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Source: *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 47, No. 3, Restoration and Eighteenth Century (Summer, 2007), pp. 573-594

Published by: [Rice University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4625127>

Accessed: 30-10-2015 14:56 UTC

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Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*

VERNON GUY DICKSON

[T]he historian, wanting the precept, is so tied, not to what should be but to what is, to the particular truth of things and not to the general reason of things, that his example draweth no necessary consequence, and therefore a less fruitful doctrine. Now doth the peerless poet perform both.

—Sir Philip Sidney¹

For years, a central issue in the discussion of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave. A True History* has been whether it is true or false, factual or fabricated.² While most now believe the tale's core to be authentic, based on Behn's real stay in Suriname, others question the need to ascertain the truthfulness of the work; after all, who would write pages on the factual fallacies of *Robinson Crusoe* or *Gulliver's Travels*?³ There are reasons to question the incessant interrogation of truthfulness in Behn's text in comparison with more accepted canonical figures—her texts have received much unfair criticism, though this attention has also been productive of detailed and meaningful inquiries into her works.⁴ While I believe the search for truth within Behn's work is still a meaningful one, there is a need to revisit the motives and aims of that search, to contextualize Behn's exploration of truth with respect to the period's changing notions of truth's relation to and representation of fact and fiction.⁵

Sir Philip Sidney, immediately following the epigraph I have given, argues that "whatsoever the [moral] philosopher saith

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should be done, [the poet] giveth a perfect picture of it in some-one."⁶ Behn, as I will develop further, enacts within *Oroonoko*'s character this performance of morality that Sidney locates at the juncture of poetry, history, and moral philosophy, displaying what she sees as appropriate truth—moral exemplarity and the truth of moral character that her finally bleak work suggests is missing within her own culture. Behn ostensibly argues against Sidney's praise of poetry, emphasizing in her opening lines the strict truth of *Oroonoko* without the embellishments of the "Poets Pleasure" as encouraged by her period's focus on empiricism and post-Baconian rhetorical practices.⁷ However, Behn also performs the role of Sidney's poet, using *Oroonoko* as a representative of truth and wonders yet unknown (or misunderstood), a moral example of what "should be" in her own world.⁸ In many ways, then, *Oroonoko* is a text about truth's place in Behn's world, fictional and actual. Accordingly, there is a need to refocus the text's analysis to a moral rather than biographical or historical reading for truth. Behn's frames for her work, before and within her tale, and her emphasis on authorizing her narrative through a variety of gestures suggest *Oroonoko* seeks to assert cultural models of moral truth and exemplarity.

Furthermore, the models that *Oroonoko* asserts are not new; rather, Behn uses wonder (especially in the character of Oroonoko) and the current vogue of travel narratives to reassert humanist traditions of moral exemplarity, tied up with noble and singular heroism—the "Great Man" to whom she refers repeatedly throughout her introductory epistle passing out of currency in her time (pp. 34–7).⁹ This idea of singular exemplarity also reinforces Behn's royalist perspective.¹⁰ As my epigraph from Sidney suggests, I believe that reading Behn as a participant in and conservator of an earlier humanist tradition of exemplarity instead of primarily, as is commonly done, the beginning point of the novel and new models of historicity helps to explain many of the seeming incongruities and ruptures of her text, especially in terms of her treatment of truth and fiction, history and morality.¹¹

In "The Epistle Dedicatory" of *Oroonoko*, Aphra Behn commends her sponsor, Lord Maitland, proclaiming his virtue and valuable example to others: "'Tis by such illustrious Presidents as your Lordship the World can be Better'd and Refin'd" (p. 35). She adds that the value of a pen-written portrait of character, compared with a pencil drawing, lies in the emphasis the pen gives to "the Nobler part, the Soul and Mind; the Pictures of the Pen shall out-last those of the Pencil, and even Worlds themselves" (p.

35).¹² She continues by emphasizing the importance of recording the histories and characters of great men so that they may serve as examples to others, reiterating that Lord Maitland's learning derives from having "*Read innumerable Volumes of Men, and Books, not Vainly for the gust of Novelty, but Knowledge, excellent Knowledge*" to be shared with others through honorable service and moral example (p. 35).¹³ Finally, Behn recommends *Oroonoko* to her sponsor as such a volume, both true and foreign, a story authorized by the central protagonist, Prince Oroonoko, and his exemplary character:

This is a true Story, of a Man Gallant enough to merit your Protection; and, had he always been so Fortunate, he had not made so Inglorious an end: The Royal Slave I had the Honour to know in my Travels to the other World; and though I had none above me in that Country, yet I wanted power to preserve this Great Man. If there be any thing that seems Romantick, I beseech your Lordship to consider, these Countries do, in all things, so far differ from ours, that they produce unconceivable Wonders; at least, they appear so to us, because New and Strange. What I have mention'd I have taken care shou'd be Truth, let the Critical Reader judge as he pleases. 'Twill be no Commendation to the book, to assure your Lordship I writ it in a few Hours, though it may serve to Excuse some of its Faults of Connexion; for I never rested my Pen a Moment for Thought: 'Tis purely the Merit of my Slave that must render it worthy of the Honour it begs; and the Author of that of Subscribing herself,

My Lord,
Your Lordship's most obliged
and obedient Servant,
A. BEHN. ¹⁴

According to Behn's account, then, veracity—including the Romantick (though true) "Wonders" of "the other World"—and the authorizing "Merit" of a royal and moral character create the core and the value of her work.¹⁵ Behn is intent on using the honorable character of her royal and foreign subject to authorize the narration; she is merely a medium of the story.

