



# APHRA BEHN

PIONEER AMONG WOMEN WRITERS

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ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

TACET BOOKS

ESSENTIAL NOVELISTS

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Aphra Behn

EDITED BY

August Nemo



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# Author

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APHRA BEHN, (BORN 1640?, Harbledown?, Kent, Eng.—died April 16, 1689, London), English dramatist, fiction writer, and poet who was the first Englishwoman known to earn her living by writing.

Her origin remains a mystery, in part because Behn may have deliberately obscured her early life. One tradition identifies Behn as the child known only as Ayfara or Aphra who traveled in the 1650s with a couple named Amis to Suriname, which was then an English possession. She was more likely the daughter of a barber, Bartholomew Johnson, who may or may not have sailed with her and the rest of her family to Suriname in 1663. She returned to England in 1664 and married a merchant named Behn; he died (or the couple separated) soon after. Her wit and talent having brought her into high esteem, she was employed by King Charles II in secret service in the Netherlands in 1666. Unrewarded and briefly imprisoned for debt, she began to write to support herself.

Behn's early works were tragicomedies in verse. In 1670 her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage*, was produced, and *The Amorous Prince* followed a year later. Her sole tragedy, *Abdelazer*, was staged in 1676. However, she turned increasingly to light comedy and farce over the course of the 1670s. Many of these witty and vivacious comedies, notably *The Rover* (two parts, produced 1677 and 1681), were commercially successful. *The Rover* depicts the adventures of a small group of English Cavaliers in Madrid and Naples during the exile of the future Charles II. *The Emperor of the Moon*, first performed in 1687, presaged the

harlequinade, a form of comic theatre that evolved into the English pantomime.

Though Behn wrote many plays, her fiction today draws more interest. Her short novel *Oroonoko* (1688) tells the story of an enslaved African prince whom Behn claimed to have known in South America. Its engagement with the themes of slavery, race, and gender, as well as its influence on the development of the English novel, helped to make it, by the turn of the 21st century, her best-known work. Behn's other fiction includes the multipart epistolary novel *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684–87) and *The Fair Jilt* (1688).

Behn's versatility, like her output, was immense; she wrote other popular works of fiction, and she often adapted works by older dramatists. She also wrote poetry, the bulk of which was collected in *Poems upon Several Occasions*, with *A Voyage to the Island of Love* (1684) and *Lycidus; or, The Lover in Fashion* (1688). Behn's charm and generosity won her a wide circle of friends, and her relative freedom as a professional writer, as well as the subject matter of her works, made her the object of some scandal.

# Oroonoko

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OR, THE ROYAL SLAVE

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I DO NOT PRETEND, IN giving you the history of this Royal Slave, to entertain my reader with adventures of a feigned hero, whose life and fortunes fancy may manage at the poet's pleasure; nor in relating the truth, design to adorn it with any accidents but such as arrived in earnest to him: and it shall come simply into the world, recommended by its own proper merits and natural intrigues; there being enough of reality to support it, and to render it diverting, without the addition of invention.

I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down; and what I could not be witness of, I received from the mouth of the chief actor in this history, the hero himself, who gave us the whole transactions of his youth: and though I shall omit, for brevity's sake, a thousand little accidents of his life, which, however pleasant to us, where history was scarce and adventures very rare, yet might prove tedious and heavy to my reader, in a world where he finds diversions for every minute, new and strange. But we who were perfectly charmed with the character of this great man were curious to gather every circumstance of his life.

The scene of the last part of his adventures lies in a colony in America, called Surinam, in the West Indies.

But before I give you the story of this gallant slave, 'tis fit I tell you the manner of bringing them to these new colonies;

those they make use of there not being natives of the place: for those we live with in perfect amity, without daring to command 'em; but, on the contrary, caress 'em with all the brotherly and friendly affection in the world; trading with them for their fish, venison, buffalo's skins, and little rarities; as marmosets, a sort of monkey, as big as a rat or weasel, but of marvelous and delicate shape, having face and hands like a human creature; and couseries, a little beast in the form and fashion of a lion, as big as a kitten, but so exactly made in all parts like that noble beast that it is it in miniature. Then for little parakeets, great parrots, mackaws, and a thousand other birds and beasts of wonderful and surprising forms, shapes, and colors. For skins of prodigious snakes, of which there are some threescore yards in length; as is the skin of one that may be seen at his Majesty's Antiquary's; where are also some rare flies, of amazing forms and colors, presented to 'em by myself; some as big as my fist, some less; and all of various excellencies, such as art cannot imitate. Then we trade for feathers, which they order into all shapes, make themselves little short habits of 'em and glorious wreaths for their heads, necks, arms, and legs, whose tinctures are unconceivable. I had a set of these presented to me, and I gave 'em to the King's Theater, and it was the dress of the Indian Queen, infinitely admired by persons of quality; and was unimitable. Besides these, a thousand little knacks and rarities in nature; and some of art, as their baskets, weapons, aprons, etc. We dealt with 'em with beads of all colors, knives, axes, pins, and needles; which they used only as tools to drill holes with in their ears, noses, and lips, where they hang a great many little things; as long beads, bits of tin, brass or silver beat thin, and any shining trinket. The beads they weave into aprons about a quarter of an ell long, and of the same breadth; working them very prettily in flowers of several colors; which apron they wear just before 'em, as Adam and Eve did the fig-leaves; the men wearing a



