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A DEGENERATE RACE: ENGLISH BARBARISM IN APHRA BEHN'S *OROONOKO* AND *THE WIDOW RANTER*

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For Aphra Behn and other Restoration writers like Dryden and Milton, barbarism was an uncivil taint only recently overcome and still lurking in the English people. More explicitly, Behn's position is that the nation's inability to tolerate the Stuart line (traumatized by one regicide, one forced "abdication," and countless assassination or usurpation plots) is a result of a barbarous national character which prefers violence and personal independence to the mercy and moral prudence of kingly government. Poised on either side of the 1688 revolution, two of Behn's last works, *Oroonoko* (1688) and *The Widow Ranter* (performed posthumously in 1689), exploit English anxieties about the nation's racial incapacity to live in a peaceful, civil society—in current parlance we might say Behn sees the English people as possessing a collective genetic predisposition towards violence, greed, and restless disobedience. Her argument invokes a common seventeenth-century narrative of political origins which tracks the emergence of civil society from a primitive and violent pre-political state. But unlike early liberal political thinkers such as Thomas Hobbes, Henry Neville, or John Locke, and much like her contemporary John Dryden, Behn inverts that narrative of political origins to display the dangerous tendencies of the English race.

Behn uses the Americas, traditionally imagined as the site of primitive governments, to demonstrate the barbarous and rapacious qualities of European political society. Yet in her late works, Behn worries over the English national proclivity for lawless violence in a manner that a colleague like Dryden would find both unpalatable and bad for ticket sales. Perhaps finally disillusioned by the repeated rejections of the Stuart line, Behn shares with her political opposite John Milton a deep and hostile antipathy towards the English national character. Neither endorsing a Whig historiography that imagines an ever-improving civil society nor embracing the classical idea of *anakuklosis* in which governments continuously revolve

between their multiple forms, in *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*, Behn posits a contemporary return to the primitive violence of pre-political society as the result of England's rejection of the Stuart kings in particular and the political philosophy of absolute monarchy in general.

Behn sees her republican and Whig opponents as a pastiche of undesirables incapable of government—they are the *mobile vulgus*, a subversive, noisome crowd of "ignoramus" Whig politicians, the monstrous mercantile middle class, and a deluded multitude of rabble.[1] For Behn, while English barbarism may be most explicitly manifest in the undisciplined spaces of the American colonies, the real threat is not in colonial corruption *per se* but in the Whig influenced corruption and destabilization of class and governmental authority in England. The development of a more formal Tory ideology in the eighteenth century is directly related to such fears of backsliding into national barbarism. Stripped of many of the overtly repressive aspects of Stuart absolutism, eighteenth-century Tory ideology construes royal authority as a legitimate and virtuous means of disciplining a volatile populace dangerously susceptible to the influence of demagogues and enthusiasts.

Behn's American settings serve a typically colonial purpose—they are at once allegories of and foils for representations of the metropole. With the term "salvage ethnography," James Clifford describes the process by which colonial cultures become fetishized and precious to a metropolitan nation; the colonizing nation seeks to preserve a vanishing colonial culture in order to cast light on the perceived origins of the metropole.[2] Such a process conserves cherished aspects of an indigenous culture to satisfy the demands of metropolitan nostalgia for similar aspects of its own prehistory. Aphra Behn uses an inversion of such salvage ethnography in her royalist depictions of the American colonies; it is not nostalgia for but anxiety about the primitive origins of the English nation that is at the core of *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*. While she may idealize the honesty and simplicity of indigenous American cultures, Behn sees Virginia and Surinam as refractions of England's primitive history, a period of undisciplined, violent, lawless Northern barbarism which so haunted a nation driven to assert its credentials of civility. In Behn's late works, the barbarians are not indigenous peoples but rather the dregs of English culture who find in the Americas an opportunity to express their natural predilection towards self-interest, cruelty, mob rule, and lawlessness.

Behn uses the colonies as spaces of historical description to point out two crucial facts for her Restoration audience: first, the national civilizing process is fragile and tenuous; and second, the lack of disciplined absolutist government in the colonies is reactivating barbaric tendencies which the nation has only recently overcome. Earlier in the seventeenth century, Samuel Daniel would express just this anxiety in his "Epistle: To Prince Henrie," arguing that colonial expansion and trade would imperil the project of English civilization: "our ymmoderate humours may be made / A prey unto some Gothicq barbarous hand / That shall lay wast out glorie, ruynate / All these erected monuments, that stand / Fraile witnesses of our more fraile estate."[3] The fear is not that the barbarous colonial renegades and criminals will come home to England, but rather that the primitive tendencies already loosed in Surinam and Virginia are emerging in England, spurred on by the seventeenth century's multiple rebellions and many emergent, subversive theories of political obligation. For Behn, as for other Stuart sympathizers like Dryden, without the check of an absolute sovereign guaranteeing the rule of law and without the proper filial bonds of love and duty between subject and sovereign, the English nation's intrinsic barbarity cannot be contained.

As an apologist for the Stuart court in the 1680s, Behn had a very difficult task.[4] Along with royalist colleagues such as Dryden, Roger L'Estrange, and Nathaniel Thompson, Behn had to try and convince a rabidly anti-Catholic London audience that not only was an aggressively Catholic James II a just and desirable king, but also that the rabidly Protestant Whigs and their desire for constitutional rule were in fact bad for the people and the country.[5] The plots and crises of succession in the 1680s were generally organized along Catholic-Protestant lines, but the notion that the people could consent to the rule of one monarch and not another was anathema to the royalist cause both in England and abroad. However, for a variety of factors the idea of a divine right or absolute sovereign was doomed in England despite the best efforts of a legion of authors justifying it in the press. After the regicide, restoring faith in the idea of an absolute monarchy *de jure divino* was a difficult task—neither plagues of locusts nor pillars of fire had punished the nation or its temporary parliamentary rulers.[6] Even at the end of Dryden's "Absalom and Achitophel" when God thunders assent to David's absolute prerogative, or in his *Albion and Albanius*, an operatic assault on "Zeal" and "Democracy," we can recognize Dryden's desperate defense of royal authority addressed to a generally skeptical public.[7]

For Stuart loyalists, any check on the God-given royal prerogative leads directly to the ignorant democratic tyranny of the common people. Absolutist propaganda, like any ideologically freighted representation, manifested itself in a diversity of genres. Royalist Catholic printer Thompson, in an attempt to win the "deluded multitude" back from democracy and sedition, published a series of irreverent and politically charged "Loyal Songs." Thompson's strategy was to win over the "misinformed rabble" not through homiletic or political argument but through the medium of song itself: hearing his loyal tunes, Thompson argued that the people "began to listen; they began to hear the Truth in a SONG; in time found their Errours, and were charm'd into Obedience. Those that despise the revered Prelate in the Pulpit, and the grave Judge on the Bench; that will neither submit to the Laws of God or Man, will yet lend an itching Ear to a Loyal Song . . . and often become a convert by It."[8] As a direct challenge to the sedition of democracy, Thompson saw his loyal songs as technologies of manufacturing consent in a malleable public: he argued that these "melodious tingling[s] hath reduced [those] who otherwise had never been brought under the Discipline of Obedience or Government."[9]

Thompson's "The Whigs Exaltation" expresses the perceived peril of democracy: "the Whigs will teach the Nobles how to bow, And keep their Gentry down / . . . The name of the Lord shall be abhorr'd / For ev'ry Mans a Brother. What reason then in Church or State / One man should rule another? / Thus having peel'd and plunder'd all, / And levell'd each degree, / We'l make their plump young Daughters fall, / And he[y] boys up go we!"[10] An anonymous loyal song reflects the fear of the rabble in government: "Each Cobler's Statesman grown, and the bold Rable / Convert each ale-house Board to Council-table."[11] We find almost an exact echo of this image particularly in *The Widow Ranter* where former pickpockets and cobblers rule Virginia oafishly, and with startling cowardice and treachery.

