Title: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko and the "Blank Spaces" of Colonial Fictions

Author(s): Albert J. Rivero

Source: ***Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900.*** 39.3 (Summer 1999): p443. From *Literature Resource Center*.

Document Type: Critical essay

Full Text:

Near the beginning of Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, Marlow confides to his listeners that "when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps. I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia, and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there." Fortunate enough to have been born in nineteenth-century England, the grown man has lived out the little chap's dreams of exploration "in every sort of latitude all over the two hemispheres." But, as Marlow ruefully confesses, the hankerings of nineteenth-century European explorers must be tempered by the recognition that, what was once virgin territory inviting European possession has, at least since his boyhood, "ceased to be a blank space of delightful mystery - a white patch for a boy to dream gloriously over. It [has] become a place of darkness."(1) The little chap's seemingly commendable "passion for maps" and "dreams" of glorious exploration have become the grown man's colonizing lust transformed into imperialistic nightmare.

I have been begun this essay on Oroonoko with a brief excursion into Heart of Darkness because, though written two hundred years apart, these stories show remarkable points of convergence. Both stories, for example, are told by an eyewitness narrator ("Mrs. A. Behn," Marlow) who both collaborates with and criticizes the colonial enterprise; both feature a protagonist (Oroonoko, Kurtz) who, beginning as civilized, goes spectacularly native; both delineate an uncanny identification or collusion between narrator and protagonist. Though in Behn's novella this identification is complicated by race and gender differences, in Conrad's the interpretation of Marlow's fascination with Kurtz is perplexed by the presence of a framing narrator. It seems that there is one story and one story only of colonialism, whose typicality and repetition figure forth what Abdul R. JanMohamed has called a "Manichean Allegory," in which "the putative superiority of the European and the supposed inferiority of the native" are represented over and over.(2) These representations depict events reputed to have occurred in what Mary Louise Pratt has labeled "contact zones": "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination."(3) Complicating the nature of the exchanges occurring in these "'in-between' spaces," Homi K. Bhabha has argued that the "liminal space," the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy."(4) Bhabha's model, as his book brilliantly demonstrates, works better in the postmodern world, in which hierarchies, because more fluid, might be more easily subverted - or at least tamed into what is perhaps the illusory consolation of their disappearance. Such is not the case with the colonial societies represented by both Behn and Conrad. While there might be much apparent boundary crossing in Oroonoko and Heart of Darkness, many acts of commerce between colonizer and colonized, both stories are governed by hierarchical ideologies. In both, "cultural hybridity" is a recipe for disaster, leading to the transformation of highly educated men (one of them of royal blood) into savage monsters who must be destroyed to repair the fragile and porous boundaries between civilization and barbarity.

Oroonoko and Heart of Darkness, then, attempt to preserve, by acts of rhetorical violence, hierarchies of class and race, while representing the virtual impossibility of doing so in those chaotic, carnivalesque colonial spaces. Both are divided fictions, duplicitous representations riven by the contradictions lying at the heart of the colonial project - both written, moreover, by "outsiders," by a woman marginalized because of her gender and by an Anglo-Pole writing about a society and in a language not his own.(5) This is why Heart of Darkness has occupied such a double place in recent discussions of colonial fictions and why, as Bhabha has noted, its "long shadow... falls on so many texts of the postcolonial pedagogy."(6) Is Conrad's tale, as Chinua Achebe has passionately asserted, the work of a racist?(7) Is it a critique of imperialist ideology? Or is it - in a formulation which, as I shall argue below, also applies to Oroonoko - "a melancholic memorial to romantic love and historic memory"?(8) As Bhabha has shrewdly observed, "the unreadability of these Conradian runes has attracted much interpretive attention, precisely because their depths contain no truth that is not perfectly visible."(9) The recent critical history of Behn's Oroonoko has raised many of these same questions - complicated, of course, by its author's gender.(10) Behn's "runes," it seems, are as "unreadable" as Conrad's and, therefore, as productive of interpretative possibilities and contradictions.

II

Whatever its other generic allegiances, Oroonoko belongs to a long line of "Eye-Witness" narratives of "Travels to the other World."(11) For Behn and her contemporaries, that "other World" was, of course, America, presumably a nameless "blank space" until discovered and mapped out by Europeans, and its originary narrative Christopher Columbus's meticulously detailed "diarios" of his several voyages. Though writing about what eventually turned out (for Europeans) to be a "new world," Columbus, initially believing that he had arrived at "the Indies" by a different route, followed in his diaries the protocols established for travel narratives by such notable explorers as Sir John Mandeville and Marco Polo.(12) Written to inform as well as entertain, all these narratives, ultimately deriving from Homer's Odyssey, represent the "unconceivable Wonders" (to use Behn's phrase, p. 7) of remote peoples and lands. But, as has often been noted, the narrator's seemingly innocent ethnographical interest and fascination with the marvelous usually mask a darker purpose.(13) What is represented "as a wonder in the European representational machinery," from exotic peoples to exotic places, is well on its way to being appropriated in the "immense project of colonization," a project carried out not only "out there," in those colonial spaces, but also "here," in the representations drawn on the white patches of European maps or inscribed in the blank pages of European travel books? Through a process of imaginative translation, those strange colonial spaces are naturalized into familiar European narratives. Thus, in the most culturally powerful of these translations, when the traveler wishes to engage the sympathies of his or her readers, the "new world" becomes the Garden of Eden, its natives outlandish versions of Adam and Eve, and the recorder of these wonders a visitor to a hitherto undiscovered yet strangely familiar paradise. When the author's purpose is simply, in Kurtz's succinct motto, to "exterminate all the brutes,"(15) the landscape becomes a wilderness and its inhabitants Canaanites, Egyptians, or "devils" deserving immediate extinction. What is usually lost in these self-serving European representations is the humanity of those others, who become brothers, in Stephen Greenblatt's apt pun, only by European dispensation.(16)

