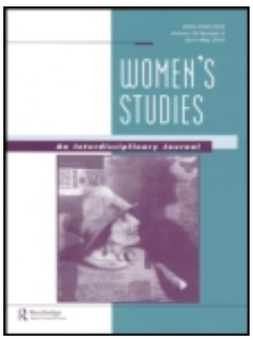

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Juggling the Categories of Race, Class and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*

MARGARET W. FERGUSON

MY TITLE METAPHOR of juggling is appropriate insofar as this essay, expanded from a talk and then shortened for purposes of symmetry, conjures an image of female authorship in which one performs for an audience and tries to earn its favor by keeping several balls moving in some at least not egregiously boring fashion. The metaphor is inexact, however, insofar as it implies that the objects to be juggled are known in advance to the performer and audience both, for none of the three category terms I've invoked in my title has anything like a fixed meaning, or even an agreed on range of meanings, in contemporary critical discourses circulating (mostly) along academic routes in the (so-called) First World.[1] Despite, or perhaps because of the fact that the triad of terms I've chosen is threatening to become a new trinity of sorts,[2] there has been, to my knowledge, relatively little careful discussion of the important *asymmetries* among the terms both in current critical practices across different fields and subfields and in the analytic values of these terms for the slow work that Gayatri Spivak (following Kant) calls *critique* and distinguishes from the quicker, more gestural work of mere critical *opposition.*[3]

Feminist literary scholars working in the field of Renaissance culture and trained mostly in U.S. and Canadian universities seem, generally speaking, to be more likely to define their analytic focus with reference to problems of categories of gender and class than with reference to race. With some notable exceptions such as Karen Newman's recent article on *Othello,* Laura Brown's study of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko,* and Ania Loomba's *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama,* I know of little recent work by feminist students of early modern literature which directly attempts to *theorize* the relation between either historical or contemporary critical concepts of gender, race, and class.[4] Without claiming to untangle the various knots signalled by the conjunction of these terms in my title, I do want to reflect briefly on some of the questions

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that conjunction raises for feminist critical thinking now, before turning to Aphra Behn.

If feminist literary scholars of the Renaissance are at a relatively early stage in defining race as an analytic category and conceiving of research programs that would explicitly address its constellation of problems, we need, at the very least, to join Joan Kelly's famous question — Did women have a Renaissance? — with versions of that question for groups *other* than white European women, recognizing, however, that the different "versions" of the questions may not turn out to be neatly analogous.[5] Though analogies, even identities, may be a useful place to begin expanding a critical frame of reference — as I was reminded when an undergraduate in one of my classes on Behn's *Oroonoko* referred to the white female narrator of that work as a "member of the female race" — we need to work against as well as with the grain of our desire for parallels. We can see Joan Kelly herself trying to do this in a passage written in 1979, a passage which uses parenthetical phrases to signal both an awareness that the feminist scholar needs to constitute her object of study with reference to questions of race and an uncertainty about just *how* she should do so:

> What we see are not two spheres of social reality but two (or three) sets of social relations. For now I would call them relations of work and sex (or of class and race, and sex/gender).[6]

Kelly's key dichotomies keep threatening to break into trichotomies, but they don't quite. A feminist-Marxist paradigm is clearly at work in her effort to define the object of study as a set of relations pertaining, broadly speaking, to the "parallel" realms of economic production, on the one hand — work — and the realm of the sex/gender system, on the other, that realm which feminist social scientists in the 1970's were defining in order to stress the cultural rather than biological determinations of "female nature."[7] But where does race fit into this paradigm? It doesn't, or doesn't very clearly. Why break the category of *work* down into "class" and "race," and what's the possible relation between these two sub-categories and the apparently parallel subdivision Kelly parenthetically offers for sex, namely the two terms "sex/gender," separated however by a slash, not an "and"? Obviously, race doesn't stand in anything like the relation to class that gender, in Kelly's formulation, stands to sex.

I call attention to this formulation first because it's symptomatic of a continuing problem in Renaissance feminist studies and arguably in literary feminist scholarship by whites in the academy, more generally. I use Kelly also because her formulation points to a somewhat paradoxical and necessarily provisional solution that I want to propose, and briefly illustrate, in this essay. The solution can be put first in a negative formulation: it is *not* to

attempt to fix a definition of the terms or of their mode of correlation; such definitional work should not in any case be done in the abstract but rather with reference to specific historical instances. Just think, for example, of the complex ways in which the three categories are linked, conceptually and with material effects, in the well-known convention of American racial ideology whereby a white woman can give birth to a black child but a black woman cannot have a white child.[8] Another description of this convention stresses the idea of social status rather than gender: children of mixed marriages in twentieth-century U.S. society are affiliated, regardless of their biological phenotype, with the racial group of the lower ranking parent, Marvin Harris remarks in an encyclopedia article on "Race."[9] This consequential bit of ideology clearly solicits analysis with respect both to gender and to class, and indeed both categories, broadly construed, have interacted historically to shape, and sometimes abruptly alter, our culture's legal definitions of race. David Brion Davis notes, for instance, that the State of Maryland reversed the old convention of *partus sequitur ventrum* (the child follows the mother) in the late seventeenth century in order to "inhibit the lustful desires of white women."[10] Here white women as a group are characterized as prone to behavior that blurs socially important racial distinctions (the Maryland statute was generated by a discussion of how to classify mulattos). An eighteenth-century document, however, displays a fear of female sexuality that is yoked with, or channeled through, an ideology of class: "The lower class of the women of England," wrote the noted historian of Jamaica, Edward Long, "are remarkably fond of the blacks, for reasons too brutal to mention; they would connect themselves with horses and asses, if the law permitted them."[11]

To illustrate the variability — across temporal and geographical boundaries — of ideological conceptions of race, the American historian Barbara Fields tells a lovely story about an American journalist who allegedly asked Haiti's Papa Doc Duvalier what percentage of his country's population was white. "Ninety-eight percent," Papa Doc responded. "Struggling to make sense of this incredible piece of information, the American finally asked Duvalier: 'How do you define white?' Duvalier answered the question with a question: 'How do you define black in your country?' Receiving the explanation that in the United States anyone with any black blood was considered black, Duvalier nodded and said, 'Well, that's the way we define white in my country.'"[12]

This anecdote leads me to a more positive formulation of my provisional solution: a plea to scholars to suspend their own assumptions about what a category like race means or meant to members of a different culture. Encountering the classic epistemological problem — which is also, inevitably,

an ethical and political problem — of the "first world" anthropologist seeking to interpret a "native" cultural concept,[13] scholars who work with concepts of class, race, and gender might do well to keep all three terms floating, as it were, in an ideological liquid — a solution, I might venture to say — without assuming that we have any a priori understanding of what they mean even in our own by no means homogeneous academic subculture, much less what the terms may have meant for textual producers and receivers in different historical and cultural milieux than our own.