Licenser L'Estrange used a similar strategy to sway the people to the Stuart cause. Rationalizing his use of the fable for political indoctrination, in the preface to his *Fables* (1669) L'Estrange argues that "there's Nothing makes a Deeper Impression upon the Minds of Men, or comes Lively to their Understanding, than those Instructive Notices that are Convey'd to them by Glances, Insinuations, and Surprize; and under the cover of some Allegory or Riddle . . . which is, in truth, no other than a more Agreeable Vehicle found out for Conveying to us the Truth and Reason of Things, through the

Medium of Images and Shadows."[12] Both Thompson and L'Estrange saw the need to sway a misinformed rabble with indirect persuasion, and yet incite in that audience sincere royalist loyalty. Behn's *Oroonoko* tries to achieve this same result, taking an oblique path through the "Images and Shadows" of tragic prose romance. Much like Dryden's heroic plays from *The Indian Emperour* (1665) to *Don Sebastian* (1689), both Behn's tragicomic *Widow Ranter* and the novella *Oroonoko* rely on the affective force of the tragic plot as a medium of political education, mobilizing the fear, pity, and anxiety of the reader to promote absolute monarchy as the only defense against the latent barbarism of the English race. Behn's two American works bludgeon her opponents with both farcical and scathing representations of their ochlocracy (mob rule) and its attendant elevation of trade. For Behn, the nebulous Whig confluence of republicanism and Williamite kingship which emerges after James II's removal violently corrupts the civilizing project of the nation as it destroys sacred and virtuous royal authority as an institution at home and in person abroad.

I.

Vicious. Warlike. Drunken. Fierce. Violent. Primitive. Dull of intellect. Impetuous. Skeptical of Authority. Nonagricultural and undomestic. These are the qualities of the northern European barbarian as manifested in a long and profoundly influential ethnographic tradition which continues from classical antiquity into the early modern period.[13] As stark counterexamples to the civilized cultures edging the Mediterranean, the gothic northerners were an abhorrently violent, disorganized, and undisciplined mass of primitives who had contributed almost nothing to the processes of advancement. Early modern readers would readily recognize these brutal Goths as the ancestors of the various Germanic peoples of Europe, a racial group that includes Norse, Germans, Dutch, Irish, Welsh, and most critically for this essay, the English.[14] Such barbaric national status haunts many early modern English authors, as Richard Helgerson has pointed out.[15] Along with Caesar's *de bello gallici*, the *loci classici* of barbarian ethnography are Tacitus's *Agricola* and *Germania*. Debora Shuger culls a representative picture of barbarian culture from Caesar and Tacitus:

> The Germans "spend all their lives in hunting and warlike pursuits." They have "no taste for peace" but consider "war and plunder [raptus]" the only honorable pursuits, leaving "the care of house,

> home, and fields . . . to the women, old men, and weaklings of the family," for "a German is not so easily prevailed upon to plough the land and wait patiently for harvest as to challenge a foe and earn wounds for his reward. He thinks it tame and spiritless to accumulate slowly by the sweat of his brow what can be got quickly by the loss of a little blood." Hence they "are not agriculturalist . . . but live principally on meat, cheese, and milk, . . . nor do they own private property, lest their men" get accustomed to living in one place, lose their warlike enthusiasm, and take up agriculture.[16]

Like his early modern successors, Tacitus attributes much of the peculiar formation of barbarian culture to the rugged and hostile northern geography: in Agricola's Britain, "The climate is wretched," while barbarian Germany "is covered either by bristling forests or foul swamps;" even the German cows "lack the handsome heads that are their natural glory."[17] For Tacitus, such a wretched climate and geography produces a nomadic, anti-agriculturalist, violent, hasty barbarian culture. Political theorist and ethnographer Jean Bodin, upon whose sophisticated theories of sovereignty the supporters of the Stuart family relied, conceptualizes national identity in terms of geographical determinism. For Bodin, characteristics of a given culture are linked causally to physical factors like climate, diet, and terrain.[18] While a harsh climate might engender barbarism, industry, or sloth, such attributes were not racially naturalized. Barbarism may have once been an attribute of the northern European, but it was not unalterably so.[19]

Such a conclusion is crucially important to the development of early modern English nationhood. Instead of a naturalized or intrinsic racial quality, geographically determined barbarism was an onerous and regrettable aspect of the English past which could be expunged from the national character through the rigorous application of political, social, linguistic, and epistemological civility.[20] Thus the process of English civilization was fashioned as heroic and exceptional by its triumph over the rather cumbersome burden of a "barbaric" geography. The process of civilizing England, as Helgerson argues, was conducted with direct reference to the primitive northern past: "sixteenth-century national self-articulation began with a sense of national barbarism, with a recognition of the self as despised other, and then moved to repair that damaged self-image."[21] By the beginning of the seventeenth century, English culture had been regulated, civilized, and refined as a response to the barbaric past—not only had England generated a suitably civil canon of authors such

as Spenser and Shakespeare, but it had an articulate, praiseworthy, and publicly available history, a clarified and rigorous legal and ecclesiastical structure, and an abiding belief not just in the idea of an English nation but in the exceptional destiny of that nation.[22]

This is not to suggest, however, that in early modern England the primitive gothic past was to be utterly erased so much as kept safely and selectively in the past. Just as Tacitus admires the Germans' lack of ostentation, indolence, enervation, and luxurious corruption, so too did early modern English literati see in their barbaric, martial past an undesirable but finally useful prehistory, a few elements of which ought to be celebrated and conserved. Not surprisingly these meritorious features included the (often aristocratic) values which would later make up part of the rhetoric of English exceptionalism—personal independence, industry, and honor—and were preserved in the late Elizabethan period, as Helgerson argues, through Spenser's gothic romances, Shakespeare's history plays, and Camden and Drayton's chorographies *Britannia* and *Poly-Olbion*.

But civilization is difficult. As much as the Elizabethans did succeed in regulating and fashioning an English nation, the anxieties of English barbarism were far from banished from the cultural psyche of the educated classes. The civil wars were adequate testimony, especially to Royalists, that England had not left barbarism behind in the twilight of history. As we know, Royalists saw in the "ignorant rabble" an undisciplined mob inclined to violence, greed, and drunkenness, waiting for a chance at regicide, slaughter, rapine, and plunder. But barbarism was hardly limited to the laboring classes, even in the aristocratic imagination. The mob that Dryden, Behn, L'Estrange, and other Stuart sympathizers vilified was thought to be in part the product of English geography, in part the product of a collective national racial character only recently refined, sanitized, and civilized. Their fear was that such latent barbarism would bloom without the suitable application of political discipline, and their faith was that a strong sovereign dispensing justice and mercy from a position above the law was the only plausible defense against recurrent national backsliding into barbarism.

Even an outspoken republican like John Milton saw English barbarism as an impediment to the development of a just and godly commonwealth. In his "Digression" from the *History of Britain* (1670), Milton argues that liberty had been "sought out of Season, in a corrupt and degenerate age" by a nation of "unfortunate Britains . . . entangled and oppresst with things too hard and generous above

their strain and temper." Milton retreats into geographic determinism as he invokes the English predilection for barbarism in his defense of Commonwealth: "For Britain, to speak a truth not often spoken, . . . is a Land fruitful enough of Men stout and courageous in War, [but] naturally not over-fertile of Men able to govern justly and prudently in Peace. . . . For the Sun which we want, ripens Wits as well as Fruits; and as Wine and Oyl are Imported to us from abroad; so must ripe understanding, and many civil Vertues, be imported into our minds from Foreign Writings, and examples of best Ages."[23] While this tract is clearly an effort to rationalize the failure of the commonwealth, the fact that Milton would see English northern barbarism as the primary reason for the failure of the Good Old Cause indicates the powerfully pervasive hold such ideas of the national character had in the years after 1660.

