

**MADAME MEDIATOR:  
WOMEN WRITERS  
OF 17<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY ATLANTICISM**

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## ABSTRACT

Beginning with Madam Mediator, Margaret Cavendish's liminal character in her closet drama *The Convent of Pleasure*, this study examines the mediation between complicity and subversion required of women writers seeking access to publication and circulation in the late seventeenth century. Contemporaries Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian emerge as skilled mediators navigating not only complicity and subversion, but also the Atlantic itself during missions to European colonies in Surinam where few men with far more resources dared venture. After profound cross-cultural encounters, they produced writing that conformed sufficiently to gain wide audiences, but that also archived subversive responses to imperial racism and sexism for subsequent women writers to recover. One such writer, Beryl Gilroy, born in Guyana the 1920's, recovers mediated subversions like those in Behn's and Merian's works as what Raymond Williams calls "structures of feeling" awaiting incorporation into hegemonic culture. Using her Atlanticist position to diffuse her subaltern status, Gilroy transforms archived structures of feeling in the works of 17<sup>th</sup> century women writers into fully voiced tropicopolitan blasts at the foundations of empire. In the process, Gilroy models what Laura Brown calls radical contemporaneity, but Gilroy does it across cultures as well as time, drawing out of the encounters among structures of feeling about race and sex "quantum leaps" of imagination, as Adrienne Rich calls them, that "spark like a dialectic," as Audre Lorde asserts, from which 21<sup>st</sup> century writers can begin to formulate visions of human interaction without racist and sexist oppression.

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*Chapter 1*

INTRODUCTION – MADAME MEDIATOR THE MARXIST FEMINIST

*As the sociologist Orlando Patterson has noted, we should not be surprised that the Enlightenment could accommodate slavery; we should be surprised if it had not. The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery.*

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, 1992 (38)

*For spiritual values and a creative tradition to continue unbroken we need concrete artifacts, the work of hands, written words to read, images to look at, a dialogue with brave imaginative women who came before us.*

Adrienne Rich, "Condition for Work"  
*On Lies and Secrets*, 1979 (205)

*Little did I realize that the feminist revolution would have the unexpected consequence of intensifying the confusion between the sexes, leaving women in a tangle of dependence and independence as they entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century.*

Maureen Dowd "What's a Modern Girl to Do?"  
*The New York Times Magazine*, October 30, 2005 (52)

**Radical Imagination and Ecumenical Reading**

In *Playing in the Dark*, Toni Morrison takes Orlando Patterson's insight above as a quantum leap into an analysis of what she calls in her subtitle *Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Turning to four early 20<sup>th</sup> century texts with Patterson's lens, she "contemplate[s] how Africanist personae, narrative, and idiom moved and enriched the text in self-conscious ways, to consider what the

engagement meant for the work of the writer's imagination" (16).<sup>1</sup> Africans became the "dark" that Morrison looked for in "white" American literature. By centering images of Africans in her imagination as a reader, she detected invisible Africans, Africans in the shadows, Africans at the edges of the action and reaction. Beginning with Patterson's insight, Morrison's explanation of how the European enslavement of West Africans helped create 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment concepts of liberty offers a materialist framework for explaining oppression in general in the same evolving cultural structure. Reading Morrison's formulation as gender, for example, we could also say that it is no surprise that the Enlightenment could accommodate sexism, misogyny and the brutalization of women which women writers of that period have notoriously compared to slavery. Nothing highlighted the European concept of Enlightenment individualism that inspired rugged masculine exploration, conquest, capitalism, and empire – if it did not in fact create it – like female abjection within violently policed evolving cultural structures. In this study, I have taken Toni Morrison's analytical insight as my own quantum leap to think about what literature by marginalized authors reveals about how their personae, narrative, and idiom move and enrich their texts in self-conscious ways, to consider what the engagement means for the work of the writer's imagination – and what it can teach modern social justice advocates.

As my gendered paraphrase of Morrison's insight suggests, I took "female" as the initial marginalized group and chose to examine women writers.

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<sup>1</sup> Morrison analyzed Willa Cather's *Saphira and the Slave Girl*, Edgar Allen Poe's *Gordon Pym*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*, and Ernest Hemmingway's *To Have and Have Not*.

However, sexism, as materialist feminists like Rosemary Hennesey, Chrys Ingraham, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and many others have shown, never operates alone. It may underlie all other oppressions historically, but it immediately creates and relies on many other oppressions for its own existence. Chief among these oppressions in late 20<sup>th</sup> century western culture are racism and classism. Together with sexism, these oppressions began to harden and intensify in western culture in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, peaking in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and perhaps finally beginning to soften as the 21<sup>st</sup> century commenced. Wondering how and why this happened, I re-visited works by women written in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century to see what was hidden in the shadows, edges and absences that might help dismantle sexism, racism and classism. I chose English playwright and poet Aphra Behn and German naturalist and artist Maria Sibylla Merian, prominent women of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries whose work slipped through the sexist sieve into the traditional literary canon because their influence far exceeded that of their male contemporaries. I chose them because, first, only the works of well-known women survive from that time. Second, their works are available today only because they negotiated formidable odds to be published and distributed in their own era and to be considered worthy of examination in ours, which indicates that they engaged core cultural issues of their day that are still core issues in our day. I have entitled this project *Madame Mediator* after a secondary character in Margaret Cavendish's 1654 closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*, because Madame Mediator's shuttle diplomacy between self-cloistered women and the peevish patriarchy outside the cloister illustrates the necessity

marginalized people face of dealing solicitously with hegemonic forces arranged against their interests. Finally, I chose Behn and Merian because their lives are nearly identical in time span and both traveled to Surinam on the northwest coast of South America.

Behn and Merian archive what Raymond Williams, writing in *Marxism and Literature*, has called alternative and oppositional cultural material, by which he means ideas, beliefs, and activities that resist hegemonic cultural forces. The retrieval of works like Behn's and Merian's by 20<sup>th</sup> century feminists exposed a long genealogy of female works containing alternative and oppositional material. After Phillis Wheatley's poetry was published in 1773,<sup>2</sup> this genealogy began to include women of color like my third author, Beryl Gilroy. She is a late 20<sup>th</sup> century novelist from Guyana, contiguous with modern Surinam, who recreated 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century narratives by bringing to center what Morrison detected in the shadows, edges, and absences of European literature and history. Beryl Gilroy retells the stories of two young English colonists using the 18<sup>th</sup> century tradition of first person travel narratives from her own standpoint as a non-white colonial subject. Also among the many reasons I chose her work is that she left Guyana for London where she earned three advanced degrees in the psychology of race and ethnic difference. Her work exemplifies the kind of "reading" of difference this project amplifies, a kind of reading I uncovered in both Behn's and Merian's works as well. After studying the works of Behn, Merian and Gilroy in the context of Materialist Feminism, Raymond Williams' model of culture, Guyatri Spivak's analysis of the subaltern, and Srinivas Aravamudan's concept of the

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<sup>2</sup> See Phillis Wheatley's *Poems of Phillis Wheatley: a Native African and a Slave*.

tropicopolitan, I decided to call this reading strategy "ecumenical reading." It requires a radical imagination, a willingness to examine and perhaps alter the roots of our deepest sense of what the world is and should be, a willingness evident in the works of Behn, Merian, and Beryl Gilroy. Only then can we get close enough to the experience of others to detect enough fragments of meaning and knowledge to permit continued human survival. I propose ecumenical reading based on radical imagination as an urgent requirement for dismantling sexist, racist and classist oppression, and reducing human suffering.

In order to illustrate the various elements of the reading strategy I propose, in particular its materialist feminist backbone, I have approached each author first through her life and then through her work. In addition, the chapter on each author's life discusses a major aspect of the reading strategy I propose while the chapter on each author's work illustrates how that strategy is applied by and to that author's work. In Chapter 2, Aphra Behn's life illustrates the concept of an Atlanticist life, building on Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic. I propose "the Atlantic region" as analogous to the container in Williams' metaphor for culture as a solution, and reveal that Behn and her work are far more authoritative in scope than was the work of most of her male colleagues and even her King. Unlike them, she traveled into realms of unrest (Holland, prison) and cultural difference (ship life, Surinam) and brought this unusual body of experience into her work, which was not only in heavy circulation during her lifetime but has circulated almost continuously ever since despite sexist marginalization. Her early work, as I show in Chapter 3, written soon after her trip to Surinam, provides

insight into the production of *Oroonoko* late in her life and offers to writers like Beryl Gilroy crucial access to the lost social material of Africans and indigenous South Americans.

Similarly, Maria Sibylla Merian's life illustrates in Chapter 4 how European women were subaltern according to Spivak's definition, even when they were endowed with considerable privilege relative to other subalterns. Merian's privilege, like Behn's, was physically and financially precarious because she was female. But, as with Behn, Merian's privilege exposed her to the most advanced thought and many of the most powerful men of her time. In some ways, her subaltern status in relation to those men allowed her to do her work slightly under the radar of the kind of scrutiny Margaret Cavendish was subjected to. Merian passed for most of her working life (which began around age eight) as a precocious girl whose interest in insects led her to exceptionally beautiful if gender-typical designs for elaborate embroideries of exotic flowers. By her thirties, when she broke away from her marriage and took up her scientific vocation openly, she had built a reputation for precision, accuracy, and close observation of insects in nature that generated just enough support to avoid undue obstacles to her naturalist expedition to Surinam. However, she received almost no financial or organizational support, unlike the few men of her period who attempted such expeditions. And, unlike the men of her period, she refused to allow contemporary insect-generation theories and their attendant moral underpinnings and over-interpretations to obscure her observations and artistic renderings of what insects really did and what their surroundings were really like.

In Chapter 5, I show how she carried this resistant attitude into her interactions with Africans and the indigenous people of Surinam and quoted them as her equals in her most important work.

Women writing between Behn's and Merian's late 17<sup>th</sup> century experience and Beryl Gilroy's late 20<sup>th</sup> century experience gives Gilroy access to a genealogy of women writers leading up to and then beyond Phillis Wheatley's pivotal work at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Early women writers cleared just enough social space for someone like Phillis Wheatley to step into and begin the tropicalizations that Aravamudan describes. Wheatley's work still stands as the icon authorizing women of color, especially Africans in the "New World," to stake a claim on the language they've been forced to learn and to produce artifacts on their own terms that represent, record, archive, create, and change their own lives and their own sense of their experience and history. Wheatley wrote about reading and emulating Pope's work, and he vilified several women writers of his time, Mary Wortley Montagu, Susanna Centlivre, and Eliza Haywood most famously among them. Wheatley would have known that and might have read them.<sup>3</sup> Pope also targeted Behn, whose *Oroonoko* was by Wheatley's time at its peak in its various theatrical and poetic forms in the Atlantic region as a popular romantic play with an abolitionist agenda – though quite altered by sentimentalism from Behn's original concept. Wheatley's Madame Mediator status cleared social space for the works of women writers of color from Mary Prince to Mary Seacole, who built on Wheatley's authority to clear more social space for the tropicalizing work of 20<sup>th</sup> century women writers of color like Beryl Gilroy. The feminist genealogy from

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<sup>3</sup> See Vincent Caretta's "Introduction" *Complete Writings. Phillis Wheatley*.

Cavendish to Behn and Merian then through Wheatley to Gilroy connects Behn, Merian, and Gilroy in this study.

Thus in Chapter 6, I use Beryl Gilroy's life to explain how Aravamudan's concept of tropicopolitan is important to a 21<sup>st</sup> century reading strategy. In addition to having lived an Atlanticist life and to having been born into a long generational line of particularly abject subalterns, Beryl Gilroy was clearly a tropicopolitan. This identity distinguishes her somewhat from Africans in England or the US because, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, life in the tropics – no matter what color your skin was – was considered to be "life outside the civilized world." By choosing to establish herself in "the first world" as a writer and educator – indeed by producing a child, Paul Gilroy, who attained the status of public intellectual in the first world – Beryl Gilroy is a very different kind of Madame Mediator from Behn and Merian. Beryl Gilroy is a tropicalizing Madame Mediator.

In Chapter 7, I examine how Gilroy's fiction tropicalizes – deforms at its heart, as Aravamudan might say – "first world" presumptions about the developing world and its denizens. In her 1996 novel *Inkle and Yarico*, Gilroy reimagines an early 18<sup>th</sup> century English urban legend<sup>4</sup> set in the New World. The story saw "extensive use by a diversity of writers in France and Germany where [it] had its vogue no less than in England" (Felsenstein xii). A materialist feminist

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Felsenstein connects the image of Yarico to "one of the most potent of eighteenth-century urban myths, that of the Noble Savage" (7). Later he describes what he variously refers to as "the tale" and "the legend" as having "status as a tale that is so commonly known that it has taken on veracity" (32). Furthermore, "As a Caribbean legend, *Inkle and Yarico* ... thrives as a local folk song..." (44). I refer to the tale of *Inkle and Yarico* as an urban legend because this cluster of characterizations of the legend by Felsenstein closely resembles the OED definition of urban legend: "urban myth [or urban legend] orig. U.S., a sensational but apocryphal story which through repetition in varying versions has acquired the status of folklore, esp. one lent plausibility by its contemporary setting, or by the purported involvement of someone known to the teller" (OED online, Tufts University, accessed 1/6/06).

reading of Beryl Gilroy's novel illustrates why determinist debates over cultural formation are distractions from the overriding importance of the relationships among cultural elements (Williams *Problems* 39-43).<sup>5</sup> Williams, Hennessy, and Paul Gilroy, among many others, have pointed out that Marx avoided the categorical distinctions and determinist assertions that troubled 20<sup>th</sup> century Marxist theory because the usefulness of constitutive elements of culture as explanatory tropes is diminished by their misuse as distinct categories. In Beryl Gilroy's novel, circulating elements of culture also refute such irrelevant demarcations. Her mediation takes 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century social material and rereads it to create new structures of feeling from which to create new – and one fervently hopes more socially just – hegemonic social structures.

### **Structures of Feeling in the Atlantic Cockpit**

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century African American feminists have demonstrated through the concept of intersectionality, that, for women of color and in particular black women in the Atlantic region, the intersection of racism and sexism impose dual (at least) oppressions. Their experience of oppression intersects with other women's experience through sexism and with black men's experience through racism. Such intersectionalities should radicalize a syncretic population of the oppressed that includes all people of color and all women. Usually intersectionality does not syncretize oppressed populations because our differences are effectively deployed to divide and pit us against one another. In

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<sup>5</sup> From "Means of Communication as Means of Production and Consumption," in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980).

*Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, Rosemary Hennessy

describes it this way:

... one of the greatest fears of the ruling groups is that subaltern populations might develop alliances with people in other positions in the class structure. In the face of this threat, the ruling bloc has had to devise a range of strategies to keep alliances from forming among all of those who are being exploited... ..For instance, we could say that heteronormativity[']s] ...normative structure has been defined by layered and often incoherent logics: a heteropolar gender scheme and male- and white-privileged hierarchies – both of which conceal class dynamics, situate individuals in contradictory ways, and pit social groups against one another.  
(*Profit* 14, 91)

Whether we are analyzing heterosexism, as Hennessy is, or racism, sexism, or any other socio-economic oppression, we eventually come to the underlying objectives of the ruling class: to "pit social groups against one another" so that they don't collaborate to topple the rulers. This ubiquitous image of pitting groups and individuals against one another comes from cock-fighting, called the sport of kings in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. While "kings" have since outlawed this sport among the people, they continue to practice it for themselves using, as Hennessey suggests, categories of people instead of cocks. For that reason, I think of the Atlantic region as a giant cockpit in which individuals<sup>6</sup> wielding the forces of hegemonic power manage social relations to benefit the few (themselves) by exploiting the many. The "cockpit" is a term that invokes several levels of meaning<sup>7</sup> and pulls

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<sup>6</sup> I do mean "individuals" and not "forces" because, as many cultural and historical scholars have demonstrated, (Ronald Takaki, for example), cockpit strategies are self-consciously deliberate explicit policies, not abstract social phenomenon.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the airplane cockpit, the trading pit of any stock exchange, the cockpit area of Jamaica where escaped slaves hid, "Feathers fly in IAC-Liberty Media cockfight," "Presidential Cockfight," sparring, at each other's throat, etc.

into one useful strand the social relations and materials that are at the core of every social justice conflict.

As a structural element of western culture, the image of the cockpit has evolved through functions and vernaculars to create and maintain the collective presumption that culture is hierarchical "by nature" rather than by human practice – and thus by human choice among several alternatives. To maintain this “reality,” power brokers in the hierarchal stands of hegemony accrue profit by manipulating subaltern populations into competition for survival in the cockpit arena by controlling both the materials of production and the opportunities available to “earn” a living – in other words by controlling the means for survival. This is also how capitalism is defined, especially by Marxists and socialists. Throughout the history of the west, the challenge for social justice advocates – like anti-racists and anti-sexists – against capitalist imperialists sporting profitably with human populations has been to make this cockpit strategy visible to exploited subalterned social groups obediently battling each other in the pit. The social justice objective is to cause diverse oppressed groups to look up into the hegemonic stands and understand how the powerful profit from their conflict. Once subaltern groups see this economic and cultural system for what it is, they will, it is hoped, form coalition across lines of difference, collaborate in progressive action, and synthesize new paradigms for social relations. In so doing, they would commit treason against capitalist empire in its various forms from 17<sup>th</sup> century monarchy to 21<sup>st</sup> century transnational corporations.

So, we could then describe the Atlantic region, which Paul Gilroy has famously called the Black Atlantic and Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, building on Gilroy, call the Red Atlantic, as one huge cockpit of sexist, patriarchal, racist capitalism, to rehearse bell hooks' descriptor list, in which people who are not part of the ruling group – in other words Guyatri Spivak's subalterns – are divided into categories, manipulated economically and culturally until they and everyone else believe the categories are “natural,” and then the categorical groups are pitted against each other for the profit of their handlers.<sup>8</sup> Women subalterned by sexism struggle, like other subaltern groups, to cope with the brutal hierarchy of the Atlantic cockpit. Inevitably in such a complicated system of categorical hierarchies (and hierarchical categories), some women have more privilege than others and some of these privileged few women act as mediators, playing in the liminal space between power and lack of power in an effort to obtain power for themselves. Of this small group of women, a few wield their liminal mediator status to object to oppression, reject its privilege, and project an alternative to the seemingly inexorable intensification of sexism, racism, and capitalist exploitation. They do so because, in repeated acts of what Laura Brown calls radical contemporaneity,<sup>9</sup> they observe in the “other” possibilities for a different kind of culture in which subalterity is less brutally exploitive or even non-existent. They detect, reveal, analyze, and finally preserve alternate cultural structures in ecumenizing texts that, in a visible feminist

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<sup>8</sup> Each of these writers will be dealt with more fully below. See Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Marcus Rediker's and Peter Linebaugh's *The Many Headed Hydra*, bell hooks' *Feminism is for Everybody*, and Guyatri Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?"

<sup>9</sup> See Laura Brown's "The Romance of Empire" and further discussion below.

genealogy, leave cultural traces at least as visible as structures of feeling that can be retrieved for use in the continuing struggle against Atlantic cockpit culture.

Until the late twentieth century, voices of women of color were systematically marginalized through the double-subalterity of gender and race. However, in the late 1980's, this group of women Srinivas Aravamudan<sup>10</sup> calls tropicopolitans gained from centuries of feminist and anti-racist effort sufficient privilege to transcend both sexism and racism enough to join in and build on feminist genealogy. This allowed them to radically alter feminist ideology in acts that produced, among other cultural materials, ecumenizing texts that reveal the structures of feeling of 17<sup>th</sup> century Madame Mediators and expand on them to rewrite lost history through their art. In that process, they have created new structures of feeling ready for incorporation into an Atlantic culture finally heading – as so many of us fervently imagine – away from the cockpit and toward a more promising social structure.

History, fully told, reveals many instances of such treasonous uprisings, though history is seldom fully told. Most uprisings are unsuccessful. Most successful uprisings ultimately fail to achieve their own social justice goals. More than the corruption of power, new ruling blocs – for example new democracies – fail to reach their goals because of a lack of wide-spread ideological agreement among collaborating activists. Synthesizing new paradigms for progressive social relations is one of the most difficult tasks faced by anti-racists, feminists, and other social justice activists. Social movement toward any new cultural paradigm, much less a progressive one, requires a collective cultural imaginative leap that, in

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<sup>10</sup> Aravamudan's concept is treated fully below. See Srinivas Aravamudan's *Tropicopolitans*.

1978, Adrienne Rich called "the 'quantum leap' [which] implies that even as we try to deal with backlash and emergency, we are imagining the new" (*On Lies* 271-2). This collective "leap of the imagination" is crucial because "nothing less than the most *radical imagination* will carry us beyond this place, beyond the mere struggle for survival, to that lucid recognition of our possibilities which will keep us impatient, and unresigned to mere survival" (Rich *On Lies* 273 my emphasis).<sup>11</sup> Radical Imagination – this is the term, I finally realized, that is a prerequisite for the reading strategy I am proposing in this project and it is finally time to turn our collective analysis to this task.

Why? Because, as late as October 2005 in the *New York Times Magazine*, Maureen Dowd complains that “Despite the best efforts of philosophers, politicians, historians, novelists, screenwriters, linguists, therapists, anthropologists, and facilitators, men and women are still in a muddle in the boardroom, the bedroom and the Situation Room” (52). The 2008 election cycle proved that Dowd is still correct. If feminists have largely failed in the US to initiate a quantum leap toward egalitarian society, so have other social justice advocates in the US. Newly powerful Hispanic- and African-American populations are passionately split over the rights of homosexuals and transgender people, over definitions of family, and over the rights of diverse groups to live by diverse moral systems. Unions struggle to perceive solidarity with illegal immigrant laborers facing racist deportations and female laborers facing sexism. In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> C, the US government itself championed democratic

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<sup>11</sup> Both quotes are from "The Contemporary Emergency and the Quantum Leap" in *On Lies, Secrets and Silence*.

liberty with nearly unilateral military violence, and frustrated, impeded, and openly obstructed international human rights programs with its global political super power. Western culture has largely failed to take the quantum leap of synthesizing progressive paradigms into egalitarian social relations.

The reason lies in the fact that the quantum leap Rich's radical imagination calls for has two seemingly opposite attributes. In western vernacular, "quantum leap" means a flash of enormous revolutionary change, causing far-ranging effects and major shifts in social consciousness. However, the original meaning of "quantum leap" is from physics where it signifies the smallest quantifiable change: the sudden move of a single electron from one orbital layer around an atom's nucleus to another layer. This "quantum jump" causes a release of energy in the form of light. The meaning of this emitted light is the key to both the process and the metaphor of "quantum leap" because it draws the opposing meanings into one coherent image. Thinking of this light as a quantum – the smallest measurable unit – of knowledge, we can imagine one Adam/atom looking up at the power brokers in the stands in a sudden small flash of comprehension. We cannot imagine this flash occurring without catalyst or without causing similar effects in surrounding atoms. Feminists call these flashes or quantum leaps consciousness-raising, recognizing that, if channeled carefully, such collective leaps of the imagination can – and have – become political movements that lead to social change.

Most of the time, however, quantum leaps do not become successful dominant movements of social change. Even when they do, western cultural

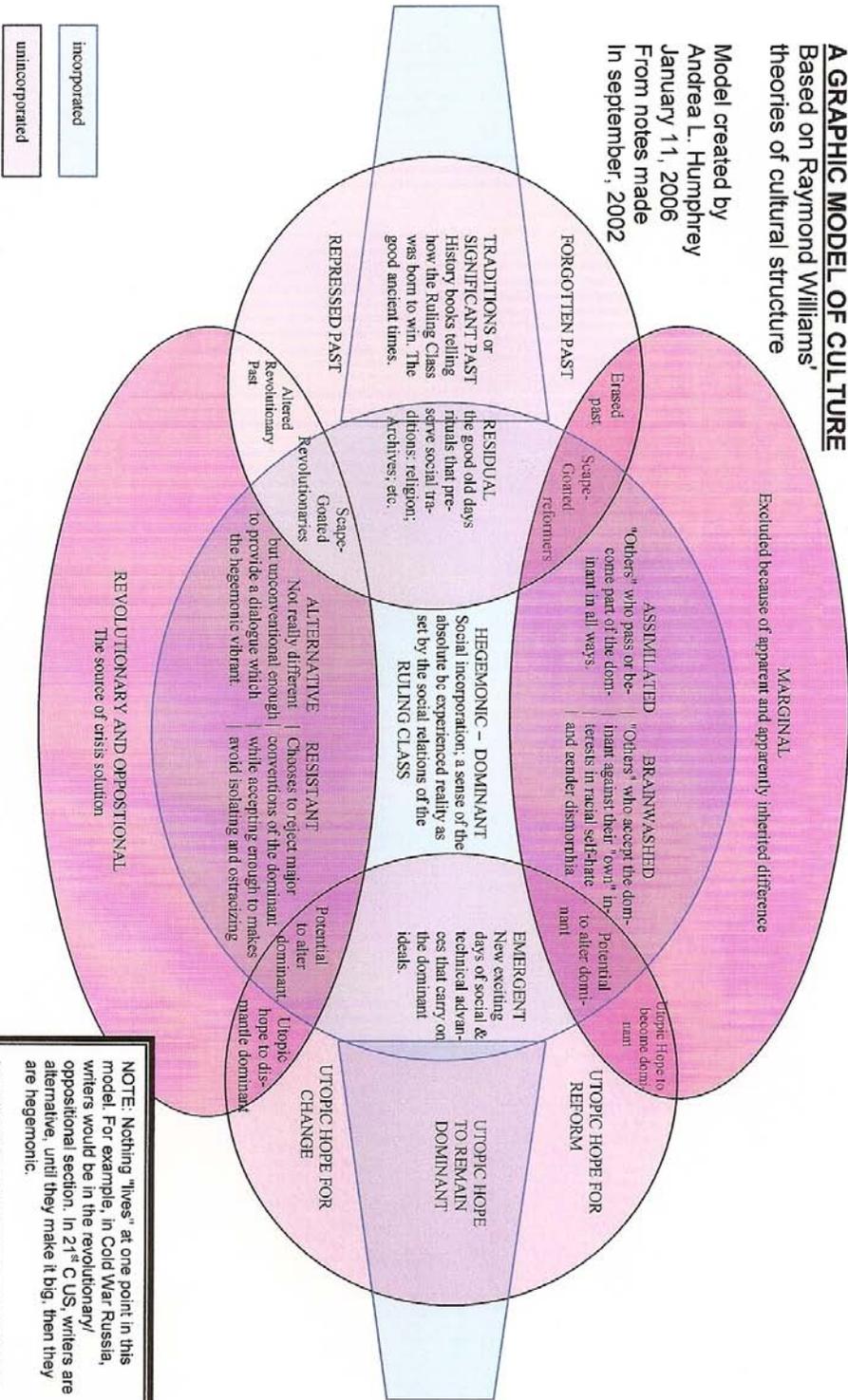
analysis privileges the iconic leader, the large dramatic events, and, in a patriarchal white culture, centers the role of the white male in these processes. This leaves an enormous amount of social process and material unexamined, even undetected. In *Marxism and Literature*, this is the social material Raymond Williams wants to make visible for analysis. After laying out a long and complicated history of social theory, he comes to his central idea: that culture is like a chemical solution and this unaccounted for material is like a chemical substance that can precipitate into social structures – but has not yet done so. Williams calls the potential connections between still unprecipitated elements of social material *structures of feeling*. As he puts it, “Methodologically, then, a ‘structure of feeling’ is a cultural hypothesis, actually derived from attempts to understand such elements and their connections in a generation or period” (Williams *Marxism and Literature* 132-3). Like the pre-capitalist ideas germinating in the 15<sup>th</sup> century sport of cock-fighting, *structures of feeling* are “embryonic” because they are not (yet) fully articulated as official ideology or “incorporated,” as Williams calls it, into social structures.

