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THE PASSION OF *OROONOKO*: PASSIVE OBEDIENCE, THE ROYAL SLAVE, AND APHRA BEHN'S BAROQUE REALISM

BY CORRINNE HAROL

When the "royal slave" protagonist of Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* (1689) encounters the Surinam war captains and hears that their right to military leadership is established via self-mutilation, he deems this "passive valour" to be "too brutal to be applauded."[1] Nonetheless, Oroonoko expresses his "esteem" of the war captains, who prove their bravery in a "debate" that involves "contemptibly" cutting off ears, noses, and lips, among other things (56). This action-packed text's sole mention of "passive" occurs here. But this belies the text's reliance on passivity as a thematic and a plot device. The grandfather's impotence, the numb eel's ability to paralyze its victims, Oroonoko's inability to execute his plan for revenge: these are just a few examples of the way that passivity dominates the plot of *Oroonoko*. *Oroonoko* is a text fundamentally concerned with political obedience, written at precisely the moment in British history when that question was more or less being resolved in favor, according to the Whig interpretation of history, of the subject's right to refuse obedience to political authority, indeed even, according to John Locke and others, in favor of the obligation that the subject rebel against a tyrannical authority.[2] Behn, as is well known but not so comfortably assimilated, was a political conservative who was loyal to the king and probably Catholic, culturally and politically if not spiritually.[3] In her poem, "To His Sacred Majesty, King James the Second," she celebrates the Catholic monarch's "patience, suffering, and humility."[4] What, then, are we to make, and indeed why has so little been made, of a text in which the hero, very much celebrated by the female pen who narrates his story, spends such a noticeable amount of the text passive, almost supernaturally so, and in which the main actions are an impotently-executed slave revolt and a Christ-like execution? In general, a modern Whiggish perspective derogates passivity and obedience and valorizes the congruence of belief and action. As such, Oroonoko's passivity, the narrator's celebration of him, and, most of all, the narrator's own inaction, are key critical problems in the text. According to Victoria Kahn, in the seventeenth century "passion and action"

replace "virtue and vice" as explanations for human motivation—and thus for human ethics and politics.[5] *Oroonoko*, written during a crucial overlap between these two systems of value and in the thick of the revolution of 1688–89 and its renewed debates about passive obedience, offers a unique theorization of the virtues of passivity. It makes a pragmatic, if not a religious, case for passive obedience negatively, by repeatedly showing the consequences of active disobedience as well as the immorality of most action. It makes that case universally, by having its exemplar be both royal and slave, British and African. And it makes its case through its aesthetic, locating ideal human behavior in the values that will dominate realist novels (emotional passion, passive witnessing, and political detachment) over the values of politics (activity and power) and theater (heroic romance and "applau[se]," 56). *Oroonoko*'s case for passivity rests not on divine right, contract, or historical precedent. Rather, in response to the opposition claim that passive obedience is "contrary to the Law of Nature," *Oroonoko* demonstrates passivity to be a law of nature, linked to procreation and to death and not susceptible to human will, contract, or politics.[6]

I. THE POLITICS OF PASSIVITY

The Loyalist doctrine of passive obedience, associated in a political sense with the Stuarts at this critical moment of their demise, is frequently conflated with non-resistance. But non-resistance is only the negative value in a theory of political obligation that has three parts: active obedience, passive obedience, and non-resistance.[7] In his 1689 tract on passive obedience, the Anglican clergyman Abednego Seller (1646/7–1705) offers a typical definition of political obligation: "the duty of every Christian, in things lawful, actively to obey his superior; in things unlawful, to suffer rather than obey, and in any case, or upon any pretense whatsoever not to resist, because whoever does so shall receive to themselves Damnation."[8] Thus, passivity relates not to obedience (which is active), nor to resistance (which is prohibited), but rather to the acceptance of punishment in cases of non-obedience. When a sovereign demands something unlawful, the subject may choose to "suffer rather than obey." The injunction against resistance is thus not absolute in terms of what it demands of its adherent, who must decide when it is appropriate to "obey" and when to "suffer," and it allows for a discrepancy between conscience and action. Seller, quoting "Dr. Jackson," describes passive obedience as "Subjection of the outward man."[9] This "subjection" depends upon the prioritizing,

morally if not politically, of inward conscience; thus, the outward, less important, part is subjugated, but the conscience remains pure.[10] As John Kettlewell (1653–1695) says, "*religion, is an internal thing*" and "any outward force upon us, must stop at the outside of us: or, if it pierce further, it will force away our Lives, before it reach our Hearts."[11] Richard L. Greaves locates the genesis of this emphasis on conscience and interiority as a basis for political subjectivity in Elizabethan Protestant, including Puritan, dogma: "Conscience was the key in determining the proper object of obedience, for it was never justifiable to violate one's conscience in order to comply with a magistrate's decree. In fact, conscience bound one not to fulfill such commands."[12] The doctrine of passive obedience, thus, was not so much a call to complete submission, but rather an explanation of how to respond to disagreements with a political ruler, and thus a primer on non-obedience (and according to J. C. D. Clark, a precursor to modern forms of civil disobedience) rather than a mandate to obey.[13]

When passive obedience is discussed, both by its critics in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and in later analyses, it is often described as fundamentally proscriptive and absolute, in that it prohibits rebellion in all circumstances. John Toland (1670–1722), for example, glosses it as "*PASSIVE, or unlimited OBEDIENCE*," that inculcates obedience to commands "tho' never so *strange, illegal, unjust, or prejudicial*."[14] But passive obedience's roots in theories of conscience—which developed in the seventeenth century into the emphasis on law over government—allowed seventeenth-century writers to use the concept as a way of articulating the crucial role of subjects in evaluating their rulers. As James Ellesby (b. 1644 or 1645) puts it, "Let our Governours be never so Bad, Actual Obedience is due to all their Lawful Commands, and Submission to those that are Otherwise."[15] Writers on passive obedience are thus theorizing different options available to the subject, who must make decisions based on his or her own evaluation of the legitimacy of the ruler's commands; passive obedience thus offers ways for the subject to act no matter how ungodly the king. This subtlety in theories of obedience, in which conscience has to be weighed against the good of political stability, goes back at least as far as Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) and positions the politico-religious subject in a complex and thoughtful relationship to the ruler.[16] "We must," one writer explains, "be patients or Agents; Agents, when he is good and godly; patients, when he is tyrannous and wicked."[17] Thus while the Whig interpretation of history would suggest that in 1688–89 there were two camps—those for complete subjection and

those for liberty—in fact the landscape was much more nuanced. Up until the revolution of 1688–89, and for some time afterwards, nearly all political theory was based in some form of obedience.[18] Moreover, absolute positions on obedience were hard to come by. For example, the notoriously conservative Robert Filmer (d. 1653) argues that the rules of obedience "cannot be learnt without a relative Knowledge of those Points wherein a Sovereign may Command," and he thus makes a case for the importance of education and individual reason in determining obedience.[19] And from the other side, Samuel Johnson (1649–1703), passive obedience's most ardent critic, celebrates forms of resistance practiced by early Christians—prayers, words, and non-compliance with orders—that are in fact congruent with, indeed are even the exemplars of, passive obedience.[20]

The doctrine of passive obedience is often conflated with divine right, but in fact these two concepts are quite distinct, as the example of Christ proves.[21] Passive obedience has no necessary relation to the king's divinity, but rather it theorizes the mandate for obedience under the conditions of an illegal and tyrannical rule. The traditional exemplar of this mode of passive obedience was Jesus's suffering under unjust Roman rule. From him, Englishmen should learn to, "take vp the Cross" instead of rebelling.[22] Christ's active obedience consisted in following the will of God, and his passive obedience consisted in suffering the punishments that such obedience entailed. Seventeenth-century sermons about the "active and passive obedience" of Christ stressed that the two were inseparable: Christ followed both God's will and the law whenever possible, but when his religious conscience made following secular law impossible, he continued to follow God's will and suffered whatever the secular authorities demanded. Thus, Christ's Passion stood as the ultimate example of passive obedience, in that he suffered in submission to God's law. It also provided a way to theorize split allegiances: between sacred and secular authority and between body and soul. The major distinction between active and passive obedience thus involved not God's will, nor the subject's will or obedience, but rather the experience of the subject's body. As one Civil War tract put it, obedience consists in allowing the ruler's will to work "either of us, or on us; of us, when they command for Truth; on us, not by us, when they command against the Truth."[23] Thomas Bainbrigg (1636–1703) puts the case thusly: passive obedience, he complains, "sets Body and Soul at variance."[24] The passivity of Christ's body thus offered a complex heuristic for thinking about the nature of passivity—and of the body/soul relationship—in the political arena.