Such a process of translation, of familiarizing and defamiliarizing, of brothering and othering, is clearly evident in Oroonoko. But unlike "factual" travel narratives whose primary purpose is the furthering of the colonial enterprise by encouraging readers at home either to fund future expeditions or to become explorers themselves - for instance, Sir Walter Ralegh's The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empyre of Gviana (1596), with its enticing "relation of the great and Golden Citie of Manoa"(17) - Oroonoko is a fictional work, whose claims to historical truth, as Michael McKeon and others have pointed out, must be understood, at least in part, as the typical authenticating claims of a new species of prose fiction.(18) Although Behn's biographers now agree that her story was probably based on her actual experiences in the new world, there is no historical record testifying to the existence of Oroonoko and Imoinda.(19) To be sure, Thomas Southeme, in his dedicatory epistle to his play Oroonoko (1695), seems to vouch for the historical existence of Behn's royal slave, but his testimony, based on hearsay, could also be interpreted as yet another authenticating strategy to establish the historical reality of his dramatic hero, as he appropriates him from his female predecessor. Simply put, we do not know whether Behn actually befriended in Surinam an African "royal slave" whom, for reasons known only to herself, she renamed after a South American river, or made up the whole story and bolstered its historicity by populating it with such historical personages as William Byam, John Treffry, and Lord Willoughby. But, as we read Behn's story or watch Southerne's play, the historical existence of the hero is one of the many authorial representations we are supposed to accept as "true" - a presumptive belief Samuel Richardson would famously phrase, sixty years later, as "that kind of Historical Faith which Fiction itself is generally read with, tho' we know it to be Fiction."(20)

Southerne's words also deserve attention for what they reveal about his understanding of Behn's reasons for telling - and retelling - her story: "She [Behn] had a great command of the stage, and I have often wondered that she would bury her favorite hero in a novel when she might have revived him in the scene. She thought either that no actor could represent him, or she could not bear him represented. And I believe the last when I remember what I have heard from a friend of hers, that she always told his story more feelingly than she writ it."(21) The anecdote Southeme "remembers" to "have heard" represents Behn as a quasi-Homeric singer of Oroonoko's tale, who, after many compelling oral performances, finally "buries" his story in a less "feelingly" rendered "novel." Southerne thus puffs his own dramatic effort by suggesting that he has done what Behn had failed to do, in the process attributing to her either of two contradictory motives: skepticism of the power of theatrical impersonation to do justice to her hero, or fear of the emotive efficacy of dramatic representations. In either case, Southerne is emphasizing that Behn had refrained from writing a play because of her powerful emotional investment in the story. His choice of words - remember, revive, bury - also suggests that Southerne interprets Behn's repeated acts of storytelling as acts of remembrance, as memorial exhumations, as elegies for her dead friend.

Whatever the historical status of its hero, Southerne is certainly correct in noting the elegiac tone of Behn's Oroonoko. As her biographers have chronicled, in 1688, the year of its publication, Behn, gravely ill with about a year to live, had to endure the painful events leading up to the inglorious removal of James II from the English throne.(22) For this reason, many critics have read Oroonoko as a political allegory in which the African "royal slave" stands for Behn's beloved "black" Stuarts, from the martyred Charles I, to the recently deceased Charles II, to the soon-to-be deposed James II.(23) I would also suggest, however, that we read Oroonoko as a work of mourning. As we travel through its several locations and time frames, from Europe to Africa to South America as these are spatially rendered in the "scenes" of Behn's narrative, we mourn with its author the passing of her youth and the aristocratic ideals symbolized by the young Oroonoko and Imoinda. The colonial spaces represented in Oroonoko are thus emotionally charged, made significant by its author's memories. In this respect, Behn's story looks forward to such later textual recuperations of lost time as William Wordsworth's Tintern Abbey or Marcel Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu - as well as Conrad's Heart of Darkness - in which geographical coordinates chart a map of personal and historical memory. One could argue, of course, that Behn chooses exotic characters and exotic settings for her tale simply to ensure its marketability, and that, in this respect, she is importing Oroonoko into England as yet another imperialistic commodity.(24) But all that such an argument would prove would be the obvious point that Behn wrote for bread and that, to do so, she might have been willing to participate in the commercial exchanges of colonial curiosities - exchanges which, represented at the beginning of her story with obvious delight (pp. 8-10), she would have found far less reprehensible than her twentieth-century academic readers. In the "blank spaces" of Oroonoko, Behn deploys the customarily duplicitous representations of colonial narratives for a less mercenary purpose, to take hold of a world fast slipping from her grasp.

From her opening textual space, the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Richard, Lord Maitland (1653-95), one of James II's Scots supporters and a recent convert to Catholicism, we witness Behn's attempt both to recuperate her past and to assert the power of her "Pen" to do so.(25) She begins by tacitly praising her "Circumspection" in choosing a "Patron . . . whose Wit, and Worth, truly Merits all that one is capable of saying" (p. 5) - a worthy counterpart to the hero of her "true Story," another"Great Man . . . Gallant enough to merit [Lord Maitland's] Protection" (p. 7). Reviving the old Horatian analogy between painting and poetry (ut pictura poesis), she contrasts the superficial arts of"a Picture-drawer" with those of"a Poet," who, "a Painter in his way," draws "the Nobler part, the Soul and Mind." This is why "the Pictures of the Pen shall out-last those of the Pencil, and even Worlds themselves" (p. 5). Behn then goes on to extol her patron for his exemplary "Virtue" and "excellent Knowledge," for his "noble Principles of Loyalty and Religion" (p. 6). He is, in sum, a "perfect Pattern," by whose example "the World can be Better'd and Refin'd; when a great part of the lazy Nobility shall, with Shame, behold the admirable Accomplishments of a Man so Great, and so Young" (p. 6). As William C. Spengemann has aphoristically put it, Lord Maitland is here portrayed as "a ghost of the old order that died with Oroonoko."(26) By expanding her encomium to include Lord Maitland's wife, Anne Campbell, and seeing in them and their "tranquil Lives . . . an Image of the new Made and Beautiful Pair in Paradise" (p. 7), Behn draws as well an implicit contrast between the "Happy" Scottish couple and the unhappy Oroonoko and Imoinda. Perhaps Richard and Anne, those young outsiders from North Britain, can avoid the fate, if the propitiating "Prayers" of their supporters prove efficacious, of the young African pair, who, we later learn, "resemble our Ancient Picts" (p. 40); perhaps they can restore the "Virtue" so sorely lacking in Behn's world and thus help to re-create the old order in a new, more civilized British nation. But Behn's biblical image is a troubling one whose logical forward trajectory prophesies a fall and transforms her hopeful panegyric into wistful elegy. Yet, if in Surinam the young Aphra had "wanted power to preserve this Great Man" (p. 7), here in England, two decades later, even if prayers fail to obtain eternal "Blessings" for Lord and Lady Maitland, the now famous "Mrs. A. Behn" can "preserve," because of"the Reputation of [her] Pen" (p. 65), both of her great men and their consorts in the exemplary "Pictures" of her "Book," thereby granting them the "immortal Fame" (p. 5) they so richly deserve.