Most *structures of feeling* are never incorporated into the dominant or official ideology. This means that most of what is happening in any given culture at any particular moment is excluded from authorized social histories and hegemonic social structures. However, thinking about the immanent bonds of unprecipitated social material as *structures of feeling* makes this material available as recoverable histories (i.e. chronological structures) and as traceable

### A GRAPHIC MODEL OF CULTURE

Based on Raymond Williams' theories of cultural structure

Model created by  
 Andrea L. Humphrey  
 January 11, 2006  
 From notes made  
 in september, 2002



**NOTE:** Nothing "lives" at one point in this model. For example, in Cold War Russia, writers would be in the revolutionary/ oppositional section. In 21<sup>st</sup> C US, writers are alternative, until they make it big, then they are hegemonic.

In reality, this model is never symmetrical or static. None of the categorical lines are sharp or impermeable. An analogue for this model in nature might be a river delta, always changing but with the constant presence of the various features. ALH 106

genealogies (i.e. material structures) which can be read and reread from subsequent and different standpoints despite being obscured by the intervening hegemonic forces of historical production. Like substances present but not precipitated from solution, unincorporated social material from the past still circulates in cultural solution for feminists, Marxists, and others to access through their own *structures of feeling* expressed as theory and art.

In this study, I deploy ecumenical reading based on leaps of radical imagination to uncover and analyze alternative and oppositional structures of feeling about race and sex that were circulating in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. The prominence of women writers like Behn and Merian was subsequently excised by patriarchal misogyny and their alternative and oppositional insights were marginalized, obscured, and defined as treasonous to the project of capitalist empire. In other words, their work was relegated to what Williams has called the "neglected and excluded" past (Williams *Problems* 39).<sup>12</sup> Building on the feminist and racial reclamation projects of late 20<sup>th</sup> century, I contextualize more deeply the work of Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian in the material reality of their historical moment and lived experience and compare their works to the late 20<sup>th</sup> century work and experience of Beryl Gilroy. It is time to reevaluate from a 21<sup>st</sup> century perspective Behn's and Merian's "social hypotheses" within the paradigmatic ideologies circulating in their cultural solution. Written just as western paradigms began to rigidify into brutally sexist and racist hegemonic structures and institutions, Behn's and Merian's "neglected and excluded" social material contains largely unexamined structures of feeling

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<sup>12</sup> "Repressed" and "forgotten past" in Figure 1.

that will help spark more quantum leaps away from these same social paradigms as they finally begin to dissolve in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. More importantly, as Beryl Gilroy's work illustrates, their structures of feeling help expand the 21<sup>st</sup> century's cultural imagination, revealing new quantum leap destinations.

### **Feminist genealogy and Strategic Essentialism**

#### ***Conflicted Foremothers as Madame Mediator***

Until the 1970's, the lived experience of anyone not defined as a white heterosexual capitalist male circulated outside Western cultural hegemony. In the 1970's, feminist scholars, like Gerda Lerner in her groundbreaking series *Women and History*, reengaged the production of history and helped initiate efforts to reclaim the roles of women in historical events and processes – women many feminists think of as our foremothers. As this collective effort continues among feminists and among members of other marginalized groups, new structures of feeling in the west are synthesizing into 21<sup>st</sup> century ideologies of cultural difference that reject divisive cultural constructions of race, sex, class and other categories. One way to expedite the precipitation of these new structures of feeling into cultural ideology is to combine them with applicable early Enlightenment alternative and oppositional structures of feeling that were channeled out of the emerging dominant cultural ideological current.<sup>13</sup> It is a

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Herbert Aptheker's 1993 *Anti-Racism in U.S. History: The First Two Hundred Years*.

vexed project. Proponents of alternative and oppositional structures of feeling do not stand neatly as purely "just" people acting against the unadulterated evil empire of exploitation – at least not for long. Basic human survival – of the species and the individual – depends on sufficient complicity with the surrounding human culture. Moreover, the survival of the works and ideas of any single individual depends on a complex web of complicity that simply cannot be reduced to good and evil, right and wrong, feminist and sexist, or fair and racist. In this context, even the evil empire loses its coherence as both empire and evil. With a radical imagination, we can look back with the same appreciation for the uncertainty of the writers in this study as we have for the uncertainty that we experience now as we look forward toward a new paradigm of difference and learn from their negotiations with uncertainty.

As I mentioned above, because of the uncertainty experienced by the writers I discuss, I have entitled this project *Madame Mediator* after a secondary character in Margaret Cavendish's 1654 closet drama, *The Convent of Pleasure*. As the mother of Lady Happy, sole heir to the estate of Madame Mediator's husband, Lord Fortune, Madame Mediator is an emblem of uncertain consciousness. Madame Mediator knows from experience that a woman can only obtain cultural security in a sexist society through compliance and complicity with patriarchal social and economic structures. Motivated by fear and love for her daughter, Madame Mediator vigorously opposes Lady Happy's plan to use her inheritance to wall in her father's estate as a convent of pleasure for single and widowed women, a seraglio that excludes rather than services men. In an effort to

figure out where her interests lie as a woman and a mother in this new paradigm literally constructed by her daughter, Madame Mediator passes back and forth through the single portal in the Convent wall trying to mediate the safest social relations for her child and herself. Outside she bemoans the completion of the convent and considers the pleas several male suitors make to her to mediate with Lady Happy on their behalf. Sir Courtly reminds Madame Mediator that "If she [Lady Happy] be a Votress to Nature, you are the only Person fit to be Lady Prioress; and so by your power and authority you may give us leave to visit your Nuns sometimes" (Cavendish *Convent* II.i). But inside the Convent, Madame Mediator becomes committed to her daughter's program of a secure seraglio governed by and for women. In her fervor, she exposes the imposter Princess as an infiltrating Prince: "in comes Madame Mediator wringing her hands, and spreading her arms; and full of Passion cries out: O Ladies, Ladies! you're all betrayed, undone, undone; for there is a man disguised in the Convent, search and you'll find it" (Cavendish *Convent* V.i). By demanding his exposure and expulsion, Madame Mediator acts to prevent what she once thought was a mother's fondest patriarchal dream for her daughter: marriage to a prince, the most patriarchal of patriarchal males, since he is destined to replace his father the king.

Ultimately, Madame Mediator's mediation fails. The exposed Prince invokes his patriarchal right to marry Lady Happy and carry her off to his foreign kingdom, along with her fortune, thus abandoning Madame Mediator to an uncertain fate:

M. Mediat: O the Lord! I hope you will not bring an Army, to take away all the Women; will you?

Princ: No, Madame Mediator, we will leave you behind us. (V.i)

The Prince's joke raises and also refuses to recognize the misogynistic abandonment of the elder female whose aged body makes her superfluous to patriarchy's focus on the production of a male heir. Worse, Lady Happy's proto-feminist imagination fails her in the end as she is carried off to foreign domesticity, abandoning her feminist fortress more or less willingly to the whim of her new spouse who assigns Mimick, her old fool, to manage it. Mimick wants the convent divided "in two equal parts; one for Fools, and th' other for Married Men, as mad Men" (Cavendish *Convent* V.i). In Mimick's world, Fools and madmen rank above women. Indeed, even women of privilege like Madame Mediator are not secure when their husband's wealth is passed to a daughter whose marriage consigns that wealth to a spouse determined to "have [the daughter] by force of arms" and then to "leave [the widowed mother] behind us" (Cavendish *Convent* V.i).

If Lady Happy's feminist imagination fails her, Cavendish's feminist vision does not fail to expose the multi-layered fallacies – or "phallusies"<sup>14</sup> – of patriarchy. In patriarchal terms, the Prince is willing – along with the begging suitors – to endure any humiliation as a suitor to relieve an autonomous woman of her virginity, fortune and freedom, even if it means becoming a "woo man" cross-dressing as a woman cross-dressing as a man to woo a woman dressed as a

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<sup>14</sup> I will use this term throughout this work to signify false assumptions generated by and in the service of patriarchy. I will use the term "fallacy" when I mean false assumptions from a more general source. In seeing sexism as the foundation for institutionalized bigotries like racism, heterosexism and homophobia, I do not assert that sexism has an over-arching meaning or power in relation to other bigotries. Belief in hierarchies of oppression, as feminism – through the corrective intervention of critical race theory and black feminism – has demonstrated, is a complete phallusy.

woman acting like a man. But what is happening in feminist and materialist terms? Intentionally or not, Cavendish leaves the sex of Lady Happy's disguised lover unreadable. She gives the character's name as "Princess" in the cast list at the end of the play rather than, as is traditional, at the beginning. She abbreviates an already short name – Prince or Princess – to "Princ." While the abbreviations of other character names in Cavendish's script – "M. Mediat," "L. Happy," "Advis" – do not obscure the sex of their character, "Princ" lops off all indication and does not reinsert it after the sex of "Princ" is questioned by Madame Mediator. In fact, the Princ[ess]'s sex is never explicitly named even at the end of the play when Madame Mediator alerts the residents to the presence of "a man disguised" but un genders "man" by commanding "search and you'll find *it*" (Cavendish *Convent* V.i my italics). The several layers of the Princ[ess]'s sex and gender performance and naming suggest a gender fluidity that 20<sup>th</sup> century readers are much more reluctant to consider than Cavendish and her generation was. Even so, the layers also portray gender and sex identity as a performance of power that profits and privileges masculinity and patriarchy.

Like the vexed mother/daughter lineage outlined in *The Convent of Pleasure*, the Madame Mediator lineage through literary fore-mothers is critical for generating quantum leaps of the feminist and anti-racist imaginations. As dominant racist and sexist structures of feeling transform into ideologies, Williams's model of culture shows that the only way for alternative and oppositional structures of feeling to produce a readable archive despite systemic marginalization is through a genealogy carried along outside the dominant

historical record as traditions, tropes, codes and circulations among those committed to – or at least struggling to imagine – social justice. Literature by women is one mode for transporting this genealogy. For men writing in a misogynist context, ideological genealogy is a history of conflict, competition and triumphant elimination of the obsolete father – what Harold Bloom has called "the anxiety of influence" and others have dubbed the Great Man literary tradition.<sup>15</sup> Women and those the patriarchal tradition designates as Other can't afford such waste. Thus the mother/daughter – or parent/child<sup>16</sup> – lineage is founded not on elimination and waste but on production, preservation and reproduction.

However, reclaiming the heritage of feminist foremothers has not been conflict free. Such work requires collective action among feminist scholars, but that action is only as effective as it is diverse. Second wave feminism in the US struggled with the reality of its own racist practices in the 1960's and 70's and only began to make strides toward real diversity in the mid 1980's after finally admitting women of color and lesbians to fully theorized membership in the movement. Consequently, in the past twenty-five years, many of the most paradigm-shifting feminist theories have come from lesbians and feminists of color and, for sheer number, African American feminist womynists. They brought into feminism concepts like intersectionality, indivisibility and the non-hierarchical nature of oppressions, all concepts that work in the Atlantic cockpit against the cockpit strategy of pitting one population's suffering against another's

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<sup>15</sup> See Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*.

<sup>16</sup> Since men are not excluded from genealogy in a literal sense, excluding them in a metaphoric sense, as the Great Man tradition excludes women, is worse than useless. Even though my project here is, in part, reclaiming the role of mother, my objective is to imagine more fully the parent/child.

fear of suffering to prevent the formation of revolutionary coalition. As black women's experience illustrates, the intersection of sexism and racism is more than simple addition. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, who articulated the concept of intersectionality in 1995, explains her formulation this way:

It grew out of trying to conceptualize the way the law responded to issues where both race and gender discrimination were involved. What happened was like an accident, a collision. Intersectionality simply came from the idea that if you're standing in the path of multiple forms of exclusion, you are likely to get hit by both. These women are injured, but when the race ambulance and the gender ambulance arrive at the scene, they see these women of color lying in the intersection and they say, "Well, we can't figure out if this was just race or just sex discrimination. And unless they can show us which one it was, we can't help them." (qtd in Thomas)<sup>17</sup>

Black women's experience is thus unique compared to black men's and white women's experience because sexism and racism are indivisible in black women's lives, always interacting with each other. Through Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, black feminists recognized that activism against racism and sexism must be non-hierarchical because giving priority to either sexism or racism fails to liberate black women.

Intersectionality is not limited to the experience of black women. For example, the intersection of sexism and ageism authorized Cavendish's Princ[ess] to leave Madame Mediator behind to shift for herself as an elderly widow. Understanding intersectionality as a broad experience reveals increasing opportunities for coalition. Intersectionality, inalienability and non-hierarchization

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<sup>17</sup> Original quote is found in an interview by Sheila Thomas with Crenshaw: "Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender," *Perspectives: the Quarterly Magazine for and about Women Lawyers*, Spring 2004, published by The Commission on Women of the American Bar Association. <<http://www.abanet.org/women/perspectives/articles.html>> 08 26 10

generate collaborative activism by revealing the common ground among oppressed groups and thus unleashes enormous political power where before there was only victimization and competition for resources. These concepts are treason against empire, since they give oppressed groups reason to look up from the cockpit and accuse those in the stands of power of exploitation and oppression.

These and other black feminist theories have enabled US feminists, whose acknowledged leaders were predominantly white until the early 1980's, to recognize that working for a non-sexist society means engaging in much more than anti-sexist activism and gender theorizing. In fact, in these conceptual moves, black feminists and womynists synthesized two forces – anti-sexism and anti-racism – that have traversed the past four centuries of US cultural history in parallel and dialectical relationship. A graph [See Figure 2] illustrating the intensity of anti-racist and anti-sexist activity across a timeline of these four centuries demonstrates this dialectic. It also shows that anti-racist activity precedes anti-sexist activity at each historical moment of foment. Since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, middle and upper class white European women in the US were repeatedly informed of their own sexist oppression – obscured by class privilege and economic security – by their revulsion for the suffering of black Africans enslaved in European and American societies. However, white women's structures of feeling about slavery were not converted to oppositional anti-racist ideology and activist *movement* – i.e. abolitionism – until black African individuals began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to speak among them, began to resist the dehumanization of white supremacy by demonstrating their human intelligence in stories published

about them and in their own published writing. In addition to causing visceral reactions and sentimental responses among white women, diasporic and enslaved Africans in the Atlantic region provided proto-feminists with a cultural analysis of master/slave relationships based on alternative structures of feeling – theirs.

Conversations between these oppressed groups synthesized structures of feeling about their oppressions into ideological visions of a non-sexist, non-racist world and how it might be produced. In combination with revulsion to suffering, these alternative and oppositional structures of feeling have for centuries motivated resistance to the evolving racist and sexist ideologies that served empire with hegemonic force. In the face of that dominance, Raymond Williams' concept of emerging, dominant and receding elements of culture [Figure 1] offers some hope that oppressive hegemonic racist and sexist ideologies can wane and are waning. As my timeline [Figure 2] of the anti-sexist and anti-racist movements suggests, feminists and anti-racists of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries rebelled against an emerging paradigm of sex, gender and race that peaked in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This means that in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists and anti-racists in Western culture are resisting what might finally be a receding paradigm of sex, gender, and race and increasingly synthesizing the structures of feeling for emerging egalitarian ideologies of identity and society that could dominate the evolving cultural structure.

Written in this context, 1980's and 90's critiques of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century prominent women writers were an important exercise in analysis and transformation – for feminists and for feminism. However, white feminists

struggling to understand their own culpability in racist social practices and policies, as well as feminists of color still working to theorize their oppressions, analyzed these early women writers using the same anti-racist and anti-sexist standards they were learning to apply to themselves. To the extent that this transformation was white-centered – focused on white guilt, white shame, white anger, and attempts to dissociate from ongoing institutional racism – it barely began to address the anti-racist work feminists needed to do in cross-racial coalitions that decenter whiteness. Paul Gilroy calls for decentering whiteness when he calls for:

the primal history of modernity to be reconstructed from the slaves' points of view... [which] require[s] a discrete view not just of the dynamics of power and domination in plantation societies dedicated to the pursuit of commercial profit but of such central categories of the Enlightenment project as the idea of universality, the fixity of meaning, the coherence of the subject, and, of course, the foundational ethnocentrism in which these have all tended to be anchored. (55)

Decentering whiteness, maleness, heterosexuality and other attributes of the modern hegemonic norm in the west can free western culture from the despotism of a monolithic vision of culture. Decentering centrism itself is one of the effects of Williams's model of culture as solution and it offers a way of sorting the false assumptions from the new ideals that the Enlightenment generated, a way of retaining the ideals of individual human rights while rejecting the foundational racist classist sexist ethnocentrism in which those rights were imagined.

Despite its stumbles, second wave feminism accomplished some of this work. Once the African American feminist concepts described above entered

mainstream feminism, materialist feminists like Rosemary Hennessy and Rajeswari Mohan could collaboratively claim in 1989 that:

Our critique is a critique for feminism. Only it is directed as much against new imperialism, white supremacy, homophobia, and class exploitation as it is against patriarchy. In doing so, we argue for a globalizing reading strategy. Such a strategy attends to the interconnection between various modalities of oppression and exploitation at any one instance of the social while situating that instance in the global deployment of capitalist power relations. (187)

In other words, if sexism is common to all patriarchal societies, it does not accomplish patriarchal domination on its own. Sexism provided the quantum leap in the early cultural imagination that led to constructing social hierarchies as monstrous cockpits of domination and profit. In the 1990's, bell hooks urged feminists to understand that imperialism *is* patriarchy; it is "white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (hooks *Feminism* 4). To take up anti-sexist work as a feminist – to take up anti-racist work or any social justice work – is to take up work against all oppressive imperatives of the patriarchal paradigm.

For all these reasons, this study will not look in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries for some original or singular determining cause of women's oppressions in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Instead, it will use a radical imaginative approach to examine relations among oppressions the Atlantic cockpit. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, thanks to the work of black feminists, the determined self-assessment of white feminists, the Marxist discourse of cultural studies, and the developing discourse of Marxist, socialist and materialist feminisms, it is time to revisit early women writers once again to recover what was left behind by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century analyses. Now that feminists understand difference as that which, according to Audre Lorde's

powerful image, "spark[s] like a dialectic" with the power to transform, we can reclaim more of the anti-sexist and anti-racist imagination of our fore-mothers on the emerging side of the racist sexist paradigm (Lorde 111).<sup>18</sup> Even though feminists and anti-racists in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot free ourselves from our own standards as we repeatedly look back to our literary foremothers in the 17<sup>th</sup> century for advice, we can understand that we apply our standards and how they limit our readings. Then we can work to resist those limitations. Similarly, feminists who are gratified by the powerful image of crusading feminist foremothers must constantly rehearse the reality that literary and ideological foremothers are only "good enough mothers," flawed even as they crusaded for change. As their 21<sup>st</sup> century descendants, feminist anti-racists of all sexes must learn what we can from the successes and mistakes of our 20<sup>th</sup> century and our 18<sup>th</sup> century foremothers.

### *Strategic Essentialism*

"Feminist genealogy" and "feminist foremothers" require a bit of explanation since the formulations risk misguided essentialism in the service of dubious identity politics. Gerda Lerner deals with this problem in the first volume of her *Women and History* series, *The Creation of Patriarchy*. She connects maternalist (as opposed to materialist) feminism to essentialism as Adrienne Rich

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<sup>18</sup> "Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic." From "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House" in *Sister Outsider*.

invokes it in *Of Woman Born*. Explaining its origins in J. J. Bachofen's *Das*

*Mutterrecht*, Lerner writes that:

Maternalist theory is built upon the acceptance of biological sex differences as a given. Most feminist-maternalists also consider the sexual division of labor built upon these biological differences as inevitable, although some recent thinkers have revised that position. Maternalists sharply differ from the traditionalists in reasoning from this for women's equality and even for the superiority of women. (26)

Yet, as Lerner describes it, maternalism uses patriarchal essentialist claims to prove the phallus of binary cultural essentialism. As Sojourner Truth wryly put it, "Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him" (Gage 518a).<sup>19</sup> In a paromologic<sup>20</sup> feint, Truth accepted – sarcastically – the essentialist assertion of "that little man in black there" in order to disprove it by following its false logic to its insupportable conclusion (Gage 318). In the same way, Adrienne Rich and others in the maternalist tradition said a lot more than Lerner gives them credit for. They do not accept the essentialist phallusies of patriarchy. Instead, they begin with them in order to disprove them. After all, Rich's lesbian continuum is the ribbon Judith Butler cut in *Gender Trouble* to enter the multi-gendered land where all bodies (not just heterosexual bodies) and all of bodily existence (not just reproduction) matters.

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<sup>19</sup> Gage, Francis. "Frances Gage's Reminiscences." In "Sojourner Truth's Defense of the Rights of Women." In *Women Images and Realities: a Multicultural Anthology*. 3rd ed. Amy Kesselman, Lily D. McNair, Nancy Schniedewind, eds. NYC: McGraw Hill, 2003. 318

<sup>20</sup> To concede a weaker point in order to prove a stronger one.

Nevertheless, Lerner is right to caution that claims of feminist genealogy can veer dangerously close to reductive essentialism. Thus when I speak of women's structures of feeling, I am deploying a strategic essentialism that conditionally accepts the essentialist phallusies inherent in the imposed category of woman in order to perceive the lived experience of bodies forced into and policed by that category. As women, we were silenced. Thus as women we responded, and as women we have, at first, had to speak. We formed syncretic groups – and also antagonistic groups. We organized, stored and passed on our marginalized ideas and experiences as women. This history must be understood in this context of enforced essentialism and strategic responses to it and not simply disdainfully dismissed as misguided naive identity politics.

Yet, what Lerner's and, for example, the Red Stocking Manifesto's<sup>21</sup> radicalism insist on is that to the extent that we did respond to women's oppression *only* as women, we failed to end the oppression. Maternalist feminism simply reinscribes the patriarchal phallusies of sex difference when it forgets the social construction of woman. Even in the arena of human rights, which many radical feminists disdain for its supposedly reformist agenda, women made no headway as women. We only gained some measure of equality by rejecting the category of woman and insisting on the explicit inclusion of women in human rights systems as humans with no special rights, which is to say with equal rights. This strategy made violence *even* against women a crime. And yet, demographic studies of the experience of women as women or blacks as blacks are critical for

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<sup>21</sup> See Robin Morgan's "Redstocking Manifesto" It can also be accessed online at [http://www.redstockings.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=59](http://www.redstockings.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=76&Itemid=59)

determining whether human rights are being upheld without regard to sex or race. The egalitarian erasure of difference from standards of justice is the ideal against which we must continually measure equality from the categorical standpoints still in cultural circulation.

Women's structures of feeling are categorical only because, as humans, females live in patriarchally gendered categories and conditions. Behn's obvious revulsion for Oroonoko's treatment is human, even humanist, not feminine, yet it comes out of her experience of being categorized a woman and thus as inferior in ways that parallel the presumed inferiority of Africans. Oroonoko and Behn are people from two different oppressed groups oppressed for different reasons and in different and even oppositional ways by the same dominant power with one objective regarding them both: maintaining and increasing its power over them. However, Oroonoko would not have written a narrative about western oppression of women from his standpoint because as an African man he would have identified with western men. Alliances with dominant groups produce more power and privilege than those with oppressed groups, especially when an oppressed group is granted more power by the dominant group because they share a highly valued trait (race, sex) which reinforces the power of the dominant group. This is why Behn's novel wasn't titled *Imoinda*. This is why the US congress of white men made political alliance with black men by granting them the vote fifty years before giving it to the much larger and less controllable voting

block of white women.<sup>22</sup> The frustration of this move for 19<sup>th</sup> century feminists does not justify their racist response, but it sure does help to explain it. The structures of feeling I hope to recover from these women writers must be seen as human first and foremost.