While Christ, as one writer put it, "never exercised any act of Civil Government," and thus a case could be made for a quietist version of Christic political subjectivity, the nature of Anglicanism as a national religion required some accommodation between religious and political modes of subjectivity.[25] During the Civil Wars, Loyalist writers staked their claim to the moral and political high ground by representing Jesus's Passion as the ultimate expression of passive obedience and Catholic loyalty to the pope as its opposite. But after the Restoration of the Stuarts in 1660, Christ posed problems for a Loyalist position, insofar as his suffering at the hands of a manifestly unjust rule did not offer a model for Stuart loyalism. Christ as an exemplar of passive obedience also posed problems for an emergent Whig politics of sincerity as well as for writers interested in asserting a more nuanced, casuist, or radical position on political subjectivity.[26] Thus, while Christ figures importantly in this longer history of passive obedience, during the revolution of 1688–89, writers—Behn excluded—more frequently turned to the Old Testament and to the primitive Christians, whose resistance to tyrannical rulers like Constantius and Julian could be more easily marshaled to support their position.[27]

Discussions of passive obedience—for, against, and descriptive—rightly point out that it frequently finds its moral justification in the afterlife. The biblical source on which theories of passive obedience rest is Romans 13, which argues, as is echoed in the quotation above by Seller, "they that resist, shall receive to themselves damnation."[28] Nonetheless, passive obedience is not an apolitical doctrine. It makes possible modes of political agency that are expressive rather than active, and thus it legitimizes particular methods—we might call them literary—of political activity. Bainbrigg, for example, argues that options for subjects who disagree with their ruler include: "make their Defenses and plead their Causes," "pray to God," and "accept of deliverance"; he argues that passive obedience does not mean that one should "court Suffering" because there is always the option, of which the French Huguenots are the most relevant example, of exile: "our Savior has given us leave," he says, *"when they persecute us in one City to flee into another."*[29] Many writers refer to the "Prayers and Tears" that the performance of passive obedience can produce in political and military terms; one writer, for example, calls these forms of expression a *"thundering Legion of Prayers and Tears,"* thus implying their capacity for political or moral effects.[30] On the opposing side, writers argue that Romans 13 is not applicable to the current situation of James II's tyrannical rule for, as Johnson writes, "no Tyrant can put

in so much as his Nose at the 13th of the *Romans*," and thus James is an "outcast" of Romans.[31] Supporters and critics of passive obedience in 1688–89 agree that Romans 13 explains the limits of political obedience: for Loyalists, this limit space is where passive obedience becomes potentially efficacious as oppositional discourse in "Prayers and Tears," while for Whigs, this space is where political obedience is suspended and genuine autonomous political action can happen.[32]

The historical trajectory and political alignments of passive obedience reveal some surprising plot twists. The English Protestant embrace of what came to be known as passive obedience had deep roots in the politics of English anti-Catholicism. In anti-Catholic propaganda, as Greaves and John Neville Figgis have argued, Catholics are portrayed as clearly and treasonously prioritizing their allegiance to the pope over any secular authority.[33] Criticizing passive obedience was thus originally a Protestant, even Puritan, articulation of difference from Catholicism. After the Restoration it came to be "the defining symbol of the Anglican middle ground" according to Clark. And then, during the Revolution of 1688–89, it came to be thoroughly identified with the Catholic James II and his most ardent supporters.[34] Derided by radical Whigs and their later historians, it could nonetheless be made congruous with the revolution of 1688–89; for example, according to George Hickes, "the majority of Subjects" during the revolution "were merely passive, and surprized into deliverance."[35] Passive obedience also allowed Loyalists to align their Whig opposition with Catholics. The Whig opponents of passive obedience criticize Catholics but have, according to one author, "carried along with them one of their most pestiferous Opinions," insofar as both legitimate rebellion against kings: Catholics via their allegiance to the pope and Whigs via vesting authority in the people.[36] In another irony of the history of passive obedience, its most famous critic, Johnson, while being whipped for his writings against passive obedience, invoked Christ's sufferings to buoy his supporters.[37] In sum, no writers on passive obedience during this time considered it to be apolitical or irrelevant, and as a concept it had a certain plasticity that made it politically volatile.[38]

Writings on passive obedience repeatedly invoke the New Testament parable in which Jesus's response to the question of paying taxes to an unjust ruler is to "Render . . . vnto Cesar the things which be Cesars."[39] The phrase "render vnto Cesar" means render unto to the king that, and only that, which the king deserves, since the following phrase instructs followers to render "vnto God the things which be Gods." That which is Caesar's includes taxes, specifically the coins that

already bear the image of Caesar, and, in most Loyalist interpretations, the lack of active resistance. But, in the hands of writers both for and against passive obedience, this passage is ultimately more about what cannot be "render[ed] to Cesar," not only conscience but in fact everything outside of tax money.[40] In *Oroonoko* this mandate to "render vnto Cesar the things which be Cesars" is deeply ironic, as Oroonoko's slave name is Caesar. The choice to call him Caesar reflects his amphibious nature as royal slave, and it perhaps prefigures his grotesque cutting/cesarean at the end, a plot development that, I will argue, reflects a complicated politics of passivity. As a violent history of a largely passive royal slave who chooses exile over revolt, *Oroonoko* investigates the possibility of meaningful political action in a body whose ultimate destiny is desacralized passivity.[41]

Oroonoko has proved incredibly fertile ground for scholars working in a diversity of critical methods and fields, as Srinivas Aravamudan pointed out when he characterized the phenomenon as "oroonokoism."[42] Feminist scholars working on the history of women writers, postcolonial scholars working on slavery/colonialism, and those researching the prehistory and roots of the novel have all found things to love—or to hate—about *Oroonoko*. On its path to canonization, two camps of *Oroonoko* critics have emerged: those doing ideological readings about gender (Ros Ballaster, Margaret Ferguson, Moira Ferguson, Charlotte Sussman) or about race and colonialism (Laura Brown, Laura Doyle, Albert Rivero), and those who argue that such readings are anachronistic (George Guffy, Derek Hughes, Richard Kroll, Adam Sills).[43] In simple terms, these camps differ in whether they approach *Oroonoko* retrospectively, as an avatar of the novel and of the ideological issues that concern modern critics, or whether they see the text as a product of the seventeenth-century aesthetic values and the specific political issues that provide its context. These camps reflect the amphibious nature of the text: like its royal slave protagonist, *Oroonoko* straddles two worlds. It reveals its roots in seventeenth-century politics and aesthetics via its baroque investments in the physical body, in allegory, and in its fantasy attachment to the possibility of virtuous transcendence. It reveals its roots in modernity via its realism, its commitment to the notion that the particulars—of race, class, and gender but more importantly of the contingent ethical choices one can make in this realistic world—matter. In terms of politics, it shows how and perhaps why literature leaves behind the kinds of specific political concerns of those in power, including God—and the allegorical mode that reflected and represented those concerns—to focus, in novels,

on more abstract ideological issues, while simultaneously investing in the specific details of individual lives. Hence "baroque realism," my own contribution to oroonokoism, is my effort to explain this hybrid quality of *Oroonoko* and its eponymous protagonist, the passive royal slave. While most scholars have followed the Whig interpretation of history, which finds passive obedience to be absurd both politically and intellectually, I read *Oroonoko* as a specific product of 1688–89, as a hybrid text on many levels, and as part of the complex Loyalist countertheorization to emergent Whig orthodoxy about political subjectivity.

II. PASSIVITY, PLOT, AND GENRE

Oroonoko is a curious text in which none of the significant actions of the hero—except for his initial disobedience—actually relate to the plot developments.[44] Oroonoko slays tigers, narrowly escapes a numb eel, and he even fights real battles in Africa, but none of this bears upon the events that structure the course of Oroonoko's life and narrative, all of which are motivated by linguistic, symbolic, representational, or external forces. His two great acts—leading the exodus of slaves and killing Imoinda—are not so much actions as withdrawals from the theater of action. His lack of labor, that fact which makes him a slave "only [in] name," also marks something important about his political position: because he is not asked to do anything for the ruling power, he has little occasion to withhold his obedience (46). Oroonoko, as a royal slave, is supposed to be the exception to all rules, for example to the rule that all women belong to his grandfather and to the rule that slaves must labor. But *Oroonoko* repeatedly demonstrates that exceptionality—and autonomous activity—can only be sustained fictionally, in romance.