long stripe of linen, which they deal with us for. They thread these beads also on long cotton threads, and make girdles to tie their aprons to, which come twenty times, or more, about the waist, and then cross, like a shoulder-belt, both ways, and round their necks, arms, and legs. This adornment, with their long black hair, and the face painted in little specks or flowers here and there, makes 'em a wonderful figure to behold. Some of the beauties, which indeed are finely shaped, as almost all are, and who have pretty features, are charming and novel; for they have all that is called beauty, except the color, which is a reddish yellow; or after a new oiling, which they often use to themselves, they are of the color of a new brick, but smooth, soft, and sleek. They are extreme modest and bashful, very shy, and nice of being touched. And though they are all thus naked, if one lives forever among 'em there is not to be seen an undecent action, or glance: and being continually used to see one another so unadorned, so like our first parents before the Fall, it seems as if they had no wishes, there being nothing to heighten curiosity; but all you can see, you see at once, and every moment see; and where there is no novelty, there can be no curiosity. Not but I have seen a handsome young Indian dying for love of a very beautiful young Indian maid; but all his courtship was to fold his arms, pursue her with his eyes, and sighs were all his language: while she, as if no such lover were present, or rather as if she desired none such, carefully guarded her eyes from beholding him; and never approached him but she looked down with all the blushing modesty I have seen in the most severe and cautious of our world. And these people represented to me an absolute idea of the first state of innocence, before man knew how to sin. And 'tis most evident and plain that simple Nature is the most harmless, inoffensive, and virtuous mistress. 'Tis she alone, if she were permitted, that better instructs the world than all the inventions of man. Religion would here but destroy that

tranquillity they possess by ignorance; and laws would but teach 'em to know offense, of which now they have no notion. They once made mourning and fasting for the death of the English Governor, who had given his hand to come on such a day to 'em, and neither came nor sent; believing, when a man's word was past, nothing but death could or should prevent his keeping it: and when they saw he was not dead, they asked him what name they had for a man who promised a thing he did not do. The Governor told them, such a man was a liar, which was a word of infamy to a gentleman. Then one of 'em replied, "Governor, you are a liar, and guilty of that infamy." They have a native justice, which knows no fraud; and they understand no vice, or cunning, but when they are taught by the white men. They have plurality of wives; which, when they grow old, serve those that succeed 'em, who are young, but with a servitude easy and respected; and unless they take slaves in war, they have no other attendants.

Those on that continent where I was had no king; but the oldest war-captain was obeyed with great resignation.

A war-captain is a man who has led them on to battle with conduct and success; of whom I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter, and of some other of their customs and manners, as they fall in my way.

With these people, as I said, we live in perfect tranquillity and good understanding, as it behoves us to do; they knowing all the places where to seek the best food of the country, and the means of getting it; and for very small and unvaluable trifles, supply us with that 'tis impossible for us to get: for they do not only in the woods, and over the savannahs, in hunting, supply the parts of hounds, by swiftly scouring through those almost impassable places, and by the mere activity of their feet run down the nimblest deer and other eatable beasts; but in the water, one would think

they were gods of the rivers, or fellow-citizens of the deep; so rare an art they have in swimming, diving, and almost living in water; by which they command the less swift inhabitants of the floods. And then for shooting, what they cannot take, or reach with their hands, they do with arrows; and have so admirable an aim that they will split almost an hair, and at any distance that an arrow can reach: they will shoot down oranges and other fruit, and only touch the stalk with the dart's point, that they may not hurt the fruit. So that they being on all occasions very useful to us, we find it absolutely necessary to caress 'em as friends, and not to treat 'em as slaves, nor dare we do other, their numbers so far surpassing ours in that continent.

Those then whom we make use of to work in our plantations of sugar are negroes, black slaves altogether, who are transported thither in this manner.

Those who want slaves make a bargain with a master or a captain of a ship, and contract to pay him so much apiece, a matter of twenty pound a head, for as many as he agrees for, and to pay for 'em when they shall be delivered on such a plantation: so that when there arrives a ship laden with slaves, they who have so contracted go aboard, and receive their number by lot; and perhaps in one lot that may be for ten, there may happen to be three or four men, the rest women and children. Or be there more or less of either sex, you are obliged to be contented with your lot.