Yet, it would be equally phallescious to dismiss the categorical nature of the connections among the individuals designated as women. If these connections among women are not essential, they are material. They are social and cultural material – they are in fact structures of feeling shared by this designated category of people in their lived experience as members of this category. Lerner makes careful distinctions between essentialist claims and constructionist claims, though she uses neither term, and to locate the juncture of biology and culture at a point she identifies as functional, a point that she insists is historical, located primarily in the distant past in the development of human civilization, a point which is now almost inaccessible to western societies where the complicity and compliance of women is most evident. In Lerner's version of patriarchal history, this moment of juncture between biology and culture is expressed in the meaning assigned to the (re)productive female body. In that generative and early nurturing condition, the (re)productive female body is both biologically and culturally separated from other un(re)productive bodies. However, the nearly immediate reduction of that categorization to binary sex and gender formations is a culturally constructed phallusy since it excludes un(re)productive female bodies, asexual male bodies, intersexed bodies and other bodies uncategorizable within a sexual binary.

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<sup>22</sup> And this, I submit, is why we have a young and inexperienced black man as president, who is, thank god, brilliant, superbly prepared, and immensely capable, instead of his equally qualified and progressive, more experienced female rival.

Patriarchal history is the account of the imposition of this phallusy and of the illogical designation of all bodies that do not fit into this sex binary as members of the monstrous Other.<sup>23</sup> The (re)productive female body is the nucleus of this Other, since the (re)productive female body is the only category that makes any categorical sense in opposition to the ideal male body. Since history until the late 1980's has been synonymous with patriarchal history, patriarchal genealogy and male-modeled cultural structures, everything else is excluded as other, female, feminine, non-patriarchal. In this context feminist genealogy is not essentialist, but it is essential.

**Structures of feeling in Solution – a cultural metaphor**

Identifying the ideological currents that the developing hegemony sailed away from requires a sense of the cultural structures and systems in which they circulate. As this project unfolds, I turn repeatedly to Raymond Williams's dynamic model of culture: that culture is fluid, always moving, changing, and, most importantly, dynamic in the present, like an ocean. Neither culture nor the hegemonic structure within it has any particular fixed form. For this reason, Williams argues vehemently against metaphors for culture – including the Marxist base and superstructure – that tend toward rigidity and the past tense. Even about hegemony, one of the most rigid of cultural structures, Williams writes:

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<sup>23</sup> While charging patriarchal culture with phallescious errors, I also concede that the same might be said of a matriarchal society, if such ever existed. Rather than speculate on that possibility, I focus on the material history of patriarchy and on creating and detecting moments of creating a post-patriarchal society.

Hegemony is always an active process, but this does not mean that it is simply a complex of dominant features and elements. On the contrary, it is always a more or less adequate organization and interconnection of otherwise separated and even disparate meanings, values and practices, which it specifically incorporates in a significant culture and an effective social order. (Williams *Marxism* 115)

Cultural features and elements become hegemonic through “incorporation,” a dynamic cultural process through which the overall social structure constitutes itself and evolves.

As the power relations change in the hegemonic center, cultural elements are available for incorporation – or marginalization – into cultural hegemony along two axes: time (or history) and social “space” (or society). [See Figure 1] For example, along the social axis in a roughly “present” or synchronic sense, Williams identifies three categories of cultural elements: traditions, institutions and formations. On this axis, revolution turns the hegemonic center away from central traditions, institutions and formations toward what was previously or is emerging as oppositional in an effort to compel hegemony to incorporate it. Similarly, reform turns the hegemonic center toward what was previously or is emerging as alternative in an effort to compel hegemony to incorporate that. Along the time/diachronic/historical/genealogical axis, on the other hand, Williams identifies processes of culture as “dominant, residual and emergent,” or emergent, dominant and residual, to put them in chronological order. Thus reclamation, revelation, and realization reach into the past and pull into the present social elements that were forgotten, repressed, erased or altered as a result of hegemonic pressures. Similarly, the technological, theoretical, economic and

ideological reach into the future to authorize (or not) for incorporation into the emergent hegemony the social developments that influence, become, dismantle, reform or change the hegemonic center.

What Williams calls “epochal analysis” is quite useful for tracing the history and function of these hegemonic forces. However, Williams carefully distinguishes between this history of the effect of hegemonic forces and “historical analysis,” which are not limited to studies of the hegemonic. He writes “In authentic historical analysis it is necessary at every point to recognize the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies *both within and beyond* a specific and effective dominance” (*Marxism and Literature* 121 italics mine). Looking beyond the hegemonic edges where most historical accounts stop reveals that incorporation is not a happy linear progression toward recognition of the untapped value of the emergent and non-hegemonic. Incorporation also includes appropriation, corruption, stealing, altering, burying and otherwise subverting the power of the unincorporated to preserve rather than change the power structure of the hegemonic center.

Even when culture is understood on these coherent terms, there is still social material that escapes such categorization. Emphasizing the passage with italics, Williams writes:

What has really to be said, as a way of defining important elements of both the residual and the emergent, and as a way of understanding the character of the dominant, is that *no mode of production and therefore no dominant social order and therefore no dominant culture ever in reality includes or exhausts all human practice, human energy, and human intention.*” (*Marxism and Literature* 125, his italics)

Some social material is actively excluded not only from the hegemonic center but also from any accounts of society; most often this consists of or is “often *seen* as the personal or the private, or as the natural or even metaphysical” (my italics). Williams calls this hegemonic exclusion a hegemonic “seizure” of “the ruling definition of the social...[and] it is this seizure that has especially to be resisted” (*Marxism and Literature* 125). This resistance can be staged from and for the protection of the social material that escapes hegemonic seizure and remains unincorporated, uncategorized and unrecognized social material.

Williams is especially interested in that excess social material that he calls “form,” as opposed to “practices,” and in emergent culture as “new forms or adaptations of [past and present] forms ... a pre-emergence, active pressing but not yet fully articulated” (*Marxism and Literature* 126). He includes in unseized cultural forms works of art – like literature – because even though they constitute, in many cases, artifacts or finished objects with “received interpretations,” they have no cultural function unless and until they are engaged in a process of “specifically active readings” in the present (*Marxism and Literature* 129). In this way, all art is text and all art is art only in the present moment of engagement.

Thus, as Williams concludes:

...the actual alternative to the received and produced fixed forms [of the hegemony] is not silence: not the absence, the unconscious, which bourgeois culture has mythicized. It is a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange. (129)

He calls “structures of feeling” that which, though they are deployed by and through individual lived experience, consist of a collective cognitive structure of

ongoing feelings and thinkings within a coherent social collective of meanings, values and evolving standards.

This concept of structures of feelings is the destination idea of Williams's *Marxism and Literature*, and he admits that "the concept is difficult." In a small climactic chapter, he explains that a structure of feelings consists of:

...characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living interrelating continuity.

linked together in:

a "structure": as a set, with specific internal relations, at once interlocking and in tension.

that function as:

a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its specific hierarchies. (*Marxism and Literature* 132).

Structures of feeling are like salt in the cultural solution of the Atlantic cockpit.

Williams's chapter on structures of feeling in *Marxism and Literature* is the climactic chapter of his book, like the culminating sex scene in a romance novel. It is a long hard rewarding slog through various theoretical currents of thought that he repeatedly shows simply don't encompass all social material in a culture. At last, in this chapter on structures of feeling, Williams's prose gives way to poetic ellipsis and finally to a rhetorical orgasm of ungrammatical *jouissance* in reaching the conceptual objective of the work. Paragraph two begins

with the phrase “When we begin to grasp...” and ends with an orgasmic sentence that culminates in a scare quote embrace:

And then if the social is the fixed and explicit – the known relationships, institutions, formations, positions – all that is present and moving, all that escapes or seems to escape from the fixed and the explicit and the known, is grasped and defined as the personal: this, here, now, alive, ‘subjective’. (Williams *Marxism and Literature* 128)

Four pages later, the content and rhetorical energy build again, like a second go that is more measured and deliberate, building to a mutual chiasmus of pleasure of “not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity” (Williams *Marxism and Literature* 132). The last sentence, consisting of six clauses telescoped through two colons, ends with a sigh of release: “offering explanations but now at a reduced tension: the social explanation fully admitted, the intensity of experienced fear and shame now dispersed and generalized” (Williams *Marxism and Literature* 134). Why does this central chapter of *Marxism and Literature* feel so sexual? It is partly because the marginalized, suppressed, abjected realm of social experience he is describing includes, in Western culture at any rate, most sexual experience and knowledge. It also includes the sexual abject, the sexually abject and the hyper-sexualized. It includes social material and subjects marginalized by sexual racialization and racialized sexuality enforced by gender, perhaps the most powerful policing force deployed by the western culture against oppositional and alternative structures of feeling.

To imagine escaping that seizure, let me examine Williams's deepest insight expressed, as many such insights are, in that moment before dropping off into the textual afterglow:

For structures of feeling can be defined as social experiences in *solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been *precipitated* and are more evidently and more immediately available. (Williams *Marxism and Literature* 134 his italics)

Since this metaphor partakes of chemistry, we must delve into the chemical processes he points to: solutions and precipitation. A *solution* is usually (but not always) a liquid mixture of two or more substances in which one of the substances is distributed evenly throughout the other. A solution has two basic components: *solvent* and *solute*. The solvent is usually water and usually greater in proportion. The solute, usually smaller in proportion, is added to the solvent. The solvent acts on the solute by breaking its weaker molecular bonds and freeing smaller molecules to circulate evenly throughout the solvent, resulting in a solution. *Precipitation* is a chemical process in which molecules circulating in solution form bonds that create new molecular substances that form sediment if denser, or suspensions if less dense than the solvent. Among the physical conditions required for precipitation is saturation, which is when the solvent has absorbed as much solute as it can and still hold the dissolved components apart, preventing molecular bonding. Adding any more solute at this point causes the solvent molecules to be unable to effectively surround the solute molecules and hold them apart; the solute then begins to reestablish molecular bonds and precipitate out of the solution – up, down or suspended. However, if the movement of the molecules

of the solvent substance is increased with heat or pressure, then it can hold more solute molecules apart, preventing precipitation and achieving higher rates of absorption of solute by solvent. Once the source of heat or pressure is removed, solute molecules can then reach each other through the less active crowd of solvent molecules and bond as precipitates. As solvent activity slows, the precipitation rate increases. In addition, evaporation – the escaping of solvent molecules into the air – decreases the number of solvent molecules present to hold the solute molecules apart, so more bonds form and more solute precipitates.

Salt as a solute provides a rich example of this process because its intermolecular forces cause the elements of sodium and chloride to bond in a symmetrical lattice shape that results in a faceted solid or crystal which can be considered analogous to hegemonic elements of culture. Intermolecular forces pull molecules together – or push them apart – altering the physical state of the substance from liquid to solid or to gas (Malone 294).<sup>24</sup> While there are three types of intermolecular forces, the intermolecular force involved in the molecular bonds of *all* substances is called London forces. I'm not making this up, but it is interesting to think about who did. There is a less ironic name for London forces which more precisely indicates the nature of the force: instantaneous dipole-induced dipole forces. As Malone explains:

In larger molecules with more electrons, instantaneous dipoles become more likely so London forces become more significant. Also, larger molecules are generally more polarizable than smaller ones because they are surrounded by larger more diffuse electron clouds" and thus have a greater chance of being off balance. (295)

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<sup>24</sup> Leo J. Malone explains in *Basic Concepts of Chemistry*, upon which my explanations of the chemistry of solution depend.

“London forces” using polarization to cause large things to become unbalanced!!!

A post-colonial Marxist-feminist rejoices at the irony!! These shifts sometimes involve the quantum leaps described earlier. So, again, as social process in cultural solutions, London forces are analogous to many kinds of social bonds. In feminism, we call them consciousness-raising. In Marxism, we call them radicalization. In advertising, we call them manipulation of desire. In Williamsism, we call them structures of feeling. Whether we accept the Euro-centric naming of such a vital force, the irony of the naming certainly points to the history of the west in the past 300 years.

As we have seen, Williams’s analogy of the concepts of chemical solution and precipitates works as an analytical model for culture, right down to the subatomic level. Now we can plug into the metaphor the analogies Williams himself named: structures of feeling are the relationships among the elements of social material before they precipitate from the solution. We know from our examination of the chemical process of saline solution that the substance that precipitates from solution is not the solvent, water in our example, but the solute, salt in our example. Williams’s analogy between culture and his version of chemical solution seems contradictory on one point: he asserts on one page that “structures of feeling can be defined as social experiences *in solution*”; on the next page, he speaks of “the structure of feeling, *as solution*” (133-4, his italics, my underline). From the detailed description of chemical solutions above, we know that there is a vast difference between being in solution and being solution. As a solute, salt might be in solution, but it does not constitute solution without the

presence of a solute. This apparent contradiction is resolved through Williams's repeated use of the term linkage to recognize that in both cases he is not referring to solute, solvent or solution as structures of feeling, but to London forces, or the linking attractions among all molecules. As attractions, these forces are imminent social relations among social elements not yet precipitated through social processes like articulation. As Williams explains:

The idea of a structure of feeling can be specifically related to the evidence of forms and conventions – semantic figures – which, in art and literature, are often among the very first indications that such a new structure is forming. ...as a matter of cultural theory this is a way of defining forms and conventions in art and literature as inalienable elements of social material process: not by derivation from other social forms and pre-forms, but as social formation of a specific kind which may in turn be seen as the articulation (often the only fully available articulation) of structures of feeling which as living processes are much more widely experienced. (133)

In that sense, then, articulation is analogous to and one form of precipitation. Potential London forces and other kinds of potential bonds among elements of human experience and social material still dissolved in cultural solution are what Williams means by structures of feeling.

The final theoretical task in this analogy is to discuss the product of precipitation: the precipitate, which sometimes takes the form of a crystal. Williams only hints at this process in his chapter on structures of feeling, but from his discussion of hegemony, we can carry his analogy with chemical solution to the formation of crystals in solution. The concept of equilibrium is at the center of crystal formation and behavior and it provides some wonderful political analogies. Williams writes:

Yet, we are also defining a social experience which is still *in process*, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating, but which in analysis (though rarely otherwise) has its emergent, connecting, and dominant characteristics, indeed its hierarchies. These are often more recognizable at a later stage, when they have been (as often happens) formalized, classified, and in many cases built into institutions and formations. By that time the case is different; a new structure of feeling will usually already have begun to form, in the true social present. (132)

Similarly, the elements of solute circulate in a saturated aqueous solution until a few of them break through the surrounding water molecules, as described above, and form bonds creating salt molecules as precipitates. At first this occurs “in relatively isolated ways” (Williams). As any child who has tried to grow rock salt knows, precipitation of solute into crystal can be slow indeed. It usually won't occur without the application of heat to enable super saturation of the solution and the introduction of a seed crystal for the precipitating salt molecules to bond with and then also without the condition of evaporation. Thus, the salt precipitates are, as Williams says, “often more recognizable at a later stage” after incorporation into rigid crystals – crystals which we can now see as analogous to hegemonic social structures.

So, exploring the analogy Williams makes between the chemical processes of solution and the social processes of culture produces the following:

The chemical conditions of solution – the mixed compounds, the container of the mixture, the mixing agent, external conditions like heat, pressure and contamination – is culture and its vicissitudes.

The solution container is space, including geography, place, and categories like nation state, property, and region.

The solution itself is all human cultural activity, in all tenses, not just the past tense, and in particular the present.

Solvent (i.e. water) is ongoing lived personal experience – a loosely bound substance that can act on solvents to deconstruct or dissolve them into solutions and also reconstruct and re-solve them into precipitates and crystals.

Solute (i.e. salt) is ongoing lived social experience – being constantly created over time by generational increase and change.

Chemical and physical changes in substances are the potential of solute substances to dissolve, precipitate and crystallize, forming and breaking molecular bonds and of solvent substances to heat up, compress or evaporate. This is what Williams means by structures of feeling.

Elements are units of human experience, personal and social, that bond like atomic particles in electronegative social relations.

Compounds and molecules are human personal and social experiences like memory, training, perception, beliefs, etc., linked together to form new substances or cultural incorporations.

A substance is social material with particular attributes and characteristics. Substances are formed by molecular bonds between elements and molecules and may exist as unincorporated sediment, unbonded solute or solvent, or fully formed crystals.

If the catalysts for precipitates and crystals include heat, pressure and contamination, then the catalysts for cultural precipitates include conditions like war, natural catastrophe, famine, economic failure and expansion, and peace. These conditions exert social pressures long after they have themselves abated because of the structural nature of society's response to them. For example, the violent heat, pressure and contamination of the enslavement of Africans by Europeans in the West Indies and Americas still profoundly affects social relations in these regions 125 years after slavery was abolished. The importance of thinking about war, for example, within this model is that it makes space for all of the forms of reception and response to the condition of war. It insists on

recovery of social material during war time that hegemonic forces seize, corrupt and obscure.

If structures of feeling are present tense, then how can we in the present examine them as they occurred in the past? One way is through radical imagination, the prerequisite for the reading strategy I have called ecumenical reading. First, the analyst must account for the structures of feeling circulating around her as she works by being conscious of and even by articulating the pertinent politics of her own location.<sup>25</sup> Second, the analyst must also peruse non-canonical texts and work with non-canonical definitions of textuality and knowledge in order to look around the edges of canonical readings of texts both in her own generational period and the generational period she is analyzing. Thus, as Williams explains, a historical analysis of culture through literature would seek and analyze “meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs....over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences” (*Marxism and Literature* 132). An important caution, which I will look at in more detail below, is to be very careful about how we think about “the individual” in this model. When Williams speaks of elements of culture that involve human activity and human experience and social relations, he is never speaking of individual human subjects or lives. These elements of human activity and experience occur, as we have seen, in both solute and solvent, just as atoms are present in both salt as sodium (Na) and chlorine (Cl) and in water as oxygen (O) and hydrogen (H).

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<sup>25</sup> See Adrienne Rich’s “Notes Toward a Politics of Location.”

These elements of human activity and experience can be said to be produced by individuals and through individuals in relation to each other and to social material, but the personal as such is rarely part of a social formation, even while its presence is required to produce the precipitant social forms through its action upon the solvent's pre-precipitated material – i.e. structures of feeling. But the individual is never a pure substance or free substance operating as a coherent, discreet whole in cultural solution. This point above all others illustrates the danger of reducing the products of any individual to a single aspect of that individual's apparent identity.

Structures of feeling form in response to and as a representation of emergent and pre-emergent social developments. The “structured formation” of structures of feeling in solution, Williams writes, “is at the very edge of semantic availability, has many of the characteristics of a pre-formation, until specific articulations – new semantic figures – are discovered in material practice” (*Marxism and Literature* 134). What experiences are my writers having that generate social material in opposition or as alternative to what was happening regarding issues of race and sex at the turn into the 18<sup>th</sup> century? When Behn writes *Oroonoko*, she is coping with very different structures of feeling than Beryl Gilroy is when she writes *Inkle and Yarico*. If, as a diasporic Caribbean Black female scholar, Beryl Gilroy is proposing oppositional responses to emerging social material that will precipitate around difference as new social structures of race and sex, then Aphra Behn is proposing as a professional English white woman's oppositional responses to emerging social material that respond to

slavery as racism and marriage as sexism. Williams's model explains why this is so.

### *The Ecumenizing Text*

Srinivas Aravamudan invokes an image in *Tropicopolitans* that describes the particular articulations women writers produce as cultural mediators, articulations his image suggests could be called "ecumenizing texts." He attributes to Mary Wortley Montagu a mediating ability to see beyond her own Christian culture when she compares it to Turkey's Islamic culture on an equal rational footing rather than within the power hierarchy of self-other presumed by contemporary European philosophy. Aravamudan writes, "Montagu visualizes a secular anthropologizing stance toward cultures, similar to many other post-Renaissance appreciations of the arbitrary norms that under-gird cultural identity. Such a perception replaces ...a simple ethnocentrism ...with an eclectic relativism" (Aravamudan 161). And what makes it eclectic is that it is an act of radical imagination leading to an ecumenical reading of cross-cultural encounter.

Aravamudan calls Montagu's approach "levantinization," which he defines as "a strategic deformation of Orientalism's representational mechanisms" (160). My claim for at least the writers in this study is that this deformation is accomplished textually through ecumenization which is itself made possible by an attitude of relativism which is in turn caused by encountering "other" cultural systems from "a secular anthropologizing stance." Aravamudan may seem

disdainful of Montagu's "anthropologizing" ecumenism when he calls it "deformation" instead of the "resistance" he credits Tropicopolitans with when they tropicalize colonial cultural material. But later in his text he includes "deformation" as a major element of tropicalization, a mediation that also resists hegemonic trends toward racism, sexism and other oppressions. Relativism then becomes a moral stand, an integration of belief and practice that synthesizes resistant structures of feeling through a force – an alternative to London force? – that pulls culture toward emerging concepts of social justice and away from emerging concepts of patriarchal capitalist exploitation. The ecumenizing text is the articulation of what a relativist "anthropologizing stance" reveals and, perhaps, of synthesizing those new structures of feeling into social material that is more likely to be incorporated into – and thus alter – mainstream hegemonic structures. At the very least, ecumenizing texts are recoverable as such.

Aravamudan is right to insist that Montagu's ecumenizing is not tropicopolitan as he defines it. She is not a member of a colonized population living in the tropics. In fact, she never even visits the tropics. She is not "a shadow image of more visible metropolitans" (Aravamudan 4). She *is* one of the most visible metropolitans in one of the most powerful metropolises of its time, even of all post-Renaissance times. The condition of her writings – her comparatively luxurious progress to Istanbul and back – represent exactly "the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans" Aravamudan sees his tropicopolitans tropicalizing against and in spite of (4). However, despite her class privilege, her subaltern status as a female facilitated the production of her radical imagination

and ecumenizing texts, and then disempowered them both in relation to hegemonic forces. In Aravamudan's model, Montagu epitomizes the Enlightenment colonial agent. But when Guyatri Spivak's theories of the subaltern condition are brought to bear on analyses of Montagu's life and work, we learn something more complex about Montagu and about tropicalizations. Montagu's work, once it is finally published, does deform hegemonic presumptions about non-European culture: "she contests the normative masculine vision of her predecessors, noticing different phenomena and correcting previous misrepresentations from a woman's perspective" (Aravamudan 163). However, its full deformative effect is unleashed only as we re-re-read it now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, when feminist reclamation projects use her work through cycles of patriarchal obscurity to challenge the fantasy of the Oriental despot<sup>26</sup> that still guides western policy at the highest levels.

Montagu's insights have yet to move from structures of feeling – a sense that western Orientalism is based on phallus – to mainstream social material, never mind hegemonic cultural power structures. But her ecumenizing texts – along with those examined in this project – nevertheless do their ecumenizing work, pushing against the articulation and incorporation – or precipitation – of racist and sexist structures of feeling into oppressive hegemonic ideologies. If read for what Aravamudan has called tropicalizations, my writers' texts reveal many ecumenizing insights. For that reason, even though some of the writers here

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<sup>26</sup> See Mladen Dolar, "Introduction." *The Sultan's Court* Alain Grosrichard. Dolar describes Grosrichard's assertion that the western fantasy of despotism assigned in many literary works to ruthless "Oriental" despots was an attempt to relocate fears of local despots to foreign soil where they could be safely vilified and also ignored. The relocation justified retaining local power structures to avoid being overrun by or becoming like foreign despots.

don't fit into Aravamudan's category of tropicopolitans, we can observe and explain how they are colonized by patriarchy. Aravamudan makes a precise and convincing case for considering the population of individuals he defines as a class whose history and attributes have been systematically marginalized and so must be systematically analyzed, reclaimed, reread for the powerful material they contain. I am interested in and further engage his move below as it facilitates an ecumenizing comparison of, on one hand, the social relations between colonized residents of the tropics and western European colonizers and, on the other hand, the patriarchal social relations between hegemonic cultural forces and marginalized – or subalterned – people within a culture, whether those subalterns are the colonizers or the colonized. Why? Because if hegemonic forces like colonization form crystals in solution, then the structures of feeling of the colonized (tropicopolitans) and the marginalized (subalterns) are the ones whose lived experience dissolve oppressive systems and whose social relations can precipitate – chemically and socially – solutions that are more socially and culturally just.

*Chapter 2*

## APHRA BEHN'S ATLANTICIST LIFE: MADAME MEDIATOR THE SPY

*If such questions were unavailable to me in 1966, it was partly because of the silence surrounding the lives of women – not only our creative work, but the very terms on which that work has been created; and partly for lack of any intellectual community which would take those questions seriously.*

Adrienne Rich,

"Postscript," 1979

Aphra Behn was an Atlanticist on several levels. She was raised in an international milieu, spoke several languages, traveled the Atlantic to the New World, and was a high level participant in Atlantic politics, economy and culture. Many 21<sup>st</sup> century readers still don't associate these traits with any women, much less 17<sup>th</sup> century women. Even feminist and literary critics who *do* know the few facts of Behn's life side-step the material significance of her Atlanticist attributes as they analyze her work. We often forget that, in Behn's time, Atlantic travel, associations with powerful men, even artistic vocations, were not unheard of among women even if they were unusual for a woman of Behn's class. She was not the first or the only woman to take part in Atlanticist discourse. Puritan Anne Hutchinson, for example, and Margaret Fell Fox, co-founder with her husband George Fox of the Quakers, were both prominent women who claimed physical

and intellectual space in the New World.<sup>27</sup> What they produced in response to their New World encounters certainly deformed patriarchal representational mechanisms. As women in explicitly patriarchal religious social structures, Hutchinson and Fell Fox moved in Williams' cultural model (Chapter 1, figure 1), from coerced gendered assimilation to a self-consciously chosen alternative position relative to the 17<sup>th</sup> century hegemonic center by claiming their voices as humans during 17<sup>th</sup> religious upheavals. Their ecumenizing texts – spoken, written and performed – mediated between the excluded, revolutionary, and oppositional margins and the hegemonic center in a utopic<sup>28</sup> hope for at least reform of dominant patriarchal religious paradigms. Fifty years later, Behn and Merian also chose to mediate in the same liminal cultural space, but in an effort to deform colonialism's representational mechanisms by challenging evolving stereotypical images of the New World.

