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‘Others’, slaves, and colonists in *Oroonoko*

Oroonoko continues to strike new readers with its sheer historical surprise: the first English woman author to have had a full professional career, nearing the end of her life, set down an unexampled tale of a black African prince betrayed into slavery in a New World English colony. Though writing in evident haste – ‘*I never rested my Pen a Moment for Thought*’ (III, p. 56) – Behn produced a story so original and so powerful that it started a procession of Oroonoko-like figures in stories, plays, poems, and popular news reports. When her name and writings sank into disrepute, *Oroonoko* remained the work for which she was most steadily remembered. After interest in her writing revived, beginning around 1900, it gradually gained notice as a literary novelty, even a small classic in its own right. Current attention to women’s writing and to matters of race have now combined to make it, for all its pell-mell sentences, perhaps the most widely reprinted and studied prose tale to come from early modern England. Yet for a comparatively short tale, *Oroonoko* has had a distracting variety of readings. Over three centuries, the exceptional woman author and her singular black hero seem to have stood on radically shifting grounds.

These shifts reflect, of course, what readers of different periods have looked for in literary works and have singled out in writings by women; but they also reflect a broadening comprehension of the vast global changes that lie behind Behn’s tale, enriching some peoples, dispossessing or destroying others, and transforming beyond recognition the world of the Atlantic basin. Early readers spoke of *Oroonoko* as the ‘True History’ announced in its subtitle, about an exotic prince Behn had known on her travels and was moved to memorialize. Her biographers now agree that she was in the short-lived colony of Surinam at least briefly around the start of 1664, although the detailed colonial records do not confirm her claim of her father’s appointment to the military post of lieutenant general (not lieutenant governor, as many studies have said). Nor are there any models for such captive figures as Oroonoko and Imoinda, or for that matter any slaves at all who were

so familiarly known. In its next phase, fitted to the progressive ordering schemes of early literary historians, *Oroonoko* was not first-hand testimony but a new contribution to realistic fiction, if stamped by the ruling codes of heroic drama and romance. It pointed forward to the rise of the novel, the advance of women's writing, and, most surprisingly, the earliest stirrings of humane protest against plantation slavery. Recently, to a new generation of readers less concerned with the era of slavery than with extended colonial domination, such a chronicle of progress seems only a schoolbook triumphalism. The more widely *Oroonoko* has been read, the more deeply it has been searched for Behn's entanglements, as both actor and storyteller, in structures and discourses of power. These are usually understood through the common coordinates summed up in a 1992 essay title, 'The Politics of Gender, Race, and Class',¹ or else traced in configurings of non-obvious details that might appear in the field study of an ingenious contemporary anthropologist.

Each of these approaches has been accepted and overstated, energetically disputed and set aside, only to come back, moderated but not superseded. All point, after all, to essential qualities of the story. Unlike its various adaptations and imitations, Behn's original is vividly circumstantial, with a sometimes brutal factuality. Her truth claims still exert their fascination; even the wild life of long-forgotten Surinam has undergone much scholarly inspection, and some details of colonial life that might seem symbolic touches – colonists dressed in taffeta, slaves smoking tobacco – prove to be everyday custom. Fully argued anti-slavery sentiment lay a century in the future, but pity for Behn's slave hero, who casts off his slave name and finally everything that belongs to his life, stands in high relief against the scattered dry notations to be read in the contemporary records: 'some 60, very thin ordinary slaves', 'a stout man slave leaped overboard and drowned himself', 'for Negro man 36 Copper Barrs', 'pretty good Slaves but many small ones amongst them'.² Modern sensitivity to forms of oppression can seem to miss entirely the effects of an author who believes in privilege, reveals interesting double motives in her best characters, and so often loves her schemers. Yet in her tale, as in the records, nothing comes to us unmediated; of the three populations Behn juxtaposes – native Americans, West Africans, and white colonists – only the Europeans recorded themselves or read her story. Open and exploratory in so many ways, *Oroonoko* seems to live in its own conceptual loop. Moreover, as an unstable text full of shifts and near-contradictions, it proves singularly well adapted to the examination of power as something that is continually remade in ever-reconstituted forms.

But to enter its loop is difficult. Behn calls her colonial setting an 'other' or an 'obscure World' (III, pp. 56, 88), and it has receded far from us.

Rarely does a literary work become canonical without a historical field of related works, some small subgenre of two or three stories from Barbados or Jamaica, say, against which *Oroonoko* might be measured. The meanings and associations of our familiar terms – ‘race’ or ‘ethnicity’, ‘slavery’, ‘colonialism’, along with ‘commerce’, ‘government’, and others – seem to lie behind a screen. (That slaves were property, for example, does not catch the sense of many writers that slaves were money.) Those were not Behn’s guiding terms; their meanings were developing, and they would change more the next year with the new reign of William III. Background documentation is full and carefully kept, but it is about complex dealings among white men. As Janet Todd has noted, *Oroonoko* has been made an ‘iconic’ text, like *The Tempest* and *Othello*.³ But it is precisely not *The Tempest* or *Othello* in its imaginative rendering of places, peoples, and developments existing off the stage or the page, in a brief, unmythified time somewhere between the wonders of the discovery era and the solidities of empire.

Relations with ‘Others’

Early readers’ acceptance of *Oroonoko* as ‘true history’ is a testament to a quick, communicative style that looks very much like reportage, to their own avidity for remarkable stories, and to the wholly uncertain boundaries between fact and fiction in the late seventeenth century. Many New World travel accounts included such common fictions as Behn’s non-tropical perpetual springtime and rumoured ‘Mountains of Gold’ (III, p. 104), or sometimes even marvels out of Pliny’s *Natural History* and other ancient sources; romances offered themselves as continuations of classical history. Clever London writers, Behn among them, swore to the authenticity of every strange or lurid detail. But where Behn repeatedly invokes the greatness of her great man, the high task fallen to her ‘Female Pen’ (III, p. 88), her first commentators focused instead on her personal attachment to her hero. The young playwright Thomas Southerne, when he recast her tale as a hugely successful London play, wondered why as an established and prolific playwright she had not staged Oroonoko’s story herself. Perhaps, he conjectured, ‘she could not bear him represented’, since he had ‘heard from a friend of hers, that she always told his story more feelingly than she writ it’.⁴ Thus Southerne validated the real existence of his hero while suggesting his own fuller expression of feeling. A few decades later, a young actor from Behn’s theatre world was said to attest that she ‘always spoke so tenderly of Oroonoko, that it was impossible for him to have been a fictitious person’.⁵ Meanwhile, in a 1696 ‘Memoir’ prefacing Behn’s posthumous *Histories and Novels*, a gabby ‘Gentlewoman of her Acquaintance’ claimed to defend Behn from ‘unjust

Aspersions' about a concealed love intrigue between the young author – described as a girl prodigy, all innocent allure – and her attractive hero. 'Gentlewoman's' memoir, padded out with various far-fetched adventures, circulated in all six editions over the next half century.