Coramantien, a country of blacks so called, was one of those places in which they found the most advantageous trading for these slaves, and thither most of our great traders in that merchandise traffic; for that nation is very warlike and brave: and having a continual campaign, being always in hostility with one neighboring prince or other, they had the fortune to take a great many captives: for all they took in battle were sold as slaves; at least those common men who

could not ransom themselves. Of these slaves so taken, the general only has all the profit; and of these generals our captains and masters of ships buy all their freights.

The King of Coramantien was himself a man of an hundred and odd years old, and had no son, though he had many beautiful black wives: for most certainly there are beauties that can charm of that color. In his younger years he had had many gallant men to his sons, thirteen of whom died in battle, conquering when they fell; and he had only left him for his successor one grandchild, son to one of these dead victors, who, as soon as he could bear a bow in his hand, and a quiver at his back, was sent into the field to be trained up by one of the oldest generals to war; where, from his natural inclination to arms, and the occasions given him, with the good conduct of the old general, he became, at the age of seventeen, one of the most expert captains and bravest soldiers that ever saw the field of Mars: so that he was adored as the wonder of all that world, and the darling of the soldiers. Besides, he was adorned with a native beauty, so transcending all those of his gloomy race that he struck an awe and reverence even into those that knew not his quality; as he did into me, who beheld him with surprise and wonder, when afterwards he arrived in our world.

He had scarce arrived at his seventeenth year, when, fighting by his side, the general was killed with an arrow in his eye, which the Prince Oroonoko (for so was this gallant Moor called) very narrowly avoided; nor had he, if the general who saw the arrow shot, and perceiving it aimed at the prince, had not bowed his head between, on purpose to receive it in his own body, rather than it should touch that of the prince, and so saved him.

'Twas then, afflicted as Oroonoko was, that he was proclaimed general in the old man's place: and then it was, at the finishing of that war, which had continued for two

years, that the prince came to court, where he had hardly been a month together, from the time of his fifth year to that of seventeen; and 'twas amazing to imagine where it was he learned so much humanity: or, to give his accomplishments a juster name, where 'twas he got that real greatness of soul, those refined notions of true honor, that absolute generosity, and that softness that was capable of the highest passions of love and gallantry, whose objects were almost continually fighting men, or those mangled or dead, who heard no sounds but those of war and groans. Some part of it we may attribute to the care of a Frenchman of wit and learning, who, finding it turn to very good account to be a sort of royal tutor to this young black, and perceiving him very ready, apt, and quick of apprehension, took a great pleasure to teach him morals, language, and science; and was for it extremely beloved and valued by him. Another reason was, he loved when he came from war, to see all the English gentlemen that traded thither; and did not only learn their language, but that of the Spaniard also, with whom he traded afterwards for slaves.

I have often seen and conversed with this great man, and been a witness to many of his mighty actions; and do assure my reader, the most illustrious courts could not have produced a braver man, both for greatness of courage and mind, a judgment more solid, a wit more quick, and a conversation more sweet and diverting. He knew almost as much as if he had read much: he had heard of and admired the Romans: he had heard of the late Civil Wars in England, and the deplorable death of our great monarch; and would discourse of it with all the sense and abhorrence of the injustice imaginable. He had an extreme good and graceful mien, and all the civility of a well-bred great man. He had nothing of barbarity in his nature, but in all points addressed himself as if his education had been in some European court.

This great and just character of Oroonoko gave me an extreme curiosity to see him, especially when I knew he spoke French and English, and that I could talk with him. But though I had heard so much of him, I was as greatly surprised when I saw him as if I had heard nothing of him; so beyond all report I found him. He came into the room, and addressed himself to me and some other women with the best grace in the world. 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 of perfect ebony, or polished jet. His eyes were the most awful that could be seen, and very piercing; the white of 'em 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 nobly and exactly formed that, bating his color, there could be nothing in nature more beautiful, agreeable, and handsome. There was no one grace wanting that bears the standard of true beauty. His hair came down to his shoulders, by the aids of art, which was by pulling it out with a quill, and keeping it combed; of which he took particular care. Nor did the perfections of his mind come short of those of his person; for his discourse was admirable upon almost any subject: and whoever had heard him speak would have been convinced of their errors, that all fine wit is confined to the white men, especially to those of Christendom; and would have confessed that 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.

This prince, such as I have described him, whose soul and body were so admirably adorned, was (while yet he was in the court of his grandfather, as I said) as capable of love as 'twas possible for a brave and gallant man to be; and in saying that, I have named the highest degree of love: for sure great souls are most capable of that passion.