A certain kind of historicist scholar, of either the so-called "old" historicist or the radical Foucauldian "new" stripe, might object to my proposed (non) solution on the grounds that each of the categories of social thought I'm invoking here is in some sense anachronistic for Renaissance Studies. While it is certainly true that the terms "race," "class," and "gender" had demonstrably different *dominant* meanings in Renaissance English than they do today, there are nonetheless significant areas of semantic overlap: Renaissance references to the "human" or the "English" race, for instance, don't entail the obsession with pigmentation differences typical of nineteenth- and twentieth-century notions of race, but the earlier usage does display the "ideological device," still common in many contemporary racial categorizations, of securing group identity by a (frequently mythical) set of genealogical rules.[14] The historicist objection against anachronism can be useful if it helps us avoid simplistic conflations, but the objection should not prevent us from seeking evidence pertaining to the *types* of systemic social inequities frequently signaled — whether inadvertently or critically — by the uses of one or more of these terms in post-Renaissance discourses. To stop the search for significant traces of such inequities is to accept an academic argument for hermeneutic "purity" that is arguably an ideological defense against seeing continuities between systemic injustices in past societies — including those partly shaped and largely represented by European intellectuals — and in our own. The effort of *interrogating* modern notions of race, class and gender by comparing them (as it were) to earlier historical versions of these notions — and vice-versa — seems to me crucial to the intellectual work of U.S. feminism in the 1990's.

That work has been powerfully though also controversially begun by scholars such as Teresa de Lauretis in her book *Technologies of Gender* (1987), which argues that gender is a *representation*, not an essence fundamentally determined, for instance, by "sexual difference," and which further argues that "gender represents not an individual but a relation, and a social relation";[15] by Barbara Fields, in the article from which I drew the Papa Doc story, an article entitled "Ideology and Race in American History" (1982), which argues provocatively for a demystified understanding of race as a

category derived from historical circumstances and racist ideologies rather than from some imputed "reality" of biological fact; and by the Marxist scholars Stephen Resnick and Richard Wolff, who argue for a non-essentialist conception of class in *Knowledge and Class* (1989). Defining class not primarily as a categorizing system for social groups but rather as a *process* by which "unpaid labor is pumped out of direct producers," they stress that this process is "overdetermined" (in a phrase they borrow, with caveats, from Louis Althusser, who borrowed it from psychoanalytic discourse) by other processes such as "labor transforming nature," "exerting and obeying authority among persons," "giving and gaining access to property," and last but not least, language.[16] This approach to class is useful, first because it avoids many of the problems raised by historians concerned with anachronism (i.e., should one speak of "classes" before the full development of capitalism and/or before class consciousness exists on the part of a given group?); and second because it insists that any given individual may occupy more than one "position" relative to the "class process."[17]

Let us look, now, at some of the ways in which the categories of race, class, and gender, understood as historically contingent and relational rather than foundational concepts, work in a mutually determining fashion in Behn's *Oroonoko* and in what we can reconstruct of the various historical discourses and shifting configurations of material life from which her book derives and to which it contributed substantially — most obviously by limning an image of the "Noble Negro" in ways that made it, as Laura Brown observes, "a crucial early text in the sentimental, antislavery tradition that grew steadily throughout the eighteenth century."[18]

Whatever the "facts" of Aphra Behn's birth (conflicting theories construct her as the illegitimate daughter of an aristocrat, male or female, or as the child of a barber or a wetnurse), the single most important determinant of her multiple class positions was arguably her access to, and later, her deployment of, the skills of literacy.[19] Her lack of a classical education meant that she was not "fully" literate in her culture's terms, but her ability to read and write English and several other European languages nonetheless allowed her to earn her living by her pen, first as a spy for Charles II and later as the author of plays, poems, novellas, and translations. Though classic Marxist theory does not consider intellectual work "direct production," the writer in the early modern era, as a member of an emergent class or caste of secular intellectuals ambiguously placed between their sometimes relatively humble origins and the nobility whom they frequently served and with whom they often imaginatively identified, was in many cases a producer of commodities

for the market. Indeed the energy with which many humanist writers sought to distinguish their labor from "merely" clerkly or artisanal work suggests how fraught with anxiety (then as now) was the self-definition of persons who occupied the ambiguous class position of intellectual worker.[20] If, from one perspective and in certain circumstances, the writer was himself (or much more rarely, herself) a worker from whose labor surplus was extracted by others (as, for instance, occurred when one worked for fixed wages as the secretary or accountant for an aristocratic plantation owner), from another perspective, the writer was often a (relatively) privileged beneficiary of the process whereby early capitalists profited from the forced labor (say) of indentured white servants or black or Indian slaves. My examples are of course chosen to highlight the multiple ambiguities that arise when one seeks to specify how a figure like Aphra Behn participated in the process of extracting surplus in Britain's early colonial economy. At this point, I will insist only on foregrounding the fact that she *did* participate, as a producer of verbal commodities who explicitly if intermittently defined herself as oppressed by and financially dependent on wealthy men, but also as a member of an English "family" of slave owners (as it were) and as such, one who directly and "naturally" profited from others' labor.

The peculiarities of her multiple and shifting class positions are inextricably linked to, indeed partly determined by, the anomalies of her situation as a *female* writer, one who sold her wares to male patrons as a prostitute sells her body to clients. As Catherine Gallagher has brilliantly shown, Behn herself elaborated the prostitute-woman writer analogy along with an even more ideologically mystified one of the female writer as an absolutist monarch.[21] In *Oroonoko*, set in the early 1660's, before Behn's rather mysterious marriage to a Dutch merchant, but written in 1688, long after she had ceased to be a wife, she defines her status as formed in crucial ways by her gender; she refers explicitly to her "female pen," and frequently presents herself as a heroine with features drawn from literary codes of romance and Petrarchan lyric.[22] Lurking behind her portrait of the author as a young, unmarried lady with great verbal facility is a complex body of cultural discourse on Woman and the forms of behavior she should eschew (talking and writing in public, which behavior is often equated with prostitution) and embrace (obedience to fathers and husbands being a prime command).[23] An emerging cultural discourse about women who went to the colonies — often, allegedly, to acquire the husbands they'd not found in England, or worse, to satisfy their "natural" lusts with men of color — also lurks behind Behn's self-portrait.[24] This cultural subtext, made into an explicit subplot of Thomas Southerne's 1696 stage version of *Oronooko*, seems particularly germane to Behn since, as

Angeline Goreau has argued, her (adoptive?) father left her without a dowry when he died en route to Surinam.[25] Her novella at once partly reproduces the negative cultural subtext(s) of female gender and seeks to refute them.