While a slave, Oroonoko engages in a series of heavily symbolic heroic activities, in which his power to command rather than perform obedience is fictionalized. When he goes tiger hunting, his physical command over the natural world both provides the entertainment for the colonialists and keeps the peace in their society. Even here, where his activity is largely romantic symbolism and undertaken for amusement ("applau[se]") and indeed as a form of keeping him politically passive, Oroonoko is not so very active. In slaying the first tiger, Oroonoko calmly gets his friends to "obey" him by leaving the tiger to him, he fixes his "aweful stern Eyes" on the tiger, puts himself "into a . . . posture of defense" and runs his sword through the tiger in a manner that suggests static posing and aesthetic restraint—as in clas-

sical sculpture—rather than impassioned activity and representational excess—as in baroque art (49). In pursuit of "trophies and garlands" Oroonoko then proceeds to stalk a tiger who has unfathomably withstood several bullets to the heart, and, again, it is Oroonoko's patience as well as his technique with a bow and arrow, "so good a will, and so sure a hand," not any extreme physical feat, that allow him to slay the tiger (50–51). In killing both of these tigers, Oroonoko and his colonizer friends fictionalize him as a romantic hero, able to perform feats that others find to be impossible. But Oroonoko is also acting politically: both tigers have infringed upon private property, the second tiger stealing sheep and oxen that "were for the support of those to whom they belonged" (49). This casual mention of private property within this ostensible diversion reveals these tiger episodes to be deeply implicated in the colonial economy, so deeply that the beneficiaries of these actions ("those to whom they belonged") never enter the narrative. Within Oroonoko's narrative, these actions are performative or fictionalized heroic activities. Their real effect is Oroonoko's political passivity: his own refrain from taking any private property, including his own body, away.

These heavily romanticized and fictionalized episodes are followed by one that is seemingly anomalous. In his continued pursuit of goals favorable to social stability—his own passivity and romantic entertainment for all—Oroonoko, in one of the greatest ironies in this highly ironic text, next pursues a numb eel, a creature whose sole power is that of making its victim passive. This episode teaches Oroonoko that he is indeed like others, that his special statuses—as a royal and as a slave who does not labor— do not exempt him from the numb eel's powerful mandate to passivity. The Surinam natives who save Oroonoko from his plight are nameless, peripheral to the main narrative; their rescue of Oroonoko exists only as a sidelight to their own lives and merely postpones Oroonoko's ultimate passivity within his own narrative. The eel episode meditates on the impotence of physical force and the inevitability of passivity, even in a prince without a people and a slave who does not labor. In all three of these encounters between the royal slave and power of nature, the denouements rehearse the vulnerability of the natural body: the first episode ends with the tiger whelp being thrown at the narrator's feet; the second with the supernatural tiger, whose heart has absorbed seven bullets, being anatomized; and the third with the eel, who had a seemingly supernatural power to make Oroonoko passive, being eaten by the colonizers and Oroonoko in a civilized meal. All of these episodes are not about the human power

over nature but rather the natural law of passivity: both Oroonoko's and the animals'. These fictionalized stagings of what we might anachronistically call Oroonoko's agency—but which prove nothing so much as his lack of agency—take place within a larger plot structure in which Oroonoko's activities are structurally irrelevant.[45] In the main events of the narrative, Oroonoko is even less active and less politically relevant than he is during these staged heroics.

In Africa, during the chronological beginning of the story, we see a traditional monarchy functioning, albeit imperfectly, under the mandate of passive obedience. Oroonoko and Imoinda submit, for the most part, to the grandfather's rule, despite his impotence and the illegality of his actions. The charming young protagonists must mask their true feelings, which are revealed by non-verbal communication and by the narration. As long as they do not act on their true feelings, calm reigns in Coramantien, with both Oroonoko and the grandfather prohibited from sexual activity. In this first part of the novel, a conservative doctrine of political obligation is explicitly invoked: Imoinda and Oroonoko base their actions on the maxim that "They pay a most absolute resignation to the monarch," an "obedience" that is "not at all inferior to what they paid their Gods" (14–15).[46] The first and only significant action that Oroonoko takes in the story is to defy his obligation to his grandfather and sovereign by having sex with Imoinda. In this romantic betrayal of political obligation, which is presented as background to the main narrative, the original dilemma in Coramantien reveals an ambivalence about political obligation that permeates the rest of the text, in so far as the story reinforces passivity and obedience, but it would not have occurred without this initial disobedience and the love story that motivated it. The prioritizing of passion over obedience that sets the action of *Oroonoko* on its tragic course is simultaneously romantic and anti-romantic. It is romantic because romance eschews the limits of both nature and politics. Kahn has argued that in romance, "the ongoing consent and affections" are more important than obligation and thus there is no such thing as an "irrevocable act of consent."[47] Still, romance usually defers consummation; typically, the refrain from sexual activity marks the virtuous control of the passions that authorizes other forms of activity, often seemingly supernatural ones (like slaying tigers). The grandfather points out that according to their code of political obligation, not only should Oroonoko not have consummated his love for Imoinda, but also the grandfather should have put her to death rather than exiling her. Thus, according to both political and generic laws current in 1688–89, the rest of *Oroonoko* should never

have happened. Oroonoko himself only lives because of the sacrifice of Imoinda's father, who becomes a "hero" when he passively "bow[s] his head" to "receive" the arrow "in his own body" that would have killed Oroonoko (10–12). The main events of the text thus operate outside the boundaries of stable social and political spheres—as well as the codes of romance—which are made possible by acts of obedience and passivity. The initial action of Oroonoko—to prioritize his affections and passions over parental approval and obedience—will be the plot that animates many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels. But here, in 1688–89, we are in relatively uncharted territory.

Thus, one way to gloss the tale of *Oroonoko* could go like this: an erstwhile perfect prince disobeys his grandfather's orders and subsequently suffers pain, misfortune, and a gruesome death (punctuated by a short period of sexual and domestic happiness). In this accounting, at the level of plot, Behn's gambit is to show that political obedience applies to all, as Oroonoko's disobedience takes him from a prince to a slave. Imoinda, by contrast, is the perfectly obedient subject and a completely static character. When Oroonoko kills her, he only completes what the grandfather should have done in the first place. This is perhaps why Imoinda is "brave," "beautiful," and "constant," as well as why she gets the last word of the text (73). In order to make this reading work, the suffering that Oroonoko endures in Surinam must somehow be a result of the disobedience in Coramantien. But the two parts of the story—its two plots, two aesthetics, and two politics of obedience—do not have any causal relationship. For *Oroonoko* is also the tale of a prince whose claim to the "honour" adjudged by the narrator is not for heroic battles but rather for passivity and suffering.[48] Bainbrigg defends passive obedience by arguing that suffering for a good cause is what "men of worth" do in every age. "In the exercise of Vertue," Bainbrigg argues, "Man must have nothing of the Slave in him." A man who would "flinch from his duty" on account of suffering is "slavish."[49] Neither Oroonoko's initial disobedience nor his behavior in Surinam has anything to do with flinching from suffering. Hence the suffering that Oroonoko endures—that which makes him a slave and that which he endures because he is a slave—is, paradoxically, that which keeps him from being "slavish." His disobedience takes him from royal to slave, and it is not his heroic deeds but rather his resulting suffering that constitutes his heroism.

Throughout its narrative, *Oroonoko* remains a text in which every action, no matter how benign (such as reproducing with the one you love and are married to) brings danger. Passivity, by contrast, has political

and moral value. When asked, for example, why he has not acted on his desire for Imoinda, Trefry reports that her "modesty and weeping so tender and so moving" effectively "overcame" and "disarm[ed]" him and caused him, gratefully, to "retire" (42). Imoinda's expressive and moral passivity reproduce themselves in Trefry's avoidance of sexual assault upon her, just as, to some extent, they had that effect on the grandfather when she, "all in tears," tells him he is committing a sin and a crime to be with her (16). These repeated references to the moral and social effects of tears quite closely reflect the discourse about passive obedience, and they make a case for the moral superiority of passivity and expressivity over activity and agency.[50] In all the systems of value in the text—heroic, Christic, African, European—the passivity of the human subject is the foundation of virtue. This is why the generic and geopolitical vertigo of *Oroonoko* is important.

III. LYING AND LYING DOWN

For Whigs writing during 1688–89 and its aftermath, passive obedience represented not only an abrogation of political rights but also a dangerous form of hypocrisy. The Whig critique of passive obedience was part of a larger critique of what they considered to be their opponents' hypocritical tendencies to divorce material, verbal, and visual forms of expression—including political action—from subjective truths and beliefs. Passive obedience, in which a subject's beliefs are not acted upon, along with other forms of hypocrisy, provided a grounds of negation upon which Whigs theorized the legitimacy, the authenticity, and the morality of the modern individual, who makes ideas and actions coincide.

