

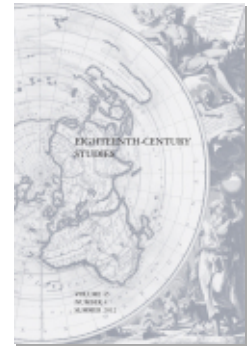


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SPECTACLE, SPECTATORSHIP, AND SYMPATHY IN APHRA BEHN'S OROONOKO

Ramesh Mallipeddi

In *Oroonoko*, the language of spectacle and visibility is Aphra Behn's principal strategy for presenting exoticism to the reader's gaze. In 1688, when the novella was first published, its twin locations—the West African slave trading station Coramantien and the American colony Surinam—were still relatively unknown to Behn's readers. In her dedication to Lord Maitland, Behn notes that "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."¹ The narrative's strikingly specular character reflects Behn's attempt to display these unfamiliar places to an English audience. Moreover, spectacle was an important vehicle for mediating representations of alien cultures in the public pageants and major theatrical forms of Restoration England, especially the heroic drama. The novella's rendering of the New World—its ecstatic enumeration of exotic plants, strange animals, and unfamiliar objects—is partly shaped by the commercial spectacles of the public pageants; its idealized presentation of Oroonoko's battlefield exploits, by the stage spectacles of the heroic drama. Indeed, the novella portrays the New World landscape, Native American customs, Oroonoko's black body, and his heroism and victimization with a degree of excessive and hyperbolic intensity.

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What was strange and unprecedented in the second half of the seventeenth century, however, was not only the Surinam landscape, but also the socioeconomic institution that had come into existence there: plantation slavery.² The rise of sugar colonies in the Caribbean, supported chiefly by the importation of slave labor from West Africa, denoted a shift in England's colonizing activities: spatially, from the Old World to the New (or from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic); and ideologically, from expansionist strategies based on war and conquest to those advanced by commerce and trade.³ The resulting English commercial empire, created by the movement of people and commodities in the Atlantic basin—between Africa, Europe, and America—necessitated new discourses of imperial expansion and new ideologies of racial difference. The novella's effort to register this historic transformation is most powerfully evident, I argue, in its treatment of Oroonoko's black body. Historically, especially in Renaissance drama, blackness was deemed an undesirable attribute, but the black body itself was not always presented as a commodity. In *Oroonoko*, however, Behn first elevates the black body to an admirable spectacle via the conventions of Restoration drama, then shows how it is reduced to an exchangeable commodity, and finally documents its violent dismemberment at the scaffold.

In this article, I aim to explore the theoretical implications of the novella's emphasis on spectacle by utilizing spectacle as a category of analysis for a variety of representations, including those of heroism and victimization, of suffering and mutilation, and of the body and commodity (or, more properly, the body as commodity). Through an examination of various tropes of extreme visibility, I will show that, notwithstanding its troubling representation of colonial contact, Behn's novella grasps—as does no other literary work of her time—the transformation of the black body into a commodity at the point of its insertion into the circuits of commercial exchange.

Historians of New World slavery have for a long time recognized *Oroonoko*'s seminal role in the British humanitarian campaign against slavery, also known as the antislavery movement.⁴ They have not, however, explained the precise connection between the sympathetic female spectator and Oroonoko's tragic victimization. The primary site for the operation of sympathy in the novella, I argue, is Oroonoko's body. Slavery most fundamentally divests a person of any right over his or her body. The female narrator records this alienation not from the standpoint of a detached observer but from that of an engaged participant, viewing the reduction of royal body to ordinary property as an assault on human dignity. As an honorable prince, Oroonoko is in full possession of his royal person. But under slavery, in the wake of his extirpation from Coramantien, he is alienated not only from all claims of birth and lineage, but also most immediately from his own body. The planters' absolute power over Oroonoko and his consequent powerlessness are starkly dramatized at the moment of his mutilation on the scaffold. And it is on the eve of his public execution that the female narrator denounces the planters and decides to memorialize Oroonoko's tragic fate via writing. But because Behn's sympathy is largely reserved for the indignity endured by an aristocratic prince, and not necessarily for the sufferings of a multitude of other Africans, the workings of sympathy in the novella appear paradoxical. By focusing on the female narrator's vicarious response to the spectacle of Oroonoko's public execution, I intend to

explore the ways in which Behn's text formulated certain fundamental paradoxes intrinsic to scenes of sympathy—paradoxes that would continue to structure English citizens' emotional engagement with Caribbean slaves in the long eighteenth century.

PUBLIC PAGEANTS AND THEATRICAL SCENERIES

If the word "spectacle" is employed, literally, to mean an act of exhibiting a thing or person for the viewer's pleasure or for satisfying curiosity, seventeenth-century England can be said to have had at least two prominent avenues for staging spectacles of cultural encounter: the Lord Mayor's civic pageants and the heroic drama. The civic pageants of the second half of the period, sponsored by the enormously powerful London guilds, somewhat resembled and functioned as mobile curio cabinets of exoticism.⁵ Organized annually on 29 October to commemorate the Lord Mayor's assumption of office, these pageants were intended to showcase the uniqueness of each of the trading guilds, whose claims to distinction rested on their overseas commercial ventures. As such, the Lord Mayor's pageant was a product of specific ideological circumstance, and its main goal was to showcase the "fruits" of colonial trade for the nation. In these pageants, various continents (Africa, Asia, and Europe) were routinely emblemized and their stereotypical attributes personified. Even though these pageants were little more than elaborately staged costume pieces, whose main concern was to "call attention to the benefits of global trade acquired by England," they still managed to showcase the changes in the evolution of a commercial empire: "in some Restoration-era pageants, plantation and slave economics were justified and endorsed."⁶

The second prominent avenue for staging cultural difference, the Restoration drama, lacked the contemporaneity of the public pageant, given its absence of preoccupation with the immediate concerns of English colonialism. At Charles Stuart's ascension to the throne, England was anything but a dominant colonial power; from the mid- to the late seventeenth century, it was continually engaged in wars with the Dutch in an attempt to secure monopolies on sea trading.⁷ With this part of English history the heroic drama did not concern itself; instead, for the most part, it sought to dramatize the founding moments of Eurocolonial (especially peninsular) expansionist projects in Old and New World settings. If civic pageants functioned as sites for showcasing the achievements of a mercantile class, the newly designed playhouse at the Restoration became an alternative site for staging the imperialist fantasies of an aristocratic coterie.⁸ John Loftis notes that "the achievements in exploration of the Spanish . . . made them suitable subjects for the heroic play—the more so since they traveled and fought in exotic places which could justify the introduction on stage of ceremonial and spectacle."⁹ The stagings of cultural contact as spectacle in serious drama were helped by the innovations accompanying the newly opened playhouse, which was famous for, among other things, the introduction of movable scenery and machines; its relatively homogeneous, upper-class audience; and its emphasis on spectacle.¹⁰ The new theater proved to be an excellent venue for staging colonial contact, as Bridget Orr suggests, in that it "not only used exotic costumes, props and dances but also employed sophisticated new 'machines' to display scenes of Oriental wealth, sensuality and violence and pagan imagery."¹¹ The prominence of iconographic scenery in the background is conveniently matched by the highly stylized heroic action in the foreground, which

harnessed the classical motif of the Herculean hero to dramatize the founding moments of European imperial expansion.¹²