It is not enough simply to assert that English writers were anxious about their potential northern barbarism and instituted a widespread project of civilization. Peter Burke suggests that as a response to emerging discourses of national identity in early modern Europe, aristocrats withdrew from the traditional forms and roles of their indigenous popular culture in order to maintain a suitably vertical and naturalized relationship between themselves and their inferiors.[24] The idea of a national identity, whether civilized or not, implies a "wide, horizontal comradeship" between all subjects regardless of class.[25] If barbarism was the spur which produced representations of an English nation, as Helgerson contends, and if aristocrats saw in the horizontality of the idea of nation an erosion of naturalized class privilege, as Burke argues, then it follows that the aristocratic withdrawal from popular, national culture is at least in part a flight from an ignorant, acquisitive rabble which has no respect for civil authority. That the lower classes evoked such anxiety in England seems plausible. Old habits of thought die hard and are quite portable. Even when confronted with native people in America or Africa, English merchants and colonists relied first on class as a means to comprehend and sort the people they met. While theories of racial superiority were current and powerful, in most cases they were secondary evaluative indices, as Karen Ordahl Kupperman has argued in her study of seventeenth-century English interpretations of native Virginians.[26]

For early modern England (particularly in the seventeenth century) a violent gothic past was a massively useful trope—the civilizing processes of national self-fashioning and commercial expansion were

vindicated with reference to this brutal British past. Apologists for commerce saw in trade a civilizing and regulating function which focused the passions on material objects outside of the self rather than abstracted and internal qualities such as virtue and honor. The *Pax Britannia* would be erected not on the foundation of conquest, but rather on the stable and pacific ground of trade. J. G. A. Pocock argues that the "barbarism and savagery" of unregulated passions served as a powerful stimulus for the new economic man. But rather than embracing what might be an inglorious and destructive barbarism lurking in the national past, "apologists for commerce preferred, to any scheme of history based on civic humanism, those schemes of natural law and *jus gentium* propounded by Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke, and the German jurists, which stressed the emergence of civil jurisprudence out of a state of nature, since the latter could be readily equated with barbarism."[27] In the anti-Stuart political vernacular of the later seventeenth century, the divine right of kings comes to look like nothing so much as a relic of a primitive and insular past best left behind with the tattered wolf hides and war paint of England's barbarian ancestors. Dryden and Behn, the Restoration's two great apologists for Stuart authority, shoulder the task of linking national civility with absolute kingship while celebrating select gains of commercial expansion. Behn's great contemporary John Dryden employs a strategy of literary exemplarity, presenting a merciful, just, and loving Stuart sovereign (or his fictional avatars) as the best guarantee of national peace and continuing civility. Although she too argues that the only defense against a warlike and primitive national character is a strong sovereign, Behn seems to prefer the cautionary tale or the demonstrative counterexample as a means of political education. *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter* demonstrate primitive violence and barbarian lawlessness in contemporary practice, without much tangible hope of deliverance or redemption. For Behn, the future holds only a return to the gothic barbarism which for so long kept England bathed in darkness and cruelty.

II.

Oroonoko, a 1688 novella which details the persecution of a virtuous monarch by a cadre of rapacious colonial profiteers and transported criminals now in political office, would resonate with the recent history of popular rebellion against divine right monarchy and the contemporary attack on James II's authority. *Oroonoko* has been

read as an abolitionist tract, a critique of European colonialism, a meditation on Behn's status as a professional female author, and as an allegory for the regicide of Charles I or the deposition of James II. Much of the recent criticism on *Oroonoko* has been focused on the figure of Behn herself and her complicity with or critique of early modern systems of colonialism and gender.[28] My intention here is to build on such analyses by positioning *Oroonoko* within a tradition of antipopulist Stuart apologetics, a tradition which argues that the deconsecration of absolute sovereignty, the denaturalization of aristocratic privilege, and the elevation of international trade all lead inevitably to barbarism and faction. In *Oroonoko*, Behn responds to the threat of a constitutional monarchy, which Defoe would later endorse in his poem "The True-Born Englishman" thus: "if to a king they do the reins commit, / All men are bound in conscience to submit; / But then that king must by his oath assent / To *postulatas* of the government, / Which if he breaks, he cuts off the entail, / And power retreats to its original."[29] Such a king, subject to the "*postulatas* of the government," is for Behn merely a puppet of the unruly crowd, which Defoe characterizes as the "original" of sovereignty.

It is important to remember that James II was an ardent Catholic in a nation established in part upon a providential series of anti-Catholic triumphs. And more importantly, James II was a terrible king—haughty, diffident, aggressive in promoting Catholicism, staggeringly careless of popular opinion. Within months, he succeeded in alienating most of Charles II's popular and party support through fiascoes like the Trial of the Seven Bishops.[30] While Behn did maintain her Stuart sympathies, *Oroonoko's* office is to defend the concept and institution of absolute monarchy itself rather than the particular case of James II or the Stuart family. Prince Oroonoko is the perfect vehicle for such an abstraction because he is both transparently foreign and unrelated to James II, and transparently virtuous as an ideal monarch.

Almost from the moment we are first presented with the figure of Oroonoko, Behn signals clearly that he is an idealized representation of kingship which inheres somatically. Not only is Oroonoko an "expert captain" and the "bravest [of] soldiers," he is "adorned with a native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race, that he struck an awe and reverence, even in those that knew not his quality."[31] Oroonoko's physical beauty is a sign of his inward nobility—his virtue and suitability for leadership is available to all. Let us consider Behn's often cited description of Oroonoko:

> He was pretty tall, but of a shape the most exact that can be fancied; the most famous statuary could not form the figure of a man more admirably turned from head to foot. His face was not of that brown, rusty black which most of that nation are, but a perfect ebony, or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing; the white of them being like snow, as were his teeth. His nose was rising and Roman, instead of African and flat. His mouth, the finest shaped that could be seen; far from those great turned lips, which are so natural to the rest of the Negroes. The whole proportion and air of his face was so noble, and exactly formed, that bating his colour, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. . . . Oroonoko was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely, had as great a soul, as politic maxims, and was as sensible of power as any prince civilized in the most refined schools of humanity and learning, or the most illustrious courts. (80–81)

The narrator's ekphrasis of Oroonoko's body, as fetishistic in its treatment of detail as it is, establishes several crucial points. The passage is one of only a handful of elaborate and lovingly detailed descriptive inclusions in an otherwise sterile prose narrative (the other moments of baroque detail describe locales and features of Surinam). Such a shift in prose style contributes to the aestheticization of Oroonoko emphasized in the narrative. Like another aesthetic object (the Indian headdress described in the opening lines of the novella), Oroonoko is commodified as an exotic, luxurious, and appealing example of colonial bounty. For the narrator (as for the slave traders he will later meet), Oroonoko is an object given value by his physical character. He is not only beautiful and "exactly formed," but as an object of art he seems to invite the narrator's attentive erotic gaze. She pauses over each feature of his body, and then proceeds inward to detail his greatness of soul and refinement. Here Oroonoko is transformed into a kind of colonial fetish; his body at once stands for the exotic products of mercantile imperialism and serves as the object of the narrator's material and erotic desires. As such a fetish, Oroonoko stands for the alluring potential of colonial exploration; as we will see, that beautiful potential is soon sullied by a barbaric mob.[32] Oroonoko's beauty, even despite the alleged defect of his blackness, is the first in a series of signs indicating his interior nobility and greatness of soul. And, although he has had "some part" of a courtly education and has encountered English and Spanish traders, Oroonoko's regal comportment is in large part due to his intrinsic and comprehensive greatness.

Oroonoko appears in this passage as a synthetic form—he is at once a mixture of African "polished jet" and "rising and Roman" features, of European and African culture such that he does meet the narrator's "standard of true beauty." As such, Oroonoko is a figure for naturalized aristocratic virtues and royal prerogative—like any king, his greatness of soul and suitability for government are not geographically determined but rather are somatic and visible to all. Behn's claim that the noble Oroonoko "was as capable even of reigning well, and of governing as wisely . . . as any prince civilized in Europe" (81) bears this out. In Coramantien, Oroonoko is graceful, heroic, honorable, gentle, intelligent, sympathetic, brave, and "admirably adorned . . . in soul and body" (81). Such detail is also nostalgic, looking back on an ideal incarnation of the king before he is betrayed into a contemporary moment which is disdainful of royal authority.

