

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

THE AUTHORITY OF THE OTHER:
NARRATION AND ACCOMMODATION IN APHRA BEHN'S ORONOKO

BY

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LAURA M. ROBINSON

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
the University of Manitoba in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of

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ABSTRACT

Feminists and Marxists tend to slot oppressed peoples into the role of victim, into the position of the Other opposing the Subject. Although these labels are necessary to bring marginalized groups to the centre, they often work instead to confine such groups to the periphery and deny them agency. Oppressed peoples necessarily adapt to their oppressors for survival; however, not infrequently, subtle resistance to their condition flashes from behind their submission. A method for recognizing the agency of the oppressed, borrowed from studies of colonial discourse, is to locate the tensions in the text, the sites of resistance, the areas which contain double meaning and ambiguity. In these gaps the oppressed find agency and challenge the dominant ideology. A Restoration novel which represents several groups of oppressed peoples is Oroonoko; or the Royal Slave (1688) by Aphra Behn, a writer many critics are attempting to reinstate into the literary canon. The authority of the narrator, the hero and the colonial discourse become problematic because Behn undermines these traditional authorities by exposing their ineffectuality and fallibility. Through an analysis of these three sites of intentional resistance, this study suggests that Behn is voicing a subtle challenge to society's flawed system of beliefs. In this challenge to the master discourse, Behn locates the agency of the Other in the space of disruption: where Behn disrupts her narrator's "truth," she locates her own subjectivity; where Oroonoko's authority becomes ineffectual, unjustly oppressed groups are revealed; and, where the colonial discourse is disrupted by inexplicable native behaviour, the natives retain their autonomy.

INTRODUCTION

THE ACCOMMODATION OF THE OTHER

Aphra Behn's journey from popularity to obscurity is not related to the quality of her writing. I think she is one of the most gifted writers our culture has produced. And I want her back on the literary scene--centre-stage--where her work can be read, evaluated, debated, and can become part of our well-known literary heritage. (Spender, Mothers of the Novel 63)

Who is Aphra Behn? During the Restoration her many plays were among the most popular and successful on the stage. She also published several collections of poetry and a number of "novels" (her term, as what we now know as a novel was just emerging). Behn socialized in the same circles as Dryden, Rochester and the Restoration wits. And, indeed, she was one herself. Her comedies sparkle with vital humour, while her romance-style novels transport the reader into obstacle-filled adventures, and her tragic novel Oroonoko fills us with horror.

Behn has been lauded as not only the first professional English woman writer but also one of the first novelists. How is it, then, that we still don't know who she is? After an exciting life travelling, biographers generally agree, from England to Surinam to England to Holland and back to England, Behn settled down to support herself by her pen, Mr. Behn, if there ever was one, having died shortly after their marriage. After years of successful writing and her death in 1689, Behn plummeted into relative obscurity. This shift to obscurity, as Spender declares, is not related to her writing. Most feminist critics, like Spender, suggest that Behn's gender has kept her out of circulation (e.g. Goreau 13). They claim that many readers and critics resist/resisted Behn's work simply because she was a woman. With this claim in mind, the time has come for literary critics to cast their critical eyes on the literary canon. Why don't we read Aphra Behn?

One reason may be that she has been treated as a secondary writer by critics who don't appear to have read her works carefully. Harrison Steeves, in Before Jane Austen,

makes the following authoritative proclamation about Behn: "but even at their best, her novels are no more than tastelessly smart, and to the average reader of today they must seem limited and dull" (16). George Woodcock, who devotes an entire book to exploring Behn's fascinating life, undermines his subject greatly in the last several pages. "Her actual writings," he writes "pleasant readings as they make, are not so great that the world would have suffered catastrophically from their lack" (240). With such critics appraising Behn, no wonder we haven't paused to examine her work for ourselves.

Another reason we do not read Behn might be due to the fact that even the critics who claim to appreciate her talent often don't actually examine her work. Robert Chibka, one critic who does offer an interpretive analysis of Behn's Oroonoko, regrets that, although Behn is considered one of the first novelists, her work is not studied in depth: he declares that "being first provokes praise and pigeonholing, but rarely stimulates serious interest in technique; we care more *that* Orville and Wilbur flew than *how*. If priority has assured Behn a place in our literary histories, it has prompted little interpretive scrutiny" (510, his emphasis). Chibka's statement is sadly true. Robert Adams Day, for example, offers an insightful observation about Behn's Oroonoko. After mentioning this novel, he comments in parentheses upon its superior quality, as if in passing: "(which is entirely original for its time in its clashing levels of diction, setting, plot, description and narrative voice--the reader's expectations are constantly being aroused and defeated in the most surprising ways)" (373). That Day would relegate such an important statement not only to a modifying clause but to a parenthetical aside is almost comical, especially when his article concerns itself with a less literary and much more speculative subject of why Behn, as a woman, was able to write at all.

Like Day, many critics, in emphasizing only Behn's gender, inadvertently undermine her considerable artistry. This continual critical focus upon Behn's sex is

frustrating in its limitation. Dale Spender, who has done much to encourage the study of 'forgotten' women writers, never moves beyond a superficial and cursory discussion of the writer's actual work (Mothers of the Novel, Women of Ideas). It is not enough to look at Behn's writings simply because she is a woman, an anomaly in the world of male penmanship, for she is a fine writer as well. As Bonnie St. Andrews states in Forbidden Fruit,

The incessant speechifying about the superiority (always natural or ordained) of one genital system over an "other," as it were, reaches the point of diminishing returns. The question of good literature threatens to be obscured by secondary sexual characteristics. (There are--even in Academe--males who will not read literature by women; women who will not read literature by men do not, usually, find themselves long in Academe). (22)

Behn deserves to have her writing read and analyzed. That she is a woman is important when looking at her subject matter and perspective. That she is a good writer should secure her place in English literary tradition. I believe that her writing has failed to survive in the canon not necessarily because she is a woman but because she challenged and continues to challenge the existing beliefs of the dominant class.

One of Behn's best and most innovative works, written late in her career, is her novel Oroonoko; or the Royal Slave (1688). This novel subtly tosses out a challenge to the status quo that many readers have missed or chosen to bypass. By creating an unreliable narrator to tell the tale of a black prince who is tricked into slavery, Behn constructs an inconspicuous irony which rebounds in unexpected ways. Wayne Booth, in The Rhetoric of Fiction, discusses the ironic potential of this type of narrator:

All of the great uses of unreliable narration depend for their success on far more subtle effects than merely flattering the reader or making him [sic] work. Whenever an author conveys to his reader an unspoken point, he creates a sense of collusion against all those, whether in the story or out of it, who do not get that point. Irony is always thus in part a device for excluding as well as for including, and those who are included, those who happen to have the necessary information to grasp the irony, cannot but derive at least part of their pleasure from a sense that others are excluded. In the irony with which we are concerned,

the speaker is himself the butt of the ironic point. The author and reader are secretly in collusion, behind the speaker's back, agreeing upon the standard by which he is found wanting. (304)

Behn's narrator, by her naivité, inadvertently exposes many of the flaws in her society's beliefs; therefore, Behn, behind the scenes, encourages her reader to agree with this unspoken assessment. Confounding and intensifying this ironic structure is the fact that Behn's fallible narrator claims to be Aphra Behn herself.

Oroonoko not only has this supposedly autobiographical element, but it also appears similar to a tragic Romance. Behn's narrator tells the story of the African prince, Oroonoko, who falls in love and unites with a young woman named Imoinda. Unfortunately, Oroonoko's grandfather, the tyrannical king, oblivious to the young couple's union, decides to add Imoinda to his collection of wives. After Oroonoko sneaks into the King's harem to "ravish" Imoinda, the angry King sells her into slavery, telling Oroonoko he has killed her. Oroonoko, himself a slave trader, is tricked into slavery and transported to Surinam in the West Indies. Once there he is introduced to several colonists, the narrator of the tale being one of them, and reunited with Imoinda. However, all is not well as Oroonoko and Imoinda, both unjustly enslaved, yearn for freedom. Oroonoko incites the other slaves to rebel with him, and he is severely punished. He wishes to seek revenge and kills Imoinda, now pregnant, so she won't be left to the mercy of the colonists. Without having enacted his planned revenge, Oroonoko is captured and horrifically dismembered by the colonists. Behn modifies this Romantic storyline, however with the inclusion of much realism, a few truth-claims, and some digressions about the native Surinamians.

Through this mixture of literary genres and her amalgamation of cultural groups, Behn explores much new territory in this novel. She depicts three major cultures and their interrelation: the blacks from Coramantien, the Indians from Surinam and the

English colonists in Surinam. Significantly, within this context she purposefully portrays the oppressed peoples: women, slaves, and the colonized. Rita Felski, in her study Beyond Feminist Aesthetics, comments that

even the most subjective feminist writing ... appeals to a notion of communal identity which differs significantly from the literature of bourgeois individualism, combining an examination of individual experience with a dimension of solidarity and group identity through an acknowledgment of a shared experience of subordination. (78)

By writing herself as a fallible and gendered narrator who tells the story of a black slave she knew in an English colony, Behn explores her own subjectivity in relation to a community of other oppressed peoples.

Behn's portrayal of the oppressed is significant. Many critics, particularly feminists and Marxists, tend to slot oppressed peoples into the role of victim, into the position of Other opposing the Subject. While valid sometimes and in some contexts, this theoretical position may work to confine such groups to Otherness indefinitely. Through Behn's subtle irony, her narrator's contradictions, the confusing ambiguities and other textual tension, she displays for her readers the resistance of the oppressed groups to the status quo.

In Oroonoko, Behn questions and undermines traditional authority. In so doing she opens a space for the authority and agency of the Other, or the oppressed groups. First, I will explore the ideological theories which, while they are sometimes very true, generally undermine the critical powers of subjugated peoples and I will examine the response of the Other to the ideologies imposed upon them. By this analysis I will demonstrate that an active space for the Other does exist and has always existed. More specifically, through an analysis of Behn's textual accommodation to and modification of traditional authority, I will show that an active, but subtle, resistance of the Other to authority can exist within oppressive systems.

Much critical theory has tended/tends to devalue the active space, or agency, of the subjugated person; therefore, even those theorists concerned with social justice and social change, have often privileged the position of the dominant class to an unmerited extent. By labelling the oppressed "possessed tokens" (Daly 9), by suggesting we need to 'feminize' the world (French 545), and by asserting that subjugated people have certain essences that cannot be represented in Western discourse (Irigaray 231; Owens 59), many theorists inadvertently grant the oppressive dominant class and its tools of representation much greater powers than it deserves. In order to locate the position for the Others' agency, I will first look at how ideology can function to maintain the dominant class as such. While I don't believe that the dominant ideology is always internalized by all members of a society all of the time, I do not dispute the fact that it can and often does serve this purpose. But, more important, I will show that this same ideology can be analyzed for the space in which the oppressed classes resist the status quo. Many critics are right in claiming that the oppressed necessarily adapt to their oppressor for survival; however, these theorists tend to stop there. Other critics, like Patterson, Felski, and Nash and Sweet, suggest that this accommodation is by no means constant or believed by the oppressed individual: the oppressed demonstrate resistance to their condition in subtle ways. By locating this accommodational resistance we can start to uncover the agency, the activity, and the authority of the subjugated group.

Although the dominant ideology may not always be believed, it can work to help the ruling class maintain its power. In the legitimizing doctrine of domination, the oppressed necessarily has no agency. Certainly, to write is always a political act, intentionally or not. Whether objective history, scientific document, journal entry, fictive novel or letter, all texts are encoded in ideological apparatuses. As feminists, Marxists and others concerned with oppressed groups have recognized, texts legitimizing the rule of the

dominant class--presently and in Aphra Behn's day, those people who embody the powers of patriarchal imperialism-- are necessary to the maintenance of the status quo. Equally as important to the dominant class is the silencing and de-legitimizing of the oppressed groups. Blacks, the colonized, and women, for example, have traditionally been denied the education and the tools necessary for voicing their own viewpoint. Instead, they are presented and spoken for by the dominant group. In the view, the language, and the theory of the dominant ideology, the oppressed groups do not/cannot actively re-present themselves but stand by passively as they are represented by the "oppressors."

Writing requires authority, an intangible property of the dominant class. In Slavery and Social Death, Orlando Patterson explains that authority comes from tradition, and that it is gained, in part, by control over cultural symbols. These symbols,

both private and public, constitute a major instrument of power when used directly or indirectly. Herein lies the source of authority. Those who exercise power, if they are able to transform it into a 'right,' a norm, a usual part of the order of things, must first control (or at least be in a position to manipulate) appropriate symbolic symbols. They may do so by exploiting already existing symbols, or they may create new ones relevant to their needs. (37)

If a group has authority, it can easily legitimize its power, and Patterson emphasizes that "all power strives for authority" (35). Moreover, he declares that "the power relation has three facets." Besides the social facet of coercion and the psychological aspect of persuasion, the

third is the cultural facet of authority, "the means of transforming force into right, and obedience into duty" which, according to Jean Jacques Rousseau, the powerful find necessary "to ensure them continual mastership." Rousseau felt that the source of "legitimate powers" lay in those "conventions" which today we would call culture. (2)

Of course, the cultural codes and symbols used authoritatively to legitimize one's power need to be generally recognizable, especially by those one wishes to control (Bhabha, "Signs Taken for Wonders" 155). One gains authority over something, too, by having

"knowledge" of it. In Orientalism, Edward Said suggests that the study of "Orientalism" by Western cultures subjects Oriental countries to Western authority:

Knowledge means rising above immediacy, beyond self, into the foreign and distant. The object of such knowledge is inherently vulnerable to scrutiny; this object is a 'fact' which, if it develops, changes, or otherwise transforms itself in the way that civilizations frequently do, nevertheless is fundamentally, even ontologically stable. To have such knowledge of such a thing is to dominate it, to have authority over it. And authority here means for 'us' to deny autonomy to 'it'--the Oriental country--since we know it and it exists, in a sense, *as* we know it. (32)

While Said's statements can certainly be true, they are only true for Westerners and they neglect to consider the response of the Oriental country, or the Other, to this authoritative knowledge.

Undeniably, authority is the means employed by the powers-that-be to legitimize and maintain their control. Ironically, like an inescapable circle, these powers gain further authority from the encoded legitimizing tradition from which they derive their power. And these powers need to exert and re-encode this authority in order to maintain their power. Persons from outside the ruling class are not able to easily vest themselves with this traditional authority. Said claims that

there is nothing mysterious or natural about authority. It is formed, irradiated, disseminated; it is instrumental; it is persuasive; it has status, it establishes canons of taste and value; it is virtually indistinguishable from certain ideas it dignifies as true, and from traditions, perceptions, and judgements it forms, transmits, reproduces. Above all, authority can, indeed must, be analyzed. (19-20)

Authority, necessary to writing, seems to contain the message of the dominant ideology because it comes from the cultural traditions and symbols that help to maintain and propagate the beliefs of the ruling class. The beliefs and principles which make up the dominant ideology are reflected in the texts produced, authoritatively, by the proponents of this ideology. Along this line, Said comments that "such texts [authoritative ones] can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such

knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it" (94). Said feels that the dominant ideology is reflected and produced, without alteration, in the discourse of the powers it serves. This discourse can be labelled the master discourse as it functions to maintain the position of mastery, and no other discourses exist but it.

Often, in order to re-assert this masterful authority, a writer presumes to have objective subjectivity, or presumes to know Truth. In other words, the writer of a text is in the subject position writing about an object (subject/object). The writer declares her or himself, being subject, to have objective knowledge of his/her object, or the object of his/her text. The writer, subjecting the object of the text to his/her assumptions and biases, then is believed to hold the infallible authority of objective subjectivity. To further confound this perplexing array of oppositions which prove to be synonymous, when the dominant ideology wishes to de-legitimize the concerns of a subordinate group, it claims the group is subjective, this time meaning non-objective, emotional, or biased. This subordinate group's subjectivity does not mean they hold the subjective or authoritative position. On the contrary, this subjective label deprives them of legitimate claims to rationality, logic and, the consequence of these two qualities, authority.

While theorists, like Said, feel that the dominant ideology is reconstituted and reinforced over and over in the master discourse, theorists like Rita Felski point out the limitations of this view: "It fails to demonstrate the possibility that texts may to varying degrees transform or rework rather than simply replicate given ideological positions" (3-4). Similarly, Green and Kahn state that "in their creation of fictions, writers call upon the same signifying codes that pervade social interactions, re-presenting in fictions the rituals and symbols that make up social practice. ... Moreover, since each invocation of

a code is also its reinforcement or reinscription, literature does more than transmit ideology: it actually creates it" (4-5). Felski also notes that "there is a tendency to conceptualize ideology as an all-pervasive and unified phenomenon and to underestimate the critical understanding of and opposition to dominant ideologies which exists within subordinate groups" (64). In other words, while ideology may buoy up the master class, oppressed groups do not necessarily believe in the master ideology, nor do they reinscribe it unchanged.

The underestimation of the opposition of the Other to the dominant class is evident in many theoretical positions which emphasize how the oppressor needs to oppress others in order to completely define him(/her?)self. Simone de Beauvoir, writing specifically about women in The Second Sex, comments that "the subject can be posed only in being opposed--he sets himself up as the essential, as opposed to the Other, the inessential, the object" (xvii). Beauvoir explains that woman "is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other" (xvi). She also points out that "no group ever sets itself up as One without at once setting up the Other over against itself" (xvii). Likewise, Spender claims that "groups in power validate themselves by reference to those out of power--which they dismiss as *wrong*--and justify themselves in the process" (Women of Ideas 8, her emphasis).