I have already said, the old general was killed by the shot of an arrow by the side of this prince in battle; and that Oroonoko was made general. This old dead hero had one only daughter left of his race, a beauty, that to describe her truly, one need say only, she was female to the noble male; the beautiful black Venus to our young Mars; as charming in her person as he, and of delicate virtues. I have seen a hundred white men sighing after her, and making a thousand vows at her feet, all in vain, and unsuccessful. And she was indeed too great for any but a prince of her own nation to adore.

Oroonoko coming from the wars (which were now ended), after he had made his court to his grandfather he thought in honor he ought to make a visit to Imoinda, the daughter of his foster-father, the dead general; and to make some excuses to her, because his preservation was the occasion of her father's death; and to present her with those slaves that had been taken in this last battle, as the trophies of her father's victories. When he came, attended by all the young soldiers of any merit, he was infinitely surprised at the beauty of this fair Queen of Night, whose face and person was so exceeding all he had ever beheld, that lovely modesty with which she received him, that softness in her look and sighs, upon the melancholy occasion of this honor that was done by so great a man as Oroonoko, and a prince of whom she had heard such admirable things; the awfulness wherewith she received him, and the sweetness of her words and behavior while he staid, gained a perfect

conquest over his fierce heart, and made him feel the victor could be subdued. So that having made his first compliments, and presented her an hundred and fifty slaves in fetters, he told her with his eyes that he was not insensible of her charms; while Imoinda, who wished for nothing more than so glorious a conquest, was pleased to believe she understood that silent language of new-born love; and, from that moment, put on all her additions to beauty.

The prince returned to court with quite another humor than before; and though he did not speak much of the fair Imoinda, he had the pleasure to hear all his followers speak of nothing but the charms of that maid, insomuch that, even in the presence of the old king, they were extolling her, and heightening, if possible, the beauties they had found in her: so that nothing else was talked of, no other sound was heard in every corner where there were whisperers, but Imoinda! Imoinda!

'Twill be imagined Oroonoko staid not long before he made his second visit; nor, considering his quality, not much longer before he told her he adored her. I have often heard him say that he admired by what strange inspiration he came to talk things so soft, and so passionate, who never knew love, nor was used to the conversation of women; but (to use his own words) he said, most happily, some new and, till then, unknown power instructed his heart and tongue in the language of love, and at the same time, in favor of him, inspired Imoinda with a sense of his passion. She was touched with what he said, and returned it all in such answers as went to his very heart, with a pleasure unknown before. Nor did he use those obligations ill, that love had done him, but turned all his happy moments to the best advantage; and as he knew no vice, his flame aimed at nothing but honor, if such a distinction may be made in



love; and especially in that country, where men take to themselves as many as they can maintain; and where the only crime and sin with woman is to turn her off, to abandon her to want, shame, and misery: such ill morals are only practised in Christian countries, where they prefer the bare name of religion; and, without virtue or morality, think that sufficient. But Oroonoko was none of those professors; but as he had right notions of honor, so he made her such propositions as were not only and barely such; but, contrary to the custom of his country, he made her vows she should be the only woman he would possess while he lived; that no age or wrinkles should incline him to change; for her soul would be always fine, and always young; and he should have an eternal idea in his mind of the charms she now bore; and should look into his heart for that idea, when he could find it no longer in her face.

After a thousand assurances of his lasting flame, and her eternal empire over him, she condescended to receive him for her husband; or rather, received him as the greatest honor the gods could do her.

There is a certain ceremony in these cases to be observed, which I forgot to ask how 'twas performed; but 'twas concluded on both sides that, in obedience to him, the grandfather was to be first made acquainted with the design: for they pay a most absolute resignation to the monarch, especially when he is a parent also.

On the other side, the old king, who had many wives and many concubines, wanted not court-flatterers to insinuate into his heart a thousand tender thoughts for this young beauty; and who represented her to his fancy as the most charming he had ever possessed in all the long race of his numerous years. At this character, his old heart, like an extinguished brand, most apt to take fire, felt new sparks of love, and began to kindle; and now grown to his second

childhood, longed with impatience to behold this gay thing, with whom, alas! he could but innocently play. But how he should be confirmed she was this wonder, before he used his power to call her to court (where maidens never came, unless for the king's private use) he was next to consider; and while he was so doing, he had intelligence brought him that Imoinda was most certainly mistress to the Prince Oroonoko. This gave him some chagrin: however, it gave him also an opportunity, one day, when the prince was a-hunting, to wait on a man of quality, as his slave and attendant, who should go and make a present to Imoinda, as from the prince; he should then, unknown, see this fair maid, and have an opportunity to hear what message she would return the prince for his present, and from thence gather the state of her heart, and degree of her inclination. This was put in execution, and the old monarch saw, and burned: he found her all he had heard, and would not delay his happiness, but found he should have some obstacle to overcome her heart; for she expressed her sense of the present the prince had sent her, in terms so sweet, so soft and pretty, with an air of love and joy that could not be dissembled, insomuch that 'twas past doubt whether she loved Oroonoko entirely. This gave the old king some affliction; but he salved it with this, that the obedience the people pay their king was not at all inferior to what they paid their gods; and what love would not oblige Imoinda to do, duty would compel her to.