Like Hutchinson and Fox, Behn and Merian began life as white European women in assimilated and brainwashed regions of Williams's model of culture (Chapter 1, figure 1), contiguous to the hegemonic center. However, Behn and Merian rejected more than the gender limitations into which they were born; they also claimed alternative and oppositional standpoints on race, class, sex, and

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<sup>27</sup> On Hutchinson, see David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*. 2nd ed, Durham, NC, Duke UP, 1990. On Fell Fox, see Bonnelyn Young Kunze, *Margaret Fell and the Rise of Quakerism*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1994, and Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of the Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775*. NYC: Knopf, 1999; and Tolles, Frederick B., *Quakers and the Atlantic Culture*, NYC, Macmillan, 1960.

<sup>28</sup> Rather than "utopian," which carries a much broader meaning that includes locations and delirium, I use the narrower term "utopic," defined by the OED as "That embodies or proposes utopian ideals."  
([http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/cgi/entry/00296133?query\\_type=word&query\\_word=utopic&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&single=1&sort\\_type=alpha](http://dictionary.oed.com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/cgi/entry/00296133?query_type=word&query_word=utopic&first=1&max_to_show=10&single=1&sort_type=alpha))

sexuality. Even in the context of gender, they wrenched themselves free of the gendered moral expectations policed by religious communities to operate professionally on equal footing among men. In doing so, they directly confronted the political and economic forces of the emerging colonial empire. In combination with their personal locations and experience, the ideological turmoil of the Restoration for Behn and the Reformation for Merian facilitated their movement from assimilated and brainwashed young women to alternative and oppositional adults who chose vocations that challenged the "phallusies" of dominant social structures in a utopic hope for change, not just reform.

However, none of these women were revolutionary figures. They did not seek to destroy and replace the current or the emerging social order. They remained alternative and oppositional, reaching to influence the shape of hegemonic things to come while mediating among the surrounding social forces. If they had broken away from or revolted against the hegemonic order – or “crystal” in William’s solution model – they would be unavailable to 21<sup>st</sup> century readers as mediators complicit with their cultural while also working to synthesize alternative structures of feeling into the developing order. Compare, for example, Anne Hutchinson's fate to her co-religionist and neighbor Anne Bradstreet. Hutchinson was declared guilty of heresy in what is now known as the Antinomian Controversy in a trial in which Bradstreet's husband Simon and father Thomas Dudley, deputy governor, participated. Of Hutchinson, Dudley said:

...Mistress Hutchinson from that time she came, hath made a disturbance. ...[she had] vented diverse of her *strange* opinions and had made parties in the country [and] Mistress Hutchinson hath so forestalled the minds of many by their resort to her

meetings that now she hath a potent party in the country. Now, if all these things have endangered us as from that foundation, and if *she* in particular hath disparaged all our ministers in the land that they have preached a covenant of *works*, and only Mr. Cotton a covenant of *grace*, why this is *not* to be suffered. (qtd LaPlante 51)

While Dudley was among Hutchinson's staunchest detractors, Simon Bradstreet, on the other hand, the colony's thirty-three year old secretary, "seemed to offer Anne Hutchinson her first line of support" when he spoke up just once and suggested that she consider abandoning her meetings to protect herself instead of continuing to offend the colony (LaPlante 49). Hutchinson refused to compromise her beliefs and finally was cast out of the colony and forced to move her family, including ten of her twelve children (ages 24-2 yrs) in early spring when "the snow on the ground was thigh deep" (LaPlante 208). Forty-seven and pregnant for the sixteenth and final time herself, Hutchinson walked sixteen miles to Roger Williams's Providence, then traveled by ship to Aquidneck Island where her sixty or so family and followers "lived in pits dug in the ground" until houses were built a few months later. She was forced to move again four years later when the "external" land to which she'd been banished was declared internal to Massachusetts. Now a widow with six dependent children as young as six, she moved into New Amsterdam's Pelham Bay colony in 1641 where, after losing eighty men women and children to a surprise attack by Dutch soldiers, the Siwanoy Indians raided the settlement in desperate revenge. They had issued a warning to the town, planning only to burn the buildings, but Hutchinson felt her "history of good relations with the natives" would protect her, so she ordered her family to stay and go about their business (LaPlante 236). She and all her family

were scalped and burned inside their new home. When news of the massacre arrived in Boston, the response of the church was summed up by Thomas Weld: "Thus the Lord heard our groans to heaven, and freed us from this great and sore affliction" – by which he means Hutchinson (qtd LaPlante 244).<sup>29</sup>

At the time of Hutchinson's trial, "Anne Bradstreet was a twenty-five-year-old mother too busy with three small children to attend the celebrated event just a block from her house" (LaPlante 49). But at twenty-five, motherhood had come frustratingly late, leaving her "time and energy," as Adrienne Rich points out,

...to go on reading and thinking. The Bible was in the air she and everyone else [in the colony] breathed; but she also knew Raleigh's *History of the World*, Camden's *Annals of Queen Elizabeth*, Piers Plowman, Sidney's poems; and she was deeply impressed by Joshua Sylvester's translation of Guillaume Du Bartas' *La Sepmaine du Creation*. ("Introduction" xi)

While these works were solid Puritan fare, they also positioned her to critique and write in conversation with the most celebrated thinkers of her day. For example, Rich reports that Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson and John Milton all responded to du Bartas' *Creation* with critiques and works of their own. The works of Bradstreet

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<sup>29</sup> LaPlante notes that despite her horrifying death, which the Siwonay themselves regretted afterward, their revenge having been intended for the Dutch not Hutchinson's English family, Hutchinson appears in modern culture in some unexpected places. Because of her revered status among both the Siwonay and the local Dutch, the river near her final home was called the Hutchinson River, which generated the name for the Hutchinson River Parkway (239). FDR was her 6<sup>th</sup> great grandson (which means his cousin Eleanor must also have been related), and H. W. and George W. Bush are both descendants as well, being her 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> great grandsons (243). But the most important place where her voice is heard is in the third amendment to the US constitution in 1789: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (qtd LaPlante 235). Williams's Charter of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations is credited with codifying this right, though the 1634 charter of Maryland codified it first. But LaPlante insists that "these words and the underlying concept owe as much to the Hutchinsonians on Aquidneck as to Roger Williams" (235). But my point remains that in none of this do we have direct access to Hutchinson's voice, words or ideas because she was not sufficiently complicit and thus too powerless to warrant publication.

that were spirited to England for publication without her knowledge under the title *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung Up in America*, exhibited, in Rich's estimation, "technical amateurishness, [that was] remarkably impersonal even by Puritan standards" (Rich "Introduction" xiv). In other words, perfect Madame Mediator material: acceptable as women's fare, safe for men to publish.

It was Bradstreet's later work that spoke about her less compliant take on Puritan life, beginning with her first poem after being shown *The Tenth Muse* for the first time. She called it her "rambling brat" and, encouraged by the approbation of the surrounding culture, and yet not remotely satisfied by it, she began to write poetry that challenged what Rich called ten years later "the ambiguities of patronizing compliments from male critics" (Rich xv, xx).<sup>30</sup> Now herself equipped with the imagination and intellectual authority to ask questions that her 1967 Foreword ignored, Rich muses "do the lives of the women of a community change simply because that community migrates to another continent? (The question would have to be asked differently for the poet Phyllis [sic] Wheatley, brought to the 'new world' as a slave.)" (Rich "Introduction" xxi). Indeed it would. And Rich's further question puts the matter even more starkly: "What did the warning of the midwife heretic Anne Hutchinson's fate mean for Anne Bradstreet?" (xxi). Among the things it meant was that Bradstreet knew that her life was literally at stake – not a dead metaphor for Bradstreet – as she considered the question of how to comport herself and how to express herself

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<sup>30</sup> Adrienne Rich's "Postscript" is followed by Hensley's footnote: NOTE: this postscript first appeared in Adrienne Rich's *On Lies, Secrets and Silence* (Norton, 1979). So, the edition of Hensley's edited collection of Bradstreet's work is apparently published after 1979, but there is no indication in the text of when. Amazon shows it as 1981.

when one self was dissonant with another. For she was as sincere and devoted a Christian as she was a dedicated wife to her beloved Simon.

Bradstreet considered these dissonances very very carefully. After seeing her work summarily exposed to the public by a well-meaning but presumptuous brother in law, she began to produce a life that was both complicit enough to preserve for herself the space of a beloved mother and wife within her dangerous Puritan community in a wilderness world, while at the same time expressing enough alternative structures of feeling to push modern poet and critic Rich to conclude her postscript with grateful passion:

Yet they [the feminist questions] were there; unformed. I believe any woman for whom the feminist breaking of silence has been a transforming force can also look back to a time when the faint, improbable outlines of unaskable questions, curling in her brain cells, triggered a shock of recognition at certain lines, phrases, images, in the work of this or that woman, long dead, whose life and experience she could only dimly try to imagine. (xxi)

Rich's 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist structures of feeling had discovered Bradstreet's 17<sup>th</sup> century structures of feeling as "unaskable questions, curling in her brain cells" because Bradstreet's work had been both complicit and rebellious (xxi). In order to push through patriarchal policing into cultural circulation visible both in their own time and to modern readers now, women writers like Behn had to be sufficiently complicit with patriarchal hegemonic structures – they had to form sufficient social bonds – to achieve publication and production. They had to publish or seem to perish. After all, if they didn't comply sufficiently, their mediations were then relegated to the erased and forgotten past, which, as we academics know, amounts to death – sometimes literally as well as literarily.

That these women writers achieved privileged locations as fully invested adults indicates their success in this balancing act. Like Madame Mediator, they were allowed access to dominant circles of power and also to marginalized and revolutionary circles. Like molecules on the surface of a crystal in solution, their locations as women marginalized on the exterior of the dominant social matrices positioned them to engage with marginalized, alternative, resistant and revolutionary structures of feeling circulating at close range. Through their class, sexuality, race and religion, they had access both to the patriarchal castle and to the women's convent of pleasure and intellect. Behn and, as we shall see in following chapters, Merian were Madame Mediators looking out into the cultural solution for freely circulating structures of feeling with which to deform it.

### *Atlanticism – the container of western culture*

Before exploring Behn's life as an Atlanticist, I need to explain one more element of Williams' metaphor of solution: the container that holds the solution. If the solution is culture, then what is the container? When chemistry speaks of a container, of course it usually means a glass container. The chemical properties of glass prevent chemical reactions between the container and most solutions. Such reactions would change the physical properties of the container – allowing it to rust, rot or dissolve as iron, wood and paper more readily do – forming new substances that might then affect the solution. While typically not useful in lab

research, such container/solution exchange is not always negative or unpredictable. It is a welcome feature, for example, of oak-cured wines and whiskeys in which both the whiskey and the barrel are refined.<sup>31</sup> Welcome or not, exchange between container and solution is an important feature of Williams's analogy of culture as solution, since the container is analogous to geography or region and is profoundly interactive with the solution – i.e. with culture. Like a sherry wood whiskey cask, region has its own history as well as its own properties that change through interaction with culture. Paul Gilroy<sup>32</sup> examines this relationship in *The Black Atlantic*, his recontextualization of western culture as transnational and as geographically centered in the Atlantic region and not any more limited to the rigid national borders and cultural structures of Europe and, eventually, New World nations than they were to the political and cultural borders of indigenous people in Africa or the pre-Columbian Americas.

The vehicle – metaphorically and literally – for Paul Gilroy's recontextualization is the fraught image of the European merchant and navy ships crisscrossing the Atlantic from the 1490's onward. Paul Gilroy's term "the Black Atlantic" is based on this image and its horrific role in the African diaspora throughout the region as a constituent element of Atlantic cultural formation.

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<sup>31</sup> "The character of Scotch whisky is much influenced by the manner in which it is matured. Chief among the factors in this connexion is the nature of the cask employed. The main varieties are plain wood, sherry and refill casks. Technically the term "plain" wood is applied to a cask made from seasoned oak which has contained no other liquor than whisky. Similarly the term "sherry" wood is as a rule only applied to a cask the wood of which has become impregnated with sherry by contact with that wine, and which has not been used in any other manner. A sherry cask which has been filled with whisky, then emptied and "refilled" with whisky, is known as a "refill." Brandy and Madeira " wood " are also occasionally employed."

[http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/WAT\\_WIL/WHISKY\\_or\\_WHISKEY.html](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/WAT_WIL/WHISKY_or_WHISKEY.html) accessed 5/31/2006 alh

<sup>32</sup> Since I am using texts by both Paul Gilroy and his mother Beryl Gilroy, I will refer to them as P. Gilroy and Beryl Gilroy.

Building on Bakhtin's concept, Gilroy calls this ship image a chronotope, which is a unit of cultural analysis based on time and space that provides or facilitates an ex-ray view of the cultural forces at work in the cultural context of the text (Gilroy P 4, 225 n. 2) The ship chronotope circulates in the Atlantic like molecules of social substance swirling as solute in the solvent. Paul Gilroy and fellow cultural theorists Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh describe each ship as a coherent community with its own language variations, rituals, traditions and economy. The bonds among the individuals on such ships are analogous to the intramolecular atomic bonds in a very complex molecule – i.e. London forces – carrying with it from one crystalline shore to another structures of feeling that resolve and dissolve social material it encounters there. Archives from these chronotopes enable a more ecumenical view of the Atlantic region they traverse.

While Paul Gilroy's analysis seems caught in North Atlantic currents, the container of western culture consists of the "nations" on four continents contiguous to both north and south Atlantic oceans and all the land masses between or within Atlantic shores. The territory is as coherent as Europe itself, and thus challenges the nationalist assumptions of the European context. In this way, Atlanticism is more than a regional designation that invokes a hierarchy of bordered spaces: continent, territory, nation, state, county, city, home. Paul Gilroy explains that rather than focusing on "cultural nationalism" (4) and "an absolute sense of ethnic difference" that nationalism often produces (3), he is interested in "the rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural, international formation" (4). He challenges the racial and ethnic absolutism typical of nationalist discourse

and claims that just as the biological borders of race have always been permeable so the boundaries of nation and culture are as permeable and fluid as the shifting ocean shores. Through this more comprehensive model, "cultural historians could take the Atlantic as one single, complex unit of analysis in their discussions of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (Gilroy P 15). Similarly, feminist literary critics could and have reread women's literature in such a rhizomatic context to detect circulating structures of feeling often made invisible by linguistic and national categories.

### **Behn's Life**

Though sparse, Behn's biography places her squarely in the Atlantic region where her intellectual imperative originates. Based on biographer Janet Todd's exhaustive and widely accepted research, Aphra Behn was born Eaffrey Johnson on December 14, 1640, in "Harbledown, a village of under 200 inhabitants just outside Canterbury, known for its asylum for the disabled poor" (Todd J. 14).<sup>33</sup> Her father, Bartholomew, was a "barber" or perhaps "a barber surgeon," who "met many people, could know the world, and might meet the immigrants who came to and through Kent, the French Huguenots or Protestants who wove silk and made paper, French-speaking Walloons from the Low Countries [i.e. Holland] and even the Dutch religious refugees who settled in

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<sup>33</sup> Janet Todd J. is cited as "Todd J." while Kim Todd (mostly in the Merian chapters) is cited as "Todd K."

nearby Sandwich” (Todd J. 16). Through her father, Behn was immediately immersed in linguistic and cultural diversity, including the milieu of Maria Sibylla Merian's mother Johanna, a Walloon refugee in Frankfurt.

Behn's adult access to aristocratic social connections begins with her mother, Elizabeth Denham, whose younger brother, George, was an Oxford educated physician. He disdained his sister for lowering her status to marry a barber,<sup>34</sup> but her vocation as a wetnurse preserved her aristocratic social relationships. Being a wetnurse was a much higher calling than we think of today, thanks to 19<sup>th</sup> century portrayals of wetnurses as dirty scrounging women.<sup>35</sup> In particular, her mother's wetnursing established young Behn as "foster sister" to Thomas Colepepper whose mother was Barbara Sydney, from a family that married into aristocracy. Through these ties, Behn had the run of the Colepepper estate and Penshurst on many occasions, and thus had access not only to this rarified social environment but also to its libraries. Todd points out that Behn's grasp of "classical languages, history, philosophy and comparative religions" indicates some kind of experience like this (Todd J. 28). Todd sees these events manifested literarily in *The Lucky Mistake* in the character of Vernole and literally throughout her entire adult life, particularly through the relationship with her foster-brother (Todd J. 28). Todd also notes that whether Behn traversed the halls

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<sup>34</sup> Todd J. notes that "the adult Aphra may have returned the disdain: throughout her life she inveighed against the foolish arrogant students of Oxford who mistook a little learning for sense" (15).

<sup>35</sup> For example, Jemima's wet nurse in Wollestonecraft's *Maria: or the Wrongs of Woman* (1797); Mrs. Mann who runs the first workhouse, really a baby farm that Oliver Twist is placed in after his mother dies (1838). The "baby farms" in Victorian England were notorious places where unwanted babies were dropped off to enterprising (desperate) women who fed them as well as they could, or consumed the children's fees and fed the children gruel or simply starved the children. Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens both railed against them. On baby farming, see Haller, Dorothy, "Bastardy and Baby Farming in Victorian England."

of Penshurst or of her foster brother's home in Sturry nearer her birth home, she acquired a definite proto-Restoration taste for aristocratic extravagance and liberal living (Todd J. 30).

Behn's home county of Kent was a region criss-crossed by immigrants and royalty running to and returning from exile, trailing political foment. Todd J. asserts that Behn:

...was unmoved by [Kent's] political traditions that made much of its settlement by Jutes rather than Saxons and of its independent history. Though it supposed itself to be full of heroic, liberty-loving people, it bred few important republicans of the sort Aphra Behn might have found heroic and it showed its libertarian spirit mostly by avoiding taxes and disobeying the Puritan injunctions to ignore Christmas and stop cock-fighting. (Todd J. 18)

Though Todd seems to dismiss the importance of Kentish politics on Behn, the effects of growing up around such upheaval appears throughout Behn's works. She was twelve when Charles I was beheaded, to the great relief of the populace. This relief turned to terror as they saw the great Cathedral of Canterbury vandalized and ruined by Puritan roundheads, like "popish" Catholic and Anglican churches throughout the land (Todd J. 11). Behn was twenty-one when Charles II was restored to the enormous relief of a population eager again for the relative freedom of subjection to a king. For Behn, this was the exact age span from which to respond to great events with sweeping romantic idealism. "In this festive time, young Aphra may have been one of the maidens who strewed herbs along the leisurely royal route through Kent and wondered at the height and swarthinness of the new King. ...she was transfixed in a posture of admiration that she never publicly changed" (Todd J. 11). I submit that she did publicly challenge

her king, but not with direct critique. That would have ended her career rather abruptly. Behn's romantic and conflicted notions about monarchy can be traced to these traumatic events as she tried to work out through literature the continual dissonance of her professional interactions with monarchical government – including spying.

This dissonance also appears in Behn's relationship to religion. True to her Kentish libertarian upbringing, her rejection of Puritanism for its hypocrisy was accompanied by a wistful romantic attachment to Catholicism. Her early experience at the edges of aristocratic circles foreclosed any temptation to deploy femininity through piety in order to gain access to masculine arenas, as Anne Bradstreet and others did.<sup>36</sup> Todd J. notes that Behn's attraction to Catholicism was likely shaped by these excesses of Puritan destruction and starkness:

Paintings, lamps, stars, and male charms – it was not exactly piety. Aphra loved the intrigue, the naughtiness, the finery, the ceremony, the sensual mystique, the scandal of what Puritanism had tried to eradicate in her home country. If she were on a spying mission, she would already have been showing her bent towards the unlawful in the terms of her own nation; she would have found Catholicism equally appealing because forbidden. (Todd J. *Life* 32)

It was sensuality and naughtiness that drew Behn to Catholic ritual, that gave her a sense of what liberty could be and what it ought to permit, even celebrate, instead of criminalizing, pathologizing and punishing – a structure of feeling, if you will, of liberty as it would come to be defined, a liberty at war with the monarchy she loved and romanticized.

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<sup>36</sup> See Charlotte Gordon's *Mistress Bradstreet: The Untold Life of America's First Poet*, 2005. Also, Todd J. writes, "Some [women] managed to form the link [between femininity and piety] into a kind of subverting force, but Behn was not among these; she disliked Puritans far too much to emulate or use them" (Todd J. 32).

Behn's adult life is only slightly more documented than her early life, as Todd repeatedly reminds her readers, and what we know is portrayed only in Behn's literature. Even so, Todd's "collateral" research into people and conflicts around Behn provides compelling assertions. Since Behn was a skilled handwriter<sup>37</sup> when she first arrived in London, where "there was a huge industry of such work," Todd concludes that Behn spent her first years there as a copy girl, analogue to a modern typist (Todd J. 21). In this role, Behn met educated and powerful people and, most importantly, other writers. Todd's evidence also suggests that Behn was a favorite of brothers King Charles II and James, Duke of York, though she was never allowed at court. In her biography of Behn, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, Maureen Duffy concludes that Behn was present when James escaped plague-ridden London for Yorkshire where Behn socialized with courtiers, including the Duke of Buckingham. Charles, ten years older than Behn, was a prolific womanizer (Todd J. 150)<sup>38</sup> and Behn was a beautiful and vivacious young woman circulating on the court's margins with little to protect her but her wits. Todd reports that twenty-four year old Behn "had an audience with the King [Charles II] upon her return, to report on Suriname," a very unusual occurrence for a woman of her class, which supports both the spy and mistress theories (Todd J. 71). Duffy asserts stoutly that Behn had offers from both Charles II and brother

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<sup>37</sup> Many more people in this period could read than could write because these skills were taught separately. See Gordon: "Most Puritan women could read, since everyone wanted them to be able to study Scripture for themselves, but fewer could actually shape their own letters" (36). And note 11 for this page: "...see Halls' *Worlds of Wonder*, especially 32-33" (291).

<sup>38</sup> Todd makes a connection between Prince Frederick in *The Amorous Prince* and Charles II's pursuit of Francis Stewart, who angered him with her rejection. With Todd's hints of Behn's own rejection of mistress-hood, one wonders whether Behn also felt the sting of a monarch's anger. Todd does note "Behn's irritation with a king who had abandoned her penniless, whilst wasting the nation's substance on expensive mistresses" (150).

James to be a royal mistress but refused them (71).<sup>39</sup> Duffy writes "I think she gained the attention of James and of George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham, and that it's to this period she refers in the poem 'On Desire'" (71).<sup>40</sup> Her life-long devotion to James and his brother, and her despair over their actions, spring from this period.

Considering these tangled high-placed connections, it's not all that surprising that before she turned twenty-five "Aphra Behn was a professional spy, code-named Astrea and agent 160, before she became a professional writer" (Todd J. 5). In fact, it seems logical that Behn spied for the king prior to the well-documented mission to Holland if she was chosen for that delicate mission. Todd J. argues convincingly that the trip to Suriname was one of those prior missions.<sup>41</sup> In fact one wonders if her trip to York with James's retinue included some covert action as well. In any case, soon after returning from Suriname in 1664, she was sent by Charles II to Antwerp via the network of spies and operatives in which her foster-brother, royalist Thomas Culpepper, participated, "a vast army of such people" who answered "to the King's chancellor in exile, Edward Hyde"(Todd J. 30). As part of her cover, Behn took with her her mother, Elizabeth, and her younger brother George. Their upkeep caused her expenses to skyrocket just as Charles II withdrew his funding of her mission. She borrowed money from

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<sup>39</sup> Duffy writes "There was an alternative [to marriage]: she could be a 'miss,' a mistress. She rejected that too...If James, Duke of York, or George, Duke of Buckingham, had offered at York, it must have been this that was offered."

<sup>40</sup> Duffy quotes the poem:

Where wert thou, oh, malicious spright,  
When shining Honour did invite?  
When interest call'd then thou went shy...  
When Princes at my feet did lye.  
When thou could'st mix ambition with thy joy...

<sup>41</sup> I deal with the Suriname trip in some detail below.

Edward Butler to fund her family's return to England, but was jailed for debt when she was unable to repay the debt. Her experience in Antwerp of being abandoned by king and country to debt and poverty was deeply disillusioning and she was never granted an audience again with Charles II.<sup>42</sup> As a consequence, to follow her life trajectory of intrigue and exploration, she turned to self-employment through her pen. Duffy writes: "Once she was out [of debtors' prison], the problem of how to survive presented itself again. She could marry. She could be kept. Or she could try to keep herself. Incredibly, it must have seemed to many people, she chose the last" (100).

Todd conceives of Behn's life as a receding series of masks necessitated by the fact that "Secrecy is endemic to the Restoration, a period badly documented and given to covering traces when these traces hinted at complicated disloyalties" (Todd J. 1). It was also a period capped by a "bloodless" revolution, so-called because no armies were pitted against one another. Nevertheless, plenty of brutal murders, torturings, executions and assassinations occurred, not to mention deaths by starvation and illness in debtor's prisons when, as happened to Behn after Antwerp, wages were not paid. For Behn, there was nothing abstract or extreme in Oroonoko's grotesque execution or in the possibility of herself being abducted as an Ottoman slave or in the threat of being caught as a spy and tortured to death. If, as Todd asserts, Behn's "one certain activity" in this dangerous period was espionage, then the challenges of "being and seeming"<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> J. Todd writes "She had desperately wanted to be of the court of Charles II...[but] All her efforts had been abortive" (411).

<sup>43</sup> I encountered this phrase in Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Miriam*. For Cary's Miriam, "being and seeming" should coincide: "I cannot frame disguise, no never taught/ My face a look dissenting

were life and death issues for her, not abstracts of philosophy. She wrote her reports in cipher, says Todd, and this practice continued into her writing in which "the black slave Oroonoko may stand in for the white king, the male aristocrat for the female hack writer" (Todd J. 5). Indeed, keeping in mind her spying missions and the extremities of betrayal they taught her, many complicated explorations are probably encoded in her work.