Critics, like Beauvoir, who point out that these oppositions not only expand the Subject's view of himself but render the Other inactive, invisible, incapable are yet again ignoring the potential agency of the Other. Both Virginia Woolf and Luce Irigaray have employed metaphors which depict women as mirrors which reflect men. Woolf suggests that women are like looking glasses for men, reflecting them, "at twice [their] natural size" (Woolf 35). Similarly, Irigaray uses the image of a speculum, both the

gynecological tool and concave mirror, to show how women have been regarded, speculated about and gazed upon as object but never considered a subject position (144). While these suggestions that men use women as passive objects onto which they project themselves are certainly true, these metaphors also ignore the response of women relegated to this position of mirror. Beauvoir questions the privileged position of the first term in the interrelated oppositions man/woman, self/other, subject/object: "But the other consciousness, the other ego, sets up a reciprocal claim....How is it, then, that this reciprocity has not been recognized between the sexes, that one of the contrasting terms is set up as the sole essential, denying any relativity in regard to its correlative and defining the latter as pure otherness" (xvii-xviii).

Like Beauvoir, many feminists rightly suggest that the man-self-subject has often been privileged to such an extent in life and in theory that the Other becomes completely invisible. However, they too emphasize the Other's invisibility by concentrating only upon the Subject's action and behaviour. Countering this trend, Felski acknowledges that women often exist in oppressive conditions, yet she does not render them unrepresentable. She states that

theorizing a more dialectical interrelation between subject and structure avoids the twin pitfalls of determinism and voluntarism, allowing for the recognition that the female subject is necessarily constructed through a variety of structural determinants--psychological, ideological, social--without thereby simply reducing her to a passive reflection of male-defined schemata. (58)

With a theoretical viewpoint similar to Felski's, several critics suggest that the Other is not as passive as the Subject perceives or would like it to be. Laura Brown points out that often "the category of the 'other' privileges [the] position of power while minimizing the possibility of resistance" (45). In the same vein, Patterson rejects the passivity that this type of categorization forces upon oppressed groups. He states that "domination and its companion exploitation -- those two most potent weapons in the

logocracy of the left--focus upon the dominator or the exploiter as the active agent in the relationship and place upon the exploited the further burden of passivity" (335). David Sweet and Gary Nash in their comprehensive collection of essays, Struggle and Survival in Colonial America, help to quell this belief in the oppressed's passivity by explaining that many oppressed people do not rebel against the system openly but appear to accommodate it:

At first glance, accommodationist behaviour appears to be the reverse of struggle. It connotes a meek acceptance of the system, an abject judgement that resistance is futile. But this simplistic view of an important human strategy for survival does scant justice to people's creative adaptation to an exploitative but also an apparently indestructible colonial social order....Accommodation was as often as not a subtle form of defiance, a mask of servility hiding a defiant spirit, as in the 'puttin' on ole Massa' of North American slaves. (211)

Recognition of this accommodational resistance is an important step in locating the agency--or active space--of oppressed peoples who are often dismissed as being "contented with their lot." Unfortunately, as Mendelson notes, it is often difficult to understand the actions of the oppressed because of their apparent accommodation to the dominant system:

And like other insubordinate groups, women developed cultural characteristics that can render their actions difficult to interpret. They discovered indirect ways of circumventing official strictures on their independent activities, but generally found it prudent to conceal their strategies while paying lipservice to conventional ideals. (10-11)

Because of their seeming acceptance of the oppressive system, subjugated people's behaviour has often been interpreted too negatively. An example of an extreme form of accommodational behaviour can be found in Kate Millet's Sexual Politics. Millet illustrates the stunted but studied activity behind the "feminine" or oppressed role in her section about French playwright Jean Genet's life:

He [after being raped and "feminized" by his cellmates in prison] has now achieved the lowest status in the world as he saw it; a perfect opprobrium in being criminal, queer and female. It remained only to study and refine his role, thus wallowing in

self-hatred which both Sartre and Genet describe as the 'femininity' of the passive homosexual. He is feminine because ravished and subjugated by the male; therefore, he must study the slavish gestures of 'femininity' that he may better exalt his master. (24)

Furthermore, she connects the behaviour, both perceived and actual, of blacks and women:

common opinion associates the same traits with both: inferior intelligence, an instinctual or sexual gratification, an emotional nature both primitive and childlike, an imagined prowess in or affinity for sexuality, a contentment with their own lot which is in accord with a proof of its appropriateness, a wily habit of deceit, and concealment of feeling. Both groups are forced to the same accommodational tactics: an ingratiating or supplicatory manner invented to please, a tendency to study those points at which the dominant group are subject to influence or corruption, and an assumed air of helplessness involving fraudulent appeals for direction through a show of ignorance. (80)

Millet shows the ability of the oppressed to actively seek to make themselves in the image of their oppressors, that is, the image the oppressors project upon them. But this compliance with the dominant force does not mean that oppressed individuals are always accepting of their condition. Katharine MacKinnon, also acknowledging that women resist their conditions "with forms of power forged from powerlessness," (47) is quick to point out that, although women's and blacks' culture can be "an affirmative badge of pride,"

both remain nonetheless stigmatic in the sense of a brand, a restriction, a definition as less. This is not because of any intrinsic content or value, but because the social reality is that their shape, qualities, texture, imperative, and very existence are a response to powerlessness. They exist as they do because of lack of choice. They are created out of social conditions of oppression and exclusion. (153)

Coming from a perspective similar to MacKinnon's, Elaine Hobby in Virtue of

Necessity regards women's movements within their limited positions in a more positive

light. She feels that women have made a virtue of necessity, always dealing with their constraints as best as they can. Hobby writes:

Femininity, then, is not like a restraining garment forced onto the body of an unwilling or acquiescent victim, which entirely controls her movements until it is shrugged off when the 'real woman' inside it is set free. It is both more accurate and more productive to see patriarchal domination as a dynamic (that is, constantly changing and constantly challenged) process. ... Women find ways of coping with their oppression and ways of resisting it, but this capitulation or resistance is not free or self-determined: it can normally only occur within the limits and on the

terms of the framework set by the dominant group, men. (7)

Another critic, Laura Brown, looks at this possibility of resistance from the oppressed group and its relation to the dominant ideology even more positively:

we can read the literature of those in power not only for the massive and elaborate means by which power is exercised, but also as a source of leverage for those in opposition, that while sites of resistance may be produced within a dominant ideology, they are not produced by it, and they do not serve it. They are produced despite it. (61)

Hobby and MacKinnon recognize that resistance is produced within the system of oppression but, by doing so, they again almost credit the system which produces the resistance, thus undermining the very resistance. Brown stresses that while resistance occurs within a system of oppression, the resistance works to subvert that system, not simply to challenge it, as Hobby suggests.

Importantly, resistance exists because the oppressed do not accept their position in the hierarchy and often do not internalize the validity of the hierarchy at all. Although subordinated and degraded by the dominant class, the oppressed do not lose sight of dignity and of the desire for autonomy. Patterson explains:

There is absolutely no evidence from the long and dismal annals of slavery to suggest that any group of slaves ever internalized the conception of degradation held by their masters. To be dishonoured--and to sense, however acutely, such dishonour--is not to lose the quintessential human urge to participate and want a place. (97)

What Patterson rejects is the kind of internalization that Toril Moi discusses:

If, however, we accept with Freud that all human beings--even women--may internalize the standards of their oppressors, and that they may distressingly identify with their own persecutors, liberation can no longer be seen solely as the logical consequence of a rational exposure of the false beliefs on which patriarchal rule is based. (29)

Certainly this internalization may happen. Sweet and Nash explore this apparent acceptance of their position by the oppressed:

In attempting to understand why the subjects of our stories were more likely to try to adapt and survive than to challenge directly the power of their rulers, it has been helpful to keep in mind the concept of cultural hegemony, as developed by the Italian

Marxist Antonio Gramsci and employed since by social historians of the oppressed, such as E.P. Thompson and Eugene Genovese. Gramsci's compelling thesis was that ruling classes are able to obtain and maintain the consent of those subject to them because their rule gains legitimacy even in the eyes of the most dispossessed members of society. (6)

They note, however:

The closer we look at the behaviour of people not in power, the clearer it becomes that most subscribed to an upper-class male system of values only some of the time and for some purposes. They could not be relied on to sustain these values, and they were unlikely to allow them to get in the way of their elemental struggles to survive and create a satisfactory life for themselves. (7)

Therefore, while the oppressed often appear to internalize the legitimacy of the ruling class, we should recognize that they are often forced into this kind of accommodational role. They then refine and rehearse their part, precisely fitting the image that their master-director projects upon them. Whether oppressed peoples have believed their own acting is questionable. More likely, the oppressed have, as Sweet and Nash explain, determined how best to deal with their particular circumstances, to make a virtue of necessity, as Hobby would say.

If the oppressed, coerced by an overwhelmingly powerful system into accommodational tactics, are consistently delegitimized, how can they authoritatively recreate themselves? How can they express themselves in a system that has already spoken for them? How can they use the tools of representation that help to imprison them to set themselves free? To recall Millet's description of Jean Genet is fitting. Genet became the penultimate "feminized" homosexual, filled with self-destructive self-loathing. He did, however, find an authentic voice in writing successful plays. He located, even in his degradation, his own authority.

Like Genet, subjugated individuals can find and have found representation in a system which attempts to exclude them. Beauvoir searches for a way out for women when she says that "society, being codified by man, decrees that woman is inferior: she can do

away with this inferiority only by destroying the male's superiority" (717). Herein lies a method for oppressed peoples to represent themselves. If a subjugated group or individual seeks accurate subjectivity within a discourse that traditionally denies their subjectivity and if this group seeks to represent itself without creating an Other subjugated group, a mirror image, an inessential, it can deconstruct the images of itself that are always already there. The oppressed individual can reject the authoritative position of mastery which has objectified and kept her/him in the position of Other. The oppressed can attempt to expose the fallibility--to de-legitimize--the dominant ideology which has kept them subjected. In short, the oppressed can seek to modify the assumptions and preconceptions of the master discourse. However, this task is not so simple. As Dale Spender remarks, "openly questioning the way the world works and challenging the power of the powerful is not an activity customarily rewarded" (8). Indeed, to adopt the position of authoritative subject and then subvert it is probably more effective. To disrupt expectations and assumptions about authority is to expose the very instability of these seemingly stable facts and de-legitimize the master discourse.

This disruption is precisely what Aphra Behn has done in her novel Oroonoko. She adopts then subverts the authoritative position of objective subjectivity by writing herself as a fallible narrator who becomes a character in the action. By this unreliable narration, she creates a sustained structural irony in her novel. Since we only get "truth" from our narrator who proves fallible but not intentionally duplicitous we learn not to trust her beliefs. In her narrator, Behn has created a powerful vehicle for exposing many of society's flawed and unjust beliefs.

Furthermore, Behn emphasizes her challenge to the dominant ideology by literal destructions. She discredits her Self by creating herself as intentionally fallible, but she does not stop here. She undermines her hero, Oroonoko, by associating his

self-destructive tendencies with his ineffectual power throughout the novel.

Significantly, because Oroonoko is a traditional romance hero, he embodies all the male qualities that English colonial society tends to idealize. Behn exposes the negative elements in these ideals and flaunts her invalidation of them in a most horrifying way: she has the colonists literally destroy by dismemberment the heroic but flawed Oroonoko. The tragedy of Oroonoko includes, then, the failure of a society whose ideology the hero has internalized. Oroonoko can not accommodate to the system as a slave, because he believes in it only as a slave-trader. In addition, she forces us to question our assumptions about the relationship between the colonists and the colonized and disturbs our notions surrounding the colonized themselves by indicating that the authoritative figures in their culture actively seek to physically mutilate themselves.

In the following three chapters, I will show how Behn, in Oroonoko, subverts the position of authority and exposes the flaws in the dominant ideology. In Chapter One, I will illustrate the narrator's fallibility and show that, in her ironic manipulation of subjectivity, Behn locates a place for her own individual subjectivity, her own authority. In Chapter Two, I will show how Behn undermines Oroonoko's authority by exploring the ineffectuality of his power. His authoritative beliefs in the slave trade and class system and his inability to perceive the injustice of these beliefs lead to his horrible demise. However, by destroying Oroonoko, Behn effectively questions the fallible ideology that guided him. In Chapter Three, I will show that Behn's narrator speaks of Surinam and the natives with an imperialist-legitimizing tone. However, again, through the naive narrator's confusion and contradiction, Behn exposes and invalidates the assumptions and preconceptions that the European audience had about the New World. In upsetting the imperialist master discourse, Behn creates an Other that is not oppositional, only inexplicably different, and vests her native Surinamians with greater political and

personal autonomy--in other words, greater authority.

THE FALLIBLE AUTHORITY OF THE NARRATOR

To visit foreign countries is, he says, good and profitable; but not all persons are fit to travel: not women, nor feeble persons, nor the aged, nor those too young; but men of middle years who have a good foundation of the arts and sciences and are of 'so ripe discretion as they can distinguish between good and evil.'

(Samuel Chew 33-34)

In Oroonoko, Behn illustrates that women have no representation in the master discourse. They have no images they can use as tools to re-present their realities since all the images of women belong to the dominant patriarchal ideology. Women are always already the objects of objective subjects who render them invisible. But Aphra Behn also illustrates the space where women can represent themselves. To discover furtive subjectivity, Behn produces a female narrator who can tell the story of the royal slave. Unfortunately most critics have been unable to distinguish Behn the narrator from Behn the author, and this confusion has spawned a branch of criticism aimed at proving or disproving the Truth of her story. This confusion and its influence on subsequent criticism demonstrates the resistance which readers have had to both narrator and author. Behn disturbs a traditional reading of her text because she challenges traditional (objective) subjectivity by intentionally creating a fallible and gendered narrator, similar to the oppressed romantic heroine in the story of Oroonoko. Through this calculated undermining of the subject's authority, Behn finds a place for her own subjectivity.

The relatively small body of criticism on Behn's Oroonoko consists of much misunderstanding of this unique work. One area of criticism has focused intently upon Behn's narrator's truth-claims. Understandably confusing the narrator with Behn herself, Ernest Bernbaum was one of the first to accuse Behn of lying, claiming that she could never have been in Surinam, where the story of Oroonoko unfolds. While Bernbaum

explains that Defoe and similarly realistic writers did not stray far from fact or probability, he says "no such bounds confined the romantic, sensational, and hero-worshipping Mrs. Behn" (433). Significantly, in trying to undermine her credibility, Bernbaum occasionally allows that Behn had "artistic power" (421). In response to his argument, several critics, like J. A. Ramsaran and Wylie Sypher, document authoritative facts which help to defend Behn's supposed truth.

Taking a slightly different approach, Roland Hill supports the fact that Behn had travelled to places like Surinam but emphasizes the factual inaccuracies of her novel. He claims that Behn added her (inaccurate) realistic settings to contribute to the probability of her narrative; however, he points out in her defence that "in all fairness we must note that the settings of Oroonoko are, for the most part, mere background and are not used to influence directly either character or action" (201-02). Hill's own misunderstanding is blatantly clear: how can a black Prince be deviously captured and transported to some other land, where, significantly, there also exist other "foreign" peoples, and be forced into slavery with other blacks without the "mere background" being somehow significant? From Oroonoko's inability to enter the forbidden Otan, a harem in Africa, to the Captain's ship which transports him to the New World, to St. John's Hill house situated on high white marble cliffs, the "background" of Oroonoko certainly does control and influence both characters and action.

Likewise underestimating Behn in The History of the Novel, Ernest A. Baker not only grants her "a mediocre allowance of talent" (79) but minimizes her contribution to the novel genre as such:

Mrs. Behn was no realist, but one brought up in the school of romance and unable to take any but a romantic view of life, who felt the need, however, of breaking away from the unreality of the romances. She imagined this was to be done merely by seasoning her narratives with facts, real or spurious, with familiar names and places, and the like. (99)

By reducing Behn to a bumbling romance writer who peppers us with realism, Baker clouds what contributions Behn did make to the novel genre and ignores the genuine artistry of Oroonoko.

Commentary preoccupied with whether Behn actually travelled to Surinam displaces productive literary analysis of Oroonoko. Adelaide Amore comments on the numerous articles which focus upon Behn's truths: "Within the critical discussions of Mrs. Behn (who seems especially the victim of Bernbaum's invective), personal criticism directed at discrediting the author on some basis other than a literary one forms a major portion of the response to her work" (xviii). She points out that "the truthfulness issue has become a substitute for a discussion of the author's effectiveness as storyteller, and, more importantly, the literary value of the work" (xx). George Guffey concurs with this point when he suggests that "the continuing effect of this critical emphasis has been to keep us away from Mrs. Behn's novel itself" (8). Robert Chibka, however, regards this criticism in a slightly more positive light: "That Behn's veracity seems to so many to matter so much perversely testifies to her excellence in some aspects of 'realism'" (512).

Certainly several biographers, such as Angeline Goreau, Maureen Duffy and George Woodcock, have generally agreed that Behn did go to Surinam but this "proof" does not need to play a very large part in the discussion of Behn's novel. If we wish to analyze whether Behn, as a writer, depended primarily on personal experience, then confirmation of her travels to Surinam becomes important. If we are interested in piecing together the historical elements in her novel, and she does mention historical figures, then we need to expend some time confirming her experience. But if we are primarily interested in analyzing her work as a literary piece of art, then what matters is what she has created, how she created it, and why she created it that way.