After the customary claims to historical accuracy, bolstered by the assertion that what she did not witness herself she "receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History," the narrator, before giving "the Story of this Gallant Slave," sets the "Scene of the last part of his Adventures," which, we are told, "lies in a Colony in America, called Surinam, in the West-Indies" (p. 8). These rapid shifts in location in its opening paragraphs underscore the displacements of all the characters in the story. The narrator and other whites, later joined by Oroonoko's French tutor, have come largely from England, though we eventually learn that Trefry, the gallant slave's benevolent owner, is Cornish (p. 34) and that Banister, his barbarous executioner, is "a wild Irish Man" (p. 64) - the latter's nationality offering, perhaps, a sad commentary on the failures of the English imperial machinery to "civilize" the inhabitants of at least one of its nearest colonies. Oroonoko and Imoinda, in grim fulfillment of his wish "to fly with her to some unknown World, who never heard our Story" (p. 18), will be brought over by slave ships from West Africa, while the native Indians, renamed through Columbus's navigational blunder, are magnanimously "caress[ed] . . . with all brotherly and friendly Affection in the World" (p. 8), after attempts to wrest their world away from them have led to a pragmatic arrangement in which the outnumbered colonists pretend to be guests or tenants in a land they largely (though tenuously) control.

The Indians are further alienated in their own land by the inevitably Eurocentric perceptions of the narrator. As Behn attempts to incorporate the strange animals of Surinam into her narrative, she naturalizes them not only by comparing them to animals familiar to her English readers but also by measuring them by human standards. Thus, for example, she writes of "Marmosets, a sort of Monkey as big as a Rat or Weasel [with] Face and Hands like a Humane Creature: and Cousheries, a little Beast in the form and fashion of a Lion, as big as a Kitten" (p. 8). She then reveals that she has "presented" to the Royal Society "some rare Flies, of amazing Forms and Colours . . . some as big as my Fist" (p. 9). This is a remarkable moment, as we realize that the then living hand writing the story we are now reading was like those rare flies, that we are literally witnessing those exotic insects being grabbed from the spaces of their world, deprived of life, and brought over into those of ours. It is here that the colonial enterprise, with its transcontinental transportation of curiosities, precious metals, and African slaves, intersects with personal memory, as the author's nostalgic recreation of the lost world she visited in her youth - the English have in the interim ceded this territory to the Dutch - is connected with its commodification in display cases, theatrical spectacles (she has also brought feathers to adorn a performance of The Indian Queen), and the pages of her book.

If strange animals are appropriated into the reader's European world in part by being humanized, the Indians eventually prove that they belong in theirs by revealing their resemblance to animals. In hunting, for example, they "supply the parts of Hounds, by swiftly scouring those almost impassable places; and by the meer Activity of their Feet, run down the nimblest Deer, and other eatable Beasts. But in the water, one wou'd think they were Gods of the Rivers . . . so rare an Art they have in Swimming, Diving, and almost Living in Water; by which they command the lest swift Inhabitants of the Flood" (pp. 10-1). This is how they prove "very useful" (p. 11) to the colonists, as a lifeline to an otherwise inaccessible food supply, with all authorial protestations of affection as well as praise of their wonderful adaptation to their environment thus masking and legitimizing their subjection to their European "brothers." But before this moment of rhetorical unmasking or slippage, Behn describes these "useful" Indians as wearing an "Apron . . . just before 'em, as Adam and Eve did the Fig-leaves," which, coupled with other "adornments" and body paintings, "makes 'em a wonderful Figure to behold." She then remarks that, "though they are all thus naked, if one lives for ever among 'em, there is not to be seen an indecent Action, or Glance," thus reiterating their likeness to "our first Parents before the Fall." This is why, in imitation of Adam and Eve's "dominion over the fish of the sea" and all air and land animals (Genesis 1:26), they can "command" the fauna around them to serve the gastronomic needs of their European "friends." This likeness, however, must be ethnically qualified. Even the exceedingly beautiful young maidens must have their "reddish Yellow" color naturalized by having it compared to "the colour of a new Brick" (p. 9). Still, Behn's representation is overwhelmingly positive, to be used eventually to contrast this "first State of Innocence, before Man knew how to sin" with "all the Inventions of Man," including "Religion" and "Laws," introduced into this world by Europeans (p. 10).