This authorizing subject's place—a subject who, significantly, also acts as a primary agent in and of the narration—is reinforced by Behn's vehement avowal of the truthfulness of her tale, which is

in turn strengthened by her frequent inclusions of verifiable facts mixed with detailed ethnographic observations that support her role as eyewitness to the narration's occurrences.¹⁶ In addition, both truth and character also rely on the vogue for "Romantick" wonders that absorbed thinkers and audiences of the time.¹⁷ Thus, within a frame of revealing "Truth," though "New and Strange," Behn's work rests its authority on an interlinking of observation and secondhand narration based upon the unimpeachable moral character of *Oroonoko*. Significantly, as I will develop further, Behn also hints at the fiction of her work, showing her piece to be interested in moral more than narrowly factual truth.¹⁸

Unconceivable wonders, for Behn, do not limit the delivery of truth. Rather, in her period truth is frequently tied to the wonderful and to the unknown. Katie Whitaker affirms the "broad interest in rarities and wonders of all sorts, natural and artificial" in the seventeenth century.¹⁹ Whitaker's work also connects wonder to everything from feathers to the unusual human being (interestingly, each plays a role in *Oroonoko*), always emphasizing the place of reason and religion in the study and appreciation of wonder.²⁰ In his insightful examination of wonder and the marvelous in the early modern period, Peter G. Platt notes that even "late in the seventeenth century, wondrous beasts still make appearances in the *Transactions* of the Royal Society of London."²¹ Aphra Behn plainly worked within very different understandings of science, nature, truth, and history than those to which we are accustomed, just as she worked within different conceptions of narration and literary form. As Nicholas Jardine and Emma C. Spary point out, "[T]he boundaries between the natural and conventional, artificial and social have been continually contested and relocated."²² To Behn, and to many of her readers, wonder was closely related to truth as either a source of truth or an acknowledgment of truth unknown. Truth was not always about knowledge; in fact, many of the greatest truths were not known or thought to be knowable.

Tracing the early modern use of wonder in natural science and travel writing, Platt identifies two overlapping though somewhat contradictory views. One locates wonder as the means of discovering reason beyond current knowledge (a particularly Aristotelian approach), and another establishes wonder (and thus ignorance) as an end in itself, an active state of belief and acceptance.²³ Michel de Montaigne, who seems to hold at different times both of these stances, states in his essay "On the Lame" a defense of the second view: "amazement is the foundation of all philosophy; inquiry, its way of advancing; and ignorance is its end. Yes indeed:

there is a kind of ignorance, strong and magnanimous, which in honour and courage is in no wise inferior to knowledge; you need no less knowledge to beget such ignorance than to beget knowledge itself."²⁴

Behn bridges these views of wonder. She wishes her audience to use her narrative of wonders to expand their own views, particularly about truth, character, and exemplarity, but her work repeatedly asks her readers to recognize the uncertainty of the world that Montaigne professes, to be willing to accept what they do not yet understand. Thus, each view of wonder is equally useful to her project. She seems to come closest to Platt's formulation of René Descartes's view that "wonder was good, a cognitively destabilizing force that brought one to new understandings . . . the 'first of all the passions' . . . Combining the qualities both of Aristotle's sense of wonder as the origin of inquiry and of Longinus's notion of the sublime as something surprising and transporting."²⁵ Wonder, for Behn, is something inherently valuable, capable of powerful transformation, even transcendence.

Behn's primary interest in wonders is to authorize her work; to excuse (or to allow for) seemingly "*Romantick*," or fictitious, elements; and to prepare the reader to approach her work credulously, to accept things, including models, new and strange though real (true) in what she would consider the most significant sense of the term. As Mary Baine Campbell argues, wonder in Behn's work should be "taken on its own terms, not as or not only as a rhetorical masking or a deflection of 'reality.'"²⁶ Mary Baine Campbell also is aware of the blurring of fiction and fact that *Oroonoko* represents: "However much it may be simply true that Africans from the areas around 'Coramantien' had European features, it is surely not 'true' that they (or for that matter any European lovers or kings) spoke in a crisis in the precise accents of English heroic drama."²⁷ Behn is not interested in always representing absolute or factual truth. Rather, amidst the truth claims and highly detailed factual accounts, she shares a moral conception of truth. For Behn, wonders become the means both to introduce new truths as well as possibly to conceal untruth, allowing her fiction to transcend factual truth to establish moral and royal precedent—and to reify the function of texts in asserting proper moral practices. Wonders are Behn's method of enlarging the scope of understanding and perception to become aware of and to overcome contemporary social views and failings.

In her dedication, Behn specifically states that the world has

grown too “*Nice and Critical upon Dedications,*” judging all dedications to be flattery since “*if the World knows a Man has some Vices, they will not allow one to speak of his Virtues*” (p. 34). She refutes this notion, claiming that “*This, my Lord, is for want of thinking Rightly; if Men wou’d consider with Reason, they . . . wou’d believe almost every Great Man has enough to make him Worthy of all that can be said of him*” (p. 34). Behn wishes her audience not to condemn vice as much as seek for virtue in the examples of great men and see them as the much-needed positive examples of virtue that Behn espouses: “*Where shall we find a Man so Young, Like St. Augustine, in the midst of all his Youth and Gaiety, Teaching the World divine Precepts, true Notions of Faith, and Excellent Morality, and, at the same time, be also a perfect Pattern of all that accomplish a Great Man?*” (p. 36).

Accordingly, readers of *Oroonoko* are not intended to search for facts—or faults—within the tale but rather to learn from the moral lessons that Behn presents and that *Oroonoko* embodies.²⁸ In this sense, Behn’s examination and use of wonder is more about emulation or exemplarity than it is about factual knowledge. Behn also uses the vogue of travel writings and the interest in curiosities and wonders to authorize her tale; after all, there is no one else surviving from these experiences in Suriname and thus no one else to share these new, strange, and valuable occurrences with the rest of the world. Most particularly, the titular character’s moral merit would be lost, and this merit is tied inextricably to his wonder-full origins, actions, character, and body, as well as to his exemplary royal honor that Behn feels is desperately missing from her society.

Behn’s assertion to Lord Maitland that the “*great part of the lazy Nobility*” needs an appropriate example and an elevation of character suggests Behn is aware that her work comes after the unsettling of humanistic and aristocratic notions of emulation (p. 35).²⁹ Wonder allows Behn, in addition to a means of authorizing her own tale, a narrative method of reasserting the problematized ideas of exemplary modeling through the transcendent virtue and character of *Oroonoko*.

Behn’s move to authorize her tale through the value of *Oroonoko*’s character is made clear in her first lines: “I do not pretend, in giving you the History of this *Royal Slave*, to entertain my Reader with the Adventures of a feign’d *Hero*, whose Life and Fortunes Fancy may manage at the Poets Pleasure; not in relating the Truth, design to adorn it with any Accidents, but such as arriv’d in earnest to him: And it shall come simply into the World,

recommended by its own proper Merits, and natural Intrigues; there being enough of Reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the Addition of Invention" (p. 37).³⁰ Behn emphasizes the merit of the natural, truthful story she is to relate, though we also recognize her concern for the work's reception—she asserts that the story is both morally valuable in and of itself (educating, or shaming perhaps, the readers in what they should value and emulate) and also entertaining. *Oroonoko* is the kind of work she has related to Lord Maitland's character, one that teaches by proper example; conveniently, as a tale of foreign adventure, it is also diverting. Behn acknowledges the society in which her audience lives, "a World where he finds Diversions for every Minute, new and strange" and relies on the unusualness of her tale, though truthful, to entice and to educate her audience (p. 38).³¹ She has, as it were, a sure thing in this story, something with moral value but also in fashion—intriguing and truly new.