After he is trepanned into slavery and transported to Surinam, Oroonoko unsuccessfully tries to disguise himself: "he begged Trefry to give him [clothes] more befitting a slave; which he did, and took off all his robes. Nevertheless, he shone through all and his osenbrigs . . . could not conceal the graces of his looks and mien; and he had no less admirers than when he had his dazzling habit on. The royal youth appeared in spite of the slave . . . as soon as [people] approached him they venerated and esteemed him; his eyes insensibly commanded respect, and his behaviour insinuated it into every soul" (108). Here Behn explicitly highlights the fact that Oroonoko is a figure for the ideal sovereign—Oroonoko's aristocratic magnanimity or greatness of soul is physically visible, and he "instantly commands respect." The trope of the unsuccessful disguise invokes directly a common seventeenth-century trope of somatic kingship, a trope found most overtly in the Coronation poetry of 1660–1661.[33]

Oroonoko's inability to hide his right to sovereignty under a suit of osenbrigs echoes the plethora of royal escape narratives that sprung up after the Restoration. The story of Charles II's escape from the Battle of Worcester quickly became the stuff of popular folklore after 1660—barely escaping parliamentary forces, the king and his retainers shed their royal habits and disguised themselves in common clothes and, depending on the version, darkened their skin with walnut juice or soot to pass unnoticed. But the problem, at least in romantic escape narratives, was that the king's personal majesty would always shine through. As Harold Weber puts it in his discussion of such escape narratives, the "royal identity depends on a spiritual authority and power that invests the mortal body of the

individual king; the true king must reveal himself."[34] It is within such a propagandistic representation of kingship that Oroonoko is positioned; even the abhorrent and seemingly paradoxical fact of his enslavement does not deter potential worshippers. When he arrives at Trefry's plantation, Oroonoko is greeted with the sincere "veneration they pay to great men" (109) by slaves whom he himself had sold. Instead of anger or contempt at the ostensible agent of their enslavement, the slaves "cast themselves at his feet, crying out, in their language, 'Live, O King! Long live, O King!' And kissing his feet, paid him even divine homage" (109). A king is a king, even in chains.

Oroonoko's aestheticized, graceful kingship is useful as a propagandistic representation of absolutist paternalism, but it is when Behn presents the contemporary alternative to such sovereignty that her critique of Whig ideology is sharpest. To the potential rule of a benevolent Oroonoko, Behn opposes the colonial government of Surinam led by the unrepentantly vicious Byam. It is important to note that Byam and his cronies on the corrupt colonial council are a surrogate and thus *de facto* government—the real head of state, the narrator's father, having died on the way to Surinam. In "The Romance of Empire," Laura Brown's important discussion of the political and historical sources for *Oroonoko* halts over the fact that the actual Byam was a Royalist; she concludes then that the struggle between Trefry and Byam (a minor one at that) must have been a version of internecine Royalist faction.[35] Brown's interest in Byam's politics, as historically laudable as it is, deflects her from a thorough excavation of *Oroonoko's* absolutist program. Perhaps we can read Byam's tyranny as a gesture towards his own kingly affectations (though that hardly makes him a Stuart loyalist), but we certainly must read him as a vicious and unsuitable colonial despot, a barbarian chieftain who mistreats a natural superior. Behn here relies on her audience to read the figure of Oroonoko, as Kupperman suggests they would, in terms of class before terms of race.

Byam and his underlings are paragons of cruelty, acquisitiveness, and rapine. After being betrayed into slavery by an English trader who twice exploits Oroonoko's sense of honor, the royal slave describes the colonials whom Byam heads as a pack of "rogues, runagades, that have abandoned their own countries, for raping, murders, thefts, and villainies, . . . [who] upbraid each other with infamy of life, below the wildest salvages," and asks his followers "shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no

one human virtue left, to distinguish them from the vilest creatures?" (126). Immediately after an unsuccessful slave rebellion against the "rogues and runagades," again Oroonoko is betrayed and enslaved: treacherous Byam and the apparently unwitting Trefry appeal to his honor and even draft articles of peace with him before throwing him back in chains. Behn uses the treaty Byam strikes with Oroonoko to evoke her vision of contemporary political realities: first, embodied bonds (honor among generals and aristocrats) or contracts of sovereignty mean nothing to an ignorant and hypocritical rabble. Second, the written contracts between the people and the monarch designed to replace embodied, intangible promises are subject to betrayal by this rabble.[36] Byam rejects the contract and thus the law, clearly preferring the rule of the sword to the rule of law. Once he capitulates, Oroonoko and his adjutant Tuscan are whipped "in the most deplorable and inhumane manner," after which the colonists "rubbed his wounds, to complete their cruelty, with Indian pepper" (132). They torture a valued commodity with another valued commodity (pepper).

The narrator's representations of Byam and the colonial council contribute to an explicit image of the inappropriate tyranny of the lower class and the vicious: Byam's council "consisted of such notorious villains as Newgate never transported, and possibly originally were such, who understood neither the laws of God or man, and had no sort of principles to make then worthy the name of men" (133–34). Here Behn is explicitly propagandizing—the colonial council, made up of the dregs and dross of the "English mobile" (134), has no comprehension of the "laws of God or man," and so they govern with cruelty, violence, and tyranny. It is not at all surprising then that the agent of Oroonoko's execution is "one Banister, a wild Irishman, and one of the council, a fellow of absolute barbarity, and fit to execute any villainy, but was rich" (139–40). To an early modern English audience, Banister's Irishness would have been a clear reference to the gothic barbarism which had been overcome in England and marginalized geographically in the so-called Celtic Fringe of the British Isles. In the seventeenth century (as expressed in works such as Spenser's *View of the Present State of Ireland* or Milton's *Observations on the Articles of the Peace in Ireland*), English audiences saw Ireland as a wild and hostile nation of contemporary barbarians who were always potentially harboring Catholic invasion forces.

So Behn's description of Banister is loaded with redundancies: given the immediate association between the Irish and the barbarian,

here the narrator's use of "wild," "a fellow of absolute barbarity," and "fit to execute any villainy" would seem merely commonplace refinements of an image of gothic barbarism. Banister, as an example of barbarity who "was rich," exemplifies the turn which Behn predicts English culture will take if the embodied and sovereign rights of the Stuart monarchy are cast aside. Even the moneyed and putatively more civilized will find their gothic tendencies reactivated by the lack of governmental discipline. The spectacle of Oroonoko's grisly execution by dismemberment, which invokes both loyal narratives of the regicide and the wildly popular Protestant martyrologies like Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, is the final and graphic representation of the triumph of a brutal "English mobile" over a just and graceful royal authority.

But there is a second and related target of Behn's royalist invective—that of an encroaching commercial ideology. As Brown suggests, "both Charles I and Oroonoko are victims of the same historical phenomenon—those new forces in English society loosely associated with an antiabsolutist mercantile imperialism."[37] As an unfavorable representation of individual slavery, the slave trade, the colonial plantation system, and the English consumerism which generates all of them, *Oroonoko* seems to make an anticommercial critique. And as we have seen, as an agent of social mobility, mercantile imperialism puts representatives of the vicious "English mobile" into power. But the "individual slavery" the text protests is Oroonoko's. The novella quite explicitly sanctions the enslavement of prisoners, trafficking in slaves, and the colonial system which such commerce supports. Oroonoko himself trades slaves unproblematically after winning them in war, and when his fellow slaves capitulate in his rebellion, he denounces them as "by nature slaves, poor wretched rogues, fit to be used as Christians' tools; dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such masters, [that] wanted only but to be whipped into the knowledge of the Christian gods to be the vilest of all creeping things" (130–31). Here again we see royal authority undermined by treachery; Oroonoko perceives himself deserted by a "rusty-brown" rabble who are "*by nature* slaves" (my emphasis).

Oroonoko here is speaking the language of Aristotle's *Politics*, a tract which was deeply influential in early modern European political and social theory. Aristotle argues that any person seemingly incapable of reason, whose "function is the use of their bodies and nothing better," is by nature a slave.[38] Easily dismissing his followers, Oroonoko seems neither surprised nor concerned by their preference for the security of enslavement. He consistently considers the

rebellious slaves as tools of his own reassertion of his individual sovereignty and liberty; while Oroonoko cajoles them with freedom, he considers them as purely instrumental. Their inability to persist loyally with Oroonoko demonstrates their lack of natural reason; thus they are naturally slaves, instruments "fit to be used as Christians' tools." Aristotle's position on natural slavery enabled early modern theorists of American conquest like Juan Gines de Sepulveda to justify, intellectually and morally, the war upon and enslavement of American and African natives.[39] So Oroonoko's position as an advocate for slavery looks deeply ironic to us. There seems to be a conflict between Oroonoko's status as a chattel slave and his embrace of natural slavery. But the text does not share this ambivalence, endorsing the right rule of natural superiors like Oroonoko while decrying the unnatural authority of a degenerate race of colonial rapists, thieves, and barbarians. Thus the novella suggests a modified Aristotelian view of natural class status in which a benevolent and paternalistic master-slave or monarch-subject relationship stabilizes the household and the state.