In this respect, Behn's ethnographical descriptions, suffused with her nostalgic desire for a lost world, differ greatly from those appearing in a book often adduced as one of her sources, George Warren's An Impartial Description of Surinam (1667). Writing an "impartial" account meant, one suspects, to rekindle desire at home for a world slipping from English control, Warren celebrates the colony's wealth and trade opportunities and justifies the rights of possession of English settlers by emphasizing the inferiority of the native Indians and the inhumanity of"the Negroes or Slaves . . . brought out of Guiny," to be "sold like Dogs" - muting whatever sympathy he might have felt for the latter's 'Wretched miseries" with his assertion that "they are naturally treacherous and bloody."(27) For Warren, the landscape, though paradisal and therefore highly alluring, is unfortunately inhabited by "a People Cowardly and Treacherous, qualities inseparable." Like Behn's Indians, Warren's "go wholly naked, save a Flap for Modesty," but he construes their modesty differently. "The Women are generally lascivious," he tells his presumably male readers, "some . . . truly handsom . . . and their pretty Bashfulness (especially while Virgins) in the presence of a Stranger, adds such a Charming grace to their perfections (too nakedly expos'd to every wanton Eye) that who ever lives amongst them had need be owner of no less than Joseph's Continency, not at least to Covet their embraces."(28) Though these "Beauties" do not know how to kiss - an odd anthropological fact also noted by Behn (p. 50) - their promised randiness will no doubt enhance the colonial experience. Both Behn and Warren eroticize these attractive young women - and, in this manner, both could be seen as writing "romantic" colonial fictions - but, while Behn aims for the heart, advising the exquisite passion of restraint, Warren aims somewhat lower, assuring immediate gratification. Behn's, in short, is the romance of decorous, upper-class sentiments, of Petrarchan longings and gazings; Warren's is a lower-class version of grabbing while the grabbing is good. This is why Behn's idealization of these noble natives does not end with noting their resemblance to "our first Parents." She also encourages her English readers to picture these young bashful Indians as actors in a "Courtship" drama - with "Eyes, and Sighs . . . all [their] Language" (p. 10) - worthy of occupying the stage of a Restoration heroic tragedy or the pages of a French romance like Madame de Lafayette's The Princess of Cleves (1678) in which we are asked to admire the protagonist's heroic abstinence, in spite of her powerful attraction to the charming Nemours.

nd it is those lofty heroic French romances, so avidly consumed by Behn and her contemporaries, that also provide the literary space in which the African portion of Oroonoko and Imoinda's story unfolds. Although Katharine M. Rogers has advanced that, "[i]n its major outlines, Behn's representation of West African culture is accurate," the product, perhaps, of her research into "published accounts" and of conversations "with slaves and owners in Surinam or traders and travelers in England," she cannot quite establish that Behn either read those accounts or held those conversations.(29) Still, Rogers finds enough parallels between those "published accounts" and Behn's story to make a plausible case. Yet, as Joanna Lipking has recently pointed out, Rogers's account "constructs a single 'West African culture' that is a medley of unevaluated reports from earlier and later journeys, from old lore and modern scholarship of one locale."(30) After sifting the historical evidence, Lipking reaches the sensible conclusion that "Behn apparently made up her stylized courtly Africa, but for now it seems wisest not to conclude that she made it of whole cloth."(31)

What seems nearly indisputable is that, in depicting the royal court in Coramantien, Behn attributes to it the manners and ethos of French romances, as yet another way of textualizing her royalist sympathies.(32) Behn's debt to French romances in Oroonoko is general rather than specific, though, as Lipking suggests, "Oroonoko is a strikingly close cousin of the Scythian prince Oroondates," the hero of La Calprenede's voluminous Cassandra (1644-50), whose noble passion for Statira made him the type of the romantic lover.(33) Exotically"foreign," hailing from one of those dusky barbarous regions of the world, Oroondates, like Oroonoko, is nonetheless reassuringly "European" in his personal beauty, martial prowess, and punctilious adherence to a strict code of love and honor. While Oroondates' virtues seem to owe more to nature than to nurture, such is not entirely the case with Oroonoko. Although Behn does not flinch from attacking the evils introduced by Europeans into their colonies, she invariably identifies the perpetrators of those evils as lower class, faithless poltroons like Banister, Byam, and the nameless captain of the slave ship who betrays Oroonoko into slavery. She thus suggests that, if properly conducted by the right aristocratic sort of people like Colonel Martin, Trefry, and Lord Willoughby, the colonial enterprise can have salutary effects. One of those salutary effects would be the "civilizing" of primitive peoples. Though Oroonoko is not quite a primitive - as a royal prince, he possesses innate nobility - he lives in a brutal and brutalizing martial society. Thus the narrator, when speaking of his "real Greatness of Soul" and other admirable qualities, wonders "where it was he learn'd so much Humanity." She then suggests that "some part of it we may attribute to the Care of a French-Man of Wit and Learning" (p. 12). More ominously, in light of his later fate, Oroonoko supplements his European sentimental education - which apparently includes, given his overheated rhetoric of "Inchantments or Monsters" (p. 18), instruction in romances - by observing "all the English Gentlemen that traded hither; and did not only learn their Language, but that of the Spaniards also, with whom he traded afterwards for Slaves" (pp. 12-3). Even before he leaves Africa, Oroonoko has become a colonial subject. Oroonoko's African adventures, in short, take place not only in a recognizably Europeanized coastal Coramantien, a liminal space where cultures and slaves are traded, but also in a royal court, an apparently more "African" space set apart from this site of international traffic, but actually fashioned by Behn from elements she borrows from a literary genre familiar to her English readers, a genre governed by patriarchal assumptions about social hierarchy, familial obligations, and relations between the sexes. The world of Oroonoko's royal court is bloody and treacherous, as Behn understands all "real" worlds to be, yet it is a world in which, despite the machinations of evildoers, such noble virtues as loyalty, honesty, and true love are unequivocally prized and held up for admiration. It is this world of clearly defined obligations that Behn attempts to recall in her dedication to Lord Maitland, a world that never was, except perhaps in royalist propaganda, in French romances, or, in its prelapsarian version, in the Garden of Eden.

It is to the Garden of Eden that we must, of course, return, because it is in that lost paradise, as Behn re-creates it in the new world of Surinam, in the pages of her book, that Oroonoko and Imoinda, here "Christ'ned" (p. 38) Caesar and Clemene and thus appropriated into yet another European narrative, live out the final chapters of their tragic story.(34) After narrating the events of their courtship in Africa - their lost world, where Behn informs us, in an echo of Genesis 1:27, Imoinda "was Female to the noble Male" (p. 14) - and reuniting them, in romance fashion, in Trefry's plantation, Behn prepares the ground for the scenes of their brutal deaths. Although Oroonoko, because of his beauty, royal demeanor, and ability to speak English (p. 35), has been treated with unusual distinction by his owner and other English colonists, he has begun to worry them by his repeated requests for their freedom, especially after Imoinda becomes pregnant. Just as in Coramantien his grandfather had commanded spies to "watch his Motions" (p. 24), Oroonoko, after being threatened with "Confinement" (p. 41), is now placed under surveillance. Being accustomed, as royal prince and royal slave, to be the cynosure of all eyes, he mistakes this attention for "a Mark of extraordinary Respect" (p. 42).