Her social status is also defined as a function of her race, or, more precisely and provisionally, of her membership in a group of colonizing English white people who owned black slaves imported from Africa and who uneasily shared Surinam with another group of non-white persons, the native Carib Indians. We can conveniently trace some of the contradictions in the narrator's social identity, with its multiple "subject positions" created in part by competing allegiances according to race, class, and gender, if we examine the narrative "I" in relation to the text's different uses of the pronoun "we." With whom does the "I" align itself?[26]

The first stage of an answer is to say that the "I" aligns itself sometimes with a "we" composed of women: in these cases the "I" is definitely a "she." At other times, however, the "I" aligns — or in political terms, allies — itself with a "we" composed of property-owning English colonialists defending themselves against an Other (a "them") composed of African slaves or of native Indians, and sometimes of both. In these cases, the gender of the "I" is evidently less salient than are nationality, membership in a surplus-extracting group, and color. Within these two basically contradictory subject positions, however, other configurations appear and disappear. "We" women, for instance, are sometimes opposed to cruel and powerful white men, and this opposition clearly participates in the interrogation of the institution of marriage which many of Behn's plays mount and which texts by other seventeenth-century English women pursue as well: Lady Mary Chudleigh, for instance, in a poem "To the Ladies," of 1703, wrote that "Wife and servant are the same,/ But only differ in the name."[27] An opposition drawn along lines of gender within the British community allows — in the peculiar circumstances of colonialism — for an unusual alliance to flourish between white females, notably the narrator and her mother and sister, and the black slave Oroonoko: a community of the unjustly oppressed is thus formed, and indeed unjust oppression comes to be associated with a state of effeminacy figured, interestingly, as male impotence.[28]

The analogy between white women and Oroonoko, and particularly the alliance between the narrator and her hero, is, however, extremely volatile, partly because it poses an obvious double-pronged threat to the colonial social hierarchy in which white men occupied the top place. The narrator, as the unmarried daughter (so she claims) of the man who was supposed to govern the colony had he not died en route to his post, threatens the ideologies of patriarchy in some of the ways that Queen Elizabeth had a hundred years

before Behn wrote her book. To claim, as Behn does in her prefatory letter to an aristocratic patron, that there was "none above me in that Country," and to depict herself as living in "the best house" in the colony (p. 49), is to engage in imaginative competition with the man who actually stood in for Behn's father, one Colonel William Byam, who is painted as a brutal tyrant in the text and who cordially despised Aphra Behn, according to the historical record.[29] Wielding an instrument of writing which she and her society saw as belonging to masculine prerogative, the narrator courts notoriety by representing herself as the sympathetic confidante of a black male slave who had, in his native land, been a prince engaged in erotic and by implication political rivalry with his grandfather and king.[30] The narrator and Caesar are allied in a multi-faceted league of potential subversion.

As if to defuse that threat, the narrative counters the "we" composed of white women and Oroonoko with a stereotypical configuration, familiar from the Renaissance drama, which pits sexually vulnerable (and valuable) English women against a black man imagined as a villainous rapist.[31] One can see the "we" shifting in a striking fashion between these two poles in a passage that occurs near the end of the tale immediately after a description of how Caesar — as the narrator announces she is compelled to call Oroonoko after he assumes his slave identity in Surinam (p. 40) — leads a slave rebellion, is deserted by all but one of the other slaves, and is recaptured and brutally punished by white male property-owners. The narrator interrupts the plot's temporal progression to return to a point in the just-recounted story when the outcome of Oroonoko's rebellion was still uncertain. That uncertainty is oddly preserved for Behn's readers by her shift from the simple past tense to a subjunctive formulation that mixes past, present, and the possibility of a different future:

> You must know, that when the News was brought . . . that Caesar had betaken himself to the Woods, and carry'd with him all the Negroes, we were possess'd with extreme Fear, which no Persuasions could dissipate, that he would secure himself till night and then, that he would come down and cut all our throats. 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: but we had not gone many Leagues, but the News overtook us, that Caesar was taken and whipped like a common Slave (pp. 67–8).

In this passage, the authorial "I" seems at once extraordinarily lucid and disturbingly blind about her own complicitly in her hero's capture and humiliating punishment. Had she been present, she "supposes" she could have prevented the cruelty which "they" — white men — wrought upon the black male slave.[32] Her claim to possess some singular social authority,

however, is belied by her representation of herself as part of a group of weak females, a passive group possessed — and the play on that word is rich — not by men, black or white, but rather by an agent named Fear and quickly renamed Apprehension. That oddly abstract agent, however, turns out, if we look closely, to be a product of something the passage twice calls NEWS — a mode of verbal production that is often defined as unreliable in this text, and which belongs, significantly, to a semantic complex that names crucial features of Behn's own discourse in *Oroonoko.* The novella's opening pages announce that this is a "true" "eye-witness" account of things that happened in the "new Colonies," and the author advertising her wares, along with the lands her words represent, is well aware that she must offer "Novelty" to pique her English reader's interest, for "where there is no Novelty, there can be no Curiousity" (p. 3).[33] The author herself, it would seem, is both a producer and a consumer of "news," and in the passage about her roles in Oroonoko's aborted rebellion she represents her identity — and her agency — as an ambiguous function of the *circulation* of information.

Here, as in many other parts of the book, the narrative oscillates between criticizing and profiting from a "system" of circulation which includes not only words, among them the lies characteristic of male Christian slave traders, but bodies as well. In this disturbing oscillation, which has obviously contributed to the utter lack of critical consensus about whether Behn's book supports or attacks the institution of slavery, we can see the lineaments, I believe, of a more complex model of European colonization than Tsvetan Todorov posits in his book on *The Conquest of America.*[34] In contrast to Todorov's book and most instances of Renaissance travel literature I've read, Behn's novella construes the relation between Old World and New not only in terms of a binary opposition between self and other but also in terms of a highly unstable triangular model which, in its simplest version, draws relations of sameness and difference among a black African slave, a white English woman, and a group of native Americans who are described, in the book's opening pages, as innocents "so unadorned" and beautiful that they resemble "our first parents before the fall" (p. 3). Neither the white English woman nor the black African man share the Indians' (imputed) quality of primeval innocence. The narrator and Oroonoko-Caesar have both received European educations, albeit less good, we may suppose, than those accorded to privileged white men; and both are at once victims and beneficiaries of socio-economic systems that discriminate kings from commoners and support the privileges of the nobility with the profits of the slave trade. Oroonoko is described as having captured and sold black slaves in African wars before he was himself enslaved by a dastardly lying Christian; and the narrator not only

Frontispiece from Thomas Southerne, *Oroonoko* (London, 1735). Reproduced by permission of the Rare Books and Manuscripts Division of the New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

belongs to a slave-owning class but clearly supports the nationalistic colonizing enterprise which fueled and depended on the African slave trade.[35] She laments the loss of Surinam to the Dutch a few years after the events of the novella take place (interestingly, the English traded that colony for New Amsterdam, in "our" America, in 1667) and even uses a lush description of a gold-prospecting river trip to suggest the desirability — in 1688, on the eve of William of Orange's accession to the British throne — of retaking the lost colony and its lost profits: "And 'tis to be bemoaned what his majesty lost by losing that part of America", she adds (p. 59).[36] By thus presenting a narrator and a hero who are both victims and beneficiaries of the international system

of the slave trade, and by contrasting and comparing both characters, at different moments, to the exotic and "innocent" Indians, Behn provides a perspective on "the Conquest of America" that complicates, among other binary oppositions, the ethical one, infinitely labile in the literature of the imperial venture, between "we" as "good" and "them" as "evil" — or vice versa.