A more acute contemporary tension in *Oroonoko* is between an absolutist theory of slavery and the colonial practice of forced labor. It is difficult for Behn to vindicate the actual slave economy as an example of benevolent paternalism, especially as she seems to have been an eyewitness to slave plantations in her trip to Surinam. But it is less difficult for Behn to decry the enslavement of a natural master, especially one who is relatively removed from the actual horrors of forced slave labor. We must remember that the conditions of Oroonoko's enslavement are peculiar; we never see him engaged in slave labor, and much of his time is devoted to gentlemanly adventures of tiger-hunting, eel-grabbing, and upriver ethnographic fieldwork. Here Behn recasts slavery as an abstraction, a law which applies to Oroonoko only when he threatens the colonial polity. This gesture allows her to bracket the real conditions of slavery and vindicate a benevolent, absolutist program in the abstract while decrying the misery and brutality of undisciplined capitalist barbarism.[40]

Behn's narrator's desires for and fascination with the sundry exotic objects of Surinam and its colonial economy advocates for a well-disciplined colonial project. Consider the fact that the narrative begins with an elaborate catalogue of the goodies extracted from Surinam or the cultural capital which one such souvenir brings to the narrator:

> We trade for feathers, which they order into all shapes, make themselves little short habits of them, and glorious wreaths for their

> heads, necks, arms, and legs, whose tinctures are inconceivable. I had a set of these presented to me, and I gave them to the King's Theatre, and it was the dress of the *Indian Queen*, infinitely admired by persons of quality, and were inimitable. (76)

It is important to note that this headdress is given as a gift by the natives and is not the product of forced slave labor. For all of her apparent interest in genteel honor, the narrator here becomes a debased merchant herself, breaking an honorific gift economy by trading the headdress for cultural capital back in London. With her fabulous hat, the narrator wins the admiration of persons of quality; clearly the "glorious wreath" of "inconceivable" beauty with an explicitly colonial origin seems to suggest her delighted embrace of a disciplined imperial project. As Brown suggests, this passage displays "the period's fascination with imperialist accumulation" as a synecdoche for colonial exploitation. Moreover, Brown argues that the many spectacles of plenitude and consumption such as this one "render colonialism unambiguously attractive."[41] But as we have seen, Behn's narrator has profound reservations about the state of colonial authority and about the way in which colonial trade and labor empowers the merchant class. Perhaps Behn's embrace of colonial commodities alongside her scathing critique of Whig mercantilism is explained by the paradoxical historical circumstances of the early 1680s. A booming economy of international trade supplied a financially strapped Charles II with increasing customs revenue. So while trade moved capital into the hands of a generally centrist and proconstitutional body of London merchants, the customs revenue from that trade allowed Charles to move increasingly towards his goal of absolute personal rule.[42] The contemporary colonial project was neither to be wholly embraced nor abandoned; instead the filial bonds between the divine right sovereign and his subjects, naturalized from simple obligation to mutual love and duty, should guarantee discipline and justice abroad. But as Behn points out, the barbarous English, at home and abroad, have abandoned their obligations to love and obey the king in favor of political and commercial hedonism.[43]

To get at the heart of Behn's commentary on the pernicious influences of the new commerce, we must return to a crucial aspect of *Oroonoko* which has gone mostly undiscussed so far in this essay—the fact of Oroonoko's blackness. Scholars have occasionally drawn an analogy between Oroonoko and the Stuarts, who were sometimes represented as "black" (i.e. darker in complexion).[44] Behn's use of such an analog seems unlikely to me, especially given the fact that

"blackness" of the Stuart complexion was read as a sign of foreign status and presumably thus of popery. Even in a tract selling absolute monarchy, highlighting a king's alien features would be unpersuasive and ill-calculated. Oroonoko's blackness defeats such easy allegoresis and contributes to the text's royalist internationalism. The enslavement of Oroonoko, Prince of Denmark, while traumatic, would be less radically internationalist and thus less compelling as royalist propaganda. For Behn all kings command sovereign authority, even black ones. Gallagher argues that his skin of "polished jet" differentiates him from the base, "rusty brown" of other Africans, including his grandfather the king. Oroonoko's ultimate or perfect blackness is a sign of his exceptional status and his aesthetic purity.

As many commentators have observed, although she aestheticizes him as a synthetic form of European and African features, Behn uncharacteristically refrains from lightening Oroonoko's skin to make him more palatable to an European audience. But Oroonoko's blackness carries with it much ideological freight—as Gallagher points out, black skin meant, above all, that a person was subject to be exchanged as a commodity.[45] It is precisely that blackness which allows Behn to point out the depraved and wrongheaded priorities of Whig capitalism. There are two models of value mapped onto Oroonoko's body—one of commercial value, the other of political and moral value. The commercial system within which Oroonoko circulates repeatedly demonstrates these competing models of value, forcing its agents to choose between them. Either Oroonoko is to be treated as a man of honor and an exemplary monarch, or he is to be treated as chattel, as a valuable commodity to be exchanged and employed for financial gain. Not surprisingly, from the slave trader's duplicity to Byam's and Banister's cruel barbarism, in every case Oroonoko's value to the agents of commerce is exclusively financial. Oroonoko's blackness, his value as chattel, trumps his value as an intrinsically noble and gracious monarch within the acquisitive and debased moral calculus of Whiggery.

Within an anti-absolutist mercantile ideology, distinctions of personal value or merit are worthless; as Thompson's song "The Whigs Exaltation" jibes, "ev'ry mans a Brother."[46] As Oroonoko's grisly fate at the stake suggests, the erosion of such naturalized distinctions of value results in the popular tyranny of the "English mobile." It is important to conceptualize *Oroonoko* as part of a rearguard pro-Stuart initiative in the late 1680s and remember that the tyranny of the barbaric mob in the colonies, however problematic, was merely a

way of describing the impending tyranny of the vulgar multitude in England. So when Oroonoko poses the question, "shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race?" to his fellow slaves, it is clear that the "degenerate race" is a reference to the common people of England who are unfit to rule.

III.

Behn's late play, the tragicomic *The Widow Ranter, or The History of Bacon in Virginia,* continues her use of English barbarism to bludgeon her adversaries, even though the revolution of 1688 had derailed the Stuart cause and cast a shadow over the political theory of divine right kingship. Dryden's epilogue describes the play as a "farce of government"; *The Widow Ranter* itself illustrates a "degenerate race" turned to government, or as Thompson's song puts it, "Each Cobler's Statesman grown, and the bold Rable / Convert each ale-house Board to Council-table."[47] In colonial Virginia, the custodians of the law are a rabble of drunken and vicious transports, pickpockets, and bankrupt farriers who have only their own petty interests in mind. Set against this gaggle of barbarian buffoons is the "heroic" rebel, Nathaniel Bacon, "a Man indeed above the Common Rank, by Nature Generous, Brave, Resolved, and Daring."[48] The play is fundamentally concerned with two issues which were particularly salient early in 1689: rebellion and the rule of law. Bacon, tired of the depredations of local native tribes and the inability of the colonial government to act, launches his own assault on the Indians.[49] But such action is in fact armed rebellion which threatens the colonial government by pointing out its impotence; in response, the colonial council repeatedly tries to ambush and execute Bacon, who wins the support of the other rabble, defeats the Indian armies, and dies somewhat gloriously. The play echoes *Oroonoko* as a conflict between a warrior patriot and an explicitly barbarous mob in power. *The Widow Ranter* suggests tragicomically that after 1688 the two options for government are the mob and the self-interested aristocrat. Neither the council nor Bacon possesses the kind of civic duty and political discernment which Oroonoko possesses. Caught between Bacon and the rabble, the future security of the Virginia colony depends upon the lukewarm promise of a good governor in transit from England. In keeping with Stuart mythography, the only hope is a sovereign across the water who will reinstate civic obligations and bring about peace.