This is why it matters that rather than actions, the main plot motivators and thematic obsessions of *Oroonoko* have to do (as others have noted) with truth and oaths.[51] *Oroonoko* has typically been read as a conflict between honor (romance and monarchism) and contract (truth, realism, and so forth). Both of these systems rely on harmony between representation and action. Thomas Hobbes's natural law, for example, includes the provision that "*men perform their covenants made*."[52] In a world based on contracts, meaning what you say and doing what you say you will do are the foundation of social stability. The romance's commitment to honor is based on a similar commitment to the congruence of belief and action. The key difference between honor and contract is that moral obligation underpins honor while contract establishes legal obligation.[53] But the dividing lines between

these concepts, like the geographical boundaries in the text, are difficult to establish.

Behn's decision to begin *Oroonoko* with a description of the natives of Surinam before narrating the Coramantien passages that some critics have found so romantic violates chronology (not to mention confusing readers, perhaps deliberately, about which culture is being described). But it allows Behn to posit an "absolute idea of the first state of innocence" before narrating the "history" of her hero (8). Her claim that the natives are prelapsarian rests substantially on their lack of a word for "a man who promised a thing he did not do", and the Englishmen provide the word "liar," as well as many occasions in which they demonstrate its meaning by unscrupulously lying (8). The critical consensus about this thematic in the text is redacted in the footnote to the Oxford edition: "Oroonoko is easily duped because his notion of honour is no match for those who lie" (270n8). That is, the English colonialists' blatant willingness to lie contrasts unfavorably with Oroonoko's romantic and prelapsarian "honour," even as it defeats it. From our post-colonial and Whiggish perspectives, the colonialists' repeated lying is not only an unfair way to enslave Oroonoko but it is also a failure of ethical liberal subjectivity more generally.[54]

However, it is not only the unethical but efficacious colonialists who lie. The lying, or the "Promis[ing] a thing [one does] not do" begins with the grandfather, who banishes Imoinda to slavery because he believes "he had made a great conquest over himself, when he had once resolved, and had performed what he resolved" (28), but who then proceeds to lie to Oroonoko about what he has done (as well as to admit that he really should have killed her). If liar is the word for a "man who promised a thing he did not do," that definition applies not only to the English colonialists, who lie in the sense of deliberate deception, but also to the impotent Coramantien king, to the narrator, who lies about her ability to predict the governor's manumission of Oroonoko, and finally to Oroonoko himself, who lies repeatedly despite his commitment to a code of honor. As such, *Oroonoko*'s meditation on lying and passive obedience exceeds the demand for congruence between language and action that underlies both honor and contract.[55]

The prevalence of lying across geographical and cultural boundaries helps to account for the text's complex spatial and temporal organization. At the level of story (as opposed to plot), the geographical flow of the text moves from England across the Atlantic to Surinam and from Africa across the Atlantic to Surinam. With Surinam as the cosmopolitan meeting point and as the locus of all the action witnessed

by the narrator, its status as a prelapsarian state of nature does not quite work. Rather—following Walter Benjamin, who argues that the baroque transposes original temporal data into spatial simultaneity, Chi-ming Yang, who has remarked that *Oroonoko*'s romance set in the New World make time and place "notably elusive," and Sills, who argues against a modern cartographic view of geography in the text—I want to take seriously the anti-mimetic representation of chronology and geography in the plot of *Oroonoko*.[56] According to the narrative of lying and obedience that I have been developing, Oroonoko's story begins in history—with honor and contract as two competing but ultimately similar foundations for political action—and moves towards nature, where the body is inherently unable to comply with promise or desire. The action catalyzed by the definition of "liar" moves from history to nature in that it moves from lying about what has happened, to breaking promises about the future, to lying, and here the meaning begins to disaggregate, about what you are capable of doing. That is, the plot moves from lying as a mental act (whether representational or contractual) to lying as a physical act, or more properly a lack of physical action. For ultimately in *Oroonoko* lying—that is, lying down—is the one action that can be reliably performed. One can promise to take action or one can lie about one's intention to lie passively obedient, but inevitably these all turn out to be lies.

Thus, while Oroonoko, the narrator, and the scholars who have written about the text focus more frequently on the broken promises of the colonialists and slave traders, for my purposes, Oroonoko's own vows to "never lift a weapon, or draw a bow, but abandon the small remains of his life to sighs and tears" (29), to "make no resistance" (37), and to "lift [no] hand" (46) are key to the text's engagement with passive obedience. Oroonoko promises to "act nothing upon the white people": he would prefer to "forfeit his eternal liberty, and life itself, than lift his hand against his greatest enemy," a promise he will fail to keep, except for the part about forfeiting his life (46). In this, he is not so different from the English colonialists who promise his freedom and repeatedly renege. I have already shown how Oroonoko's inaction dominates most of the plot. According to seventeenth-century theories of political obedience, active resistance to authority is never an option. In extreme cases of abuse or intolerable discrepancy between conscience and political demand, the final option, according to writers on passive obedience, is exile, as exemplified in Moses's exodus as well as the French Huguenots' exile in England.[57] This is why it is important that Oroonoko doesn't rebel but rather leads an exodus: he does not

try to change the political system, such as it is, in Surinam, but rather to leave it. He convinces the other slaves to leave their politico-social situation, based on the religious (rather than political) rhetoric that their treatment as more like "senseless brutes than human souls" had robbed them of their "divine quality" and would continue for "eternity" (57–58). Their path to potential freedom is through what seems to be an inhabited swath of land, that is, a land without a sovereign who must be obeyed.[58] Thus, in a way, Oroonoko does comply with his promise not to rebel. In order to carry out this plan, he must essentially leave the world of politics, in which questions of activity and passivity are framed and given meaning. Oroonoko's great action is thus a withdrawal from the theater of political action. It is motivated by modern notions of passion (his initial passion for Imoinda and his concern for their unborn child) and not politics, and it also falters at least partially due to passion: his fellow slaves' commitment to their own families. The exodus also has affinities with classical notions of honor: Oroonoko repeatedly claims that they are better off losing their lives than living "in perpetual slavery" (59). The mixed rhetoric—of Christian ideas about the soul and heroic ideals of military honor—in Oroonoko's speech reveals something about the text's attitude toward passivity. Despite the conflict between Christian and classical notions of interiority—with Christianity privileging the interior realm of conscience and heroic romance insisting that interiority and activity coincide—that seems to be at the heart of the text's moral dilemmas, Oroonoko's speech and *Oroonoko* more generally suggest that in both cases, passivity of the body is the ultimate moral position and the ultimate narrative outcome.

IV. BAROQUE REALISM: A MANGLED KING, SMOKING

In the dedication of *Oroonoko*, to Richard Maitland, Behn describes her innovative prose fiction as a mixture of allegorical and novelistic modes, and of baroque and neoclassical aesthetics. She opens by suggesting that her art contrasts with painting, which is ideally mimetic and classical in nature, in so far as the "original alone gives it its perfection" and a "good hand cannot augment its beauty" (3). Writing, at least her kind of writing, instead draws "the nobler part, the soul and mind" (3). Given that *Oroonoko* will be written in a heavily plotted and (especially in the second half) richly detailed style, this claim to draw the soul (assuming it applies beyond the dedication) suggests a baroque technique of spiritual animation via immersion in

the sensual. Indeed, such lives as Oroonoko's and Maitland's, Behn's dedication suggests, would "lie neglected" (a phrase I hope that this essay has animated) without her written effort to resurrect them to "immortal fame" (3–4). She pairs this baroque claim with a neoclassical one: she hopes the "lazy nobility" will be elevated via the examples of the resurrected Maitland and Oroonoko (4). Thus the baroque technique of resurrection and the neoclassical technique of imitation in the service of didacticism, both described here as forms of animation, promise to work together to fulfill Behn's political and aesthetic vision. But I have been suggesting that this double animation proves mostly to produce negation, in so far as it represents and exalts passivity. Indeed the dedication itself supports this: via her comparison of her writing to painting, whether neoclassical or baroque, Behn evinces a politics of virtue that can be representational and affective but that is not active or narrative.

