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"'Tis there eternal spring": Mapping the Exotic in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko

Andrew Hiscock

"The various [Restoration] works so far mentioned in this chapter have been considered because they form part of the history of English prose fiction; but their intrinsic value is such that no well-read man [sic] need reproach himself if he never turns their pages."¹

- 1 Such is the conclusion in James Sutherland's still widely-read survey of Restoration literature. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the purpose of this study is to challenge such a claim with regard to Behn's *Oroonoko*, even if the scope of my discussion does not allow me to undermine his assertion with recourse to other prose texts from the period.
- 2 Aphra Behn has been hailed as the first English woman writer to earn her living professionally—indeed, the sheer volume of her output renders her the most productive Restoration writer after Dryden. Despite Behn's celebrated reputation as a playwright, Janet Todd invites us to consider that "for literary history, [Behn's] most important new area was prose fiction, not an established form (and not yet especially lucrative)"². In the 1680s, in the last years of her life, Behn appears to have turned to prose writing to mend her ailing career as a playwright. Her male counterparts, such as Dryden and Wycherley for example, were similarly suffering as a result of a sustained crisis in the theatre³. In this decade, the theatre environment of the capital was in a state of decay as a jittery nation reeled from the revelation in 1678 of a supposed *Popish Plot* promoting the cause of the catholic Duke of York. Moreover, in 1682 with regard to Behn herself, it is thought that she met with disapprobation at court for her prologue and epilogue to the play *Romulus and Hersilia, or, The Sabine War*, in which the Duke of Monmouth was brought into disrepute.
- 3 Licensed for publication in the autumn of 1688 (but not appearing in print until 1689), *Oroonoko* clearly constitutes an important line of enquiry in any genealogy for prose narrative that we may wish to construct.⁴ Prose writing was clearly a *pioneering* venture on Behn's part for a largely untested mass market and may indeed have constituted, as Gallagher proposes, "*a wild space, unmapped and unarticulated*"⁵. Nevertheless, in all her

fiction writing, Behn is clearly seen to experiment with *received* conventions of genre [romance, epistolary novel, *nouvelle* and the *chronique scandaleuse*, for example] in order to create hybrids which continue to challenge her readership and to revise gendered expectations regarding authorship⁶. It must also become gradually apparent that in *Oroonoko*, Behn is drawing upon conventions traditionally associated with that popular Restoration discourse which was to be nurtured by the Royal Society: the travel narrative⁷. In addition, *Oroonoko* was certainly popular amongst the first generation of its readers—so much so, that in 1696, Thomas Southerne dramatised a substantially-revised version of Behn's narrative ...only this time with a white heroine! It may be that both texts benefited from the enthusiasms of an early anti-slavery sentiment; but equally, they may have responded to some contemporary prejudices that *disorderly* European women went to the colonies in order to satisfy their sexual appetites with natives of various provenance⁸.

- 4 Since the beginning of the century there has been controversy over the idea whether Behn did, in *Oroonoko*, generate an *other self* in narratorial terms or whether this short prose work constituted a positioning of herself within biographical discourse, which it purports to be: "I was myself an eye-witness, to a great part, of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself"⁹. Exploring the facts as they appeared in the 1940s, MacCarthy concluded that "Mrs.Behn's way is half heroic and half realistic"¹⁰. The tide of critical opinion now points in favour of Behn having been in Surinam at some point in the years 1663-1664 when she would have been approaching her mid-twenties. Whatever the direction the controversy may take in the future, it should be remembered, as Rogers points out, that "none of her contemporaries [...] suggested that she had not been there"¹¹. However, the archeological polemic over Behn's presence in Surinam or otherwise surely overlooks the fact that approximately half of the narrative is located in West Africa and on board a slaving ship of which no one suggests Behn would have had first-hand knowledge, and that the Surinam which Behn evokes in the 1680s shows that any memories she may have had of the place have been often considerably *refreshed* by recourse to secondary texts and empowered by rhetorical conventions¹². At this point, for example, it might be noted that the reunion between the enslaved hero and his beloved Imoinda, taking place during the narrator's sojourn in Surinam, remains distinctly reminiscent of those described in earlier romances from the seventeenth century: we learn that "[Oroonoko] adored the very cottage where she resided, and said, that little inch of the world would give him more happiness than all the universe could do, and she vowed, it was a palace, while adorned with the presence of Oroonoko"¹³. Characteristically, Behn does not conduct the whole narrative in accordance with the expectations of such writing: the reader will not find the familiar romance vision in which the pressures of cultural restraints are challenged by a female value-system focusing on love for example. In this text, there is no possibility that the heroine (narrator or Imoinda) may be allowed to break out of identities imposed upon her by an inhibiting patriarchy; neither become, as in the romance tradition, unrealistically valued as desired women, nor are they given an enhanced cultural power of intervention.
- 5 However, the fact that debate has been generated at all around Behn's claim to truthfulness indicates that an abiding dimension of the prose-reading experience is epistemological—and this clearly links with some other possible expectations of prose readers of the Augustan period as it unfolded: for example, engagement with topical issues; probability; sympathy; self-consciousness of style; and depiction of evolving

subjectivities¹⁴. The seemingly schizophrenic Behn combines the *humilitas* topos, favoured by women writers in the Early Modern period, with an early Augustan authoritative voice of *writer*: "But [Oroonoko's] misfortune was to fall in an obscure world that afforded only a female pen to celebrate his fame"¹⁵. Subsequently, the reader is often reminded of the status of Behn-the-writer, how she engages with Restoration artistic life, and of the recognition she has gained as a result. Indeed, reader attentions are repeatedly deflected from the business in hand to authorial posturing and self-display: "We met on the river with Colonel Martin, a man of great gallantry, wit, and goodness, and, whom I have celebrated in a character of my new comedy, by his own name, in memory of so brave a man"¹⁶. Elsewhere, the hero's bewilderment, exasperation, melancholy, disorientation and so on are set in relief by the narrator's authoritative promotion of her own experience: "[with the Indians] we trade for feathers [...]. I had a set of these presented to me, and I gave them to the King's Theatre, and it was the dress of the *Indian Queen*, infinitely admired by persons of quality, and were inimitable"¹⁷. Ultimately, it becomes abundantly clear that humility is a strategy with which Behn is able to confirm her status as writer: "Thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate, and a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise. Yet, I hope, the reputation of my pen is considerable enough to make his glorious name to survive to all ages, with that of the brave, the beautiful, and the constant Imoinda"¹⁸. Throughout the narrative, the authority of the narrator's emotional, cultural and political experience is privileged over and above that of her hero. Drawing upon the conventions of journalistic and travel writing (two key discursive fields in the emergence of prose fiction) in order to validate her textual voice, the narrator underlines her heightened powers of observation and sensitivity in order to promote herself as a reliable interpreter of the unfolding tale.