Margo Hendricks has argued that the play uses the threat of a barbaric, potentially miscegenous Indian other to stabilize and reunify the English colony in Virginia and ratify the genocidal aims of the imperial project.[50] While Hendricks is quite correct to point out the genocidal implications of the colonial project, as well as Bacon's own deep involvement in such ideology, she misreads the play's central threat. The barbarians at the gate are not Indians but tailors, panders, and pickpockets. The few representations of Indians in *The Widow Ranter* are almost all positive from a royalist perspective, particularly because the Indian King and Queen are suitably regal, graceful, and virtuous, while the drunken louts (Boozer, Dunce, Timerous, Wellman, Whiff, Whimsey, and others) who make up the government of Virginia are repeatedly portrayed as base, degenerate, and craven. In fact, as Kupperman suggests, the term "Virginian" itself was a popular slander, suggesting precisely such oafishly inelegant and self-interested colonial behavior.[51]

Bacon, after his expedition against the Indians, is accused of treason and betrayed by boorish councilmen who repeatedly try to ambush and murder him. Naturally, Bacon escapes to lead his forces successfully against the Indians (once again), at which time he kills the Indian King and, accidentally, his beloved Indian Queen Semernia. Fearing that the battle has been lost, and threatened by the council's troops, Bacon secures himself "from being a publick Spectacle upon the common theatre of death" (5.4.292–93) and kills himself with poison. Bacon's adjutant Daring eulogizes the heroic and just general as a "great Soul'd Man, no private Body e're contained a Nobler, [who] could have conquer'd all America" (5.4.313–14). Even in death Bacon manages to distance himself from the treachery of the council; he avoids the "common" stage of death and in dying honorably ratifies the virtue of a truly brave aristocracy.

While it seems that Bacon is a second Oroonoko, his suicide is the result of a misreading of the battle, and in the context of a tragicomedy it is at least partially ridiculous that the victorious general kills himself after his forces have won. Bacon is hardly the transparent vehicle for absolutist ideology that Oroonoko is—his insistence on the points of honor is overwrought, making him look either foolish or tendentious. Despite the objections of his lieutenants, Bacon misreads Parson Dunce, an ineptly treacherous oaf sent by the council to lead him into ambush. Bacon trusts Dunce but escapes the bumbling assassins; throughout these episodes the heroic lead looks like nothing so much as a caricature of personal aristocratic honor. But if

Bacon's adherence to martial honor is sometimes farcical, it is the rebellious aspect of his character which is most politically threatening. Faced with an ineffective civil magistracy, Bacon marshals his own forces to take action. As such he represents the threat of a warrior aristocracy, a cadre of overmighty subjects who engage in military action for personal or arbitrary reasons.[52] Responding to the Indian King's objection to the English presence in Virginia, Bacon justifies his rebellion in the language of property rights: "finding here my Inheritance, I am resolv'd still to maintain it so; And by my sword which first cut out my Portion, Defend each inch of Land with my last drop of Bloud" (2.1.15–17). Bacon here sounds suspiciously like a commonwealthsman trumpeting his ancient inherited rights of property and justifying his rebellion as a defense of those property rights. Here Behn links the rhetoric of the Good Old Cause directly to rebellion and civil chaos; if every subject with some charisma and a militia is able to defend his real or imagined property rights, then there is no chance for peace.

At the end of the play Bacon mistakenly kills his beloved Indian princess and himself, testifying both to his violence and his foolishness; the only outcome of rebellion in defense of inherited property rights is civil chaos and personal ruin. But the alternative to Bacon is the colonial council, which has access to that selfsame rhetoric of liberty and property: their warrant on the rebel accuses that "*Bacon*, contrary to Law and Equity, has to satisfie his own Ambition taken up Arms, with a pretence to fight the *Indians*, but indeed to molest and enslave the whole Colony, and to take away their Liberties and Properties" (3.2.127–29). Throughout most of the play, Behn suggests that there is not much of a choice: either the privately motivated warrior aristocrat or the congress of rabble must rule in Virginia.

Behn is quite explicit in presenting the colonial government as a conglomerate of the lower class mob; its management of the rule of law is a travesty. When the young gentleman Hazard lands in Jamestown, his aristocratic comrade Friendly advises him that "this Country wants nothing but to be People'd with a well-born Race to make it one of the best Collonies in the World, but for want of a Governour we are Ruled by a Councill, some of which have been perhaps transported Criminals, who having Acquired great Estates are now become your Honor, and [who] . . . Possess all Places of Authority" (1.1.105–10). Hendricks reads the lines "well-born race" as suggestive of the genocidal impulse in the colonial endeavor. Perhaps, but these lines explicitly suggest the need for an educated

and civil ruling class to assert its natural authority over ill-born "transported criminals." Against any claims that individual colonial experience qualifies one for government, once again we find Behn militating for the naturally determined and just rule of the virtuous and genteel.[53] And again, as in *Oroonoko*, we have an image of a surrogate popular government which lacks the proper and presumably regulating authority of a head of state, suggesting a by now familiar English analog. Here we can see an echo of Behn's domestic Stuart loyalism after the flight of James II and the Williamite Succession: England too wants a legitimate governor and waits for the promised return of the gallant man across the water.

Hazard immediately encounters and quarrels with a silly triad of illegitimate "Your Honours" in the forms of Dullman, Timerous, and Boozer. In their cups, they point out the lower class origins of most of the colonial "gentry": Timerous outs Parson Dunce, another "man of honour," as a bankrupt farrier and Mrs. Flirt as the daughter of a tailor, while Flirt reveals that Timerous was "broken excise-man . . . [who] came over a poor servant" (1.1.195–97). Dullman, true to his name, then announces his own past as a failed tinker and a transported housebreaker along with Boozer's history as a "common pickpocket [who] turned evidence" and fled to the colonies "when times grew honest" (1.1.205–6).

Perhaps Behn's most telling commentary on the inability of the lower classes to triumph over their barbarism is in the farce of judicature that unfolds in the first scene of act 3 where young Hazard is tried for offending the Honourable Justice Timerous shortly after his arrival. After convening, the august court of justices moves to procure a punch bowl "of larger Circumference" such that it may not be prematurely emptied when "the bench sits late about weighty affairs" (3.1.37–39); and to ensure an ample supply of punch, the court dismisses Justice Boozer from the bench for "Drinking too much Punch in the time of hearing Tryals" (3.1.45–46). After adjudicating a suit investigating which of the Justices' wives is the greatest whore, the court turns to Hazard. Timerous describes his brush with assassination at the hands of Hazard, but his claims are not corroborated by Flirt, who testifies that Hazard only drew upon Timerous after being affronted and cudgeled by Dullman and Boozer. In the following comic exchange, Timerous exhibits an obvious inability to comprehend the law—like his fellow Justice Boozer it is likely that Timerous cannot even read. Hazard admits to drawing his sword on Timerous:

HAZARD: If I did, it was *se defendendo*.
TIMEROUS: Do you hear that Brothers, he did in defiance.
HAZARD: Sir, you ought not sit Judge and Accuser too.
WHIFF: The gentleman's i' th' right, Brother, you cannot do it according to Law.
TIMEROUS: Gads Zoors, what new tricks, new querks?
HAZARD: Gentlemen, take notice, he swears in Court.
TIMEROUS: Gads Zoors, what's that to you Sir.
HAZARD: This is the second time of his swearing. (3.1.112–20)

Not only does Timerous swear in court and misunderstand Hazard's basic Latin "*se defendendo*," but he sits as accuser and judge in defiance of basic legal protocols. But what is most apparent here is not Timerous's comedic breaches in legal decorum; rather it is the fact that Hazard's correct objections are entirely lost upon the drowsy court, on the illiterate and "degenerate race" of drunken tinkers and pickpockets. Despite Hazard's exasperated requests to be heard, Justice Whimsey concludes haphazardly that Timerous "shall be Friends with the Gentleman [since] this was some Drunken bout" (3.1.159). Timerous acquiesces and Hazard leaves dumbfounded, asking Friendly "is this the best Court of Judicature your country affords?" (3.1.159). Wanting only a "well-born race" to govern Virginia, it is.