It is at this point in her narrative, after refocusing our eyes on her hero, that Behn, in the ruminative manner Sigmund Freud has associated with the work of mourning, resituates our gaze and returns us to the scene of her arrival in Surinam, as she eulogizes her father, who "dy'd at Sea . . . never . . . to possess the Honour design'd him," to be "Lieutenant-General of Six and thirty Islands, besides the Continent of Surinam."(35) This "vast and charming World" - conjectured ("they say") to occupy a nearly infinite colonial space extending from China to Peru, never "possessed" by her real father, and too hastily parted with by "his late Majesty, of sacred Memory," Behn's beloved royal "father," Charles II - is now lovingly recreated by their doubly dispossessed daughter. Echoing her earlier account, Behn once again describes the "Country" where she has arrived as a hortus deliciarum, blessed with "Eternal Spring," burgeoning with "Groves of Oranges, Limons, Citrons, Figs, Nutmegs, and Noble Aromaticks, continually bearing their Fragrancies" (p. 43). It is those "Fragrancies" that Behn, writing with nearly Keatsian gusto, particularly emphasizes, as she remembers the smells of burning candles and of the timber used for firing as well as the "perfumes" emanating from the roasting meats of the native animals, "especially a little Beast call'd an Armadilly, a thing which I can liken to nothing so well as a Rhinoceros . . . about the bigness of a Pig of Six Weeks old" (p. 43). Yet, notwithstanding Behn's moving attempt to make it live again in her prose, as a way of memorializing her past and of castigating those (like Byam) who let this marvelous possession get away, this is not really the Garden of Eden, as she well knew, but its fallen, duplicitous representation. By the time of her arrival, low-born European colonists - "such notorious Villains as Newgate never transported" (p. 59), as she characterizes Byam's council - had considerably tarnished this apparent bower of bliss, though there yet remained one act - or series of acts - to transform it into a place of utter darkness. Soon her celebratory chronicle of pleasant olfactory reminiscence would be disturbed by a more pungent memory, by the mortifying "Stink" (p. 62) of Imoinda's rotting carcass and the "earthly Smell" (p. 64) of Oroonoko's self-mutilated body.

But before witnessing the spectacular deaths of Imoinda and Oroonoko, we must briefly visit another colonial space. After describing again her paradisal surroundings, this time as viewed from the prospect of St. John's Hill, the "best House" in the country, where she lived, Behn treats her readers to a narrative of what she calls "our Sports" (p. 44). As befits an epic hero, Oroonoko performs such feats of strength as killing ferocious tigers; but, here, in this colonial world, these heroic feats serve other purposes as well, namely to keep him distracted from entertaining thoughts of freedom, while amusing and, after risking his life in capturing a "Numb Eel" (pp. 46-7), feeding his English captors. These feats not only establish Oroonoko's control over savage nature, his superiority over it, but also, paradoxically, confirm his own savage nature and his inferiority to his weaker European companions. This process, by which a man hitherto praised for his civilized manners will eventually become a wife-killing "Monster of the Wood" (p. 61), resembles that by which, as we have seen above, the native Indians are first humanized by being likened to Adam and Eve and then dehumanized by being compared to animals. It is no wonder then that Oroonoko, thus transmuted into a liminal creature inhabiting the space between civilization and savagery, leads the whites in an ethnographic expedition to an Indian town.

This "digression," as Behn later calls it (p. 51), begins with the revelation that, contrary to her earlier assurance of amity between Indians and English colonists, all is not well, and a "feud" has broken out. One result of this hostility is that the fearful narrator cannot now satisfy her touristic desire of visiting a real Indian town situated away from the colonized space of English plantations, presumably preserved in its pristine state, and thus waiting to be appropriated not by actual possession but as spectacle in yet another variation of imperialistic commodification. Volunteering to act as "guard" for "about Eighteen" English men and women, Oroonoko accompanies them on an eight-day journey, by barge, to such an unspoiled, secluded place (p. 47). Then something truly wonderful and strange happens. Having taken along with them as interpreter a fisherman, an amphibiously bicultural being who has, "by long Living there, become a perfect Indian in Colour," so that their colonial encounter need not be confined to "Gazing only," the visitors decide to "surprize" the natives, "by making 'em see something they never had seen, (that is, White People)" (p. 48). While the rest of the party, including Oroonoko and the fisherman, hide in the "thick Reeds" (p. 48) to observe this scene, Behn, her brother, and her woman boldly advance into the town.

At first, we see the Indians as the whites see them, "some Dancing, others . . . carrying . . . Water from the River" (p. 48). Then, in an exhilarating reversal of perspective, we begin to see the young, richly dressed whites as the naked Indians see them - or, more accurately, as Behn imagines that "seeing" to occur, in a scene being observed not only by those concealed among the reeds - from behind a natural "screen," as it were - but also by her readers: "They were all Naked, and we were Dress'd . . . very Glittering and Rich . . . my own Hair was cut short, and I had a Taffaty Cap, with Black Feathers on my Head; my Brother was in a Stuff Suit, with Silver Loops and Buttons, and abundance of Green Ribbon" (p. 48). But the Indians, who, we have earlier learned, can gaze on each other, though naked, with admirable restraint, apparently cannot control themselves when confronted with the temptation of English sartorial splendor: "By degrees they grew more bold, and from gazing upon us round, they touch'd us; laying their Hands upon all the Features of our Faces, feeling our Breasts and Arms, taking up one Petticoat, then wondering to see another; admiring our Shoes and Stockings, but more our Garters, which we gave 'em; and they ty'd about their Legs, being Lac'd with Silver Lace at the ends; for they much Esteem many shining things: In fine, we suffer'd 'em to survey us as they pleas'd, and we thought they wou'd never have done admiring us" (p. 48). The initial act of spectatorship is now followed by exploratory groping, by the erotic discovery of one undergarment concealing another, by the ceding of one token piece of finery to the curious primitive, as English bodies, in playful parody of the techniques of colonialization, become territories to be surveyed. But, unlike Indian and slave bodies, English bodies cannot be fully possessed, at least not by these Indians: the staging of this play has not really been for their benefit. The Indians can conduct their survey only because they are "suffer'd" to do so, with the "objects" of their curiosity never fully giving up their rights as "subjects," as proprietors of their own bodies. This scene, in short, establishes the author and her brother as nearly divine "objects" of admiration and desire, as gods to be worshiped, in a dazzling textualization of many an imperialistic fantasy of domination, a fantasy we are invited, as English readers, to approve with the true avouch of our own eyes.