Apart from the appeal of inside gossip and a habitual quasi-jovial personalizing of what women wrote, these first comments show a striking obliviousness to the kind of racial barriers now embedded in our sense of Western history. Oroonoko is Behn's intimate, as he is within the story with all the main male characters – taken as 'his dearest Brother' (III, p. 87) by Trefry, the overseer at Parham plantation where he is sold, and taking as a parent the local planter Colonel Martin, with support from 'all the Gentlemen of the Country' (III, p. 95). Trefry and a susceptible 'hundred *White Men*' yearn in vain for Oroonoko's African beloved, Imoinda, though she is 'too great' (III, p. 63) for them. 'No Man, of any Nation' could resist, Trefry says (III, p. 90). The colour bar so strictly marked in colonial societies under the British Empire is not in place here. Indeed, for all Behn's designating and describing of skin colours, 'race' in its modern sense is a word she almost never uses. Oroonoko vehemently denounces whites – he becomes a sort of racist in reverse – and once calls the white slave managers '*a degenerate Race*' (III, p. 105), but both he and the narrator are more biting when they talk about 'Christians'. The three population groups of characters come equally from different 'countries' or 'nations', and a few – Oroonoko's exiled French tutor, his African enemy Jamoan, and the sun-browned fisherman trader – move laterally into other groups. It is 'race' as Behn commonly uses the term, to mean lineage – most clearly when lineage is royal or noble – that is put forward as visible and intrinsic.

The model friendly 'others' in nearly two centuries of travel literature, as in the opening of Behn's tale, had been the New World Indians. Doubly misnamed, but of the West Indies and wholly unknown in Europe, they were idealized in many accounts as attractive, innocent, and sociable. Almost as if discovering heroes and heroines, Sir Walter Raleigh reported of one people of Guiana, encompassing Surinam, 'in all my life either in the Indies or in Europe did I never behold a more goodly or better favoured people, or a more manly', and he recalls seeing hundreds of scenes of native modesty among the women, 'and of those very young, and excellently favoured which came among us without deceit, stark naked'.⁶ Texts provided with illustrations – narratives by Hans Staden and Jean de Léry, for example – show handsome, dignified, classically modelled figures, although they may be performing human sacrifice or preparing to eat a roasted foot. Montaigne pressed the point in his provocative essay 'Of Cannibals', drawing on reports from Brazil. Constructing an anti-Europe of prelapsarian noble savages who

did not know how to lie but ate their enemies, he suggested, first, that what was natural and uncorrupted was of higher value, and then that nothing but cultural partiality made cannibal practices seem more barbarous than those of Christian Europe. Behn's generic guileless natives seem more entertaining and piquant than challenging; little about them is genuinely alien, although the practice of ritual self-mutilation by Indian war captains seems to be her invented detail. The challenges to European values, the inversions of what is civilized or savage, are played out in the main story of her African hero with 'nothing of Barbarity in his Nature' (III, p. 62), caught in a European world of compromise and duplicity, who meets his end at the hands of a 'wild' Irishman, 'a Fellow of absolute Barbarity', amid a 'rude and wild' rabble (III, p. 118).

Published travel reports on sub-Saharan Africa were both less frequent and more derivative.⁷ Seventeenth-century Europeans did not know the West African interior beyond the string of fortified coastal stations where they traded. For Behn, that was an opportunity, a convenient blank space on the contemporary map into which she could inject her romance tale of honour and love, a form that 'had traipsed all over the world', in J. Paul Hunter's summation, 'without any significant effect on how people thought, acted, or felt'.⁸ Only a few details seem identifiably West African: the canopy and carpets, the strict sequestration of the king's women, the frequent wars and sale of war captives – but these are set amid vaguely 'oriental' ceremonies and dancing, a vaguely classical military camp, intrigue and gossip that might belong to a European court, and (for a satiric anti-Europe touch found also among Behn's Indians) careful provision for the security of older women. To many present-day scholars, Africa as a single continent – 'Africa', in quotation marks – is a Western construct, an invented or appropriated place. 'Narrative about Africa', Achille Mbembe remarks, 'is always pretext for a comment about something else, some other place, some other people'.⁹ Behn's 'Coramantien' – not in reality 'a Country' (III, p. 60) but only a main English trading station on the Gold Coast, in modern Ghana – seems to hold out the nostalgic possibility that somewhere, in some ordered kingdom, an ideal of heroic male valour might survive in pure form and an ideal faithful love be reinvented.

The hero of this blank space is an improbable figure, as heroes are. Clearly writing against what she knew as common ethnocentric stereotyping, Behn describes him as a marvellous exception, meeting European standards of beauty, courtly refinement, and wit, 'more civiliz'd, according to the *European Mode*, than any other had been' (III, p. 82). Michael Craton characterizes him as 'a European *philosophe* in blackface', and Laura Brown notes how smoothly he fits 'the trope of sentimental identification by which

the native "other" is naturalized as a European aristocrat'.¹⁰ Yet Behn's early readers, so quick to accept Oroonoko as a real African, were not simply romance-minded. If they were also readers of the travel literature that made up so large a part of popular printed matter, they might have come upon similar figures. Early European traders knew no 'Africa', only different peoples in separate nations and ports. However indifferent to their black slave cargoes, they did not project the sweeping racial clichés that grew up with the slave trade back upon the Africans they traded with. Whether Othello or other black characters ever figured in anyone's thought would be worth knowing.

Early reporters seem to hold no settled view. Many are derogatory and all are thoroughly Eurocentric, especially about African customs. But some writers describe with surprise and admiration selected individuals or groups they find to meet European standards of looks and civility. A Sierra Leone prince – with the same caveat Behn uses (III, p. 63), 'bating his complexion' – is found 'a very handsome man; his aire was courteous and majestick'.¹¹ A French reporter, generally impressed by the superior Gold Coast inhabitants, describes reciprocal visits with a local governor he finds more engaging than all the rest combined. 'Nothing barbarous' but 'much humanity', is his verdict, without the flat nose or 'that large mouth that the other blacks have', his features showing 'pride and much gentleness'.¹² In 1665 Behn's Gold Coast 'Coramantien' was taken by the Dutch and renamed, but all through the eighteenth century the British favoured fort workers and slaves called 'Coromantines' as exceptionally noble and intelligent, if also proud and rebellious.¹³ Meanwhile pre-slavery reports still in circulation in the great travel compilations of Hakluyt and Purchas recounted meetings with Europeanized rulers, especially in the Portuguese Congo: one king is 'magnificall, and wittie . . . wise in counsell . . . besides very liberal and courteous'; another, likewise 'liberall', is 'verie favourable to all Travellers, and doth delight verie much to heare of forreigne Countries', 'amazed' when told of Queen Elizabeth.¹⁴ What seems unprecedented is not Oroonoko's wit or even his European education, but his open trustfulness. From the beginning, the experienced West African traders were found only too shrewd, 'very wary people in their bargaining, and will not lose one sparke of golde of any value'.¹⁵ The ease with which a prince is kidnapped, along with 'about an hundred' court youths (III, p. 83), and the ruthlessness he meets, suggest some influence of widely circulated atrocity stories in Bartolomé de Las Casas, Montaigne, and other sources about Spanish treachery and cruelty to gentle and magnanimous New World kings.