After returning to London and recovering from her losses in Antwerp without the help of foster-brother or king, Behn lived the rest of her life in London, writing and scrabbling in the theater world right up to the end. That period of her life is the best documented and, for my purpose here, less interesting than the period before she began to write professionally because it is upon these early experiences that she builds the ideology that informs her work, as we shall see in the next chapter. When she died in 1689, she was only 49 years old and had traveled further, had seen more, could converse in more languages and had innovated in more ways than almost any learned and powerful man in Europe of her time.

### *Challenges to Atlanticism*

Paul Gilroy's concept of "the black Atlantic" is very useful to me in understanding Behn's experience, but it's not likely that he intended this use of his

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from my thought" (4.4.145-6). As *Miriam* shows, this moral stand carries life and death consequences in a politically volatile context.

idea. Like Toni Morrison, Paul Gilroy sees race-based slavery as "internal to the structure of western civilization" as a "central political and philosophical concept" (Gilroy, P 9). Morrison wrote: "The concept of freedom did not emerge in a vacuum. Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery" (38). Despite the devastating truth in Morrison's and Paul Gilroy's claims, European enslavement of West Africans did not create freedom. The Enlightenment did. And despite feminist and anti-racist critiques of the Enlightenment – most richly deserved – the Enlightenment did not create slavery. It abolished it. It is true that the brutality of white Christian Europe's enslavement of West Africans in the Atlantic is an appalling betrayal of rational humanist ideals espoused by the Enlightenment. But abolition, not slavery, was the product of those ideals. Slavery – especially European enslavement of West Africans in the colonial period – was a betrayal that is at best a result of irrational UNenlightened approaches to cultural common wealth.

While no white Christian European is yet exempt from some level of complicity in this intercontinental multi-century tragedy, the tragedy is a product of contending economic and political forces in Europe and throughout the Atlantic region. Only in hindsight does it resemble a monolithic single-minded European plot. What makes it monolithic is not the phenotype-based racism that was its most overt trait, but the far more powerful and insidious trait that racism facilitated: capitalist profit-making. Like slavery itself, profit, greed and imperial imperatives were not unique to Europe, but 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe hit upon an economic system that, through the incorporation of racist and sexist structures of

feeling into hegemonic cultural structures, served greed particularly well. My claim in no way seeks exoneration for Europe or transfer of any responsibility for this history to Africans or "economic forces" or any other scapegoat. My claim is an attempt to build on Paul Gilroy's own ecumenical move to look beyond European-imposed concepts of nation to see more clearly the forces at work in Atlantic culture. Despite its many flaws and abuses – its illogical binaries, its obsession with categories and naming, its false universalizations – I contend that Enlightenment ideals regarding the value of the individual that triggered revolutions for liberty around the North Atlantic also informed "blacks in the West [who] eavesdropped on and then took over a fundamental question from the intellectual obsessions of their enlightened rulers" (Gilroy, P 39). While Gilroy's sarcasm seeks to separate "blacks in the West" from "their enlightened rulers" in order to emphasize that "blacks" were considered outside western Enlightenment by those rulers and that "blacks" therefore were forced to develop their own philosophical genealogy on these questions – a fact that his book sets out to establish and examine – the fact of the connection remains with "the ambiguous intellectual traditions of the European Enlightenment which have, at different moments, been both a lifeline and a fetter" (Gilroy, P 30).

So what? In order to get at the alternative social material in my subject authors, I need to draw Paul Gilroy's "circle" a little wider than he does. I do this by pulling from his expansive analysis of the imposed category of "black" on the West African diasporic population one element of the reading strategy he proposes and apply it to women writers: the recognition that they are both inside

and outside the hegemonic cultural structure and that neither the insider or outsider designations are their choice. Furthermore, despite the lack of choice in their position relative to the hegemony, they form with modulating success a genealogy of alternative, oppositional and generally non-hegemonic cultural strategies, traditions and artifacts. And finally that the cultural material they generate is made much more visible when they are examined in the wider realm in which at least some of them moved. Recovery of their cultural material promises alternative approaches to race that could be useful to us now.

So, as Paul Gilroy frames it and as I use it, Atlantic culture is roughly coterminous with western culture – but western culture extends far beyond European culture. Beginning with the 18<sup>th</sup> century revolutionary writings of Burke and other Europeans, Paul Gilroy explains how western ideals of beauty and sublimity were built upon the distinction between white Europeans and people of color. Enlightenment discourses of beauty, truth, virtue, etc, were precursors to the discourses of cultural studies generated in and by the Atlantic region; thus cultural studies must always be examined for the racism, sexism, classism and nationalism – even culturalism – that was the co-parent with discourses of truth, beauty, and virtue. Similarly, feminism was initially organized and theorized by white bourgeois women, the only people privileged enough to have sufficient leisure and energy. Thus feminism, too, must always be challenged for its racist blindnesses despite all the anti-racist theorizing and intentions. The extent to which social structures and innovations are situated in the "Enlightenment's ideological and political" heritage, they risk taking insufficient account of

“various discontinuities...with the decentered and inescapably plural nature of modern subjectivity and identity” (Gilroy, P 46-7). Even when the white European Enlightenment tries to open itself to non-white and/or non-European points of view and standpoints, it does so on the “assumption of symmetrical intersubjectivity” (Gilroy, P 47). Because of hegemonic, political, ideological, social and economic structures, this assumption is clearly false and clear especially to people of color and non-Europeans – and, at least partially, clear to women, including white European women. At the same time, all theorists must recognize that it is the cultural take on race, not race *qua* race, that causes categories of people to develop standpoints and/or points of view based on phenotypic designations. Then we extend the racist categorization to whatever the “race” produces. As Paul Gilroy suggests, “The key to comprehending this [complexity] lies not in the overhasty separation of the cultural forms particular to both groups into some ethnic typology but in a detailed and comprehensive grasp of their complex interpenetration” (Gilroy, P 48). In other words, we obscure potentially important cultural material if we insist on assigning presuming that colonizers’ texts always exploit and appropriate and the colonized’s texts always resist and that either achievement is always good or always bad. While we can’t assume a “symmetrical intersubjectivity,” and ignore the material effects of power imbalances, we also cannot assume that individuals on either side of the imbalance will always react in any particular way or only that particular way. As Paul Gilroy observes, “the intellectual and cultural achievements of the black Atlantic populations exist partly inside and not always against the grand narrative

of Enlightenment and its operational principles" (Gilroy, P 48). Beyond interdependence, categories of people must be analyzed through an even more profound dialectic of interpenetration

With this caution in mind, I was troubled when Paul Gilroy seemed to chide Habermas for believing that the trouble with the Enlightenment project is simply that it is incomplete, ill-applied, and has not yet lived up to its political and philosophical promises. Paul Gilroy seemed at that point to be suggesting that the project is its flaws and incompleteness (Gilroy, P 49). But that view reduces the Enlightenment to a completed social structure existing only in the past. It forecloses the contending structures of feeling that Williams describes in every movement and brackets off the present tense effects of particular historical moments in the current movement, saying in effect that a social movement is no more than its failures and mistakes. In "Journeying to Death: a Critique of Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*," Laura Chrisman is concerned with several limitations that crop up in Paul Gilroy's detailed explanations of his central idea and the ways in which they contradict and weaken it. Her criticism centers on a charge that Paul Gilroy's supporting arguments are essentially negative and take no account of the positive potential that his overall formulation releases. She writes, "While Gilroy's whole *oeuvre* is animated by a rejection of what he sees as the reductively absolutist, vanguardist, exclusivist, and essentialized-purist currents of ethnic nationalism and economistic socialism, I want to suggest that the counter-model Gilroy presents, of an outer-national, hybrid blackness, itself rests on many of the same assumptions" (Chrisman 83).

Chrisman's charge manifests in three ways. First, she notes that Paul Gilroy claims that only art provides an authentic outlet for black expression, bracketing off politics and economics as the realm of bourgeois thinking and fantasies into which black people are drawn. Chrisman would rather see Gilroy "explore the significance of mixed race intellectuals and cultural texts" as a way to "counter Afrocentric nationalism" (88). She's right! And, in the end, Gilroy agrees with her. In his very last paragraph he notes that his goal in calling for a closer examination of black "expressive, vernacular cultures" that survive European enslavement of West Africans in the New World is in order to:

...figure the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity, and intermixture en route to better theories of racism and of black political culture than those so far offered by cultural absolutists of various phenotypical hues. ...The history of black in the West and the social movements that have affirmed and rewritten that history can provide a lesson which is not restricted to blacks. (Gilroy, P 223)

This utopic hope for a consideration of hybridity is crucial to Paul Gilroy since his mother, Guyanan novelist and teacher Beryl Gilroy, is exactly the kind of person whose position he is exploring and exactly the kind of person she gave birth to in him with his white father: "successive generations of black intellectuals" (Gilroy, P 2). The problem is a chiasmus: mixed race people like Paul Gilroy are called and treated as blacks – i.e. as not among whites; but when African-descended people claim the political unity of that imposed category, the surrounding racist culture calls their cultural products "hybrid" and appropriates them, leaving the categorized people themselves bracketed off as not hybrid, as black, as "not among whites." US culture, for example, still struggles to recognize the concept

of mixed race, even though virtually no individual is of any single race no matter how race is defined. The standards of the one drop rule circulate widely as a virulent residual structure of feelings about race in the US. It is imposed on black populations in the US and also internalized by them as internalized racism (being too black) and as standards of authenticity (being too white). My own students tell me that even very light-skinned – i.e. almost pure Spanish – Puerto Rican students are treated as people of color on US campuses, especially by US students of color, while dark-skinned people from Cape Verde are treated as blacks in the US rather than as ethnic Portuguese as they identify themselves. As Raymond Williams constructs structures of feeling, Paul Gilroy's assertion seems quite logical: for the group still designated "black," art is the most immediate and effective medium through which to challenge unarticulated residual racist structures of feeling that are material evidence of less overt racist underpinnings of social and economic systems through which certain racial groups continue to be disadvantaged. But Paul Gilroy's fuller point is that a politics of race in which diasporic Africans deploy identity politics and strategic essentialism too often works against the anti-racist social and political changes they seek. Forming a multi-racial multi-cultural society requires abandoning political practices that reinforce, reinscribe and reinvigorate differences constructed on racist fallacies. However, in the face of continued overt and insidious institutional and systemic racism, understanding that development requires a quantum leap through art into political activism and economic production within as well as transcending the national culture they find themselves in.

That brings me to Chrisman's second critique: that Paul Gilroy presumes an unbreachable divide between nationalism and internationalism. She asserts that he favors the latter exclusively, seeing only negative effects of nationalism on blacks – both the racist nationalism of white dominated nations and the racialized nationalism of Black Nationalist movements – ignoring the potential positive effects. By doing so, he brackets off the dialectic relationship between nationalism and internationalism – for example that the latter can't exist without the former. In this logic, internationalism reinscribes rather than dissolves nationalism. Moreover, in Chrisman's view:

...because his definition of this emancipatory black diasporism repudiates the potential resources of nationalism and socialism, and proceeds by way of positing absolute antinomies between these respective value systems, Gilroy's formulations become necessarily self-enclosed, hermetically sealed off, resistant to dialogism, dialectical transformation and cross fertilization. 'The Black Atlantic' becomes, despite its immense potential, an exclusive club liner, populated by 'mandarin' and 'masses' hand-picked by Gilroy, bound for death. ...His denunciation [of national categories] rests, I think, on a fatalism – there ain't no black in the union jack and there never can be – which ironically operates to leave such racially exclusive nationalism intact rather than capable of being challenged from within, the more so as he rightly sees the right and left united here. ...Gilroy's analysis replicates the cultural determinism that he ascribes to cultural nationalists by presupposing an unchangeable homogeneity of white British ideology. (84-5)

Chrisman's critique demonstrates Paul Gilroy's original point: that any analysis made within western culture of itself partakes of the failures of western culture. Yet even if Paul Gilroy rejects nationalism on principle more than on logical analysis, he insists convincingly that a nationalism that has been used by empire to brutalize and erase diasporic Africans should not be trusted to emancipate

them. However, "should not be trusted" is quite different from "should not be engaged with." No nation state should ever be trusted to operate on behalf of the good of the commonwealth because that trust leads to complacency among the middle class and impunity among its leaders. But this imperative doesn't require the destruction of the state. Indeed, the only way for the state to benefit the commonwealth is if the people do not trust it and thus constantly work within it to aim its power toward the good. The state is an abstract with material effects carried out by its people. In the US, with its new black president, we finally begin to see some "good" results from the work of African Americans who joined the nation state's systems as mediators, obtaining by degrees the cultural, political and economic capital to bend and change the state to include "blacks" in the state's definition of citizen. As this process continues in the US – a process vastly speeded up by Obama's election – blackness will be increasingly indecipherable to culture and hybridity will replace – at long last – the false and brittle "purity" that Enlightenment obsessions created.

Finally, Chrisman notes that Gilroy, "a big fan of utopianism," is willing on one hand to deploy it "solely with outer-national cultural impulses," but that, on the other hand, he refuses utopianism to Black Nationalism, along with any positive reading of it. One such positive reading, according to Chrisman, could be "an affirmation of an idealized pure African heritage to which black Americans rightfully belong, and through which they can transcend socio-economic disadvantage" (86). While black utopianism might have "a critical as well as affirmative relationship to white racist hegemony," Chrisman asks that it also be

remembered "that Afrocentrism has gained popularity amongst a wide range of black institutions and communities in the context of ever-worsening socio-economic crisis for black Americans (in 1997), in which white racial paranoias and hostilities toward black minorities seem to be intensifying" (Chrisman 86). This direct correlation between growing African American social success and economic failure may be causal, but this is precisely Paul Gilroy's point. Diasporic Africans in the Atlantic are not served by a utopianism that obscures conditions and the requirements for improving them.

Despite the efforts of Garvey and the Afro-centrists, transcendence of the black community was not been produced by an idealized heritage. Socio-economic disadvantage of Africans compared to Europeans has existed for a long time. Blacks experienced very little increase in socio-economic well-being until the Civil Rights movement in the 60's and 70's began a wave of social changes that have finally led to an increased black middle class in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. The changes took place within the African American community first, where black power was discovered circulating within the nation's borders. Leading feminist and other social justice resistance movements, the Black Power and Civil Rights movements caused crucial institutional changes – the Civil Rights Act, the Fair Pay Act, the Voting Rights Act – that cracked open the sluice gates for systemic and economic cultural changes. More African American men and women entered college and professions – especially teaching – positioning more and more African Americans to join the middle, intellectual and upper classes.

To the extent that utopianism is irrational (as it is by definition), it can become a distraction from the cultural work marginalized populations need to do for themselves. For diasporic Africans, that work is to understand themselves not as a potential nation or as defined culturally by any particular nation, but as a diasporic culture that is forcibly kept outside of national systems and nation states. Chrisman's resistant term "outer-national" as opposed to international is useful here. On that point, I absolutely agree with her that "to posit nationalism and outer- or trans-nationalism as mutually incompatible political goals, cultural values, and analytic perspectives is, I suspect, less productive than to see them as interdependent" (Chrisman 87). But the example of Paul Gilroy's own mother, Beryl Gilroy, poses the question of objective. What do "real blacks" want? Even perceived as a broad outer-national culture, the black Atlantic is composed of as varied a population as is the US. Can this diverse population that contains widely divergent histories relative to European enslavement of West Africans – including West African descended people who themselves owned slaves in the New World – share one monolithic cultural object relative to any nation state? The hybrid and marginalized experience of diasporic Africans has been so obscured and trivialized by the nationalist forces of nation-states that to posit nationalism as any more than minimally compatible with what could be organized into the political goals of diasporic Africans was certainly counter-productive when Paul Gilroy wrote *The Black Atlantic* in 1993 and when Chrisman challenged him in 1997. Only now, in 2006, is it useful to begin thinking utopically about cultural

conditions for diasporic Africans and for the Atlantic region in general. But the answer is very unlikely to be a utopic separatist reformation of an African nation.

Chrisman worries that:

...the way in which [Gilroy] conceptualized the Black Atlantic is one which makes totalizing claims for itself, so that the identity and experience of New World slave-descended black people is somehow, by default, seen to contain or represent all modern black experience. Slavery is consistently accorded a primacy which colonialism is not, be that primacy in constituting black identity and culture or in serving as a structural/ontological deconstructor of Enlightenment modernity" (88-9).

To the extent that Paul Gilroy universalizes all black experience as New World slave-descended, he is wrong. And to the extent that he reduces the Atlantic experience of European imperialism to slavery, he is also wrong. Yet, to the extent that he asserts that New World slavery affects all modern black experience, he is right. And the Atlantic construct illustrates why. Chrisman wants Gilroy to at least leave space in his claims for what she apparently sees as a "black colonialism" that is distinct from New World slavery. I agree that among even enslaved Africans, there remained structures of feeling about liberty that are distinct from European structures of feeling about liberty: the freedom to fly back "home" to Africa upon death; the freedom to suicide to attain that end; even the freedom to kill a beloved to forestall the brutality – concrete and abstract – of enslavement. There must be other forms of liberty that the lack (so far) of archives obscures. But on what terms would that distinction be made? Certainly, the experiences of black people who remained in Africa under European colonialism are different from that of black people caught up in New World

slavery. Thus the experiences of their descendents are also different. But the difference is no greater in degree than the difference between Phillis Wheatley's experience in New World slavery and Mary Prince's or Oroonoko's, or Frederick Douglass's.<sup>44</sup> More important than the distinctions are the connections that compel Paul Gilroy's title. The whole reason for European colonization of West and South Africa was labor – slave labor for three centuries followed by wage-slave labor followed by economic colonization that creates a climate in which Africans feel compelled to enslave each other once again. These connections that are still so dominant justify Paul Gilroy's accordance of primacy to New World slavery. However, if there is anything distinct about the art and music of a people, it doesn't come from diaspora or slavery alone. Others were diasporic (Jews, Armenians), others were enslaved (indigenous people, Europeans, women) and others besides Europeans – including Africans – were enslavers.<sup>45</sup> That means then that what makes the art of African-descended people unique is more than the particular combination of experiences of enslavement and colonization but also includes structures of feeling about their African heritage. And these structures of feeling will differ widely depending on where post-middle passage African-descended people have lived.

While Chrisman's three critiques usefully complicate Paul Gilroy's concept of the black Atlantic, they led her to charge that Gilroy illogically claims

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<sup>44</sup> See Phillis Wheatley, *Complete Writings*, Vincent Caretta, ed. NYC: Penguin, 2001; *The Classic Slave Narratives*. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed. NYC: Mentor, 1987, including "The Life of Olaudah Equiano," "The History of Mary Prince," "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass," and "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" about Harriet Jacobs. Also see Vincent Caretta's *oeuvre* of slave narratives in the bibliography below.

<sup>45</sup> See Linda Colley's *Captives*.

that black subjectivity is both rejected by modernity and shaped by it: "Gilroy seems at once to assert that slaves' holistic subjectivity is both something that they had to struggle to hold on to against the pressure of modernity's compartmentalizing imperatives *and* that this holism is something bequeathed to them by the very experience of modernity itself" (90). But Paul Gilroy is quite logical on this point. Modernity is precisely this paradox of progressive human ideals and brutal misapplications of them. To put a positive spin on Morrison's claim that " Nothing highlighted freedom – if it did not in fact create it – like slavery," the structures of feeling that the dissonance between being rejected and being shaped by modernity put into motion is the force that precipitated social change all across the Atlantic region regarding slavery and – very very eventually – race difference (38). The price of cultural progress toward anti-racism has been only barely justified by an outcome that is still fragile and far from fully manifest. The Enlightenment called for an end to slavery and other forms of human injustice, but in order to hear its own cry and justify its own actions in the face of contending social forces like racism, sexism and capitalist exploitation, it had to compile – in part by creating – horrifying evidence of human suffering. If modernity's concept of human subjectivity was not granted by white patriarchal males to those they designated as their property – women, children, and people of color, in particular Africans – the actual humanity of these oppressed people became obvious to themselves through their own interpretation of Enlightenment ideals. Thus they clearly understood that Enlightenment concepts of human subjectivity did in fact apply to them – understood it at first only as structures of

feeling resistant to hegemonic patriarchal exploitation – and that the Enlightenment actually built a case precisely for the subjectivity of the subaltern, despite what its privileged authors thought they were doing. Do such people have to struggle to hold onto their holistic sense of their own humanity against the pressure of modernity's compartmentalizing imperatives? History says they had to and did. Contemporary cultural theory says they still do.

### *Behn's path to Suriname*

Just as this dissonance Paul Gilroy examines really begins to heat up in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century, Aphra Behn, now in her early twenties, took on what Todd suggests was the latest of several spy missions for her king, Charles II. In answer to the lengthy controversy over whether Behn actually traveled to Suriname, Todd offers detailed evidence for the credibility of Behn's claims in *Oroonoko*.<sup>46</sup> Todd concludes that "she seems to have set off with her full family of mother, sister, younger brother and maids. They were useful in giving her respectability and covering her activities" as a spy for the king (45). Todd finds evidence of Behn's family in Suriname – and their social effect – in a letter Deputy Governor William Baym<sup>47</sup> wrote in March 1664: "he found... a ship 'full-freighted' and ready to depart for London, with room for a few more passengers. So on it he dispatched 'the faire shouperdess and Devouring Gorge...but with what reluctancy and regritt

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<sup>46</sup> Paradoxically and ironically, the more Behn's textual claims to Surinam travel are substantiated, the less substantial are claims that *Oroonoko* is the first English novel.

<sup>47</sup> Whom Behn vilifies in *Oroonoko*.

you may well Conjecture'" (qtd Todd J. 66).<sup>48</sup> She finds evidence of the likely ships Behn traveled in and even proposes that the illusive Mr. Behn, from whom Behn takes her famous surname, may have been on board the return ship, may have been married to Behn at sea and may even have died there.<sup>49</sup> As to why Aphra Behn goes to Suriname, Todd's entire "Secret Life" biography is premised on her spy activities that culminated in the missions to Suriname and Antwerp. Todd proposes that she was sent to Suriname to take account of the king's operatives there, to fact-check their reports and to report on real conditions. If this was so, then the presence of her family not only covered her spy activities, but also gave credence to the story of her father's death at sea and the pretence for the trip in the first place. Todd's most convincing piece of evidence, in my view, is the private audience Behn had with King Charles II when she returns. When added to Behn's well-documented subsequent employment by Charles II as a spy in Antwerp, I am convinced by Todd's account.

Whether you accept Behn's assertions in *Oroonoko* that she was accompanying her father to his new administrative position in Suriname or Todd's evidence that Behn took her mother, brother and sister as cover for her secret fact-finding mission to Suriname, the fact of Behn's journey seems at last to be widely accepted. No doubt one reason for the reluctance to grant Behn's presence in Suriname is that life on the 21<sup>st</sup> century Gulf Coast is difficult enough for modern

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<sup>48</sup> Byam's letter was to Robert Harley Chancellor on Barbados, whom he had just returned from visiting and complaining to about conditions – including spies like Behn – in Surinam (Todd J. 66).

<sup>49</sup> However, Todd is more convinced and convincing that Mr. Behn, whether on the ship or not, lived in London after Aphra's return from Surinam, where he was "a merchant of Dutch extraction" who stayed on in London during the plague to protect his assets, as many of them did, while sending his wife to safety in the country, and that he died in London in the chaos of the plague (74).

US scholars to imagine, even if they have visited as tourists. 17<sup>th</sup> century life in Gulf Coast jungles, especially for European women in full bustle, seems impossible to imagine. Behn provides a comprehensive description in *Oroonoko*, but the description's veracity, doubted from its publication date, has only recently been confirmed by modern interdisciplinary research. For that reason, I provide these excerpts from Natalie Zemon Davis's scholarly description of exactly what Behn and Merian most likely encountered:

The Land to which Maria Sibylla [Merian] and Dorothea [her daughter] came in the late summer of 1699 was inhabited by Amerindian peoples, of whom the Europeans saw especially the Arawaks and those speaking Carib language: some 8,000 Africans, most of them born on the western coast of Africa anywhere from Guinea to Angola; some 600 Dutch Protestants, mostly from Holland and Zeeland; around 300 Portuguese Jews and a few German Jews; increasing numbers of Huguenot refugees seeking new lives after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes; a handful of English families who dared to stay on after their colony passed to the Dutch in 1667...Sugar was then the colony's only export and its obsession...Along the shores of the [rivers] Suriname, the Cottica, the Commewijne, and their creeks, almost two-hundred estates stretched out with their cane fields...The labor was provided by slaves, mostly African men and women...Europeans and Africans on the Dutch plantations talked to each other in a recently created English-based Creole, called 'Neger-Engels' by contemporaries...which she [Merian] and Dorothea learned as they had learned Dutch years before in Friesland. ...some slaves got away successfully, and even in the early days, under the English, Africans had set up independent 'maroon' villages on the upper Suriname and its creeks. ...As for the 'red slaves', a few of them escaped with the Africans and even married with them. Most of their compatriots were living in their own Carib and Arawak settlements along the ...rivers not occupied by Europeans. (172-5)

In *Chrysalis*, Kim Todd's Merian biography there is a vivid description of the heavy heat, aggressive foliage, insistent wildlife, and constant presence of unexpected poisons Europeans faced when they disembarked at Parimaribo in

Surinam, but I will save those passages for the Merian chapters. Almost forty years elapses between Behn's and Merian's visits, and Davis's details are of the latter Dutch administration. However, what Merian saw established in 1699, Behn saw emerging in 1643. So, Davis's picture of 1699 Suriname informs both writers' standpoints.