- 6 It is in the role of interlocutor that reader and narrator are transported to a fantasied West Africa: "Coramantien, a country of blacks so called, was one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these slaves; and thither most of our [*sic*] great traders in that merchandize trafficked"¹⁹. Some of the details regarding West African tribal life outlined by Behn are being supported by evidence unearthed by critics, but on the whole it would seem that this early phase of the narrative is significantly influenced by the popular seventeenth-century discourses of the *orientalist* narrative and the romance as typified by contemporary French writers²⁰. Such an *orientalist* emphasis led Vita Sackville-West to insist that "Oroonoko resembles those seventeenth century paintings of negroes in plumes and satins, rather than an actual slave on a practical plantation. She dresses him, it is true, in a suit of brown hollands; but none the less the plumes continue to wave in the breeze and the satins to glisten in the sun. She could not wholly escape from *Le Grand Cyrus*"²¹. With reference to romance writing, Behn's near-contemporary the mischievous Congreve was to inform the reader of his novella *Incognita* (1692) that "Romances are generally composed of the constant loves and invincible courages of heroes, heroines, kings and queens, mortals of the first rank, and so forth"²². It soon becomes apparent that the first phase of Oroonoko's adventures engages closely with a frame of reference familiar from the writing of such figures as de Scudéry, La Calprénède and, indeed, Scheherezade's tales of the seraglio—or "the otan" as it is called in Behn's Coramantien²³.
- 7 This has led to a measure of dissatisfaction from some critical quarters: e.g. "Even those who accept the (partial) authenticity of the Surinam scenes are likely to dismiss the African background and the character of the hero as far-fetched romance" Rogers,

"Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*", p.3. For further evidence here of critical dissatisfaction, see: Lipking, "Confusing matters", in Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies*, pp.259ff, 266ff.. It may be that Behn is attempting to endear herself to a readership which is still in embryonic form by exploiting existing prose conventions. Like so much of Behn's writing, *Oroonoko* often indulges in strategies of titillation and high emotionalism evident throughout Restoration literature. Convincingly, Ballaster proposes that in this period "women's only political instrumentality was to be achieved by playing the role of seductress. Not only does the woman writer receive approval rather than scorn for her confinement of her interest to the sphere of love, she also receives financial remuneration"²⁴. Moreover, Behn never chose to underplay the authoring of this role of seductress in any of her writing. The appetites of the sensualist and the power-hungry frequently dominate her literary lines of vision on the human condition. At regular intervals, Behn involves her reader/audience in unnerving, ludic experiences of voyeurism and self-scrutiny. This leads Ferguson to affirm that "behind the apparently liberal views of a character like Desdemona or the first-person female narrator of Behn's *Oroonoko*, both of whom find great beauty in a black man, lies a strong, if by no means culturally dominant, line of philosophical speculation and its accompanying pleasures, among them the erotic pleasure of experimenting with the unfamiliar"²⁵.

- 8 In this tale of aristocratic passion, we are invited to view the actors in the superlative terms of seventeenth-century romance: for already "at the age of seventeen, [Oroonoko was] one of the most expert captains, and bravest soldiers, that ever saw the field of Mars; so that he was adored as the wonder of all that world, and the darling of the soldiers. Besides, he was adorned with a native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race". Such *panegyric* continues, but repeatedly the narrator's celebration of the hero betrays her own Eurocentric prejudices as well as casting grave doubts over any perceived "enlightened" discourses which may be operating within the text. The narrator proceeds to exclaim that "'twas amazing to imagine where it was [Oroonoko] learned so much humanity; or, to give his accomplishments a juster name, where 'twas he got that real greatness of soul"²⁶. This rhetoric of wonder familiar from seventeenth-century romances and New World encounter narratives is, however, resolved for the reader as we are *reassured* that "some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman of wit and learning [...]. [...] Another reason was, he loved, when he came from war, to see all the English gentlemen that traded thither; and did not only learn their language, but that of the Spaniards also, with whom he traded afterwards for slaves"²⁷. Inevitably, the narrator's *ennobling* of Oroonoko on account of his social exposure to Europeans problematises the abolitionist readings which were placed upon Behn's text from its publication. Ultimately, it is difficult not to concur with Gallagher that "unless we acknowledge that Oroonoko's blackness refers most importantly to racial difference and indeed is dependent on a stock response of racial prejudice in the reader, we cannot explain what is so wonderful about him and so meritorious in the author. [...] Oroonoko is a wonder because blackness and heroism are normally thought to be mutually exclusive qualities"²⁸. The aristocratic hero confirms his place predominantly in Behn's exotic narrative through his sense of royalist solidarity and his expressed sympathies for many European value systems: "[Oroonoko] had heard of, and admired the Romans; he had heard of the late Civil Wars in England, and the deplorable death of our great monarch [...]. [...] in all points [he] addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court"²⁹. The gratified narrator praises Oroonoko's mimicry of European cultural mores:

this is interpreted effectively as an acknowledgement of cultural subordination on the part of the African. The hero is admired in proportion to his abilities to reproduce, or mirror, the colonizer values. It is only later that this act of refraction by Oroonoko is deemed to be subversive and disruptive as he commits himself to civil disobedience and refuses to submit to the regal authority of his colonial masters.

- 9 The narrator frequently transforms into a radically disconcerting *curator*. As she directs her reader's apparently greedy eyes to the main players in her tale, they become specimens of the extraordinary, the tantalising *unknown*. In order to soothe the potentially disoriented reader, Behn validates (albeit unnervingly) this textual journeying around the globe by returning to the governing referents of romance writing which even extend to the detailing of the protagonists' physiognomy: the reader is informed, for example, that "[Oroonoko's] face was not of that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony, or polished jet. [...] His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. [...] The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble, and exactly formed, that, bating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. [...] [Imoinda] was female to the noble male; the beautiful black Venus, to our young Mars"³⁰. Subsequently, the familiar object of desire from romances and orientalist tales of the aristocratic virgin emerges in the figure of Imoinda. Her body becomes a site of contested ownership and exchange in the vigorous homosocial relationships of Behn's exoticised Africa. Significantly, Oroonoko himself chooses to privilege male comradeship and warriorship when his worthy African opponent, Jamoan, was "never put [...] amongst the rank of captives [...] but [Oroonoko] kept him in his own court" and Jamoan nursed "so great an affection [...] for Oroonoko" that he remained there³¹. However, robbed of any meaningful cultural status, Imoinda's body becomes the symbolic possibility of sexual and political achievement for both the hero and his grandfather, "the king of Cormantien [who] was himself a man of a hundred and odd years old"³². Such patriarchal relationships, particularly with reference to Oroonoko and his grandfather the king, serve not only to commodify Imoinda, but also to render her amongst the *perishable goods* in this hedonistic society. When the hero finally gains access to her bed, the king demonises her "as a polluted thing, wholly unfit for his embrace" and resolves that she and his treacherous wife Onahal "should be both sold off, as slaves, to another country, either Christian, or heathen, 'twas no matter where"³³.
- 10 In general, the anxieties and sexual menace surrounding the courtly intrigues in Behn's Coramantien reveal a narrator who never fails to be stimulated by love intrigues and the moral ambiguities to which they give rise. Repeatedly, the narrative voice is found to savour details of the court's sensualism and this can only serve to interrupt any moral dialectic which may be operating in the text. The narrator revels in harem adventures to such an extent that the victimisation of the heroine is effectively displaced by erotic detailing: "They brought [Imoinda] thus to court; and the king, who had caused a very rich bath to be prepared, was led into it, where he sat under a canopy in state, to receive this longed for virgin; whom he having commanded should be brought to him, they (after disrobing her) led her to the bath, and making fast the doors, left her to descend. The king, without more courtship, bade her throw off her mantle and come to his arms". Here, the *other self* which the narrator chooses to fabricate in an account of *darkest*, unknown Africa is subjected to a rhetorical heightening effect. However, the anxieties surrounding this *other self* can never be fully concealed. Whilst inviting the reader to make an imaginative leap into a conventionally forbidden world of exotic and erotic