Behn's preoccupation with spectacle and visuality, then, has a larger sociohistorical precedent in the public pageants of the bourgeoisie and the heroic drama of the aristocratic coterie, and her modes of representation are consequently shaped by the paradoxical legacies of this inheritance: the historical specificity of the pageant as well as the evident artificiality of the heroic drama. *Oroonoko's* reliance on visual devices for narrating colonial contact must therefore be read in relation to mercantilist and aristocratic ideologies. The affinity between the novella's complex system of representation and theater is further underscored by the fact that it was successfully adapted for the stage, most famously by Southerne and Hawkesworth, in the next century—adaptations that were more popular than the novelistic original. This traffic between literary and cultural practices needs qualification, however, as the phenomenological experiences of reading a novel and seeing a play or a public pageant are not identical: first, the representation of spectacle in a novel is primarily mediated by language, while in theater it is assisted by scenery;¹³ and second, the subjectivity of the narrator is a crucial determinant in any narrative act, a concern that does not arise in an analysis of the theatrical presentation of spectacle. The implications of this difference will be important for us throughout this discussion, but for now we must recall that the Restoration was also a period in which the interface between narrative and dramatic forms was being renegotiated by the emergence of a small but powerful print culture, a time when print had begun to redefine the relationship between text and performance, the stage and the page, making the experiences of reading and watching a play two continuous experiences.¹⁴ As Julie Stone Peters has shown in her account of the entangled histories of print and theater, “by the middle of the seventeenth century, audiences had come to expect that the texts of performed events—whether plays at the regular playhouse, court masques, royal entrees, or city pageants—would appear in print.”¹⁵ The emergence of a fledgling print culture at this time enabled a readerly discourse about seeing, thereby redrawing the boundaries between the respective practices of reading a novella and seeing a play. It is this conjunction of practices that prompted Peter Holland in *The Ornament of Action* to reorient his critical analysis of Restoration drama from the opposition of text and performance to that between reading and seeing.¹⁶

NEW WORLD ENCOUNTERS

Some of these tensions, between the emergent habits of reading and the established habits of seeing, surface early in the novella. Behn begins her narrative, appropriately, with a description of the “Scene” of the last part of the hero's adventures, Surinam, before digressing to Coramantien. The field of vision unveiled in the opening pages by the narrator's ecstatic description essentially foregrounds a motley assortment of rarities and curiosities which the natives trade with the planters, such as “a thousand other Birds and Beasts of wonderful and surprising Forms, Shapes, and Colours. For Skins of prodigious Snakes, of which there are some threescore Yards in length . . . also some rare Flies, of amazing Forms and Colours . . . and all of various Excellencies, such as Art cannot imitate” (*O*, 8–9). Behn's catalog of plants, animals, and insects is, in Mary Louise Pratt's words, in

line with seventeenth-century landscape discourse—emblematic and composite, not specific and differentiated.¹⁷ The descriptive detail here is pleasurable not only because these things are a part of nature, but because they are exotic commodities, finding their way into such English scientific and cultural institutions as the Royal Academy and Restoration theater. As Laura Brown suggests, “Behn’s enumeration of these goods is typical of the age’s economic and literary language, where the mere act of listing, the evocation of brilliant colors, and the sense of an incalculable numerousness express the period’s fascination with imperialist accumulation.”¹⁸

If the objects are wonderful qua commodities, the commodity-form itself conceals the relations of existing social production. The interaction between the natives and the planters is structured by a modern, mercantile exchange economy, but Behn’s representation of the natives is stereotypical insofar as they exemplify prelapsarian innocence, antecedent to desire and curiosity. This image of amity and reciprocity is eventually shown to be fictitious, but here, especially in the opening description, Behn’s narrator presents the dispossessed natives as inhabiting an empty, homogeneous, qualitatively undifferentiated temporal continuum, even though, by virtue of being colonized, they are firmly within the boundaries of historical time. Social and economic interaction is based, apparently, on perfect reciprocity: with the natives, the settlers “live in perfect Amity, without daring to command ’em; but on the contrary, caress ’em with all the brotherly and friendly Affection in the World; trading with ’em for their Fish, Venison, Buffalo’s, Skins, and little Rarities” (*O*, 8). The implied contrast made here, of course, is between the treatment of Africans and the Natives: the first as commodities, as objects of exchange; the second as equal partners in the exchange of commodities.

By the end of her description, however, Behn implies that “it behooves” the settlers to live in “good Understanding” and “perfect Tranquility” with the natives (*O*, 10). Consequently, their supposedly amicable interaction is the product not of goodwill but of pragmatic necessity: first, the natives know “all the places where to seek the best Food of the Country, and the Means of getting it; and for very small and unvaluabe Trifles, supply us with what ’tis impossible for us to get” (*O*, 10; emphasis mine);¹⁹ and second, “their Numbers [are] so far surpassing ours in that *Continent*” (*O*, 11). The descriptive scene in Surinam, then, temporarily masks the real relations of interaction, marked by hostility and fear; furthermore, it is arranged to display exotic objects and peoples for the pleasure of those viewing it, even as it obfuscates the relations of production and the participation of commodities, as objects of expropriation, in circuits of mercantilist exchange. Finally, the visual pleasures of seeing and contemplating are closely allied to the desire to possess and master; as Pratt observes, “the eye scanning prospects in the spatial sense knows itself to be looking at prospects in the temporal sense—possibilities of a Eurocolonial future coded as resources to be developed, surpluses to be traded, towns to be built. Such prospects are what make information relevant in a description.”²⁰

The spectacle of cultural difference is coded explicitly in scopic terms during the narrator’s exploration of the interior parts of the colony, when she visits the Indian town with her sister, Oroonoko, and Imoinda. The women’s proposed visit is at first delayed owing to a dispute between the Indians and the English—a significant narrative detail that contradicts the image of amity presented in the early sections of the novel. The situation might have prevented their visit altogether but

for Oroonoko, who offers to accompany them. Here Behn stages a “reciprocal vision,” in which the seer becomes the seen; the European visitors are transformed into objects of scrutiny, and the native customs and rituals are experienced as spectacles. Not conversant with the natives’ language, “imagining we shou’d have a half Diversion in Gazing only” (O, 48), the party leaves for the Indians’ island, where the visitors let themselves be surveyed, touched, wondered at, and esteemed by the curious Indians. The “mystique of the reciprocal vision,” as Suvir Kaul has shown in a compelling reading of this episode, is soon undermined by the establishment of European technological superiority.²¹ The group’s encounter with the great war-captains who are at council—and whose bodies are lacerated beyond recognition—turns into a frightening spectacle: “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” (O, 50). In fact, their bodies are so mutilated, so disfigured as to defy comprehension: “But so frightful a Vision it was to see ’em no Fancy can create; no such Dreams can represent so dreadful a Spectacle. For my part, I took ’em for Hobgoblins, or Fiends, rather than Men; but however their Shapes appear’d, their Souls were very Humane and Noble” (O, 50). What exactly constitutes this encounter that “no fancy can create”? In their contests for generalship, the captains engage in ritual mutilation to prove their courage and, “’tis by a passive Valour they shew and prove their Activity; a sort of Courage too Brutal to be applauded by our Black Hero; nevertheless he express’d his Esteem of ’em” (O, 50).

The disfigured bodies of the Indian captains, then, seem to exceed the limits of fancy and imagination, constituting almost an experiential event. But this native practice of self-wounding routinely figured in accounts of the New World around the time *Oroonoko* was published. For instance, in *An Impartial Description of Surinam* (1667), George Warren remarks that the Indians “have some more than ordinary persons, who are their captains, and lead them out to wars, whose courage they first prove, by happily whipping them with rods, which if they endure bravely without crying, or any considerable motion, they are acknowledg’d gallant fellows and honored by the less hardy.”²² Similarly, John Davies’s 1666 translation of Charles de Rochefort’s *History of the Caribby-Islands* (1656) contains an even lengthier description of the same custom in a chapter entitled “Of what may be accounted Polity amongst the Caribbians.” According to Rochefort, a captain who wishes to become General of the Army is first

obliged to give great demonstrations of his constancy: for they cruelly cut and mangled his shoulders and breasts with the tooth of an *Agouty*; nay his best friends made deep incisions in divers parts of his body: And the wretched person who expected that charge was to endure all this, without betraying the least sign of resentment and pain; nay, on the contrary, it was requisite that it was receiv’d all with a smiling countenance, as if he were the most satisfied man in the World: We shall not wonder so much that Barbarians should endure such Torments, in order to the acquisition of some Dignity, when it shall be considered, that the *Turks* do not shew themselves sometimes less cruel towards themselves, upon the account of pure gallantry, and as it were by way of divertissement;

witness what is related by *Busbequius* in the fourth Book of his *Embassies*, which were too tedious to set down in this place.²³