This "degenerate race" of "Your Honours," threatened by the rebellion of Bacon as well as the arrival of two young gentlemen and fearing that either group will succeed and thus that the council will be "huft out of [their] Commissions" (1.2.18), trumps up a legal pretext and plans to reward Bacon's "treason" with ambush and murder. They see Bacon as both an ambitious threat who clings to a "silly thing called Honour" (1.2.90–91) and a representative of a naturalized gentility which they affect but cannot achieve. In the council's hands, the law becomes merely a rationale for achieving their desires and whims and not a method of responsible government or effective jurisprudence. As Whimsey suggests, executing the rebel Bacon would be just, "tho' he fought like *Alexander*, and preserv'd the whole world from perdition, yet if he did it against Law, 'tis Lawful to hang him" (1.2.108–10). While Bacon's rebellion may save the colony from perdition, and technically he is acting against the law, we have little confidence that Whimsey's grasp of jurisprudence extends this far. Rather in keeping with his character (and his name), this statement indicates the arbitrariness of the law when administered by the vicious. The law of Virginia is expedient for the drunken lawmakers, privately motivated, and thus finally nonbinding. While

republicans like Algernon Sidney or Locke might object that any law arbitrarily imposed on the polity by an absolute authority is privately motivated and thus nonbinding, Behn uses the rabble's barbarous failure to administer the rule of law as support for a divine right theory of merciful Stuart sovereignty.[54] Since the people are incapable of elevating themselves out of chaos, by default the task must fall to a benevolent and virtuous king-father, a figure Behn presents in *Oroonoko* but defers in *The Widow Ranter*. While there is a noble governor on the way to Virginia, the play seems finally pessimistic about the fate of Stuart absolutism in a fallen world. Sharing Milton's antipopulist conclusion in the "Digression" to his *History of Britian*, Behn argues that the people are too vicious and self-interested to tolerate a sovereign possessed of equity, prudence, and moral judgment in his enforcement of the rule of law. Ironically Behn and Milton meet in a poetics of defeat, each assigning the failure of their (radically opposed) political positions to the barbarity and self-interest of the English people.[55]

Hendricks reads Bacon's dying injunction for Daring to "make a peace—with the English council—and never let ambition . . . make you forget . . . your duty—and allegiance" as evidence of the unification of colonial society against the Indian menace.[56] Such a conclusion argues that bonds of race are stronger than bonds of class. But in the final scene, Behn's conclusion is decidedly different—valences of class status are still very much in place. Whiff and Whimsey, stripped, are discovered wandering the battlefield after having cravenly deserted their regiment to hide. Behn here imposes the necessary discipline on her Virginian barbarians. Stripped of their genteel uniform, Whiff and Whimsey are subjected to sartorial discipline; they lose their tangible signs of gentility along with their abstract signs (titles, government positions) and return to their suitable state. But the two honourable Justices are forgiven, although their "Places in the Councel shall be supply'd by these Gentlemen of Sence and Honour" (5.5.389–90). Timerous, the "broken excise-man" turned States-man, follows suit, leaving the council for his plantation, concluding that he "never thrived since [he] was a statesman, left Planting, and fell to promising and Lying" (5.5.395–96). With the Virginians' council posts filled by authentic gentlemen of sense and honour like Daring, Hazard, and Fearless, the play closes with the impending just government of a truly "well-born race" and a statement that, in effect, class-inflected virtue will out. Likewise Bacon's dying words withdraw his rebellion and reject his investment in his

inherited property rights, suggesting as well that civil obedience is most desirable. Beyond such a polemical position, the play also stages the dilemma of a subject caught between equally dubious forms of civil government, a position which the loyal Behn would have found herself when the play was composed. Neither the rebellion of the overmighty Bacon nor the lawful government of the colonial rabble is desirable or just: either the subject must defer to punch-swilling judges or to the private interests of Bacon. In both cases the *salus populi* is deeply in danger, and there are no safe alternatives for good government.

Oroonoko and *The Widow Ranter* strategically use a perceived national anxiety over a barbaric past which has only recently been civilized to make a critique of a putatively Whig ideology favoring both popular sovereignty and a self-interested ideology of commerce which entitles the rabble, erodes class distinction, and undoes the social discipline of the state. Behn's position is that such a corrupt, democratizing ideology threatens not only an appropriate and traditional verticality of class but also denaturalizes the qualities of authority such as moral virtue, mercy, equity, and gentility. As a propagandist, Behn argues that the moral calculus of Whiggery is corrupt and politically irresponsible, for it privileges exchange value over virtue, commerce over justice, violence and barbarism over stability, and the rule of the wild and ignorant people over the rule of the educated and just. These American texts, which are so critically concerned with forms of government, are not primarily warnings against colonial dissolution, miscegenation, or imperialism. Rather they represent Behn's more local warnings tuned to a fever pitch; for the barbarians are at the gate in England, and popular rule means that the project of English civilization has failed and chaos is come again.

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NOTES

For their helpful comments and suggestions on this article, I would like to thank Felicity Nussbaum, Jayne Lewis, Helen Deutsch, Max Novak, and Marshall Brown.

[1] For an overview of party propaganda between the civil wars and the mid-eighteenth century, tracing respectively the polemical characterization of Cavalier and Roundhead, Whig and Tory, see T. N. Corns, W. A. Speck, and J. A. Downie, "Archetypal Mystification: Polemic and Reality in English Political Literature 1640–1750," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 7:3 (1982): 1–27.

[2] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," *Writing Culture: The Politics and Poetics of Ethnography*, ed. George Marcus and James Clifford (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986), 98–121.

[3] Samuel Daniel, "Epistle: To Prince Henrie" (London, ca. 1609–1610), 86–90.

[4] As Philip Harth rightly points out, the Tory propaganda machine was a project shared by a series of loyal authors rather than an organization run by court officials or functionaries. See his *Pen For A Party: Dryden's Tory Propaganda In Its Contexts* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1993).

[5] Tim Harris, *London Crowds in the Reign of Charles II* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 130–55.

[6] David Underdown, *A Freeborn People: Politics and the Nation in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 129.

[7] See John Dryden, "Absalom and Achitophel" (London, 1681), and *Albion and Albanius* (London, 1685).

[8] See the "Preface" in Nathaniel Thompson, *One Hundred and Eighty Loyal Songs* (London, 1682).

[9] Thompson, 2.

[10] Thompson, 6–7.

[11] Harris, 137.

[12] See the preface to Roger L'Estrange's *Fables of Aesop and Other Eminent Mythologists with Morals and Reflexions*, 3rd ed. (London, 1669), 4–5, 7.

[13] For a discussion of the links between barbarian ethnography and early modern English fears of a warrior aristocracy, see Debora Shuger, "Irishmen, Aristocrats, and Other White Barbarians," *Renaissance Quarterly* 50 (1997): 494–525.

[14] Like every racial or national group, the English were recognized as synthetic. While commentators would point out the multiple incursions of other races or ethnic groups into the national character, each of these incursions was made by a "gothic" race; e.g. Saxons, Danes, Normans, Dutch, Irish, Welsh. It was a commonplace for early modern authors to refer to their countryfolk as a race—for a very helpful survey of the intellectual and historical contours of eighteenth-century race theory, see Nicholas Hudson, "From 'Nation' to 'Race': The Origin of Racial Classification in Eighteenth-Century Thought," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1996): 247–64. For a discussion of race in the making of English identity see Aparna Dharwadker, "Nation, Race, and the Ideology of Commerce in Defoe," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 39 (1998): 63–84.

[15] For a detailed and persuasive treatment of this idea, see Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1992).

[16] While *Agricola* is explicitly concerned with the British Isles, it has much less of the ethnographic speculation of *Germania* and is mostly concerned with the colonial government and life of Agricola. Thus *Germania* is a more suitable source for ethnography of the northern tribes, even though these tribes are not explicit residents of Britannia. The passage is quoted from Shuger, 499–500.

[17] Tacitus, *Agricola and Germania*. ed. and trans. H. Mattingly and S. A. Handford (New York: Penguin, 1970), 104.

[18] I am here indebted to Margaret Trabue Hodgen's discussion of Jean Bodin and early modern geographical determinism. See her *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), 254–94. See also Bodin, *Method for the Easy Comprehension of History*, trans. Beatrice Reynolds (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1945).