pleasures, the excitable narrator frequently discloses the effects of her inadequate knowledge: "Imoinda, [saw the king's] eyes fierce, and his hands tremble, whether with age or anger, I know not, but she fancied the last"³⁴. Every detail of Imoinda's subjugation is dwelt upon in this phase of the narrative: "[Oroonoko] found that, however she was forced to expose her lovely person to [the king's] withered arms, she could only sigh and weep there, and think of [him]"³⁵. In many ways, Imoinda constitutes a key element in Behn's frequently conventional portrayal of an exotic world as seen through European eyes. Such a world is, of course, held in a time warp awaiting the *magical* arrival of outsiders. The culture of *the Other* is characterised by uninhibited patriarchy, sexual availability and passivity to foreigners. As a cultural marker, gender is clearly deployed in Behn's text as an integral element in her examination of repressive power relationships and Gallagher is surely right to insist that in this debate the reader should be mindful of the commodification of the female writer in this period as her reputation is placed in jeopardy through the marketing of her literary wares³⁶. In the same way that the narrator entrances the hero with classical texts, so she commodifies him and resells him for consumption through her own storytelling—and yet the *body* of her text is also being consumed.

- 11 Clearly, the politics of warfare and slaving are largely displaced at this point in favour of an emphasis on the erotic ambitions of the tribal ruling classes. An interpolated narrative briefly introduces the reader to Onahal, the discarded royal wife. This new counter in the game of love and chance enables Behn to probe the sexual careers of two couples (Oroonoko and Imoinda, Onahal and Aboan) and this is a prospect which the narrator greets with nervous excitement: "But Onahal [...] took her dear Aboan to her own [chamber], where [...] he suffered himself to be caressed in bed by Onahal. [...] I believe [Oroonoko] omitted saying nothing to this young [Imoinda], that might persuade her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the rights of love; and I believe she was not long resisting those arms where she so longed to be; and having opportunity, night and silence, youth, love and desire, he soon prevailed; and ravished in a moment what his old grandfather had been endeavouring for so many months. 'Tis not to be imagined the satisfaction of these two young lovers"³⁷. As he finds his way into the seraglio and spends a night of illicit passion with Imoinda, Behn's African prince smacks more than a little of the Restoration rake-hero whose overpowering sexual appetites effectively serve to circumscribe female liberty—and they do nothing to inhibit the practices of monarchy, patriarchal violence and traditional schemas of ownership. This is rendered evident as Imoinda is repeatedly viewed in terms of sexual promise and yet forfeits legitimacy of status in this society when that promise is *redeemed* by the hero.
- 12 In any consideration of power relations in this text, the question of slavery must loom large. In the main, Behn's reader is not encouraged to challenge enslavement as a malignant cultural practice. Early on in the text, the apparently all-noble hero endears himself to his "fair Queen of Night" with "slaves that had been taken in this last battle, as the trophies of her father's victories. [...] So that having made his first compliments, and presented her a hundred and fifty slaves in fetters, he told her with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms". Instead of dwelling upon any consideration for the plights of these particular captives, the reader must attend to "some new, and till then unknown power [which] instructed his heart and tongue in the language of love"³⁸. Indeed, subsequently, when the English slaver arrives Oroonoko has no qualms about doing business with such men: "[...] Oroonoko, who was more civilized, according to the

European mode, than any other had been, [...] took more delight in the white nations, and, above all, men of parts and wit. To this captain he sold abundance of his slaves"³⁹. The hero is found to inscribe himself willingly in the market economy of his culture as he trades in slaves. Such commerce provokes no moralizing intervention on the part of the narrator who guards a very selective line of vision when it comes to detailing narratives of oppression. Moreover, it is made abundantly clear that if *Oroonoko* is humiliated in servitude, it is through the devaluing of his cultural status rather than anything else; this notion is echoed in the discussion of Imoinda's enslavement: "[The king] ought to have had so nobly put her to death and not to have sold her like a common slave, the greatest revenge, and the most disgraceful of any"⁴⁰. Most recently in critical studies, the gender politics of Behn's text has been unduly privileged—serving to displace, if not to obscure, the racial ideologies underpinning *Oroonoko*. Laura Brown is surely timely in pointing out that “perhaps the feminist failure to attend to the primary concern of *Oroonoko* is partially due to the general neglect of race and slavery among critics of eighteenth-century literature"⁴¹.

- 13 apparent in this narrative that Behn is not generating narratorial *other selves* and transporting readers across oceans in order to give support to any mass movement for slave emancipation. No such body of thought existed to be tapped⁴². Indeed, the monopoly for the Royal African Company was held by the Stuart kings and, as Ferguson stresses, “Restoration society deplored slavery when the enslaved were Europeans"⁴³. Behn internalises the cultural codes of her society and asks her readers to extend their sympathies *exceptionally* to enslaved black aristocrats. The subtitle of this work, *The Royal Slave*, proposes what appears to the narrator an appalling or even obscene oxymoron. On its own, the notion of "slave" is not found to provoke a consistent textual response. Brown goes on to make the important point that "the constant misrepresentation and romanticising of African reality [...] undercuts an emancipationist reading. The picture drawn of the journey on the middle passage from West Africa to the Caribbean [...] is the material of fantasy"⁴⁴. Indeed, the narrative of the so-called Middle Passage focuses primarily on the faithlessness of the English captain, the noble anguish of the hero, and the deference of his fellow countrymen who agree to endure their conditions once their prince is given the recognition he deserves. Behn repeatedly directs the reader's attention to an aristocratic individual's dignified demeanour under a vicious regime and his yearning for a world in which noble codes of courtesy and deference prevail. Once on Surinam's shores, *Oroonoko* will have the satisfaction of saying to the captain: "Farewell, Sir! 'Tis worth my suffering to gain so true a knowledge both of you and of your gods by whom you swear"⁴⁵.
- 14 The subsequent textual shift to Surinam provides the *locus* of catastrophe for the protagonist as he finds himself in "the next world" where the colonial desire is both "to master" the land and its enslaved subculture. Arrival in the *New World* gives the narrator the pretext to indulge in some patriotic and golden age mythmaking: "'Tis a continent whose vast extent was never yet known, and may contain more noble earth than all the universe besides; for, they say, it reaches from east to west, one way as far as China, and another to Peru. It affords all things both for beauty and use; 'tis there eternal Spring, always the very months of April, May and June"⁴⁶. Many critics of Behn's narrative have highlighted Sir Walter Raleigh's promotion of Guiana during the Jacobean period "[as] a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned or wrought"⁴⁷. This region of South America was to remain one of the many fantasied *loci* for Europeans associated

with the Caribbean. The British were to make their first attempts at settlement in Surinam in the 1640s. After a sequence of vigorous conflicts between Dutch and British forces trying to secure authority over the colony, it was finally surrendered to the Dutch in the Treaty of Breda of 1667⁴⁸.