Why, then, did she create this intrusive narrator, inviting us to believe that this

naive story-teller is indeed Aphra Behn the playwright? The narrators she creates for her other fictions are often given a small amount of character but do not take part in the action: in "The Fair Jilt" for example the narrator begins the fiction by a tirade against fashionable fops who cannot love, establishing a personality for herself before leaping into the story; the narrator in "The Wandering Beauty" relates the story heard when she was twelve from a lady "who was particularly concern'd in many of the Passages" (Summers 5:447); in other tales like "The Adventure of the Black Lady" the narrator is barely visible. In Oroonoko, however, the narrator does not merely relate the story from the sidelines but is actually an important participant in the action.

The narrator's participation is not as problematic as her attitudes. Critics who have analyzed the narrator of Oroonoko have come to differing conclusions about this character. Martine Watson Brownley regards the narrator as the only "ordinary" character in the novel (176). She states:

Oroonoko's importance in early English prose fiction has long been established, and as George Guffey points out, the 'particularly well-defined narrator' is one important element which distinguishes the work from other fiction of the time. Functioning as a strongly felt presence throughout Oroonoko, the narrator unifies the novel, enhances the tenuous realism of the basically heroic story, and offers a viable standard of judgement for the readers. (174)

Hardly ordinary or remarkable for her "judgement" is the intrusive female who entertains Oroonoko by telling biblical stories one moment and, for a lark, rows up the river to venture into a potentially hostile native village the next. Chibka, on the other hand, rightly sees the narrator-author as a manipulative force in a context of truths and falsehoods. While Chibka certainly understands the layers of deceit in Oroonoko, he does not recognize that Behn creates in her narrator a vehicle for sustained structural irony: Behn creates herself not simply as an intrusive narrator but one that is fallible.

That Behn is a particularly intrusive narrator is quickly evident. She claims to be

"an Eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down; and what I cou'd not be Witness of, I receiv'd from the Mouth of the chief Actor in this History" (1).¹ There are also many small intrusions like the first person plural pronoun in the following sentence: "Oroonoko was first seiz'd on, and sold to our Overseer" (37). She consistently and constantly draws the narrative back toward herself. When discussing how Oroonoko says good-bye to Imoinda before killing her, Behn asserts her narrative position yet again:

It being thus, you may believe the Deed was soon resolved on; and 'tis not to be doubted, but the parting, the eternal leave-taking of two such Lovers, so greatly born, so sensible, so beautiful, so young, and so fond, must be very moving, as the Relation of it was to me afterwards. (72)

The narrator's intrusion here almost undercuts the tragedy of the scene as it interrupts the lover's farewell and Oroonoko's slaying and decapitation of his pregnant wife.

From these areas of seemingly innocuous intrusions, the narrator's fallibility naturally emerges. Her unreliability is evident in areas of tension and textual resistance. For example, after discussing Oroonoko's appearance and noble character, she says "I have often seen and conversed with this Great Man, and been a Witness to many of his mighty Actions." However, she begins the very next paragraph with a seemingly contradictory statement: "This great and just Character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme Curiosity to see him" (7). The reader resists comprehension momentarily: the narrator first claims to have often seen Oroonoko, then states that she has a curiosity to see him. Of course, the first is a statement of reflection, looking back from her present position as narrator, while the second sentence expresses her emotion at the time. The initial textual ambiguity however causes us to question the narrator's story-telling ability.

Moreover, the narrator herself suggests her fallibility. While relating the happy moment of Oroonoko and Imoinda's original union, she explains that "there is a certain Ceremony in these cases to be observ'd, which I forgot to ask how 'twas perform'd" (11).

Although through much of the novel she is an omnipresent voice, relaying with authority information she could not possibly know, here she forgets a detail and, most significantly, calls attention to her lapse. This forgetfulness happens again after Oroonoko and Imoinda are reunited. The narrator suddenly recalls, "I had forgot to tell you, that those who are nobly born of that Country, are so delicately cut and raised all over the Fore-part of the Trunk of their Bodies" (45). If she could forget one ceremony, one description, she may forget others: the reader questions her again. How interesting it is that both of these instances of forgetfulness occur with the two ceremonial unions of the lovers.

Another textual tension occurs when the narrator lets us know that she is editing the material she is presenting to us. She begins by explaining that she will "omit, for brevity's sake, a thousand little Accidents of his [Oroonoko's] life" (1). Later in the story, however, our narrator relates the story about the foreign natives inviting colonists to forage for gold in their country. Immediately following this specific story, the narrator apologizes: "Though this Digression is a little from my Story, however, since it contains some Proofs of the Curiosity and Daring of this great Man [Oroonoko], I was content to omit nothing of his Character" (59). The reader resists this apology for two reasons. First, this small relation of the encounter with the strange Indians contained no mention of Oroonoko. Her apology, on second look, refers to the larger excursion to the Indian village which Oroonoko had suggested; but, again, we stumble momentarily over the text. Second, not only does this excerpt about the foreign natives have no direct bearing on Oroonoko, but she seems to contradict her earlier statement about omitting details, even if she was only referring to the details of his early African life. She does assert the fact that she is capable of omission, leaving the reader wondering what else isn't in the text.

Her reliability as a source for the story is problematic as well. The first half of the tale takes place in African Coramantien, where Behn has never claimed to be. She is

relating what Oroonoko has told her about his life and situation; this information, as we have seen, is edited for presentation to the reader (1). However, she admits that she sought confirmation for his story from Oroonoko's French tutor (44). She also compiles information from Trefry as she relates that, after Imoinda and Oroonoko had reunited, Trefry came to her "to give me an account of what had hapned" (44). As well, for many of the major incidents of the story our brave narrator was notably absent and we must therefore assume that she is telling the story as others have told it to her. At crucial moments she is rarely there, yet she is always present in narration.

The fact that our narrator is often absent from the important action strongly suggests that her fallibility is inseparable from her gender: she is very significantly female. She writes that Oroonoko's "Misfortune was to fall in an obscure World, that afforded only a Female Pen to celebrate his Fame" (40), for the first time parading her gender on the stage of the novel. She doesn't fully introduce herself to the reader as a character until more than half way through the novel when Oroonoko seeks diversion at St. John's Hill. She teaches Imoinda "pretty Works" and explains that Oroonoko preferred the company of the women (46). She also lets us know that Oroonoko calls her his "*Great Mistress*" (46). Several pages later she fills us in on the details of her character: she is the daughter of the man who would have been Lieutenant-General of Surinam and thirty-six islands, if he hadn't died on the voyage over. She and her remaining family will be continuing on their voyage since the reason they came to Surinam is no longer valid -- "we did not intend to stay upon the Place" (48). She further displays her gendered fallibility when the mother "tyger" approaches Oroonoko and the entertainment-seeking group in the jungle: "However, we Women fled as fast as we could from it" (50). As well, when Oroonoko is revived at St. John's Hill after killing Imoinda, our young narrator explains away her later absence: "the earthly Smell about him so strong, that I was

persuaded to leave the place for some time, (being myself but sickly, and very apt to fall into Fits of dangerous Illness upon any extraordinary Melancholy)" (76). So, not only is the unreliable narrator absent from much of the action but she is absent and ineffectual because of her gender.

Our fallible narrator swells with a vision of herself which is undermined by the text and our expectations. For example, she explains that "as soon as I came into the Country, the best House in it was presented me, call'd St. John's Hill" (49). On page fifty-four, she mentions that she has a brother and, on page seventy-seven, she comments on her mother's and sister's inaction. She therefore has at least three relatives with her, yet she significantly uses the pronoun "I" when explaining that St. John's Hill was their residence. She apparently considers herself the new head of the family unit, although we can readily assume that the colonists would confer this power upon either her mother or brother. Her unrealistic attitude about her own authority manifests itself again while she is discussing Oroonoko's newly-discovered dangerousness: "This apprehension made all the Females of us fly down the river, to be secured; and while we were away, they acted this Cruelty; for I suppose I had Authority and Interest enough there, had I suspected any such thing, to have prevented it" (68). Not only is she demonstrating that again, because of her sex, she missed being an eye-witness to important action, but she mistakenly thinks that, because of her father's rank, she would have had the authority to protect Oroonoko. Brownley addresses this notion of the narrator's sway in the colony:

Since the narrator's position in the colony is derived from the importance of the post that her father was to have held, it would seem logical that all his relatives would command the same kind of respect. Undoubtedly the narrator would have found herself as powerless to halt the execution as her mother and sister were. (179)

Brownley neglects to comment on the fact that the narrator still thinks she has the power, authority and ability to put a stop to Oroonoko's torture. That she doesn't stop the

colonists' treatment of Oroonoko undercuts her attitude towards herself with a dramatic irony. We can see that she is considered a female in need of protection and rushed out of the territory the moment crisis strikes. The irony lies in her own inability to perceive her actual position in the colony, so that she writes herself larger than life. Spencer confirms the narrator's self-deception in this regard:

Like Oroonoko, who is given the outward respect due to a prince but kept from real power, the narrator is under the illusion that she has high status in the colony; but when it comes to a crisis the men are the real rulers, and being the daughter of a man who would have governed Surinam if he had lived does not help her. (50)

Behn as the author undermines the character of the narrator by exposing the unrealistic view she has of herself, as a woman in Surinam.

Behn self-destructively writes herself as a fallible female narrator who surprisingly bears a striking similarity to the most victimized character in the novel, Oroonoko's wife Imoinda. Jane Spencer has stressed the difference between the narrator and Imoinda:

The marginality of the narrator's position is very important to Behn for another reason. It enables her to create her self-image as a writer, free from some of the restrictions on behaviour and feeling which operate on women as represented in the narrative. The contrast between the heroine, Imoinda, and the woman who writes her story is instructive. (51)

Significantly, however, the comparison of the two characters tells much more than the contrast. Spencer, like many other critics, does not distinguish between the real author of Oroonoko and the created narrator of the story. Indeed, Aphra Behn as writer has transcended the position of a woman in her society and in her narrative by picking up the pen but, as we have seen, the character of the narrator is not free from the restrictions imposed on women. That is why she has much more in common with Imoinda than may first be apparent. To start with, both Imoinda and the narrator are introduced to us shortly after the death of their fathers. In addition, we only really meet both women in

connection with Oroonoko: we meet Imoinda when Oroonoko presents slaves to her after her father's death, while the narrator introduces herself to us as a character when Oroonoko seeks diversion at St. John's Hill. That the narrator engages in pastimes unusual for a lady of her position is undeniable: with Oroonoko, she goes hunting "tyger"s in the jungle and ventures into a native village. But the pregnant Imoinda is always a silent presence on these adventures as well, "a sharer in all our Adventures" (58). Indeed, Imoinda emerges as the braver character of the two as she picks up a bow and arrow in the slave revolt and succeeds in wounding the Governor (64-65). While Imoinda is fighting, our brave narrator is safely spirited away downstream (68).

The most significant point of similarity between the two women lies in their social obligations. Looking at the oppressed, enslaved and silent Imoinda first, we see that her social obligations to entertain or support men signify powerlessness to a greater extent than the narrator's. For example, the King of Coramantien when deciding that he would send Imoinda the Veil of Invitation even though she loves Oroonoko, rationalizes his decision by claiming "that the Obedience the People pay their King, was not at all inferiour to what they paid their Gods; and what Love wou'd not oblige Imoinda to do, Duty wou'd compel her to" (12). Indeed, Imoinda, while cowering and weeping before the King, comments how proud she is "having it in her power to oblige her King" (13), although we know that it is "death to disobey" (12). The King installs Imoinda in the Otan where she entertains him and any visitors.

Imoinda's Old World obligations are carried over into the New World. For example, the narrator explains that the slave-women, including Imoinda, waited for the slave-men at a designated place for the revolt: "The Wives, who pay an entire Obedience to their Husbands, obey'd, and stay'd for 'em where they were appointed" (63). And later the narrator approvingly explains why Imoinda so happily agreed to be killed by Oroonoko:

"For Wives have a respect for their Husbands equal to what any other People pay a Deity; and when a Man finds any occasion to quit his Wife, if he love her, she dies by his hand; if not, he sells her, or suffers some other to kill her" (72). These statements by the narrator may be compared with an earlier statement by Oroonoko to the slave-men: "But if there were a Woman among them so degenerate from Love and Vertue, to chuse Slavery before the pursuit of her Husband, and with the hazard of her Life, to share with him in his Fortunes; that such a one ought to be abandoned, and left as a Prey to the common Enemy" (62). What is the difference, Behn invites us to wonder, between slavery and a relationship with a man who, like a Deity or a King, commands obedience and who has the power to sell or kill the woman he commandeers? Imoinda realizes while complying with the King's wishes -- "it being in vain to resist" (13)-- that accommodating obligations is necessary for survival.

Although she appears to move in a world much less constrained than Imoinda's, the narrator bears the weight of similar social obligations. In very subtle ways the narrator lets us know that she functions within constraints. She explains, for example, that slave-holders change slaves' names, adding, "for the future therefore I must call *Oroonoko* *Cæsar*; since by that Name only he was known in our Western World" (40). As a young woman who believes she has much authority in Surinam, the narrator feels obliged to call Oroonoko by his Western name. Significantly she doesn't feel that she must call Imoinda by her Western name, Clemene. Something or someone has particularly obliged her in the first instance and not in the latter. Moreover, the narrator relates that "I was obliged, by some Persons who fear'd a Mutiny (which is very fatal sometimes in those Colonies that abound so with Slaves, that they exceed the Whites in vast numbers) to discourse with Cæsar, and to give him all the satisfaction I possibly could" (46). Our narrator does not think it necessary to tell us who has obliged her to entertain Cæsar. Again, the narrator is

entreated to watch after and entertain Oroonoko:

After this, I neither thought it convenient to trust him much out of our view, nor did the Country, who fear'd him; but with one accord it was advis'd to treat him fairly, and oblige him to remain within such a compass, and that he should be permitted, as seldom as could be, to go up to the Plantations of the Negroes; or, if he did, to be accompany'd by some that should be rather in appearance Attendants than Spies. (48)

After this subtle confession that she acted as a spy for some unidentified person or persons, the narrator finally introduces herself as a character and proceeds to tell us of all the diversions she sought with Oroonoko and Imoinda. No wonder she lapsed into a melancholy fit of illness when she discovered that Oroonoko had killed his beloved wife! She is almost as guilty as the terrible Byam. Although her social obligations are not as confining and life-threatening as Imoinda's, Oroonoko's narrator finds herself in situations where she must both entertain and spy on Oroonoko.

This comparison between the narrator and Imoinda not only undermines the narrator who believes that she has authority and power in the colony of Surinam but, on a much larger scale, illustrates with intense clarity the fictive nature of this novel. In other words, regardless of the fallible narrator's truth-claims, Oroonoko is not primarily an autobiographical history of a real royal slave. It is first and foremost a creative and artistic work of fiction.

Behn invests her position as author of the fictive text with greater authority by undermining the narrator who claims to be telling the truth. Robert Chibka recognizes Behn's grasp on creating convincing fiction when he points out that for the characters in and the author of Oroonoko "to convince others [characters and readers] that one's fictions are fact is the most powerful" position and, significantly, "the most morally indefensible" (519). Likewise emphasizing the fictive element, Lennard Davis claims that "from the prestructure, to the presentation, through the content and even the digressions of

Oroonoko, fiction-making and lying are central to the work. Fabrications build up into frames within frames doubling back upon themselves until every turn reveals fact warped into fiction which turns back upon itself to become fact" (110). That truth and falsehood are so important in Oroonoko is also borne out by the already discussed body of criticism on Behn's "lying," if only because those critics could not or refused to see Behn's irony. Because Behn has taken great care to form for us a gendered and fallible narrator who swears that she is telling the truth when the reader can see that she often is not, Behn's creative ability is more firmly entrenched within the boundaries of the novel. She creates a world where authority is not to be trusted, where those in power have no honour, and places herself at the helm of this world by "documenting" it. But as I have already suggested, Behn does not limit her narrator to reporting facts. "Indeed," says William Spengemann, "the narrator does not even take care to report only those things that Oroonoko, her supposed source of information, could have seen at the time or learned about subsequently" (393). Instead, Behn has our narrator add much flourish and embellishment to her "true" story.

In a number of instances, Behn uses many ironic and humorous twists to exaggerate her fallibility as narrator in Oroonoko. For example, the one extended description she gives of herself borders on the absurd. When the white folks decide to visit an Indian village and surprise the naked natives of the steaming hot South American continent, Behn describes her brother and herself as follows: "we appear'd extremely fine: my own Hair was cut short, and I had a taffety Cap, with black Feathers on my Head" (55). Not only does the image of short hair and a cap seem odd and boyish, but the taffety itself is slightly ambiguous. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, taffety, besides being a fancy dress cloth more suitable for gala events than jungle forays, could also symbolize being overdressed to a Restoration reader. Suddenly, we can see this pompous young European

standing in an Indian village, decked out in all sorts and layers of European finery, sweltering under the humid sun, while the relatively uninhibited natives lift petticoat after petticoat, laughing at it all.

Her talent for manufacturing subtle irony helps to confirm Behn's authority as a creative writer. Not recognizing this irony, Martine Watson Brownley says of Behn:

She fails entirely to exploit the ironic potential in such situations as Oroonoko's inciting the men he himself enslaved to rebel against their masters. Nevertheless, the narrator exposes through Oroonoko the mistreatment of slaves, and his speeches are a powerful condemnation of the entire system. (177)

Behn does not exploit anything. She lays the groundwork for the readers to make their own ironic connections, as Brownley has done, thus allowing herself greater manipulative powers. We can see this subtle irony at work when the narrator is explaining how slaves were divided up into lots for sale. She relates that in each lot there would often be only "three or four Men, the rest Women and Children. Or be there more or less of either Sex, you are obliged to be contented with your Lot" (5). The pun on the phrase "to be contented with your Lot" is surely a comment not only on the luck of the receivers of the lot, but on the bad luck of the blacks who wound up enslaved. And almost certainly she is mocking the unequal assessments of the worth of each sex.