Behn continues her plea for authority by adding that "I was my self an Eye-Witness . . . and what I cou'd not be Witness of, I receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History, the *Hero* himself" (p. 37). Thus, she supports her work through her own role as a participant in the tale but also defers authority (since much of the story happens outside her presence) to Oroonoko, who acts as an authorizing agent for the narration and a source of truth. Behn continues to reaffirm the truthfulness of her work throughout, using references to specific details and verifiable facts—from the other-worldly artifacts she claims to have presented to "His Majesty's *Antiquaries*" to the feather adornments she gave "to the King's Theatre" for John Dryden's *The Indian-Queen* (ca. 1664) production—in addition to the inclusion of specific, known individuals (including Francis Willoughby, William Byam, and John Trefry, all since deceased) and historical realities (such as England's withdrawal from Suriname in 1667) to reinforce her authority on Suriname, the West Indies, and the peoples and cultures she depicts (pp. 38–9). Her early descriptions of otherworldly courtship, customs, tribal justice, hunting, slave trading, and other activities establish her authority as a credible observer of a foreign land, while also preparing her audience for cultures that will defy (and in some cases outshine) their own (pp. 38–41). However, within only a few pages of narration, she shifts from Suriname to Africa, speaking about Coramantien and Prince Oroonoko's earlier history, a tale clearly derivative of others' words (most likely told to her by Oroonoko, according to her previous statement that he shared with her what she did not

see herself). The blending of ethnography and observation with secondhand accounts is melded seamlessly, creating an ongoing sense of truth and realism, though also releasing Behn from much accountability for truth and allowing “the Critical Reader [to] judge as he pleases.” After all, she is merely reporting what she has seen and heard from others, and, of course, her hero, noble and royal, allows a perfect site for authority and accountability. He is Roman(tic) and royal, a symbol of truth and “true Honour,” as well as a deceased and thus unquestionable source (p. 42).

Behn's own meeting with him stresses the unquestionable nature of his character. Notice how she models in her response to Oroonoko the response she expects from her audience: “This great and just Character of *Oroonoko* gave me an extream Curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke *French* and *English*, and that I cou'd talk with him. But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surpriz'd when I saw him, as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all Report I found him” (p. 43).³² Behn's first meeting with Oroonoko impresses on the audience that he wondrously defies and surpasses current understanding, creating a perfect model of aristocratic manhood, physically, socially, mentally, culturally, politically, and morally:

He came into the Room, and address'd himself to me, and some other Women, with the best Grace in the World. He was pretty tall, but of a Shape the most exact that can be fancy'd: The most famous Statuary cou'd not form the Figure of a Man more admirably turn'd from Head to Foot . . . The whole Proportion and Air of his Face was so noble, and exactly form'd, that, bating his Colour, there cou'd be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome. There was no one Grace wanting, that bears the Standard of true Beauty . . . Nor did the Perfections of his Mind come short of those of his Person; for his Discourse was admirable upon almost any Subject; and who-ever had heard him speak, wou'd have been convinc'd of their Errors, that all fine Wit is confin'd to the *White Men*, especially to those of *Christendom*; and wou'd have confess'd that *Oroonoko* was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a Soul, as politick Maxims, and was as sensible of Power as any Prince civiliz'd in the most refin'd Schools of Humanity and Learning, or the most Illustrious Courts.

(pp. 43–4)

Here and elsewhere, Behn creates a noble figure that is quasi-classical, pagan, and yet virtuous, similar to the moral exemplarity of “the secular, pagan history of Greece and Rome” emphasized by humanistic studies as described by Timothy Hampton.³³ Hampton demonstrates that humanists believed every text should be read to discover moral application translatable into practical actions for everyday life.³⁴ Thus, Behn is literally re-creating, in a recent model contained in a pagan history, an exemplarity that echoes the work of earlier writers from the Renaissance, such as Guillaume Budé, Desiderius Erasmus, Shakespeare, and Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. However, unlike Cervantes’s *The History of Don Quixote de la Mancha* that works “to confront the limitations of humanist discourse and to narrate the failure of exemplarity, to underscore both exemplarity’s value and impossibility,” Behn re-creates through the authorizing discourse of the wondrous the possibility of representative virtue, of humanist and royalist precepts that avoid the “problematic individual” Georg Lukács describes at the center of the then evolving novel.³⁵ Behn’s Oroonoko is able to fulfill through his wondrous character the need for the “individual and his lived experience” as well as to reside within the “world of ideals” that normally “stands above [the central character].”³⁶ *Oroonoko* recaptures a belief in worthy example through the authorizing and illimitable power of wonder.

In short, Oroonoko represents a paragon of body, language, and character, an authorizing agent and subject for Behn’s narration, an unquestionable source and subject, a perfect model of emulation. While her description comes across as hyperbole, Behn has prepared her audience to avoid misjudging or limiting the approbation of great men, and, of course, Oroonoko bears within his body the essence of wonders new and strange. How do we begin to question a source unknown to us and so absolutely overawing to the narrator herself and, by report, everyone else who knew him? Oroonoko, only known—and thoroughly perfected—through Behn’s relation, becomes a representative figure of moral truth in the work, a character that cannot be questioned because of his safely distanced and nearly symbolic station.³⁷

Oroonoko’s character is made unimpeachable within the narration as a representative figure of honor and trust.³⁸ When he is taken by the treacherous sea captain, he questions oaths made in reference to God and “the World to come,” emphasizing instead his personal honor:

Let him know I Swear by my Honour, which to violate, wou'd not only render me contemptible and despised by all brave and honest Men, and so give my self perpetual pain, but it wou'd be eternally offending and diseasing all Mankind, harming, betraying, circumventing and outraging all Men; but Punishments hereafter are suffer'd by ones self; and the World takes no cognizances whether this God have revenged 'em, nor not, 'tis done so secretly, and deferr'd so long: While the Man of no Honour, suffers every moment the scorn and contempt of the honest World, and dies every day ignominiously in his Fame, which is more valuable than Life.

(p. 65)

Oroonoko's foreign and inviolable sense of honor, which remains absolute throughout the work, allows him to represent continually (perhaps even to characterize) noble truth within the tale. To accept any part of the tale, any part of Oroonoko's characterization, as true makes it almost impossible to draw any further lines between fact and fiction.