Rocheftort recognizes the otherness of New World heroism—the insentience of Carib captains and their stoic endurance of pain—yet he quickly neutralizes its novelty (“we shall not wonder so much . . . when it shall be considered”), interpreting it through the lens of the Old World heroism of Turks. But for Behn’s female narrator, seeing the Carib war captains is a rare moment of self-discovery, an epistemological event.²⁴ More precisely, the meeting with the Indian captains turns out to be a spectacle of valor, in part because their self-mutilation defies interpretation in terms of the familiar, whereas the active courage of Oroonoko, even in as unfamiliar and alien place as Coramantien, can be assimilated into the paradigms of European literature as derived from heroic romance. Furthermore, the language is visceral and sensationalist; the experience of pain is framed for the consumption of the female viewer. Indeed, what is frightening here is not so much the objective existence of the disfigured body as its incapacity to experience pain. The spectacle of the passive valor of the Indian captains, like the surprising forms, shapes, and colors of the landscape which even “Art cannot imitate,” resists easy assimilation into the European paradigms of representation. The expression of wonder and astonishment stands, therefore, “for all that cannot be understood, that can scarcely be believed” in the course of her exploration of the New World.²⁵

THE BLACK BODY AS SPECTACLE

This resistance of the New World to representation is, of course, a recurrent feature of the ethnographic discourse connected to it since Columbus. Thus, when Behn regards the landscape and native customs as spectacles, she may well be seen as following a well-established convention.²⁶ But how does one explain the wonder and surprise associated with the Old World, in connection with Oroonoko’s exemplary heroism and his dazzling blackness, given centuries of European contact with Africa? Beginning with George Peele’s Portuguese history play, *The Battle of Alcazar* (1588), the English stage has had a steady supply of “Othello’s countrymen,” as Eldred Jones has documented in a pioneering monograph.²⁷ Some of these plays were successfully revived during the Restoration, and Spanish and Portuguese history plays were major vehicles for representing contact between Europe and Africa. But Behn seems to differentiate Oroonoko from the models available to her in literary tradition, for his uniqueness is based on his external difference from other Africans. In the oft-cited description of Oroonoko’s body, the narrator says, “His face was not of that brown, rusty Black which most of the nation are, but a perfect Ebony, or *polish’d Jett*” (*O*, 13; emphasis added). In an account of the hero’s legendary beginnings, the qualities of surprise and wonder are emphasized: “he was adorn’d with a native Beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy Race, that he strook an Awe and Reverence, even in those that knew not his Quality; as he did in me, who beheld him with Surprize and Wonder, when afterwards he arrive’d in our World” (*O*, 12). In fact, this conflation of blackness, beauty, and heroism was unprecedented, at least in the seventeenth century. Traditionally, in an earlier period, the predicate of blackness did not always exclude heroism, but their conjunction was perceived, at best, to be troubling. To appreciate the significance

of Behn's innovation, we need to understand the general configuration of these two key terms—blackness and heroism—in seventeenth-century England.

There is a strong tradition in Renaissance drama of the noble, valiant Moor, the prototypical instance of which is, of course, Othello. But Othello's nobility, unlike Oroonoko's, is predicated not on his phenomenal appearance (he is, in fact, considerably older than Desdemona), but on his military prowess and his service to the state. Of greater relevance to our argument here is Behn's dramatic adaptation of Thomas Dekker's 1599 Spanish history play, *Lust's Dominion*, in 1677, roughly ten years before the publication of *Oroonoko*. In Behn's adaptation, *The Moor's Revenge*, the villainous Abdelazer justifies his claim to the throne by asking the Spanish lords to "Witness the many Battles I have won; / In which I've emptied all my Youthfull Veins!— / And all for *Spain!*—ungratefull of my favours!"²⁸ Occasionally, however, the Spanish characters in the play do reluctantly acknowledge Abdelazer's heroic virtue. Like Othello, Abdelazer is a Christian, and is married to Florella, sister to a young Spanish nobleman. King Ferdinand, who is besotted with her, wonders, "How came thy Father so bewitch'd to Valour / (For *Abdelazer* has no other Virtue), / To recompense it With so fair a creature? / Was this—a Treasure to enrich the Devil with?"²⁹ Abdelazer's struggle for legitimacy and recognition must, paradoxically, rest on a disavowal of his color, fittingly enough in a subordinate clause: "Although my skin be black, within my veins / Runs blood as red, and Royal as the best."³⁰ This disavowal is similar to the Duke's assurance to Barbantio that Othello's valor is based on a negation of color: "Your son-in-law is far more fair than black."³¹

In *The Moor's Revenge*, then, Behn closely follows the representational logic of heroism established by a literary tradition largely stereotypical in its disavowal of blackness. Her Moorish character is shaped by a set of popular images routinely associated with Africans, condensing the three prominent images extant in seventeenth-century writing: the valiant, the erotic, and the treacherous Moor.³² Their mutual relationship is characterized by complementarity. The bodies of Othello and Abdelazer, for instance, are subliminally sexualized on account of their valor; still, the black body itself is rarely, if ever, an unambiguous object of sexual desire. This is made painfully obvious in *The Moor's Revenge*, which is remarkable for its prescient recognition of the dynamics of racialization. The phrase "polish'd Ebony," whose importance is widely remarked upon in *Oroonoko* criticism, appears in this adaptation for the first time, not as a wonderful attribute of the black body but as an insuperable obstacle to the fulfillment of the Moorish character's interracial desire.³³ In Behn's play, Abdelazer (played by Thomas Betterton when it premiered in London) pursues Leonora, the late Spanish King's daughter, having first bastardized and then delegitimized her brother Philip's claim to the throne. When Leonora, notwithstanding Abdelazer's seemingly earnest professions of love, reaffirms her desire to marry the young Spanish nobleman Alonzo, an importunate Abdelazer cries out in despair:

Aye! there's your Cause of hate! Curst be my Birth,
And curst be Nature, that has dy'd my Skin
With this ungrateful colour! could not the Gods
Have given me equal Beauty with *Alonzo!*

—Yet as I am, I've been in vain Ador'd,
 And Beauties great as thine have languish'd for me.
 The Lights put out! thou in thy naked arms
 Wilt find me soft and smooth as polish'd Ebony;
 And all my Kisses on thy balmy Lips as sweet,
 As are the Breezes, breath'd amidst the Groves,
 Or ripening Spices in the height of day:
 . . .
 See—I can bend as low, and sigh as often,
 (kneels).
 And sue for blessings only you can grant,
 As any fair and soft *Alonzo* can—. . .³⁴

This speech clearly implies that blackness and beauty are incompatible attributes. Like *Oroonoko*, *Abdelazer* is a royal prince (of Barbary), yet his royal birth cannot mitigate the “natural” curse that has dyed his skin with an “ungrateful” color, nor can it undo a Manichean opposition between white and black.³⁵ Indeed, *Abdelazer*'s black body must be subjected to total deracination for it to appear as desirable as *Alonzo*'s fair one. Furthermore, the concluding lines indicate the impossibility of *Abdelazer* playing the chivalric hero. The above speech does not celebrate blackness but renders it, on account of its color, positively and unambiguously unattractive; the lights must be put out, and *Leonora*'s vision momentarily suspended, in order for the polished, ebony-like body to metamorphose into a tactile object of desire. *Oroonoko*'s body, by contrast, is always bathed in light; it radiates beauty and grandeur, and its visibility is clearly predicated on its dazzling appearance. And the drama of the female narrator's sexualization of, and her identification with, *Oroonoko* is abetted by his polished, tapering body. Indeed, there is an inversion of sorts in the meaning and significance of blackness here, between *Abdelazer* and *Oroonoko*; the physicality of the first emerges only with the suspension of vision, whereas the second is always a spectacle. I will suggest that this reversal must be read in terms of the black body's imbrication in new ideologies of empire on the one hand, and with the commodity-form on the other.³⁶