Another important qualification needs to be made about Brownley's statement: the narrator does not intentionally expose the mistreatment of slaves. She is a fallible character who believes that she is simply telling her tale. Behn the artist, on the other hand, using the narrator as a vehicle, exposes many ideological incongruities, inconsistencies, and raw edges that the narrator does not directly offer an opinion on. For example, when the narrator relates how the Captain captured Oroonoko, she writes: "Some have commended this Act, as brave in the Captain; but I will spare my sense of it, and leave it to my Reader to judge as he pleases" (33). Of course, we can read between the

lines here and realize that the author's sense of the Captain's actions counters those who commend him, even if the narrator's sense is unspoken. When the narrator does directly offer her opinion, we should not trust it.

Behn challenges ideas of traditional subjectivity, the authoritative and objective position of a writer, by undermining the authority of her subject, or her narrator who is her Self. Throughout literature women are most often placed in the object position, written about, questioned, analyzed, denigrated and idealized by authoritative and objective (male) subjects. Before Aphra Behn, few women picked up the pen to write in the first place, much less attempted self-representation. A comment from Toril Moi may shed some light on the inhibiting structures that Behn had to manoeuvre around to locate her own subjectivity: "Since creativity is defined as male, it follows that the dominant literary images of femininity are male fantasies too. Women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness, and instead must seek to conform to the patriarchal standards imposed on them" (57).

Significantly, many critics looking at Behn's images of the "feminine" have been disappointed by her portrayal of women: MacCarthy when discussing whether Behn could be the author of the satirical work The Ten Pleasures says that "it would be difficult to exhaust the quotations from Aphra Behn's works which reveal her cynical attitude to women" (195) and Rogers claims that Behn's works "do not show any particular feminine insight" (Feminism in Eighteenth Century England 101). MacCarthy would be more accurate to state that Behn reveals a cynical attitude, which is not necessarily her own. Likewise, Rogers is searching for "feminine" insight without explicating what it is or how it is to be judged. On the other hand, Elaine Hobby seeks out the ways Behn's women have moved within the constraints imposed upon them by the external world:

Aphra Behn's stories map out a world of female possibilities and limits: a bleak

world since the options open to her heroines are shown to be few indeed. It is rescued from despair only by the sparkling courage and daring of her women protagonists, who with great determination negotiate their way through a universe where men have all the power. (96)

This statement holds true for Oroonoko because the narrator, as oppressed and naive as she is, still manages to pick up the pen to write Oroonoko's story.

In Oroonoko, Behn reverses the traditional male/subject-female/object opposition and writes herself as the subject writing Oroonoko the object. But simply placing herself in the subject position to create a wonderfully heroic royal black slave would not truly re-present the reality that Behn seeks to re-create. Indeed, Behn does more than simply depict women in a positive light (if that's what MacCarthy wants) or locate some type of "feminine" ideology (or whatever Rogers looks for). Instead she finds the space in her text where women exist by delineating where they don't. Jane Spencer explains that "as events unfold we realize that her gender is an important part of her authority: what she knows, and the comments she is able to make, depend on it. The female pen is vindicated" (48). Spencer has it backwards. The narrator's gender is an important part of her decided lack of authority. What she relates, reports, and documents without having first hand knowledge is the actual story: she was only party to two of the "diversions" and to Oroonoko's captivity at St. John's Hill. The narrator's fallibility rests on her gender and her resulting absence from much of the action. At the same time, however, she knows the story because Oroonoko was isolated with the women to keep him from causing trouble.

Traditionally, because women have rarely existed as subjects writing texts, one who does must be fallible, slippery, lying and inaccurate. Behn's narrator, subjecting Oroonoko's life to her editing, embellishments and omission inadvertently illustrates and exposes the biases of traditional subjectivity. Perhaps this challenge of Behn's to the status quo explains the critics' inability to accept not only the distinction between Behn and her narrator, but her intentional fallibility. Their focus on her facts helps them to

avoid confronting the very disruptiveness of Oroonoko. These critics resist the fact that, if the narrator lies, and we only get the story through the narrator, then the entire framework of subjectivity and objectivity --what the master discourse labels truth-- crumbles.

Men-subjects writing true histories are generally perceived to be writing reality. Behn carries no such delusions. She exposes the subjective unreliability of the "I" and, in so doing, does indeed vindicate the female pen. She self-destructs or deconstructs her Self: her narrator is both the subject, being Behn, and the object produced by Behn. The more fallible her narrator-subject becomes, the more artistry Behn employs. The more artistry Behn employs, the more she fills the subject position. The more she fills the subject position through her resistance to traditional subjectivity, the more she effectively locates and re-presents the active place for women within the master discourse.

II

THE INEFFECTUAL AUTHORITY OF THE BLACK PRINCE

That empire and power which he had pursued through the whole course of his life with so much hazard, he did at last with much difficulty compass, but reaped no other fruits from it than the empty name and invidious glory.

(Plutarch's "Julius Cæsar" 580)

By producing a fallible narrator to tell the story of Oroonoko, Aphra Behn creates a structural irony for her novel. Through the naive narrator's disclosures and the subsequent contradictions and ambiguities, Behn questions the authority of the master discourse which the narrator represents. Specifically, because the narrator lauds and celebrates Oroonoko, a character who proves so fallible himself, Behn exposes the weaknesses in the dominant ideology which would fail to recognize this fallibility. Because most critics have not acknowledged that the narrator is unreliable, they have taken Oroonoko at face value, wrongly interpreting him as simply the ultimate Romance Hero transplanted into a realistic setting. Instead, Oroonoko is a more tragic hero who reflects the imperfect practices of the dominant ideology which Behn wishes to expose and collapse. Behn creates her hero not only by showing his self-destructive tendencies but also by emphasizing that the narrator hears the tale primarily from him and perpetuates his version of himself. As well, Behn undermines both Oroonoko's heroic qualities and her narrator's heroic biases by having the black Prince described in a very Eurocentric way and by countering his esteemed honour with implications that he does not behave honourably. Ultimately, through Oroonoko's trust in the systems of class and slavery which trap and kill him, Behn questions the tragic fallibility of these systems.

Most critics of Oroonoko have focused their attention on the young black Prince tricked into slavery. Because the narrator immerses him in the discourse of Romance, they understandably tend to approach him as a king-like Hero. Laura Brown, for instance, feels he is "the superhuman epic protagonist" common in much literature (48) and

Adelaide Amore contends that "in contrast to his African and European oppressors, Oroonoko emerges as an heroic figure" (xv). Comparing Oroonoko with King James II, George Guffey thinks that

Behn makes a strong argument for the absolute power of legitimate kings and that, through a series of parallels between James and the mistreated royal slave Oroonoko, she attempts to gain the sympathy of her reader for James, who, at the time of publication of the book, was in great danger of imminent deposition or worse. (16)

Likewise, Maureen Duffy in her biography of Behn offers this unsubstantiated parallel:

Emotionally Orinooko [sic], Imoinda and their unborn child are James, Mary and the unborn, while she was writing it, Prince. Trefry, Martin and her family are the loyalists; Byam and Banister and their rabble are the opposition. *I don't think she was aware of this herself but it's undoubtably so* Even Orinooko's 'blackness' was a characteristic of the Stuarts. She was preparing herself for tragedy, *even though she didn't know it*, and for the heroic deaths of the royal family. (267, my italics)

Duffy neglects to explain specifically how she arrives at these "undoubtable" conclusions.

She also fails to give Behn much credit for having command over her art.

This enthusiasm for royalty causes some critics to conclude that Behn was not writing against slavery in Oroonoko. For example, Peter Hulme, also assuming Oroonoko's heroic nature, says that this novel

would seem to use the difference of the protagonist as a mark of nobility to stand in contrast to the unscrupulous lack of honour of the English traders: the politics here would again seem basically domestic, particularly if Oroonoko himself can, as has been suggested, be read as the betrayed Charles II, his kingdom turned over to the Dutch, as Surinam had been in 1667. There is clearly no condemnation of the slave trade as such and Oroonoko, far from being a representative African, is distinguished in every possible way from his fellow-countrymen, even in his physical appearance. (240)

Guffey agrees that Behn does not take an abolitionist stance in her novel. He feels that "the slavery of her black hero is to be deplored primarily because he is a prince" (22).

Rogers in "Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," too, argues that Behn does not necessarily take a position opposing slavery in this novel.

Even more prevalent than the royalist approach to Oroonoko is the belief that he is a

Rousseau-style noble savage or naturally virtuous man. For example, Adelaide Amore claims that

Oroonoko represents that natural man in that he is uncontaminated by the excesses or conflicts of the Restoration, either on political, social or moral grounds. He is, in many ways, a new symbol for the noble state of man untainted -- the kind of man Rousseau would see later as the natural embodiment of true virtue and goodness. In this way Oroonoko's openness and innocent acceptance of ideas is seen as a preferable state of being. (xxxvii)

She also regards Coramantien, where he is born, as "an older, more natural world"

(xxxiv). Rogers maintains this "natural" theme by labelling Oroonoko a natural king

("Fact and Fiction in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko" 9). Along the same lines, Chibka connects the artless world of Surinam with Oroonoko's artless nobility:

This landscape [of Surinam] combines beauty and utility as Oroonoko joins nobility of mind with heroic action. As it joins nature and art, he combines the antirealist traits of a romance hero with the insistence that his story is true. As he supersedes sophisticated Europeans by embodying virtues they merely profess, the citrus grove outdoes the civilized artifice of Italian gardens. (518)

Jerry Beasley not only claims that Oroonoko is "an isolated man infinitely superior in every respect to those who murder him" but, having been taught the fine principles of Western civilization by his French tutor, is the only man "able to sustain these principles intact" (221). Likewise, Angeline Goreau suggests that

Oroonoko, for Aphra, embodies an ideal of honour and truth now lost in the corruption of her own society. Though a slave, he repeatedly proves himself more noble than his white owners. It is, in fact, his savagery that saves him from what Aphra sees as the moral degeneracy of European society. In every instance of the adventures Aphra says she lived through with the slave, his essential superiority is confirmed. (59)

There are still more tributes to Oroonoko's natural superiority: Spengemann feels "Oroonoko personifies the ideals of cosmic order, social harmony, and individual nobility" (402). Brownley describes Oroonoko's world of Coramantien as "paradisiacal" and an "Edenic fantasy" (176) but she doesn't explain why. Furthermore, Brownley suggests that "the heroic style sets [Oroonoko] apart within the narrative just as his ideal love,

truth, and honour separate him from the ordinary standards of those around him" (175). She goes on: "Oroonoko himself provides the noblest example of human excellencies in the novel, but he is ideal rather than real" (177). And finally, even Ramsaran's fact-filled essay supporting Behn's facts about Surinam expresses the notion that Behn's "soul burned with a passionate sense of justice for the oppressed slave in whom she saw the image of potential nobility" (145).

Summing up most of the criticism mentioned, Spengemann suggests that Behn has decorated Oroonoko with the following "hopes": "the natural nobility of the American Indian, the divine right of the martyred Charles, and the redemptive sacrifice of Christ" (402). All of these critics's assumptions are based on the conclusion that Oroonoko is indeed as heroic as he initially appears to the narrator. Encased in what Brownley calls the "heroic style narrative," Oroonoko does seem to be a god-like, king-like, naturally noble man.

Taking a more feminist, but equally sympathetic approach, some critics have made a connection between Oroonoko and a typically feminine position. Chibka makes the following observation about Oroonoko: "though nobility temporarily hides the change, he occupies by virtue of race in Surinam the position Imoinda already occupied by virtue of gender in Africa: he is property" (528). Angeline Goreau in Reconstructing Aphra ties Oroonoko's plight in with Behn's own:

she herself very much shared Oroonoko's intellectual curiosity and delight in everything that might be called 'learning.' It is also interesting that it is precisely because of this predilection that Oroonoko is captured; his desire for mental improvement is the trap. By a strange twist of symbolism, his position mirrors that of young women of European society, whose desire for knowledge -- if they were unfortunate to possess such longings -- was most often a sure route to downfall. (58)

Laura Brown, too, mentions that Oroonoko ultimately becomes "feminized" (51). This evident parallel between Oroonoko and a "feminized" condition strongly suggests that Behn

is working at a level beyond that of a naive romance: she is exposing the constraints society places upon women, through her enslaved and mistreated hero. What these critics don't recognize is the tension created by Oroonoko's parallel to a feminine position. That he can be placed in such a "feminine" position and still regard Imoinda as property to dispose of as he deems necessary further attests to his fallible heroism.

Most critics have not seen Oroonoko's fallibility because he is such an heroic figure. His heroism is evident, for example, when the King's men attempt to capture him in the Otan with Imoinda. Oroonoko's authoritative command causes them to withdraw: "this he spoke with a Voice so resolv'd and assur'd, that they soon retired from the Door" (25). Later, too, upon arriving in Surinam and discovering he is still to be a slave, he heroically pronounces, "come, my Fellow-Slaves, let us descend, and see if we can meet with more Honour and Honesty in the next World we shall touch upon" (37). These two examples are only a small sample of the many possible illustrations of Oroonoko's heroic quality.

However, what the sympathetic critics miss is Behn's intentional undermining of these heroic moments. She makes us question Oroonoko's heroism by exposing both the narrator's dependence on other sources for much of the story and her hero-worshipping attitude towards Oroonoko. Because the narrator learns the story of Oroonoko from Oroonoko, we can question the images she gives us. For example, when the love-sick Oroonoko rebounds after refusing to lead his people into battle, the narrator describes him as follows:

While he was speaking, he suffer'd his People to dress him for the Field; and sallying out of his Pavilion, with more Life and Vigour in his Countenance than ever he shew'd, he appear'd like some Divine Power descended to save his Country from Destruction: and his People had purposely put him on all things that might make him shine with most Splendor, to strike a reverend Awe into the Beholders. (30)

Does Oroonoko tell our narrator that he descended like a god to save his people? She could

not possibly have known otherwise, not having been in Coramantien. Again, this idea of Oroonoko as a godlike figure returns when he is received at court after the battle, "belov'd like a Deity" (32). Although our narrator is fallible, she is not duplicitous; she thinks she is simply telling the story as she remembers it being told to her. That her descriptions and images of Oroonoko are so godlike sheds light on how Oroonoko views himself. These descriptions, too, shed some light on the narrator's view of the heroic Oroonoko: she readily interprets him in terms of his own self-conception.

The narrator's lavish descriptions of Oroonoko persist after she reports his arrival in Surinam, where others can verify our hero's story. In other words, even when others are present to pass elements of the tale on to the narrator, she continues to suggest his divinity. When Oroonoko arrives at his assigned house among "the Negroes," they are amazed to see him, who enslaved and sold them to the Englishmen, and cry out: "Live, O King! Long live, O King! and kissing his Feet, paid him even Divine Homage" (41). The irony of this passage has evaded many critics who feel that the slaves' response is testimony to Oroonoko's stature. Even if a reader isn't troubled or amused by the image of enslaved people kissing the feet of their enslaver "from a Veneration they pay to great Men," the text clues us to the inappropriateness of their behaviour. Oroonoko, "troubled with their Over-Joy and Over-Ceremony, besought 'em to rise, and to receive him as their Fellow-Slave; assuring them he was no better" (41). Even Oroonoko who is used to this type of "divine homage" is troubled by their overreaction. This incident and the fact that Oroonoko is disquieted by it reflects light back on the other veneration paid to Oroonoko: perhaps this "divine homage" is not fitting for our heroic prince.

Behn sets up Oroonoko's heroic authority only to gradually subvert it. From leading his Coramantien comrades into battle to impressing the white colonists to inciting the slaves to rebel, Oroonoko's active authority is always evident. However, Behn weakens

Oroonoko's authority again and again as she stresses his tendency towards self-destruction, exposing his extreme powerlessness.

Oroonoko's self-destructive tendencies reveal a major imperfection in our hero. The narrator tells us how Oroonoko feels about self-destruction when he examines the Indian war chiefs and inquires into how they received their injuries: they slash at their own bodies in competition for the chieftom "and it's 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" (58). While he responds with a type of horror to the Indian war chiefs, he does similar injury to himself on many occasions. Most significantly, Oroonoko attacks himself when discovered by the colonists near the dead body of Imoinda. Indeed, the action of murdering his pregnant wife demonstrates a type of self-destruction, especially since he cannot bring himself to leave the body afterwards to carry out the rest of his plan. When faced with the band of horrified colonists, not only does Oroonoko cut a piece of flesh from his throat but he disembowels himself (75). More telling, however, is the fact that he responds to the colonists in this way only because he has been by dead Imoinda's side without any sustenance for eight days (73). When he is attacked or threatened by the colonists, he hasn't the strength to fight them, so he attempts to destroy himself. Self-destruction is an almost forgivable reaction when one is placed in a powerless position: better to destroy oneself than to allow someone else to do so. However, like the Indian war chiefs, Oroonoko chooses self-destruction at many other times when he is seemingly in a powerful position, thus exposing instead his decided lack of power. In other words, although he has authority, when he cannot exercise it, he self-destructs. This self-destruction, then, illustrates his ineffectual power.