We see Oroonoko act in a way that does not connote absolute honesty only when he is faced with his grandfather's taking of Imoinda. Here we see him counteract his grandfather only after being assured "the Breach of the Law [was] on his Grand-father's side" and that "it was both just and lawful for him so to do" (p. 49). It is even more important to note that his servants answered falsely to his grandfather on behalf of the prince, "being entirely Slaves to the Merits and Vertues of the Prince," but as far as can be seen without Oroonoko's request or perhaps even knowledge (pp. 49–50). This possible exception only re-emphasizes Behn's insistence on honorable truth based on an inner and personal code of morality and character entirely summed up within the prince. He is the standard for truth and honor upheld within the world of factual fiction created by Behn.

Oroonoko, significantly, is not just concerned about Imoinda, his circumstances, or his own fate—rather he is concerned overtly about the example he sets with all of his choices. He is the "*Great Man*" (the honorable hero or exemplar) Behn seeks for in her dedication, concerned about teaching the world true precepts and self-consciously living as "*a perfect Pattern*" (p. 36). When faced with his grandfather's treachery, Oroonoko feels trapped and unable to defy custom, and he laments his only options: "*either ignobly set an ill President to my Successors, or abandon*

my Country, and fly with her to some unknown World, who never heard our Story" (p. 48). He seems equally repulsed about setting a poor example as abandoning his story, losing the chance to set an example of any kind. His primary concern appears to be about how his choices will be read and understood.

Behn reiterates the power of his example throughout her tale, emphasizing the power of exemplarity in establishing order in appropriately minded audiences. Oroonoko is introduced as both an example and a wonder: "he became, at the Age of Seventeen, of the most expert Captains, and bravest Soldiers, that ever saw the Field of *Mars*: So that he was ador'd as the Wonder of all that World, and the Darling of the Soldiers" and was made the General of all the armies (p. 42). When Oroonoko refuses to fight in his anguish over Imoinda's seeming death, his men are thrown into an unnatural "Disorder" ensuring their defeat until Oroonoko returns to the field—"he appear'd like some Divine Power"—and inspires a "new Order . . . changing absolutely the Fate of the Day, [and] gain'd an entire Conquest" (pp. 60–1). Oroonoko's example inspires remarkable actions in others, leading to a restitution of civil order—he even befriends the enemy prince, creating unity and strength where there was war and strife before. In a similar manner, when the sea captain takes Oroonoko and his men captive, it is only after Oroonoko is tricked into setting precedent and is freed "that he might show himself to the rest; that they might have an Eye upon him," that his men end their self-starvation (p. 65). Of course, this second example evidences the way in which the text repeatedly doubles precedent and exemplarity, showing the easy appropriation of example to create inappropriate or poor precedent. Aphra Behn comments on the sea captain's astonishing treachery: "Some have commended this Act, as brave, in the Captain; but I will spare my Sence of it, and leave it to my Reader, to judge as he pleases" (p. 64). The power of precedent is always at the mercy of judgment—judgment that Behn hopes her readers will exercise in reading for precedents in her tale and in life around them, as her preface and Erasmus's writings indicate.³⁹

Behn links exemplarity and her embodiment of divinity and virtue within Oroonoko. Oroonoko stands as not simply a perfect pattern but also as a kingly and therefore divine standard in the text. When Oroonoko leads his army to victory, he was "receiv'd at Court with all the Joy and Magnificence that cou'd be express'd to a young Victor, who was not only return'd triumphant, but belov'd like a Deity" (p. 62). Earlier, Oroonoko is linked to royalists in England as he comments on "the deplorable Death of our

great Monarch; and wou'd discourse of it with all the Sense, and Abhorrence of the Injustice imaginable" (p. 43). Most important to Behn's discussion of morality and character, Oroonoko himself always embodies divinity, whether he is in common cotton or just returned from victorious wars in Africa: "Nevertheless, he shone through all; and his *Osenbrigs* (a sort of brown *Holland* Suit he had on) cou'd not conceal the Graces of his Looks and Mien; and he had no less Admirers, than when he had his dazeling Habit on: The Royal Youth appear'd in spight of the Slave, and People cou'd not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it: As soon as they approach'd him, they venerated and esteem'd him; his Eyes insensibly commanded Respect, and his Behaviour insinuated it into every Soul" (p. 68). Oroonoko's behavior, Behn insists, distinguishes him, ensuring that all look on him as an example, inspiring (even unknowingly) a difference in their own actions and manner. He is received by the landowners as "if the King himself (God bless him) had come a-shore," while the slaves (some of whom he had enslaved himself) greeted him with celebration and outcries, "[a]nd kissing his Feet, paid him even Divine Homage" (pp. 69–70). Of course, it is with this difference that cannot be denied that Oroonoko is able, almost, to upset the inappropriate order in Suriname. All but those the narrator vilifies follow Oroonoko, who promises a better order and pattern of behavior (p. 93).

Oroonoko, opposed to Byam, the sea captain, and other unworthy representatives of "our Western World," outshines in character all other dominant patterns in the text, just as Behn figures Suriname to outshine "the whole Globe of the World" in natural beauty (pp. 69, 77). That she immediately moves from declaring that Suriname "outvie[s]" "all the Gardens of boasted *Italy*" (p. 77) to narrating an example of Oroonoko overdoing "an English Gentleman, Brother to *Harry Martin*, the great *Oliverian*" in protecting Behn and other women from a wild tiger, indicates that Oroonoko is to be seen as a rebirth of royal precedent, specifically geared toward a rebuttal of Oliver Cromwell's worth (pp. 77–8). Faced with the tiger, Oroonoko "tak[es] Mr *Martin's* Sword [and] desir'd him to stand aside, or follow the Ladies. He obey'd him, and [Oroonoko] met this monstrous Beast of might, size, and vast Limbs" (p. 78). Oroonoko repeatedly outshines all other patterns within the text, emphasizing honor and royal order as well as absolute moral truth and character.