What even this account of the complexity of Behn's novella leaves out, however, is the ideological force of the "other" black slave in the story — Imoinda, Oroonoko's beloved, whom the English rename Clemene. Imoinda is doubly enslaved — to the whites, male and female, who have bought her and also, as the narrative insists, to her black husband. In striking contrast to the unmarried narrator, who stands, in relation to Oroonoko, as a queen or Petrarchan lady–lord to a vassal — a "Great Mistress" (p. 46) — Imoinda is an uncanny amalgam of European ideals of wifely subservience and European fantasies about wives of Oriental despots. She is thus the perfect embodiment, with the exception of her dark hue, of an image of the ideal English wife as the property, body and soul, of her husband. Wives like Imoinda — that is, *African* wives, as refracted in the mirror a white female English author holds up to this example of the Other — "have a respect for their Husbands equal to what 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" (p. 72).

This passage occurs late in the tale, immediately after Oroonoko has resolved to kill his pregnant wife for reasons that show him to be no less obsessed than Othello by a sexual jealousy intricately bound up with ideologies of property possession: "his great heart," the narrator approvingly explains, "could not endure the Thought" that Imoinda might, after his death, "become a Slave to the enraged Multitude," that is, be "ravished by every Brute" (p. 71). So, with Imoinda's joyful consent (she's considerably more compliant in her fate than Desdemona), he "sever[s] her yet smiling Face from that delicate Body, pregnant as it was with the fruits of tenderest Love" (p. 72).

Even this brief glance at Imoinda's death scene should suggest how odd it is that Imoinda's specificity as a *black wife* should be effaced not only from most critical narratives on Behn but also from the cover of the only inexpensive modern edition of the text, the Norton paperback edited by Lore Metzger. This object solicits the attention of potential readers with a cover picture that evokes the titillating cultural image of miscegenous romance in general and, in particular, the best known high-cultural instance of such romance for Anglo-American readers, namely Shakespeare's *Othello*. The cover shows a black man on a tropical shore holding a knife histrionically pointed toward the

bare throat of a *white* woman. A note on the Norton edition's back cover informs us that the frontispiece reproduces one from a 1735 edition of *Oroonoko* — not, however, Aphra Behn's novella, but rather the play published in 1696 by Thomas Southerne. Although some critics have treated Behn's and Southerne's versions as interchangeable, there are in fact crucial differences between them.[37] In addition to making his Oroonoko a much less severe critic of slavery than Behn's hero is, Southerne replaces Behn's idealized but distinctly black heroine with a beautiful white girl. This change may perhaps be explained as Southerne's bow to a strikingly gendered and also colored convention of the Restoration stage which I'm still trying to understand, namely that male English actors could appear in blackface but actresses could not.[38]

Whatever the reasons for Southerne's recoloring of Behn's Imoinda, they can't be reduced to the exigencies of stage convention since he was criticized by contemporaries for not giving her a dark hue to match Oroonoko's — a hue the critic specifically terms "Indian" in a confusion typical of primitivist ideology.[39] Among Southerne's motives, I suspect, was a desire to capitalize on a rumor that during her stay in Surinam Behn "had a love affair with the black hero of her story."[40] The continuing circulation of this rumor through the medium of modern books, even though most critics don't credit it, is a commercial fact that needs more discussion that I have space for here. I do however want to open some questions about that fact, and our participation in it as mostly first-world born and mostly white readers, or potential buyer–readers, of *Oroonoko.* Behn's text offers an ambiguous reflection on the role of intellectual producers and consumers in an expanding international market which included in the seventeenth century, as it still does in ours, books and bodies among its prime commodities. Behn's reflection on (and of) this market has many facets, one of which, uncannily but I think instructively, seems to anticipate the titillating representation of differently gendered and colored bodies that would advertise her story (but the possessive pronoun points to problems in the very conception of authorial "ownership") in the eighteenth century and again in the late twentieth.

The facet of Behn's "market representation" to which I'm referring is her textual staging of an implicit *competition* between the white English female author and the black African female slave-wife-mother-to-be. The competition is for Oroonoko's body and its power to engender something in the future, something that will outlive it. That power remains latent — impotent, one might say — without a female counterpart for which Behn offers two opposing images: Imoinda's pregnant body, holding a potential slave-laborer ("for," as the text reminds us, "all the Breed is theirs to whom the

Parents belong"); and, alternatively, the author's "female pen," which she deploys to describe, with an unnerving blend of relish and horror, the scenes of Oroonoko's bodily dismemberment and eventual death following his leading of a slave revolt. She uses that pen also, as she tells the reader in the final paragraph, in hopes of making Oroonoko's "glorious Name to survive all Ages" (p. 78).

The narrator of course wins the competition. Through her pen flow at least some of the prerogatives of the English empire and its language, a language she has shown herself using, in one remarkable scene, as a potent instrument of sexual and political domination. In this scene, which explicitly pits an image of politically "dangerous" biological reproduction against an image of "safe" verbal production, the author presents herself most paradoxically as both a servant and a beneficiary of the eroticized socio-economic *system* of domination she describes. When some unnamed English authority figures perceive that Oroonoko is growing sullen because of the "Thought" that his child will belong not to him but to his owners, the narrator is "obliged," she tells us, to use her fiction-making powers to "divert" Oroonoko (and Imoinda too) from thoughts of "Mutiny." Mutiny is specifically tied to a problem in population management, a problem about which Behn's text — like much colonialist discourse, including chilling debates on whether it is better to "buy or breed" one's slaves — is fundamentally, and necessarily, ambivalent.[41] Mutiny, the narrator observes, "is very fatal sometimes in those Colonies that abound so with Slaves, that they exceed the Whites in vast numbers" (p. 46). It is to abort the potential mutiny that the narrator is "obliged" to "discourse with Caesar, and to give him all the Satisfaction I possibly could" — which she does, entertaining him with stories about "the Loves of the Romans and great Men, which charmed him to my company." In an interestingly gendered division of narrative goods, she tells Imoinda stories about nuns.[42]

Playing a version of Othello to both her slaves, and thus dramatizing a complex mode of authorial "ownership" of characters cast in the role of enthralled audience, Behn represents herself creating a paradoxical *facsimile* of freedom, for herself, her immediate audience, and by implication, her largely female English readers as well, in which servitude is rendered tolerable by being eroticized, fantasized, "diverted" from activities, either sexual or military, that might work to dislodge the English from their precarious lordship of this new world land. Just how precarious their possession was the narrative acknowledges by repeatedly lamenting their loss of the land to the Dutch; but the deeper problems of the logic of colonialism are also signalled, albeit confusedly, by the contrast between the description of slave mutiny quoted above and the explanation offered early in the story for why the British do *not*

enslave the native Indians, a group which, like the Africans, are essential to the colonialists' welfare; "they being on all occasions very useful to us," the narrator says, "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" (p. 5).[43] This passage sheds an ironic light on the later moment when the narrator uses stories to divert Oroonoko from thoughts of mutiny, for we see that one logical solution to the mutiny problem, a solution that her stories to Oroonoko suppress but which her larger narrative only partially represses, is the possibility of *not* enslaving a group of "others" who outnumber you. Such a solution, with respect both to Africans and to Indians, had been recommended by a few early critics of the colonial enterprise; but Behn is far from joining the tiny group who voiced criticisms of the whole system of international trade based on forced labor by persons of many skin colors including freckled Irish white.[44]