In fact, the parallels between Behn's and Maria Sibylla Merian's trips to Suriname are numerous and suggestive. As a woman in her early twenties, Behn traveled there with her mother. As a mother of a woman in her early twenties, Merian traveled there with her daughter. Behn and Merian both befriended Africans and Amerindians in Suriname. They both journeyed up the Suriname River to St. John's Hill where they stayed for months. They both witnessed and were appalled by the cruelty of Europeans to their West African slaves. They both wrote about that cruelty. They even both collected butterflies while there and transported them home. Janet Todd reports that when Behn prepared to leave Suriname, "She packed up various curiosities which she had acquired, including some remarkable dead butterflies and her set of Indian feathers" (66). Butterflies were Merian's objective. These coincidences suggest that many more European women went to Suriname in this period than we take note of today. Many more women had power in the New World than we usually acknowledge.<sup>50</sup> The recent film series, *Pirates of the Caribbean*, is more accurate on that score than most mainstream history books.<sup>51</sup> Beryl Gilroy's novels *Inkle and Yarico* and *Stedman*

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<sup>50</sup> Davis, for example, tells of one "Esther Gabay, whose name was often on the export lists, [who] produced her sugar with only forty-one [slaves]," compared to the colony high in 1700 of 300 slaves on "the estate of Samuel Nassy" (173).

<sup>51</sup> Verbinski, Gore, dir., 2003.

and *Joanna: a Love in Bondage* tell a similar demographic tale. Lots of European women moved into the alternative, oppositional and even *revolutionary* realms of Atlanticist culture, and contemporary documents, if not the mainstream historic record, report on their activities. Behn and Merian witnessed and gave witness to women's presence in the New World.

For this project, the most important similarity between Behn's and Merian's Suriname journeys is that they befriended Africans and Amerindians. Behn's narration of her relationships with Africans and Amerindians has been roundly criticized as racist exploitation and her portrayal of Oroonoko as indulging in the trope of the noble savage.<sup>52</sup> Her account of an encounter with Amerindians in one of their villages is also read as a portrayal of Europa condescending to notice the lowly natives.<sup>53</sup> But such late 20<sup>th</sup> century Eurocentric readings don't account for the fact that Behn portrayed actual encounters between white Europeans and oppressed non-Europeans from multiple standpoints – for one thing, explicitly recognizing that multiple standpoints existed – and that she gave voice to those standpoints as few if any published English texts did before hers.<sup>54</sup> She quoted the people she met. She made

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<sup>52</sup> For example, in his introduction to *English Trader, Indian Maid*, Frank Felsenstein points to "cultural critic Hayden White's exploration of 'the metaphors of "Wild Man" and "Noble Savage" in common currency in early modern European thought...contradictory impulses [that] can be found in many texts treating of European encounters with the native, including within our period works of such prominence as Mrs. [sic] Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*" (4).

<sup>53</sup> See Chapter 3 for examples.

<sup>54</sup> See Carla Mulford's *Early American Writings*, where the editors report that while most Christian Europeans wrote of New World people as savages and barbarians, following the rhetorical traditions of the Ottoman empire regarding their colonies, "some Christians, such as Álvaro Núñez Cabeza de Vaca and Bartholomé de Las Casas, remarked about the hospitality and peacefulness of the peoples among whom they lived and traveled" (25). De Las Casas (1474-1566), a soldier and colonist was "an early critic of Spanish colonization" (52). And de Vaca (c1490-c1577) was a Spanish nobleman who survived a disastrous expedition to Florida by living among various indigenous tribes along the Texas coast for eight years. His experience made him a fierce advocate

Oroonoko the central character of her novel and his story the central plot. This move was unheard of at that time, particularly among male writers, who tended to write like "Charles Plumier [who] described his botanical investigation in Martinique as if they were solitary rambles" (Davis 184-5).<sup>55</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, deeper and broader contextualization reveals that Behn provided much more concrete cultural material than literary critics have generally given her credit for.

As Behn and Merian saw for themselves in Suriname, virtually all African and Amerindian women in the New World were dragged into the cultural realms Behn observed in Suriname. Rose Brewer's description of modern global "uneven economic growth and the internationalization [that has] involved Black women in the complex circuitry of labor exchange of women nationally and globally" also sounds like a description of the 17<sup>th</sup> century circuitry of women's labor in slavery in this region (Brewer 241). Brewer argues that analyses – especially Marxist analyses – of Black labor and slave labor have largely ignored reproductive labor and women's household work, while gender analyses of class and labor have focused primarily on white women. As a result, "Dismissing intersections of race and gender in such autonomous analyses conceptually erases African-American women" (Brewer 240). The analyses never even admit to the existence of Amerindian women as women, so no erasure was required there. This process began in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and Behn and Merian bear witness to and push against it.

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for native people until he was "forcibly removed from his position as governor [of the Rio de la Plata] and returned to Spain in chains" (61). His surviving accounts are an incredible resource.

<sup>55</sup> See Davis on "scientific" travelogues (184-5) and further discussion in my chapters on Merian.

In addition to erasing the gendered exploitation of women of all "colors," patriarchal Marxist analyses also – and perhaps more pointedly – obscure the fact that, through blind luck followed by astute business practices and clever sexual and reproductive negotiations, some women in each of these groups were able to establish sufficient agency to alter their cultural status from life-threatening marginality to a more survivable even prosperous alternative position. To achieve a clearer picture of the operation of race and sex in the New World and its few opportunities for power, we must keep "white" women in this analysis because most European women in this period were also pushed and dragged into Atlantic colonies by punitive transportation, indenture, poverty and the rules of marriage. Some few went by choice, as Merian did (if Behn went as a spy, she may have been heavily pressured), and certainly Euro-women's race privilege positioned some of them closer to power than non-European women generally achieved in the New World. White women could pass into circles of power in the New World much more easily than women of color, but a few women of color did obtain power while the vast majority of white women did not. Behn examines this kind of outcome in her late play *The Widow Ranter*, sharply contrasting the eponymous widow's fate to that of Amerindian Queen Semernia. Without denying a single assertion of sexist and racist oppression, we must account for the existence of individuals in generally oppressed groups who gained social, economic, and political powers that European-produced patriarchal histories prefer to obscure because these people are the mediators, the ones whose exception proves the rule but also bends the rule and forms a genealogy of structures of feeling against the

rule. Behn and Merian archived some of this evidence and achieved enough hegemonic circulation themselves to propel their work into wide Atlantic attention in their lifetimes. They wrote about what they saw with explicit disapproval and they articulated alternatives. Their ecumenizing texts helped lay the ideological foundation for what eventually became the 19<sup>th</sup> century abolitionist movement, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century union movements and the late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist movements. More immediately, their ecumenizing methods took revolutionary stands in their respective fields, challenging patriarchal paradigms of textual, graphic, dramatic and technological production.

### **Behn and literature**

Unlike her colleagues in this study, Behn's only medium of choice was literature: poetry, plays, novels, short stories, business and position letters, epilogues, prologues and "drolleries" or anthologies. Glaringly absent are personal documents and the genres permitted to honorable religious and/or aristocratic women: spiritual testament, theological essay, moral treatises, pious letters and diaries. Some of the reason for this lack in Behn's *oeuvre* can be attributed to Behn's more secular point of view, a wide-spread sentiment after the recent religious civil wars. However, Janet Todd submits that, while Behn was bitterly resentful of the starkness of Cromwellian Protestantism, she was enamored of the pageantry of Catholicism (*Life* 32). We can also attribute Behn's choice of genres to her libertine sexuality, also a feature of Restoration

sensibility. After one short childless excursion into marriage, Behn remained single by choice, taking several male lovers and, with her poetry as evidence, a woman or two. Even so, for a woman reaching for traditionally male prestige, it was much safer to publicly explore and express marginal sexualities through fictional characters. Writing, never mind leaving behind, personal documents about such a life would be far too dangerous in a world where "the female poet inspired obscene and misogynous abuse" (Hughes *Theater* 5).

Of course, as many have noted, Behn chose literary art because it paid and she needed a living. However, "needing" a living was her choice. To avoid "obscene and misogynous abuse", she could have chosen a quiet even pious marriage that would have afforded her the leisure to write more sober works. That worked well for Mary Wortley Montagu, in the next generation of women writers. Like Montague, Behn was beautiful, witty, and fairly well-connected. She could have married at any time. Duffy strongly implies she could have been a royal mistress, a lucrative living while it lasts that is often followed by marriage to a grateful wealthy aristocrat (Duffy 71-2). However, after her betrayal at the hands of her beloved king and her imprisonment through no fault of her own, personal freedom and personal choice became keen concerns for Behn. They also appeared in many of her plays and stories that point to the exploitation of women in marriage and mistress relationships. Thus Behn chose not to follow the gender narrative she'd been taught. She chose life and love on her own terms. Her "need" for a living was a choice, a resistance to coerced gender assimilation.

If her real need for a living was chosen, her need for intellectual engagement was a personal imperative. According to Derek Hughes, Behn read widely, including Hobbes, who, as Hughes asserts, "was enormously influential on the intellectual and sexual iconoclasm of the leading Restoration dramatists, including Aphra Behn" (Hughes *Theater* 8). Yet, she doesn't directly engage in philosophical dialogue with Hobbes as Cavendish did. She chooses literary art instead, perhaps because philosophy and theology require a pose of certainty that she refused to claim. Her early plays reach for a definition of leadership and social structure that accounts for the contradiction between the failures of her beloved King Charles II and the Hobbesian presumption that aristocrats inherit nobility and just leadership. As Hughes notes, "however opposed the rival systems of male power [monarchy vs. republicanism, military vs. economic] are to each other, they can be identical in relation to women" as well as to non-European colonized populations (*Theatre* 11). Literature provides a context in which claiming to know is not the objective; challenge, resistance, deliberation, open analysis is. Literature is the ecumenizing form Behn required – and chose.

*Chapter 3*

## APHRA BEHN'S ATLANTICIST TEXTS

*Is it impossible there might be wrought an understanding betwixt my Lord and you? 'Twas to that end I first desired this truce, My self proposing to be Mediator.*  
 Queen Semernia, *The Widow Ranter* (II.i), Aphra Behn

The sometimes dismissive and contradictory late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist criticisms of Behn's work were my initial motivation for this inquiry. I set out wanting to engage with three of those claims: she's not feminist enough; she's racist; she's elitist. Below, I engage with each of those claims in relation to four of her works: gender in *The Young King*, race in *Abdelazer*, and all three topics in *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*. This is a tricky project for me as a feminist because the late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist reclamation of Behn's work along with dozens of others of early women writers brought the crucial challenge to patriarchal cultural structures that women had always been writing and participating in cultural formation. Moreover, even the feminist critiques of Behn I want to challenge are formative products of their historical moment that were crucial – especially to white feminists – in understanding colonial relations of power as feminists, women and humans. While I do disagree with the three claims listed above, what I actually try to do in this chapter is to expand on late 20<sup>th</sup> century analyses in order to account more fully for how Behn's sense of herself in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as an Atlanticist shaped the art she produced. I expand

on Todd's assertion that "the early Aphra was not necessarily a confirmed and single-minded royalist" to show via her work that Behn was never a single-minded anything (Todd J. *Secret* 31 n 24). Rosemary Hennesey and Chrys Ingraham assert in their Introduction to *Materialist Feminism* that "historical materialist (Marxist) feminists aim to make visible *the reasons why* representations of identity are changing, *why* they do not take the same forms they did a century or even fifty years ago, and how these changes in identity are connected to *historical* shifts in the production of life under late capitalism" (9 their emphases). My aim here is to show how Behn portrays, challenges, ridicules and laments changes in race, gender and class representation in early capitalism.

### **Gender in The Young King**

Behn's central observation in her first two plays, *The Young King* and *Abdelazer*, are clearly parallel and informed by the same presumption: that nature matters, but nurture decides. Both plays demonstrate that environment only produces noble leadership when it provides sufficient material and intellectual conditions: effective teachers, reliable materials, active applications and a healthy life style. While gender relations and race intersect in *Abdelazer*, gender relations are fore-grounded in *The Young King* which exposes Behn's gender project as subversive from the start, despite what many see as her "conventional" endings. Probably written while Behn was still in Suriname,<sup>56</sup> Behn's first play, *The Young*

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<sup>56</sup> See Janet Todd and Derek Hughes, "Tragedy and Tragicomedy." *The Cambridge Companion to Aphra Behn*. (84)

*King*, takes up where Margaret Cavendish left off in *The Convent of Pleasure*, which is not surprising. Cavendish's work was widely known for its overt – some suggested crazy – challenge to male-dominated intellectual spheres. However, Derek Hughes notes that Behn "never mentioned Cavendish" probably because the ridicule Cavendish garnered was not what Behn wished to emulate (*Theatre* 5). Yet it's difficult to imagine that Behn had not read Cavendish's gender-bending closet drama and poetry. Maureen Duffy is convinced that Behn met Cavendish when she attended James in York during the plague, "for William and Margaret Cavendish came to greet James" (*Passionate* 71). If Behn didn't meet Cavendish, it is doubtful she missed London's sense of her as represented by Dorothy Osborne's often-cited barb that "the poor woman is a little distracted, she could never be so ridiculous else as to venture at writing books, and in verse too" (Duffy 71). Duffy joins Hughes in assuming Behn made a strategic decision to ignore Cavendish in order to avoid public association with her. This suggests that Behn was well aware that a more mediating stance would carry her farther than had Cavendish's frontal assault on gender roles.

Nevertheless, in *The Young King*, Behn overtly engages gender-bending, gender conflict and sexual power imbalances also found at the center of Cavendish's *Convent of Pleasure*. Behn portrays amazons<sup>57</sup> as heads of state in the Queen of Dacia, her daughter Princess Cleomena, and her daughter's aid and comrade in arms, Semiris. Unlike the Queen, Cleomena and Semiris are warrior women, trained on the Queen's order to amazon attributes invoking military

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<sup>57</sup> Hughes and Todd J. note that *The Young King* "is based on *Life is a Dream* (*La Vida es sueño*, 1635) by the Spanish Dramatist Calderón de la Barca." (85).

masculinity, in effect a third gender. No mere throne drapes, these women lead armies to victory and fight along side their soldiers. Behn emphasizes this when – perhaps ignorantly<sup>58</sup> in her first play, but with clear intention – she organizes the cast list by country of affiliation rather than by sex, echoing Cavendish's similar mis-formatting of the cast list for *The Convent of Pleasure*.<sup>59</sup> But nothing is what it seems in this play, least of all gender, and everything is not only contested but contentious.

The play is set in the region and period of Caucasian Amazons near the end of the historical war between the Dacians and the Scythians, a war that resolved a union of the two nations against the Greeks.<sup>60</sup> In the play, the eponymous young king, Orsames, has been raised in isolation by an elderly male scholar because "The Gods foretel he shall [...] fierce and bloody, a Ravisher, a Tyrant o're his People; his Reign but short, and so unfit for Reign" (I.i). As the

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<sup>58</sup> Of twenty-three plays just in my own library ranging from Kyd's 1591 *The Spanish Tragedy* to Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* of 1728, many of which had their cast lists added by 17<sup>th</sup> century editors, all placed the cast list in the front and 13 categorized them by sex, placing women last after the most lowly of men. Five organized characters by families, three by other categories, and one was all women.

<sup>59</sup> See my introduction for this discussion.

<sup>60</sup> In a fine example of contradiction, Hughes repeats the claim that *The Young King* is based on Calderón de la Barca's *La Vida es sueño*, but then asserts that "Behn has no verbal debts to Calderón (indeed it is unclear whether she knew the play at first hand)" because she "seems not to have known Spanish and no published English translation was available" (*Theater* 18, 205 n 9). Hughes refers also to a second plot from *La Vida es sueño*, but points out that Behn replaces it with a cross-dressing plot from "a popular French prose romance, La Calprenède's *Cleopatra*" (19). But he skims over the Amazonian plot lines, noting simply that Behn "turn[ed Segismundo] into Orsames, Prince of Dacia," and that Thersander "is prince and heir apparent of the enemy nation of Scythia...but he is fighting on the Dacian side under the name of Clemanthis" (*Theater* 18, 19). This slide-by allows him to claim passively that Cleomena's "Amazonian role of female warrior ...has been thrust on her by her brother's displacement" (*Theater* 19). In fact, Pimante assures General Vallentio that "the superstitious Queen, who thinks that Crown belongs to *Cleomena*---...Breeds her more like a General than a Woman: Ah how she loves fine Arms! a Bow, a Quiver; and though she be no natural *Amazon*, she's capable of all their Martial Fopperies" (I.i). In other words, Behn credits the queen with shaping Cleomena as an Amazon. Dacia has legendary (i.e. literary) connections to historical Amazon cultures. In addition, the region of Dacia near the Black Sea was at one time controlled by Queen Tomyris a fierce warrior who founded Tomis, now Constanta, Romania (see Jordanes. "The Origin And Deeds Of The Goths.")

play opens, the war is between battles, and a hero has emerged named Clemanthus, who saved the life of General Honorius who is the brother of the Queen of Dacia. In so doing, Clemanthus has earned the passionate love of war-hardened Dacian male soldiers who "abhor the feeble Reign of Women; / [because] It foretels the downfal of the noblest Trade---War" (I). Coming through a grove on her way back from the battlefields, General Cleomena confesses to her aide, Semiris, that the valorous stories of Honorius's rescue make her love Clemanthus. Surprised by the confession, Semiris stumbles over what turns out to be a sleeping man whose beauty ignites Cleomena's love a second time. Cleomena speaks of her love for both the unseen Clemanthus and for the unnamed sleeping beauty in the same "unmanning" terms earlier used by Colonel Vallentino who had proclaimed of his hero Clemanthus "Oh! how soft and wanton I could grow in the Description I could make of him" (I.i). Adding to the fragmentation of Cleomena's love for "two" men is the fact that Clemanthus, who is, as it turns out, the sleeping man Semiris stumbled over, is actually Cleomena's Scythian enemy, Prince Thersander, in disguise.

The Queen had promised Cleomena's hand in marriage to whichever man kills the Scythian King. But when Scythia is on the brink of winning the war with both King and Prince Thersander surviving, the Dacian princes vying for Cleomena's hand offer to settle the conflict with a one on one battle with the fierce Prince Thersander, heir to the Scythian throne. As the princes draw lots, Thersander, posing again as Clemanthus in Dacia to woo Cleomena, is commanded by a grateful Queen to join the draw to win the right to challenge the

fierce Thersander – i.e. himself – in one on one combat. Of course, he wins. To resolve the dilemma, Thersander dresses his own Scythian lieutenant, Amintas, as Clemanthus and instructs Amintas to lose the combat to Thersander, so that he can claim Cleomena's hand in his own name rather than as Clemanthus. But when Amintas dressed as Clemanthus is ambushed and badly wounded by one of the jealous Dacian princes, Cleomena despairs, dons Amintas → Clemanthus → Thersander's clothes and goes off to take on Thersander herself, presuming he villainously killed her beloved Clemanthus (who never actually existed) rather than honorably lose to him in public. She plans to murder rather than marry the triumphant Thersander, and very nearly succeeds before marching triumphantly back to her appalled mother, the Queen. Only after she is convinced that Prince Thersander did not kill “Clemanthus” does she agree to marry Prince Thersander in order to broker peace. Only when she meets him without his armor, lying in bed wounded by her, does she finally recognize him as her beloved Clemanthus, completing the union between Dacia and Scythia against marauding Greeks.<sup>61</sup> In other words, Cleomena believes she loves two separate men (Clemanthus and the sleeping man), both of whom she must forswear for the sake of a third (the man who wins the one on one battle), while she battles a fourth (Prince Thersander) to the death. But all four men are one and the same, the one that she strives to kill. In completing the union between Dacia and Scythia, Cleomena also completes in her beloved the union of the valor of the warrior (Thersander) and heroism of the rescuer (Clemanthus) with the vulnerability of the sleeping (man in the grove) and wounded (Thersander after Cleomena's attack on him) men.

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<sup>61</sup> I did not research what Behn read that gave her this information on this point.

Todd claims that, by the end of the play, *The Young King* reclaims traditional gender roles. She writes, "For both [Orsames and Cleomena], gender will out...Brother and sister assume their gendered 'natural' roles and throw off the disguise of nurture" (Todd J. 64). Yet, in another turnabout, Todd J. immediately admits "Despite the strident assertion of gender, there are some odd depictions in the play" (Todd J. *Secrets* 64). One might even say queer depictions. For what Behn has proposed is that sex and sexuality are not coterminous with gender: that females can learn to be masculine and that masculine females can be heterosexual – or homosexual, as Semiris's deep devotion to Cleomena suggests, or bisexual as Cleomena's passions for Clemanthus and Semiris indicate. If Princess Cleomena seems to slide away into stereotypical property status as Orsames, the newly crowned "young king" of Dacia, gives her to Thersander, the equally new king of Scythia, the play's viewers now know these "traditional roles" for a farce. They have seen a royal male, whose lack of proper training results in his failure as an honorable monarch, claim the throne of Dacia only through his sister's agency when she authorizes Col. Vallentino to raise the "rabble" on Orsames' behalf. Confirming that she would have Orsames crowned, Cleomena assures Vallentino "Yes, I would have it, by my self I would" (IV.v). The play's viewers have seen Amazon women trained successfully to protect men, lead men and take on men as equals in hand to hand battle. Behn's portrayal invokes structures of feeling regarding gender fallacies, making visible the fact that in the marriage of Princess Cleomena and the new king of Scythia, multiple gender performances are material and undeniable. Yes, the traditional heterosexual rituals

are reestablished by the end of the play – but their false assumptions have been exposed. Gender does not out. Gender expands.

That Behn writes this play while in Suriname<sup>62</sup> in her twenties acting as a spy for Charles II<sup>63</sup> attests to her early awareness of the complicated politics of gender in the highest socio-political circles. That she restores stereotypical gender structures at the end of the play speaks to the frustration she has already experienced in trying to navigate those politics not only as a woman but as a woman of complex gender. Gender is in fact so complex for Behn and for those she portrays and socializes with that reading the end of *The Young King* as gender-normative feels more like an anachronistic imposition of late 20<sup>th</sup> century gender phallusies than a conservative move on Behn's part. When Behn returns to this period at the end of her life to write *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*, she brings with her twenty-four intervening years of gender frustration after writing *The Young King*.

### **Presumptions about race in *Abdelazer***

As with gender, understanding Behn's race politics is complicated not only by events in her period but also by events in the period of her readers. Behn's racial ideology in her early play, *Abdelazer*, illustrates the broader socio-political contemporary context of her second to last work, *Oroonoko*. Her fifth play, her only tragedy, and "one of the best new tragedies since the Restoration" (Hughes

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<sup>62</sup> See Hughes, *Theater* (4).

<sup>63</sup> See Todd J., *Secret Life* (esp 31).

*Theatre 70*), *Abdelazer* was written twelve years after the Suriname journey and twelve years before *Oroonoko* and is the first text in which she explicitly examines the semiotics of complexion. It also contains her most diabolical female character in Abdelazer's lover, Queen Isabella. Derek Hughes notes that *Abdelazer* is "based on *Lust's Dominion*, perhaps by Dekker, Day and Haughton" (Hughes *Theatre* 56). Todd J. reports that "Behn's failure to declare the source of *Abdelazer* had...been labeled plagiarism" by some of her colleagues, but in fact one contemporary admitted she "has much improv'd it throughout" (Todd J. 186). Specifically, Behn challenged the sex and race stereotypes featured in *Lust's Dominion*. As Hughes explains, "by rejecting crude stereotypes of villainy, Behn differs profoundly from her source, which relies on them. Her Moor and adulteress are deeply villainous, but blackness and sexual transgressiveness are not, as they are in *Lust's Dominion*, complete and self-evident explanations of villainy" (Hughes *Theatre* 60). In other words, following Aravamudan's definition of tropicalization, Behn appropriated a popular vehicle for the evil female and black villain tropes and exposed them as phallusies. She mediated hegemonic ideology with the radical notion that the stereotypes were socially constructed while Abdelazer's and Isabella's criminality was historically and individually motivated, not essential aspects of their natures through race or sex.

As the play opens, Abdelazer sits brooding revenge. Here and elsewhere in the play we learn that when his father, "great *Abdela*, King of *Fez*"<sup>64</sup> lost Fez

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<sup>64</sup> Or Abdullah or Boabdil "**Boabdil** (a corruption of the name **Abu Abdullah**, or, in full, **Abu 'abd-Allah Muhammad XII**, Arabic: عشر يناثلا دمحم لئلا دبوع وبأ (b. 1460?; d. 1533) was the last Moorish king of Granada (of the Nasrid dynasty). He was also called *el chico*, the little, and also *el zogybi*, the unfortunate. A son of Abu l-Hasan Ali, king of the taifa of Granada, he was

to Spain, the child Abdelazer was "Taken hostage by Isabella and Philip"<sup>65</sup> and raised like a son (V.i). As he rose through the military ranks in Spain's army, so did his drive to avenge his father and his own loss of a kingdom. He has already seduced Philip's Queen, Isabella, and caused her to poison Philip to facilitate their affair. She kills Abdelazer's wife in a feint to protect the King, her son Ferdinand, after which Abdelazer unexpectedly appears and kills the King for attempting to seduce the young wife. When Abdelazer foments civil war between himself and Isabella's remaining son, Philip, for the empty throne, Isabella seduces Philip's ally, Cardinal Mendoza, away from the field with his army. Abdelazer wins the war and imprisons Philip and Mendoza on the treason of being father and son by means of Isabella's false tale of Mendoza's rape of the very young Isabella while her King was at war in Fez. With the males heirs all taken care of, Abdelazer tricks his aide Roderigo into killing Isabella and then kills Roderigo as an agent of Mendoza. Abdelazer places Isabella's remaining child, Leonora, on the throne and then attempts to woo and finally to rape her, but is interrupted by his own close aid, Osmin. Having observed Abdelazer's double double crosses, Osmin, betrays him and his brutal ways, freeing Philip and Mendoza, and bringing other lords to their support. Rushing into the cell, Abdelazer sees himself betrayed and alone and taunts Philip to attack him. All charge Abdelazer at once and he, thrusting for

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proclaimed king in 1482 in place of his father, who was driven from the land" (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boabdil>). Also see Franco Cardini, *Europe and Islam*, (141) and Henry Kamen, *Empire: How Spain Became a World Power 1492-1763* (18).