- 15 The narrator arrives in Surinam as a young, vulnerable woman who has recently witnessed the death of her father on board ship and now finds herself drawn into the politics of a slaving society. However, it soon becomes clear that whatever the anxieties aroused by her familial dilemmas, the narrator still allows herself to reflect upon and promote the English colonial venture: "Though, in a word, I must say thus much of it, that certainly had his late Majesty, of sacred memory, but seen and known what a vast and charming world he had been master of in that continent, he would never have parted so easily with it to the Dutch"⁴⁹. The golden-age opulence of the physical environment is fused with the beauty of the inhabitants to reveal to a comprehensive vision which is both seductive and, more importantly, exploitable. Even the Surinam Indians, who are supposedly products of a serene world, are significant only as profitable resources: "...they being, on all occasions, very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress them as friends, and not to treat them as slaves; nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent"⁵⁰. In this new-world phase of the narrative, the reader is effectively being encouraged to move along to the next showcase in the museum and to feast his or her eyes on the *bodies* of the next specimens: "Some of the beauties which indeed are finely shaped, as almost all are, and who have pretty features, are very charming and novel; for they have all that is called beauty, except the colour, which is a reddish yellow; [...]. They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touched [...], [they are] continually used to see one another so unadorned, so like our first parents before the Fall"⁵¹. Here, the narrator draws attention to anxieties associated with the discourses of the Golden Age and the Noble Savage. The Surinam Indians are exotic, remote, and periodically perceived as child-like, but as Adams and Eves they are also formulated as ancestral *other selves* for Europeans: their status remains unstable in being both subordinate to the colonizers and yet inscribed in the colonizers' mythic genealogies. An analogous process of identification, involving sameness and difference, is applied to Oroonoko and Imoinda on one occasion: "I had forgot to tell you, that those who are nobly born of that country are delicately cut and raced all over the fore part of the trunk of their bodies, that it looks as if it were japanned [...]. [...] and those who are so carved over the body resemble our ancient Picts"⁵². By pursuing various avenues of colonial mythmaking, the narrator unsettles the desired European past and, consequently, introduces discontinuities of perception. Ultimately, she chooses to concentrate upon the *bodily* reality of the Indians as she attempts to re-adopt a textual voice of *reportage*: they are attributed with only a creaturely existence of preening and physical attractiveness, without the necessary negro skin pigment which would register them as imported slaves. Given that much of the textual voyaging composed by Behn has been to heighten the sensual and emotional experience of the reader, the formerly *orientalising* narrator concludes rather flatly that "there being nothing to heighten curiosity, but all you can see, you see at once, and every moment see; and where there is no novelty, there can be no curiosity"⁵³.
- 16 In Surinam, the brutalising culture of plantation slaving, which had been established by the British since 1650, is rapidly made apparent. Exploitation is the governing principle of this environment as raw materials and foodstuffs are provided at a profit for the

metropolitan, colonial power across the seas. The largest contingent within the colonial society was the often ailing and maltreated slave population and, inevitably, this generated continual disquiet and fears of rebellion. With no control over their living space, their employment or their very bodies, the slaves also find that the colonizers wish to erase their African identities through the act of re-naming: "I ought to tell you, that the Christians never buy any slaves but they give them some name of their own, their native ones being very like barbarous, and hard to pronounce; so that Mr Trefry gave Oroonoko that of Caesar"⁵⁴. Oroonoko, along with his countrymen, is thus forcibly absorbed into the cultural referents of the colonialising society (even the narrator henceforth refers to the hero as Caesar) and reproduces from his lowly status a new, effectively mock-heroic *self*. The planters desire to bring forth *colonial order* from *slave chaos* through the act of re-naming, a dominant strategy of cultural interpellation if ever there were one, and as a consequence they confirm their rights of property. Intermittently, the narrator fuses her golden age fixations with the conventions of courtly love. This can be witnessed when she turns her attention to Imoinda's residence in the new land: the fair *Queen of Night* evolves under the conventions of romance into a version of the *donna angelicata* armed with her "shock dog". The supposedly benign planter, Trefry, confides to the hero that "[...]the whole country resounded with the fame of Clemene, for so, said he, we have christened her. But she denied us all with such a noble disdain, that 'tis a miracle to see that she, who can give such eternal desires, should herself be all ice, and all unconcern [...] and so retired, as she feared a rape even from the God of Day, or that the breezes would steal kisses from her delicate mouth". When Oroonoko puzzles over the implausibility of this female slave not being violated, Trefry, planter-cum-potential-rapist, confesses, "but oh! she disarms me with that modesty and weeping so tender and so moving, that I retire, and thank my stars she overcame me"⁵⁵. Here again, by taking refuge in a form of Petrarchism, the surprisingly lyrical narrator attempts to deflect interest away from the interrogation of colonial and/or patriarchal brutality.

- 17 In the desire to explore native territory in the Rain Forest, an expedition is proposed to travel up the river to an Indian village—eighteen people are to make up the party, principally Europeans but also including Oroonoko and Imoinda. The hero effectively becomes a circus attraction for the narrator and her compatriots as he performs feats with tigers and dangerous eels in the jungle. In so doing, he transforms provisionally, for Goreau, into "the perfect Arthurian knight (dragon-slayer) in the guise of a black slave"⁵⁶. On this trip, it becomes apparent that if the protagonist performs adequately for his European fellow-travellers, then the terms of his slavery are less rigidly enforced: "[...] Caesar made it his business to search out and provide for our entertainment, especially to please his dearly beloved Imoinda, who was a sharer in all our adventures; we being resolved to make her chains as easy as we could, and to compliment the prince in that manner that most obliged him"⁵⁷. The colonizers' determination to generate a land of milk and honey from the brutalities of the South American settlement can only be further complicated by the introduction of a third element in the colonial experience: encounters with the indigenous peoples. As the narrative allows us to penetrate the unknown areas of the Rain Forest, the accounts of Oroonoko's intrepid adventures and the perceived exoticism of the native villages threaten to dislodge the colonizers from their privileged cultural position. In response, the narrator deftly directs our eyes away from the cultures of the colonised and reformulates desire focused on European self-display: "By degrees [the Indians] grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touched us, laying