He was therefore no sooner got to his apartment but he sent the royal veil to Imoinda; that is the ceremony of invitation: he sends the lady he has a mind to honor with his bed, a veil, with which she is covered, and secured for the king's use; and 'tis death to disobey; besides, held a most impious disobedience.

'Tis not to be imagined the surprise and grief that seized the lovely maid at this news and sight. However, as delays in these cases are dangerous, and pleading worse than treason; trembling, and almost fainting, she was obliged to suffer herself to be covered and led away.

They brought her thus to court; and the king, who had caused a very rich bath to be prepared, was led into it, where he sat under a canopy, in state, to receive this longed-for virgin; whom he having commanded should be brought to him, they (after disrobing her) led her to the bath, and making fast the doors, left her to descend. The king, without more courtship, bade her throw off her mantle, and come to his arms. But Imoinda, all in tears, threw herself on the marble, on the brink of the bath, and besought him to hear her. She told him, as she was a maid, how proud of the divine glory she should have been, of having it in her power to oblige her king; but as by the laws he could not, and from his royal goodness would not, take from any man his wedded wife; so she believed she should be the occasion of making him commit a great sin if she did not reveal her state and condition, and tell him she was another's, and could not be so happy to be his.

The king, enraged at this delay, hastily demanded the name of the bold man that had married a woman of her degree without his consent. Imoinda, seeing his eyes fierce, and his hands tremble (whether with age or anger, I know not, but she fancied the last), almost repented she had said so much, for now she feared the storm would fall on the prince; she therefore said a thousand things to appease the raging of his flame, and to prepare him to hear who it was with calmness: but before she spoke, he imagined who she meant, but would not seem to do so, but commanded her to lay aside her mantle, and suffer herself to receive his caresses, or, by his gods he swore, that happy man whom

she was going to name should die, though it were even Oroonoko himself. "Therefore," said he, "deny this marriage, and swear thyself a maid." "That," replied Imoinda, "by all our powers I do; for I am not yet known to my husband." "'Tis enough," said the king, "'tis enough both to satisfy my conscience and my heart." And rising from his seat, he went and led her into the bath; it being in vain for her to resist.

In this time, the prince, who was returned from hunting, went to visit his Imoinda, but found her gone; and not only so, but heard she had received the royal veil. This raised him to a storm; and in his madness, they had much ado to save him from laying violent hands on himself. Force first prevailed, and then reason: they urged all to him that might oppose his rage; but nothing weighed so greatly with him as the king's old age, incapable of injuring him with Imoinda. He would give way to that hope, because it pleased him most, and flattered best his heart. Yet this served not altogether to make him cease his different passions, which sometimes raged within him, and softened into showers. 'Twas not enough to appease him, to tell him his grandfather was old, and could not that way injure him, while he retained that awful duty which the young men are used there to pay to their grave relations. He could not be convinced he had no cause to sigh and mourn for the loss of a mistress he could not with all his strength and courage retrieve. And he would often cry, "O, my friends! were she in walled cities, or confined from me in fortifications of the greatest strength; did enchantments or monsters detain her from me; I would venture through any hazard to free her: but here, in the arms of a feeble old man, my youth, my violent love, my trade in arms, and all my vast desire of glory, avail me nothing. Imoinda is as irrecoverably lost to me as if she were snatched by the cold arms of death. Oh! she is never to be retrieved. If I would wait tedious years, till fate should bow the old king to his grave, even that would

not leave me Imoinda free; but still that custom that makes it so vile a crime for a son to marry his father's wives or mistresses would hinder my happiness; unless I would either ignobly set an ill precedent to my successors, or abandon my country, and fly with her to some unknown world who never heard our story."

But it was objected to him that his case was not the same; for Imoinda being his lawful wife by solemn contract, 'twas he was the injured man, and might, if he so pleased take Imoinda back, the breach of the law being on his grandfather's side; and that if he could circumvent him, and redeem her from the otan, which is the palace of the king's women, a sort of seraglio, it was both just and lawful for him so to do.

