



Oroonoko

Aphra Behn

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"Oroonoko" by Aphra Behn is an important work of western literature. Published in 1688, it follows the tragic love story of Oroonoko and Imoinda, two Coromantin lovers. The two young people fall deeply in love with each other and are secretly married. Yet the king also loves Imoinda, and commands that she become a part of his harem. When he discovers that she has already lost her virginity, he secretly sells her as a slave. Because of his overwhelming guilt, the king lies to Oroonoko and says that Imoinda has died. Oroonoko carries on with his life without Imoinda. Yet he is later betrayed by a friend and is also sold into slavery. The two lovers are surprisingly reunited, and they continue their relationship. Imoinda becomes pregnant, and the two petition to be allowed to return to their homeland. Their request is denied, so Oroonoko organizes a slave revolt. The lovers plan to kill their oppressor, but Oroonoko is worried at how Imoinda will be treated if he is killed. They discuss their options, and they realize that the only way to escape this world with honor is for Imoinda to die. Oroonoko kills Imoinda, but he is too deep in mourning to carry out their original plan. Oroonoko is sentenced to death, but he stands stoically while his oppressors dismember him. A deeply moving and tragic tale of love and loss, "Oroonoko" stands as one of the first great English novels and a classic of the canon of Western fiction.

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