The first of his moments of self-destruction occurs when he is still an authoritative

Royal Prince. He discovers that Imoinda has been claimed by his grandfather, the King: "in his madness, they had much ado to save him from laying violent hands on himself" (13). Again, on closer examination, Oroonoko is indeed in an ineffectual position here as his wife now belongs to the king who has the ultimate power in the land. His position of authority is undermined. As well, after Oroonoko on the battlefield receives the false news that Imoinda is dead, he goes into withdrawal, refusing to lead his people in battle: "After having spoken this, whatever his greatest Officers and Men of the best Rank cou'd do, they could not raise him from the Carpet or persuade him to Action, and Resolutions of Life" (28). Even though he is placed on the battlefield where he has ultimate authority over his army, his authority does him no good. He has had no control over Imoinda's life. Those who tried to rouse him had "much ado to get Admittance" (28). The Prince is only resurrected from "his amorous Slumber, in which he had remain'd bury'd for two days, without permitting any Sustenance to approach him" (30) by the sounds of battle. Again, however, his response in the face of powerlessness is to self-destruct.

Furthermore, when on board ship, Oroonoko's response, and his people's, to captivity is to refuse food, "being deprived of all other means" of destroying himself (34). This reaction is once again a response to powerlessness. Oroonoko faces another bout of destruction when he discovers Clemene is Imoinda. The sight of her "left his Body destitute of almost Life: it stood without Motion, and for a Minute knew not that it had a Being; and I believe, he had never come to himself, so oppress'd he was with Over-joy, if he had not met with this alloy, that he perceived Imoinda fall dead in the hands of Trefry. This awaken'd him" (43). Here, the enslaved and thus powerless Oroonoko is resurrected by the sacrifice of Imoinda: her "death" awakens him.

Perhaps almost trivializing Oroonoko's ineffectual authority is the incident with the "Numb-eel." Oroonoko cannot believe the stories about this creature and, in true heroic

fashion, ventures forth to prove that it is "impossible [that] a Man could lose his Force at the touch of a Fish" (53). He soon discovers that the stories are true and if he "was almost dead, with the effect of this Fish, he was more so with that of the Water, where he had remain'd the space of going a League, and they found they had much ado to bring him back to Life" (53). He grips harder to the fishing rod in order to prove that a fish can have no power over him, and by doing so almost kills himself. Our hero Oroonoko is powerless even to a fish.

Having established through Oroonoko's self-destruction that his authority is ineffectual, Behn further undermines Oroonoko's natural heroism in the narrator's descriptions of him. Not only is our narrator describing him in ways we would now term "Eurocentric" but she also exposes an unnatural quality to Oroonoko; and, in so doing she inadvertently reveals her own class and race biases. She begins his physical description by commenting that a statue couldn't have been more well-formed. She compares him favourably to the other Africans: where their skin is "brown rusty black," his is "perfect Ebony, or polished Jett"; "his nose was rising and *Roman* instead of *African* and flat"; his mouth is not like the "great turn'd Lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes"; "bating his Colour," she goes on, "there could be nothing in Nature more beautiful, agreeable and handsome" (8). He does not share in those traits "natural" to other Africans and, except for his blackness, there is nothing so naturally attractive as our unnatural Oroonoko. Are we to interpret these statements regarding his beauty and skin colour as suggesting that his "perfect Ebony, or polished Jett" skintone is unattractive or just unnaturally attractive? His natural beauty extends to his hair as well which "came down to his Shoulders, by the Aids of Art, which was by pulling it out with a Quill" (8). With the help of artifice, Oroonoko, an African, was able to wear his hair long and straight, in the European style. And our narrator takes pains to point out that of his hair "he took

particular care." From the comparison to a statue to his unnaturally European looks to his great care over artificially hiding the African texture to his hair, Oroonoko appears, "bating his Colour," more European than "primitive" or "savage" or "natural" African, perhaps setting him up for his later title of "Cæsar." Our narrator even explains that Oroonoko is as fine "as any Prince civiliz'd" in Europe, claiming that "whoever had heard him speak, wou'd have been convinced of their Errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white Man" (8). For an African, Oroonoko is indeed an exceptional case in Europeans' eyes as he is not only "civilized" but "witty" and "attractive," implying that other Africans are naturally none of these things. That Oroonoko is not a natural or average African but appears more European in form suggests that he is more artificial than he or our narrator have perceived.

Indeed, his European elements are not restricted to his looks alone but extend to his character. Our narrator, listing Oroonoko's many wondrous qualities, innocently wonders how he came upon them:

and twas amazing to imagine where it was he learn'd so much Humanity: or, to give his Accomplishments a juster Name, where 'twas he got that real Greatness of Soul, those refined Notions of true Honour, that absolute Generosity, and the Softness that was capable of the highest Passions of Love and Gallantry. (7)

Where, indeed, Oroonoko learned these many things our narrator quickly informs us:

"Some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman of Wit and Learning, who finding it turn to very good account to be a sort of Royal Tutor to this young Black ... took great pleasure to teach him Morals, Language and Science" (7). Oroonoko has not learned his many positive qualities from the Coramantien world he inhabits but from a European ex patriot. He picks up more of his attributes from "all the English Gentleman that traded thither; and did not only learn their Language, but that of the *Spaniard* also, with whom he traded afterwards for Slaves" (7). Oroonoko's wonderful qualities are attributed to

European learning and not necessarily to his own African world. This European influence undermines his natural leadership and nobility by emphasizing how his inflated "Soul," "Honour," "Generosity," "Love," and "Gallantry" were all acquired characteristics supposedly not common to his homeland.

Behn also subverts her hero by subtly challenging his self-proclaimed honour. Oroonoko professes his honour after he is imprisoned on the Captain's ship. The Captain strikes a false deal with him so he will convince his people to eat: "and , Oroonoko, whose Honour was such as he never had violated a Word in his Life himself, much less a solemn Asseveration, believ'd in an instant what this man said" (34). Oroonoko is, of course, telling this part of the story to the narrator since she was not on board the ship. We can almost hear Oroonoko's voice through the narrator's words, explaining away his quick belief in the Captain through his own unviolated Honour.

Although Oroonoko swears to his unviolated Word, we can see that he acts in ways which compromise the proclaimed virginal status of his honour. In the first place, Oroonoko, when designing plans to enter the Otan to be with Imoinda (itself a dishonourable deed but forgivable since Oroonoko is considered, in our eyes if not the King's, married to Imoinda), enlists Aboan to seduce Onahal, one of the King's older wives. Onahal, whose present duty it is to teach Imoinda the "Arts of Love," is a severe, cast-off wife and "'twas this Severity that gave Oroonoko a thousand Fears he should never prevail with Onahal to see Imoinda" (19). Aboan, a fine young man, sets out to seduce Onahal and succeeds: "Aboan fail'd not that night to tell the Prince of his Success, and how advantageous the Service of Onahal might be to his Amour with Imoinda" (19). Oroonoko then wants Aboan

to caress her so, as to engage her entirely, which he could not fail to do, if he comply'd with her Desires: *For then (said the Prince) her Life lying at your mercy, she must grant you the Request you make in my behalf. Aboan understood*

him, and assur'd him he would make love so effectually that he would defy the most expert Mistress of the Art, to find out whether he dissembled it, or had it really. (19-20)

So Aboan sets up a late night rendez-vous between himself and Onahal, Oroonoko and Imoinda, and once there "he suffer'd himself to be caress'd in bed by Onahal" (23). The interesting element in this sequence of events is the Prince's quick willingness, for all of his lofty ideals and morals, to manipulate, emotionally and physically, both Aboan and Onahal to further his own interests with Imoinda. Moreover, once he is in the Otan with Imoinda he persuades

her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the Rights of Love. And I believe she was not long resisting those Arms where she so long'd to be; and having Opportunity, Night, and Silence, Youth, Love and Desire, he soon prevail'd, and ravished in a moment what his old Grandfather had been endeavouring for so many Months. (23)

The narrator inserts herself into the seduction scene by offering her beliefs about Imoinda's response to Oroonoko. This emphasis of the narrative voice during Imoinda's ravishment serves two purposes: the narrator's intrusiveness causes us to question again from whose mouth the story is ultimately coming and, because we can't trust the narrator's beliefs, causes us to question how long Imoinda did "resist" and why she needed to "resist" her actual husband. That their marriage or union did not receive the necessary approval of the King further calls into question Oroonoko's integrity. The suppressed language here is that of rape: suffer, seize, take, Rights, resisting, prevailed, ravished. Indeed, when Imoinda attempts to convince the king that she'd been raped the language used is similar: "That, unknown to her⁴, he had broke into her Apartment, and ravished her. She spoke this much against her Conscience; but to save her own Life, 'twas absolutely necessary she should feign this Falsity" (25). She isn't lying. Unknown to her, Oroonoko did enter her apartment and, following that, he did "ravish" her. This whole incident with Aboan, Onahal and Imoinda casts doubt upon Oroonoko's unviolated honour.

Furthermore, after the Captain releases Oroonoko from bondage,

Oroonoko, who was too generous, not to give credit to his Word, shew'd himself to his People, who were transported with excess of Joy at the sight of their darling Prince; falling at his feet, and kissing and embracing him; believing, as some divine Oracle, all he assur'd 'em. But he besought 'em to bear their Chains with the Bravery that became those whom he had seen act so nobly in Arms. (34)

Once he is free of his chains, Oroonoko prevails upon his people to suffer their bondage with dignity. When he was locked up, he simply and heroically wanted to die, yet he is willing to convince his enslaved companions to bear their imprisonment with (unheroic?) nobility. His words work with his people, according to the story the narrator passes along. They became "pleas'd with their Captivity, since by it they hoped to redeem the Prince, who, all the rest of the Voyage, was treated with all the respect due to his Birth" (34). Oroonoko's word proves false, as the Captain's word proves false. Yet, a small detail here suggests a bigger story. The narrator tells us that by their captivity, Oroonoko's people hope to redeem their Prince. To redeem? To save, to buy back, to purchase the freedom of, to make amends for, to compensate for? In other words and in another sense, Oroonoko thinks he has bought his freedom by his people's captivity. Oroonoko's word or honour is not all that he claims.

The parallel Behn creates between her hero and Plutarch's history of Julius Cæsar also throws suspicion upon Oroonoko's esteemed honour. The most evident suggestion of a parallel is the fact that Behn has the Europeans name Oroonoko "Cæsar" once he arrives in Surinam. This name causes us to recall Plutarch's history of the potentially tyrannical Cæsar who was murdered by his social inferiors. Ironically, the narrator entertains Oroonoko with stories which certainly sound as if they could be from Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans, "with the Loves of the *Romans*, and great Men, which charmed him to my Company" (46). Indeed, that she claims to be telling a history of the heroic slave suggests that she is placing herself in a position comparable to Plutarch's

(1).

Not only does Behn create a self-destructive hero who is fallible but she uses him as a vehicle to reveal the errors in society's beliefs. Oroonoko shows a tragic flaw when he cannot accommodate to his new life of nominal slavery once in Surinam. He has fallen victim to the two overlapping systems of class and slavery in which he wholeheartedly believes, yet he does not learn from his victimization. Pearson and Pope in their study, The Female Hero, explain that

An exploration of the heroic journeys of women--and of men who are relatively powerless because of class or race--makes clear that the archetypal hero masters the world by understanding it, not by domination, controlling or owning the world or other people. (4-5)

Although "relatively powerless," Oroonoko never comes to understand his ineffectual authority or the materialist world about him. Pearson and Pope also comment that "the white male tragic hero experiences a tragic fall when his inflated ego encounters experience" (10). Oroonoko is not white but his education, his looks, "bating his colour," and his mannerisms are, and he certainly experiences a tragic fall when he is victimized by the very systems he supports. By moving Oroonoko from a slave-trader to a slave, Behn exposes the injustices in both the class system and the slave trade which society, at the time, legitimized and supported, and she again undermines both the hero and narrator who help to legitimize these social practices.

The term "quality" can signify one's character or disposition, but in Oroonoko we are quickly made aware that it is much more superficial and simply refers to one's social standing or class. This meaning is apparent as early as page two when Behn relates how "Persons of Quality" admired the native dress she brought to England and donated to the production of the play Indian Queen. Persons of quality here refers to people of high social rank or nobility. However, quality isn't readily apparent; one has to be told of another's

social status. For example, the narrator describes Oroonoko: "Besides, he was adorn'd with a native Beauty, so transcending all those of his gloomy Race, that he struck an Awe and Reverence, even in those who knew not his quality" (6). Likewise, when Trefry first meets Oroonoko, he

had a great mind to be enquiring into his Quality and Fortune: which, though Oroonoko endeavour'd to hide, by only confessing he was above the Rank of common Slaves; Trefry soon found he was yet something greater than he confess'd; and from that moment began to conceive so vast an Esteem for him, that he ever after lov'd him as his dearest Brother, and shew'd him all the civilities due to so great a Man. (38)

Even though these two quotations suggest that Oroonoko did indeed have an heroic and noble presence, this presence is not enough to give him "quality." The awestruck audience of Oroonoko would have to inquire or find out what social position he had occupied, as Trefry did, no doubt, from the other slaves from the ship who accompanied them on the boat. Another demonstration of the superficiality of "quality" occurs after the colonists discover that Clemene is Oroonoko's Imoinda. Our narrator naively tells us: "we took her to be of Quality before, yet when we knew Clemene was Imoinda, we could not enough admire her" (45). Not only does their attitude towards Imoinda change once they have proof of her quality, but they also took Imoinda to be of quality before simply because she has superficial body markings. Significantly, Oroonoko is marked in this same way. The quality of "quality" can easily be disguised as well, further attesting to its superficial nature. When the king wished to determine the depth of Imoinda's love for Oroonoko, he devised a plan to visit Imoinda by waiting "on a Man of Quality, as his Slave and Attendant" (12). The Man of Quality brought Imoinda a present, claiming it was from Oroonoko, to elicit a reaction. Imoinda never perceived any trickery and never suspected that the slave was actually the king, thus suggesting that "quality" is purely superficial. One has to know the class of the person one is dealing with in order to treat him or her

appropriately. Indeed, Aboan, when determining whether Onahal favours him, observes "that she had given him Glances more tender and inviting than she had done to others of his Quality" (19).

Oroonoko, in one of his heroic speeches, makes an important distinction between positive traits and Quality. When he is mourning Imoinda and does not want to lead his people into battle, Oroonoko

wished 'em to chuse the bravest Man amongst 'em, let his Quality or Birth be what it wou'd: *For, Oh my Friends!* (said he) *it is not Titles make men brave or good; or Birth that bestows Courage and Generosity, or makes the Owner happy. Believe this, when you behold Oroonoko the most wretched, and abandoned by Fortune, of all the Creation of the Gods.* (29)

But, for all his rhetoric, Oroonoko privileges Quality and expects the same privileges granted to himself. For example, consider what happens when the "better bred" Captain, who "was always better receiv'd at Court, than most of the Traders to those Countries were; and especially by *Oroonoko*, who was more civiliz'd, according to the *European* Mode, than any other had been, and took more delight in the *White* Nations," invites Oroonoko on board his ship. Oroonoko "condescended to accept" (32). Ironically, Oroonoko lowers himself to the Captain's level to accept this invitation, suggesting that he feels much superior in rank. The irony lies in the fact that the lower-ranking Captain sees Oroonoko, for all his royalty, solely as an African commodity, if a fine specimen thereof. Furthermore, when Oroonoko is freed from his chains in order to persuade his people to eat, he is "treated with all the respect due to his Birth" (36), even while his own people languish behind bars.

Not only is quality superficial and not necessarily supported by any positive traits, it is often difficult to ascertain, especially for Oroonoko. For example, Oroonoko felt that the Captain of the ship was "a Man of a fine sort of Address and Conversation, better bred, and more engaging than most of that sort of Men are" (32). Oroonoko's judgement is

quickly invalidated when the Captain tricks him into slavery. Another man Oroonoko felt had quality is Tuscan, "a tall *Negro* of some more Quality than the rest" (61). Indeed, besides Imoinda and Oroonoko, Tuscan was the only slave that did not swiftly give himself up to the colonists at the time of the slave rebellion and he was whipped along side Oroonoko. However, Tuscan eventually became "perfectly reconciled to Byam," the tyrannical Deputy-Governor of Surinam, and, although he ultimately comes to Oroonoko's aid, his "quality" is undermined by this reconciliation (73-74).

The most significant blurrings of actual "quality" happen with the French tutor, the Governor in Surinam, and Oroonoko himself. The Frenchman who, "finding it turn to very good account" (7) to become Oroonoko's tutor is later referred to as Oroonoko's "Governour" (31). That the banished European finds it pays well to teach Oroonoko suggests that his motivation is not love for Oroonoko or for teaching but for material gain and power. He makes no appeal for Oroonoko's freedom on board ship or once in the New World. Although he occasionally visits the royal slave, the Frenchman is free to pursue his fortunes. In addition, the label 'governor,' while applied to teachers, carries the much stronger meaning of one who governs, controls, or rules. This term picks up a more political connotation when we move to Surinam and hear about the actual governor of this colony. This governor should have "Quality" by nature of his social position but, because of his bad character, he does not. The Governor of Surinam causes us to look back upon the French Governor with distrust. Most significant here, however, is the fact that Oroonoko himself, once in Surinam, is "received more like a Governour than a Slave" (40). Again, this "governor reference," heavy with negative connotations, causes us to question the "quality" of our hero.

Quality or social rank, accepted by Oroonoko, becomes problematic once he is transported into slavery in Surinam. He retains the vestiges of royal authority, but he is

a slave. He abhors his enslavement for many reasons: besides slavery's association with cowardice and submission, Oroonoko despises it not only because he's a Prince, but because he was tricked into it, not nobly captured in battle. However, he is blind to the racial element and to the horrors of slavery. Like one's inherited social position and the privileges it carries, he feels slavery is legitimate and natural, if not for him.