Oroonoko's sudden abduction carries him to Behn's 'obscure' colony, long since lost to the Dutch in 1667, remote from her readers. But Surinam lay

at the heart of the growing slave trade. At the time of her visit, Behn could have seen there only about three thousand black slaves, though, as she says, exceeding the whites 'in vast Numbers' (III, p. 93).¹⁶ By the time she wrote, however, slaving was 'a booming business', if not yet fully organized; the English colonists would soon acquire about a quarter of a million Africans and always clamoured for more.¹⁷ That number would grow tenfold.¹⁸ In all, of the estimated eleven million slaves ultimately shipped to destinations in the Americas, fully ninety per cent would be sent to the South Atlantic, not to the North American colonies; among British transports, the figure was nearly eighty per cent. Neither Behn nor her readers, of course, could foresee the scale of the slave shipments into the South Atlantic slave system, the rigour of the labour it extracted, or the death trap it would be. That has been fully explored as a historical subject only in recent decades. But after slave trading and then slave holding ended, by successive parliamentary acts in the first third of the nineteenth century, readers of *Oroonoko* knew very vivid accounts of wrongs and the entire domination of white over black.

Early slavery

From the nineteenth century, *Oroonoko* was seen as Behn's imagined character, perhaps inspired by a glimpse of 'some Indian Othello' during her travels or possibly by news of a captive Guinea king on display in England.¹⁹ Now her woman's sensibility was found to take a different turn. Swinburne, in some very rich prose, lauded 'the noble impulse of womanly compassion and womanly horror' that made her tale 'one ardent and continuous appeal for sympathy and pity, one fervent and impassioned protest against cruelty and tyranny'.²⁰ Ernest Baker, in the first twentieth-century edition, summed up the work as 'the first emancipation novel'.²¹ But the widespread claim that *Oroonoko* was a protest raised protest. After all, *Oroonoko* himself deals in slaves on quite a lavish scale, presenting 'an hundred and fifty' war trophies to Imoinda, selling 'abundance' to the captain, promising 'a vast quantity' as ransom (III, pp. 64, 82, 93). At the end of the story, the system stands as it was. It was only rank, critics argued, that made for the sense of injustice, the sentimental appeal of his story and those it inspired throughout the eighteenth century, just when the mounting slave millions were in transit. 'Your free-born Briton could feel for a prince, particularly a prince in distress', scoffed Wylie Sypher.²² Still, a male author had not produced this innovative story. Women scholars of the later twentieth century saw a natural, even irresistible parallel between the struggling independent-minded woman author, particularly outspoken on women's subjection in forced marriages, and her cultivated African, owned and controlled whatever his finer

feelings. Like Swinburne, feminist biographer Angeline Goreau in 1980 saw 'impassioned attack', and with Baker classed the work as 'perhaps the first important abolitionist statement' in English literature.²³ What was slavery to Behn? Can she be said to have a view of it?

Although slavery had long since vanished from Northern Europe and the English took pride in their ancient Saxon heritage of liberty – liberty, they chiefly meant, from Europe's tyrants and popes – slavery was a long-familiar institution, in the Bible, the Greek city states, imperial Rome, many places over the world. It was still practised in Christian and Muslim countries of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean, including parts of Southern Europe. Some West African trading districts had always exported (and sometimes imported) slaves, sending them north over the trans-Saharan caravan routes and, from the mid-fifteenth century, supplying them to Portuguese ships for new plantations in the Atlantic islands and the American colonies. In addition, the Spanish and Portuguese had at first enslaved large numbers of native Americans. Reflecting this variety, the early adventures of Robinson Crusoe, set in the 1650s, include his two years as a captive slave in Morocco, an effort at planting in Brazil with a black slave and two white servants, and an attempted voyage to Africa for an illicit contract cargo. Though without any legal title, Crusoe also sells his Moroccan boy assistant and accepts with pleased aplomb the Carib Friday's vows of permanent subjection. Behn too employs the term 'slave' rather loosely to refer to the European indentured servants, the 'Attendants' (III, p. 59) taken by local Indians in wars, and 'our *Indian Slaves*, that Row'd us' (III, p. 103), who apparently come from the small population of four hundred Indian slaves recorded in Surinam in the 1660s but may possibly be only servants.²⁴ Yet she is clear about the central labour system, drawing what would come to seem an immutable linkage of blacks, slavery, and sugar: 'Those then whom we make use of to work in our Plantations of Sugar, are *Negro's*, *Black-Slaves* altogether' (III, p. 60).

The importation of Africans spreading across the Caribbean was a response to a highly profitable product combined with a shortage of workers. In effect, when the colonies found themselves faced with the same conditions as those of the Roman Empire – 'expanding markets and limited labor supplies'²⁵ – they took what Braudel has called 'that huge and traumatic step backwards'²⁶ and reinstated the vast and inflexible agricultural production system of the Romans. Already more strict than other forms of slavery, this system now had a 'starkly racial character' that proved 'more profoundly oppressive and more socially divisive',²⁷ generating 'race', generating 'Africa'. Moreover, in Surinam and the English islands, slave trafficking, previously left to various European merchants, had become the business of

the Stuart crown. Just before the time of Behn's visit, Charles II had chartered a company, The Royal Adventurers into Africa – replaced in the next decade by the more efficient Royal African Company – headed by his brother (later James II), for the purpose of controlling and profiting from the sale of slaves to English colonies. The colonists disliked the system and quite regularly evaded it, but how could Behn oppose it? The unnamed Lord Governor in her tale, Lord Willoughby of Parham, was under instruction to disseminate the Company's plan to provide 'a competent and a constant supply of Negro-servants' so 'necessary' to the planters.²⁸ The long lists of important courtiers and merchants who made up the subscribers included Lord Arlington and Thomas Killigrew, Behn's employers on her spying mission to the Low Countries in 1666–7, and Lord Lauderdale, the prominent uncle of the Scottish lord to whom she dedicated *Oroonoko*.²⁹ When Oroonoko is associated with the Romans of history, when he feels an allegiance to the Stuart royal line, he is not only showing a refined affinity with two prestigious European cultures but deepening the paradox of his status as 'Royal Slave'. Chief trader in his own kingdom, someone flung from the apex of a pyramid to its base, he is also associated with those who ruled major slaveholding societies in the West and were in their persons all that a slave was not.