While *Oroonoko* is, and rightly so, often considered an early novel, it draws heavily on the residual mode of baroque allegory and the world view that it represented. I argued in the last section that the theme of lying (and lying down) in the text does not pit cynical modernity against innocent nativism, but it rather suggests that lying and passivity inhere in the ahistorical human experience. Similarly, Oroonoko's baroque commitments—as contrasted with romance, where the body is no obstacle, and also realism, where it is there to be overcome and is vastly overshadowed in importance by interiority—locate shared humanity in the body that lacks both agency and grace. Beginning with the grandfather's impotence, the vulnerability, incapacity, and intractability of the body is everywhere in evidence. Imoinda's pregnancy, Oroonoko's easy inebriation, the slave's attention to the difficulties of rebelling with women and children: it is ultimately the body's incapacity that collapses historical, racial, and national distinctions. This theme is best exemplified in the final image of a mangled king smoking. According to Oroonoko's heroic design he will " first . . . kill [Imoinda], and then his enemies, and next himself" (67). He manages the first part of the triple promise (the part that was already mandated by his initial disobedience), but this action is followed by Oroonoko's most debilitating moment of paralysis. After killing Imoinda (which is described in a highly stylized way, almost a neoclassical tableau), Oroonoko lies prone, immobilized as his promise of revenge turns into a lie, while Imoinda's body rots under the leaves. Laura J. Rosenthal's claim that Oroonoko really "goes native" here is quite apt.[59] For he is about to replicate the natives' most puzzling ritual: the war captains' self-

mutilation, which Oroonoko initially finds "too brutal to be applauded" (56). The seemingly blithe way that the Surinam war captains conduct a "debate" that entails hacking off body parts in order to prove what they "dare do" collapses the distinction between promise and action. In lieu of any "reply" to the challenge to demonstrate their courage, that is in lieu of any promise (about what they are willing, able, or dare to do), the war captains "prove their activity" by what the narrator calls a "passive valour" (56). The narrator takes the war captains to be "hobgoblins or fiends," and indeed the parallel is apt, because their "debate" challenges the relationship between representation and reality and the distinction between conscience and action by insisting, ironically enough, on the total passivity of the body (55–56). Via the brutalization of their passive bodies, the war captains earn the right to be "obeyed with great resignation" (8).

The brutality of the war captains' self-mutilation, by a process of mysterious causation typical of allegory, leads to Oroonoko's own self-mutilation (his auto-caesarian if you will) and then to the colonialists' mutilation of him, all described in brutally realistic terms. Here, at the very end of the text, the parallels among England, Surinam, and Africa coalesce most uncannily in the image—so extreme even for the baroque that its seems almost a satirical baroque—of Oroonoko's ghastly pipe-smoking as his mutilated and dying body takes on the resonance of a "mangled king" (73). This final image of Oroonoko, smoking a pipe as he "gave up the ghost," might be seen as suggesting some agency—the evidence of conscience or of faith that audiences to the execution of martyrs were trained to look for (72).[60] But Oroonoko's interiority and his agency disappear over the course of the text, and this grotesque image of his demise does not bear witness to any individual or religious transcendence. While at the beginning of the narrative, his expressive eyes revealed the discontinuity between his passion and his political situation, in the end the only evidence of Oroonoko's interiority, or of a transcendent truth beyond his body, is his tobacco smoking. But tobacco would have been the crop that slaves were laboring to produce, and it would have also been associated, particularly by the method of pipe smoking, with Native Americans.[61] In yet another of the text's deep ironies, many of which revolve around our hero's name, "Orinoco" designates not only a river in South America, not only an African prince, but also, according to the *OED*—and as Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcón have noticed—tobacco itself; not only that, but an inferior form of tobacco to boot.[62] Rather than demonstrating "resilience of character," this image of Oroonoko smoking

orinoco is thus profoundly ironic, almost a parody of both religious ideas about conscience and emergent Whiggish ideas about agency.[63] And the tableau around this figure, with Oroonoko surrounded by his ruthless executioners and impotent admirers, seems to be a parody of the Passion of Christ.[64] Oroonoko's execution parallels Jesus's in many ways. While the *King James Bible* translates several deaths as a process of giving up "the ghost," Oroonoko's death is most comparable to Jesus's death, translated as "And Jesus cried with a loude voice, and gave vp the ghost."[65] Oroonoko cries out, in his penultimate bout of suffering, the rather heterodox promise that the colonialists will "no more find a faith in me" (70). The ghost (which is etymologically and doctrinally related to "breath") that he breathes out when he "[gives] up the ghost" would have been mingled with the tobacco that he has "learnt" to smoke (72). His "learnt" habit of smoking tobacco, I'm arguing, offers no evidence of spiritual transcendence, individual agency, or Christic sacramentalism. Rather, it proffers a claim about the shared humanity of slaves, natives, and royals. This final image thus leaves us with a baroque aesthetic, but one that questions rather than affirms spirituality and interiority. It aestheticizes the passive suffering body as a secular and universal truth.

The arguments in 1688–89 about passive obedience—as well as about succession, rights, the rule of law, and so on—were frequently, from both sides, grounded in history, and in the specifics of England's "ancient Laws."[66] By setting *Oroonoko*, allegorically and/or globally, outside of England, by setting it repeatedly and increasingly in settings with no legitimate ruler, and by making her protagonist both royal and slave, Behn's representation of the fundamental passivity of the human body levels a critique, from a perspective with both spiritual and materialist elements, of political and nationalist ways of thinking about individuality.[67] This global context of *Oroonoko* pits the exceptionalism expected in realism against the capacity for similitude provided by allegory. And it pits the self's capacity to objectify the world (exemplified in the logic of modern slavery) against the baroque allegorical commitments, in Gordon Teskey's words, to "mythopoetic and visionary" participation, between local and cosmic forces and between signs and referents.[68] It pits neoclassical modes of accommodation and didacticism against the baroque obsession with the inevitability of death, decay, and sorrow. And finally, and most relevantly, it pits both romantic and realistic modes of thinking about agency against what Benjamin has described as the baroque's genius for depicting "man's subjection to nature."[69] Loyalist theories of pas-

sive obedience were founded on the notion that "political duties had a religious basis"; Behn's baroque realism secularizes that theory and grounds it in nature, not politics or religion.[70]

V. THE PASSIVELY OBEDIENT NOVEL

The novel, at least the realist and sentimental novels of the eighteenth century, is an anti-allegorical form. Novels happen when we begin to think, in Lorna Clymer's terms, that "not repeating oneself—or anyone else" is a "sign of mastery."[71] This essay has been arguing that this is the sign that Oroonoko is unable to perform. In his lying, in his ultimate impotence, and in the narrator's repetition not only of the colonialists' lies but also of the lying of Oroonoko, we find a text unable to stop repeating and also unable to sustain a fiction of exceptionality: royals, slaves, and protagonists of novels are destined to embody the universal law of passivity. Teskey has argued that allegory is a form of ritual interpretation that produces a depoliticized form of hope that we belong to one spiritual project. Politics, he says, "puts the body at risk," while allegory "cares without risk."[72] Teskey's critique of allegory might lead to a reading of *Oroonoko* as a deeply conservative response to the emergence of modern politics: Behn's Tory allegory critiques all efforts at political activity as impractical and as violations of our shared humanity. My analysis of passivity in the text could support this reading. But this is not the only possible interpretation of the baroque body politic in *Oroonoko*. *Oroonoko*'s emphasis on the sexual, suffering, impotent body about which no promises can be made, the ground of Behn's baroque aesthetic and her conservative critique of modernity, is the same ground upon which rests the recent critique of the liberal emphasis on human rights—Giorgio Agamben's theorization, for example, of the implications of how "bare life" (or "life exposed to death") emerges from natural life.[73] According to Agamben, following Carl Schmitt's theory of sovereignty, late liberal capitalism, in a logic both foundational and unjust, works by a proliferation of the state of exception. As a secular and conservative thinker, Behn was uniquely positioned to predict the dangers of this increasingly secular world that was emerging as she was writing *Oroonoko*. Her interrogation of Oroonoko's double and oxymoronic exceptionality—that is, her depiction of a world with no monarch, justice, or true exceptionality—shows how the denial of the law of passivity leads not to active agency nor freedom but rather to a proliferation of injustice and suffering.[74] The political crisis that that brought down the Stuarts and that thus provides the immediate

context for *Oroonoko* involved James II's 1689 Declaration of Indulgence; the Declaration, granting "liberty of conscience," rested on the notion that king's exceptionality allows him the prerogative to grant liberty, or exception, to his (minority or individual) subjects.[75] Behn's gambit in *Oroonoko* is to make a royal, the one person who is an exception to the rule of law at least under royalist theory, into a slave, the one category of person excluded from liberal rights theory, and to show that even in these bodies, indeed even as the exception to these exceptions, the human body lacks the possibility of either transcendence into spirituality or abstraction into rights. The end game of the logic of the exception in *Oroonoko* is that all bodies are subject to unjust practices, to violence and decay, and they cannot be made congruent with human languages of desire, agency, or command. While we may, and the narrator does, dream that a just ruler (James II or Oroonoko himself) might be different, or at least not quite as bad, that Surinam, or Coramantien, or England itself might prove the exception to the rule, the novel ultimately provides a vision of continual passivity in human affairs, one in which questions of justice and the reality of the vulnerable human body are all too easily divorced from legal, political, and discursive modes of social interaction.