By framing her work with factual details known to her audience as well as with a noble prince of impeachable character,

Behn reinforces her work's worth, while diffusing her authority on to other sources and clouding a search for absolute historical and biographical truth within the tale. Behn frees her noble source from full accountability by relating the tale in such a way that shows her mediation and alludes to the mediation of others, as the narrator tells us of things that neither she nor Oroonoko could have known: events private to Imoinda and the old king, conversations between Aboan and Onahal, etc.⁴⁰ The narrator also describes Oroonoko in the third person at points that Behn (as a character) could never have seen, such as on the slave boat: "It may be easily guess'd, in what manner the Prince resented this Indignity, who may be best resembl'd to a Lion taken in a Toil; so he rag'd, so he struggl'd for Liberty, but all in vain" (p. 64). David Paxman has argued that much of the tale's "hyperbolic praise" of Oroonoko must be self-referential.⁴¹ While this assertion may be true, I believe the multivocality of the work's narration allows for a space of uncertainty, for Behn's supposition (as, possibly, evidenced in the relation of Oroonoko's actions on the slave boat) or hyperbole, and for other, and unknown, mediation. The tale derives from an unknown (and thus, again, unquestionable) shared source, centered in the royal character of Oroonoko but diffused by a multiplicity of sources and mediators of truth, allowing Behn to swear to the tale's truth as a sharer of received knowledge as well as firsthand experience, and leading us to trust in an interwoven tale in which the boundaries of certain knowledge (especially factual knowledge) are always unclear and purposefully unimportant.

Behn, accordingly, creates in Oroonoko a self-referential source of truth and exemplarity tied into the moral and social aspects of her work.⁴² As the history's value purportedly derives from the moral character at the story's center (and source), the work draws on his morality to overdetermine the truth of the work. Oroonoko becomes symbolic of moral truth and character to such a degree that nothing he does can be questioned, while the history constructed from amorphous and unknown sources becomes so interwoven with the factual and fictional aspects of the work that any attempt to separate historical truths from the narration's purported truth, without accepting the inner relations of truth and character within the work, would require a dismembering of the body of the text not dissimilar to the brutal dismembering of Oroonoko's body that takes place at the close of the work. Byam hacks up Oroonoko in order to impose upon the other slaves his own version of truth, indeed his own tale of

absolute mastery over the land and peoples there—a tale equally based in fact and fiction, but lacking the moral core of character and truth that *Oroonoko* has come to represent.⁴³

Truth then can be questioned and appropriated—which Byam violently exemplifies—but true meaning, signification, is located for Behn within the moral whole, within the authorizing agent of the work—the truth of character beyond discrete actions—with the burden of understanding and application upon the audience, as described by Erasmus. Again, we are reminded of Behn's insistence that the truth and value of her work (as well as others' works, as her preface states) lie in the audience's ability to glean and to emulate the good from the necessarily (and unimportantly) fallible characters presented to them, in daily life, in fiction, in fact. Behn's truth is wonderful and thus not fully understood but certainly based in moral and royal character and observation. Another tale can be written about the factual truthfulness of *Oroonoko*, but such a work would betray and dismember the moral corpus of Behn's narration.

NOTES

I am grateful to Beth Tobin for early and incisive critiques of my work. I am also appreciative of the support and insightful comments of Curtis Perry, O M Brack, Sharon Crowley, Cora Fox, Carol Mejia-LaPerle, Heather Hicks, and Lynette Austin.

¹ Philip Sidney, *Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), p. 221.

² Even in recent scholarship, the issue continues to be discussed and the search for historical and biographical evidence continues (such as in Bernard Dhuicq's "New Evidence on Aphra Behn's Stay in Surinam," *N&Q*, n. s., 42, 1 [March 1995]: 40–1). Despite evidence Behn was in Suriname and details real events, Joanna Lipking still argues that even if Behn did base her work on some facts, she also "falsified them boldly" ("Confusing Matters: Searching the Backgrounds of *Oroonoko*," in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996], pp. 259–81, 261). The battle about historical truth in Behn's work continues, if only in different guises.

³ Robert L. Chibka points out that many of the novels of the day had truth claims quite similar to Behn's in her *True History* but that more canonical authors are not so inundated with factual critique ("'Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman's Invention': Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *TSL* 30, 4 [Winter 1988]: 510–37). Chibka is one of the first scholars to consider Behn seriously as a writer rather than an anomalous figure in literary history and to emphasize, as he puts it, not *that* she wrote but *how*—her aesthetic, rhetorical, and literary merit, rather than her historical value or biographical content (though, of course, these categories leak, sometimes quite profusely). Chibka follows Dale Spender in questioning the

battle over the truthfulness of Behn's fiction, arguing instead for the merit of her work as, quite self-consciously, fiction (see *Mothers of the Novel: One Hundred Good Women Writers before Jane Austen* [London: Pandora, 1986], esp. pp. 1–7, 47–66). However, his work has not stopped the work of others to point out (or to harangue) continually the historicity of Behn's work—a project that finds validity more and more, even for major canonical figures, in an age of new historicism.

⁴ Perhaps the best response to the repeated vilification of Behn, largely for being bawdy, is Sue-Ellen Case's discussion of women's limited place and power within society: "As sexualised objects of their society, their realms of power and development were the bedrooms and brothels. Women lived in the spheres of sexual and marital arrangements, deriving their personal power from liaisons with men. If these situations are bawdy, they are bawdy for men, who had the liberty of the public sphere. For women, they were simply the only realm of potential narrative and dialogue" (*Feminism and Theatre* [London: Macmillan, 1988], p. 38). It is significant then that Behn must adopt, as I argue in this work, a male center to authorize her work, to transcend the limits of female space.

⁵ Brian Vickers and Nancy S. Struever are among the many scholars to recognize the shift during Behn's period within the discourse of truth from elaboration and metaphor, "the abuse of rhetoric," to factual exactness and empiricism following models such as Francis Bacon (who in turn follows an Aristotelian approach to writing) (*Rhetoric and the Pursuit of Truth: Language Change in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* [Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1985], p. 7).

⁶ Sidney, p. 221.

⁷ Behn, *Oroonoko; or, The Royal Slave*, ed. Catherine Gallagher with Simon Stern (Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2000), p. 37. All citations of *Oroonoko* will appear parenthetically in the text.

⁸ Lennard J. Davis points to Behn's opening truth claim as the inauguration of disclaimers for true history unembellished by literary elements. However, as he also discusses, the work tends away from what an audience can easily construe as true: "One wonders if Behn is consciously testing the credulity of the reader as Oroonoko's own credulity had been tested" (*Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel* [New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983], p. 110). As with many critics before him, Davis fails to recognize that Behn's work focuses on setting up an example of moral exemplarity more than relating a historical biography. While he does note that it is "steeped in an insecurity resulting from bad faith, criminality, lying, and fabrication," he does not connect this thematic emphasis with the work's larger effort to teach civic and moral duty through exemplarity (p. 110). As Davis recognizes (and then dismisses in pursuit of Behn's place within the origins of the novel), the work fits well within the fictions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as my epigraph to Sidney suggests. Put in terms of Michael McKeon's taxonomy of epistemologies, Behn recognizes the current shift from "romance idealism" to "naïve empiricism" but attempts to destabilize the shift, offering instead a persuasive moral view of truth, based both on wonder (another iteration of romance) and observable truth (*The Origins of the English Novel, 1600–1740* [Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987], p. 21).