With her cool explanation of 'the most advantageous Trading' for slaves to 'make use of' (III, p. 60), Behn was up to date. But it is a measure of the distance of the colonies from Europe and the unexamined way in which slave labour was adopted that, even in 1688, she apparently could not take for granted that her readers would know what it was. As she fills in the background of Oroonoko's story, Behn provides what amounts to an introductory primer on its practical workings: slaves' prices and their contract sale in lots, their separation and renaming, their customary clothing, plots of ground, holiday music and communal festivities, the precautionary surveillance and, at intervals, the escalating cycles of fear and violence. The men who wrote from the colonies were occupied with administration and religion, history and natural history, and the unending policy and factional disputes that stuff out the colonial state papers. It was left to the woman storyteller to sketch a general outline of this new kind of mixed society. While Behn scholars argued for decades about whether *Oroonoko* was based on first-hand experience, historians drew on its passages as a valuable collateral source.

Oroonoko's story, however, does not treat ordinary slave life. Instead it dramatizes what observers understood to be wrongs or special harshnesses, portrayed as they are suffered personally, always in an exacerbated form. There were both official and anecdotal reports about kidnappings of small groups lured aboard ships and sold, a recognized outrage and against

Company policy, since it stopped trade.³⁰ Here a prince and heir is betrayed with his hundred noble companions. (When Behn numbers people in hundreds, she inflates population groups in the records.) Gentlemanly trust and hospitality prove elaborate pretences that abruptly give way to open force and calculation about the men as physical specimens. On the ships, many anonymous slaves committed suicide or refused to eat and mounted attacks if they could. Slave traders record their use of shackles, force-feeding, and other measures. Oroonoko's shock and desperation are seen at close hand. Slavery has earlier been defined as worse than death for well-born Africans, and Oroonoko furiously refuses the 'Indignity', 'Disgrace', and 'shameful Fetters' (III, pp. 83–4), only to be restrained by promises instead of fetters. This is not the transatlantic slave journey known as the Middle Passage, with its foulness and mortality, but only, he thinks, 'a tedious Voyage' (III, p. 86). At its end, the common slaves simply emerge from the hold – presumably not a place where Oroonoko 'decently might descend' (III, p. 83) when he had toured the ship as a royal guest – and with the courtiers vanish into slavery. Behn focuses on the contrast between Christian deceit and Oroonoko's 'Heathen' honour (III, p. 84), and she does not explain here or later how the many women and children came to be enslaved.

If *Oroonoko* is not about the Middle Passage, it is also not about the cane fields or sugar machinery. The uncomplaining slave workers provide a friendly chorus confirming Oroonoko's greatness. Joyfully reunited with Imoinda, he lives among the white colonists in a storybook slavery of polite visits, hunting, and exploration. The politeness is strained, however, by the non-appearance of the absent governor who can grant Oroonoko's promised freedom, and his growing suspicions and fear that the child Imoinda is carrying will be born a slave. This was a feature of slavery that received much comment, occasionally pitying but mainly matter of fact. Like the parents, slave children were classified as chattel or real property, essentially as they would be if they were crops or livestock; in Behn's coarse phrasing, 'all the Breed is theirs to whom the Parents belong' (III, p. 93). This case is aggravated not only by the lovers' long-delayed, virtuous, tender, and fully sexual union, but because Oroonoko, like Imoinda, is the last of his 'Race' (III, p. 93) and their child promises to be a royal heir. But while Oroonoko often speaks about virtue, he is always reticent about rank. What immediately moves him are Imoinda's 'Griefs' (III, p. 104).

Now Oroonoko turns leader, as he did with his army in Africa, addressing the male slaves not about his circumstances but theirs. It is a stirring 'Harangue . . . of the Miseries, and Ignominies of Slavery' (III, p. 105). Others in Behn's time freely characterized slavery as an unhappy state and also noted its cruel abuses, but the common refrain was that it was 'necessary'. Other

invented slave orations or dialogues, which were just beginning to appear, are eloquent on slave miseries, but they typically collapse into assurances of glad service to kind masters. Oroonoko's speech does no such thing. It presents a serious, uncompromising (and also clearly gendered) plea for the dignity of all men. But it also introduces new elements that recharacterize the colonial scene, point to conditions that Oroonoko has not seemed to see, and sometimes sit oddly in the tale.

First, Oroonoko dwells on the slaves' overwork and mistreatment, unending 'Drudgeries . . . fitter for Beasts than Men' and the special cruelty of indiscriminate punishments, bloody whippings that should be revenged, he says, 'with a Life of some of those Tyrants' for 'every drop' (III, p. 105). Yet these are the slaves at Parham, ruled by the mild Trefry, among plantation inhabitants against whom Oroonoko has previously sworn he would 'sooner forfeit his eternal Liberty . . . than lift his Hand' (III, p. 94). Next he challenges the right of ownership of '*an unknown People*' who have not '*Vanquish'd us Nobly in Fight*' but only '*Bought and Sold*' commercially; here he apparently draws a distinction between the domestic slaves ('*the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards*') and field labourers ('*the Support of Rogues, Runagades*') (III, p. 105). But his argument is 'curious', as Anita Pacheco has pointed out, characterizing the speech as 'military rhetoric' affirming 'a regard for human dignity that is rooted not in compassion, but in pride'.³¹ As Oroonoko should surely know, most of these slaves have been vanquished in war, not, to be sure, by the English, but by Oroonoko himself. It was he who sold them, with 'all the profit' (III, p. 61). He seems now to approve only of the first stage of the one form of enslavement in which he participated in Africa, because it alone can count as manly. He has also always cultivated these 'unknown' English, and has chosen to spend his time with women, at 'Sports' (III, p. 96), or with gentlemen planters who bear no resemblance to the '*degenerate Race*' with '*no one Humane Vertue*' (III, p. 105) he now exco-riates. Finally, after some discussion of women's role, Oroonoko concludes with a sweeping appeal to the abstract ideal of liberty. Liberty has been the central subject in the earlier negotiations about his case. Now he calls on the slaves to embrace liberty rather than slavery 'if they Dy'd in the attempt' (III, p. 106). In Roman history this had been both an ideal and a practical legal distinction; in English history it was a familiar trope that Behn's readers would have recognised, invoked in political speech by royalists as well as republicans.³²

We do not learn if a slave population more bravely bent on liberty might be able to gain it, as Oroonoko thinks, or, more probably, could be talked back into slavery by the 'fair means' (III, p. 108) Trefry advises. The low types Oroonoko has described now appear. Led by Behn's second villain,

the deputy governor Byam, they mount a precipitous disorderly attack. The main body of slaves, demoralized by their fearful women and children, give up and abandon Oroonoko. It is the start of his gradual isolation, until he stands as a single hero in some remarkable pictorial scenes. Now, abandoned, Oroonoko comes up with a theory of natural slavery that dates back to Aristotle. While contemptuous of all Christians as unprincipled hypocrites, he also furiously scorns the slaves as made 'by Nature' only to be slaves, 'Dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such Masters' (III, p. 109). Readers, if they liked, could settle back in their chairs; slaves were not Romans or Englishmen but a dependent, naturally servile people led this way and that. Oroonoko's descriptions of cruel whippings stand, however, and are borne out by what happens to him.