Oroonoko documents Oroonoko's inability to provide an alternative to the lying, deceiving, brutal world of colonialism and slavery, because his capacity for expression and his exceptionalities, his two possible modes of political action, have been eroded throughout the narrative. It is thus important, in terms of the relationship between the history of passive obedience and the development of the novel form, that Oroonoko's story is mediated by a surrogate, a narrator whose own position within the story is just as physically implicated and even less agential than his own but who nonetheless acts as a witness to and a judge of his story: as an "eye-witness" (6) she deems him to have been "a great man" (73) who is "worthy of a better fate" (73). The narrator, as Athey and Alarcón have argued, retains a position of "reflection and moral judgment," even as all she can do is to admonish Oroonoko, for reasons that are extremely compromised, to "rest yet a little longer with patience" and then to describe the brutal reality of her hero's passive and suffering body when that strategy fails (46).[76] Scholars have often noticed, and criticized, the narrator's inaction in the story, her ghostlike presence that never acts on Oroonoko's behalf even as she exalts him.[77] I want to suggest that her inaction is a modern form of passive obedience and is integral to her politically and ethically complicated role as witness and narrator. It is important to notice that she is not

fully detached from the action. Her body is exposed and vulnerable: to the natives when they examine her dress; to the violent potential of slave revolt and, by implication, to the violence of colonizers; and finally to "fits of dangerous illness upon any extraordinary melancholy," the occasion of her ultimate passivity, via exile, during the scene of Oroonoko's death (72). Her implicated and passive body, like Oroonoko's, is not a vehicle for individual agency or spirituality. She bears witness, via various modes of removal, to Oroonoko's suffering, but this limited witnessing comes "from the ground," not from any place of participation or transcendence.[78] The tragedy of Oroonoko perhaps inheres precisely in this fact that she can neither participate in his life politically nor transcend his death spiritually. Sacrifice, as Graham Ward has argued, depends upon communion among community.[79] Oroonoko can, in Agamben's terms be "killed but not sacrificed" precisely because of this lack of communion between the narrator and her hero, a lack that marks the text's distance from baroque participation.[80] If Oroonoko's attitude toward the war captains was that he could "esteem" but not "applaud" them, then Behn's narrator makes both applause and esteem seem impossible. Applause is, by definition, a visible display of approval, while esteem refers to the interior judgment of approval, often directed towards a deity, rather than to the representation of approval.[81] The setting of the story—in a place without a monarch or shared ideals—and the techniques of narration—a tragedy narrated by an eyewitness/participant—make both esteem and applause unavailable. Esteem and applause—those effects of heroic, religious, and theatrical modes—are replaced here with the practices and the complicated agency of passive obedience. The narrator is expressive; she pleads a case, assumes a discrepancy between justice and reality, and accommodates a discrepancy between belief and action. Moreover, as an early prose fiction, *Oroonoko* not only participates in a modern form of lying, but it can, to push its connection with passive obedience a bit and in contrast with predecessor forms like theater and baroque religious art, be experienced by readers while lying down.

In short, *Oroonoko* uses the occasion of debates over passive obedience and religious toleration to instantiate the modern narrator: passive and thus politically compromised because partially detached from the situation and partially implicated, a narrator whose liberty of conscience, whose right to a different moral standard from the one depicted—indeed even from the one in which she participates as an actor—depends upon passivity and expressivity even as it precludes active agency.[82] The text's ambivalence about its own generic regula-

tions, and their political implications, is perhaps why the narrator wishes a "more sublime wit" than her own could do justice to Oroonoko's story (73). With the narrator in *Oroonoko*, Behn suggests that in the emergent political landscape only a certain kind of inaction—the compromised and contingent witnessing available in the passively obedient novel form—is consonant with a discursive practice devoted to justice. *Oroonoko*, then, predicts both the novel and the modes of agency with which modernity would grapple, in so far as it works by a logic of surrogacy and representation, and in so far as it is ideological but not political. It is a modernized mode of passive obedience for a world in which there is no sovereign to which one can appeal, no exception who can make exceptions. In terms of its place within the history of the novel, *Oroonoko* presents the typical novelistic plot, in which virtuous and passionate young people rebel against a tyrannical parental figure. That Behn's young lovers find realism rather than romance and passivity rather than rebellious transcendence does not preclude a novelistic sensibility that valorizes individuality, but it predicts a great deal of compromise for the future citizens of democracy. This is the ground of Behn's political conservatism and her literary innovation.

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NOTES

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[1] Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko, and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1998), 56. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number.

[2] See John Locke, *Two Treatises Of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 2003).

[3] Little is known about Behn's religious background and leanings. See Sara Heller Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women: Three Studies* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1987); Mary Ann O'Donnell, "Private Jottings, Public Utterances: Aphra Behn's Published Writings and Her Commonplace Book," in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996), 285–309; and Alison Shell, "Popish Plots: The Feign'd Curtizans in Context," also in *Aphra Behn Studies*, ed. Todd, 31–49. Elsewhere O'Donnell notes a variant in *Oroonoko*'s dedication that focuses on Maitland's Catholicism; see *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources* (New York: Garland, 1986), esp. 122–23, 129–30.

[4] Behn, "To His Sacred Majesty, King James the Second," in *Oroonoko, and Other Writings*, 255–56. These adjectives are all terms that appear repeatedly as analogues of passive obedience.

[5] Victoria Ann Kahn, *Wayward Contracts: The Crisis of Political Obligation In England, 1640–1674* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004), 13.

[6] *Passive Obedience In Actual Resistance*, (London, 1691), 1.

[7] For overviews of the history of political obedience in early modern England, see Richard L. Greaves, "Concepts of Political Obedience in Late Tudor England," *Journal of British Studies* 22 (1982): 23–34; and John Neville Figgis, *The Divine Right Of Kings*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1914). In 1709–10, the case of Henry Sacheverell revisited these debates, linking passive obedience clearly with the lost Stuart cause.

[8] Abednego Seller, *The History Of Self-Defense* (London, printed for Theodore Johnson 1689), A3. All printed versions of this book do not have the preface cited here.

[9] Seller, *A Defence of Dr. Sacheverell. Or, Passive-Obedience prov'd to be the doctrine of the Church of England* (London, 1710), 51. He presumably refers to the divine Thomas Jackson (1579–1640).

[10] Hence passive obedience is not the kind of annihilation of the self will discussed in Scott Paul Gordon, *The Power of the Passive Self in English Literature, 1640–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2002). Passive obedience does not, especially as it becomes secularized, make a claim to complete oneness with God. What is at stake in passive obedience is not the power of God but the power of the conscience, and the need to balance secular and sacred beliefs.

[11] John Kettlewell, *Christianity, A Doctrine Of The Cross: Or, Passive Obedience* (London, 1695), 4–5.

[12] Greaves, 29. J. C. Davis argues that the claim to liberty of conscience "had virtually nothing to do with a claim to direct or manage ourselves"; rather it is a claim to "be free to submit to the governance of God [over] any other authority" ("Religion and the Struggle for Freedom in the English Revolution," *Historical Journal* 35 [1992]: 515).

[13] See J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1660–1832: Religion, Ideology, And Politics During The Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2000).

[14] John Toland, *Mr. Toland's Reflections On Dr. Sacheverells Sermon* (London, 1710), 11. George Berkeley is one of the few major thinkers after 1688–89 who supports passive obedience; see Berkeley, *Passive Obedience* (London, 1713). Berkeley bases his support—for nonresistance and acceptance of punishment—on human reason and the practicalities of governance. By contrast, David Hume says "in all our notions of morals we never entertain such an absurdity as that of passive obedience" (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vol. [London, 1739–40], 3:163–64). William Blackstone later calls passive obedience a "slavish and exploded doctrine" (*Commentaries on the Laws of England*, 4 vol. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765–69], 1:326).

[15] James Ellesby, M.A., Vicar of Chiswick in Middlesex, *The Doctrine Of Passive Obedience* (London, 1685), 15.

[16] In *De Regimine Principum*, Thomas Aquinas argues that monarchy is the best form of government and counsels that violent resistance to a tyrannical government is unwise, but he distinguishes tyrants from monarchs and allows for the possibility of communal resistance to tyranny. See Aquinas, *De Regimine Principum Ad Regem Cypri: Et De Regimine Judaeorum Ad Ducissam Brabantiae*, 2nd ed., ed. Joseph Mathis (Taurini: Marietti, 1986).

[17] W. J., welwiller to peace and truth, *Obedience Active And Passive Due To The Supream Povver* (London, 1643), 9.

