transformation does not necessarily come at a loss, but at a celebration of difference and an opportunity to become. It is important to recognize the Wilson seems to celebrate empire and forgets to privilege the importance of
lived locations. But if survival is important to consider in empire, then there needs to be a way in which people can transform materials, translate power, so that identities and materials can be redesigned within new spaces. Perhaps natural landscapes nurture the materials of that construct the human body in order to cultivate new creations of human power.

**Dressing for Garden Performance**

In considering the relationship between the female body and the natural world, I risk essentializing the female body as a porous, natural body that is closer to the natural world than other human bodies, which limits my discussion of the garden to an extension of the human body. In the essay “Toward an Ecofeminist Standpoint Theory,” Deborah Slicer pieces together feminist and environmental criticism in order to consider the relationship between the natural world and the female body as spaces of performance. She converses with several well-known feminist theorists, such as Judith Butler and Val Plumwood, in order to suggest ways in which the female body can be considered as a sort of ground that is both defined materially and constructed naturally. Silver suggests that femininity as a body is both a performance of culturally defined femininity and a signifier of natural composition (estrogen). The female body is a physical matter and not a cultural subject. Most importantly for my discussion, Slicer refers to Plumwood’s descriptions of femininity, arguing that “because women are identified as part of nature, rather than as discontinuous with nature, and are assigned work that serves and is immersed in material life, women’s self-identities and ontological orientations are more continuous with nature and thus serve as helpful starting points in rethinking certain predominant ontological and social assumptions” (54). In other words, the female body is associated with the natural world in order to demonstrate the market value of the material properties of nature. The
female body is socially constructed through the ways in which the female body interacts with nature and demonstrates the variety of uses of the natural world within a constructed, social world. The female body is a tool that translates natural materials into cultural materials. Through the female body, nature is endowed with social value and significance. In this way, nature is a material, an accessory to a socially contrived femininity. The female body and nature as body are both materials that are designed upon by men and exchanged between men. However, the materials are ultimately a female space, a female material that dictates the way in which men can use the female body and nature as body.

As a result, the female body and nature as body are both physical objects that do not need to be transformed in order to have value and integrity. The body as matter connects the subject—female or male, natural or social—to the spaces that he or she occupies. In her essay “Bodies that Matter,” Butler interrogates the implication of body as matter. She theorizes that bodies “matter, not as site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter” (9). The body—female, male, natural, or social—is always in a state of becoming. The body works with and in the materials that surround it in order to become an actively forming definition of place. Accordingly, each body is created from a variety of matter that comes in contact with it. Both human bodies and nature as body are distinguishable from one another by the ways in which each body uses and contributes to any surrounding matter. Materials, then, become a way to construct the body, to clothe the body in a way that can highlight individual value and presence.
Body as matter has value and presence in the way that it interacts with surrounding bodies, both creating and recreating these bodies. As London asserts in her analysis of the eighteenth-century British novel, women are given agency in their ability to create; however, by the end of the novel, “that agency is relocated within male characters by way of endings that assert the primacy of real property and hence women’s subordination to the men who control it” (7). Though her discussion is circumscribed to the British novel, her assertions also apply to British drama. Interestingly, her assertions are undone when we consider the landscape as a character rather than a symbol of authority and a measurement of social hierarchy. When nature is considered as a character of interest and a character of labor, it must be placed within the hierarchy of men and women in the eighteenth century England, and it therefore undoes the social hierarchy that is created through land ownership. With this perspective, women are no longer emblematic of the land or moveable signifiers of property; rather, women are workers with the land. The social hierarchy is no longer determined by labor in the landscape. Instead, the social hierarchy is determined by labor with, finding freedom within the moment when garden and wilderness collide.