If this uprising followed the pattern of slave plots reported from the colonies – such as one in Barbados that was described in a 1676 pamphlet, one of many led by slaves identified as Coromantines³³ – we might expect many of the features here: the planning under cover of holiday feasting; the rumours and panic among the women colonists; public punishment of ringleaders by such elaborate, prolonged, purposefully intimidating means as whipping and hot pepper, gelding and dismemberment, slow burning alive, and the mutilation of corpses; also, here and in many reports, stoic defiance like Oroonoko's on the part of tortured slaves. A contemporary observer in Surinam noted with interest but no shred of sympathy that 'the most exquisite tortures . . . for a terrour and example to others' were endured by retaken runaway slaves 'without shrinking'.³⁴ It seems probable that Behn had glimpsed not 'some Indian Othello', but rather possibilities for the heroic in slave resistance and intransigence.

But Behn has rearranged these elements, interrupting the simple sequence of offence and punishment and stretching out events through the rest of her tale. Oroonoko has led an escape, potentially threatening, as Behn notes, but not outright rebellion. White colonists and black slaves do not face each other across a colour bar but divide along class lines around Oroonoko. Oroonoko's friends, planters 'of the better sort' (III, p. 107), not only sympathize with him but, implausibly, may have colluded in the mass escape. When the slaves turn to face their attackers, the killing or wounding of whites, even of the deputy governor, are not viewed as punishable acts but are reported with satisfaction. (In fact, Behn and Martin openly wish for Byam's death.) Later, when the recaptured slaves are supplied with whips and turn on Oroonoko, they are nearly ordered to whip the overseer, Trefry, for defending him. At every point, Oroonoko's white friends strongly object to Byam's use of force. And indeed, Byam does not use the machinery of colonial justice to restore and preserve security. When his flattery, assurances, and even

a written contract persuade Oroonoko to surrender, Byam has him bound and cruelly whipped only – it is said three times – to gratify his ‘revenge’. When Oroonoko vows his own ‘dire Revenge’ (III, p. 111) – now the word occurs nine times – Byam for self-protection calls on his disreputable Council, which sentences Oroonoko to be hanged as ‘an Example’ (III, p. 112). When Oroonoko’s friends eject Byam and the Council and protect him at Parham, Byam plays a trick and has it invaded. Oroonoko is taken and publicly executed, not by hanging but by slow dismemberment. It is a two-man revenge plot, played out within the framework of colonial slave discipline, ending in judicial murder.

Unjustified torture of a noble victim told in gruesome physical detail: no wonder later readers were left feeling that they had read an exposé. Oroonoko himself is often filled with outrage, and in Behn’s assurances that Council members and the Justices met later retribution there seems a thread of unsatisfied anger. Behn’s contemporaries, however, do not seem to have taken such a view. Capital punishments in England then were cruel, and those who reported on slave punishments in the colonies seem interested but quite unmoved. ‘Very exquisite Torments’, commented Hans Sloane, a cultivated physician and scholar, who details the various tortures and mutilations and then roundly defends them.³⁵ Behn’s literary followers, in pursuit of more decorous sentimental effects, largely left such violence out. So far as we can judge, Behn’s early audience was impressed not by the injustice and violence, but by Oroonoko and his heroism. But in the last part of the tale, the promising, bountiful colony is revealed as a place of division and misrule. Many individual observers and much new legislation characterized the slaves as ‘brutish’. In Behn’s story, the colonial managers are the brutes.

Colonial society

Recent critical interpretations of *Oroonoko* show complex new methods and sympathies: ‘The injunction is to read in reverse, against the grain, between the lines, from below. The wretched of the earth are talking, and we are all trying to listen.’³⁶ As a woman, Behn is expected to hold a different or dissident view of power, yet as a white European, she is inevitably in service to power, colluding with it and constructing it in her writing. She portrays ‘others’ who rise above European moral laxity, but read from below and against the grain, she is seen to be subordinating and even betraying the ‘others’ she warmly praises. Her friendships and enmities prove illusory; she may demean Europeans, but foreseeably shares a superiority over the wretched. Where she can be observed shaping available materials, Behn shows a strong

taste for dramatic polarities, but read between the lines, her text is full of tensions and contradictions. Even her authorial control can seem a form of 'colonial mastery'.³⁷

Undoubtedly Behn writes as a frank and ardent colonialist, pausing twice to mourn Charles II's loss of so rich a land. In an ode the year before *Oroonoko*, she had lauded the 'Brave' settlers of Jamaica who 'have by Conquest made it all your own' and paid 'such Useful Tribute' to James II.³⁸ In *Oroonoko*, her native American scenes with their attractive primitivism and new encounters are readily seen to express colonialist ideology. 'Very useful' Indians whom the colonists 'caress' provide necessary services for 'unvaluable Trifles' (III, p. 60) and are likened to swift animals; the trade for an overflowing catalogue of exotic natural specimens and artefacts is defined by Laura Brown as a 'discourse of imperialist acquisition' that points to 'imperialist exploitation';³⁹ quite charming contact scenes in a town of distant Indians might seem 'an exemplary drama of reciprocity', as Suvir Kaul notes, but quickly establish a comfortable cultural and technological superiority.⁴⁰ For Behn the colony is a place of leisure, witty company, and adventures; no one struggles for a livelihood. But at its edges it holds danger, and friendship motivated by fear. Behn seems to view relations with native Americans as a test of courage and civility. Oroonoko, who supremely has those virtues, establishes 'perfect, open, and free Trade' (III, p. 103) with the Indians, but later when the Dutch treat them 'not so civilly' (III, p. 100), they rush in and commit butchery. Behn herself is among the brave few who 'venture' (III, p. 100) when most others fall behind. Her closer test, however, is with Oroonoko himself.

The most striking weather change in critical opinion is found in Behn's relation to her hero, which no longer springs from admiration and attachment, or compassion for his sufferings, but from complicity and exploitation. While readers usually trace her participation in culture or discourse, not her intentions, some charges against her are startling: that she is racist, for example, or personally responsible for Oroonoko's death. But to a wide range of readers, the narrator's self-descriptions are deeply suspect. Despite her claims for influence in the colony, as many critics have noted, she distrusts Oroonoko, flees with the other women, and fails to save him from being whipped, then absents herself when he is taken and murdered. Long ago Martine Watson Brownley sensibly pointed out how useful it is that Behn's high hyperbolic style and extreme characters are grounded by an ordinary narrator of uncertain convictions and presence of mind.⁴¹ Jane Spencer has traced Behn's helplessness to her femininity – her mother and sister are likewise helpless bystanders – which she escapes only as a writer.⁴² Later readings are more severe. Behn's narrator is not only placed – or places

herself – in a pivotal role as agent for the colony, fearing, placating, watching, and also protecting a hero of fiery moods. She is not only a worldly observer who frankly assumes some admixture of calculation and likes the art of the stratagem, and also represents herself in some very slippery language, as Robert Chibka has shown.⁴³ Much worse, she knowingly deceives Oroonoko with false promises to keep him in slavery, as if writing in the first person to discredit herself, casting herself with the two smoothly lying villains she does much to make us hate.