[18] Howell A. Lloyd argues that political obedience was a central tenet of all European political theory and that its demise was much less rapid and profound than a Whig interpretation might suggest. See Lloyd, Glenn Burgess, and Simon Hodson, eds., *European Political Thought 1450–1700: Religion, Law And Philosophy* (New Haven: Yale

Univ. Press, 2007), 498–509. On the importance of obedience to all sides in 1688–89, see also Mark Goldie, "The Revolution of 1689 and the Structure of Political Argument," *Bulletin of Research in the Humanities* 83 (1980): 473–564; and J. P. Kenyon, *Revolution Principles: The Politics Of Party, 1689–1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1977). Most writers assumed the importance of political obedience, but of course there were radical Whigs who argued that political power resides within the people, who can revoke their rulers' power by acts of rebellion.

[19] Robert Filmer, *Patriarcha, or, The Natural Power of Kings* (London, 1680), 5–6.

[20] See Samuel Johnson, *Julian the Apostate* (London, 1682). Johnson, who was the chaplain to William Russell (a major proponent of exclusion and the right of subjects to resist), argues that early Christians legitimately resisted the rule of the pagan Julian. For a history of this text, see Dorothy Auchter, *Dictionary of Literary and Dramatic Censorship in Tudor and Stuart England* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), 174–78. The most famous interlocutor for Johnson is George Hickes (1642–1715), the English divine who would become a non-juror, in *Jovian, or, An answer to Julian the Apostate by a minister of London* (London, 1683). The radical argument that Johnson and other Whigs make is that it is the law, and not the king, that one is obliged to obey, and thus that active rebellion is justified if the king subverts the law. Johnson was tried and imprisoned for seditious libel. But my point here is that his most famous example in fact complies with passive obedience. For an overview of Johnson's career, see Melinda Zook, "Early Whig Ideology, Ancient Constitutionalism, and The Reverend Samuel Johnson," *Journal of British Studies* 32 (1993): 139–65.

[21] This is a complex problem, but divine right and passive obedience are often erroneously conflated. Writers who argued strongly for passive obedience frequently did so on the basis of either "Hereditary or Elective" right. See for example John Walker, *The Antidote: Or, a Seasonable Discourse on Rom. 13.1* (London, 1684), 36.

[22] Mark 10:21 (King James Version, 1611). According to Ellesby, Christ was "so far from offering at Resistance . . . that he did not . . . make shew of the least Murmuring or Discontent," and his apostles "rejoyc'd in Affliction, and gloried in Tribulations" (6–7).

[23] W. J., welwiller to peace and truth, 9.

[24] Thomas Bainbrigg, *Seasonable Reflections on a Late Pamphlet Entitled a History of Passive Obedience Since the Reformation* (London, 1689–90), 15. Bainbrigg argues that all obedience is active.

[25] John Norton, *A Discussion of that Great Point In Divinity, The Sufferings Of Christ; And the Questions about his Righteousnesse Active, Passive* (London, 1653), A2.

[26] See J. S. McGee, "Conversion and the Imitation of Christ in Anglican and Puritan Writing," *Journal of British Studies* 15 (1976): 21–39. As George Hickes puts it, the Church of England "thinks her self obliged to suffer, as her *Saviour*, like a Lamb brought to the slaughter; and dares pretend to take up no Arms but those of the *Primitive Christians (Whose true Copy she is) Tears, Arguments and Prayers*" (*The Judgment of an Anonymous Writer* [London, 1684], 2). Jeremy Taylor (1613–1667) notes that Christ "esteemed it his *Meat and drink to do the will of his Father*, and for his obedience alone obtain'd the greatest glory: and no man ever came to perfection but by obedience" (*The Rule And Exercises Of Holy Living* [London, 1650], 191).

[27] There were Loyalist accounts featuring Christ. See for example Thomas Pierce, *A Prophylactick from Disloyalty in These Perilous Times* (London, 1688).

[28] Rom. 13:2 (KJV).

[29] Bainbrigg, 28–32.

[30] Francis Turner, *Sermon Preached Before the King on the 30/1 of January 1680/1* (London, 1681), 24. For a similar example see W. J., welwiller to peace and truth, 16–17. See also this exact phrase in *Oroonoko*, 30.

[31] Samuel Johnson, *An Answer to the History of Passive Obedience* (London, 1709/10), 5. *Passive Obedience In Actual Resistance* satirizes such "prayers and tears" as a mechanism of "Thraldom and Bondage" based on specious interpretation of scripture (2).

[32] This political notion is often deeply imbricated in religious ideas. In one text, passive obedience is wrong because it makes God "Unmerciful, Cruel, Barbarous, and Tyrannical" (*Vox Populi, Vox Dei* [London, 1709], 38). There are also, of course, writers who deny the political import of such affective displays. Robert Filmer, for example says there is "no Remedy in the Text against Tyrants, but in Crying and praying unto God in that Day" (80–81).

[33] Greaves cites a gloss of the Great Bible of 1539, which says that Christians must "obeye Ungodly rulers" (24) because "the actions of both [kinds of rules] can be controlled by God for his ends" (31). See also Figgis. Obviously this is not a completely new idea. Rather, my point is that after a period of insistence, under the Stuarts, on the divine right of kings in England, writers in 1688–89 began to theorize the meaning and practice of obeying an unjust king in new ways. Joseph Priestley will later (ironically in a critique of passive obedience) describe passive obedience as a necessary counter to the "king-killing principles" of Catholics (*An Essay On The First Principles Of Government* [Dublin, 1768], 29).

[34] Clark's influential argument recovers the "shared ideological inheritance" (88) of Whigs and Tories throughout the long eighteenth century, and passive obedience is a centerpiece of this "middle ground" (58). Besides the fact that ideological change comes slowly, and that England's history was one of compromise, no government, as Clark points out, has incentive to support the right to resistance.

[35] George Hickes, *A Sermon Preach'd before the Honourable House of Commons* (London, 1692), 22–23. Thomas Long (1621–1707) makes a similar case: "being no Men at Arms" the clergy had fulfilled its duty by standing still and waiting *"for the salvation of God"* to relieve them from their terror and oppression (*The Historian Unmask'd* [London, 1689], 6). For a discussion of the history of passive obedience and the complex ways it interacted with the revolution, see George F. Sensabaugh, "Milton and the Doctrine of Passive Obedience," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 13 (1939): 19–54.

[36] *The Doctrine of Passive Obedience and Nonresistance, as established in the Church of England* (London, 1710), 26. In another example, Sacheverell links Republicans, who think people can remake government, with "Papists" who think Rome can overrule Britain (*Perils of False Brethren* [London, 1709], 86).

[37] See Zook, "Early Whig Ideology," 147.

[38] See Clark, 58, who argues that the emergent democratic society of England was deeply rooted in the values of passive obedience.

[39] Luke 20:25; see also Matt. 22:21 and Mark 12:17 (KJV).

[40] In an example of an argument against passive obedience invoking this language, one writer, W. J. "welwiller to peace and truth," argues that what is received from the sovereign must be returned in kind, "because they keep our Tillage safe, they must have Tribute out of our Lands" (W. J., welwiller to peace and truth, 8). Charles Taylor will, much later, argue quite oppositely that conscience is defined by participation in social institutions. Traditional despotism, Taylor argues, could require only that people "remain passive and obey the laws," while a democracy asks that citizens be "motivated" to contribute not only "treasure" but also "blood" and participation in governance

("Nationalism and Modernity," in *Theorizing Nationalism*, ed. Ronald Beiner [Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1999], 228).

[41] It also investigates what difference it makes for a slave or group of slaves (versus a religious minority) to choose exile. I am grateful to Michael O'Driscoll for this observation, which bears more analysis than I can give it here.

[42] Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688–1804* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 1999), 29–70.

[43] For examples of gender criticism see the following: Ros Ballaster, "New Hystericism: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: The Body, the Text and the Feminist Critic," in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 283–95; Margaret W. Ferguson, "Juggling the Categories of Race, Class, and Gender," *Women's Studies* 19 (1991): 159–81; Moira Ferguson, "*Oroonoko*: Birth of a Paradigm," *New Literary History* 23 (1992): 339–59; and Charlotte Sussman, "The Other Problem with Women: Reproduction and Slave Culture in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," in *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Heidi Hutner (Charlottesville: Univ. Press of Virginia, 1993), 212–33. *For race and colonial studies, see* Laura Brown, "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slave," in *The New Eighteenth Century*, ed. Brown and Felicity Nussbaum (New York: Methuen, 1987), 41–61; Laura Doyle, *Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640–1940* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2008); and Albert J. Rivero, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and the 'Blank Spaces' of Colonial Fictions," *SEL Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 39 (1999): 443–62. For examples of critics who see such readings as anachronistic, see the following: 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, UCLA, 1975), 1–41; Derek Hughes, "Race, Gender, and Scholarly Practice: Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," *Essays in Criticism* 52 (2002): 1–22; Richard Kroll, "'Tales of Love and Gallantry': The Politics of *Oroonoko*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 67 (2004): 573–605; and Adam Sills, "Surveying 'The Map of Slavery' in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Journal of Narrative Theory* 36 (2006): 314–40. The dichotomy I mention oversimplifies the critical field; see for example, Joanna Lipking, "'Others', Slaves, and Colonists in Oroonoko," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, ed. Derek Hughes and Janet Todd (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 166–87. *Oroonoko*'s critical fame, the reason for oroonokoism, has largely rested on its innovations in the novel form and the kind of ideological questions about the individual's place in society that concern the novel and its critics. But *Oroonoko* should also be treated as belated rather than new, or as allegory rather than novel. Scholars have recently, and rightly so I think, been thinking about *Oroonoko*'s affinities with theater; see Sills and Marta Figlerowicz, "'Frightful Spectacles of a Mangled King': Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and Narration Through Theater," *New Literary History* 39 (2008): 321–34.