But this scene does much more than simply rehearse some well-worn imperialistic cliches. For the first time in her narrative, the author paints a picture of herself, literally establishing her presence in Surinam by creating for herself a body that can be admired, desired, wondered at, dressed and undressed, touched, a tangible, palpable, attractive young body, with fashionably cut hair, almost "native" head gear, with breasts, arms, legs, and feet that can be felt and adorned. In this powerfully charged blank space of her colonial fiction, Behn thus places herself at the center of our sexual attention, not only visibly to remind us that this story is being written by a woman, but also to re-create in her text the desirable young woman she once was. It is as though, as we are reading, the frontispiece representing the author, not having appeared in its customary space at the beginning, suddenly emerges in the middle of the book, in a poignant ekphrastic moment meant to recuperate a happy segment of lost time for one brief narrative frame, just before the story hastens toward dissolution and death. This joyful, carnivalesque encounter, punctuated by the commerce of hands, of languages, of food, is immediately followed by the frightful "Spectacle" of the self-mutilated "War Captains" (p. 50). Though Behn, in a subordinate clause, assures us of the humanity and nobility of their souls, what she emphasizes in her description is their inhuman repulsiveness: "For my part I took 'em for Hobgoblins, or Fiends, rather than Men" (p. 50). Anticipating Gulliver's description of the mortifying Struldbruggs, she dwells, in suitably mangled syntax, on each horrific detail: "Some wanted their Noses, some their Lips, some both Noses and Lips, some their Ears, and others Cut through each Cheek, with long Slashes, through which their Teeth appear'd; they had other several formidable Wounds and Scars, or rather Dismemberings" (p. 50). We have gone from the celebration of what Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, following Mikhail Bakhtin, have called "classical bodies" to a dreadful vision of "grotesque bodies," from an account of paradisal friendship to a visible reminder of the violence human beings are capable of inflicting on themselves and on each other.(36) Although Oroonoko, we are assured, regards this self-mutilation as "a sort of Courage too Brutal to be applauded," he nevertheless expresses "his Esteem of 'em" (p. 50) and will soon be imitating the war captains' brutality. From this point on, after this idyllic interlude, the narrative, no longer chronicling happy spots of time, descends into a hellish, phantasmagoric underworld in which we witness bodies in pain or inflicting pain, as a young woman's glorious dream of exploration is transformed into imperialistic nightmare.

Soon after their return, not wishing to have his royal child born a slave, Oroonoko, finally fed up with the empty promises of freedom of his supposedly good-hearted owner and of "his Great Mistress" (p. 41), as he calls the young Behn, leads a revolt which, failing, brings on a sadistic whipping, "rending the very Flesh from [his] Bones" (p. 57). Stoically enduring this ordeal, even after his captors rub "Indian Pepper" on "his Wounds, to compleat their Cruelty" (p. 57), Oroonoko now enters another narrative space as he begins to act as the mad hero of a bloody revenge tragedy. Unable to wreak his revenge on the bodies of his captors, he briefly escapes to the jungle and turns his anger on the pregnant body of Imoinda in a complicated act of kindness and cruelty, "first, cutting her Throat, and then severing her yet Smiling Face from that Delicate Body, pregnant as it was with Fruits of tend'rest Love" (p. 61). Then, on the verge of being recaptured, he further mutilates his already lacerated body, ripping up his own "Belly" and pulling out his "Bowels" (p. 63), by which gesture, in Charlotte Sussman's astute reading, "he recalls that he has just effectively aborted Imoinda's child."(37) Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that the narrator, having lovingly fashioned these attractive bodies, now details their defacement and dismemberment as a way both of completing her own work of mourning and of expiating the guilt she feels over her inability to have done anything to have helped them avoid their fate. If we believe that the story is historically true - or at least suspend our disbelief long enough to accept it as such - then the horrific accounts of the deaths of Imoinda and Oroonoko might be read as the historically accurate, painful testimony of a survivor, as Behn now speaks for those who can no longer speak. Oroonoko indeed decapitated his wife and sat around for eight days in a catatonic state while her body rotted and began to stink; he was then captured and cruelly executed, in precisely the way narrated in Behn's text, by the barbarous Banister. In this respect, as I have been arguing, the story becomes a memorial monument - a cenotaph, perhaps, since the real corpses are buried elsewhere - with its plot containing the textual bodies of the young narrator and of her beloved African friends, the latter in both their classical and grotesque incarnations. The pages of the book, then, literally embody that lost time, that lost colonial space of Behn's youth.