their hands upon all the features of our faces, feeling our breasts and arms, taking up one petticoat, then wondering to see another [...]. In fine, we suffer'd 'em to survey us as they pleas'd, and we thought they would never have done admiring us"⁵⁸. Here, the Europeans luxuriate in becoming the focus for the erotic and exotic *gaze* of the potentially colonized. The narrator is thus pawed by *the Other* and, at one remove, devoured by the eyes of the reader. In this manner, she models yet another *self* which is expressed in terms of the unfamiliar, the inhabital in a foreign land: this textual strategy enables her and her compatriots to remain the privileged source of meaning and interpretation. Moreover, it becomes evident that the travelling party is not on any voyage of discovery but rather on a tactical expedition to learn how the culture of *the Other* operates in order to master it. This initial reconnaissance mission is effectively an attempt to compensate for an inadequate knowledge of the terrain and to assert a priority claim to ownership. Through mapping and recording, the narrator is of course staking out both a territorial and a textual extension to European authority. The sustained emphasis upon the wonder of the natives is thought, by the narrative voice at least, to dispossess them of status: she goes as far as to re-present their perceived naiveté in order once again to enhance the Europeans' status: "When we had eaten, my brother and I took out our flutes, and played to them, which gave them new wonder, and I soon perceived, by an admiration that is natural to these people, and by extreme ignorance and simplicity of them, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant religion among them, and to impose any notions or fictions upon them. For seeing a kinsman of mine set some paper a-fire, with a burning-glass, a trick they had never before seen, they were like to have adored him for a god [...]"⁵⁹.

- 18 The awe of the natives renders them easier prey for the *mastering* practices of the Europeans: there can be no worthwhile exchange of information between the two cultures because the Europeans refuse to place themselves in a position of equality. The latter are promoted textually as the keepers of knowledge; other races, whether African or South American, are consigned to the exotic margins where the titillating, the barbaric and the trivial exist. In addition, it becomes apparent that the credulous Indians are being contrasted with the implied reader's *sophisticated* trust in the details of this alleged travel narrative. The Indians are deliberately infantilised by the narrator in order to demonstrate their need for *parental* guidance from Europe and to validate designs for appropriation. Subsequently, the narrator marvels that the Indians have no verbal formation for the notion of falsehood; this *lack* is quickly resolved as both the native and enslaved populations learn its meaning from the would-be heroic, but ultimately faithless colonizers.
- 19 As has been appreciated above, Behn never allows the reader's moral indignation in response to the degrading circumstances of slavery depicted to be widened beyond the aristocratic spotlight of Oroonoko and Imoinda. Indeed, even in their most dire anguish, the protagonists themselves can only conceive of emancipation in modest terms: "It was thus, for some time we diverted him. But now Imoinda began to show that she was with child, and did nothing but sigh and weep for the captivity of her lord, herself, and the infant yet unborn, and believed, if it were so hard to gain the liberty of two, 'twould be more difficult to get that for three"⁶⁰. Later, in the celebrated harangue to his fellow slaves urging them on towards rebellion against the slavemasters, it must be remembered that Oroonoko has been fired into action by his own family's plight rather than any irrepressible feeling of altruism: "No, but we are bought and sold like apes, or monkeys,

to be the sport of women, fools and cowards, and the support of rogues, runagades, that have abandoned their own countries, for raping, murders, thefts and villainies"⁶¹. In becoming such *anarchic* agents of revolt, the protagonists unsurprisingly forfeit most of the narrator's sympathies: finding that they have irrevocably chosen upon a course of civil disobedience, she restores her allegiances firmly to the colonialisng society: "[...] and we had by noon about six hundred men, they call the militia of the county, that came to assist us in the pursuit of the fugitives" [*italics mine*]⁶². In the resulting *dérèglement* of the colonial patriarchy, the possibility of female heroism is made available interestingly in the warrior figure of Imoinda, "who, grown big as she was, did nevertheless press near her lord, having a bow, and a quiver full of poisoned arrows"⁶³. At every turn, the narrator deflects attention away from a possible abolitionist emphasis to a concentration on the monstrosity of reversing the social and colonial hierarchies which causes aristocrats to fight against royalist forces⁶⁴. After the collapse of the rebellion, the politics of caste and rank comes characteristically in this text to re-assert itself. Oroonoko agrees to parley with the deputy governor, Byam: "As for the rashness and inconsiderateness of his action [Oroonoko] would confess the governor is in the right, and that he was ashamed of what he had done, in endeavouring to make those free, who were by nature slaves, poor wretched rogues, fit to be used as Christians' tools; dogs, treacherous and cowardly"⁶⁵. Indeed, towards the end of a text obsessed with an embittered struggle for ownership, the schema of imbalanced gender relations is restored. The vanquished hero acknowledges cultural defeat but determines to maintain his sexual authority by killing the pregnant Imoinda: he does this in the belief that "she may be first ravished by every brute, exposed first to their nasty lusts, and then a shameful death"⁶⁶.

- 20 In general, Behn's remorseless tale of brutality and slavery is framed by dynamic narratorial interventions which increasingly become a source of profound unease for the reader. The gender politics of subjugation which the narrator is forced to experience in this society and the strategies which she employs with her "female pen" to counter them occupy a significant section of this *récit*, but they are inevitably displaced for many modern readers by the horrific spectacle of negro servitude. If the narrator problematises reader engagement as she betrays her motivations and emotional responses, there are occasions when her feckless desire to exploit is challenged even by the hero himself and interpreted as repugnant: "[after Imoinda's death] We said all we could to make him live, and gave him new assurances, but he begged we would not think so poorly of him, or of his love to Imoinda, to imagine we could flatter him to life again"⁶⁷. As has been appreciated above, much recent feminist criticism has concentrated on the analogies to be made in *Oroonoko* between oppressive racial and gender value systems⁶⁸. Clearly, on occasions, Behn does allow herself to adopt a bifocal line of vision on the question of inequality involving both race and gender—but, importantly, these enquiries are not attributed equal status. The matching of post-colonial and feminist theorising may be convenient but it can remain far from telling for Behn's text, and the need to replace one instance of victimhood with another can only do the text a disservice. Such critical tactics have led Fogarty to observe that "[*Oroonoko*] is now, it transpires, a prescient narrative because it mirrors the failure of western feminism adequately to address the problem of racism and to recognize the way in which white women themselves play the role of oppressor with regard especially to their black counterparts"⁶⁹. The affirmation of the culturally impotent female narrator can do nothing to disguise her strategic absences, manipulative stratagems and selective emotional interventions throughout the unfolding of this tale. Undoubtedly, at the very heart of *Oroonoko* lies a complex study of the cultural

operations and prejudices which devalue human life and, ultimately, have the power to destroy it; but Behn does not indulge the reader with an uncomplicated narrative of binary oppositions: master/slave, colonizer/colonised, man/woman, white/black. The unstable personae, or *selves*, of her narrator are riddled with contradictions and discontinuities and these frequently result in her furthering the interests of the very colonial society which is repressing her cultural status. Ferguson is surely just to underline that "through [Behn's] "Female Pen" flow at least some of the prerogatives of the English empire and its language"⁷⁰.