Behn's scene-building has its rough edges.⁴⁴ The right of the narrator or Oroonoko's other friends to promise that freedom will be granted by the absent governor remains unclear. Here Behn had little to guide or obstruct her. Slavery in the English colonies was left undefined, so Oroonoko's case could only be a matter of custom and common opinion, although Imoinda's slave status seems unambiguous. Behn may only claim to know what that opinion would be. What might have happened if Oroonoko had been patient – all he promises is 'to rest, yet a little longer' (III, p. 94) – is foreclosed by Imoinda's approaching childbirth. What the narrator might have done to act more forcefully is foreclosed once Oroonoko is bound and whipped 'like a common Slave' (III, p. 111). After this violation, Oroonoko stays alive solely to take revenge and then, he says, 'scorns to live with' and is 'resolv'd not to survive his Whipping' (III, pp. 112, 113), referring to it bitterly through the rest of the story. The humane ministrations – most unusual colonial scenes – relieve his pain; otherwise, the narrator and the others can only try to talk a hero out of being heroic. His physical decline and frantic moods make him increasingly a spectacle of 'otherness', but he speaks with still greater poise.

Imoinda, the hero's retiring feminine counterpart, is a less appealing character than she must once have been, but she has come into the spotlight. Here the critique is of Behn as author. First, she creates a female love object far more limited than herself, naturally submissive, wholly subordinated, sometimes mentioned almost as an afterthought. Moreover, as consideration of race displaces gender, Imoinda also disrupts the earlier feminist identification of woman author with her slave hero by showing the failed solidarity of the white woman with the black one. A much-repeated argument by Margaret Ferguson, calling attention to Imoinda as 'other other', casts Behn as other woman in latent 'competition . . . for Oroonoko's body' – a return to the suggestive subtext of 'Gentlewoman' in 1696 – that produces Behn's book and obliterates Imoinda's child.⁴⁵ Others have found 'conflictual relationship' in the ways Imoinda is made alien by her extensively carved and mutely sacrificed body,⁴⁶ or emphasize her association with rape and bodily decay.⁴⁷

While African reports described male patricians and warriors, polygynous West African societies produced no Imoindas. Behn seems to have constructed her from an amalgam of earlier romance and epic characters – and perhaps also the modest Indian maidens and Amazons who were reported to live near the Amazon River – and then called her in or out to support Oroonoko's scenes. Imoinda is present to fight beside her husband, for example, but not present after his whipping when the colonists nurse him back to health. Sometimes she seems like a decorous European heroine, sometimes quite foreign; an author stands to be criticized either way. But Imoinda always seems to be in the service of some planned symmetry.

Like Montaigne's cannibals, non-Europeans in Surinam illustrate strict and simple virtue in love. In contrast to Deputy Governor Byam, who has an Indian mistress, the African male slaves show a strong attachment to family, *'more dear to us than Life'*, and their wives *'pay an intire Obedience'* (III, p. 107). But these virtues are domestic, not heroic; the wives quickly impede the men's honour. Only Imoinda fights on bravely with poisoned arrows although heavily pregnant, with a non-European physical hardiness, and only she supports her husband's honour. Oroonoko's oration here seems central. Both lovers observe the two linked principles he had urged on the male slaves: for the men, *'Honour was the First Principle in Nature'* (III, p. 106), which the wives should accept and follow even at the cost of their lives, but the wives in turn require men's *'equal Care'* (III, p. 106). Imoinda must be killed not simply so Oroonoko can assert ownership of her body or their child,⁴⁸ but because when Oroonoko pursues his 'first principle' and seeks revenge, Imoinda faces rape and killing. By his code, he must protect her. Once Behn understands it, she approves his deed: *'we thought it Brave and Just'* (III, p. 113).

Again Behn has tightened the noose, with Oroonoko's desperate moods about Imoinda's ravishing or death in the African scenes, his later protectiveness, and Imoinda's extreme modesty. Yet the demands made on both characters are very extreme. Behn wants pathos as well as heroic principle and its logic. To create a mood of tender agreement, joyful on Imoinda's side, she introduces an African belief about the afterlife (one found in many reports about slaves) and an accepted African custom of wife-killing, carried out personally if husbands love the wives. For the moment, both characters seem primitive, almost childlike, virtuous in the remote style of Montaigne's cannibals. It almost seems a relief when Oroonoko succumbs to a more understandable grief and rage.

Meanwhile, the ignoble colonists are shown ready to violate female as well as male honour, or simply to attack a woman. The documents often mention whipping and torture of male slaves, entirely legal and in fact increasingly

mandated. But early English colonial reports leave unmentioned the threats to slave women of forced liaisons or sexual violence from the predominantly male white populations. Perhaps Southerne in his play made Imoinda into a white woman partly because her key scenes with his predatory governor would have brought this non-subject only too visibly before the London audience. Oroonoko's vision of Imoinda 'Ravished by every Brute' and put to 'a shameful Death' (III, p. 113) reinforces the unrestrained mob rule of the seamy colonists who overrun Behn's Edenic landscape in the last part of the tale.

What led Behn in her last year to look back to vanished colonial scenes as laboratories of misgovernment, as she did also in her late play *The Widow Ranter*? Perhaps she saw strong material in her memories or had old scores to settle, but many critics have heard a Tory warning voice about England: a reminder of the martyrdom of Charles I or the dangers immediately threatening James II and the looming power of the Dutch; at least, a broadly sketched parable about the void left by a missing Lord and incursions by low upstarts. But *Oroonoko* does not seem to have a simple political key. The colonists do not fall into line in political parties, as real colonists, facing new circumstances and making new alliances, often did not. Both villains, the captain and deputy governor, are clearly agents of the king in control of many men, and Oroonoko recognizes their authority. If *Oroonoko* offers a critique of commerce, it does not seem complete. The cunning slave captain, for whom any African is saleable, might be seen to show an incipiently Whiggish ruthless greed, and Byam's group plans to hold Imoinda and her child as slaves. However, Byam – in real life a staunch Royalist official with Surinam estates and also a well-born wife – is demoted here to an unpropertied intruder. According to Behn, he 'had nothing, and so need fear nothing' (III, p. 107), and is privately not only a bully but a sponger who wants to live 'at other Peoples Expence' (III, p. 113). What Byam effectively controls is a caricature government: a Falstaffian 'comical' militia (III, p. 107), a lawless and brawling Council given legal authority, the 'wild' Irish assassin Banister, 'inhuman' Justices (III, p. 118), and an executioner. Class and respectability are prominent, but so is administrative power.