This reasoning had some force upon him, and he should have been entirely comforted, but for the thought that she was possessed by his grandfather. However, he loved so well that he was resolved to believe what most favored his hope, and to endeavor to learn from Imoinda's own mouth, what only she could satisfy him in, whether she was robbed of that blessing which was only due to his faith and love. But as it was very hard to get a sight of the women (for no men ever entered into the otan but when the king went to entertain himself with some one of his wives or mistresses; and 'twas death, at any other time, for any other to go in), so he knew not how to contrive to get a sight of her.

While Oroonoko felt all the agonies of love, and suffered under a torment the most painful in the world, the old king was not exempted from his share of affliction. He was troubled for having been forced, by an irresistible passion, to rob his son of a treasure, he knew, could not but be extremely dear to him; since she was the most beautiful that ever had been seen, and had besides all the sweetness and innocence of youth and modesty, with a charm of wit

surpassing all. He found that, however she was forced to expose her lovely person to his withered arms, she could only sigh and weep there, and think of Oroonoko; and oftentimes could not forbear speaking of him, though her life were, by custom, forfeited by owning her passion. But she spoke not of a lover only, but of a prince dear to him to whom she spoke; and of the praises of a man who, till now, filled the old man's soul with joy at every recital of his bravery, or even his name. And 'twas this dotage on our young hero that gave Imoinda a thousand privileges to speak of him, without offending; and this condescension in the old king, that made her take the satisfaction of speaking of him so very often.

Besides, he many times inquired how the prince bore himself: and those of whom he asked, being entirely slaves to the merits and virtues of the prince, still answered what they thought conduced best to his service; which was, to make the old king fancy that the prince had no more interest in Imoinda, and had resigned her willingly to the pleasure of the king; that he diverted himself with his mathematicians, his fortifications, his officers, and his hunting.

This pleased the old lover, who failed not to report these things again to Imoinda, that she might, by the example of her young lover, withdraw her heart, and rest better contented in his arms. But, however she was forced to receive this unwelcome news, in all appearance with unconcern and content, her heart was bursting within, and she was only happy when she could get alone, to vent her griefs and moans with sighs and tears.

What reports of the prince's conduct were made to the king, he thought good to justify as far as possibly he could by his actions; and when he appeared in the presence of the king, he showed a face not at all betraying his heart: so that in a

little time, the old man, being entirely convinced that he was no longer a lover of Imoinda, he carried him with him, in his train, to the otan, often to banquet with his mistresses. But as soon as he entered, one day, into the apartment of Imoinda, with the king, at the first glance from her eyes, notwithstanding all his determined resolution, he was ready to sink in the place where he stood; and had certainly done so but for the support of Aboan, a young man who was next to him; which, with his change of countenance, had betrayed him, had the king chanced to look that way. And I have observed, 'tis a very great error in those who laugh when one says, "A negro can change color": for I have seen 'em as frequently blush, and look pale, and that as visibly as ever I saw in the most beautiful white. And 'tis certain that both these changes were evident, this day, in both these lovers. And Imoinda, who saw with some joy the change in the prince's face, and found it in her own, strove to divert the king from beholding either, by a forced caress, with which she met him; which was a new wound in the heart of the poor dying prince. But as soon as the king was busied in looking on some fine thing of Imoinda's making, she had time to tell the prince, with her angry, but love-darting eyes, that she resented his coldness, and bemoaned her own miserable captivity. Nor were his eyes silent, but answered hers again, as much as eyes could do, instructed by the most tender and most passionate heart that ever loved: and they spoke so well, and so effectually, as Imoinda no longer doubted but she was the only delight and darling of that soul she found pleading in 'em its right of love, which none was more willing to resign than she. And 'twas this powerful language alone that in an instant conveyed all the thoughts of their souls to each other; that they both found there wanted but opportunity to make them both entirely happy. But when he saw another door opened by Onahal (a former old wife of the king's, who now had charge of Imoinda), and saw the prospect of a bed of state made ready, with sweets

and flowers for the dalliance of the king, who immediately led the trembling victim from his sight, into that prepared repose; what rage! what wild frenzies seized his heart! which forcing to keep within bounds, and to suffer without noise, it became the more insupportable, and rent his soul with ten thousand pains. He was forced to retire to vent his groans, where he fell down on a carpet, and lay struggling a long time, and only breathing now and then, "O Imoinda!" When Onahal had finished her necessary affair within, shutting the door, she came forth, to wait till the king called; and hearing someone sighing in the other room, she passed on, and found the prince in that deplorable condition, which she thought needed her aid. She gave him cordials, but all in vain; till finding the nature of his disease, by his sighs, and naming Imoinda, she told him he had not so much cause as he imagined to afflict himself: for if he knew the king so well as she did, he would not lose a moment in jealousy; and that she was confident that Imoinda bore, at this moment, part in his affliction. Aboan was of the same opinion, and both together persuaded him to reassume his courage; and all sitting down on the carpet, the prince said so many obliging things to Onahal that he half-persuaded her to be of his party: and she promised him she would thus far comply with his just desires, that she would let Imoinda know how faithful he was, what he suffered, and what he said.