_Petticoats of the Embellished Garden_  
In order to explore these assertions of materially constructed bodies, I want to ground my discussion in an examination of the materials of design in _Oroonoko_. First, Charlotte and Lucy wear the ornamental dress of the garden work in Suriname. At the close of the play, Welldon redresses himself as Charlotte. As she explains to Stanmore, “your old friend in breeches that was, and now your humble servant in petticoats” (V.i.48). With her change in clothes she also has a change in character. First, the play script itself signals this shift, as Welldon’s lines no longer exist, and are now signaled by
the name “Charlotte.” Second, she transitions from a friend to a servant. The emergence of petticoats immediately places Charlotte as subject to Stanmore instead of an equal to Stanmore. The clothing also acts as a way for Charlotte to protect herself from social rejection. As she confesses to Stanmore, “I was resolved to see whether you liked me as a woman or not. If I had found you indifferent, I would have endeavored to have been so, too. But you say you like me, and therefore I have ventured to discover the truth” (V.i.77-80). Through clothing, Charlotte was able to gain a relationship to power that she previously did not have access to. Importantly, Charlotte concedes that her body belongs in the petticoats, even though the breeches apparently negated her femininity. This scene calls attention to the reliance on material design in defining the reception of the body. Though Charlotte’s body ultimately resides in petticoats, her cross dress as Welldon successfully redesigned her body as male.

Charlotte explains the way that her clothing acted as a tool for her in the landscape. She explains to Stanmore that “At more leisure I’ll satisfy you how I came to be in man’s clothes—for no ill, I assure you, though I have happened to play the rogue in ‘em. They have assisted me in marrying my sister and have gone a great way in befriending your cousin Jack with the widow” (V.i.86-90). While these explanations are part of the hilarity and ridiculousness of the Restoration plot, Charlotte’s clothing demonstrates the way in which clothing acts as an embodiment of power. In the breeches, Charlotte was able to design a space for her female self, so that when she re-emerged in her petticoats, she would be able to ornament a landscape of her own design. Importantly, this power is confined to social relations. The ability to shift in clothing also demonstrates the importance of material construction in defining the performance of
bodies in the garden. Charlotte recognizes that the clothes “assisted” her in her designs. She needed the material, masculine signifier—breeches—in order to work in Suriname, to design a space for her female body in the social and natural landscape.

Chains of Garden Work
Dressing for the garden becomes an outward signifier of the body’s role in the garden—a way to mend the reception of the body with the work that the body performs. The first time that Oroonoko is described in any sort of dress in the play, he is described in chains. Aboan reminds Oroonoko of what it is like to be a slave:

Remember, sir,
You are a slave yourself, and to command
Is now another’s right. Not think of it!
Since the first moment they put on my chains,
I’ve thought of nothing but the weight of ‘em
And how to throw them off. Can your sit easy? (III.ii.110-115).

In designing dress for the garden, Aboan describes the battle between liberty and confinement. Chains are a signifier for confinement. Importantly, Aboan draws attention to the physical presence of these chains, remarking about the weight of the chains, the way in which these chains dictate and limit the movement and potential of the body. Aboan also calls attention to the way in which the chains are outward signifiers of a slave. The chains are congruent with Oroonoko’s position as a slave.

Though these chains are a social material, and not a natural material of physical construction, the chains create physical marks on the body, thus changing the appearance of Oroonoko’s body. Oroonoko describes the physical marks of slavery and confinement:

But while I am a man,
In flesh that bears the living mark of shame,
The print of his dishonorable chains,
My memory still rousing up my wrongs,
I never can forgive this governor,
This villain, the disgrace of trust and place,
Unjust contempt of delegated power. (V.iii.48-54).

This speech, first of all, acts as a corrective to the earlier scenes of spectacle. Here, Oroonoko’s speech is made separate from his body as spectacle. His words call attention to the way in which bodies are marked by the power of man: bodies as landscape and landscape as character. Oroonoko separates himself as man from “flesh that bears the living mark of shame.” The chains may be a signifier of his body’s narrative; however, he asserts that his is separate from the print that incases his body. Importantly, Oroonoko recognizes that “unjust contempt of delegated power” put him in these chains. The materials of confinement are means of power, a signifier of power of the bodies. His chained body is a monument to British empirical power.