In offering the noble African prince's heroic exploits as virtual theatrical spectacles, Behn in part relies on the motif of the Herculean hero developed by such contemporaries as Dryden and Davenant, who in their *Oriental* and *Spanish* history plays popularized the idea of an idealized, demi-god hero, whose familiar traits are courage, valor, fortitude, and generosity. There is, of course, an evident artificiality to this depiction; the procedures of emblemization, characteristic of the public pageant, and operatic extravagance, an essential stylistic trait of the heroic drama, are decisive in shaping the logic of “reductive normalizing” at work in Behn's novella. While heroic exploits in earlier drama remain largely unstaged or only obliquely invoked, heroic drama insists on narrating, through dialogue, the hero's battlefield exploits on stage. In *The Conquest of Granada*, for instance, prior to bringing *Almanzor* on stage, Dryden has *Abdalla* and *Abemennar* describe the bullfight and extol the extraordinary courage of the stranger. Similarly, Behn presents *Oroonoko*'s martial feats as marvelous, with the emphasis falling always on deliberate externalization. Introducing the hero's almost miraculous beginnings, Behn reports that, from his “natural Inclination to Arms,” *Oroonoko* became at seventeen “one of the most expert Captains, and bravest Soldiers, that ever saw the

Field of *Mars*” (O, 12). Challenged by the rival war captain, Jamoan, Oroonoko appears in the battlefield “like some Devine Power descended to save his Country from Destruction; and his People had purposely put on him all things that might make him shine with most Splendor, to strike a reverend Awe into the Beholders” (O, 29). After his transplantation in the New World, like the prototypical romance hero, Oroonoko takes delight in “Chasing and Killing Tigers of a monstrous Size,” and in subduing “wonderful Snakes, such as *Alexander* is reported to have incounter’d at the River of *Amazons*” (O, 42). Yet “these were not Actions great enough for his large Soul, which was still panting after more renown’d Action” (O, 42).

For all intents and purposes, then, Oroonoko appears as a typical romance hero whose feats of valor are untouched by the vagaries of slavery and servitude. Eugene Waith notes that “the Herculean hero, in every version, is a hero, [and] more even than other heroes, evokes the response of wonder” in his beholders, “in the sense of astonishment at apparent impossibilities.”³⁷ But is the response of wonder that Oroonoko inspires the same as that of the classical Herculean hero? Oroonoko does evoke surprise and awe, but he is a wonder in another sense; what is surprising and wonderful is not only his extraordinary courage but also his ethnic difference. As Catherine Gallagher explains: “Oroonoko is a wonder because blackness and heroism are mutually thought to be exclusive qualities . . . it is only in his difference from other Africans that Oroonoko achieves his heroism, but it is in his blackness that heroism partakes of the marvelous.”³⁸ As indicated above, blackness and heroism were not always thought to be mutually exclusive, but their unqualified conflation by Behn is certainly unprecedented in literary tradition. Oroonoko’s ethnicity, its origins in exotic locales, is thus a source of wonder in the text. The location of the first half of Behn’s novella is not North Africa, with which the Europeans (first the Portuguese and the Spanish, then the Dutch and the English) had a longstanding contact, but the relatively newfound Guinea Coast of West Africa. Historically, Europe’s relationship with the powerful North African states was marked by conquest and war: with Guinea, by contrast, by trade, as indicated by the European division of West Africa into Slave, Gold, and Ivory Coasts. Thus, when Behn refers parenthetically to Oroonoko as “this gallant Moor” (O, 12), she addresses, as Candace Ward has argued, “the paradoxical fact of Oroonoko’s race” but also “subordinate[s] it to more recognizable visceral markers of his delicacy,” rendering his ethnic origins undeniably exotic.³⁹ Behn’s conflation of blackness and heroism, then, is grounded in exoticism: “Oroonoko’s blackness must therefore be seen at once as authentically and unnaturally African. It is the exotic trait that makes his story worth writing, the feature that makes him unprecedented as hero and hence a wonder.”⁴⁰

THE BLACK BODY AS FETISH

If the element of exoticism makes Oroonoko’s heroism a spectacle in its evocation of wonder and astonishment, his black body emerges as a spectacle in its own right precisely at the moment of its transformation into commodity. That the fictional emergence of the dazzling African body should coincide with a period of burgeoning Atlantic slave trade is by no means fortuitous. The paradoxical moments of this process—its overvaluation in fiction and its degradation through trade—are consistent with the logic of antithetical determinations of the commodity

in the exchange process, a logic that is best understood as that of the fetish.⁴¹ The commodification of the body here demands interpretation not just in relation to its most obvious social context, the institution of slavery, but in connection with the symbolic meanings associated with the commodity-form. By doing so, we will account for the various strands of meaning that make *Oroonoko* one of the most overdetermined instances of literary representation, insofar as he occupies a variety of contradictory subject positions (king, royal slave, common slave, and domestic pet).

In the opening pages of *Capital*, Marx follows the sensuous life of the commodity in its contradictory incarnations, from its inception as a thing in the production process, through its entry into the circuits of exchange as a commodity, to its antithetical transmutations into money and other commodities. Economic exchange—or “social metabolism”—is the process, Marx suggests, that enables these various metamorphoses of the commodity; the money-form, as the universal equivalent of all commodities, is the invisible mediator of the exchange processes.⁴² The exchange process subjects the commodity to a double metamorphosis: “The antithetical transmutations of the commodity are accompanied through two antithetical social processes.”⁴³ It is here, in the context of the exchange process, that Marx defines the commodity fetish: the money-fetish and the commodity-fetish arise when “the products of men’s labour universally take on the form of the commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish, now become *visible and dazzling to our eyes*.”⁴⁴ I would suggest that the attributes of dazzle and excessive visibility related to *Oroonoko*’s black body; the novella’s contradictory logic and its chiasmic structure; the superimposition of bourgeois and aristocratic ideologies; and the metaphorical nature of the oxymoron of its subtitle, “The Royal Slave,” are ultimately indicators of the metamorphoses that characterize the exchange process.

The earliest and historically the most enduring fetish—characterized by excessive dazzle and visibility—is, of course, gold, which is not a commodity but the abstract measure of all commodities, even if, as a concrete measure of a single commodity, it can be part of the exchange process. In other words, gold is simultaneously both inside and outside of the circuits of exchange. Now, the predicates of splendor and shine, as employed to describe *Oroonoko*’s black body, suggest that he is the living incarnation of the precious metal itself. *Oroonoko*, Guinea’s captive prince, like the most precious metal of the Gold Coast, is a condensation of all the attributes historically associated with gold, since his royalism and splendor are measures of all the other commodified bodies of his fellow countrymen. Simultaneously, Behn’s use of these predicates transforms a large number of “common slaves” into an undifferentiated mass, while conferring a measure of transcendence onto *Oroonoko*’s color. During his passage up the river to Surinam, *Oroonoko*’s grandeur is spontaneously communicated to the ordinary slaves: “The Royal Youth appear’d in spite 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” (*O*, 36). After his disembarkation, as contended by his new owner Mr. Trefry, *Oroonoko*’s “Grandure [is] confirm’d by the Adoration of all the Slaves” (*O*, 37). Yet, the inevitable movement of the body as commodity, since it is implicated in the exchange process, must pass into its antithetical determina-

tion; in accordance with the logic of the exchange process, it should be nothing more than a commodity. Guinea's captive prince is subject to the same antithetical determinations to which the commodity is subjected in the process of exchange.

For example, the narrator's flights of ecstasy in seeing the proliferation of objects is analogous to her effusions while describing Oroonoko's body. They—the body and the objects—are always perceived as marvelous, and the language employed to describe them is nearly identical. The uncanny connection between the objects and the human body occurs in the following description: the planters trade with the natives in plants and animals, “such as Mormosets, a sort of Monkey as big as a Rat or a Weasel, but of a delicate shape, and has face and hands like a Human Creature” (O, 8).⁴⁵ Oroonoko's harangue to his fellow slaves explicitly reinforces the connection, when he exposes their degradation as pets, things, and animals: “Have they vanquished us nobly in Fight? Have they won us in Honorable Battel? And are we, by the Chance of war, become their slaves? This would not anger a Noble Heart, this wou'd not animate a Soldier's soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the sport of Women, Fools and Cowards” (O, 52).