This discourse lasted till the king called, which gave Oroonoko a certain satisfaction; and with the hope Onahal had made him conceive, he assumed a look as gay as 'twas possible a man in his circumstances could do: and presently after, he was called in with the rest who waited without. The king commanded music to be brought, and several of his young wives and mistresses came all together by his command, to dance before him; where Imoinda performed her part with an air and grace so surpassing all the rest as



her beauty was above 'em, and received the present ordained as a prize. The prince was every moment more charmed with the new beauties and graces he beheld in this fair one; and while he gazed, and she danced, Onahal was retired to a window with Aboan.

This Onahal, as I said, was one of the cast-mistresses of the old king; and 'twas these (now past their beauty) that were made guardians or governantes to the new and the young ones, and whose business it was to teach them all those wanton arts of love with which they prevailed and charmed heretofore in their turn; and who now treated the triumphing happy ones with all the severity as to liberty and freedom that was possible, in revenge of their honors they rob them of; envying them those satisfactions, those gallantries and presents, that were once made to themselves, while youth and beauty lasted, and which they now saw pass, as it were regardless by, and paid only to the bloomings. And, certainly, nothing is more afflicting to a decayed beauty than to behold in itself declining charms that were once adored; and to find those caresses paid to new beauties, to which once she laid claim; to hear them whisper, as she passes by, that once was a delicate woman. Those abandoned ladies therefore endeavor to revenge all the despites and decays of time, on these flourishing happy ones. And 'twas this severity that gave Oroonoko a thousand fears he should never prevail with Onahal to see Imoinda. But as I said, she was now retired to a window with Aboan.

This young man was not only one of the best quality, but a man extremely well made, and beautiful; and coming often to attend the king to the otan, he had subdued the heart of the antiquated Onahal, which had not forgot how pleasant it was to be in love. And though she had some decays in her face, she had none in her sense and wit; she was there

agreeable still, even to Aboan's youth: so that he took pleasure in entertaining her with discourses of love. He knew also that to make his court to these she-favorites was the way to be great; these being the persons that do all affairs and business at court. He had also observed that she had given him glances more tender and inviting than she had done to others of his quality. And now, when he saw that her favor could so absolutely oblige the prince, he failed not to sigh in her ear, and to look with eyes all soft upon her, and gave her hope that she had made some impressions on his heart. He found her pleased at this, and making a thousand advances to him: but the ceremony ending, and the king departing, broke up the company for that day, and his conversation.

Aboan failed not that night to tell the prince of his success, and how advantageous the service of Onahal might be to his amour with Imoinda. The prince was overjoyed with this good news, and besought him if it were possible to caress her so as to engage her entirely, which he could not fail to do, if he complied with her desires: "For then," said the prince, "her life lying at your mercy, she must grant you the request you make in my behalf." Aboan understood him, and assured him he would make love so effectually that he would defy the most expert mistress of the art to find out whether he dissembled it, or had it really. And 'twas with impatience they waited the next opportunity of going to the otan.

The wars came on, the time of taking the field approached; and 'twas impossible for the prince to delay his going at the head of his army to encounter the enemy; so that every day seemed a tedious year, till he saw his Imoinda: for he believed he could not live if he were forced away without being so happy. 'Twas with impatience, therefore, that he

expected the next visit the king would make; and according to his wish it was not long.

The parley of the eyes of these two lovers had not passed so secretly but an old jealous lover could spy it; or rather, he wanted not flatterers who told him they observed it: so that the prince was hastened to the camp, and this was the last visit he found he should make to the otan; he therefore urged Aboan to make the best of this last effort, and to explain himself so to Onahal that she, deferring her enjoyment of her young lover no longer, might make way for the prince to speak to Imoinda.

The whole affair being agreed on between the prince and Aboan, they attended the king, as the custom was, to the otan; where, while the whole company was taken up in beholding the dancing, and antic postures the woman-royal made, to divert the kind, Onahal singled out Aboan, whom she found most pliable to her wish. When she had him where she believed she could not be heard, she sighed to him, and softly cried, "Ah, Aboan! when will you be sensible of my passion? I confess it with my mouth, because I would not give my eyes the lie; and you have but too much already perceived they have confessed my flame: nor would I have you believe that, because I am the abandoned mistress of a king, I esteem myself altogether divested of charms. No, Aboan, I have still a rest of beauty enough engaging, and have learned to please too well, not to be desirable. I can have lovers still, but will have none but Aboan." "Madam," replied the half-feigning youth, "you have already, by my eyes, found you can still conquer; and I believe 'tis in pity of me you condescend to this kind confession. But, Madam, words are used to be so small a part of our country-courtship that 'tis rare one can get so happy an opportunity as to tell one's heart; and those few minutes we have are forced to be snatched for more certain

proofs of love than speaking and sighing; and such I languish for."