In its characteristically disturbing way, Behn's novel shows us just enough about the author's competition with Imoinda, and the enmeshment of that competition within a larger socio-sexual-economic system, to make us uneasy when we hold the book *Oroonoko* in our hands and realize that the text itself invites us to see the book as a safe-sex substitute for the potentially mutinous but also economically valuable black slave child Oroonoko might have had with Imoinda. In a bizarre twisting of the old trope of book as child, Behn offers her contemporary English readers, and us too, a representation of an economy in which the white woman's book is born, quite starkly, from the death and silencing of black persons, one of them pregnant. Behind the scene of Oroonoko's final torture, which gruesomely anticipates Alice Walker's description, in her story of a cross-race rape during the U.S. Civil Rights struggle, of "white folks standing in a circle roasting something that had talked to them in their own language before they tore out its tongue," is the murder-sacrifice of the black woman and her unborn child.[45] And the threat represented by the black woman, I would suggest, is obscurely acknowledged to be even greater than the threat represented by the black man, so that the text finally has to enlist him, through enticements of European codes of masculine honor and Petrarchan romance, to suppress the one character who actually uses physical force rather than words to attack the highest legal representative of the colonial system, namely the male Lieutenant Governor. Reversing the Renaissance commonplace that defined deeds as masculine, words as feminine, Imoinda wounds Byam, the narrator tells us, with a poisoned arrow; he is saved, however — though the narrator clearly regrets this — by his Indian mistress, who sucks the venom from his wound. The white female narrator's own ambivalent relation to male English authority is figured here by the

device of splitting "other" women into two roles: one rebellious and one erotically complicitous.

Imoinda's rebellious power — and the need to destroy it — are figured most strikingly, I think, in the two juxtaposed episodes where Oroonoko first kills a mother tiger and lays the whelp at the author's feet (p. 51) and then kills a property-destroying tiger — again female — and extracts her bullet-ridden heart to give to the English audience. At this moment Oroonoko is most transparently shown as a figure for the author of *Oroonoko*, a repository of novel curiosities which Behn offers to her readers as he offers the tiger's cub, and then its heart, to his owner-admirers:

> This heart the conqueror brought up to us, and 'twas a very great curiosity, which all the country came to see, and which gave Caesar occasion of making many fine Discourses, of Accidents in War, and strange Escapes. (p. 53)

Here Behn deliberately constructs her hero from echoes of Shakespeare; Oroonoko woos her and other British ladies as Othello wooed Desdemona with his eloquent story of his "most disastrous chances . . . moving accidents . . . hair breadth-scapes i' th' imminent deadly breach" (1.3.134–36).[46] With respect to the power relation between a narrator and an audience, this scene offers a mirror reversal of the one in which the narrator entertains her sullen, potentially mutinous hero with *her* culture's stories of "great [Roman] men." We can now see even more clearly that the "ground" of both scenes, the "material," as it were, from which the production and reception of exotic stories derives, is the silent figure of the black woman — silent but by no means safe, as is suggested by the image of the female tiger and the narrative device of duplicating it.

Perhaps, then, the Norton cover is an ironically apt representation of the complex of problems centering on property — sexual, economic and intellectual — that Behn's book at once exposes and effaces. For the white woman who stands in Imoinda's place might well be Behn herself, the literate white woman who spoke *for* some oppressed black slaves but who did so with extreme partiality, discriminating among them according to status (the novel sympathizes with *noble* slaves only, depicting common ones as "natural" servants and traitors to Oroonoko's cause) and also according to gender. Laura Brown has remarked that Behn's representation of Oroonoko is full of the ironies of the colonialist version of the self-other dialectic, in which the "other" can only be recognized as an image of the European self.[47] Brown does not, however, explore how Behn's narrative includes the "other other" of Imoinda in that dialectic, or rather, at once includes and occludes the multiple differences between the figure named Imoinda/Clemene and her

black husband, her white "mistress," and, of course, her historical "self," the woman, or more precisely, women, who were Indians and Africans both and who did not speak English, much less the idiom of heroic romance Behn favors, until the Renaissance, as we call it, brought Europeans to African and American territories. The last word of Behn's book is "Imoinda." I want to suggest, by way of a necessarily open-ended conclusion, that a quest for the historical and contemporary meanings of that name — with its teasing plays on "I", "moi" [me], "am," "Indian" — will require more attention to modalities of identification and difference than most feminists, Marxists, deconstructionists, psychoanalytic, or new-historicist critics have yet expended.

The importance of that task can perhaps be better appreciated when one thinks of how insistently the colonizing of the New World was figured as a project of erotic possession (as, for instance, in Donne's famous lines apostrophizing his naked mistress as "O My America, my New Found-land"), and, more specifically, as a project rife with fantasies of miscegenation — a mixing of ostensibly distinct categories that was just beginning, in the mid-seventeenth century, to be legally prohibited in the American colonies and which was for that reason acquiring a new erotic charge.[48] Indeed one might well want to pursue Imoinda's cultural significance by studying the odd symmetries and dissonances between the representations of both Africa and America as female bodies, the former repeatedly described as inaccessible, the latter as easily penetrable at first, but later often dangerous.[49]

If I end by suggesting that more work needs to be done on Imoinda's symbolic and material existences, I do so because I'm well aware that my own essay has only begun to formulate, much less answer, questions about the *blanks* on the maps which many of us use to explore the temporal and spatial terrain we term the Renaissance. In attempting a kind of interpretation that seeks to grasp relations of gender, race, and class through — and against — the material of a specific historical text read in a "context" impossible to delimit with certainty much less to master intellectually, I've sought to keep all three of my key category terms in play, not reducing any one to another, noticing how they sometimes supplement, sometimes fracture each other. I'm aware, however, that I'm a juggler who can't begin to handle enough balls: I've left out of this discussion many other categories of social thought that operate in Behn's text, among them religion and a powerful monarchist political ideology that arguably both drives and limits the story's investment in the oxymoronic figure of the *royal* slave.[50] Despite the gaps in my narrative, I hope I've done enough to suggest not only the difficulties but some of the pleasures of working with conceptual categories that lie squarely in the center of battlefields, historical and contemporary. Working with such categories

spurs me to think about my own implication in an economic and ideological system that has some salient continuities with the system inhabited and represented by Aphra Behn, a white woman writer whose gender allowed her to belong only eccentrically to the emerging caste of travelling intellectuals serving, representing, and sometimes critically anatomizing Europe's early imperial enterprises.

Notes

Many colleagues and students have helped me with this essay; I owe special thanks to Judy Berman, Ann R. Jones, Mary Poovey, David Simpson, Valerie Smith, and Liz Wiesen.