Behn's Surinam might be viewed not as a mirror of England, but as a developing colony at a very early stage. Many early observers contrasted the admirable landscapes with the uncontrolled inhabitants, given to drinking, swearing, fighting, and 'lascivious Abominations',⁴⁹ with rusty arms and absurd social pretensions. That many colonists came as transported criminals and vagrants or as indentured servants led to broad stereotyping. An early visitor called Jamaica 'the dunghill whereon England doth cast forth its rubbidge: rogues and whores and such like people'.⁵⁰ A later popular author

repeated 'dunghill' and unloosed his eloquence, including 'The Receptacle of Vagabonds, the Sanctuary of Bankrupts, and a Close-stool for the Purges of our Prisons'.⁵¹ Behn draws on such planter stereotypes, especially in her portrait of the Council. But she has made a distinction: the low characters in her story are the government, are the law. The upper-class planters who discern natural differences and are drawn to Oroonoko also resist being governed. They are not fond of the Lord Governor, whose job was to regulate from above, implementing unwelcome home policy. In the colony, they do not join with the militia, and they expel Byam and his Council, posting guards against them. Trefry calls Byam's use of his colony-wide authority a 'Tyranny' and argues that Parham, as the private land of a royal appointee, is 'a Sanctuary' like a royal palace, 'exempt from the Law' (III, pp. 112–13). Thus the colonists are divided, an aggressive new civil administration in conflict with recalcitrant gentleman landholders.

This has at least some status as 'true history'. Planters who had exercised unlimited control over their lands and their slaves as private property did not always cooperate with the centralized administration that was needed for safety as the colonies grew and slave majorities increased. A multiplying network of new colonial laws designed to punish or prevent every form of slave misbehaviour also had to be accompanied by laws against owners who protected their slaves from punishment or shielded runaways.⁵² *Oroonoko* closes on two disparate versions of slave management: overbearing or fearful men aggressively bent on exerting force against Oroonoko and others whom they do not own, and the men of quality who quietly manage their own estates. Colonel Martin, given the last word among the characters, refuses Oroonoko's remains on his land and 'swore . . . he cou'd govern his *Negroes* without Terrifying and Grieving them with frightful Spectacles of a mangl'd King' (III, p. 118). A coherent older set of rights is being broken too.

A postcolonial reader might point out, as Richard Frohock has, that Behn has cordoned off the cruelties. She attributes 'violence and the less palpa-ble acts of imperialism to the "other" immoral and lower-class whites', even though Martin's supposedly benign counter-vision of subjection without violence is mere 'storytelling'.⁵³ Yet this is not quite true. Oroonoko's account of promiscuous bloody whippings and the machinery mobilized against him leave some impression of institutional violence. And while the English colonial system proved 'impossible to maintain' without 'police regulations',⁵⁴ that issue was not yet settled. Some people argued for humane arrangements. In 1701, Christopher Codrington, a wealthy colonial governor and literary patron with a link to Behn,⁵⁵ received a frightened report that Coromantine slaves had decapitated an important planter. His reaction was that Coromantines were a nation of 'born Heroes', so the planter must have been 'guilty

of some unusual act of severity, or rather some indignity'.⁵⁶ He and the London Council wanted to see all slaves protected from inhumanity. Instead the colony passed an entirely typical law that imposed death or mutilation on any slave who hurt any white. It gave protection not to slaves or the rights of owners but to white skin.

Behn is not greatly interested in law, although she shows its place in her three different societies. Her interest is in human agreements, not without firm subordination but, as she portrays them, freely recognized, unforced, reciprocal. There is a very wide range: reverence toward monarchs and leaders, oaths among men, vows between lovers, trade relations, marital relations, confidences and help among friends, and not a little strategizing and cajoling. Opposed to these are the snare of false vows or outright force. Oroonoko reacts strongly to both broken faith and any physical compulsion, sensitive even to Behn's passing mention of his possible confinement, 'not so Luckily spoke' (III, p. 94). Both violate his honour, as Behn emphasizes. When writing of lesser occasions, she also often uses forms of the word 'oblige', referring to what is obligatory, what obligates oneself or others, or simply what obliges and pleases. All are proper social ties or ligatures. This running theme is made visible in her final scene. With a compliment to Banister because his crude words of menace are true, Oroonoko chooses to stand untied. Thus he alters and in a fashion civilizes his barbaric killing. Struggling in the English colony, nearly lost to memory, he is in his own country.

NOTES

- 1 Heidi Hutner, 'Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Politics of Gender, Race, and Class', in *Living by the Pen: Early British Writers*, ed. Dale Spender (New York: Teachers College Press, 1992), pp. 39–51.
- 2 *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, 5 vols. (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1930–5), I, pp. 202, 204, 226, 240.
- 3 Janet Todd, *The Critical Fortunes of Aphra Behn* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1998), p. 124.
- 4 Thomas Southerne, Preface to *Oroonoko*, ed. Maximillian E. Novak and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 4.
- 5 *A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical*, III, p. 149 (1735), quoted in Jeslyn Medoff, "'Very Like a Fiction': Some Early Biographies of Aphra Behn", in *Write or Be Written*, ed. Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt (Aldershot, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001), p. 265 n. 19. Medoff also studies the biographical readings and speculations in 'Amalgamating an Author: Aphra Behn in Two Biographies of the Long Eighteenth Century', in *Aphra Behn (1640–1689): Identity, Alterity, Ambiguity*, ed. Mary Ann O'Donnell, Bernard Dhuicq, Guyonne Leduc (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000).