⁹Throughout this article, I will refer to Behn as both the author and the narrator of the work. Despite the evidence of Behn's real experience in Suriname, the narrator is a construction of the narrative, a character; however, the importance of truth within the tale derives from Behn's presentation and perspective of truth in her work as both author and narrator. Within the dedication, these roles blend perfectly. If this were a different kind of work, the dedicatory epistle likely would be seen as the closest thing to the author's own voice and persona within the text. In this case, where the dedication melds fluidly into the text proper, there is simply no textual distinction between the author of the preface and the narrator of the tale that follows. Each is a facet of Behn's self-representation; each can be argued to be true or false, façade or fact. McKeon offers the useful insight that "no tension exists in [Behn's] dual role as narrator and character, because both roles are dedicated to the single end of physically witnessing, and thereby authenticating, a central character" (p. 112). Of course, I also wish to emphasize the ways in which Behn uses *Oroonoko* in turn to authenticate her own work, a kind of doubly displaced authority or a rhetorical shell and nut game.

¹⁰Susan J. Owen has effectively argued for the ways in which Behn "specifically associates royalism and 'virtue'" in her later plays, just before *Oroonoko*, while Gallagher explicates the ways in which *Oroonoko* argues for an absolute monarchy connected to exchange value ("Suspect my loyalty when I lose my virtue': Sexual Politics and Party in Aphra Behn's Plays of the Exclusion Crisis, 1678–83," in *Aphra Behn*, ed. Todd [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999], pp. 57–72, 64); "*Oroonoko's* Blackness," in *Aphra Behn Studies*, pp. 235–58, 246–54). Behn's morality is largely royalist, as many have pointed out, and Behn seems unapologetic of slavery and colonialism, such as in the text's support of *Oroonoko's* deriding the slaves as dogs worthy of their place in society. In her preface Behn praises Lord Maitland while lamenting "*the Barrenness of your Soil [Scotland]: Which however cannot be incommode to your Lordship; since your Quality, and the Veneration that the Commonality naturally pay their Lords, creates a flowing Plenty there*" (p. 36). Behn is not speaking for the material interests of the poor and unlanded, and, as Charlotte Sussman has pointed out, "she sides with the status quo of slave culture" (p. 229), at least as the narrator ("The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner [Charlottesville and London: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1993], pp. 212–33, 229). For further reading of *Oroonoko's* place within antislavery texts and as a conflicted royalist text itself, see Laura Brown, *Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), esp. pp. 1–63; Anita Pacheco, "Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *SEL* 34, 3 (Summer 1994): 491–506; and George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment," in *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope*, ed. Guffey and Andrew Wright (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1975), pp. 3–41. For more on humanism's complicated relation to royalism see Fritz Caspari, *Humanism and the Social Order in Tudor England* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1954), esp. pp. 1–27, 132–56; James Kelsey McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics under Henry VIII and Edward VI* (Oxford: Claren-

don Press, 1965), pp. 1–281; Alistair Fox, “Facts and Fallacies: Interpreting English Humanism,” in *Reassessing the Henrician Age: Humanism, Politics, and Reform, 1500–1550*, ed. Fox and John Guy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 9–33; Anthony Grafton, *Defenders of the Text: The Traditions of Scholarship in an Age of Science, 1450–1800* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1991), pp. 1–243; Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men’s Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995), esp. pp. 23–132; and Rebecca W. Bushnell, *A Culture of Teaching: Early Modern Humanism in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 10–72, 144–84.

¹¹ Behn was active in placing her work within her period. Owen argues for Behn’s ability to respond ideologically “to the needs of the particular historical moment,” while Todd specifically links *Oroonoko* and Behn’s later works to “[t]he relationship between fiction and fact, fiction and faction, fact and faction, [and] literary faction and political faction” (Owen, p. 68; Todd, “A Spectacular Death: History and Story in *The Widow Ranter*,” in *Aphra Behn*, pp. 73–84, 74). Davis and to a lesser extent McKeon exemplify the way in which *Oroonoko* is placed frequently at the beginning of the rise of the novel (and often, by extension, linked with new principles of fiction, truth, and history) rather than read within its own context at the end of the seventeenth century (see for example Davis, p. 103 or McKeon, p. 269).

¹² These lines echo Ben Jonson’s writing in his *Discoveries*, in which he claims “*Poetry, and Picture, are Arts of a like nature . . . Yet of the two, the Pen is more noble, then the Pencil. For that can speake to the Understanding; the other, but to the Sense*” (*Timber: or, Discoveries*, in *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy and Evelyn Simpson, vol. 8 [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947], pp. 609–10). Jonson also cites Plutarch here, reifying this link of the two arts, “It was excellently said of *Plutarch*, Poetry was a speaking Picture, and *Picture* a mute Poesie” (p. 609). The lines also draw to mind Horace’s opening statement in the *Ars Poetica* comparing the “equall power to Painter, and to Poet,” as Jonson translates the line (*Horace on the Art of Poetry: Latin Text, English Prose Translation, Introduction and Notes, together with Ben Jonson’s English Verse Rendering*, ed. Edward Henry Blakeney [1928; rpt. Freeport NY: Books for Libraries, 1970], p. 107).

¹³ As I will develop further, the dedication reflects the modeling of moral exemplarity, both in texts and in life, which Renaissance humanists championed, as developed by Timothy Hampton in *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1990), esp. pp. ix–xii, 1–30. Donald R. Kelley and David Harris Sacks unequivocally claim that “Renaissance history was exemplary” (*The Historical Imagination in Early Modern Britain: History, Rhetoric, and Fiction, 1500–1800* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997], p. 6). Sidney’s assertion that the ultimate goal of knowledge is “well-doing and not of well-knowing only” matches quite appropriately what Behn espouses in this epistle and throughout the text (p. 219).

¹⁴ P. 37. Daniel Pigg asserts that Behn melds her difference from typical male authors with Oroonoko’s difference from European princes to set up a space for acceptable and meritorious transcendence (“Trying to Frame the Unframable: Oroonoko as Discourse in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *SSF* 34, 1 [Winter 1997]: 105–11).