[19] David Hume's essay "Of National Characters" explicitly argues against such physical causes of national character and posits that the formation of national

characteristics or habits of thought is the result of "moral" influences such as the form and stability of government and theology, the efficacy of trade or labor, and cultural representations. Although in "Of National Characters" Hume represents the English favorably as diverse and liberty loving, in his letters Hume frequently inveighs against the English as a race "sunk in Stupidity and Barbarism and Faction." The two are not mutually exclusive, however—the independence of the English is, as we will see, in part fashioned as a legacy of a gothic past. However, Hume's argument against geographic determinism is troublesome to notions of English exceptionalism—if it is not the climate of Britannia which elicits barbarism, then it must have been (and must still be) the moral institutions of England which do so. See Hume, "Of National Characters," in *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, ed. Thomas Hill Greene and Thomas Hodge Grose (Darmstadt, Germany: Scientia Verlag, 1992); and Donald Livingston, "Hume, English Barbarism, and American Independence," in *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Jeffrey Smitten and Richard Sher (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1990), 133–47.

[20] For more on the material and intellectual consequences of gentility and consensus, see Steven Shapin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1996).

[21] Helgerson, 22.

[22] Helgerson, 299.

[23] Milton apparently excised the chapter titled "A Digression" from his 1670 *History of Britain*, but after his death the critique of his Parliamentary allies made it into print as *Mr John Miltons Character of the Long Parliament* (London, 1681) during the Exclusion Crisis, thanks to his old nemesis L'Estrange. For a discussion of the circumstances surrounding the publication of *Mr John Miltons Character*, see Nicholas Von Maltzahn, *Milton's History of Britain: Republican Historiography in the English Revolution* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991).

[24] See Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1978). In *A Freeborn People*, Underdown argues that along with such a cultural rift a political one developed, in which the common people and the gentry grew to hold newly polar ideological positions, dissolving an ancient alliance.

[25] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 2nd ed. (London, Verso, 1992), 7.

[26] Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America 1580–1640* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980), 121–22.

[27] See J. G. A. Pocock, "The Mobility of Property and the Rise of Eighteenth-Century Sociology," in his *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 115.

[28] See Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves," in *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Felicity Nussbaum and Brown (New York: Methuen, 1987), 41–61. See also Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1995); Margaret Ferguson, "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," in *Women, "Race," and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Patricia Parker and Margo Hendricks (New York: Routledge, 1994), 209–24; Judith Andrade, "White Skin, Black Masks: Colonialism and the Sexual Politics of *Oroonoko*," *Cultural Critique* 26 (1994): 189–214; Anita Pacheco, "Royalism and Honor in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *SEL* 34 (1994): 491–506; and Richard Frohock, "Violence and Awe: The Foundation of Government in Aphra Behn's New World Settings," *Eighteenth Century Fiction* 8 (1996): 437–52.

[29] Daniel Defoe, *The True-Born Englishman* (London, 1701), 2.2.814–19.

[30] The Trial of the Seven Bishops was a huge gaffe for James II. Put on trial for High Treason by the court for refusing the king's liturgical attempts to reintroduce Catholicism, the Seven Bishops were all staunch royalist High-Churchmen representative of Charles II's most solid political bloc. The unsuccessful treason trial collapsed traditional oppositions within the Anglican mainstream and pointed out very clearly to all but the most committed of Stuart partisans that James II would return England to the Catholic Church at any cost, a fate which the vast majority of English subjects found unacceptable.

[31] Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave*, in *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Writings*, ed. Janet Todd (New York: Penguin, 1992), 79. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

[32] Here the traditional distinction between "barbarian" and "savage" is useful; the barbarian destroys the unfamiliar out of spite and fear, while the savage simply reacts to the unknown.

[33] See Gerard Reedy, "Mystical Politics: The Imagery of Charles II's Coronation," *Studies in Change and Revolution*, ed. Paul Korshin (New York: Scolar Press, 1972), 19–42.

[34] Harold Weber, *Paper Bullets: Print and Kingship Under Charles II* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1996), 43.

[35] Brown, 57.

[36] I am indebted to Jayne Lewis for bringing this point to my attention.

[37] Brown, 58–59.

[38] Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. and trans. Trevor Saunders and T. A. Sinclair (New York: Penguin, 1981), 68–69.

[39] Lewis Hanke, *Aristotle and the American Indians: a Study in Race Prejudice in the Modern World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970).

[40] Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcón describe Behn's critique of the colonial lack of discipline thus: "while the narrator is in favor of colonization and regrets the eventual loss of the colony to the Dutch, she finds the mode of government under Lieutenant Byam and his men to be dishonorable and therefore reprehensible. This is no condemnation of the imperial venture itself, however; both Oroonoko and the white female narrator believe that the 'noble' are the rightful rulers of 'brutes and slaves.'" See their "Oroonoko's Gendered Economies of Honor/Horror: Reframing Colonial Discourse Studies in the Americas," *American Literature* 65 (1993): 426. Also see chapter 1 of Moira Ferguson, *Subject to Others: British Women Writers and Colonial Slavery 1670–1834* (New York: Routledge, 1992), on the text's ambivalent relationship to slavery.

[41] Brown, 52–55.

[42] See Richard Ashcraft's superb *Revolutionary Politics and Locke's Two Treatises of Government* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988), 38. Merchants are not always vilified in pro-absolutist literature. In "Violence and Profits on the Restoration Stage: Trade, Nationalism, and Insecurity in Dryden's *Amboyna*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 22:1 (1998): 2–17, Robert Markley contends that in *Amboyna*, for example, the heroic merchant Towerson is the agent of the genteel extension of English imperial power and is dialectically related to the development of English national identity.

[43] For more on the turn to "political hedonism" as a mode of political philosophy in Hobbes, see Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago

Press, 1953); and on the subject's political obligations imagined as love and duty, see Victoria Kahn, "The Duty to Love: Passion and Obligation in Early Modern Political Theory" *Representations* 68 (Fall 1999): 86–107.

[44] For references to the trope of Stuart blackness, see George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's Oroonoko: Occasion and Accomplishment," in *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1975); and also Gallagher, 75–78.

[45] See Gallagher, 77.

[46] Thompson, 6.

[47] Thompson, 3.

[48] Behn, *The Widow Ranter*, *The Works of Aphra Behn*, vol. 7, ed. Todd (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1996), 1.1.113–15. Hereafter cited parenthetically by act, scene, and line number.

[49] For more on the history of Bacon's rebellion, see Charles Lynn Batten, "The Source of Mrs. Behn's *The Widow Ranter*," *Research in Restoration and Eighteenth Century Theatre* 13 (1974): 12–18; and Rogers Smith, *Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in U.S. History* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1997), 61–62. Smith describes Bacon's 1676 rebellion as a vigilante action against Susquehannock Indians that spiraled into an open rebellion against Governor Berkeley and the colonial government. Under the guise of civil defense, Bacon and his followers seized coveted lands from different native tribes, but more critically for Smith, established a "pattern of tensions between colonial land aspirations and imperial policies of restraint, as well as [demonstrated] the failure of royal authorities to hold back the colonists" (61–62).

[50] See Margo Hendricks, "Civility, Barbarism, and *The Widow Ranter*," in *Women, "Race," and Writing*, 225–239; and Margaret Ferguson, "News from the New World: Miscegenous Romance in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*," in *The Production of English Renaissance Culture*, ed. David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair, and Weber (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1994)..

[51] See Kupperman, "Presentment of Civility: English Reading of American Self-Presentation in the Early Years of Colonization," *William & Mary Quarterly* 54 (1997): 193–228.

[52] For a discussion of the relation between the barbarian and the warrior aristocracy as mutually related threats to the polity, see Shuger.

[53] Jim Egan reads John Smith as a kind of colonial crypto-Leveller, advocating for individual colonial experience as an administrative credential, and against the kind of class-based credentials Behn would later prefer. See his "'Hee That Hath Experience . . . To Subject the Salvages': British Colonialism and Modern Experiential Authority," *Genre* 28 (1995): 445–64.

[54] For a discussion of Sidney and Locke's use of natural law to theorize rebellion, see Jonathan Scott, "The Law of War: Grotius, Sidney, Locke, and the Political Theory of Rebellion," *History of Political Thought* 13 (1992): 565–85. Scott contends that Sidney legitimates armed rebellion while Locke insists that any absolutist monarch is in rebellion against the polity and thus illegal.

[55] For a related discussion, see Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London, Faber and Faber, 1984).

[56] Hendricks, 235,