- 6 *The Discovery of the Large, Rich and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1596), in *Selected Writings*, ed. Gerald Hammond (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), pp. 95, 100.
- 7 The heavy reliance of West African travel books on print sources from an earlier period is laid out by Adam Jones, 'Semper Aliquid Veteris: Printed Sources for the History of the Ivory and Gold Coasts, 1500–1750', *Journal of African History*, 27 (1986), pp. 215–35.
- 8 J. Paul Hunter, *Before Novels* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1990), p. 353.
- 9 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), p. 3.
- 10 Michael Craton, *Sinews of Empire: A Short History of British Slavery* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1974), p. 252; Laura Brown, 'The Romance of Empire: Oroonoko and the Trade in Slaves', in *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 35.
- 11 Nicolas Villault de Bellefond, *A Relation of the Coasts of Africk called Guinee* (London, 1670), p. 133.
- 12 'Relation du voyage fait sur les costes d'Afrique', in *Recueil de divers voyages*, ed. Henri Justel (Paris, 1674), p. 16 (translation mine).
- 13 Examples were gathered by Wylie Sypher, 'A Note on the Realism of Mrs Behn's Oroonoko', *Modern Language Notes*, 3 (1942), 401–5. On their role in earlier slave revolts, see my 'Confusing Matters: Searching the Backgrounds of Oroonoko', in *Aphra Behn Studies*, pp. 269–70. For an argument that they may have been named in circular fashion for their qualities, rather than place or ethnicity, see Craton, *Sinews of Empire*, pp. 74–5.
- 14 Samuel Purchas, *Hakluytus Posthumus or Purchas His Pilgrimes*, 20 vols. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1905–7), VI, p. 485; XVI, p. 270.
- 15 Richard Hakluyt, ed., *The Principal Navigations Voyages Traffiques & Discoveries of the English Nation*, 12 vols. (Glasgow: J. MacLehose and Sons, 1903–5), VI, p. 173. In Behn's lifetime the main export from the Gold Coast still was gold.
- 16 Richard Price, *The Guiana Maroons: A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 7.
- 17 Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1713* (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1973), pp. 230–1, 234.
- 18 James A. Rawley, *The Transatlantic Slave Trade: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 428. Rawley also distinguishes slave destinations.
- 19 George Saintsbury, *The English Novel* (London: J. M. Dent, 1913), p. 51; W. J. Cameron, *New Light on Aphra Behn* (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 1961), p. 7. Both of these suggestions incidentally point to the frequent blurring of the distinction between Africans and Indians.
- 20 Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Social Verse', in *Studies in Prose and Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1894), p. 95.
- 21 Ernest A. Baker, *The Novels of Mrs Aphra Behn* (London, 1905; reprinted Westport, Ct: Greenwood Press, 1969), p. xxiii.
- 22 Wylie Sypher, 'The African Prince in London', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2 (1941), 237.

- 23 Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), p. 289.
- 24 Price, *The Guiana Maroons*, p. 7.
- 25 Herbert S. Klein, 'Slavery in Western Development', in *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3. Klein includes a useful bibliographical essay.
- 26 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Phillip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row, 1972-3), II, p. 734.
- 27 Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, p. 225.
- 28 From *The Several Declarations of the Company of Royal Adventurers* (London, 1667), repr. in Elizabeth Donnan, ed., *Documents*, I, p. 156.
- 29 Donnan, *Documents*, I, pp. 169-72.
- 30 For examples see Donnan, *Documents*, I, pp. 124, 269-70, 419, and my 'Confusing Matters' in *Aphra Behn Studies*, pp. 268-9. Even more dramatic examples by the Spanish in South America were circulating in English translations of Las Casas.
- 31 Anita Pacheco, 'Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *SEL*, 34 (1994), 498.
- 32 For example, Edward Chamberlayne in his regularly republished survey guide to England cites on the principle of 'the Subjects just Liberties' the authority of 'the best of Kings', Charles I. *Angliae Notitia: or the Present State of England, 20th Edition* (London, 1702), p. 83.
- 33 *Great Newes from the Barbadoes* (London, 1676). Patterns in reported slave plots are traced by Jerome S. Handler, 'Slave Revolts and Conspiracies in Seventeenth-Century Barbados', *New West Indian Guide*, 56 (1982), 5-37. Handler makes clear the deep uncertainties about what slaves planned and how far colonists understood it.
- 34 George Warren, *An Impartial Description of Surinam* (London, 1667), p. 19.
- 35 Hans Sloane, *A Voyage to the Islands . . . with the Natural History of [Jamaica]*, I (London, 1707), p. lvii.
- 36 Philip D. Morgan, 'Encounters between British and "Indigenous" Peoples, c. 1500-c. 1800', in *Empire and Others: British Encounters with Indigenous Peoples, 1600-1850*, ed. Martin Daunton and Rick Halpern (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 43.
- 37 Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcón, '*Oroonoko*'s Gendered Economies of Honor/Horror: Reframing Colonial Discourse Studies in the Americas', *American Literature*, 65 (1993), 429.
- 38 'To Christopher Duke of Albemarle, on his Voyage to his Government of Jamaica, A Pindarick', in *Works*, I, p. 224. Ironically, Albemarle was among the colonial governors who, like Behn's version of Byam, joined with the Irish and lesser holders to undermine the established planters; see Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 160-1. The original 'Conquest' was over Spain.
- 39 Brown, 'The Romance of Empire', p. 43.
- 40 Suvir Kaul, 'Reading Literary Symptoms: Colonial Pathologies and the *Oroonoko* Fictions of Behn, Southerne, and Hawkesworth', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 18 (November, 1994), 82-3.

- 41 Martine Watson Brownley, 'The Narrator in *Oroonoko*', *Essays in Literature*, 4 (1977), 174–81.
- 42 Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 50–2.
- 43 Robert L. Chibka, "'Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman's Invention": Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30 (1988), 522–4.
- 44 For example, when Oroonoko is kidnapped he has 'drunk hard of Punch' and wines (III, p. 83), but later Behn often has his company because 'he cou'd not Drink' (III, p. 93).
- 45 Margaret W. Ferguson, 'Juggling the Categories of Race, Class and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Women's Studies*, 19 (1991), 170–1. This essay has been twice reprinted and is echoed in other essays by Ferguson.
- 46 Ros Ballaster, 'New Hystericism: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Body, the Text and the Feminist Critic', in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 290–4.
- 47 Athey and Alarcón, '*Oroonoko*'s Gendered Economies', pp. 426–37.
- 48 Charlotte Sussman points to ways in which their scenes seem to touch on resistance to childbearing, a topic in Caribbean slave history, in 'The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*', *Rereading Aphra Behn*, pp. 212–33.
- 49 Henry Adis, *A Letter Sent from Syrranam, to his Excellency, the Lord Willoughby* (London, 1664), quoted in Janet Todd, p. 37. Todd's chapters 3 and 4 provide a sense of the political and personal quarrels in the colony.
- 50 Henry Whistler, 'A journall of a voardge', BL Sloane MS 3926, in C. H. Firth, ed., *The Narrative of General Venables* (London: Longmans, Green, 1900), p. 146. The quotation has been modernized.
- 51 Edward Ward, *A Trip to Jamaica: With a True Character of the People and Island* (London, 1698), p. 13.
- 52 On slave law see Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves*, pp. 238–46.
- 53 Richard Frohock, 'Violence and Awe: The Foundations of Government in Aphra Behn's New World Settings', in *Women at Sea: Travel Writing and the Margins of Caribbean Discourse*, ed. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and Ivette Romero-Cesareo (New York: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 44, 54–5.
- 54 Elsa V. Goveia, 'The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century', *Revista de Ciencias Sociales*, 4 (1960), 82.
- 55 In *Oroonoko*, Behn says that she has put Colonel Martin into her 'New Comedy' (III, p. 111). When that play, *The Younger Brother*, was posthumously published in 1696, its editor, Charles Gildon, dedicated it to Codrington. Todd, p. 39, speculates that Codrington and Behn may have been known to one another.
- 56 *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series* (Great Britain: Public Record Office), *America and West Indies*, 1701, no. 1132. The colony was Antigua.