¹⁵ Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park suggest that wonders, especially those of the new world, destabilized social order and understanding, creating marginal places for the conception of new ideas about reality as well as pleasurable entertainment (*Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150–1750* [New York: Zone Books, 1998], esp. pp. 13–66). G. Gabrielle Starr has further developed the specific link between Behn's novelties in *Oroonoko* and the period's belief systems and sense of order: "Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it is novelty that most strongly links the worlds of verifiable experience with the worlds of imagination; but novelty brings imagination, often destructively, into contact with the real. For conservative thinkers in seventeenth-century England, novelty threatens authority in a world where chaotic tendencies seemed explosively manifest in party and religious dissent, plague and fire, or threatened Jesuit invasions and Jacobite rebellion. The revolution of inquiry (scientific and otherwise) into the novel and unknown meant cravings for novelty were often read as cravings for the unnatural" (Starr, "Objects, Imaginings, and Facts: Going Beyond Genre in Behn and Defoe," *ECF* 16, 4 [July 2004]: 499–518, 502–3). Starr also comments on Behn's bringing "empirical observation and its quest for certainty into contact with the uncertain" (p. 504).

¹⁶ Linked with Behn's truth claim, this focus on factual details and historical truth allows Behn to place herself within the growing emphasis and respectability of historical fact, as asserted by D. R. Woolf (*Reading History in Early Modern England* [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000], p. 7, and "A Feminine Past? Gender, Genre, and Historical Knowledge in England, 1500–1800," *American Historical Review* 102, 3 [June 1997]: 645–79).

¹⁷ Patricia Pender positions *Oroonoko* within the "True History" genre, explaining, based on McKeon's *The Origins of the English Novel*, the Royal Society's move to enforce "a standard of naive empiricism and authenticated historicity" that competed with readers' desires for narration and arguing for Behn's conflicted negotiation of convention and authentication ("Competing Conceptions: Rhetorics of Representation in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *WoWr* 8, 3 [2001]: 457–71, 458). While I feel Pender's conclusions fail to recognize the significance of exemplarity and moral character within Behn's project, Pender ably details Behn's careful moves to create authority and validity for her work within a culture reevaluating fact and fiction within tales of the new world.

¹⁸ Martine Watson Brownley, the first according to my knowledge to consider the issue of the narrator's role in the tale, also ties the narration to moral, social, and political commentary (to a "standard of judgment") and alludes, though only generally, to the narrator as a purposeful guide to the marvelous within the work ("The Narrator in *Oroonoko*," *ELWIU* 4, 2 [Fall 1977]: 174–81, 174). McKeon also notes but does not develop the blending of truth and morality in the text, particularly in the context of Behn's preface to *Lord Maitland* (pp. 249–50). Of course, McKeon's study, which places Behn in the trajectory of the novel, itself both new and foreign, appropriately re-emphasizes the significance of Behn's preoccupation with locating the truth and the moral within the new and strange.

¹⁹ Katie Whitaker, "The Culture of Curiosity," in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Nicholas Jardine, James A. Secord, and Emma C. Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 75–90, 75.

²⁰ Daston and Park connect wonder to the destabilization of social code as well as to the collection of wonders as emblematic of power. To own or to control wonders is considered to grant both symbolic and real power—as Byam and Behn each gain through their use (ownership) of Oroonoko.

²¹ Peter G. Platt, *Reason Diminished: Shakespeare and the Marvelous* (Lincoln and London: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 39.

²² Jardine and Spary, “The Natures of Cultural History,” in *Cultures of Natural History*, ed. Jardine, Secord, and Spary (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 3–13, 12.

²³ Platt explains, “In Aristotle’s system, a mind stimulated by wonder sought a larger rational ‘design,’ whether in the world at large or in a work of art, and this exercise was part of an even greater move in the mind from ignorance to knowledge” (p. 2).

²⁴ Michel de Montaigne, “On the Lame,” in *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. M. A. Screech (New York: Penguin, 1991), pp. 1165–6.

²⁵ Platt, pp. 59–60. This form of wonder, taken together with the earlier thinking of Montaigne, is, I believe, closest to the wonder that Mary Baine Campbell maps: “one may certainly argue for the value of a pleasurable emotion, or relation to knowing, that requires the suspension of mastery, certainty, knowingness itself” (*Wonder and Science: Imagining Worlds in Early Modern Europe* [Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1999], p. 3). Mary Baine Campbell’s work connects theories and practices of wonder, truth, and anthropological and cultural studies in the early modern period. She carefully links the issues of wonder and truth in *Oroonoko*, demonstrating the very critical relation between colonial experience, terror, authority, and fiction that Behn’s work exemplifies.

²⁶ Mary Baine Campbell, p. 3.

²⁷ Mary Baine Campbell, p. 269. Mary Baine Campbell references Elaine Campbell’s “Aphra Behn’s Surinam Interlude,” *Kunapipi* 7, 2–3 (1985): 25–35, for more on Coramantien.

²⁸ As Davis puts it, “fiction-making and lying are central to the work. Fabrications build up into frames within frames doubling back upon themselves until every turn reveals fact warped into fiction which turns back upon itself to become fact” (p. 110). From Behn’s perspective, the search for facts delineated from fiction is not valuable or desirable within the world of *Oroonoko*.

²⁹ Hampton explores the fading influence, signified in *Don Quixote* for example, of the kind of “Great Man” exemplarity that Behn invokes in her attempt to reassert a noble, even royal, pattern of modeling (pp. 4–8, 237–96).

³⁰ A much harsher view of the appropriation of Oroonoko’s character to serve Behn’s authorial needs/ends is made by Andrew P. Williams (“The African as Text: Ownership and Authority in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko*,” *The Journal of African Travel-Writing* 5 [1998]: 5–14). Williams argues powerfully that “Behn’s textual treatment of the African voice becomes, like the African body, property to be owned and traded,” indeed to be commodified (p. 5). Gallagher offers an excellent treatment of commodification, both of Behn and of Oroonoko (*Nobody’s Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994], pp. 1–87). Accordingly Behn is not so distant from those that use and abuse Oroonoko during his life. Though her motives may be slightly better, her deception

based on a desire to aid, although not necessarily to free, and her guilt only implicate her in the end—particularly questionable are her disappearances at critical moments and her stated but seemingly ineffectual power and rank. Williams observes the fallacious nature of Behn's self-deference in *Oroonoko*, a move made purely for the society within which Behn works, resulting in perhaps the most important moments of untruth in the whole work—Behn's need to self-deprecate for her biased audience (p. 7). Pender asserts that Behn's rhetoric shows her acute awareness of the problematic colonial and expansionist language (and actions) of her time and “is able to point to the often tragic ironies of the representative regimes she manipulates” (p. 470). My reading of the text lies between these assertions. Behn appropriates *Oroonoko*, and some of her actions and self-references within the narration are questionable; however, as the tale is representative of moral and not factual truth it is difficult to separate out Behn's complicitness, awareness, and use of fiction to create a deeper statement about truth.