The belief in class often helps to legitimize the practice of slavery, even when this slavery is pointedly racial. Indeed, Katharine Rogers states that "it was not evident in the seventeenth century that enslaving black people is an extreme expression of racism. Blacks themselves saw slavery as a matter of class rather than race, and so did Europeans" (6). For this reason, Rogers does not feel that Behn is necessarily taking an abolitionist stance in *Oroonoko*. George Guffey, too, feels Behn isn't portraying slavery as negative because "all three societies depicted in the story practice slavery" (20). All the societies, in other words, had a slave class. On the other hand, Laura Brown claims that this novel is "a crucial early text in the sentimental, antislavery tradition that grew steadily throughout the eighteenth century" (42). What is readily apparent in *Oroonoko* is the fact that the slaves are exclusively "Negroes." Thomas Southerne in his play *Oroonoko*, based on Behn's novel, reworks the slavery element to incorporate white slaves: he creates, for example, a white enslaved Imoinda to go with the black Prince, Oroonoko.

That slavery in *Oroonoko* is a matter of race is indisputable. Our narrator first tells us that "those then whom we make use of to work our Plantations of Sugar, are Negroes, Black-Slaves all together" (5). She follows this statement with an explanation about how the slaves are transported from Africa to the New World. We get further confirmation that it is only blacks who are enslaved when Oroonoko's French tutor is captured with the other blacks: the Captain "could not pretend to keep Prisoner" this man

(35). We assume that the Captain could not imprison the European because of his colour. Later, however, the narrator informs us that the Frenchman was not kept as a slave "because a Christian" (44). A sound argument indeed, if she hadn't already told us that he was "a Man of very little Religion" who had been banished from France "for some Heretical Notions he held" (31). The most telling evidence that slavery in Surinam is based on race is the substitution of the word Negro for slave. For example, after Oroonoko-Cæsar leads the slaves in the revolt, the narrator relates the debate the colonists held: "Cæsar ought to be made an Example to all the Negroes, to fright 'em from daring to threaten their Betters, their Lords and Masters: and at this rate no man was safe from his own slaves" (70). We see this language substitution again from the respected Colonel Martin who returns the piece of Oroonoko's body the colonists sent to him, saying that "he could govern his *Negroes*, without terrifying and grieving them with frightful Spectacles of a mangled King" (77). Behn undoubtedly presents Surinam as a world where racial slavery is practiced.

Oroonoko, however, has an attitude toward slavery based on his privileged social position and on authoritative tradition in Coramantien society. When Imoinda's father dies in battle protecting Oroonoko, Oroonoko offers her "those Slaves that had been taken in this last Battle ... an hundred an fifty Slaves in Fetters" (9). Likewise, in the battle which he almost failed to fight because of his "amorous" collapse, he personally captured the leader of the enemy, Jamoan:

This *Jamoan* afterwards became very dear to him, being a Man very gallant, and of excellent Graces, and fine Parts; so that he never put him amongst the Rank of Captives, as they used to do, without distinction, for the common Sale, or Market, but kept him in his own Court, where he retain'd nothing of the Prisoner but the Name, and returned no more into his own Country. (30-31)

Significantly, Oroonoko can keep a noble man as his nominal slave for entertainment, but he reacts negatively when he is placed in the same position in Surinam. Of course, Jamoan

was won nobly in battle, whereas Oroonoko was tricked. Ironically, however, he was tricked by a Captain who "was very well known to *Oroonoko*, with whom he had traffick'd for Slaves, and had us'd to do the same with his Predecessors" (32). The irony lies in the fact that Oroonoko becomes a slave to the very person he had sold slaves to. Oroonoko believes in the legitimacy of slavery when the slaves are caught in battle and subsequently sold, given away or kept for whatever reasons. Indeed, once a slave, one is obliged to obey one's master, as he remarks upon hearing from Trefry that the beautiful slave, Clemene, refuses all who approach her: "*I do not wonder*(reply'd the Prince) *that Clemene should refuse Slaves, being, as you say, so beautiful; but wonder how she escapes those that can entertain her as you can do: or why, being your Slave, you do not oblige her to yield*" (42). This statement, too, is steeped with dramatic irony. Not only would Oroonoko probably fly into a rage if Trefry had obliged his beloved Imoinda-Clemene to yield, but Oroonoko, whom Clemene does not refuse, is himself a slave. Trefry continues to explain that he would indeed have forced himself upon Clemene if her tears hadn't stopped him:

The Company laugh'd at his Civility to a Slave, and Cæsar only applauded the Nobleness of his Passion and Nature, since that Slave might be noble, or, what was better, have true Notions of Honour and Vertue in her. Thus passed they this night, after having received from the Slaves all imaginable Respect and Obedience. (43)

The Company's response to Trefry shows widespread acceptance of the complicity expected of slaves; however, Oroonoko, in this case, does not share it. Instead, he again makes a distinction between noble birth and the positive traits of honour and virtue. Significantly, the company present is not only the white colonists, but also the slaves of the plantation, suggesting that they share or pretend to share the masters' attitude towards slaves.

At this point, Oroonoko seems on the verge of realizing the injustice of slavery: a slave may be noble or virtuous and therefore shouldn't be treated with indignity. In fact, when he later incites the slaves to rebel, mentioning the "Miseries and Ignominies of

Slavery" (60), he seems to have learned. He heroically proclaims

And why (said he) my dear Friends and Fellow-sufferers, should we be Slaves to an unknown People? Have they vanquished us nobly in Fight? Have they won us in honourable Battle? And are we by the Chance of War become their Slaves? This wou'd not anger a noble Heart; this would 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; and the Support of Rogues and Runagades, that have abandoned their own Countries for Rapine, Murders, Theft and Villianies. (61)

In this speech that so many critics have quoted to prove Oroonoko's heroism, Oroonoko falls short of fully comprehending the situation. Oroonoko, himself, vanquished in "the Chance of War" many of the slaves he is speaking to and then sold them into slavery. He has in fact sold humans "like Apes or Monkeys." About this speech, Spengemann wrongly claims that

While Behn appears to have held no very advanced ideas about the evils of slavery itself, it is impossible to avoid the impression that Oroonoko's diatribe bespeaks her own suppressed rage against the betrayal of all those cherished things that her romantic hero had come to represent. (401)

Behn instead demonstrates that slavery is not just. For example, her narrator innocently relates incidents like Black Friday, when slaves were forced to whip slaves, regardless of their behaviour:

whether they work'd or not, whether they were faulty or meriting, they, promiscuously, the innocent with the guilty, suffer'd the infamous Whip, the sordid Stripes, from their Fellow-Slaves, till their Blood trickled from all Parts of their Body; Blood, whose every Drop ought to be revenged with a Life of some of those Tyrants that impose it. (60-61)

Besides the blatant commodification of humans, the injustice of slavery is illustrated by this cruel method of distributing punishment regardless of merit: this type of unnatural practice cannot easily be legitimized. That Oroonoko can maintain his belief in slavery in the face of such atrocities exposes a weakness in his character. For his own personal reasons, he is inciting slaves to rebel who, by his own standards, should remain slaves.

Adelaide Amore mistakenly thinks that Oroonoko is a "selfless leader":

The condition of slavery also tells in its effects on the lives of Oroonoko's own people. Even after he convinces them of the importance of fighting for freedom, they eventually cower and turn against their selfless leader. Being treated as property and not as individuals has a devastating psychological effect on these displaced peoples. (xxxii)

But Oroonoko too is once again treating these slaves as property. He wants them to rebel only to help him and Imoinda escape: "he went, pretending out of goodness to 'em, to feast among 'em, and sent all his Musick, and order'd a great Treat for the whole gang, about three hundred *Negroes*, and about an hundred and fifty were able to bear arms" (60). Like offering Trefry "Gold, or a vast quantity of Slaves" for his and Imoinda's freedom (45), this rebellion incident proves that Oroonoko still regards social inferiors as commodities to use or dispose of as he sees fit. In addition, any question as to where Oroonoko would have procured the gold or slaves he offers Trefry defies an answer; he is simply a slave without access to wealth. He does, however, have access to other slaves whom he can compel to work in his favour. That Oroonoko has not truly understood the "Miseries and Ignominies of Slavery" is most apparent when the Governor levels many accusations at him after the revolt has failed. Oroonoko admits to the Governor that "he was ashamed of what he had done, in endeavouring to make those free, who were by Nature Slaves" (66). He falls victim to the ideological practices he supports and believes in, yet still cannot perceive the injustice he helps to perpetuate. He cannot perceive his position in Surinam from any other perspective than that of the royal master. That the systems of slavery and class fail Oroonoko, with tragic and horrifying results, suggests that Behn is setting up and undermining Oroonoko, the adoring narrator and society at large, all of who support and buoy up these unjust practices.

If, as I have shown, Behn disturbs traditional subjectivity, the authority of the subject position, by creating herself as a fallible narrator-subject with little authority, then she overthrows traditional authority by undermining her god-like, king-like hero,

trapping him in his own belief system. By not imposing direct authorial interference on her hero-worshipping narrator, Behn allows Oroonoko to voice inadvertently the contradictions in his own ideology. The operation on her part is a kind of Socratic irony. Like the narrator, Oroonoko reveals his own ineffectual authority. Furthermore, if Oroonoko, who represents the authority figure, the position of power, the Prince, the trader, is tragically ineffective and still manages to look better than his grandfather or the white colonists, what is Behn saying about traditional power? Instead of showing us the idealized world of Romance or a naturally virtuous man, she invalidates the very probability of these notions.

III

THE DISRUPTED AUTHORITY OF THE COLONIAL DISCOURSE

Whether empires were agencies of civilization or exploitation, they rested on power, and all attitudes towards backwards countries or 'native' peoples were deeply imbued with the sensation of power, of imperial domination.

(Kiernan 312)

In Oroonoko, Behn intentionally creates a naive narrator as a vehicle for sustained structural irony. Her narrator, through her fallible tale-telling, exposes the tragic injustice of many of society's beliefs, as we have seen with reference to the authoritative and ineffectual Oroonoko. Another area where the narrator proves unreliable is in her descriptions and relations of the native Surinamians. Behn undermines the narrator's perceptions about the natives by exposing contradictions, ambiguities and confusion in the narrator's story. Because Behn's text is produced from colonial experience, biographers generally agree, for an European reading audience, it can be considered part of the body of colonial discourse. After first discussing what is meant by colonial discourse and its implications, I will show that Behn subtly exposes the imperialist bent of her narrator, undermines the narrator's simplistic and destructive view of the "innocent natives," and reveals parallels between New World Surinam and Old World Coramantien. In so doing, Behn locates a potentially active position for the natives, thus investing them with greater political and personal autonomy than her naive narrator would allow.

Peter Hulme in Colonial Encounters explains what is meant by colonial discourse:

Underlying the idea of colonial discourse ... is the presumption that during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on. (2, his italics)

Much work is currently being conducted in this field as critics are attempting to separate the ideologies from the texts. Abdul Jan Mohamed, for one, tries to distinguish the overt

from the covert reasons backing colonialism:

While the covert purpose is to exploit the colony's natural resources thoroughly and ruthlessly through the various imperialist material practises, the overt aim, as articulated by colonialist discourse, is to 'civilize' the savage, to introduce him [sic] to all the benefits of Western cultures. Yet the fact that this overt aim, embedded as an assumption in all colonialist literature, is accompanied in colonialist texts by a more vociferous insistence, indeed by a fixation, upon the savagery and the evilness of the native should alert us to the real function of these texts: to justify imperial occupation and exploitation. (62)

Like Jan Mohamed, many feel that colonial texts, whether historical documents, novels, diaries or law records, produced by the colonizer about the colonized, attempt to legitimize the imperialist exploitation fundamental to colonial expansion. As I suggested in my Introduction, these critics wish to challenge the notion of the writer's objective subjectivity, or authoritative Truth, and locate areas where the colonial text resists itself, where the text is ambiguous, contradictory or confused. Homi Bhabha terms this methodology "ideological analysis" and explains that it "refuses the epistemological dependence on a pre-given Transcendental subject, which functions as both origin and end, guaranteeing discursive coherence. It does so by proposing a break between the knowing subject and the subject known" ("Representation and the Colonial Text" 106). In other words, the authoritative subject, the colonizer, who observes, knows and writes about the colonial subject, may stumble unintentionally in his/her portrayal of the colonized. This stumbling results when the natives do not conform to the pre-conceived, pre-set, legitimizing ideology which the colonizer attempts, intentionally or not, to propagate. Stephen Greenblatt, for example, points out an area where such stumbling might occur in sixteenth century colonial discourse. He tells us that two different European attitudes towards New World native languages abounded in the sixteenth century: one belief held that the natives had no language while the other perceived no language barrier at all. Both, he declares, are negative for the natives as "they either push the Indians toward

utter difference--and thus silence--or toward utter likeness--and thus the collapse of their own, unique identity" (575). Writers approaching the Indians from either perspective would have difficulty reporting their experience when confronted with a consistent pattern of native behaviour resembling language but which they could not comprehend. They would stumble over the conflict between what they expected to occur and what actually occurred. Significantly, the theorists of colonial discourse assume that the reader, not the writer, locates the conflicts and stumblings in the text. These theorists tell us that if we can locate the tensions in the text which result from gaps between expectation and experience, we can uncover, first, the ideology the dominant class is imposing upon the colonized and, second, the space where the colonized actually exist.

Critical theorists and analysts of colonial discourse all work with the assumption that the producer of the colonial text is not only the colonizer but also a man. The writer, then, is always in the most dominant position possible. Bhabha, laden with this basic assumption, suggests that we need to question and re-read the traditional author's subjectivity and the traditional text:

To the myth of realist narrative--its grand syntagms and sequentiality, its pleasure, irony, comedy, characters and consolations, its historic utterances and easy identifications between I and you--colonial fantasy presents scenarios that make problematic both Authority and Intention. It registers a crisis in the assumption of the narrative priority of the 'first person' and the *natural* ascendancy of the First World. And this colonial fantasy--this specific historical formation of the 'subject'--demands another kind of reading, another gaze. ("Representation and the Colonial Text" 119, his italics)

However, when a writer creates a document which intentionally problematizes Authority and Intention and when that writer is not actually a member of the 'ruling class' by nature of her gender, the colonial text reflects a new dimension: the oppressed writing the oppressed. Bhabha assumes that colonial texts flaunt "the exercise of colonial power through discourse" ("The Other Question" 150). This position of mastery would be as

foreign to the seventeenth century European woman, even if a colonist, as was the New World. That an oppressed person, "a stereotyped other" in Bhabha's words, would exercise power upon a more blatantly oppressed group, an-other stereotyped other, is possible, certainly. We have seen how Oroonoko behaves toward both his fellow slaves and Imoinda. An identification with or understanding of the position of stereotyped other seems much more likely, however. In Aphra Behn's case, we see that she does not simply seek to reinforce her position of power. Because she sets herself up as a fallible, gendered narrator, she undermines her own authority and any possible mastery over the Others in her text.

In an attempt to better understand colonial literature Jan Mohamed identifies two divisions: the imaginary treats the colonized as a reflection of the colonizer and the symbolic demonstrates an understanding of the "problem of colonialist mentality and its encounter with the racial Other" (65). He further divides the symbolic into two sub-categories: one searches for syncretic solutions to the colonialist problem and the other, as manifested in the works of writers like Joseph Conrad, recognizes that "syncretism is impossible" (66). By "syncretism," Jan Mohammed means a bridge across the culture of the colonized and colonizer or a space of understanding between the two culturally different groups. David Brion Davis, in The Problem of Slavery in Western Civilization, mentions a similar notion:

The great question, then, was whether the literary imagination could build a bridge of sympathy and understanding across the enormous gulf that divided primitive and civilized cultures. ...Europeans could conceptualize the meaning of enslavement only in the familiar terms that increasingly aroused a sensitive response: the separation of young lovers; the heartless betrayal of an innocent girl; the unjust punishment of a faithful servant. (474)

In Oroonoko, Behn produces a text for Europe which, through her fallible and naive narrator, exposes the adversarial and materialistic nature of the colonial mentality.

However, Behn also depicts the dependence of the colonists on the natives and has her narrator relate native behaviour which is inexplicable by "Western" standards. While Behn does not create a bridge between the two cultures in her novel, she hints that this syncretism is indeed possible. She creates for us natives who, once freed from the preconceptions of their "colonizers," are autonomous individuals, moving in their own cultural sphere, independent of the Europeans. For example, the narrator's encounter with the natives in their village, while not syncretic, potentially opens the door to understanding for the reader. Ultimately, Behn shows that, like her narrator's doomed quest for authority, the only space for the Indians in the Western master discourse which labels them colonized "Other" is one of disruption. Where they can disturb the Europeans' notions, they can effectively locate themselves. And she stages this disturbance partly in the war chiefs' self-mutilation.

Because of this self-mutilation and their disquieting role in Oroonoko, the Indians are a significant addition to the story. Not many critics have expended their energy over the troubling presence of the natives in Oroonoko, other than to question their inclusion in the story at all. Angeline Goreau points out how

It has been argued that this evocation of the virtues of 'natural man' is simply an awkward digression inserted into a story whose principal interest lies elsewhere--in the hero, Oroonoko, who is not an untaught noble savage but has been educated as a European prince would have been, by European tutors. (288)

Goreau, however, explains why she feels the natives are included:

The interaction of the two ideals--symbolized by the 'civilized' Oroonoko and the noble savage is essential to the story. However, they both serve to point up the corruption of the society that pretends to be more civilized than they are. (288)

Goreau feels that, in Oroonoko, Behn returns to her "theme of the natural goodness of man in a perfect state of nature" (288). Along this same line, Lore Metzger claims that for Behn, "the New World offered salutary retreat from corrupt civilization" (xii).