1. For cogent, bibliographically useful discussions of the historical and conceptual problems implicit in the varying popular and academic understandings of each of these terms see Henry Louis Gates, "Writing 'Race' and the Difference it Makes" and Anthony Appiah, "The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race," both in *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in her *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Raymond Williams' discussion of ambiguities in both Marxist and non-Marxist notions of class in *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 51–9; and the excellent recent discussion of the different historical and contemporary meanings of "class" in Chapter 3 of Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D. Wolff's *Knowledge and Class* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).
2. In the chapter cited above, for instance, Joan Scott refers to the conjunction of race, class, and gender as a "litany" (p. 30). My effort to interrogate this triad is, I hope, complementary to her work, though it takes a more "immanent" tack than that adopted by recent critics who stress the trinity's exclusion of analytically significant categories such as sexuality and ethnicity. See, e.g., Valerie Traub's critique of the problems generated by the ways in which "gender and sexuality pose as synonymous in our critical discourse," denying and delegitimating "erotic difference" ("Desire and the Difference It Makes," *The Matter of Difference: Materialist Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne, forthcoming from Harvester, 1991).
3. There are important exceptions to this generalization: the two essays I have found most theoretically valuable, and to which my effort to use and illustrate a notion of "multiple determination" is greatly indebted, are Deborah King, "Multiple Jeopardy, Multiple Consciousness: The Context of a Black Feminist Ideology," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14:11 (1988), 42–72 and Stuart Hall, "Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance," in *Sociological Theories: Race and Colonialism* (Unesco, 1989), pp. 305–5. I thank Mary Poovey for the reference to King's essay and Jacqueline Bobo for referring to and lucidly explaining Hall's notion of articulation (derived from Ernesto Laclau) in her article "*The Color Purple*: Black Women as Cultural Readers," in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (London: Verso, 1988), 90–109. Other useful treatments of the asymmetries among three, or more frequently two, of the category terms I'm concerned with include Joan Scott's remarks about the lack of "parity" among the notions of race, class, and gender ("Gender," p. 34); Appiah's brief comments about analogous conceptual tasks in current work on gender and race ("The Illusion of Race," p. 35); Nancy Leys Stepan's "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science," in *Anatomy of Racism*, ed. David T. Goldberg (Minneapolis: University of Minne-

sota Press, 1990), pp. 38–57; various issues of the journal *Race and Class*; and, for a classic, still illuminating, Marxist perspective, Oliver Cromwell Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1948). See also Jane Lewis, "The Debate on Sex and Class," *New Left Review* (1985), 149:108–20. My quotation is from Spivak, "Imperialism and Sexual Difference," *Oxford Literary Review*, 8, nos. 1 & 2, 1986, 225.

4. See Newman, "To Wash the Ethiop White: Femininity and the Monstrous," in *Shakespeare Reproduced*, ed. Jean Howard and Marion O'Connor (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 143–62; Brown, "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves," in *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. L. Brown and Felicity Nussbaum, New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 40–61; and Loomba, *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989).
5. See Joan Kelly, "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" (1977); rpt. in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 19–50.
6. Kelly, "The Doubled Vision of Feminist Theory," in *Women, History, and Theory*, pp. 51–64; the quotation is from p. 58.
7. For a pioneering effort to define a "sex/gender" system (a phrase she prefers to "patriarchy" or "mode of reproduction"), see Gayle Rubin, "The Traffic in Women," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 156–210. esp. pp. 150, 161. More recently, some feminists have criticized this concept as granting an overly "transparent" determination to the body (what Rubin calls "anatomical sex difference"): see, e.g., Moira Gatens, "A Critique of the Sex/Gender Distinction," in *Beyond Marxism?*, ed. J. Allen and P. Patton (Leichhardt, N.S.W.: Intervention Publications, 1985), pp. 143–60; and also Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 9 (on why she prefers the term *gender* to sex/gender system).
8. See Barbara Fields,"Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race and Reconstruction*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 149.
9. *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills, (New York: MacMillan, 1968), 13: 264.
10. Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966), p. 277.
11. Long, *Candid Reflections upon the Judgement Lately Awarded by the Court of King's Bench . . . on What is Commonly Called the Negro Cause* (London, 1772; cited in Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, p. 277); see also Natalie Zemon Davis's discussion of the ideological and sometimes political associations between "unruly" women and lower-class men during the Renaissance, in "Women on Top," *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1975), pp. 124–151.
12. Fields, "Ideology and Race," p. 146.
13. For an interesting discussion of this problem see Wendy James, "The Anthropologist as Reluctant Imperialist," in *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (New York: Humanities Press, 1973), 41–69, and other essays in that volume, including Asad's introduction.
14. The *OED* gives numerous illustrations from Renaissance texts of the definitions of race as "Mankind" (I.5.a) or as "A limited group of persons descended from a common ancestor" (I.2), though it cites no examples of meanings stressing physical differences and a general taxonomic division of all humans according to race (I.2.d: "One of the great divisions of mankind, having certain physical differences in common") until 1774; the first reference to race as a liability (implicitly) of dark color is Emerson's remark, in *English Traits* (1856), that "Race in the Negro is of appalling importance" (I.6.b). It is instructive to read the *OED*'s highly selective diachronic narrative on race in conjunction with Marvin Harris's

discussion of the synchronically various uses of the term and its "ethnosemantic glosses," which are applied "to human populations organized along an astonishing variety of principles " To illustrate that variety, he remarks that in some societies where the group identity is not secured through the "ideological device" of genealogical rules, categorizations will tend to rely *more* on visible signs of difference such as skin color than they do when "the idea of descent" is paramount In Bahia, for instance, where descent rules are absent, "full siblings whose phenotypes markedly differ from each other are assigned to contrastive racial categories" and "pronounced disagreements concerning the identity of individuals frequently occur" ("Race," *International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences*, 13 263, 264)

15 See de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, pp 2–3

16 Resnick and Wolff, *Knowledge and Class*, pp 115, 117

17 In *Keywords* Raymond Williams suggests that the term "class" acquired its modern sense designating divisions of social groups (in contrast to divisions among things like plants) during the period between 1770–1840 (p 61) For a discussion of the problems of using "class" in analyzing early and pre-modern social formations, see E P Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society Class Struggle Without Class?" *Social History* 3 (1978), 133–65

18 Brown, "The Romance of Empire," p 42

19 According to Behn's first biographer, identified only as "One of the Fair Sex" and since identified both as Charles Gildon (by Montague Summers) and as Behn herself (by R A Day, "Aphra Behn's First Biographer," *Studies in Bibliography* 22 [1969], 227–40), she was a "gentlewoman by birth, of a good family in the City of Canterbury in Kent" (*History of the Life and Memoirs of Mrs Behn*, London, 1696, quoted from Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* [New York The Dial Press, 1980], p 8) Not until the late nineteenth century did anyone seek publicly to refashion Behn's biography, Sir Edward Gosse then lowered her social status on the evidence of a scribbled note, "Mrs Behn was daughter to a barber," in the margin of a recently discovered ms by Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchelsea Goreau provides an account of Gosse's "discovery" (given authority in his *Dictionary of National Biography* article on her) and subsequent biographical arguments on pp 8–10 of *Reconstructing Aphra* For further discussions of the "mystery" of Behn's birth and the manifold speculations it has engendered, see Goreau, pp 11–13, 42–43, Sara Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women Three Studies* (Brighton Harvester, 1987), pp 116–120, and Maureen Duffey, *The Passionate Shepherdess Aphra Behn, 1640–89* (London Cape, 1977), chap 1 See Goreau, pp 12–13, for a discussion of the importance of Behn's (anomalous) education for her social status