<sup>65</sup> From a private letter describing the turn-over of Granada to Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492: "With the royal banners and the cross of Christ plainly visible on the red walls of the Alhambra: ...the Moorish king with about eighty or a hundred on horseback very well dressed went forth to kiss the hand of their Highnesses. Whom they received with much love and courtesy and there they handed over to him his son, who had been a hostage from the time of his capture" (Ibn Abi Hasham Al Muhajir, *An Incomplete History: The Muslims of Spain*).

Philip, kills Osmin instead as he dies of multiple wounds. Philip declares Mendoza forgiven, himself king of "the rich-fraight Vessel" Spain and his sister's beloved Alonzo the Duke of Salamanca, paving the way for their happy marriage.

In place of crude racial stereotype, Behn portrays an individual of a particular race among individuals of other particular races. She directly addresses the material reality of skin color and what it means in the play's narrative. Todd J. notes that Abdelazer may be the first to claim in English that Black is beautiful: "soft and smooth as polisht Ebony" (*Secret* 187). Hughes notes that "Unlike Eleazer [in the source play *Lust's Dominion*], [Abdelazer] is never a stereotyped black villain" (Hughes *Theater* 59). He is never a stereotyped anything. The presence of Osmin, also black, and his slow-burning devotion to virtue shows that Abdelazer is an individual not a stereotype. Hughes unequivocally asserts that Behn "reduces the abusive emphasis on Abdelazer's blackness [in *Lust's Dominion*] and excises the moral symbolism of black and white" (Hughes *Theater* 60). Furthermore, Behn explores the presumed connections between "Moor" and "black" and "African" creating a character so multi-ethnic and multi-racial that his "race" would depend more on the actor's make up than on anything essential to the character.

Behn's portrayal of Abdelazer as a North African Muslim forces the viewer to take into account the egregious wrong Abdelazer believes Philip's family has done to him before the play begins. As Hughes puts it, Abdelazer's "villainy arises from a confluence of specific circumstances [i.e. his losses at the

hands of King Philip the elder] not from the universal wickedness of black skinned people" (Hughes *Theater* 61). In that sense, Abdelazer is Hamlet's dramatic cousin: moved to violence if not to villainy by "a confluence of specific circumstances." But while Shakespeare's focus on Hamlet's internal conflict suggests a family drama told by its most vulnerable member, Behn's treatment discourages a purely individualist psychoanalytic reading of Abdelazer's predicament. Abdelazer may be the vortex of the play's conflict, as Hamlet is in his play, but, for Abdelazer, causes and effects stream from multiple points of agency as indicated by Abdelazer's circulating dagger. Abdelazer initiates the dagger's circulation by coercing Florella into pulling it on young King Ferdinand, compelling Isabella to grab it and kill Florella, and then by pressing it on Roderigo as he sends him to murder Isabella (Hughes *Theater* 61). Because of Abdelazer's instigation, Hughes claims that this dagger represents masculine violence. However, the fact that the dagger works as well in the hands of Florella and the Queen suggests that violence and rage are genderless, just as they are in *The Young King*. If the dagger represents violence, it also represents power, and its circulation is analogous to the circulation of Abdelazer's rightful power from his father, Abdela, to King Philip in war, then to Philip's son at the play's end. Abdelazer complains "But I, instead of that, must see my Crown // Bandy'd from head to head, and tamely see it " (II.i). As in *Oroonoko*, *Abdelazer* explores and exposes the transformation of European imperialism into conquest justified by racial conquest, denigration and enslavement.

In play after play, then, Behn illustrates how the nobility can fail to fulfill the requirements of leadership on behalf of a nation, as well as of their own family. Divine right or birth right repeatedly fail to automatically produce honor, and the most noble characters in these plays are the ethical companions of the royals like Semiris and Amintas in *The Young King* and Osmin, Alonzo and Fiorella in *Abdelazer*. Behn's work disrupts type and trope to portray real individuals and their specific material realities and cultural pressures, exposing the beginnings of capitalist exploitation and the dangers of imperialism based on false concepts of honor. Her plays disrupt the stereotype of the lazy, subhuman, non-Christian, semi-civilized, black-hearted over-sexed "other" by portraying individuals who belie these types. In *Abdelazer* she disrupts the patriarchal stereotypes of Africans to describe an individual African driven to evil acts by European brutality and aided in accomplishing them by European greed and lust. In *The Young King*, she disrupts the patriarchal trope of Madonna/whore by portraying young women who love, lust, fight and live like men because of both birth traits and training but who also love and are willing to "love like women" in order to establish both intimate and political connections.

### **Beyond 20<sup>th</sup> Century Presumptions about Oroonoko**

*Oroonoko* brings together race, gender and class in an intersection that challenges dismissals of Behn and the novel as racist, classist and sexist. Behn lays out the parameters of these concerns in stark terms devoid of her

characteristic humor, bawdiness, and arch sophistication. While *Abdelazer* is a classic tragedy, *Oroonoko* is no *Abdelazer*. Abdelazer lost his kingdom through his father's defeat in honorable battle. Oroonoko was betrayed by his own grandfather king and brutalized by barbarians – British barbarians. To call *Oroonoko* a tragedy is to trivialize the brutality of Imoinda's and Oroonoko's lives and deaths at the hands of their British captors as well as the lives of non-fictional Africans caught up in the Triangle Trade. The tale of *Oroonoko* is so terrible that it overwhelms the genre of tragedy<sup>66</sup> and requires the combined power of three venerable and familiar forms to make sense of it to Behn's audience – and to Behn herself. Behn acclimates the reader with the familiar epistle and travel narrative before she slips into the framework strong enough to bear her story, a form historian Linda Colley calls captivity narrative.<sup>67</sup> Behn writes *Oroonoko* primarily in this form, which itself combines ransom appeal and slave narrative, in an effort to convince Britons to resist the barbarity of British enslavement of West Africans in Surinam.

If Behn's novella was temporarily lost to literature, it was not lost to cultural critics and historians who have a long history of treating *Oroonoko* as "a crucial early text in the sentimental, anti-slavery tradition that grew steadily throughout the eighteenth century" (Brown 42). As early as 1695, a mere six years after Behn's death, Thomas Southern's staging of *Oroonoko* altered the racial politics of Behn's original work, turning it from a multicultural exploration of

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<sup>66</sup> Tragedy defined as a noble person whose character flaw causes him to make a choice that results in an abrupt fall from glorious prominence into a horrifying consequence, usually involving a horrible death or enormous loss. The tragic narrative is constructed to maximize the audience's terror and cathartic relief.

<sup>67</sup> See Linda Colley, *Captives*.

nobility and (dis)honor to a clunky abolitionist vehicle that was a sentimental favorite for another hundred years or more. The most recent production of *Oroonoko* (February 2008) takes on early 21<sup>st</sup> century concerns with "connections among Africa, Europe and America" (Isherwood).<sup>68</sup> In a theoretical and literary context, when Second Wave feminists and white antiracists turned their critical gaze to Behn's novel in the 1980's and 90's, they saw in it the racist presumptions they were trying to detect and destroy in their own ideology and actions.<sup>69</sup> Reading *Oroonoko* through a Second Wave Feminist, white anti-racist, anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist lens does in fact open the text up to reflexive interpretations that delineate late 20<sup>th</sup> century socio-political concerns. But looking more closely at the socio-political concerns that surround the production of *Oroonoko* opens the text even further – and more usefully to 21<sup>st</sup> century readers.

The novel,<sup>70</sup> published in 1688 only one year before Behn died at age forty-nine, was written, Todd J. surmises, "between the announcement of Queen Mary [of Modena]'s pregnancy and the birth," an event which "the increasingly

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<sup>68</sup> Charles Isherwood's theater review for NYTimes, 2/11/08, "Star-Crossed Lovers Caught in an Unenlightened Era." Isherwood concludes "Unfortunately, when it comes to significant matter like psychological intricacy, narrative sophistication, depth of feeling and wit, 'Oroonoko' is about on the level of the higher-grade children's theater. More unfortunately, given a string of lewd jokes and a graphic scene of sexual abuse, it is not exactly appropriate for younger audiences." Hughes refers to the advent of this production in 2001, lamenting the tendency to rewrite Behn rather than produce her many brilliant plays (*Theatre* 195).

<sup>69</sup> I point to some of these readings below.

<sup>70</sup> Todd calls *Oroonoko* "her short story" but Hughes calls it "a novella" as does Beach, and Visconsi (Todd J. *Life* 5; Hughes *Theatre* 11). However, Hughes does call it "her novel *Oroonoko*" as well (*Theater* 30), begging the question of whether or not *Oroonoko* should be credited as the first novel. In fact, Hughes credits Behn with "realistic short fiction of a kind and quality that has no precedence in English literature, and the first full-scale realist novel (*Love Letters...*)" (*Theatre* 159).

powerless royalists of 1688" saw as their worst fears literally born out (417).<sup>71</sup> James II was a devout Catholic but his heirs, Mary and Anne, his daughters by commoner Anne Hyde, his first wife, were both staunchly Protestant.<sup>72</sup> When little James was born to James II's second wife, the risk of a Catholic dynasty became too great to a nation so recently torn by civil war. "The Bloodless Revolution of 1688" ousted King James II in favor of his own daughter, Princess Mary, and her Protestant husband, William of Orange. The remnants of Behn's youthful assumptions "that royalty, courtiers, and the aristocracy were the ultimate insiders" thus became a resigned recognition "that there was really no inside in England, no safe place..." (Todd J. *Life* 411). The succession – which Colley characterizes as the "brutally reconstructed monarchy" – was anything but the orderly social structure Hobbes celebrated and Behn longed for. By the time she wrote *Oroonoko*, Behn had seen a king beheaded (Charles I), a decade of a king-less nation (Interregnum), a decade of a restored and corrupt monarchy (Charles II), the unceremonious routing of a hapless king and his family (James II), and a "bloodless" usurpation by his common daughter and her husband (William II to Mary II). Aphra Behn died five days after William and Mary's coronation, but it would not have surprised Behn that their childlessness led to another commoner as queen (Anne I), and that her childlessness required reaching deep into Germany for any bona fide relative to the throne who was not Catholic (George I). *Oroonoko* explores both the origins and culmination of Behn's expectations regarding the tribulations of the Stuart family.

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<sup>71</sup> That child was James "the Pretender" (Williamson 88).

<sup>72</sup> Mary's and Anne's mother was Anne Hyde, "a maid of honor to his sister the Princess of Orange [and]...far below James in status" (Williamson 87).

The epistolary sensibility of *Oroonoko* manifests in the narrator/Behn's direct explanation to the reader that she has been her "self an Eye-Witness to a great part of what you will find here set down" (*Oroonoko* Norton 8).<sup>73</sup> In addition, the novel's travel narrative sensibility appears in detailed descriptions of the country invoking texts by George Warren, and "the Deputy Governor of Surinam, William Byam, whose observations were circulating in London in the 1660's" and which Behn surely had read (Todd J. *Life* 38).<sup>74</sup> Most readings of *Oroonoko* have focused on these two genres. However, these were merely introductory matter for the ubiquitous 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century genre that had already proven itself useful as propaganda: the captivity narrative produced by or about European slaves of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>75</sup> Historian Linda Colley examines the records of "thousands of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish men, women and children who were taken captive in different regions of the Extra-European world during the first quarter millennium of British imperial enterprise" (*Captives* 3). She makes vivid a facet of British anxiety that monarchy-focused histories often exclude: that "Britons *could* be slaves – and were" (Colley *Captives* 63). Colley repeatedly distinguishes between "the diversity of captivity experiences" of Britons, especially at the hands of the Ottoman Empire, and the comparative brutality of "the triangular trade in black slaves" at the hands of Europeans (*Captives* 62). Before 1670, she reports, the two versions of slave trading might

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<sup>73</sup> Also consulted: Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko: A Bedford Cultural Edition*, Catherine Gallagher, ed, 1997.

<sup>74</sup> Todd J. cites Warren's *An Impartial Description of Surinam...* (London 1667). However, Todd J. also notes that Behn's details reflect facts that were not in Warren and were of the sort that an eye witness of Behn's type would take note of (*Life* 38).

<sup>75</sup> Thanks to Carol Flynn for suggesting this connection.

have been more comparable at least in the numbers of people traded, but by 1670, "the number of blacks being shipped out to slavery annually ... was indisputably in excess of the total number of Europeans seized each year by Barbary and Ottoman corsairs" (*Captives* 62). By 1647, however, as *Oroonoko* shows, the conditions of European enslavement of Africans were markedly different from the conditions in the Ottoman Empire.

Yet even in 1688, when *Oroonoko* is published, British enslavement of West Africans was still overshadowed for Britons by their own Barbary enslavement. And this was so until well into the 18<sup>th</sup> century for compelling reasons. As Colley explains:

Barbary corsairs were highly effective predators who succeeded over the centuries in extorting very large amounts of ransom and protection money from virtually all Western European governments. Even a relatively distant secure state like Denmark devoted about 15 per cent of its profits from Mediterranean trade to paying them off. Such sums would simply not have been forthcoming had the Barbary threat not been judged to be substantial, or had fears of Barbary slavery simply been manufactured. (*Captives* 63)

British fear of Ottoman enslavement was no mere Orientalist fantasy. Two hundred and fifty years of history lay behind Briton's 17<sup>th</sup> century concept of slavery, and that concept did not exclude them from the slave roles. As Colley notes, "before 1730, men and women in Britain and Ireland were exposed to far more information about white Barbary slavery than about any other variety of slavery" (*Captives* 63). Since the majority of enslaved Britons came from London, the center of print, shipping and trade, "these people received – as we shall see – extensive newspaper, pamphlet and ballad coverage, as well as prompting church

sermons and appeals for ransom money on a nationwide basis " (Colley *Captives* 63). Similar awareness of West African enslavement would not occur until much later in the eighteenth century. *Oroonoko*, then would have read very differently to Britons in 1689 than it does to us looking back through the history of the Triangle Trade. Most of the impact of the Triangle Trade was still coming toward Aphra Behn when she composed *Oroonoko*, and just beginning to be acknowledged among some who went, as she did, to the West Indies and Gulf territories and saw for themselves.

In addition to the pervasiveness in British culture of the fear of enslavement and of slave narratives is the fact of the vast number of contending empires around the globe. Colley notes that most ordinary Britons would have "tended to take the existence of empire for granted" just as today most ordinary people take the existence of multinational corporations for granted. She lists the European sea-born empires of France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and the Netherlands as well as the Hapsburg and later Napoleon's land based Empires. Of the Eastern land-based empires of China, Russia, Persia, India and the Ottoman Empire, Colley notes that "in 1600 [they] were infinitely more formidable powers than England and its adjacent countries" (Colley *Captives* 19). Twentieth century readers of Behn forget that she knew nothing of the dominating world power that Britain was to become and that she and her readers felt more like citizens of Pakistan or perhaps Mexico do today than like the center of global wealth and colonial power. This historical moment magnifies the mediations in *Oroonoko* on developing race discourse and imperial policies. As Colley puts it:

...irrespective of the social status and sentiments of their authors, captivity narratives were always disturbing texts at some level simply by virtue of what they described. ...Virtually all British captives ...were compelled by the nature of their predicament to re-examine – and more often question for the first time – conventional wisdoms about nationality, race, religion, allegiance appropriate modes of behavior, and the location of power. (Colley *Captives* 16)

That very questioning is what Behn's text invokes.

The captivity narrative that Behn and her fellow Britons were familiar with has two basic forms, the ransom appeal and the narrative memoir, both of which Behn deploys in *Oroonoko*.<sup>76</sup> The ransom appeal sought to establish the innocence of the enslaved, his value to the community and the veracity of his story. Colley reports that "hundreds of individual appeals, many of them instigated by the captives' womenfolk" were circulated in British society (Colley *Captives* 77). In fact, this common relationship between the male captives and "their womenfolk" may have sparked the contemporary rumors of Behn's affair with Oroonoko, especially since she returned from Surinam with "Mrs." in front of her name and no man beside her.<sup>77</sup> In other words, presenting Oroonoko's narrative in a woman's voice was not an appropriation of a black man's story by a white woman, but a strategy extremely familiar to Behn's audience. It was an appeal for social attention to the problem of British enslavement of West Africans. The ordinariness of most Britons in captivity emphasized the

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<sup>76</sup> My colleague Kellie Donovan asks whether Behn invents the abolitionist slave narrative. I'm not prepared here to make that claim, but it's worth considering.

<sup>77</sup> "The Voyage from Surinam to London was long. At the end of it Aphra may have achieved something important if not much valued, for, between her arrival back in London and leaving it again in 1666, she had become Mrs. Behn" (Todd J. *Secret Life* 67). Todd J. goes on to speculate that Aphra and her sister Frances met up with two men on board their return ship: Captain Wrede of The King David, hijacked by English settlers in Barbados, and his crew man, Johan Behn "a merchant of Dutch extraction." Todd J. extracts this information from shipping records and Thomas Colepepper's work "Adversaria." (Todd J. *Secret Life* 67)

heartlessness of Ottoman enslavement, but the nobility of Oroonoko and Imoinda, both in their behavior and birth, focuses on the plight of even the most noble West Africans at the hands of a nation whose citizens were devoted to the redemption of their own people from such misery.<sup>78</sup> The man's story dominates the narrative, as Behn's readers would expect, but the presence of Imoinda also invokes the experiences of British women held in Ottoman captivity. Like most ransom appeals, *Oroonoko* provides exhaustive detail of time and place to establish the veracity of its claims. Behn also provides witnesses in the form of actual individuals who could still have been questioned and/or whose history was well-known, individuals she would not ordinarily have aligned herself with because of their political differences. These familiar features of the ransom appeal further to Behn's readers, pulling them deeper into her real objective.

To intensify the appeal, Behn reports that once Imoinda was pregnant, Oroonoko became "more impatient of liberty...and offer'd either Gold or a vast quantity of Slaves, which should be paid before they let him go, provided he cou'd have any Security that he shou'd go when his Ransom was paid" (Norton 41). Behn knew ransom was a key component of Ottoman, Brazilian and indigenous African slave systems and that the ransom-slave system was deeply classed. She explains that in Coramantien<sup>79</sup> "they had the fortune to take a great many

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<sup>78</sup> The narrators were primarily civilians, rather than military and men's stories predominated, since two thirds of the narratives were written before 1720 by male writers under 30 when seized; of 15 extant, only one is female (Colley *Captives* 89).

<sup>79</sup> "Not a country but a fortified English trading station on the Gold Coast of West Africa, in modern-day Ghana, established by agreement with the local Fante ruler in 1632. It became the English trading headquarters until taken by the Dutch in 1665. As the slave trade expanded, all persons shipped out from the region were called Cormantines or Cormantees (variously spelled) and gained a reputation for their beauty and their bearing, intelligence and fierceness in war, and

Captives [in tribal warfare]; for all they took in Battel, were sold as Slaves; at least, those common Men who cou'd not ransom themselves" (Norton 11).<sup>80</sup> In "Slaving, Trading, and Creolization in the Black Atlantic," Roquinaldo Ferreira argues that the Brazilian system of African enslavement, which was independent of the North Atlantic Triangle Trade, was structured on classed African terms. The reasonable expectation of ransom Europeans enslaved by Ottomans had explains why "the most crucial difference between the experiences of white slaves and captives in North Africa, and black plantation slaves across the Atlantic, was that – for the former – deracination and loss of freedom often, though not always, had a temporal limit" (Colley *Captives* 59).

However, unlike Africans enslaved in Africa, the promise of ransom and redemption for Europeans caught up in Ottoman slavery – English, Spanish, French, Italian and German – cut across class lines for the purpose of anti-Muslim propaganda. Colley reports "the helplessness and ordinariness of most of the [British] victims involved" emphasized the heartlessness of the "Barbary pirates" and "Ottoman corsairs" (*Captives* 78). Civic rituals required returning slaves "to wear their 'Moorish' or 'slavish habits' ... as a visual reminder of their previous subjection to an alien power and religion... For the aim was at once to reincorporate the captives into the polity and remind them of their duty to it" as well as their place in it (Colley *Captives* 79). The comparison of "the yoke of

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extreme dignity under captivity or torture. They would have been mainly but not exclusively Fante, Ashante, and other Akan-speaking peoples" (Norton *Oroonoko* n 5 p 11).

<sup>80</sup> Note in Norton on the moment of Oroonoko's abduction: "the abduction and enslavement of Africans who visited on board ships or traveled as pawns or passengers is recorded with disapproval in many early reports, official and unofficial, if never on this scale. Victims of high rank were sometimes ransomed or returned to avoid retaliation and the closing of trade" (Norton *Oroonoko* 31 n6).

Islam" to the Christian context in which ransom appeals were made was deliberate and the campaign to raise ransom funds was a nationwide effort in Britain. After 1660, while Behn was writing and producing her city plays, the King's Privy Council<sup>81</sup> sponsored "five nationwide campaigns to raise ransoms to bring home English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish captives of Barbary" (Colley *Captives* 76). These campaigns generated "public collections organized at parish and diocesan level" and Charity Briefs or "royal warrants authorizing collections for a specified charitable object" were in all the churches, and neighborhood canvases were made to collect donations (Colley *Captives* 76-7). In other words, British culture was completely saturated with anxiety over Britons in slavery and with appeals and campaigns to free even the most ordinary of people. They would feel an immediate connection to Behn's appeal.<sup>82</sup> However, Behn wasn't seeking ransom. Oroonoko was dead – long dead. Moreover, for non-Europeans enslaved by Europeans in the north Atlantic, no such hope was offered.<sup>83</sup> As Oroonoko

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<sup>81</sup> Meeting in The Cockpit, remember.

<sup>82</sup> So far, I have found little about the contemporary reception of *Oroonoko*. There was not a second printing until 1696. The closest I've gotten is this material that is on wikipedia and all over the internet: "*Oroonoko* is now the most studied of Aphra Behn's novels, but it was not immediately successful in her own lifetime. It sold well, but the only adaptation for the stage by Thomas Southerne (see below) made the story as popular as it became. Soon after her death, the novel began to be read again..." It sold well but wasn't successful? According to Mary Ann O'Donnell, "This [i.e. the first] edition was reissued in *Three Histories* (A32) later in 1688, bound first and followed by *The Fair Jilt* (A28) and *Agnes de Castro* (BA5). *Oroonoko* was reprinted in the 1696 first edition of *The Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn* and all subsequent editions of her collected novels" (Mary Ann O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: an Annotated Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources*. London: Ashgate Publishing, 2004. 122). Like so much else about this woman and her work, *Oroonoko* was and was not popular, successful and influential. I'm going with "was/is."

<sup>83</sup> There are stories of rescue and return to Africa from European slavery, but these are rare – so far. Colley cites one from 1753 told by "a Moroccan sailor called Hamet [who] recounted his captivity experiences in British America" to the British envoy William Petticrew once he was returned home after fifteen years grinding corn to feed the plantation's black labour force... 150 miles outside Charleston, South Carolina" (Colley *Captives* 86). There is another narrative published in 1968 by 18<sup>th</sup> century scholar Douglas Grant called *The Fortunate Slave: an Illustration of African Slavery in the Early Eighteenth Century* about "Job ben Solomon... who

himself puts it "it was not for Days, Months, or Years, but for Eternity; there was to be no end to their Misfortunes" (Norton 52). Ransom appeals for captured Europeans presented even the lowliest sailor as deserving a better fate than enslavement, but the British slave system refused ransom even to kings.

Once the lack of opportunity for ransom is exposed, *Oroonoko* becomes a full-on slave narrative. The slave narrative Britons expected was a story told by or about a former captive for profit, the nature of which varied as much as the beneficiary. In France and Spain, whose far more numerous subjects were reclaimed from Ottoman captivity through year-long carefully staged progressions from North Africa back to major European ports and then across the national countryside to the capital under "royal and papal banners," church and state made huge profits from the slave narratives written by attendant priests "itching to write up and publish accounts of their real and reputed sufferings" (Colley *Captives* 80-1). But Britain lacked the funds for big state celebrations because of endless civil strife. More importantly, "the captivity issue could never be allowed to embarrass the entente between Britain, Barbary, and the Ottoman Empire" in the form of new and valuable trade relations, "particularly after the acquisition of Minorca and Gibraltar" (Colley *Captives* 81). Thus, British returnees could market their own narratives – but without government support they were sometimes ignored, disbelieved or robbed of their stories by clever marketers. Slave narratives in Britain were usually very short because lengthy accounts required literacy and

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was of the Pholey race and son to the High Priest of Bundo, in Foota" and taken to British America as a slave in the 1730's (London: Oxford UP). Furthermore, some British slave captains did allow ransoming of highly valued Africans they abducted into slavery, as noted in the Norton edition of *Oroonoko* (Norton *Oroonoko* 31 n6).

funds, both scarce then, but potentially profitable narratives produced longer works that "flourished... from the 1600s through to the nineteenth century" (Colley *Captives* 88).<sup>84</sup> Behn exploited this market for needed funds, but in the tumult of William and Mary's usurpation of James II, there were far more profitable projects for her to undertake.

Behn's motives are clarified by slave narrative attributes. The returnee's circumstances shaped the narrative, just as they shaped Behn's telling of Oroonoko's story. First, narratives were an attempt by the returnee to make sense of what had occurred. Once returned to Britain, returnees would tell the stories over and over in what we now see as an effort to regain a sense of control by controlling the story (Colley *Captives* 84). Duffy notes that "Southerne, who turned the novel into a very successful play, claimed that she [Behn] told the story even better than she wrote it" (*Shepherdess* 46). In fact many spoke of how Behn told her story of the trauma of witnessing Oroonoko's betrayal and death over and over, perhaps beginning with her audience with Charles II upon her return. A newly returned captive might live for a while on his "redeemed" status before needing income from publication – as Behn herself did in her illness just before she died. Whether because of postponed financial need or scarcity of resources, transcribed captivity narratives were often produced from memory after many years' time, which raised other problems (Colley *Captives* 86, 91). Similarly,

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<sup>84</sup> One of the most long-lived lengthy accounts was published in Behn's birth year by "an English merchant called Francis Knight" who claimed to have produced a pioneering text. Unusual in its length, it was not at all unusual in its topic. "Accounts of captivity in Algiers and elsewhere in North Africa, together with narratives of white captivities in the New World, had been circulating in Continental Europe since the sixteenth century. Even in England the earliest known captivity narrative dates from the 1580's" (Colley *Captives* 88). From Colley's note 25, this text is "Strange and wonderfull things happened to Richard Hasleton...penned as he delivered it from his owne mouth (1595)" (*Captives* 396).