Similarly, Spengemann, who does not focus attention on the natives directly, discusses Behn's attitude towards the New World:

For Behn, America embodied an ideal condition of feminine nature, the original kingdom of love from which men fell into history when they took up the masculine pursuits of war and commerce. (391)

Like Goreau, Spengemann suggests that Surinam is a prelapsarian, natural world from which humans can only fall. His identification of natural America with the feminine and war and commerce with the masculine tells more perhaps about his own visions than Behn's. Behn's narrator describes Surinam in glowing detail, certainly, but her descriptions ring with the tone of someone taking an inventory.

That the narrator's first description of Surinam focuses on trade is significant. Before she even begins the story of Oroonoko, she sets the imperial stage for us, describing the colony and explaining that the colonists trade with the natives for

Fish, Venison, Buffalo's Skins, and little Rarities; as Marmosets, a sort of Monkey, as big as a Rat or Weasel but of a marvellous and delicate shape, having Face and Hands like a Human Creature; and Cousheries, a little beast in the form and fashion of a Lion, as big as a kitten ... Then for little Paraketoes, great Parrots, Muckaws, and a thousand other Birds and Beasts of wonderful and suprizing Forms, Shapes and Colours. For Skins of prodigious Snakes, of which there are some threescore Yards in length ... some rare Flies, of amazing Forms and Colours ... for Feathers.... (2)

The Europeans gain these items by trading "Beads of all Colours, Knives, Axes, Pins and Needles" (2), which the narrator later describes as "Trifles" (4). This initial description of Surinam, while exciting us with images of a far-off exotic place, also firmly establishes in our minds the Europeans' purpose there. The narrator provides a list which, although wondrous and delightful, ticks off the major trade items of this specific colony. Laura Brown notes this inventory-taking attitude and states that "in general, the items in the opening account of imperialist trade reflect the acquisitive instincts of a specifically female sensibility--dress, skins, and exotic pets" (52). One would have to argue against the essentializing and reductive notion that females have

acquisitive *instincts*, particularly when Behn's narrator does mention other trade items, like food. Brown recognizes elsewhere in her essay, however, that women are the ultimate icons for imperial trade: women of the upper classes become showy objects draped in the furs and finery gleaned from these endeavours. Their instincts are not wholly to blame, however, as men are the procurers of such ornamentation. Taken on a more general level, this list of trade items demonstrates, ultimately and inarguably, that the narrator possesses the acquisitive "instincts" of the *European*.

The narrator's second major description of Surinam initially appears as a simple explanation of its beauty. However, as the narrator herself points out, Surinam "affords all things both for Beauty and *Use*" (48, my italics) and claims that if "his late Majesty" had "seen and known what a vast and charming World he had been Master of in that Continent, he would never have parted so easily with it to the Dutch" (48). She then lists the delights of this country: the perpetual spring causes the trees, "Groves of Oranges, Lemons, Citrons, Figs, Nutmegs and noble Aromaticks, continually bearing their Fragrances" (48-49), to be in a varying state of constant production, "bearing at the same time ripe fruit, and blooming Young, or producing every day new" (49). These descriptions of continually renewable and constantly available natural resources are every imperialist's dream. Furthermore, the wood of these trees has "an intrinsick Value above common Timber; for they are, when cut, of different Colours, glorious to behold, and bear a price considerable to inlay withal" (49). Our narrator does not stop here in delineating the use these trees could be to the Western World: "they yeild rich Balm, and Gums; so that we make our Candles of such an aromatick Substance, as does not only give a sufficient Light, but as they burn, they cast their Perfumes all about" (49). Indeed, she claims, these trees are like nosegays because of their many flowers. In addition, she explains that cedar is useful not only for firewood but also for building houses. These

descriptions of the beauty and usefulness of Surinam represent a superficial stock-taking of its natural resources. Ernest Bernbaum faults Behn for never discussing the oppressive humidity of Surinam in her lengthy descriptions of the place ("Mrs. Behn's Oroonoko" 424). Why should she digress so? She is subtly questioning the nature of Europe's relationship to the New World by characterizing her European narrator as very materialistic. The most interesting element about all the narrator's descriptions of Surinam lies in the fact that Behn, artfully producing a text for the European readers/consumers, gives them what she believes they want. That Surinam emerges as a natural resource-laden world "adorn'd with such vast quantities of different Flowers eternally blowing, and every Day and Hour new" (49) suggests that the Europeans and their market craved such a place.

Through many contradictions in her portrayal of the native Surinamians, Behn exposes the European belief that the knowledgeable and worldly Europeans have corrupted the untouched natives and shows that the natives themselves cannot be easily labelled. For example, Behn creates natives many have been quick to identify as innocent, guilt-free, and prelapsarian. Of course, the narrator herself claims the natives to be all these things. She says of the native Surinamians

And these People represented to me an absolute *Idea* of the first State of Innocence, before *Man* knew how to sin: And 'tis most evident and plain, that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive and vertuous Mistress. (3)

This view of natural humanity evokes images of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, before eating of the Tree of Knowledge. In fact she claims that they are "like our first Parents before the Fall" (3). Genesis says of Adam and Eve: "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (2.25). However, earlier Behn remarks upon the native dress of an apron: "which apron they wear before 'em, as *Adam* and *Eve* did the Fig-leaves; the Men wearing a long stripe of Linen, which they deal with us for" (2).

Significantly, Adam and Eve wore fig leaves only after they had sinned: "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons" (Genesis: 3.7). Behn undermines her narrator's suggestion that the natives are prelapsarian people. Most significantly, because the men's aprons are a commodity of trade with the Europeans, Behn hints that the natives' "fall" occurs as a result of European contact.

In this same section, the narrator contradicts her description of the artless natives with suggestions of their artfulness. She mentions that they are "all thus naked" and "unadorn'd" immediately after describing them dressed in elaborately beaded and decorated aprons. "This adornment," she describes, "with their long black Hair, and the Face painted in little Specks or Flowers here and there, makes 'em a wonderful Figure to behold" (3). Indeed, far from being unadorned, natural creatures, these natives puncture holes "in their Ears, Noses and Lips, where they hang a great many little things; as long Beads, bits of Tin, Brass or Silver beat thin, and any shining Trinket" (2). While the narrator claims that the natives are naked and unfettered, she also permits us to see the painted, beaded, feathered people with all sorts of glittering trinkets dangling from their ears, noses and lips. She produces an artless prelapsarian human at the same time as she depicts the rather elaborate art behind the native attire. Here too, much of the natives' artful ornamentation is a result of trade with the Europeans: not only the cloth for the aprons but the beads, the pins and needles for puncturing the holes in their flesh, and the shining trinkets. Behn again subtly stresses the Europeans' influence on the natives' "fall" from natural artlessness.

Further exposing the Europeans' maltreatment of the natives, Behn has her narrator contradict her claim that the colonists live in peace with the natives. At the outset of her story she writes that the blacks are imported from Africa because the natives

are not used as slaves: "for those we live with in perfect Amity, without daring to command 'em; but on the contrary, caress 'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world" (1-2). She elaborates upon this statement a few pages later:

With these People, as I said, we live in perfect Tranquility, and good Understanding, as it behoves us to do; they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the Country, and the means of getting it; and for very small and unvaluable Trifles, supply us with that 'tis impossible for us to get. (4)

She intimates that the affectionate colonists treat the natives well only to gain access to food and supplies. Moreover, after listing many of the physical accomplishments of these natives which aid the Europeans, she continues:

So that they being on all occasions very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as Friends, and not to treat 'em as Slaves, nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent. (5)

She is telling the European readership that the natives are treated with great affection and respect by the whites. At the same time, by subtly increasing the element of European self-interest in each statement, she exposes the exploitive motivations of the colonists, who find it absolutely necessary for self-preservation to be friendly with the natives: the colonists import slaves from Africa because they can't "make use of" (5) the natives. Later, the narrator contradicts even this pithy excuse for not enslaving the Indians when she reveals that she and her entertainment-seeking party were rowed by "Indian slaves" (59).

Behn dissolves the (European) notion that Europeans are the experienced teachers of the innocent and ignorant natives, and in so doing, partially illuminates the native response to the Europeans. Especially telling in her long explanation about why Africans and not Surinamians are enslaved is her brief relation of the natives' encounter with the English Governor. The natives make a great show of

mourning and fasting for the Death of the English Governor, who had given his Hand to come on such a day to 'em, and neither came nor sent; believing, when a Man's

word was past, nothing but Death cou'd or shou'd prevent his keeping it: And when they saw he was not dead, they ask'd him what Name they had for a Man who promis'd a thing he did not do? The Governor told them, Such a Man was a Lyar, which was a word of Infamy to a Gentleman. Then one of 'em reply'd, Governor, you are a Lyar, and guilty of the Infamy. (4)

This incident illustrates, for our narrator, that the natives "have a native Justice, which knows no Fraud; and they understand no Vice, or Cunning, but when they are taught by the White Men" (4). This interpretation of the natives' innocence and sense of justice, sandwiched between increasingly negative statements regarding the colonists' manipulation of the natives, exposes something of the colonial mentality. The incident, and its placement in the text, forces a connection between the English Governor who, by lying, supposedly introduced the natives to this phenomenon and the other white settlers and traders, who through trade are also causing the natives' fall from innocence. This attitude toward the Indians demonstrates how the Europeans believe themselves to be the Indians' trees of knowledge, the grand teachers of experience, granting the natives eye-opening wisdom and a new, more complete, awareness of the world. The narrator tells us, for example, that she and her brother taught the ignorant Indians of the isolated Indian village how to kiss (57). By taking credit for a second fall, she reminds us of the ruthless destruction that colonists often wrought on the inhabitants of the New World.

On another level, the narrator's opinion that the natives know "no Fraud and "understand no Vice" is debatable. She says of the natives, for example, that "Religion wou'd here but destroy that Tranquility they possess by Ignorance; and Laws wou'd but teach 'em to know Offense, of which now they have no notion" (3-4). Several lines later she makes a seemingly innocuous statement, claiming that "unless they take Slaves in War, they have no other Attendants" (4). If warfare exists in Surinam, doesn't this fact shatter our view of the innocence of these natives? Usually some law has to be transgressed or some offense committed for war to result. Obviously the natives have

some understanding of Fraud and Vice. Later, too, our narrator informs us that the English had some disputes with the Indians,

so we could scarce trust our selves, without great Numbers, to go to any Indian Towns or Place where they abode, for fear they should fall upon us, as they did immediately after my coming away; and the Place being in the possession of the Dutch, they us'd them not so civilly as the English: so that they cut in pieces all they could take, getting into Houses, and hanging up the Mother, and all her Children about her; and cut a Footman, I left behind me, all in Joints, and nail'd him to Trees. (54)

Critics, like Goreau, who believe that this ideal native society shows how corrupt the Europeans are, conveniently gloss over this description. The natives' extreme hostility towards the Europeans demonstrates that the natives do understand manipulation, exploitation and lying whether used against them or by them. Indeed their response to the English Governor, if understood as ironic deviousness, is much more effective than straightforward confrontation. Not only do these people emphasize and exaggerate the Governor's dishonour by assuming his death but, when he appears, they have him name his own fault. As our narrator suggests when describing the Indian Peeie or Prophet, the natives do employ cunning and manipulation:

They consecrate a beautiful Youth from his Infancy, and all Arts are used to compleat him in the finest manner, both in Beauty and Shape: He is bred to all the little arts and cunning they are capable of; to all the legerdemain Tricks, and sleight of Hand, whereby he imposes upon the Rabble. (57)

Trickery and doubleness do play a part in the natives' lives. Our recognition of this capacity for understanding deceit both undermines the Europeans' pretense that the Europeans are the grand deflowerers of native innocence and indicates that the natives did not passively accept European treachery, on a small or large scale.

Behn not only exposes European attitudes towards the natives and their country through the naive narrator's contradictions, but she undermines the narrator's claims that Surinam is perfect by revealing parallels between this New World and Oroonoko's

Coramantien. Because Behn depicts Coramantien as an imperfect world ruled by a tyrant, the parallel she creates between Coramantien and Surinam suggests that Surinam, too, is far from the Edenic fantasy envisioned by her narrator.

Coramantien is without question an imperfect world. Not only is it the place of "most advantageous Trading for these Slaves" but it is so advantageous because of continual "hostility with one neighbouring Prince or other" (5). The phrase "one... or [the] other" renders the motivation for the hostility rather trivial. Indeed, Coramantien has a "continual Campaign" which implies that the army is always actively out in the field searching for engagement, any engagement. Because of these wars, many people "who could not ransom themselves" are taken captive and sold into slavery. This substantial and steady supply of slaves is the cause of Oroonoko's capture. If he hadn't been trading slaves with the Captain, he would never have ventured on board the slave ship. A world involved in continuous battle, for no specific reason, except perhaps to gain slaves for trade, is far from being an Edenic or perfect world. A world which treats humans as a commodity should not be regarded so cheerfully by either the narrator or her readers.

Surinam, filled with the lush landscape and 'innocent' natives described by the naive narrator, appears to be a much more idyllic place than Coramantien. The emerging similarities, then, between the two countries expose another intentional gap in Behn's discourse: Behn undermines her narrator's narrative by preventing the reader from seeing Surinam as purely Edenic. One parallel between Surinam and Coramantien is evident when our narrator tells us of the courtship between a young Indian man and woman:

but all his Courtship was, to fold his Arms, pursue her with his Eyes, and Sighs were all his Language: While she, as if no such Lover were present, or rather as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her Eyes from beholding him; and never approached him, but she look'd down with all the blushing Modesty I have seen in the most severe and cautious of our World. (3)

Likewise, when Oroonoko first meets Imoinda in Africa while presenting the slaves to her, he was amazed by "that lovely Modesty with which she receiv'd him, that Softness in her Looks and Sighs" (9). That words are repeated between these passages hints at a connection which is strengthened when Oroonoko tells Imoinda

with his Eyes that he was not insensible of her Charms; while Imoinda, who wish'd for nothing than so glorious a Conquest, was pleas'd to believe, she understood that silent Language of new-born Love; and from that moment, put on all her additions to Beauty. (9-10)

The focus on eyes and sighs and the element of modest silence is crucial to both courtships. Imoinda's and Oroonoko's courtly, patriarchal and sexist relationship, inhibited by social restraints of all kinds, sheds light on the supposedly Edenic naturalness and freedom of the Indian lovers.

In addition, Behn reveals parallels between the social practices of Surinam and Coramantien. Both societies practice polygamy. In Surinam, "they have Plurality of Wives; which, when they grow old, serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a Servitude easy and respected" (4). Similarly, in Coramantien, "Men take to themselves as many [wives] as they can maintain; and where the only Crime and Sin with Woman, is, to turn her off, to abandon her to want, shame and misery" (10). Not only do they practice polygamy, but they also protect and care for women no longer desired (by men). In addition, the inhabitants of both countries grant their leaders similar respect and power: Surinam has "no king; but the oldest War-Captain was obey'd with great Resignation" (4); likewise, the people of Coramantien "pay a most absolute Resignation to the Monarch" (11). Both countries, too, had only slaves taken in war: the Surinamians have no other attendants "unless they take Slaves in war" (4), while the constantly battling people of Coramantien took many slaves through war although most were sold to European traders. The Indians' and the blacks' body adornments demonstrate another

parallel between the social practices of both countries. Where the Surinamians paint flowers and specks on their faces and drill holes in their ears, noses and lips from which to hang bits of metal, the noble blacks from Coramantien are

delicately cut and raised all over the Fore-part of the Trunk of their Bodies, that it looks as if it were japan'd, the Works being raised like high Point round the edges of the Flowers, some are only carved with a little Flower, or Bird, at the sides of the Temples, as was Cæsar. (45)

The cuts to the body, flowers and specks are quite similar in both countries. The fact that social practices like polygamy, warfare, and body deformation all carry strongly negative connotations for Western cultures suggests that Behn is not idealizing Coramantien or Surinam.

Behn draws another subtle parallel when she depicts obstructive seraglios in both Surinam and Coramantien. In Coramantien, the king's wives, including the reluctant Imoinda, live in the Otan. This Otan has a grove of "Oranges and Citrons" and it is here that Aboan, Onahal, and Oroonoko subversively meet. The harem in Surinam is much less explicit. The narrator stays at St. John's Hill, the best House in the country, which is on "a vast Rock of white Marble" (49). Here she entertains Oroonoko and Imoinda, presumably with others in attendance, like her maid, her mother and sister. And, she does claim that Oroonoko prefers "the Company of us Women much above the men," implying that several women are in residence (46). Furthermore, our narrator describes the area surrounding this fine house: "On the edge of this white Rock, towards the River, was a Walk or Grove of Orange and Lemon-Trees...and sure, the whole Globe of the World cannot shew so delightful a Place as this Grove was" (50). Like the Otan in Coramantien, Surinam's harem has its citrus fruit grove. But, where only Imoinda "bemoan'd her own miserable Captivity" (17) in the Otan, at St. John's Hill both Imoinda and Oroonoko are captive commodities yearning for freedom. In Coramantien, Oroonoko plotted to gain

access to the harem; in Surinam, he wants to get out. The seraglio that posed an imperfect obstruction to him in Coramantien, poses a far more powerful one in Surinam.