Where else is the double metamorphosis described by Marx, the transformation of a thing into its opposite, better reflected than in the novella's oxymoronic subtitle, “The Royal Slave”? The metaphorical identification of its hero with that of a European aristocrat and the oxymoron of its title are products of the logic of the fetish, and this logic is consistent with the twin key tropes of cultural difference which Hayden White traces: the Wild Man and the Noble Savage.⁴⁶ The apparent disjunction between lineage and legal status, between royalty and slavery, obeys the same metaphorical, ironic, and ultimately paradoxical process of signification developed in White's essay, “The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish.” In tracing the genealogy of these terms between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, White extends the application of the idea beyond the domains of its traditional use—comparative religion, Marxian economics, Freudian psychoanalysis—to cultural encounters. In his view, fetishism is:

a mistaking of the form of a thing for its content or the taking of a part of a thing for the whole, and the elevation either of the form or the part to the status of a content or an essence of the whole. From the Renaissance to the end of the eighteenth century, Europeans tended to fetishize the native peoples with whom they came into contact by viewing them simultaneously as monstrous forms of humanity and as quintessential objects of desire. Whence the alternative impulses to exterminate and to redeem the native peoples. But even more basic in the European consciousness of this time was the tendency to fetishize the European type of humanity as the sole possible form that humanity in general could take.⁴⁷

The mistaking of “a part of a thing for the whole,” “the elevation of the part to the status of the whole,” and of investing a thing with mystical and divine essence, is crucial to the representational economy of Behn's novella. The idealistic presentation of the hero's exploits is predicated on the narrator's willful indifference to Oroonoko's legal status—that is, his status as slave. In addition, the impulse to redeem and humanize Oroonoko, or the novella's logic of recuperation, must occur through an aristocratic idiom, the only form of humanity which Behn regards as

genuinely human. Except for the last few pages of the novel, *Oroonoko* seems to lead a dual life, which is made possible through the logic of the fetish. Fetishism is what enables *Oroonoko* to transcend the vagaries of race and ethnicity.

“THE FRIGHTFUL SPECTACLES OF A MANGL’D KING”

Oroonoko's heroism and his blackness thus emerge as spectacles as a result of the complementary processes of exoticism and commodification: the body is fetishized as an exotic commodity. The spectacles of the glittering body, virtuous heroism, and cultural difference express the ideology of a commercial empire, and their specific configuration requires interpretation in relation to the changing ideologies of empire during the late seventeenth century. Above, we noted how the setting and colonial background of most plays during Behn's time, whether set in the Old World, like *The Conquest of Granada*, *Don Sebastian*, *The Moor's Revenge*, *The Siege of Rhodes*; or in the New World, like *The Indian Queen* and *The Indian Emperor*, dramatized episodes from Spanish and Portuguese imperial history. Unlike these historically anachronistic, atrophied costume pieces of Dryden, designed to celebrate the achievements of peninsular imperial powers, there is an inescapable contemporaneity to Behn's novella insofar as it contains one of the earliest episodes of gruesome violence in the political history of capital. As an Englishwoman writer's tragic tale about two African lovers taken captive by treachery, and transported as slaves to the American colony of Surinam, Behn's novella brings together the ideologies of heroic romance, the Caribbean plantation economy, and slavery, displacing in the process the Mediterranean with the Atlantic as the site of cultural conflict. The distinction is alternatively expressed as the difference between the Old World and the New, whose history is defined by J. H. Elliott as “the history, in the broadest sense, of the creation, destruction, and re-creation of communities as a result of the movement, across and around the Atlantic basin, of people, commodities, cultural practices, and ideas.”⁴⁸ What is central to this history is not conquest, the subject of the Neoclassical English Spanish history play; nor the territorial expansion of the Spanish monarchy to extend the domains of Christianity, modeled after the Roman Imperium; nor the conflict of Christianity with the Muslims and the heathens. Rather, the historical backdrop to Behn's novella is the process of trade and mercantilist exchange. Behn situates bodies and commodities at the center of this great historical confluence, and redefines their meaning in relation to the emergent circuits of commercial exchange across the Atlantic basin. Our final examples of the spectacle, of torture and mutilation, must be understood against this historical background.

The Caribbean plantation system is held together by interconnected webs of mercantilist exchange in the Atlantic basin, comprising Africa, Europe, and the Americas. The ultimate spectacles in the novel—Imoinda's murder along with that of her unborn child, *Oroonoko*'s self-mutilation and his dismemberment on the rack—are energized by the conflicting desires of *Oroonoko* and Byam to preserve and disrupt these networks. In a chapter of their study *Anti-Oedipus*, devoted specifically to studying the interface between precapitalist and capitalist social formations, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari define capitalism with Marx “as the *negative* of all social formations,” as it is constituted on the ruins of precapitalist societies.⁴⁹ They understand capitalism as a global system of production that

codes deterritorialized flows; the mercantilist economy of the Atlantic basin must be seen as “a global system of desire and destiny that organizes the productions of production, the productions of recording, and the productions of consumption. Flows of women and children, flows of herds and of seed, sperm flows, flows of shit, menstrual flows: nothing must escape coding.”⁵⁰ Byam is determined to insert the flows of biological production into social reproduction; Oroonoko’s semen, Imoinda’s menstrual flows, and their child are being forced into the circuits of economic production, while Oroonoko’s resistance is motivated by a desire to preserve the same as part of his archaic lineage and kinship networks.

The staging of gruesome torture at the end of the novella and access to it are closely regulated by considerations of political economy in at least two related senses.⁵¹ First, in a narrative in which white women are always the privileged witnesses, Behn’s narrator notes that the planters did not let Imoinda see the “Barbarity committed towards her Lord, but carry’d her down to Purham, and shut her up; which was not in kindness to her, but for fear she sho’d Dye with the Sight, or Miscarry; and then they shou’d lose a young Slave, and perhaps the mother” (O, 57).⁵² This suggests that spectacles of torture and cruelty can be constituted as such for white women and black men, but not to the black woman who is the locus of both biological and economic reproductions. Next, after Oroonoko’s death, Colonel Martin refuses the parts of Oroonoko’s body sent to him, saying that “he cou’d govern his Negroes without Terrifying and Grieving them with the frightful Spectacles of a mangl’d King” (O, 65). The dismemberment at the end thus is not merely an instance of the “king’s two bodies,” as is often pointed out, but also a convenient means of augmenting the social production of the plantation system. Spectacles of cruelty and dismemberment do not escape coding, but are explicitly harnessed in consolidating the productive powers of a plantation economy.

THE TORTURED BODY AND THE SYMPATHETIC SPECTATOR

The spectacle of Oroonoko’s public execution is thus meant as an imposing display of the colonists’ power, as a deterrent to other slaves. For a modern reader, Oroonoko’s dismemberment may seem horrifying, but contemporaries witnessed the drawing and quartering of condemned bodies (in England and the Caribbean) with a certain detachment, even bordering on indifference. For instance, in his *Diary*, Samuel Pepys records a well-attended public event on 13 October 1660 as follows: “I went out to Charing-cross to see Major-General Harrison hanged, drawn, and quartered—which was done there—he looking as cheerfully as any man could do in that condition. He was presently cut down and his head and his heart shown to the people, at which there was great shouts of joy.”⁵³ The hanging is of a piece with other mundane concerns of the diarist’s day-to-day life; like the walk in St. James’s Park and the visit to the theater to watch *The Moor of Venice* two days before, going out to see the execution of a regicide is an everyday occurrence. Moreover, in Pepys’s account, the public spectacle of punishment is notably devoid of pain: for the audience, the execution is a scene of festivity; for Pepys, yet another routine, unremarkable event. And for both, the sight of the broken body does not result in sympathy.⁵⁴ In his 1667 *An Impartial Description of Surinam*, George Warren’s description of the tortured slave body, like Pepys’s, is detached and unemotional.