21 Thus, the narrator can emerge as a mediating, placating and incarcerating power in the narrative as she wields her very femaleness, on occasions, to ensure Oroonoko's captive status. She may indeed be seen to endear herself to the aristocratic slaves only to "divert" them, if not, to "dampen" their ardour for a dignified existence of liberty with ready and false promises: "[the colonists] knew he and Clemene were scarce an hour in a day from my lodgings, that they ate with me, and that I obliged them in all things I was capable of: I entertained him with the lives of the Romans, and great men, which charmed him to my company, and her, with teaching her all the pretty works that I was mistress of, and telling her stories of nuns, and endeavouring to bring her to the knowledge of the true God. But of all discourses Caesar liked that the worse [...]. However, these conversations failed not altogether so well to divert him, that he liked the company of us women much above the men [...]. [...] especially myself, whom he called his Great Mistress [...]. [...] [I] told him, I took it ill he should suspect we would break our words with him, and not permit both him and Clemene to return to his own kingdom"⁷¹. Behn formulates a complex narrative voice with a troubling mixture of yearning, sympathy and indignation. However, as the text unfolds, the narratorial presence organizing the text also enacts a power of surveillance: Behn's celebration of Oroonoko and the Surinam Indians is dependent upon their submissiveness and responsiveness to colonial rule. Later on in the narrative when confronted with a restless royal slave, the narrator confides: "After this, I neither thought it convenient to trust him much out of our view, nor did the country who feared him"⁷².

22 If they do anything at all, the *other selves* of Behn's narrator surely challenge the liberal "enlightened" discourse which suggests the possibility of growing self-awareness in the colonizer through knowledge of *the Other's* culture: when the potential for a more democratic dialectic evolves, the invitation is resisted. In Africa, for example, when the aristocratic hero waits to engage in battle and learns of the supposed death of Imoinda, the reader is greeted with: "'For, O my friends!' said he, wit is not titles make men brave, or good; or birth that bestows courage and generosity, or makes the owner happy. Believe this, when you behold Oroonoko, the most wretched and abandoned by fortune of all the creation of the gods"⁷³. Such arguments are not pursued by Behn and thus they fail to destabilise in any significant manner the textual infatuation with rank and social hierarchy: *Oroonoko* repeatedly challenges any lazy premisses on the part of the reader that women's writing is necessarily oppositional⁷⁴. In this context, Rogers is timely with the reminder that at the beginning of the so-called *Enlightenment* "even the libertarian John Locke [...] [is found to] rationalise slavery (and his own investment in the Royal African Company): slaves, "being Captives taken in a just War, are by the Right of Nature subjected to the Absolute Dominion and Arbitrary Power of their Masters"⁷⁵. Thus, the historian C.V. Scammell is all-too-convincing in his assertion that "by and large, European culture evolved with little benefit from acquaintance with the wider world. The

unfamiliar was ignored, or seen through a haze of prejudice and incomprehension, or adapted to existing preconceptions. Indeed such knowledge and experience could equally well close as open the human mind, hardening old attitudes, reinforcing old prejudices, encouraging new ones"⁷⁶. Repeatedly in *Oroonoko*, Europe is found to be contrasted with the unfamiliar and unstable non-European cultures. However, by its conclusion, it is the Europeans who have assumed the role of the barbaric, flesh-hunting community prey to dangerously volatile reversals. In another meticulous act of *reportage*, the colonizers (with the voyeuristic reader?) feast their eyes on the *spectacular* maiming and killing of the hero⁷⁷. The Petrarchan discourse of feeding and nourishing is unnervingly present in Behn's narrative to its very resolution⁷⁸. It is through the staged dismembering of the hero that the colonial regime chooses to reaffirm its authority of ownership.

- 23 Behn's writing clearly does engage with and interrogate contemporary discourses of race and gender identity. The apparent dimension of *reportage* in *Oroonoko* may be a tactical choice: as Ballaster has suggested, "by figuring herself as mere teller of tales, Behn presumably makes herself more acceptable to male critics, at least within the terms of her own fictional economy"⁷⁹. In this narrative, the female pen communicates but also seems on occasions to validate morally ambiguous relations between a vicious trading milieu of colonists, an enslaved African subculture and an exploited community of Surinam Indians.
- 24 In the epilogue to his play *The Indian Queen* of 1664, Dryden submits to his audience that "You have seen all that this old World cou'd do,/ We therefore try the fortune of the new,/ And hope it is below your aim to hit/ At untaught Nature with your practic'd Wit". To a certain extent, Behn also wished to excite the jaded palates of Restoration society with a provocative sequence of encounter narratives which seem to yield the opportunity for emotional engagement on the part of the reader and the occasion for the airing of a variety of Old World prejudices. Because of this, she has on occasions been perceived as a disappointingly conservative prose writer: famously, Vita Sackville-West insisted that "we might have had the mother of Moll Flanders, and all we get is the bastard of Mademoiselle de Scudéry"⁸⁰. However, Behn does enable the reader periodically to reflect upon the vicious implications of racial and gender ideologies which are far from defunct; and, in addition, she can invite us to explore alternative cultural modes of proceeding: when the English slaver takes Oroonoko prisoner, the narrator moves that "some have commended this act, as brave in the captain; but I will spare my sense of it, and leave it to my reader to judge as he [sic] pleases"⁸¹.

NOTES

1. *Restoration Literature 1660-1700*, Oxford (Clarendon) 1990 reprint, p.218.
2. *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing, and Fiction 1660-1800*, London (Virago) 1989, p.76.
3. For further discussion here, see Gallagher, C., *Nobody's Story*, Oxford (Clarendon) 1994, p.56ff.