As a dungeon and monument to unrestrained Nature, Imoinda’s body is remade through Nature. She, therefore, belongs to the earth. Oroonoko, however, imagines a violent communal burial of their bodies in the soil of the plantation:

I cannot bear it.
Oh, let me dash against this rock of fate,
Dig up this earth, tear, tear, her bowels out
To make a grave deep as the center down
To swallow wide and bury us together. (V.v.290-294)

Here, Oroonoko feminizes the earth. He envisions a sort of raping of the earth, a tearing and a violent removal of her bowels. Oroonoko seems to believe that he and Imoinda belong in the earth, swallowed by the earth. His description could also indicate a deconstruction and potential reconstruction of the landscape garden of Suriname. He images her body penetrating the earth, decaying and nurturing possibilities, nurturing a liberated female self. Importantly, Oroonoko must use violent language, describing the earth as a female space that must be reworked by men in order to receive human power.
Though Oroonoko seems to control the designs of the communal suicide, Imoinda kills herself. She ultimately designs her body as well as the space for her body. She prefices her suicide by suggesting that her death is a group activity: “Nay then, I must assist you./And since it is the common cause of both,/’Tis just that both should be employed in it./(Stabs herself)” (V.v.319-321). She is not the only one who will die. Along with her death, Oroonoko will die and their baby will die. Her death signals an end to their lineage, to the continuation of her pattern. Importantly, Imoinda recognizes the constraints of her body, and she is able to free herself from her body.

In removing her spirit from her body, Imoinda has the potential to redesign her physical pattern. Imoinda’s body becomes the monument to the potential of her redesigned white female body. After her death, Oroonoko shifts his descriptions of power from her physical body to her liberated spirit. Oroonoko feels as though he must also kill the man, the Lieutenant Governor, who confined Imoinda to her Clemene identity. After killing the Lieutenant Governor, Oroonoko proclaims that “I have sent his ghost/ To be a witness of that happiness/In the next world which he denied us here” (V.v.350-351). There is an assumption of an afterlife that is free from the bodies of the landscaped world. Importantly, this statement reveals that the race, class, and gender patterns of the embroidered plantation are confined to the plantation. The body, whether white or black, male or female, is designed as a pattern of the social structures of the British mainland. When the spirit exits the body, the spirit finds liberty in a new space, a space without the designed bodies. Interestingly, the spirit maintains the personality and desires from the landscaped world. The only difference is the lack of a designed body. Though the spirit is removed from the physical body, the physical body still lays on the stage. Imoinda’s body
has a physical afterlife. The play text and stage directions never indicate what her body does or where it is moved after she dies. Her body, then, escapes the designs of the young fellows and is left, decaying in the imagination of the theatergoers. Perhaps her body still has a use value in Nature, within the landscape garden.
Conclusion

Designs of Natural Liberation: The Garden Afterlife

Though Charlotte, Lucy, Oroonoko, and Imoinda perform work in the garden of Suriname, the garden of Suriname has the ability to perform and flourish on its own.

Thomas Southerne calls attention to the necessity of an independent landscape in his preface to the performance of Oroonoko. First, he acknowledges his debt to Aphra Behn for providing him with a source of inspiration for his play. He continues, however, now he admonishes her for not considering the ways in which Oroonoko could work on the stage: “She had great command of the stage, and I have often wondered that she would bury her favorite hero in a novel, when she might have revived him in the scene” (Oroonoko 428). Southerne recognizes the power of different mediums for expressing ideas. He uses the word “bury” to describe Behn’s use of Oroonoko as a character. This claim describes Oroonoko as a character that is buried in language. His body is a material of Behn’s text rather than the result of the text. Behn relies on Oroonoko’s character to write her novella. Southern, conversely, revives Oroonoko in the drama of the play. Southerne names this process of revival as “mending.” He concludes his preface, claiming “Whatever happened to him in Suriname, he has mended his condition in England. He was born here under your Grace’s influence, and that has carried his fortune farther into the world than all the poetical starts that I could have solicited for his success” (Oroonoko 428). Southerne equates Oroonoko’s popularity with the way in which his body has functioned with in a British landscape. He has been shaped by Southerne but also by the landscapes he occupies—novel, drama, Suriname, and England. As Britain becomes a part of Oroonoko’s performed identity, he simultaneously changes the shape of British identity. Britain has “mended” Oroonoko’s character.
Southerne adapts this idea in Oroonoko as he depends on the British Empire to both shape and receive his character. In this way, the landscape itself is understood as a material that renews human designs. The scholar John Dixon Hunt examines the “afterlife” of gardens, which he defines as “the use of gardens by individuals” (Bending 12). Hunt uses the term “garden afterlife” in order to talk about the public reception of gardens. In his study of the garden afterlife, he uses reader response theory to discuss the reactionary experience of gardens. He argues that “a reception study will not displace the well-established approach [of examining garden designs], but it does offer exciting and fresh perspectives on garden culture by exploring how sites are experienced, often through a longue duree of existence, change, and reformulation” (Afterlife of Gardens “Preface” 7). Hunts description of the garden afterlife suggests that both cultural and natural landscapes are future oriented, a growth and entanglement of physical materials. The garden never ceases to exist; rather the garden is in a process of existing through a continual process of decay, growth, and design. The individual body, then, is redesigned through Nature. The cultural landscape of theater along with the natural materials of the cultural landscape gardens allowed Southerne to nurture a new narrative, a new creation for Oroonoko.