In a short chapter entitled "Of the Negros or Slaves," Warren mentions torture together with other protoethnographic details regarding plantation life, such as the slaves' meager diet, bare lodgings, and severe work routine. According to him, the slaves who are being punished "manifest their fortitude, or rather obstinacy in suffering the most exquisite tortures [that] can be inflicted upon them, for a terrour and example to others without shrinking."⁵⁵ The victim's deliberate and stoic insensitivity to pain is matched by Warren's own matter-of-fact relation of it.

In *Oroonoko*, Behn revises this traditional framework encompassing suffering, public spectacle, and punishment.⁵⁶ What is distinctive about her rendering of Oroonoko's execution, however, is that she transforms the scaffold into a scene of militant sympathy, responding to the hero's victimization with her own suffering. Whereas Pepys and Warren take in the sight of the tortured body with a certain detachment and matter-of-factness, Behn reacts viscerally. For instance, after Oroonoko is chained and whipped by the colonists in the wake of his unsuccessful rebellion, the narrator is horrified to see the dissolution of his radiant, well-proportioned body: "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 Eye holes" (O, 63). The body here is no longer a visual spectacle (of admiration and astonishment), celebrated earlier as "the most awful that cou'd be seen," but a ghostly, spectral shadow of its former self. The planters succeed in inscribing their power on Oroonoko's body, and the female narrator registers the effects of plantation cruelty via her own distress. In fact, the sight of the mutilated body is overpowering enough to produce a feeling of sickness: "the Sight was so gashly; his Discourse was sad; the earthly Smell about him so strong, that I was persuaded to leave the Place for some time (being myself but Sickly, and apt to fall into Fits of dangerous Illness upon any extraordinary Melancholy)" (O, 63-64). In this encounter between the tortured body and responsive feminine imagination, bodily suffering seems contagious and transitive. Indeed, seeing Oroonoko and listening to his sad speech are so disorienting as to prevent her from being present at the final execution.

Behn's narrator is neither immediately related to nor directly responsible for Oroonoko's tragedy; yet she is united with him through vicarious suffering, made possible by her capacity for sympathy. Her response is embodied, insofar as the viewer partakes of the victim's distress by becoming a cosufferer. The novella extends this embodied response to suffering in two different yet closely related directions. First, Behn's narrator makes sympathy for Oroonoko the basis of her denunciation of the planter class. In her condemnation of Byam, the Deputy Governor, as the "most Fawning fair-tong'd Fellow in the World, [w]hose Character is not fit to be mention'd with the worst of the *Slaves*," and of the members of the Council as "such notorious Villains as *Newgate* never transported" (O, 54, 59), she equates the masters with the perpetrators of a crime, and Oroonoko with a powerless victim. By doing so, she firmly aligns herself with Oroonoko and seeks to mobilize in the reader a similar emotion. Secondly, Behn offers her story as a monument to Oroonoko's tragic memory, enclosing the novella in a framework that is overwhelmingly melancholic. The tragedy of Oroonoko is, in a sense, a personal tragedy, and the writing of his history an ethical responsibility. In the preface, the perpetuation of his memory is a compensatory gesture on account of her failure

to save him in the real world: “though I had none above me in that Country, yet I wanted power to preserve this Great Man” (O, 7). Documenting his tragedy becomes a form of deferred action. By presenting the novella as a melancholic commemoration, then, Behn makes the act of writing itself a vehicle of sympathy.

Through its embodied response to the spectacle of slave distress, its moral denunciation, and its documentation of victimization to arouse sympathy, Behn’s novella stands as a foundational text in the way it sentimentalizes slavery. Behn’s sentimentalization of slavery is contemporaneous with and yet fundamentally distinct from what David Brion Davis has described as the “Christianization of Negro slavery” in the latter half of the seventeenth century.⁵⁷ At this time, Protestant and Quaker authors attempted to make the economic exploitation of African slaves a “moral problem” for English culture; though not always recognized as such today, their contribution is reckoned by historians of antislavery to be highly significant. For instance, in his 1665 *Chapters from a Christian Directory*, Richard Baxter’s condemnation of slaveholders as conquistadors “almost approached the vehemence of the most militant abolitionist.”⁵⁸ In *The Negro’s & Indian’s Advocate* (1680), written after his return from Barbados, Morgan Godwyn not only exposed the horrors of slavery (through attention to whipping, emasculation, cropping of ears, amputation of legs, and vivisection as common practices), but was the “first to analyze racism as a class ideology,” so that even after three hundred years, claims Peter Fryer, “neither his analysis nor his language has lost its cutting edge.”⁵⁹ Finally, Thomas Tryon’s 1684 *Friendly Advice to the Gentlemen-Planters of the East and West Indies* uses an innovative strategy, Christian lamentation, to relate the miseries of plantation life. Ruthe Sheffey attributes “the vigor of the humanitarian statement in *Oroonoko*” directly to Behn’s “relationship with Thomas Tryon, and more specifically to her knowledge of [this] work.”⁶⁰

Yet despite these apparent affinities, both rhetorical and ideological, the aims of *Oroonoko* and *Friendly Advice* cannot be more divergent. Tryon is primarily a reformer; his concern for the plight of slaves results in an advocacy of baptism, humane treatment, and the extension of religious instruction. Like Baxter and Godwyn, he recognizes Africans as human within a transcendently defined unity of all mankind. The humanitarian sentiment in *Oroonoko*, by contrast, is not rooted in religious universalism, nor is the dispensation of sympathy guided by Christian charity and religious obligation; rather, it is grounded in Behn’s compassion for Oroonoko’s tragic fate. Jonathan Lamb has observed that “it is amidst the bankruptcy of a clearly stated regime of moral virtue, such as feudal obligation or Christian charity, that the passionate spontaneity of sympathy finds its opportunities for expression.”⁶¹ Just as importantly, the oppressed in missionary accounts are frequently anonymous figures lacking in specificity, even when they are given a voice, as in Book 2 of Tryon’s *Friendly Advice*. But in *Oroonoko* the suffering slave is an embodied self, a particular person—in fact, a royal one—endowed with certain inalienable rights, such as bodily self-possession. As a consequence, he experiences enslavement as a violation of bodily integrity, as an injury to his personhood. Thus betrayed and whipped by Byam, Oroonoko threatens a “dire Revenge,” vowing not to kill himself “till that Justice were done to my injur’d Person” (O, 58). A little later, he characterizes the public punishment as an offense to his dignity: “I wou’d not kill my self, even after a Whipping, but will be content to live with that

Infamy, and pointed at by every grinning Slave, till I have completed my Revenge; and then you shall see that Oroonoko scorns to live with the Indignity that was put on Caesar" (O, 58).

Despite his legal condition as a slave, Behn's protagonist is acutely conscious of indignity and dispossession by virtue of his status as a royal prince. In the next century, *Oroonoko* contributed significantly to the growth of humanitarian sentiment in the antislavery movement. But I would suggest that the novella also formulated some of the fundamental moral dilemmas and contradictions intrinsic to scenes of sympathetic exchange. For one, slavery for Behn is offensive and reprehensible not because of its inherent dehumanization of racial others, but because of its degradation of an honorable aristocrat, of its reduction of the royal body to an ordinary commodity. Behn's victim is no ordinary slave, but a captive prince, whose suffering is spectacular and exemplary, in contrast to the generic oppression of a large number of common slaves. In this context, how does one reconcile such an extension of sympathy to the sufferings of an exceptional slave with her indifference to those of the multitude? In addition, sympathy, as a mode of affective relation in the novella, seems most conducive for apprehending individual suffering. Yet how capable or adequate is such a mode for meditating on the larger structures of power that produce and maintain the institution of slavery? These questions are posed but not answered in the novella. However, with the rise of the intimate public sphere, the growth of print culture, and perhaps more crucially, the gradual feminization of ideology in the following century, individual acts of sympathy began to enter, via writing, the political realm. And the concerns raised by Behn's novella about the political efficacy of sympathy—its capacity for engaging with individual misery as opposed to generic suffering—resurface with increasing frequency throughout the eighteenth century, in contexts as diverse as Mr. Spectator's tearful reaction to Yarico's enslavement in Richard Steele's version of the Yarico-Inkle story in *Spectator 11* (1713), and Yorick's earnest but unsuccessful attempt to imagine the distress of the incarcerated slave body in Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768).