4. There is, however, no reliable evidence for the exact dates of composition. For a more general debate about the ancestries of the novel, see Ballaster, R., *Seductive Forms*, Oxford (Clarendon) 1992, p.7ff; and Hunter, J.P., *Before Novels*, New York (Norton) 1990, p.5ff.
5. Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, p.xvi
6. Despite the apparent singularity of Oroonoko amongst Behn's prose writing, we should not be too ready to divorce it from her other tales of female subjugation and subversiveness. For further discussion here, see: Brown, L., "The Romance of Empire: Oroonoko and the Trade of Slaves", in Nussbaum, F. & Brown, L.(eds.), *The New Eighteenth Century*, London (Routledge) 1991, p.51ff; Goreau, A., *Reconstructing Aphra*, Oxford (O.U.P.) 1980, pp. 2878; Hobby, E., *Virtue of Necessity*, London (Virago) 1988, p.96ff; Ballaster, R., "Pretences of State": Aphra Behn and the Female Plot", Hutner, H.(ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, Charlottesville (Virginia U.P.) 1993, p.192.
7. For further discussion here, see Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp.34ff, 353ff.
8. For further discussion here, see : Ferguson, M.W., "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", in Hendricks, M. & Parker, P.(eds.), *Women, Race, and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, London (Routledge) 1994, pp.214ff, 220ff; Todd, J.(ed.), *The Works of Aphra Behn*, Volume 3: *The Fair Jilt and other Short Stories*, London (Pickering & Chatto) 1995, p.xvi; Ferguson, M., "Transmuting Othello: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko, in Novy, M., *Cross Cultural Performances*, Urbana (Illinois U.P.) 1993, p.18.
9. Todd, J.(ed.), *Aphra Behn: "Oroonoko", "The Rover" and Other Works*, London (Penguin) 1992, p.75. All subsequent references to Oroonoko will be taken from this edition. Messenger insists that Behn's textual evocation of Surinam goes beyond what was available to her in published sources in the seventeenth century". See Messenger, A., *His and Hers*, Lexington (Kentucky U.P.) 1986, p.55. For further discussion of the truthfulness of the Surinam narrative, see for example: Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p.281; Spender, D.(ed.), *Living By The Pen*, New York (Teachers College Press) 1992, p.41.
10. MacCarthy, B.G., *Women Writers*, Oxford (Blackwell/Cork U.P.) 1944, p.182.
11. Rogers, K.M., "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", *Studies in the Novel*, Spring 1988, vol.20, p.2.
12. Critical attention has repeatedly been drawn, for example, to George Warren's A Full and Impartial Description of Surinam as a likely source of details for Behn about the colony. In this context, see: Wiseman, S.J., *Aphra Behn*, Exeter (Northcote House) 1996, pp.889; Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", p.2; Ferguson, M., "Oroonoko: Birth of a Paradigm", *New Literary History*, 1992, vol.23, p.341. More generally, for discussion of locations, known or otherwise, in Oroonoko, see: Azim, F., *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, London (Routledge) 1993, p.46; Ferguson, "Transmuting Othello", in Novy, *Cross Cultural Performances*, p. 17. Equally interesting is the critical discussion comparing Behn and Defoe in terms of a narrator promoting the narrative in biographical terms—see: Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol.3, p.xvi; Ballaster, "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.206.
13. p.112. However, D.B.Davis makes the important point that "[...] if modern taste finds the Negroes of eighteenth century literature ridiculously contrived and their speech loaded with fustian or obsequiousness, this is really beside the point. Europeans could conceptualize the meaning of enslavement only in the familiar terms that increasingly aroused a sensitive response from the middle class: the separation of young lovers; the heartless betrayal of an innocent girl; the unjust punishment of a faithful servant". See *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture*, Ithaca (Cornell U.P.) 1966, p.474.
14. For a fuller discussion here, see Hunter, *Before Novels*, pp.234.
15. p.108.
16. p.132.
17. p.76.
18. pp.140-1.

19. p.78.
20. Of particular interest here are Lipking's investigations: "Behn apparently made up her stylized courtly Africa, but for now it seems wisest not to conclude that she made it of whole cloth". See "Confusing matters: searching the backgrounds of Oroonoko", in Todd, J.(ed.), *Aphra Behn Studies*, Cambridge (C.U.P.) 1996, p.267. See also Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", p.9ff.
21. *Aphra Behn*, 1640-1689, London (Gerald Howe) 1927, p.74. In this context of orientalist and travel narratives, see: Ferguson, "Oroonoko: Birth of a Paradigm", p.347; Scammell, C.V., *The First Imperial Age*, London (Routledge) 1992, p.218; McKeon, M., *The Origins of the English Novel 1600-1740*, Baltimore Johns Hopkins U.P.) 1988, pp.1012.
22. Salzman, P.(ed.), *An Anthology of Seventeenth Century Fiction*, Oxford (O.U.P.) 1991, p.474.
23. p.86. De Scudéry's Ibrahim was published in 1641. For further discussion on relevant traditions, see: Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol.3, pp.xiii xiv; *Messenger, His and Hers*, p.66ff; Hunter, *Before Novels*, p.25; Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, pp.52ff; Todd, *The Sign of Angellica*, p.50ff.
24. "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p. 191.
25. "Transmuting Othello: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", in Novy, *Cross Cultural Performances*, p.19.
26. p.79.
27. p.80.
28. *Nobody's Story*, p.70.
29. p.80.
30. pp.80-1.
31. p.100.
32. p.79.
33. p.96.
34. pp.84-5.
35. p.87.
36. *Nobody's Story*, esp. pp.63-4.
37. p.94.
38. p.82.
39. p. 101.
40. p.97.
41. Brown, "The Romance of Empire", in Nussbaum & Brown, *The New Eighteenth Century*, p.42.
42. For discussion here, see Lipking, "Confusing matters", in Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies*, p.271ff. Ferguson underlines that "Behn is far from joining the tiny group who voiced criticism of the whole system of international trade based on forced labour by persons of many skin colours, including freckled Irish white". See "Transmuting Othello", in Novy, *Cross Cultural Performances*, p.37.
43. Ferguson, "Oroonoko: Birth of a Paradigm", p.345. It has been estimated that between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, Britain monopolised about half of the total slave trade, transporting approximately two million Africans, with around one third not surviving the Middle Passage. For further discussion here, see: Keirn, T., "Monopoly, economic thought, and the Royal African Company", in Brewer, J. & Staves, S.(eds.), *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, London (Routledge) 1996, p.432ff; Scammell, *The First Imperial Age*, p.213; Lipking, "Confusing matters", in Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* p.269ff; Sussman, "The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.214.
44. Brown, "The Romance of Empire", in Nussbaum & Brown, *The New Eighteenth Century*, p.346.
45. p.106.
46. p.115.
47. Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, 1595, p.507.

48. For further discussion of the treaty, see Seaward, P., *The Restoration*, London (MacMillan) 1991, p.82ff. Regarding the details of the British colonial regime, see: Brown, "The Romance of Empire", in Nussbaum & Brown, *The New Eighteenth Century*, p.56ff (with a helpful summary mentioning figures whom Behn cites in her text); Craton, M., "Property and Propriety. Land tenure and slave property in the creation of a British West Indian plantocracy, 1612-1740", in Brewer & Staves, *Early Modern Conceptions of Property*, pp.4899. It is at this point that it is useful to be reminded by Plasa and Ring that the slave trade was outlawed by both Britain and America in 1807, full emancipation of slaves eventually brought about in British colonies between 1834 and 1838 and slavery in the United States finally abolished by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 and the Thirteenth Amendment in 1865". See Plasa, C. & Ring, B.J.(eds.), *The Discourse of Slavery*, London (Routledge) 1994, p.XIV.