³¹ Unsurprisingly, Behn's efforts mirror the humanist (and classical) ideal that a text should “teach and delight,” to use Sidney's iteration of this belief (p. 218).

³² It is important to note that the narrator frequently models for us how we are to read the text. Brownley describes her as “an ordinary woman in an extraordinary position”; thus, as the most closely related, sympathetic character to the audience, she acts as a guide to and moral judge of the events (pp. 176–7).

³³ Hampton, p. 13.

³⁴ In explaining “*applicatio*, the application of a text to action in the world,” Hampton cites Desiderius Erasmus's *De conscribendis epistolis*: “Erasmus prescribes a method for study that demonstrates the central function of all types of examples in humanist models of interpretation. Every text, he says, should be read four times: once to seize its sense, once for its grammatical structure, once for its rhetorical technique, and a fourth time ‘seeking out what seems to relate to philosophy, especially ethics, to discover any example that may be applicable to morals.’ The assumption of application is that past words and deeds embody a value which the modern reader can appropriate to guide practical action” (p. 10).

³⁵ Hampton, p. 296. Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historical-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Merlin Press, 1971), p. 78.

³⁶ Lukács, pp. 78, 77. However, from our vantage, Behn's work seems part of the ebbing literary and social trends described by both Hampton and Lukács, a move to reassert beliefs her society was dismissing. Of course, as has been demonstrated amply, Behn's work also incorporates practices that do relate to the rise of the novel.

³⁷ Even *Oroonoko*'s failures are connected to betrayal—to his difficulty in dealing with those that lack the moral honor he represents. If *Oroonoko* fails in the text, the blame is placed on dishonorable individuals (black and white).

³⁸ Pigg argues that *Oroonoko* represents “a discourse of honor,” while Pacheco baldly states, “Behn's narrative . . . invests *Oroonoko*, the representative of honor, with absolute moral authority” (Pigg, p. 109; Pacheco, p. 500). Pacheco goes on to argue that *Oroonoko* enacts revisionist strategies of the

Restoration, including attempts to revitalize the aristocracy, though the text finally demonstrates the coming redefinitions of royalism and honor.

³⁹ Behn (in one of her most overt judgments as a narrator) vilifies the men who decide to make Oroonoko “an Example to all the *Negroes*” as a counsel of “such notorious Villains as *Newgate* never transported . . . who understood neither the Laws of *God* or *Man*; and had no sort of Principles to make 'em worthy the Name of Men . . . (Damn 'em)” (p. 93). Behn seems to be pointing up that only those who cannot judge rightly fail to recognize and to follow virtue's example. See note 34 for more information on Erasmus's discussion of examples.

⁴⁰ Oroonoko's limited knowledge is particularly important for those that question the truthfulness of Aboan's relation to Onahal and Oroonoko's complicity in that possible deception. However, I agree with Chibka that “Aboan is the ‘half-feigning youth’” that defies any delineation of hard and fast truth (p. 531). He is certainly a very willing victim of Onahal's caresses. Candy B. K. Schille describes the uncertainty that surrounds Imoinda's part or role in Behn's narrative by examining the very real possibility that Imoinda and Behn shared no common language, aside from gestures (“Harems and Master Narratives: Imoinda's Story in *Oroonoko*,” *The Journal of African Travel-Writing* 5 [1998]: 15–24). If Imoinda is only known through Oroonoko's narration of her tale as told to him, this re-emphasizes his importance as a secondary author of the resulting tale, while also emphasizing the extremely marginalized role of Behn's only other female protagonist. For her possible vicarious role for the narrator in the love affair of *Oroonoko*, see Susan Z. Andrade, “White Skin, Black Masks: Colonialism and the Sexual Politics of *Oroonoko*,” *CultCrit* 27 [Spring 1994]: 189–214). Of course, as Schille notes, Oroonoko's appropriation of Imoinda's story reifies the language of colonization and conquest that pervades Behn's work, which is also commented on by Charlotte Sussman, Williams, and others. For more on the intersections of race, class, and gender in the text, see Margaret Ferguson, “Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*,” in *Aphra Behn*, pp. 209–33. For a critique of Andrade, Ferguson, and other studies of race and gender in *Oroonoko*, see Derek Hughes (“Race, Gender, and Scholarly Practice: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*,” *EIC* 52, 1 [January 2002]: 1–22). Hughes's broader rebuttal of current Behn studies, though focused on her dramatic work, is found in his *The Theatre of Aphra Behn* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); see pp. 1–3 for his own formulation of his rebuttal of trends in Behn studies.

⁴¹ David Paxman, “Oral and Literate Discourse in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*,” *Restoration* 18, 2 (Fall 1994): 88–103, 97.

⁴² Gallagher, in the introduction to her edition of *Oroonoko*, emphasizes the relation between Oroonoko's self-referential nature, the question of authority and authorization within the text, and Behn's royalist views: “*Oroonoko* can also be read as a testimonial to an ideal of sovereign authorship, authorship that is self-sustaining. It is the most self-referential of Behn's narratives” (pp. 22–3). The text purposefully entwines its authority with the royal character of Oroonoko, creating the model of noble exemplarity Behn seeks in the Epistle Dedicatory.

⁴³ As Mary Baine Campbell, Chibka, Pigg, Schille, and others assert, *Oroonoko* frequently uses the body as discourse—from tattooing and body mutilation to dancing and the meaning of clothing, from gesture and sign

language to the bodily language of love, honor, and defiance. Thus, the final brutal dismemberment of Oroonoko as a text against revolt and freedom by the governor only culminates the destructive appropriative pattern that underwrites all of *Oroonoko*. Truth, Behn implies, is subject to enslavement, dismemberment, and false reinterpretation. Of course, how this relates to her own appropriation or representation of Oroonoko has been (and should continue to be) argued from many sides, though it should not be separated from its context and moral focus.