He spoke this with such a tone that she hoped it true, and could not forbear believing it; and being wholly transported with joy for having subdued the finest of all the king's subjects to her desires, she took from her ears two large pearls, and commanded him to wear 'em in his. He would have refused 'em, crying, "Madam, these are not the proofs of your love that I expect; 'tis opportunity, 'tis a lone hour only, that can make me happy." But forcing the pearls into his hand, she whispered softly to him; "Oh! do not fear a woman's invention, when love sets her a-thinking." And pressing his hand, she cried, "This night you shall be happy. Come to the gate of the orange-grove, behind the otan, and I will be ready about midnight to receive you." 'Twas thus agreed, and she left him, that no notice might be taken of their speaking together.

The ladies were still dancing, and the king, laid on a carpet, with a great deal of pleasure was beholding them, especially Imoinda, who that day appeared more lovely than ever, being enlivened with the good tidings Onahal had brought her, of the constant passion the prince had for her. The prince was laid on another carpet at the other end of the room, with his eyes fixed on the object of his soul; and as she turned or moved, so did they: and she alone gave his eyes and soul their motions. Nor did Imoinda employ her eyes to any other use than in beholding with infinite pleasure the joy she produced in those of the prince. But while she was more regarding him than the steps she took, she chanced to fall; and so near him, as that leaping with extreme force from the carpet, he caught her in his arms as she fell: and 'twas visible to the whole presence, the joy wherewith he received her. He clasped her close to his bosom, and quite forgot that reverence that was due to the

mistress of a king, and that punishment that is the reward of a boldness of this nature. And had not the presence of mind of Imoinda (fonder of his safety than her own) befriended him, in making her spring from his arms, and fall into her dance again, he had at that instant met his death; for the old king, jealous to the last degree, rose up in rage, broke all the diversion, and led Imoinda to her apartment, and sent out word to the prince to go immediately to the camp; and that if he were found another night in court, he should suffer the death ordained for disobedient offenders.

You may imagine how welcome this news was to Oroonoko, whose unseasonable transport and caress of Imoinda was blamed by all men that loved him: and now he perceived his fault, yet cried that for such another moment he would be content to die.

All the otan was in disorder about this accident; and Onahal was particularly concerned because on the prince's stay depended her happiness; for she could no longer expect that of Aboan: so that ere they departed, they contrived it so that the prince and he should both come that night to the grove of the otan, which was all of oranges and citrons, and that there they would wait her orders.

They parted thus with grief enough till night, leaving the king in possession of the lovely maid. But nothing could appease the jealousy of the old lover; he would not be imposed on, but would have it that Imoinda made a false step on purpose to fall into Oroonoko's bosom, and that all things looked like a design on both sides; and 'twas in vain she protested her innocence: he was old and obstinate, and left her more than half assured that his fear was true.

The king, going to his apartment, sent to know where the prince was, and if he intended to obey his command. The messenger returned, and told him, he found the prince

pensive, and altogether unprepared for the campaign; that he lay negligently on the ground, and answered very little. This confirmed the jealousy of the king, and he commanded that they should very narrowly and privately watch his motions; and that he should not stir from his apartment but one spy or other should be employed to watch him: so that the hour approaching wherein he was to go to the citron-grove and taking only Aboan along with him, he leaves his apartment, and was watched to the very gate of the otan; where he was seen to enter, and where they left him, to carry back the tidings to the king.

Oroonoko and Aboan were no sooner entered but Onahal led the prince to the apartment of Imoinda; who, not knowing anything of her happiness, was laid in bed. But Onahal only left him in her chamber, to make the best of his opportunity, and took her dear Aboan to her own; where he showed the height of complaisance for his prince, when, to give him an opportunity, he suffered himself to be caressed in bed by Onahal.

The prince softly wakened Imoinda, who was not a little surprised with joy to find him there; and yet she trembled with a thousand fears. I believe he omitted saying nothing to this young maid that might persuade her to suffer him to seize his own, and take the rights of love. And I believe she was not long resisting those arms where she so longed to be; and having opportunity, night, and silence, youth, love, and desire, he soon prevailed, and ravished in a moment what his old grandfather had been endeavoring for so many months.

'Tis not to be imagined the satisfaction of these two young lovers; nor the vows she made him, that she remained a spotless maid till that night, and that what she did with his grandfather had robbed him of no part of her virgin-honor; the gods, in mercy and justice, having reserved that for her