49. Given the fondness of Restoration writers for involving their work in satire and politicking of all kinds, there has been, for example, a marked trend amongst critics to invest Oroonoko with royal symbolism whereby the black slave becomes an emblem of Charles I and/or James II. In this context, see: Duffy, M., *The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn 1640-89*, London (Methen) 1989, p.275; Brown, "The Romance of Empire", in Nussbaum & Brown, *The New Eighteenth Century*, p.57ff; Ballaster, "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.192ff; Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol.3, pp.xi, 448, note 28; Ferguson, M., *Subject to Others*, London (Routledge) 1992, p.27ff. Such interpretations also choose to ignore the facts that Oroonoko leads a rebellion and, as Ferguson points out, "this reading neglect the fact that Oroonoko rebels against a villainous tyrant figure—William Byam, who was historically a rabid Royalist". See "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.203.

50. p.78.

51. p.76.

52. pp.112.3.

53. p.76.

54. p.108.

55. p.110. For further discussion, see Ferguson, *Subject to Others*, p.41.

56. *Reconstructing Aphra*, p.62.

57. p.124.

58. pp.121-2.

59. p.122.

60. p.125.

61. p.126.

62. p.128.

63. p.129.

64. Rogers stresses that "Behn was not an abolitionist any more than her hero was" ("Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", p. 10). However, for accounts of eighteenth century abolitionist readings, see: Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p.289; Todd, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol.3, pp.xvi xvii.

65. pp.1301.

66. p.134. For a stimulating discussion on the changing perception of property and ownership in this period, see for example: Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, esp. p.78ff; Gallagher, "Oroonoko's blackness", in Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* p.247ff; Ferguson, "News from the New World", in Miller, D.L. et al., *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, Ithaca (Cornell U.P.) 1994, p. 171ff; Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, p.276ff.

67. p.139.

68. Despite the fact that parallels are to be drawn, this debate has on occasions been conducted in relatively unchallenging terms: "In Oroonoko Behn implicitly identifies white women with Black slaves, and her own white female narrator with the Black slave protagonist" (Pearson, J.,

"Slave princes and lady monsters", in Todd, *Aphra Behn Studies* p.220); As a character, Behn is also clearly paralleled with Oroonoko. Like him, she arrives a stranger in Surinam[...]" (Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, pp.678). See also, for example, Azim, F., *The Colonial Rise of the Novel*, London (Routledge) 1993, p.50ff; Ballaster, R., "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.204ff. However, as Sussman underlines, "what finally separates slavery from other kinds of servitude is that while a free person is born into a complex network of social ties and responsibilities, a slave is born into a single legal relationship --that of a servant to his master-- over which he has no volition". See "The Other Problem with Women", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.213.

69. "Looks That Kill", in Plasa & Ring, *The Discourse of Slavery*, p.6.

70. "Transmuting Othello", in Novy, *Cross cultural Performances*, p.36. See also: Spender, *Living By The Pen*, p.49; Ferguson, "Oroonoko: Birth of a Paradigm", p.348; Ballaster, "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.206; Finke, L., "Aphra Behn and the Ideological Construction of Restoration Literary Theory", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.25.

71. pp.113-4.

72. p.115.

73. p.99.

74. Jane Spencer points out that "if women writers exhibit no essential 'femininity', they are still working within a patriarchal society that defines and judges them according to its notions of what femininity is. They may internalize their society's standards of femininity and reflect this in their writing. Or they may write in opposition to those standards. [...] Women having been oppressed as women, it is not only reasonable but necessary to consider women as forming a group with significant interests in common. [...] many women, writing in conscious support of current doctrines of female inferiority, left by implication a feminist message, while others, genuinely concerned to improve women's position, made suggestions which we would now judge as anti-feminist in tendency". See *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, Oxford (Basil Blackwell) 1989, pp.ix, x.

75. Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko", p.8.

76. Scammel, *The First Imperial Age*, pp.2234.

77. This staging of the grotesque is not uncommon in Restoration literature. In Dryden's play *Tyrannick Love* (1669), the Roman emperor Maximin prescribes the tortures which the future St. Catherine will have to suffer on a wheel: "Go, bind her hand and foot beneath that Wheel:/Four of you turn the dreadful Engine round;/Four others hold her fast'ned to the ground:/That by degrees her tender breasts may feel,/First the rough razings of the pointed steel:/Her Paps then let the bearded Tenters stake,/And on each hook a gory Gobbet take;/Till th'upper flesh by piece meal torn away,/Her beating heart shall to the Sun display" (V.i.24553).

78. For further general discussion here, see Pearson, J., "Gender and Narrative in the Fiction of Aphra Behn", *Review of English Studies*, vol.xlii, no.165, 1991, p.45ff; Ballaster, *Seductive Forms*, p.69ff.

79. Ballaster, "Pretences of State", in Hutner, *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p.203.

80. Aphra Behn, p.73.

81. p.102. Jane Spencer points out that "if women writers exhibit no essential 'femininity', they are still working within a patriarchal society that defines and judges them according to its notions of what femininity is. They may internalize their society's standards of femininity and reflect this in their writing. Or they may write in opposition to those standards. [...] Women having been oppressed as women, it is not only reasonable but necessary to consider women as forming a group with significant interests in common. [...] many women, writing in conscious support of current doctrines of female inferiority, left by implication a feminist message, while others, genuinely concerned to improve women's position, made suggestions which we would

now judge as anti-feminist in tendency". See *The Rise of the Woman Novelist*, Oxford (Basil Blackwell) 1989, pp.ix, x.

ABSTRACTS

Cet article prend comme sujet la nouvelle intitulée *Oroonoko* (1688) d'Aphra Behn. Au cours de ce récit, la narratrice de Behn essaie de convaincre son lecteur qu'elle séjourna au Surinam et que son héros, le prince africain, exista réellement. Au vingtième siècle, les travaux critiques sur *Oroonoko* se concentrèrent fréquemment sur la question du séjour de Behn au Surinam. Néanmoins, ce genre de conjecture oublie notamment le fait que la première moitié de la nouvelle se déroule en Afrique Occidentale et sur un vaisseau négrier dont Behn n'avait aucune expérience personnelle.

L'article étudie les perceptions et les réactions de la narratrice et les idéologies de race et de sexe qui l'influencent tout au long de son parcours. D'abord admiratrice de son héros *Oroonoko* qui apprécie à la fois les valeurs des européens et ses responsabilités en tant que prince vendant ses esclaves de guerre aux marchands européens, la narratrice évolue vers un abandon du personnage. *Oroonoko*, trompé par un anglais qui le met aux fers et le transporte au Surinam avec sa bien-aimée *Iimoinda*, comprend peu à peu la nature de leur asservissement et organise une révolte contre les colons. Ce faisant, il perd la sympathie de la narratrice qui décide de s'intégrer définitivement dans la société coloniale.

AUTHORS

ANDREW HISCOCK

Trinity College, Carmarthen