Behn's *Oroonoko* gets at these emergent concerns surrounding plantation slavery through a mixture of disparate and heterogeneous literary and cultural conventions drawn from Restoration stage spectacles and the commercial spectacles of civic pageants. However, what is most striking about the novella is its awareness of the shifting meanings attached to the racialized African body. The exaltation of the black body as an admirable spectacle via the conventions of the heroic drama; its metamorphosis into a commodity owing to its insertion into exchange networks spawned by the English commercial empire; and its ultimate dismemberment at the hands of the planters constitute three principal moments in the text's complex redefinition of blackness. In each of these moments, the spectator's affective participation is essential. For instance, to the female narrator, Oroonoko's heroic body is a delightful spectacle, wondrous like the exotic objects displayed in the civic pageants, or those encountered in Surinam. The narrator initially fetishizes the luminous black body, neutralizing its racial difference and obscuring its material condition as property. However, she witnesses Oroonoko's brutal disfiguration at the end with a sense of visceral disgust and profound melancholy. The idealizing and mystificatory tendencies involved in fetishizing the enslaved body are thus partly

countered by a historically more accurate recognition of its status as an expendable commodity. Indeed, in its presentation of Oroonoko as noble hero and hapless victim, his body as beautiful spectacle and disfigured object, the novella's project is necessarily contradictory. Yet, notwithstanding its troubling representation of colonial contact, and despite all its elisions and contradictions, Behn's novella remains one of the earliest fictional works to document the changing valences of the black body as a consequence of its commodification, and to establish connections between slave suffering and sympathy. These connections would continue to orient English citizens' relationship to Caribbean slaves throughout the eighteenth century.

NOTES

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1. Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York: Norton, 1997), 7. (Hereafter cited parenthetically as *O.*)

2. The English settled St. Christopher in 1624, Barbados in 1627, Nevis in 1628, and Antigua in 1630, but the most important acquisition was Jamaica, captured from the Spanish in 1655, an island that “could produce more sugar than all of the other English islands put together”; Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624–1731* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1975), 21. The setting of Behn's novella, Surinam, was colonized in 1650 by the English but was lost to the Dutch in 1677. For a useful account of England's early colonial presence, see Carl Bridenbaugh and Robert Bridenbaugh, *No Peace Beyond the Line: The English in the Caribbean, 1624–1690* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972).

3. Alternatively, for a recent and persuasive attempt to trace the continued centrality of Old World to New World encounters, see Chi-ming Yang, “Asia Out of Place: The Aesthetics of Incorruptibility in Behn's *Oroonoko*,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42.1 (2008): 235–53. Focusing in particular on East-West commodity culture, Yang shows how Behn's text orientalizes transatlantic slavery “according to a hybridizing logic of chinoiserie” (249).

4. See Wylie Sypher, *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIII Century* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1942); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966); and Clare Midgley, *Women Against Slavery: The British Campaigns, 1780–1870* (London: Routledge, 1992).

5. Historical information on pageants is taken from Anthony Gerard Barthelemy, *Black Face, Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1987), 42–71; Peter Fryer, *Staying Power: Black People in Britain since 1504* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1984), 25–32; and David M. Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558–1642* (Tempe: Arizona State Univ. Press, 2003), 165–98.

6. “In the pageants of 1672, 1673, 1674, 1678, 1679, 1680, 1681, 1691, and 1692, ‘Negro-boys’ appear astride lions, griffins, camels, or unicorns. In a few of these pageants, most notably the pageants of 1672 and 1681, black characters appear in another tableau, but in most of these pageants, the black characters only serve as emblems of British achievements in trade; . . . In Thomas Jordan's 1678 pageant, *The Triumphs of London*, two black youths throw dates and raisins and other fruits from the baskets borne by artificial camels. An emblem of Fidelity says of the youths: ‘This laden Camel, bears part of your Trade, / Which back'd by an Indian Sallies from the Fort; / To express their Plenty and to shew you Sport’” (Barthelemy, *Black Face*, 50).

7. The Navigation Act of 1651 (reenacted as the First Navigation Act in 1660, hailed by Adam Smith as “perhaps the wisest of all the commercial regulations of England”) was the first in a series of parliamentary acts restricting the power of the Dutch in sea trade. These Acts were catalysts for England's conflicts with the Dutch between 1652 and 1678, known as the First (1652–54), Second (1664–67), and Third (1672–78) Dutch Wars, respectively. See Christopher Hill, *From Reformation to Revolution* (London: Pelican, 1963), 155–68.

8. Jean-Christophe Agnew, in *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 143–61, examines the shifting importance of Restoration cultural institutions—the masque, the heroic drama, the Lord Mayor's show—in relation to transformations of power relationships between various social classes in the second half of the seventeenth century.

9. John Loftis, *The Spanish Plays of Neoclassical England* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), 180.

10. Other influential innovations include the creation of a patent monopoly, the introduction of women actors, and more use of music and dancing. For our purposes, perhaps the most important alterations are changes in design and the audience composition; as Robert D. Hume notes, “the relatively small indoor theaters and high prices combine with moral stigma to limit the popular appeal of Caroline drama”; Hume, *The Development of English Drama in the Late Seventeenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 236.

11. Bridget Orr, *Empire on the English Stage, 1660–1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001), 28.

12. This tendency is evident in the output of the foremost dramatist of the period, John Dryden. As Loftis notes: “four out of six of Dryden's rhymed heroic plays and five out of twelve of his serious plays have subjects that have something to do with Spanish or Portuguese history in the era that began in 1492” (179).

13. The impact of movable scenery and spectacle on dramatic language, considered hitherto an indispensable element, did not go unnoticed by contemporaries. As Gunnar Sorelius writes, “Scenery and spectacle, it was widely felt, detracted from the important thing, the words of the author. Flecknoe, for example, suggests that “that which makes our Stage the better makes our Playes the worse perhaps, they striving now to make them more for sight then hearing, whence that solid joy of the interior is lost, and that benefit which men formerly receiv'd from Playes. . . .”; Sorelius, *The Giant Race Before the Flood: Pre-Restoration Drama on the Stage and in the Criticism of the Restoration* (Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells, 1966), 15.

14. This transitional moment is central to Catherine Gallagher's interpretation of *Oroonoko's* blackness, the intensification of which is read as the female narrator's desire for visibility, made possible by the endless textual reproduction of print—as opposed to the limited dissemination of meaning (and hence of possibilities for recognition) afforded by theatrical representation, which requires self-presence. See Catherine Gallagher, “*Oroonoko's* Blackness,” in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 223–45.

15. Julie Stone Peters, *Theater of the Book, 1480–1880: Print, Text, and Performance in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 41. Commenting on the growing importance of print, Peters further observes that “with a stronger alliance between printed texts and performances, delay between performance and publication dwindled. It was fairly normal in the first decades of the seventeenth century for a play to be published perhaps two to five years after it had been performed, when a playhouse was ready to get rid of a script, when a printer was looking for material to fill out a list, when a dramatist was looking for a little extra money or to showcase an *oeuvre*, or when there was a revival and hence a renewed demand. In England, normal delays dwindled from several years in the pre-Interregnum period, to one year in the 1660s, to three months by the end of the 1670s, to only a month or so in the 1690s” (49).

16. See Peter Holland, *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979). Scenic background in theater and descriptive detail in narrative appear to function analogously during this period, since the scene performed the function of description in prose fiction insofar as it provided a background to the action. In an analysis of Davenant's preface to *The Siege of Rhodes*, Orr writes, “the use of the movable scenery offered a visual translation of the topography. Davenant's scenes can be understood, in fact, as a translation into visual terms of the figure ‘topographia,’ the topos of geographical description used in historical or literary narrative . . . the accuracy of the topographical scenes, their perspectival organization, and their aesthetic enticement by the frieze, which framed the interior images like paintings, all encouraged the spectator in a pleasurable assimilation of the exoticism represented” (51).