Yet the accounts of the violent deaths of Imoinda and Oroonoko appear excessive. It seems as though the author, having made their beautiful bodies, must now unmake them, must render them repulsive. Both bodies, we are told, stink. After killing Imoinda and before his own execution, Oroonoko returns once more to the company of the young Aphra and his other "friends." Behn records their reaction: "If before we thought him so beautiful a Sight, he was now so alter'd, that his Face was like a Death's Head black'd over; nothing but Teeth, and Eyeholes" (p. 63). Unable to bear this ghastly simulacrum of her once "beautiful" friend, the young woman is "perswaded to leave the Place for some time (being my self but Sickly, and very apt to fall into Fits of dangerous Illness upon any extraordinary Melancholy)" (p. 64). This is why she is not around to prevent or witness his execution and receives its horrifying details from her mother and sister: "He had learn'd to take Tobacco; and when he was assur'd he should Dye, he desir'd they would give him a Pipe in his Mouth, ready Lighted, which they did; and the Executioner came, and first cut off his Members, and threw them into the Fire; after that, with an ill-favoured Knife, they cut his Ears, and his Nose, and burn'd them; he still Smoak'd on, as if nothing had touch'd him; then they hack'd off one of his Arms, and still he bore up, and held his Pipe; but at the cutting off the other Arm, his Head sunk, and his Pipe drop'd; and he gave up the Ghost, without a Groan, or a Reproach" (p. 64). Thus dies Caesar, the abject and abandoned slave, so that Oroonoko, his better royal self, may have "his Glorious Name to survive to all Ages; with that of the Brave, the Beautiful, and the Constant Imoinda" (p. 65). And thus ends Behn's story.

In closing my own critical story, I wish to place Oroonoko, yet once more, in an interpretive space we have already visited. In his brief study of the connections between mourning and melancholy, Freud, while warning his readers not to generalize too quickly from individual cases, nonetheless suggests that "it is not difficult to perceive an essential analogy between the work performed in melancholia and in mourning." He then elaborates the terms of this analogy: "Just as the work of grief, by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the benefit of continuing to live, impels the ego to give up the object, so [in melancholy] each single conflict of ambivalence, by disparaging the object, denigrating it, even as it were slaying it, loosens the fixation of the libido to it."(38) I should like to suggest that such a process of displacement of grief from a loved to an unloved object, as a way of loosening the destructive hold of that grief on one's life and allowing one to go on, is at work at the end of Behn's story. By remaking her "beautiful" young African friends into grotesques, she can exorcize her grief, overcome her melancholy, and start writing. Oroonoko and Imoinda must be dismembered before they can be remembered in the blank spaces of Behn's colonial fiction.

NOTES

1 Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness, ed. Ross C. Murfin (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), p. 22. Marlow's boyish cartographical lucubrations were based on Conrad's own: "It was in 1868, when nine years old or thereabouts, that while looking at a map of Africa of the time and putting my finger on the blank space then representing the unsolved mystery of that continent, I said to myself . . . 'When I grow up I shall go there'" (Conrad, A Personal Record [1912; rprt. Marlboro VT: Marlboro Press, 1988], p. 20). Conrad refers to this incident again in "Geography and Some Explorers," in Last Essays (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1926), p. 16.

2 Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," in "Race, "Writing and Difference, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 82.

3 Mary Louise Pratt, Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 4.

4 Homi K. Bhabha, The Location of Culture (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1, 4.

5 Pratt groups Conrad, the Anglo-Pole, with Roger Casement, the Anglo-Irishman, and suggests that"the hyphenated white men are principal architects of the often imperialist internal critique of empire" (p. 213). Pratt here ignores the importance of women writers in general - and of Aphra Behn in particular - in this critique. Moira Ferguson locates in Oroonoko "the birth of a paradigm" for women's critiques of imperialistic practices, especially slavery; see her Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery, 1670-1834 (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 27-49.

6 Bhabha, p. 212.

7 Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa," MR 18, 4 (Winter 1977): 782-94.

8 Bhabha, p. 213.

9 Bhabha, p. 212.

10 Most political readings of Oroonoko, charted along the coordinates of race, class, and gender, owe a debt to Laura Brown's "The Romance of Empire: Oroonoko and the Trade in Slaves," in The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 41-61; a revised version of this essay appears as the second chapter of Brown's Ends of Empire: Women and Ideology in Early Eighteenth-Century English Literature (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 23-63. Other important essays in this genre include Susan Z. Andrade, "White Skin, Black Masks: Colonialism and the Sexual Politics of Oroonoko," CultCrit 27 (Spring 1994): 189-214; Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcon, "Oroonoko's Gendered Economies of Honor/Horror: Reframing Colonial Discourse Studies in the Americas," in Subjects and Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender from Oroonoko to Anita Hill, ed. Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham and London: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), pp. 27-55; 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 (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 283-95; Margaret W. Ferguson, "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," in Women, "Race, "and Writing in the Early Modern Period, ed. Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 209-24, as well as "Transmuting Othello: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," in Cross-Cultural Performances: Differences in Women's Re-Visions of Shakespeare, ed. Marianne Novy (Urbana and Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1993), pp. 15-49; and Anne Fogarty, "Looks that Kill: Violence and Representation in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," in The Discourse of Slavery: Aphra Behn to Toni Morrison, ed. Carl Plasa and Betty J. Ring (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 1-17.

11 Aphra Behn, Oroonoko, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 7-8. All subsequent quotations of Oroonoko will be from this edition; page references will appear in parentheses in my text.

12 For an analysis of Christopher Columbus's diaries and their indebtedness to earlier travel narratives, see Stephen Greenblatt, Marvelous Possessions.' The Wonder of the New World (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 52-85.

13 For what is still the best study of the racist ideologies governing the Occident's mapping of its own and other cultures, see Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). For an examination of the discourse of colonialism in America, see Peter Hulme, Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean, 1492-1797 (London and New York: Methuen, 1986); Hulme acknowledges his debt to Said on p. xv.

14 Greenblatt, pp. 24, 54.

15 Conrad, Heart of Darkness, p. 66.

16 Greenblatt, p. 138. We have been recently reminded of the biblical origins of the violence spawned by claims to a distinctive collective identity, with its consequent devaluation of those outside one's group, by Regina M. Schwartz, The Curse of Cain: The Violent Legacy of Monotheism (Chicago and London: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1997).

17 Sir Walter Ralegh, The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Bewtifvl Empyre of Gviana (London, 1596), title page.

18 See Michael McKeon, The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740 (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1987), pp. 111-3, 249-51; for a more extensive treatment, see Robert L. Chibka, "'Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman's Invention': Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," TSLL 30, 4 (Winter 1988): 510-37. These authenticating claims were, of course, also found in supposedly "factual" travel narratives. For instance, following his account of snakes thirty feet long, George Warren, in An Impartial Description of Surinam (London, 1667), challenges his readers' skeptical gullibility: "I know some people are so foolishly incredulous in things of this Nature, that they will believe nothing which cannot be visibly demonstrated within the Limits of their own Thresholds; therefore, for fear of being thought to use the Authority of a Traveller, I dare not repeat how huge a Morsel one of them will swallow at a time" (p. 20).