Southerne uses this same metaphor of burial within the play. As Imoinda’s body decays in the bowels of the earth, she has the potential to be redesigned through the materials of the plantation, through the soil of the earth. Her body is no longer designed upon; rather, her body is absorbed into Nature. She becomes a monument to the possibilities of Nature, to the possibilities of the white female body. Her return to nature recalls the conclusion of the Biblical narrative of the Garden of Eden. As discussed in the
Introduction, Genesis 3:18-24 describes God’s transformation of the Garden after Adam and Eve’s sin: “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou art return” (KJV). As Imoinda returns to dust, the materials of nature, her body is transformed back into nature. Her inactive breath is absorbed into the active decay and regrowth of the natural world. Nature, therefore, is freed from its primary use as an anthropocentric tool. If the body is a material created by and through natural processes of design, nature is the ultimate designer. Human design is only an illusion, a temporary mark on nature, absorbed through the natural process of decay.

If I accept that nature nurtures a new creation for Imoinda’s body, I am problematically suggesting that death, the return to dust, is the source of freedom for the female body. In the return to dust, women are freed from their socially scripted bodies. I am continuing to research the possibilities of an “afterlife” for women within the burial garden. If I assume that Oroonoko places Imoinda’s body in the “bowels of the earth,” then the burial garden provides a way to envision the earth as the final designer of human identity, a design outside of human control. A social identity is only momentary. The earth absorbs lived bodies, and the bodies decay into the materials of the earth. The natural world, the foundational material of culture, is the quintessence of lived experience—the “dust of dust” of man’s lives. The soil, then, is not natural patterns of man; rather, the soil is natural patterns for man. Perhaps humans never have the narrative power of design. A natural narrative of design only resides in the imagination of man, never in the material of nature, or at least never permanently in the material of nature.
The garden is the foundation of human design, not the product of it. Nature has agency in the Fall.

It is still, however, important to recall that humans rely on theoretical language to distance their bodies from the earth. In his book *Landscape and Power,* W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that landscape has material power in the way that it nurtures the relationship between humans and the natural world, between “the Human and the non-Human” (15).

The act of designing landscape, such as gardens, is a performed translation of nature into culture and culture into nature. Through the garden, visitors enter into an active process of human and non-human dialogue. Mitchell describes landscapes as,

not only a natural scene, and not just a representation of a natural scene, but a natural representation of a natural scene, a trace or icon of nature in nature itself, as if nature were imprinting and encoding its essential structures on our perceptual apparatus. (15)

In the eighteenth century, cultural theorists and political advocates believed that nature could be perfected through man’s ability to reflect natural design in culture. The designed nature of the garden becomes a way in which nature becomes relatable and useful to humans: “a trace or icon of nature in nature itself.” As gardens grow into a designed “natural” space, nature becomes more a part of the growth of a collective human body, “imprinting and encoding” upon the body of the British Empire.

It is, therefore, fitting to end with the two prints of the garden workers that began my discussion of the British gardens of colonial power. Figure 1 and Figure 2 depict bodies that are both working in and with the natural world. As their bodies form the garden, the garden shapes their bodies. Their bodies are designed for the work of the garden as the garden is shaped by their labor. These images have the potential to extend my discussion of the ornamental, monumental, and natural work of bodies within pursuits
of colonial power: what natural materials were picked to dress the garden?; where did this natural materials come from?; how were these natural materials cared for?; if these natural materials are from other places, how did they change, disrupt, or fertilize the soils of the British empire?
Works Consulted


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