17. Mary Louise Pratt, in *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), employs James Turner's terms to differentiate seventeenth-century landscape discourse from that of the eighteenth: the composite description "is not a portrait of an individual place, but an ideal construction of particular motifs," whose "purpose is to express the character of a region, or a general idea of a good land"; as opposed to those of "Linnaean emissaries," whose portraits are no "longer emblematic or composite, but highly specific and differentiated" (45–48, 51).

18. Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves," in *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, eds. Felicity Nussbaum and Laura Brown (London: Methuen, 1987), 52.

19. In essence, this was also known as the Baubles theory in the late seventeenth century, whose adherents, including Defoe, contended that English merchants could trade in trinkets and trash for ivory, gold, and slaves on the Guinea Coast.

20. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 61.

21. Suvir Kaul, "Reading Literary Symptoms: Colonial Pathologies and the *Oroonoko* Fictions of Behn, Southerne, and Hawkesworth," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 18 (1994): 80–96. The phrase is originally employed in Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* to account for a distinctive rhetorical strategy in eighteenth-century European travelogues.

22. George Warren, *An Impartial Description of Surinam* (London, 1667), 24.

23. Charles de Rochefort, *The History of the Caribby-islands*, trans. John Davies (London, 1666), 314–15.

24. For a superb reading of the visitors' trip to the Indian town as a "communicational event," see Mary Helen McMurrin, "Aphra Behn from Both Sides: Translation in the Atlantic World," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 34 (2005): 1–23.

25. Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 20. For an account of the trope of wonder as an "inevitable component of the discourse of discovery," see esp. ch. 1.

26. This is one of J. H. Elliott's main premises in *The Old World and the New, 1492–1650* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1970). He suggests that "the obstacles to the incorporation of the New World within Europe's intellectual horizon were formidable"—obstacles, that is, at the level of observation, description, dissemination, and comprehension, "the ability to come to terms with the unexpected and the unfamiliar, to see them as phenomena existing in their own right, and (hardest of all) to shift the accepted boundaries of thought in order to include them" (17, 18).

27. Eldred Jones, *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965).

28. Thomas Dekker, *Lust's Dominion; Or the Lascivious Queen*, in *A Select Collection of Old English Plays*, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (London: Reeves and Turner, 1875); Aphra Behn, *Abdelazer; Or, The Moor's Revenge*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers vol. 2 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 55.

29. Behn, *Moor's Revenge*, 33.

30. *Ibid.*, 14.

31. William Shakespeare, *Othello*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 1996), 1.3.291.

32. A cogent account of this history is available in Elliot H. Tokson, *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama, 1550–1688* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1982).

33. See Gallagher, "Oroonoko's Blackness," 240–41.

34. Behn, *Moor's Revenge*, 87–88.

35. The above speech, by and large, is Behn's own; the pathos of racial difference does not figure as elaborately in the original as it does in her adaptation. In Dekker, this considerably shorter speech

appears as: "Ah! I may curse his praises, rather ban / Mine own nativity: why did this colour / Dart in my flesh so far! O, would my face / Were of Hortenzo's fashion; else would yours / Were as black as mine is" (177).

36. See Ross Ballaster, "New Hystericism: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Body, the Text and the Feminist Critic," in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (New York: Routledge, 1992), 283–95; and 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: Univ. of Virginia Press, 1993), 212–33. Both have pointed out that Imoinda's body represents the originary form of commodification, whether the networks of exchange are those of kinship, as in Coramantien, or of mercantilist exchange, as in Surinam.

37. Eugene Waith, *The Herculean Hero* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1965), 38, 53.

38. Gallagher, "Oroonoko's Blackness," 240.

39. Candace Ward, "Transports of Feeling: Constructions of the Black Man of Feeling in Eighteenth-Century Colonial Literature," in *Transport(s) in the British Empire and the Commonwealth/ Transport(s) dans l'Empire britannique et le Commonwealth*, eds. Michèle Lurdos and Judith Misrahi-Barak (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2007), 446.

40. Gallagher, "Oroonoko's Blackness," 241.

41. "In the case of *Oroonoko*'s representation in England, the choice is between domestic pet and plantation laborer, or that of privatized fetish and public commodity. The brandings and ornamental collars became semiotic markers that exhibited the subject's special status as property. These external markers revealed the status of blacks, not only as pets, but also as commodities that could, at any time, be converted to cash. As a slave argues [in Thomas Tryon's *Friendly Advice to the Gentleman-Planters*], '[we] are nothing more in many of our masters esteem than *their money*'; Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 38–39 (emphasis in original).

42. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Ernest Mandel (New York: Penguin, 1977), 198.

43. *Ibid.*, 206.

44. *Ibid.*, 187; emphasis mine.

45. This parallel was first noted in Brown, "The Romance of Empire," 54.

46. Metaphor here is simply understood as the bringing together of categories, royal and slave, that are otherwise contradictory. The importance of the trope of the royal slave for the history of sensibility is analyzed in G. A. Starr's "Aphra Behn and the Genealogy of the Man of Feeling," *Modern Philology* 87 (1990): 362–72. Starr argues that through its simultaneous presentation of contradictory images, *Oroonoko*'s heroism and his victimization, Behn's novella has greatly contributed to the history of sensibility in the eighteenth century.

47. Hayden White, "The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish," in White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1986), 194.

48. J. H. Elliott, "Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation," in *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, eds. David Armitage and Michael J. Braddick (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 239.

49. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2008) 153; original emphasis.

50. *Ibid.*, 142. The term "flows" in *Anti-Oedipus* has a broader range of application beyond the one employed above. Here is James Walvin's account of the same process: "To purchase the African, manufacturers poured into Africa; the African's labour tapped the resources of the Americas. The African, by universal agreement, was the flexed muscle of the British Empire. Produce and profits from the West Indies flowed into Britain while the needs of the plantation economies were met with British manufactures"; *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555–1860* (London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971), 10; emphasis mine. A major theoretical statement based on this approach

is available in Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993). Gilroy argues that the category of "nation" is inadequate to do justice to the complexities of cultural interaction occasioned by the deterritorialization of capital. Other influential accounts of Atlantic history include Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996); and Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History* (Durham, NC: Duke Univ. Press, 2005).

51. "Cruelty is the movement of culture that is realized in bodies and inscribed on them, belaboring them. That is what cruelty means. This culture is not the movement of ideology: on the contrary, it forcibly injects production and reproduction. For even death, punishment, and torture are desired, and are instances of production . . . it makes men or their organs into the parts and wheels of the social machine" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 145).

52. "This narrative [*Oroonoko*] must have women: it generates female figures at every turn. Not only is the protagonist represented as especially fond of the company of women, but female figures—either Imoinda or the narrator or her surrogates—appear as incentives or witnesses for all of Oroonoko's exploits" (Brown, "The Romance of Empire," 50).

53. Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 1: 265. This episode was first mentioned by George Guffey in "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment," in his *Two English Novelists* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1975), 20.

54. For a useful overview of the theatrical nature of public punishments, see Thomas Laqueur, "Crowds, Carnival, and the State in English Executions, 1604–1868," in *The First Modern Society: Essays in Honor of Lawrence Stone*, eds. Al Beier, David Cannadine, and James M. Rosenheim (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989), 305–56.

55. Warren, *Impartial Description*, 19.

56. My account of punishment and sympathetic spectatorship in this section is indebted to Lynn Hunt's illuminating discussion of torture and humanitarian sentiment in her *Inventing Human Rights: A History* (New York: Norton, 2007), esp. ch. 2, "Bone of Their Bone: Abolishing Torture."

57. Davis, *Problem of Slavery*, 474.

58. *Ibid.*, 338.

59. Fryer, *Staying Power*, 148.

60. Ruthe T. Sheffey, "Some Evidence for a New Source of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Studies in Philology* 59 (1962): 53.

61. Jonathan Lamb, *The Evolution of Sympathy in the Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2009), 1.