19 For the latest biographical information on Behn's possible visit to Surinam, see Janet Todd, The Secret Life of Aphra Behn (London: Andre Deutsch, 1996), esp. pp. 35-66. Todd's account amplifies those found in earlier biographies; see, for example, Maureen Duffy, The Passionate Shepherdess:Aphra Behn, 1640-89 (London: Methuen, 1977), pp. 38-49; and Angeline Goreau, Reconstructing Aphra.' A Social Biography of Aphra Behn (New York: Dial Press, 1980), pp. 41-69.

20 Samuel Richardson to William Warburton (19 April 1748), in Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 85.

21 Thomas Southerne, Oroonoko, ed. Maximillian E. Novak and David Stuart Rodes (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. 4. For comparisons of Behn's Oroonoko to Southerne's, in addition to Novak and Rodes's excellent introduction to their edition (pp. xiii-xlii), see Suvir Kaul, "Reading Literary Symptoms: Colonial Pathologies and the Oroonoko Fictions of Behn, Southerne, and Hawkesworth," ECLife 18, n.s., 3 (November 1994): 80-96; and Ann Messenger, His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1986), pp. 41-70.

22 See, for instance, Todd, The Secret Life of Aphra Behn, pp. 411-23.

23 See, for example, Brown, Ends of Empire, pp. 55-63; George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment," in Guffey and Andrew Wright, Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1975), pp. 3-41; and Todd, The Secret Life of Aphra Behn, pp. 418-20. In Spectacular Politics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 119-20, Paula R. Backscheider has suggested another intriguing parallel: James Scott, duke of Monmouth, Charles II's illegitimate son. Renamed "Cesario" in Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister - just as Oroonoko is renamed "Caesar" - Monmouth also led a failed rebellion and suffered a gruesome execution. For another elaboration of this parallel, see Janet Todd, Gender, Art and Death (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), pp. 36-49.

24 For an enunciation of this view, see Margaret W. Ferguson, "News from the New World: Miscegenous Romance in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko and The Widow Ranter," in The Production of English Renaissance Culture, ed. David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair, and Harold Weber (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994), pp. 151-89, 174.

25 For other readings of Behn's dedication, see Robert A. Erickson, "Mrs. A. Behn and the Myth of Oroonoko-Imoinda," ECF5, 3 (April 1993): 201-16, 215-6; and Catherine Gallagher, Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1994), pp. 86-7.

26 William C. Spengemann, "The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," NCF38, 4 (March 1984): 384-414, 405.

27 Warren, p. 19. In "Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment" (pp. 31-2), Guffey also compares Behn's account to Warren's, but his emphases differ from mine.

28 Warren, pp. 23-4. Several contemporary documents relating to Surinam and Guiana, including accounts by William Byam and Lord Willoughby, are reprinted in Colonising Expeditions to the West Indies and Guiana, 1623-1667, ed. V. T. Harlow (Hakluyt Society, 1925; rprt. Nendeln/Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1967), pp. 132-257.

29 Katharine M. Rogers, "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," SNNTS 20, 1 (Spring 1988): 1-15, 3.

30 Joanna Lipking, "Confusing Matters: Searching the Backgrounds of Oroonoko," in Aphra Behn Studies, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), pp. 259-81, 266.

31 Lipking, "Confusing Matters," p. 267.

32 That such romances could be politically applied is indicated by Sir Charles Cotterrell in his address "To the Reader" of his translation - dedicated to Charles II "from the Hague June 5th 1653" - of La Calprenede's Cassandre: "Her ten years story is so artificially contrived, and with such exact decorum, that the truth whereon it is grounded, appears the greater fiction; yet neither can the strange successe of the Grecian Conqueror, the fatal destruction of the Persian Monarchy, the deplorable end of unfortunate Darius, the afflicted estate of his Royal Family in Exile and Captivity, the easie compliance of his Subjects with the prevailing Party, nor any other passage in it seem improbable to us, whose eyes have in as short a space been witnesses of such Revolutions, as hardly any Romance, but sure no History can parallel" (Cassandra: The Fam'd Romance, 5 parts [London, 1664]). The influence of French romances on Behn and other early women writers of prose fiction has long been recognized but still awaits full critical elucidation. A good starting point may be found in Ballaster, Seductive Forms.' Women's Amatory Fiction from 1684 to 1740 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 42-66. On the "distinctly royalist" ideology informing Behn's tale, see Anita Pacheco, "Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," SEL 34, 3 (Summer 1994): 491-506.

33 Lipking, "Confusing Matters," p. 261.

34 For an analysis of Behn's use of classical narratives, see David E. Hoegberg, "Caesar's Toils: Allusion and Rebellion in Oroonoko," ECF7, 3 (April 1995): 239-58.

35 On the work of mourning, see Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), trans. Joan Riviere, in A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud, ed. John Rickman (New York: Anchor Books, 1989), pp. 124-40.

36 Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, The Politics and Poetics of Transgression (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), pp. 6-11, 100-4, 191-4.

37 Charlotte Sussman, "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, 220.

38 Freud, p. 139.

Albert J. Rivero is professor of English and director of the Honors Program at Marquette University. He has published several articles and books on Restoration and eighteenth-century British literature and is working on a critical edition of Samuel Richardson's complete correspondence as well as on a book tentatively titled "Duplicitous Representations: Fashioning Fiction from Behn to Burney."

Abstract:

A comparison of Aphra Behn's 'Oroonoko' and Joseph Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness' is presented. Issues concerning imperialism and the ramifications of cultural hybridity are examined.

**Source Citation**

Rivero, Albert J. "Aphra Behn's Oroonoko and the 'Blank Spaces' of Colonial Fictions." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 39.3 (1999): 443. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 8 Feb. 2012.

Document URL

http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA55939412&v=2.1&u=ccl\_deanza&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|A55939412