20 See Wlad Godzich, "The Culture of Illiteracy," *Enclitic* 8 (Fall 1984), 27–35, on humanist intellectuals as servants of the emerging nation states and the expanding international market of the early modern era In *Trials of Desire Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven Yale University Press, 1983), I analyzed some of the anxieties about social class articulated by writers such as Joachim du Bellay and Philip Sidney For a subtle discussion of problems in defining the modern intellectual's work either according to a classic Marxist notion of "productive" labor (that is, labor that yields *surplus* value) or according to popular conceptions of what constitutes valuable work in a post-industrial society, see Evan Watkins, *Work Time English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (Stanford Stanford University Press, 1989) Watkins builds on Antonio Gramsci's "The Formation of The Intellectuals," in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed and trans Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York International, 1971), pp 5–23

21 I am grateful to Catherine Gallagher for letting me see her chapters, "Who Was That Masked Woman? The Prostitute and the Playwright in the Works of Aphra Behn" and "The Author Monarch and the Royal Slave *Oroonoko* and the Blackness of Representation," in her forthcoming book *British Women Writers and the Literary Marketplace from*

1670–1820. A version of "Who Was That Masked Woman?" appears in *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy*, ed. Regina B. Barecca (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1988). This volume originally appeared as *Women's Studies* 15, 1–3.

22. For a discussion of the date of *Oroonoko*'s composition see George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment," in *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope*, co-authored with Andrew White (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, UCLA, 1975), pp. 15–16. All quotations from *Oroonoko* are from the text edited by Lore Metzger (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1973). The reference to the female pen is from p. 46. See Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire," esp. 48–51, for a discussion of the story's debt to the traditions of heroic romance and, in particular, coterie aristocratic drama. Brown analyzes how Behn uses romance conventions to perform what Mary Louise Pratt has called a "reductive normalization" of the hero's alterity; in this "mystificatory" process, Brown argues, the figure of the woman, both as narrative "producer" and as consumer (audience-reader), is crucial.
23. For an excellent account and bibliography of the Renaissance ideology of normative femininity, see Ann Rosalind Jones, *The Currency of Eros: Women's Love Lyric in Europe, 1540–1620* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1990), chap. 1.
24. For examples of this gendered "colonial" cultural discourse see the passages cited above (notes 11 and 12) from Davis, *The Problem of Slavery* and Goreau, pp. 48–49 (on the fears of "sodomy" that kept one lady living in Antigua housebound, and on the repercussions of the fact that men in the colonies greatly outnumbered women).
25. On Behn's situation after her father died, impoverished but also freer of paternal constraint than was thought proper, see Goreau, p. 42.
26. My account of the multiple alignments of the "I" is indebted to questions prepared by Judy Berman for a graduate seminar at the University of California, Berkeley, in the spring of 1988.
27. Chudleigh's text, from her *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1703), is quoted from *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578–1799*, ed. Moira Ferguson (Bloomington and Old Westbury: Indiana University Press and The Feminist Press, 1985), p. 237. Cf. the statement in a famous pamphlet entitled *The Levellers*, also from 1703, that "Matrimony is indeed become a meer Trade [.] They carry their daughters to *Smithfield* as they do Horses, and sell to the highest bidder." Quoted in Maximillian E. Novak and David Stuart Rodes's edition of Thomas Southerne's *Oroonoko* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1976), p. xxiv. For an example of this analogy from later in the century, see Margaret Cavendish's equation of marriage with slavery in *CCXI Sociable Letters* (1664; facsimile ed., Menston, England: Scolar Press, 1969), p. 427.
28. Behn offers a more literal and comic representation of impotence in the first part of the novella, where Imoinda is taken from Oroonoko by his tyrannical but impotent grandfather; she also represents male impotence in many of her plays and in the poem "The Disappointment," a brilliantly revisionary instance of the Restoration subgenre of "imperfect enjoyment" poems. On her deviation from male-authored poetic representations of impotence see Judith Kegan Gardiner, "Aphra Behn: Sexuality and Self-Respect," *Women's Studies* 7 (1980), 67–78, esp. 74–7; and also Margaret W. Ferguson, "A Room Not Their Own: Renaissance Women as Readers and Writers," in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 112–4.
29. The quotation is from the "Epistle Dedicatory" to Lord Maitland, included in the edition of *Oroonoko* by Adelaide P. Amore (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1987), p. 3, but not in the Norton edition. See Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, pp. 68–9, for Byam's reasons for disliking Behn and his snide reference to her as "Astrea" in a letter to a friend in England.

30. See her preface to *The Lucky Chance*, where she requests "the Priviledge for my Masculine Part the Poet in me (if any such you will allow me) to tread in those successful Paths my Predecessors have so long thriv'd in," *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers, 6 vols. (1915; rpt. New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 3:187.
31. For a fine discussion of this stereotypical confrontation across color and gender lines, see Anthony Barthelemy, *Black Face Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1987), esp. Chap. 4, which explores numerous plays in which "failure by the [white] community to limit Moors sexually leads to their exercise of power and terror" (especially in the form of the property crime of rape), p. 123. Behn herself, in *Abdelazar; Or the Moor's Revenge* (1677), her adaptation for the Restoration stage of Dekker's *Lusts Dominion*, exploits the conventional image of the threateningly sexual black man; that play offers numerous intriguing parallels to *Oroonoko*, among them the scene of Abdelazar's brutal execution, in which all the white men participate as if it were, in Barthelemy's phrase, "a communal activity" necessary for restoring the social order (p. 115).
32. Note that the most logical syntactic antecedent of "they" would be a group of *black* men composed of Oroonoko and his band, perpetrating the rape which one might easily construe as the referent for "this cruelty." The grammatical ambiguity arguably points to the struggle between the narrator's original perception of danger and her "corrected" but guiltily impotent retroactive perception that the white men, not the black ones, were her true enemies.
33. Cf. the passage where the white male character Trefry is said to be "infinitely well pleased" with the "novel" of Oroonoko's and Imoinda's reunion (p. 44).
34. See, for instance, the diametrically opposed interpretations of George Guffey and Angeline Goreau on the issue of Behn's representation of black slaves. For Guffey, who reads confidently "through" the sign of Oroonoko's blackness to an English political subtext, the novella's ideological argument is not anti-slavery but against the enslavement of *kings*, specifically the Stuart king tenuously on England's throne in 1688: "through a series of parallels between James and the mistreated royal slave Oroonoko, [Behn] attempts to gain the sympathy of her reader for James, who . . . was in great danger of imminent deposition or worse" ("Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment," pp. 16–7). Goreau, in contrast (and equally confidently), sees Behn's "impassioned attack on the condition of slavery and defense of human rights" as "perhaps the first important abolitionist statement in the history of English literature" (*Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 289). See Tzvetan Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, (New York: Harper, 1984).
35. The text is, however, significantly ambiguous about whether Behn could or did own slaves in her own right, as an unfathered, unmarried woman. In her prefatory letter to Maitland, she refers to Oroonoko as "my Slave," but she suggests, in the course of the story, that she lacked the power to dispose of her chattel property: she relates that she "assured" him, falsely, as it turns out, that he would be freed when the Governor arrived (p. 45).
36. Cf. p. 48, where the narrator laments that "certainly had his late Majesty [Charles II], of sacred Memory, but 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"; the passage goes on to advertise the natural riches of the (once and future) colony. On the British loss of Surinam (later Guiana) in exchange for New York, see Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean* (1970; rpt. New York: Vintage, 1984), p. 81.
37. See, for example, Lore Metzger's introduction to the Norton *Oroonoko*, ix–x and Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, p. 207: "Oroonoko opposed the revolts of the slaves as did his creator, Mrs. Behn." That statement seems to rely more on Southerne's version, where Oroonoko is made to speak in favor of the institution of slavery and lead a revolt only with great reluctance, than on Behn's, where the hero passionately leads the slaves to