Through the narrator's many fallible and indirect revelations, Behn presents the natives with a much greater individuality than her narrator's simple ethnocentric viewpoint would have allowed. Moreover, Behn, through her narrator, helps to reveal the natives' autonomy by implying that the Europeans rely heavily upon them for survival.

Because of a lack of adequate defence, the Europeans are rendered ineffectual and greatly dependent upon the natives. For example, the colonists, as previously mentioned, do not enslave the Indians because they need them to help locate (read: to locate) food and trade items (4). After making this claim, our narrator expounds upon the natives' hunting prowess:

And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their Hands, they do with Arrows; and have so admirable an Aim, that they will split almost an Hair, and at any distance that an Arrow can reach: they will shoot down Oranges, and other Fruit, and only touch the Stalk with the Darts Point, that they may not hurt the Fruit. (5)

She immediately follows this description of the natives' archery skills with the statement that the natives are not enslaved on account of their "usefulness." The colonists dare not treat the natives as other than friends, "their numbers so far surpassing ours in that Continent" (5). The natives' dexterity with bow and arrow and their great numbers probably serve as more accurate explanations for the Europeans' respectful treatment of them than does simply their "usefulness." Significantly, the narrator later explains in part how the slave rebellion was possible:

For the *English* had none but rusty Swords, that no Strength could draw from a Scabbard; except the People of particular Quality, who took care to oil 'em, and keep 'em in good order: The Guns also, unless here and there one, or those newly carried from *England*, would do no good or harm; for 'tis the nature of that Country to rust and eat up Iron, or any Metals but Gold and Silver. And they are very unexpert at the Bow, which the *Negroes* and *Indians* are perfect Masters of. (60)

The only weapons which the Europeans could handle well are useless in the South American climate. No wonder the settlers are friendly to the Indians--they are almost at their mercy! This fact that the European tools are forged from metals which quickly deteriorate in Surinam emphasizes that the "trifles," the "Knives, Axes, Pins and Needles," used for trade with the Indians, were trifles indeed as their lifespan would be short at best. Most significant is the realization that European metallurgy, the basis for the major technological, and therefore a cultural, difference between the two groups, is ineffectual and laughable in Surinam. Indeed, once the reserve army gathers together to quell the slave revolt, the narrator claims that "never did one see so comical an Army" (68). This militia arms itself with "those sort of cruel Whips they call *Cat with nine Tails*; some had rusty useless Guns for shew; others old Basket Hilts, whose Blades had never seen the Light in this Age; and others had long Staffs and Clubs" (64). Because their traditional weaponry is useless in Surinam, the English are potentially helpless and thus very dependent upon native good will. They do, however, manage to quell the slave rebellion.

The Europeans depend upon the natives for their medical knowledge as well. The narrator of Oroonoko seemingly dismisses native medicine when describing the Indian Peeie: He is, she says,

both a Doctor in Physick and Divinity: And by these Tricks makes the sick believe he sometimes eases their Pains, by drawing from the afflicted Part little Serpents, or odd Flies, or Worms, or any strange thing; and though they have besides undoubted good Remedies for almost all their Diseases, they cure the Patient more by Fancy than by Medicines. (57)

While she seems to trivialize native medical knowledge, she does point out that the natives can cure almost all their diseases. In fact, after the disemboweled Oroonoko is revived by a (we assume, European) doctor, the narrator comments "that Wounds are almost to a miracle cur'd in the Indies; unless Wounds in the Legs, which they rarely ever cure" (76). Her initial dismissal of the medical "fancy" of the natives can be re-read in the

light of their disease control (compare with plague-torn Europe) and their miraculous healing. As well, since the Peeie is also a doctor of divinity, Behn leaves open a space where we can almost catch a glimpse of the native religious practices.

Although the narrator seems to scorn native medicine, she reveals the colonists' dependence upon it. When Imoinda succeeds in wounding the Deputy Governor with a poisoned arrow, the governor's Indian mistress saves him from death: "an Indian Woman, his Mistress, sucked the Wound, and clean'd it from the venom" (65). When our narrator returned to Parham plantation after the slave revolt,

the first News we heard, was, That the Governour was dead of a Wound *Imoinda* had given him; but it was not so well. But it seems, he would have the Pleasure of beholding the Revenge he took on *Cæsar*; and before the cruel Ceremony was finished, he dropt down; and then they perceived the Wound he had on his Shoulder was by a venom'd Arrow, which, as I said, his *Indian* Mistress healed, by sucking the wound. (68)

That the narrator tells us twice of the Indian woman's healing of the governor shows the emphasis Behn wishes to place on this event. In addition, because the governor is believed dead by the narrator before she again mentions that he was saved by the Indian woman, we get an image of resurrection. The native not only healed the governor but she brought him back from death. This representation of the resurrecting powers of the native occurs as well when Oroonoko is struck numb by the numb-eel:

an *Indian* Boat took him up; and perceiv'd, when they touch'd him, a Numbness seize them, and by that knew the Rod was in his hand, which with a Paddle (that is, a short Oar) they struck away, and snatcht it into the Boat, *Eel* and all. If *Cæsar* was almost dead, with the effects of this Fish, he was more so with that of the water, where he had remain'd the space of going a League, and they found they had much ado to bring him back to Life. (53)

Not only did the natives immediately understand and rectify the problem with the rod and the eel but they had the skill, albeit with "much ado," to revive Oroonoko. The authoritative Oroonoko, like the governor, was resurrected by the natives. Significantly, immediately following the relation of this incident the narrator explains how frightened

the colonists are of the Indians, and she details the destruction the Indians later wrought upon the Dutch, thus assuring us that the natives are not simply "noble". That these Indians merely offered their assistance to Oroonoko and returned him to St. John's Hill then defies explanation (54). Why weren't the colonists even more afraid of them? Why would the natives assist the colonists in this way? In her subtle portrayal of the natives' healing powers and in her narrator's claims that the colonists fear the natives, Behn shows how frighteningly dependent the colonists are on the indigenous people of Surinam. She also demonstrates the Surinamians' individuality: because they revive Oroonoko and return him to the plantation even when hostilities are supposedly brewing between the Indians and the English, we see that these natives transcend the simple stereotype of savage and barbarous Indian.

By creating these kinds of unanswered and unanswerable questions about native behaviour, Behn invests her natives with greater personal and political autonomy. On the entertainment-seeking party's voyage home from the Indian village, for example, strange Indians from a different land are encountered. These people

could not understand us, but shew'd us a long cotton String, with several Knots on it, and told us, they had been coming from the Mountains so many Moons as there were Knots: they were habited in Skins of a strange Beast, and brought along with 'em Bags of Gold-Dust; which, as well as they could give us to understand, came streaming in little small Channels down the Mountains, when the Rains fell; and offer'd to be the Convoy to any body, or persons, that would go to the Mountians. (59)

Perplexing indeed is the natives' motivation for^a luring the settlers into their land. Could the trade items--the trifles-- which the English offered be the enticement? Hardly. Could these Indians, like the Peeie, be tricking or playing games with the colonists? Their action defies easy explanation. This active seeking-out of the Europeans on the part of the natives makes doubtful the European notion that they have infiltrated and conquered the land. "All the country" wanted to leave Surinam to pursue this gold, so the governor

prohibited the voyage. The narrator further notes, in keeping with her imperialistic bent, "and 'tis to be bemoan'd what his Majesty lost by losing that part of America" (59). This inexplicable action by the natives accords them greater autonomy than do the stereotypes of either simple innocent (from the narrator) or the barbarous savage (from the colonists) would lead us to expect.

The space where Behn allows her natives to possess the greatest individual autonomy is the Indian village, the people of which, claims the narrator, have never seen whites before. However, she contradicts herself by explaining that the entertainment-seeking party took along a white man "because he was known to the *Indians*, as trading among 'em, and being, by long living there, become a perfect *Indian* in colour, we, ... had a mind to surprize 'em, by making them see something they never had seen, (that is *White People*)" (55).

In this town, Behn's narrator over-emphasizes the wonder of the natives at the Europeans, equating it with admiration. When the narrator and her brother first enter the town, the Indians gather in wonder around these two over-dressed white people, spread their hair out and cry "Tepeeme" which means "Numberless Wonders, or not to be recounted no more than to number the Hair of their Heads" (55). The natives are given cause for new wonder, too, when they lift one of the narrator's petticoats only to find yet another underneath, when more foreign people emerge from the brush and when they hear the narrator and her brother play the flute (55, 56). Even the mutilated war chiefs wondered at the group (58). This wonder is interpreted by our narrator as admiration: "in fine, we suffer'd 'em to survey us as they pleas'd, and we thought they would never have done admiring us" (56). "I soon perceiv'd," she continues a few lines later, "by an admiration that is natural to these People, and by the extreme Ignorance and Simplicity of 'em, it were not difficult to establish any unknown or extravagant Religion among them,

and to impose any Notions or Fictions upon 'em" (56).

Quite inadvertently, our naive narrator makes us question the natives' "admiration" for the Europeans when she relates that they asked the Interpreter many questions about these new creatures: they asked, she says, "if we had Sense and Wit? If we could talk of Affairs of Life and War, as they could do? If we could hunt, swim, and do a thousand things they use?" (56). Importantly, wonder does not necessarily connote admiration; instead, wonder signifies astonishment, curiosity and, often, delight. That the natives respond with wonder to these glittering, overly clothed creatures who have just appeared in their midst is hardly surprising. That this wonder constitutes admiration is doubtful, especially considering the Indians' questions about the Europeans' sense and wit. Certainly, upon beholding the Indian town and customs, the narrator and her group must have expressed much wonder as well. Their wonder is definitely not translated into admiration.

In this town, too, the war chiefs' appearance serves to increase the natives' political and personal autonomy because it defies explanation by European or Western standards. Oroonoko wishes to see the war-chiefs and the entire group tags along. Our narrator provides her impression of the chiefs:

But so frightful a vision it was to see 'em, no Fancy can create; no sad 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; but 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 several other formidable Wounds and Scars, or rather Dismemberings. (57)

Our narrator also relays Oroonoko's impression of the wounds: "Caesar was marvelling as much at their Faces, wondring how they should all be so wounded in War; he was impatient to know how they all came by those frightful Marks of Rage or Malice, rather than Wounds got in noble Battel" (58). And our narrator relates how the war-captains were wounded

so:

when any War was waging, two Men, chosen out by some old Captain whose fighting was past, and who could only teach the Theory of War, were to stand in competition for the Generalship, or great War-Captain; and being brought before the old Judges, now past Labour, they are ask'd, What they dare do, to shew they are worthy to lead an Army? When he who is first ask'd, making no reply, cuts off his Nose, and throws it contemptibly on the ground; and the other does something that he thinks surpasses him, and perhaps deprives himself of Lips and an Eye: so they slash on till one gives out, and many have dy'd in this Debate. And it's by a passive Valour they shew and prove their Activity. (58)

These self-inflicted wounds are, at the least, perplexing. But perhaps they are just as perplexing as the white people's appearance for the inhabitants of this Indian community. Our narrator views these noble men in horror, reflecting the attitude of European society toward this kind of mutilation. Oroonoko, too, with a background both European and African, sees these wounds not as honourable or noble, but, assuming they have been inflicted by an enemy, as dishonourable marks of rage. Oroonoko's interpretation of this self-destruction not only illuminates his own self-mutilation later, but shows his own ethnocentric perspective.

Although finally inexplicable, the warriors' self-destruction is interesting on several levels. First, since the narrator's description in part focuses on ears, noses and lips, we recall that these natives puncture holes into these body parts for decoration. The mutilation of the body for decoration prefigures this later mutilation. The war-captains, after attacking themselves, then wear their scars as a decorative symbol. These wounds symbolize how completely the men in competition are willing to deprive themselves for the honour of protecting their people. The people of this Indian village must regard such acts as undeniably honourable, and thus men bearing the telltale scars must be treated with great respect.

We can view this self-destruction on another level by recognizing how problematic understanding this type of behaviour is to the people of the Western world. Behn is

showing us inexplicable behaviour: inexplicable in the light of Oroonoko's repeated and fallible bouts of self-destruction, and inexplicable even by Behn's own self-destruction in creating herself as a fallible narrator. Where Oroonoko's self-destruction exposed his ineffectual fallibility, both Behn and the warriors represent themselves within the master discourse--the dominant ideology--by effectively destroying themselves. Behn's destruction more fully represents her Self. The natives' destruction defies pat European explanation and therefore more fully re-presents the place of their autonomy, the place where their 'passive activity' actually exists.

Behn, through her naive narrator, exposes the simplistic and patronizing attitude of the Europeans towards the natives. At the same time, however, by showing how dependent the Europeans are on the natives and by questioning the Europeans' understanding and knowledge of the natives, Behn undermines the Europeans' power and authority in the New World, giving her natives a greater identity and autonomy. She locates the natives' agency in the master discourse in the same position as her own: they exist only where they confound those notions and attitudes of the dominant ideology which label them inferior, primitive, colonized, Other. Where Behn effectively re-presented herself by problematizing her narrator's authority and intention, she effectively re-presents the Surinamians by intentionally exposing gaps and resistance in her narrator's European text. The "Other" can only exist in the space of disruption, the space where the legitimizing master discourse crumbles.

CONCLUSION

THE AUTHORITY OF THE OTHER

What we must learn, then, is how to conceive of difference without opposition.
(Craig Owens 62)

The Other, so often interpreted as only passive and invisible, does have and has had agency, or active representation, in the master discourse. Aphra Behn, in Oroonoko, locates the space for subjugated peoples in a disruption of the legitimizing dominant ideology. In this novel, she directs a triumphant challenge to the status quo which may partially account for her unmerited expulsion from the literary canon. By re-creating a community of oppressed peoples--slaves, the colonized and women from all the cultures--she establishes a shared identity of subjugation. All these groups, including Behn since she presents herself as a character, accommodate themselves to the patriarchal tyranny in Coramantien, Surinam or both. Behn communicates textual resistance as her response to these oppressive patriarchies. By writing her Self as an unreliable narrator, she appropriates the traditionally patriarchal position of authority in order to subvert and modify it. Her intentional resistance to society's authoritative and legitimizing standards emerges in Oroonoko's troublesome atmosphere of contradiction, confusion, ambiguity and double meaning. By undermining the authority of the narrating subject, the hero and the colonial text, Behn resists the master discourse and clears a space for the authority of the Other.

By disrupting the authority of her narrator, Behn endows herself with greater artistic prowess and exposes the biases of conventional subjectivity. People in positions of power, like her history-writing narrator or the Coramantien King or Oroonoko or Trefry, often lie and contradict themselves in an attempt to legitimize unjust practices. Behn sets the stage for sustained structural irony by representing her Self as specifically

gendered and fallible. Strengthening this irony is the parallel Behn establishes between the pompous narrator who believes herself to have much control in Surinam and Imoinda, the most tragically oppressed character in the novel. By undermining her authoritative but ineffectual narrator, Behn reveals the fallibility of much 'objective history' and finds space in this disruption of traditional subjectivity for her own expression. Her own agency cannot be expressed through perpetuating or buoying up the dominant ideology, because it doesn't fully represent her. Her agency, her "Authority and Interest," is in challenging and modifying the master discourse.

Behn also exposes the fallibility of the societies which privilege the unmerited qualities of class, race and gender by undermining the icons of this traditional authority, that is, by revealing the ineffectual but despotic power of the governors, kings and heroes. By subverting her Romance hero and showing that his tragic error in judgement was his belief in his privileged place in society, Behn invalidates many of the beliefs of the dominant ideology, particularly those legitimizing slavery and class. Her subtle irony presents itself in Oroonoko's conversion from slave-trader to slave: as a slave he cannot accept his own position as a commodity, yet he still regards the other slaves and women as property to manipulate as he sees fit. He never comes to understand the injustice he helps to perpetuate. Behn quietly casts doubt on the society which esteems such a hero. Furthermore, in revealing where the dominant ideology fails, she suggests the existence of unjustly oppressed groups in the slaves and the women surrounding Oroonoko, but significantly does not attempt to fully represent these groups.

Behn does attempt, however, to re-present the agency of the native Surinamians. She intentionally disturbs the authority of her narrator's colonial discourse which describes the Indians as simple innocents in an ideal, natural resource-filled world. Ironically, Behn's narrator inadvertently contradicts herself and exposes the adversarial

and materialistic nature of the colonial mentality. Behn indicates a parallel between the overtly tyrannical Old World of Coramantien and the supposedly idyllic New World of Surinam, which further undermines the narrator's Edenic descriptions. Moreover, by inconspicuously illustrating the colonists' dependence upon the natives and by revealing incomprehensible native behaviour, Behn accords the Surinamians greater personal and political autonomy than her narrator's simple legitimizing discourse would have allowed. Again, the agency of this Other group, their undefeated autonomy, exists in the space of disruption: where she questions her narrator's beliefs and where she betrays the ineffectual power of the colonists, the natives move in perplexing and inexplicable ways.

By undermining the authority of her naive narrator who complies with and services the expected standards of society, the trust in colonial expansion, slavery and patriarchal good, Behn carefully reveals the flaws in these beliefs. Through her exposure of the ineffectual and destructive nature of patriarchy, Behn locates the authority of the Other. The Others exist where they disrupt and alter the master legitimizing discourse. With this triumphant subversion of authority, Behn should be heralded not only as one of the first novelists, first woman writers, and first realists, but as an important English ironist. If nothing else, her artistic "mastery" should be recognized: Oroonoko should be treated as the important literary, artistic, and ideological document that it is and returned to the literary canon where it can properly voice its challenge to the patriarchal status quo.

NOTE

1. All references to Aphra Behn's Oroonoko are to the Norton Edition. The italicized emphasis is Behn's unless otherwise indicated.

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