[44] Sexuality and procreation have an unusual status in this text. My historical reading of *Oroonoko* in the context of passive obedience would not be at odds with a Freudian reading that would align the sex drive with the death drive and passivity. See Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. John Reddick (New York: Penguin, 2003).

[45] Laura M. Ahearn's definition of agency as "the socioculturally mediated capacity to act," and thus quite opposite of both free will and resistance, is apt here ("Language and Agency," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 [2001]: 112).

[46] This quotation suggests, unlike the situation in 1688–89, a culture that does not distinguish sacred and secular forms of power. One has to take these references to absolute political obedience in *Oroonoko* with some degree of irony, as they are always referenced exactly when they are being violated.

[47] Kahn, 173.

[48] "Honour" is referenced at least thirty times throughout *Oroonoko*.

[49] Bainbrigg, 15–16.

[50] *Oroonoko* thus, via its meditation on passive obedience, offers some insight to the historical divorce of morality and political action. The "Prayers and Tears" of political subordinates may not change either the political structure or the mandate to passivity, though that does not mean that they are unimportant, for they are the heart of the text's ethical project, as they will be for the novel of the eighteenth century.

[51] Vernon Guy Dickson notes, correctly I think, that Oroonoko's obsession with truth is related not to factual truth but rather to moral truth; see "Truth, Wonder, and Exemplarity in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko," *SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 47 (2007): 573–594.

[52] Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), 95.

[53] For a discussion of this difference, see Kahn, 47.

[54] Kahn, in explaining how John Milton prefigures Friedrich Nietzsche, defines the "conscientious and 'calculable' ethical subject" as one who can keep ones promises and that thus presupposes a kind of internal contract (133).

[55] This fundamental truth about humans, that they "lie," also suggests something about why and how a royal can also become a slave, since the two routes to slavery are physical passivity and being duped—both forms of lying.

[56] Chi-ming Yang, "Asia Out of Place: The Aesthetics of Incorruptibility in Behn's Oroonoko," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 42 (2009): 235. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998/1977), esp. 81; and Sills.

[57] For example, in *Obedience Active and Passive Due To The Supream Povver*, W. J., welwiller to peace and truth, writes: "Moses . . . had not . . . any power committed to him to incite the people to take up armes against *Pharaoh* their King" but "only to intreat *Pharaoh* to let them goe" (11–12).

[58] This is perhaps why the New-World setting is important—it is the only way to imagine an exodus away from political situations. But of course, this is not really so: the exodus has a leader/prince, and the slaves all have family obligations that they bring with them.

[59] Laura J. Rosenthal, "*Oroonoko*: Reception, Ideology, and Narrative Strategy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*, 162.

[60] See Elizabeth Hanson, "Torture and Truth in Renaissance England," *Representations* 34 (1991): 53–84. Hanson argues that torture in Renaissance England, as part of the "developing practice of criminal investigation," was congruent with the emergent scientific epistemology of discovery, in that it assumes the "victim [is] in possession of a hidden truth . . . and . . . the interrogator's task was 'discovery'" (54–55). By contrast, the ideal Catholic victim maintained secrecy, defining truth as discontinuous from "utterance and representation" (75). Between these two competing positions emerged the idea that the conscience was fully and intensely private, unconnected to the flesh, a zone of "secrecy and discovery" (72). Methods of discovery thus "revealed that impenetrable sanctum it had created" (77). My point, though, is that *Oroonoko* satirizes all these ways of reading martyrdom.

[61] On history of tobacco, see Todd Butler, "Power in Smoke: The Language of Tobacco and Authority in Caroline England," *Studies in Philology* 106 (2009): 100–118; Jason Hughes, *Learning to Smoke: Tobacco Use in the West* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2003); and E. R. Billings, *Tobacco; Its History, Varieties, Culture, Manufacture and Commerce* (Middlesex: Wildhern Press, 1875).

[62] *OED*, *s.v.* "Orinoco," http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/132715, accessed 3 March 2012. See Stephanie Athey and Daniel Cooper Alarcón, "*Oroonoko*'s Gendered Economies of Honor/Horror: Reframing Colonial Discourse Studies in the Americas," *American Literature* 65 (1993): 425.

[63] Yang, 244. While I'm arguing against Yang's reading of agency in this scene, a similar point to mine is made by George Boulukos, who reads the smoking as a parody of Foxean Protestant martyrdom; see *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2008), 70. In *The Rover* Part 2, Behn represents tobacco quite negatively, when, in a discussion of sex and marriage as "lying," Beaumont threatens Aria with the image of an old lover: "the compound of nasty Smells about him, stinking Breath, Mustachoes stuff with villainous snush, Tobacco, and hollow Teeth" (*The Second Part of the Rover* [London, 1681], act 2, scene 2, page 31).

[64] Kroll has noticed the parallels between Oroonoko's death and Christ's Passion, including the witnessing by women, see esp. 576.

[65] Mark 15:37 (KJV).

[66] *Vox Populi, Vox Dei*, 18.

[67] In this "natural law" approach, though not in its conclusions, she is modern for 1688–9, following (or leading) such figures as Locke, whose "highly rationalized, ahistorical idiom" contrasted with the more common law/history approach of other Whigs and Tories. Melinda S. Zook, *Radical Whigs and Conspiratorial Politics in Late Stuart England* (University Park: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1999), 140.

[68] Gordon Teskey, *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1996), 101.

[69] Benjamin, 166.

[70] Clark, 135.

[71] Lorna Clymer, *Ritual, Routine and Regime: Repetition in Early Modern British and European Culture*, (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2006), 4.

[72] Teskey, 132.

[73] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1998), 88.

[74] I undertake this argument with trepidation, as I think it is always a risk to revive conservative views of the past to critique the present. In a way, this is just the flip side of the Whiggish habit, as Blair Worden phrases it, of congratulating "the past on becoming more like the present" ("Toleration and the Cromwellian Protectorate," in *Persecution and Toleration*, ed. W. J. Sheils [Oxford: Blackwell, 1984], 199).

[75] James II, King of England (1633–1701), *A Declaration of His Most Sacred Majesty, King James II to all his Loving subjects in the Kingdom of England*, (London, 1689).

[76] Athey and Alarcón, 423. They argue, following Nancy Armstrong's argument about the rise of the novel, that this is the source of both Behn's modernity and her moral authority—her "metaphysical subjectivity" (431). See Armstrong, *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[77] See Margaret W. Ferguson, esp. 165–66; see also William C. Spengemann, "The Earliest American Novel: Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 38 (1984): 384–414. Spengemann attributes the narrator's inactivity to genre, while Ferguson's reading is more about the strictures of gender/power relations.

[78] This language is from Graham Ward's reading of the death scene in *Romeo + Juliet*, which he says is shot so there is "an inability to gain moral high ground, and perspective that can change the situation" (*True Religion*, [Malden: Blackwell , 2003], 29). As in that film, there is "no sense of resurrection" in *Oroonoko*—except perhaps in the unexpected revival of the name "Imoinda" at the very end. Or perhaps in the promise (or the consolation) that only literature—or perhaps literary scholarship—can resurrect the righteous or transcend the unethical world. For an interesting account of how witnesses became separated from judicial functions, see Matthew Wickman, *The Ruins of Experience: Scotland's "Romantic" Highlands and the Birth of the Modern Witness* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

[79] See Ward, 14–17.

[80] Agamben, 90.

[81] In the tracts on passive obedience, "esteem" is due to "higher powers"; see for example Walker, esp. 60–62).

[82] For Laura Doyle, the narrator's position, writing from exile, allows her to "re-anchor . . . displaced persons and events" (*Freedom's Empire: Race and the Rise of the Novel in Atlantic Modernity, 1640–1940* [Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2008], 102).