revolt and defends their right to regain their liberty (p. 61). Though the ideological differences between Behn's and Southerne's versions of *Oroonoko* have yet to receive full critical analysis, some useful general distinctions are drawn by Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, p. 478, and by Amore in her introduction to *Oroonoko*, p. xxxii. Though Davis refers to Southerne's play as a "watered-down version" of Behn's novella, it's worth noting that even Southerne's version, in which Oroonoko defends white owners' rights to buy slaves, was unacceptable to rich merchants of Liverpool, according to Mrs. Inchbold as quoted by Amore, p. xxxii.

38. In *Guinea's Captive Kings: British Anti-Slavery Literature of the XVIIIth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1942), p. 21, Wylie Sypher suggests that it was more acceptable for theater audiences that Imoinda be white. Queen Anne and her ladies had been criticized for wearing blackface in Jonson's *Masque of Blackness*, but Englishwomen representing Moors had evidently worn black masks and makeup in the Lord Mayor's pageants in London after the Restoration; see Anthony Barthelemy, *Black Face Maligned Race*, esp. chap. 3.
39. For the poem attacking Southerne for failing to give Imoinda an "*Indian* hue," see Maximillian E. Novak and David S. Rodes's introduction to their edition of Southerne's *Oroonoko*, p. xxxvii. In *The Problem of Slavery*, Davis discusses the tendency to conflate Amerindians and African blacks in a discourse of "primitivism" (p. 480).
40. This rumor, the original source of which I haven't been able to trace, is mentioned by Lore Metzger in her introduction to *Oroonoko*, p. x; most modern biographers prefer another story (which has some documentary support) that Behn had an affair with a white Republican, William Scott, during her stay in Surinam (see Goreau, pp. 66–8).
41. On the "buy or breed" debates, see Daniel P. Mannix in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley, *Black Cargoes: A History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1518–1865* (New York: Viking, 1962), p. 23.
42. See Amore, "Introduction" to *Oroonoko*, for the hypothesis that this detail testifies to Behn's piety and possible Catholicism. Accepting the likelihood that she was indeed a Catholic, I wouldn't assume that the stories designed for Imoinda by the narrator are any more pious than Behn's own racy stories about nuns; indeed there may well be a bit of authorial self-reference (or even witty self-advertisement) here. See Behn's *History of the Nun, or, The Fair Vow Breaker* and *The Nun; or The Perjured Beauty*, both in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers, vol. 5.
43. Since the blacks also greatly outnumbered the whites in the colony, Behn's explanation for the distinction in the English treatment of the two non-white groups is clearly problematic. The matter continues to be a site of debate in modern histories of slavery in the New World, for even though Indians *were* frequently enslaved, all of the colonial powers came, eventually, to *prefer* African to Amerindian slaves for reasons that confusingly blended economic, theological, and cultural explanations. Some modern historians, for instance Winthrop Jordan, in *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550–1812* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968), invoke color difference as an explanation for why Africans came (eventually) to be seen as better (more "natural") slaves than Indians, but this view, cited and refuted by Fields, p. 11, seems anachronistic and reductive. More satisfactory discussions are given by Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, who sees the distinction as an "outgrowth of the practical demands of trade and diplomacy" (p. 178) bolstered by ideological fictions about blackness (the biblical color of evil) and "noble savages"; and by William D. Phillips, Jr., *Slavery from Roman Times to the Early Transatlantic Trade* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), who, in discussing the commonly cited adage that "one Negro is worth four Indians" in terms of labor power, suggests that the difference between the Africans' experience in agricultural societies and the Amerindians in mainly hunting-gathering cultures helps account for this sobering

ideological distinction (p. 184) — a distinction that makes a person's *economic* value stand in antithetical relation to his or her *moral* value (in European eyes, at least, which equated freedom with "natural" nobility).

44. For discussions of early critics of slavery such as Las Casas (who came only late in life to decry the enslavement of blacks as well as Indians) and Albornoz, see Davis, *The Problem of Slavery*, p. 189 and passim; Eric Williams, *From Columbus to Castro*, pp. 43–4; and Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 289 (on the Quaker George Fox's opposition to the system of slavery). On the legal and ideological distinctions very unevenly and gradually introduced between white and black slaves, see Phillips, p. 183.
45. Alice Walker, "Advancing Luna — and Ida B. Wells," in *You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981), p. 93.
46. Quoted from the Signet *Othello*, ed. Alvin Kernan (New York: New American Library, 1963), p. 55.
47. See Brown, "The Romance of Empire," pp. 47–48, where she comments astutely on Behn's description of Oroonoko as a perfect European hero ("his nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat," Norton ed., p. 8).
48. Elegy 19, "To his Mistris Going To Bed," quoted from *John Donne: Poetry and Prose*, ed. Frank Warnke (New York: Random House/Modern Library, 1967), p. 96. See Mannix and Cowley, *Black Cargoes*, p. 60, on the Maryland assembly's early (1663) law against racial intermarriages, a law specifically directed against English women; cf. Davis's observation, in *The Problem of Slavery*, that the North American colonies adopted "harsh penalties for whites who had sexual relations with Negroes, and the punishments were usually more severe for white women" (p. 277, n. 27).
49. See Barthelemy, *Black Face*, ch. 3, for a rich account of personifications of Africa on English maps and in pageants. Though he doesn't explore the implications of the fact that Africa is almost always figured as a female, and frequently as an arrow-bearing Amazon or virgin Diana, his material is suggestive for further research on Behn's representation of Imoinda, as are passages in the literature of American colonization portraying the continent as a "maiden" soon to be "deflowered" but also as a putrefying or dangerous "corpse." For such a conflation of images, see the passage from Sir Walter Raleigh's *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana* (1595) quoted in Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 41.
50. See Maureen Duffey and George Guffey for different versions, both I think reductive, of a topical interpretation of *Oroonoko* which takes Behn's hero as an allegorical figure for various Stuart monarchs, especially the "martyred" Charles I and the soon to be deposed James II. Catherine Gallagher offers a more nuanced reading of the novella in terms of absolutist political ideology in *British Women Writers and the Literary Marketplace.*