*Oroonoko* was produced forty years after the event at a time when Behn felt her resources were low.<sup>85</sup> Returnees had to prove to potential donors and parish officials they were not one of the desperately poor who invented Barbary narratives in an effort to survive, but time lapse, lack of accessible witnesses and distance often made this proof difficult (Colley *Captives* 85). Following form, as noted above for ransom appeals, Behn supplies exhaustive detail and reference to well-known witnesses she would not ordinarily align herself with. Finally, the narratives had to prove the returnee was still a loyal Briton and faithful Christian and thus deserving of funds for a living (Colley *Captives* 87). Behn's representation of Oroonoko's pre-Suriname history, his devout Muslim status, as well as his honor and nobility establish Oroonoko's merit. Colley notes Lennard Davis's observation that "early modern readers did not expect a published text to be either comprehensively factual or unmitigated fiction to the extent that even in these post-modern times we still tend to do." They did expect it to have what Colley calls "a deeper moral truth" (*Captives* 92). Behn provided both veracity<sup>86</sup> and a deeper moral truth: a recognition that European enslavement of West Africans was markedly different from Ottoman enslavement of Europeans, markedly more brutal, unchristian and unBritish.

Redeeming Europeans from Ottoman enslavement provided an irresistible opportunity to celebrate and reinforce the necessary social order, a project dear to

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<sup>85</sup> Though Todd's records shows she was actually in fairly good shape because of recent publications (*Secret Life* 432).

<sup>86</sup> While a large proportion of *Oroonoko* criticism has been obsessed with the veracity of Behn's narrative – an obsession that would have been more productively applied early on to Mandeville's work, for example – modern research continues to corroborate more and more of the details of her story. This corroboration does not reduce the literary value of the story but instead situates its sensibility firmly in its own time which modern ideological readings misinterpret.

Behn's Hobbesian heart.<sup>87</sup> If Behn was as devoted to monarchy as her critics have long asserted, the devotion sprang from the Hobbesian imperative of a social order that lifts the nation out of Gothic barbarity and into civility. As the Interregnum proved, a headless society (i.e. kingless) with no (recognizable) structure (i.e. class) generated a fall back into the not very distant brutal past of the Gothic tribes. In the context of this widespread reassertion of the social contract, Behn's ideology in *Oroonoko* is not conservative for her time, but at the heart of the nation's movement forward away from Gothic – and Puritan – barbarism. In fact, her social structure deploys radical contemporaneity in asserting that the place of particular enslaved Africans in their own social structure justifies a reassessment of increasingly race-based British assumptions about West African victims of European enslavement. If British Christian ideals of liberty are good enough for lowly British laborers, then why not for an African prince? And why not for lowly Cormantien laborers?

While *Oroonoko* is a contemporary slave narrative, Behn's treatment of Oroonoko as an individual still merits examination. Many critics have read Behn's descriptions of Oroonoko's and Imoinda's bodies as racist because of textual presumptions of racial superiority and the "Europeanization" of their African features. In order to think about Behn's language around race and difference, I want to bring in Laura Brown's discussion of radical contemporaneity in her

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<sup>87</sup> "Returning captives were greeted with elaborate, public ritual that involved the monarch, politicians, and local dynasts as well as churchmen, and were designed to transform these forlorn representatives of national humiliation into emblems of triumph, self-congratulation and patriotic self-assertion" (Colley *Captives* 79). As William Sherlock put it to former captives in his church in 1702, "consider what it is you owe your country...to be loyal to your prince, obedient to government, ready to defend it against all enemies" (qtd Colley *Captives* 79).

classic essay "The Romance of Empire: *Oroonoko* and the Trade in Slaves." Brown asserts that "the category of the 'other'" or "alterity" is a category that "privileges the position of power while minimizing the possibility of resistance" and produces Guyatri Spivak's subaltern, the first analysis of alterity, according to Brown, to combine gender and race in a colonialist setting (45). While useful in laying out colonial tensions, the "binary opposition" of the unmarked "us" vs. the "other" ultimately "seems nevertheless to have stymied a genuinely dialectical critique of colonial culture" (Brown 45). We will see below how Aravamudan's concept of the tropicopolitan seeks to undo that opposition, but Brown takes it further, insisting on "the value of a pragmatic dialectical criticism, and indeed the political importance of refusing to posit any opposition [i.e. binary] as absolute" (47). Pointing to the wishes for "the common enterprise of promoting human community" at the end of colonial critiques by Greenblatt, Fanon, JanMohamed, Todorov and Said, Brown calls these "adjunctive utopian moments...sentiment without method" (46).

To get to method and critical practice, Brown adopts Johannes Fabian's term "radical contemporaneity" as her central trope. "A dialectical notion...a critique of modern anthropological writing...," radical contemporaneity is an idea which seeks to correct a "systematic 'denial of coevalness' ([Fabian] 31) [that] has operated in the service of colonialism and neocolonialism by concealing the fact that 'anthropology's Other is, ultimately, other people who are our contemporaries' ([Fabian]143)" (Brown 46). Fabian asks anthropologists to stop seeing "other societies" they confront as being in different (usually more primitive) stages of

development and instead to see them "as different societies facing each other at the same time" (Fabian 155 qtd Brown 46). Extrapolating "radical contemporaneity" to literature, Brown asserts that "the texts of colonialism reveal signs of the dialectical [as in mutually constitutive] confrontations embodied in the historical formation of the period" (Brown 47). Brown then examines *Oroonoko* in light of radical contemporaneity, finding that *Oroonoko's* "powerful act of 'reductive normalizing' [adopted from Mary Louise Pratt (49)] performed by the romantic narrative is somewhat countered by a similarly powerful historical contextualization...[and] *Oroonoko's* critique of slavery [which] reveals the critique of colonialist ideology" (53, 54). Speaking of women's "mediatory role between heroic romance and mercantile imperialism, Brown concludes that in "the ideological contradiction that dominates the novella...we can locate a site beyond alterity, a point of critique and sympathy produced by the radical contemporaneity of issues of gender with those of romance and race" (55). She finds that "though Behn never clearly sees herself in the place of the African slave, the mediation of the figure of the woman between two contradictory paradigms upon which her narrative depends uncovers a mutuality beyond her conscious control" (61).

Brown's Marxist feminist reading of *Oroonoko* is deservedly a classic, but in relegating Behn's radical contemporaneity to an unconscious effort, Brown fails to fully employ radical contemporaneity herself. She fails the temporal challenge in Fabian's concept when she forgets to think of Behn's society and her own as "different societies facing each other at the same Time" (Fabian qtd in Brown 46).

Because Brown thinks of Behn as "other" and falls into what she herself decries as the "use of time as a distancing mechanism, on temporalizations placing the native [Behn in this instance as a native of her time] in the 'primitive' past...a systematic 'denial of coevalness'" (46). Thus, regarding Behn's descriptions of Oroonoko's body and character, she concludes: "Oroonoko is thus not only a natural European and aristocrat, but a natural neoclassicist and Royalist as well, an absurdity generated by the desire for an intimate identification with the 'royal slave'" (48). Apparently it is an absurdity to think that Africans could be varied in looks or interested in their own right in what Europeans call European Enlightenment ideals when THEY have them. The physical attributes of Africans are in fact wide ranging, including features presumed to be European like straight hair and narrow facial features. The people of the west coast of Africa have been intermixed for millennia with people from northern Africa, as their Muslim heritage demonstrates. In particular the ancient tribes of Ghana occupied the gold rich region, now in modern Nigeria, at one end of trade routes from Arabia and, in the other direction, from southern Africa. Furthermore, Behn notes that Oroonoko "could not drink; and he is but an ill Companion in that Country [i.e. Suriname] that cannot" (Norton *Oroonoko* 41). In other words, he was probably Muslim, which makes him more likely to have looked just as she described him. There is some evidence as well that after Imoinda's death, Oroonoko's "severing of her yet Smiling Face from that Delicate Body" was not an act of brutality but a ritual of respect in burial of a beloved (Norton *Oroonoko* 61).<sup>88</sup> In other words, Behn's

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<sup>88</sup> In "'My Head Belongs to the King': On the Political and Ritual Significance of Decapitation in Pre-Colonial Dahomey," Robin Law writes "The decapitation of corpses in earlier times was

motives for describing Oroonoko as she did cannot be reduced to a desire to Europeanize him.

Race was far too complex a concept in Behn's time for that kind of reductionism to make sense to her readers. In *The Complexion of Race*, Roxann Wheeler lays out the complexities of 18<sup>th</sup> C concepts of race that have been oversimplified in the West in the 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. She asserts that the emergent concept of race as skin color was accompanied well into the late 18<sup>th</sup> C by a much more complicated and diverse constellation of views. As late as 1723, an English narrator in *Journal of a Voyage up the Gambia* accepted the "apparently paradoxical statement" that a group of native translators the narrator described as "Black as Coal" describe themselves as "Here, thro' Custom, (being Christians) they account themselves White Men" (Wheeler 4). Wheeler explains:

...the assurance that skin color was the primary signifier of human difference was not a dominant conception until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and even then individuals responded variously to nonwhite skin color. To be sure, Renaissance scholarship has demonstrated that complexion had mattered greatly to Britons at least since the early modern period and that it was a magnet for reflections on European superiority. However, the eighteenth century is notable, I contend, for the reassessment of complexion's meanings. ...The larger issue at stake ...is how to theorize race in a way that accounts for its emergent character. (Wheeler 7)

Demonstrating her own complicated concept of race, Behn uses modern-sounding terms when she reports on the "many beautiful *Black-Wives*" (Norton *Oroonoko* 11) of Oroonoko's grandfather and on Oroonoko's promise that "he wou'd Act nothing upon the White-People" (Norton *Oroonoko* 42). In a different register of

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probably related to the practice of separate burial and subsequent veneration of the deceased's head as part of the ancestor cult of his own lineage."

term "race," women like Imoinda were "so delicately Cut and Rac'd all over the fore-part of the Trunk of their Bodies, that it looks as if it were Japan'd...resembling our Ancient Picts...but these carvings are more delicate" (Norton *Oroonoko* 40). In a third register, Behn writes of Oroonoko's pleasure in Imoinda's pregnancy "knowing he was the last of his Great Race" (Norton 40). Behn's novel was a mediating part of a culture-wide effort to examine old Renaissance concepts of difference in light of new Enlightenment thinking. The outcome was still circulating as structures of feeling.

For that reason, where Brown notes "the failure of Behn's novella to see beyond the mirror of it's own culture," I see this moment of contact between Behn's narrator and Oroonoko as an act of "radical contemporaneity" that requires us to take more literally than we have so far what Behn's white European woman narrator reports (Brown 48). Not only does she see beyond the mirror of her own culture, but she sees Oroonoko looking beyond the mirror of his culture back at her and hers. Contained in the narrator's report on Oroonoko is his own contact experience with Europeans. Oroonoko believes that the British captain who eventually betrays him "was always better received at [his grandfather's Cormantyne<sup>89</sup>] Court, than most of the Traders to those countries were," and was one of those European "Men of Parts and Wit" (*Oroonoko* Norton 30). In the same way that Behn's narrator sees Oroonoko as aristocratic, Oroonoko saw this

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<sup>89</sup> "Koromantyn or Coromanijn is a name derived from the Dutch fort at Koromantyn on the Gold Coast; in Suriname it designated slaves from the Fanti, Ashanti, and other interior Gold Coast tribes. For background and statistics on the tribal origins of the Bush Negroes of Guiana, see Richard Price, *The Guiana Maroons: A Historical and Bibliographical Introduction* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 12-16." (Brown n 28 282). But Norton's note on p 11 says that the fort was first British and taken by the Dutch after Behn's visit.

captain as a man modeled on Coramantien concepts of nobility. For that reason, when "the Captain, in Return of all these [Oroonoko's] mighty Favours, besought the Prince to honour his Vessel with his Presence...he condescended to accept" his invitation (Bedford *Oroonoko* 31). Oroonoko recognizes too late that the Captain was a man "who could not resolve to trust a Heathen...a Man that had no sence or notion of the God that he [the Captain] Worshipp'd" (*Oroonoko* Norton 32). Deploying the radical contemporeneity that Brown invokes above, Oroonoko trusts the English slave captain's honor several times, even agreeing to persuade his fellow captives to eat so that they could survive the voyage and be granted "their Liberty the first Opportunity" (*Oroonoko* Norton 33). Of course, as soon as the ship docks in Suriname, the Captain "sold 'em off, as Slaves, to several Merchants and Gentlemen" (*Oroonoko* Norton 34). Oroonoko and the Captain had each taken the other to be aristocratic by his own culture's standards, but the Behn's account demonstrates that European failed the test of honour in both cultures.

Despite his experience during the ocean crossing, Oroonoko presumes that the captain's dishonor is individual, not cultural. On his arrival in Suriname, Oroonoko believes John Trefry's promise to have him returned (ransomed?) to his homeland because "he finds him wise and witty enough to understand honor" (*Oroonoko* Norton 35). A delicious irony on Behn's part since Trefry understands honor so well that he was near raping Imoinda in a passion of love and lust before Oroonoko's arrival. As he cheerfully tells Oroonoko, he has daily been tempted to rape her but "she disarms me with that Modesty and Weeping so tender and so

moving that I retire, and thank my Stars she overcame me" (*Oroonoko* Norton 38). Trefry and narrator/Behn herself fail to free Oroonoko or prevent his grisly torture and death. In the end, Behn makes it clear that Oroonoko's failure of cultural perception was not due to a lack of cultural sophistication, but to the moral failure of the English captain, the enlightened overseer Trefry and the narrator herself. If narrator/Behn sees nobility in the "other" of Oroonoko's and Imoinda's representations of their culture, then she is enacting radical contemporaneity. If author Behn, who circulates around the edges of the court and, at the time of writing, has spent a career representing the English culture to itself, even as her early contact experiences percolate throughout her works, then she is also enacting radical contemporaneity, even if her readers are not.

Radical contemporaneity also explains why Behn gives to Oroonoko the summarizing of the conditions of West African enslavement in Suriname:

Caesar [Oroonoko's slave name], having singl'd out these Men from the Women and Children, made an Harangue to 'em of the Miseries, and Ignominies of Slavery; ...He told 'em it was not for Days, Months, or Years, but for Eternity; there was to be no end to their Misfortunes. ...whether they worked or not, whether they were Faulty or Meriting, they promiscuously, the Innocent with the Guilty, suffer'd the infamous Whip, ...till the blood trickled from all Parts of the Body; Blood, whose every drop ought to be Reveng'd with a Life of some of those Tyrants, that impose it; And why, said he, my dear Friends and Fellow-sufferers, shou'd we be Slaves to an unknown People? Have they Vanquish'd us Nobly in Fight? Have they Won us in Honourable Battel? And are we, by the chance of War, become their Slaves? This wou'd not anger a Noble Heart, this wou'd not animate a Souldiers Soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards; and the Sport of Rogues, and Runagades, that have abandon'd their own Countries, for Rapin, Murders, Thefts and Villanies: ...and shall we render Obedience to such a degenerate Race, who have no Humane Vertue left, to distinguish 'em from the vilest Creatures? (*Oroonoko* Norton 53).

Some have seen in this speech elitism "through codes of heroic romance: the trade in slaves is unjust only if and when slaves are not honorably conquered in battle" (Brown 54). Yet in this speech, Britons can take comfort in seeing their own enslavement through Barbary piracy condemned and in the recognition that their own battle practices do not involve enslavement, an honorable distinction at a time when war-related enslavement was practiced by almost all other empires and cultures. They could thus see their own slave system as distinct – and in that distinction see a far less civil formulation. This speech is the destination of the novel. Behn has used the familiar epistle, travel narrative and ransom appeal to lure Britons into her story to hear Oroonoko give voice to what Hegel would not formulate for a hundred more years: that the master is as debased by slavery as the slave. Behn warns that, as the Triangle Trade expands in the West Indies, not only will noble men like Oroonoko die, but so will Britain's honor and civility.

*Oroonoko* and *Abdelazer* are both presented by Behn as characters made hopeless by the ruthlessness of European imperialism. If we (mis)read Oroonoko as "the noble savage" from our late 20<sup>th</sup> century perspective, Behn's readers saw narratives of European ruthlessness creating Abdelazer's and Oroonoko's hopelessness and tragic outcomes. They saw their presumptions about divine right and monarchy exposed as comparatively backward, the beheading of their king portrayed as barbaric savagery, the corruption of their king aligned with that of an African king in what was increasingly characterized as the deepest heart of darkness. The eponymous titling of both works also emphasizes this reading. Of all Behn's plays, stories and novels (more than two dozen), these are two of only

three eponymously titled.<sup>90</sup> With this Behn clearly signals that she is representing two individual African men in very particular circumstances, and not abstracts like "the young king" or "the amorous prince" or "the city wife" – or "the noble savage."

While the ending of the novel is grotesque beyond bearing, the message is unmistakable. The European and particularly the British form of enslavement of West African is brutal, illogical, uncivil, and worst of all for Behn's love of Hobbesian order, ignoble. In an era that remained shockingly brutal despite the beauty of its art and literature, an era that still held slavery as a legitimate form of labor, Western European<sup>91</sup> slavery stood out as brutish. By deploying these various genres and familiar tropes, Behn is confronting increasingly incorporated European structures of feeling about dark-skinned people and the evolving definition of humanity, with its components of religious belief, enlightenment thought, and technological advancement – both military and commercial. Behn is confronting emerging imperialist structures of feeling with her own observation-based knowledge: she has met noble Africans. In radical contemporaneity, she sees nobility in dark-skinned bodies. As Europeans increasingly insist it isn't possible to find humanity, never mind nobility, in a dark-skinned body, she offers a powerful ecumenizing text that begs to differ.

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<sup>90</sup> *Agnes de Castro* is the third eponymous title. All the rest that refer to an individual character feature, an attribute of that character rather than her name, except for *Sir Patient Fancy*, whose name allegorically gives his major attributes.

<sup>91</sup> As we shall see in the Merian and Gilman chapters below, the Dutch were also quite brutal slave-holders. The French were not far behind.

*No Widow, Ranter*

In *The Widow Ranter*, probably Behn's last major work, she takes on class explicitly. In the City Plays, with their arch sex play and attention to hot urban topics, she exposes the social and economic structure of the marriage racket and the trade in young women as vessels of property and symbols of homosocial relations among powerful men. But, except for one or two short stories (e.g. "The Black Lady") she focused on the new merchant class and the lesser nobility. In *The Widow Ranter*, she finally looks at the full range of class difference and what it means – now that her age and health have raised the specter of poverty in her own life. She also returns to a central concern addressed in her earliest play, *The Young King*: resolving the dissonance between the necessity for a clearly defined social order, such as a monarchy, and the failure of individual monarchs to rise to full nobility and honor. As I've noted several times, many critics – even most critics – claim that Behn was a dyed-in-the-wool monarchist her whole life. Of *The Widow Ranter*, Todd laments that "Despite all the political perceptiveness which her creation of Bacon implied, Behn could still not look beyond a single figure, the royally sanctioned Governor, for any political resolution" (*Secret* 416). However, many critics agree that in *The Widow Ranter* her monarchism softens. As Hughes puts it, "it was a remarkable departure for Behn to give such centrality to a heroic malcontent" (*Theatre* 181). He means Bacon, who might represent a king and monarchist ideals, except that he fails completely, suicides unnecessarily and makes way for a happy coalition of "a well-born race" (I.i) of rational men to

reform the council and "make this Country Happy, Rich and Great" (V.i). For that reason, I argue that Bacon actually does represent "king" and Behn's final recognition that if Hobbes's call for a social order is correct, monarchy may not be the best social order after all.

Posthumously produced and published, *The Widow Ranter* is Behn's only work other than *Oroonoko* that is set in America and, according to Todd, "the first play to be set in British colonial America" (*Secret* 412). It is a complicated play loosely retelling Bacon's Rebellion in 1676 Jamestown, Virginia. Behn was one of the few who had read the account *Strange News from Virginia* narrating Bacon's Rebellion and found in it a story "suited to the troubled times of change" (Todd J. *Secret* 412).<sup>92</sup> Bacon's "crime" was that he had mounted an unauthorized military defense of "the rabble," otherwise known as local farmers and plantation owners, against "invading" Indians who were armed with weapons purchased from the Jamestown Council members in their Royally sanctioned role as local merchants. Thus there are three contending forces: the Jamestown council and its supporters who were fulfilling their royal Commission to establish trade relations with the local Indians; the local Indians who have welcomed the trade but not the deceit or encroachment of the English on their land; and the Jamestown inhabitants whose farms have been raided by angry Indians armed

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<sup>92</sup> Adam R. Beach takes on "Heidi Hutner's recent construction of a Restoration audience filled with those who were as interested in Virginian politics and history as Behn" (216). He convincingly argues that few knew anything at all about Bacon's Rebellion, including Dryden and Pepys who, Beach notes, only mentions Virginia twice in all his volumes. In fact, Beach makes the point that "Behn was intrigued by Virginia and possibly had access to unpublished accounts of Bacon's Rebellion, but we should note how unusual she was in this respect among her playwriting peers and the general theatergoing spectator" (216). Pointing to the marginal stance Behn willfully occupies in the instance of writing *The Widow Ranter*, Beach provides evidence for my styling of Behn as a self-conscious Madame Mediator, offering to expose connections between paradigms that will facilitate movement in the cultural imagination.

through trade with the Jamestown council. The character Whiff sums up the reason Bacon was charged as a rebel: "But in what he has done, he has serv'd the King and our Country, and preserv'd all our Lives and Fortunes" (I.ii). This tangled set of relationships was a rich context in which Behn brings together structures of feeling previously engaged in her work, including issues of gender relations, power structures, constructions of masculinity and femininity, attributes of leadership, and English responses to cross-cultural contact. The complex story of Bacon's rebellion was also a safer context than England in which to analyze the far more tangled events around the "bloodless" revolution of 1688.

As Behn's life drew to a close, her beloved James II was being unceremoniously shuffled off into exile by William III of Orange, who had married James's daughter Mary in part to legitimate his usurpation. Though she wrote *The Widow Ranter* just before dashing off *Oroonoko*, the image of the "frightful Spectacles of a mangl'd King..." with which she would end *Oroonoko* loomed before her (*Oroonoko* Norton 65). The brutal practices of Europeans in both pieces echo the recent deaths of European leaders at the hands of "the rabble" a phenomenon she glosses in *The Widow Ranter* and explores explicitly *Oroonoko*. Todd concludes that as Behn assessed the court and her life-long efforts to escape the rabble and join the "insiders" there, she realized that "with the state shuddering" again under the stress of coping with the inappropriate leadership of one king while preparing to accept a usurper, "there really was no inside in England, no safe place and she felt in London a similar sense of duplicity and instability to that experienced years ago in Surinam. Everywhere was

'America'" (Todd *Secret* 411). *The Widow Ranter* demonstrates that it was worse than that: everywhere was Europe.

In this confusing context, Behn was offered a commission by King James II as part of the court's eleventh hour "drive to recapture public opinion" (Todd J. *Secret* 411). As incentive, her epilogue and prologue would be written by Dryden, long a court insider. Todd claims that Behn's political project in *The Widow Ranter* was "showing what chaos would come if a legitimate authority were absent and if all felt it their right to govern and choose governors, as in America. People would only stay in their correct social places when the central authority was noble, legitimate and absolutely fixed, as both Kings Charles and James had thought" (*Secret* 412). However, Behn's overriding interest in "people stay[ing] in their correct social positions" conflicts with her longing to be lifted up from her "correct social position" and is certainly challenged by her life-long experience and observation. As a result, *The Widow Ranter* both mocks and celebrates that desire and its complex consequences.

Writing in 2002, Aspasia Velissariou argues<sup>93</sup> that "*The Widdow Ranter* is obviously not part of the Tory propaganda drama of the early 1680s" (137). What is obvious to her is not obvious to most of Behn's late 20<sup>th</sup> century critics who see in Behn's work royalist, monarchist, Hobbesian, materialist, elitist, ethnocentric racism. Velissariou explains:

In the context of the remarkable polarization of the political ideologies in the 1680s, and notwithstanding Behn's Tory partisanship, *The Widdow Ranter* ... defies reductive Whig-Tory ideological distinctions...[and] problematizes the origins of

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<sup>93</sup> "'Tis Pity That When Laws Are Faulty They Should Not Be Mended or Abolish't': Authority, Legitimation, and Honor in Aphra Behn's *The Widdow Ranter*,"

authority. ...In a gesture that to a certain extent interrogates her unrelenting support of the monarchical order, she considers the possibility of individual reaction as an alternative origin of political legitimacy when lawful power is either absent or abusive. (137)

Elliott Visconsi argues that, "Poised on either side of the 1688 revolution, two of Behn's last works, *Oroonoko* (1688) and *The Widow Ranter* (performed posthumously in 1689), exploit English anxieties about the nation's racial incapacity to live in a peaceful, civil society " (Visconsi 673). Visconsi suggests that, as a life-long witness of brutality inflicted by every class upon every other class, including beheading of kings, "Behn sees the English people as possessing a collective genetic predisposition towards violence, greed, and restless disobedience ...[and a] national proclivity for lawless violence" as a result of which "Behn shares with her political opposite John Milton a deep and hostile antipathy towards the English national character" (Visconsi 673). Yet, as we shall see, there is much in *The Widow Ranter* that argues against "hostile antipathy" and for bewilderment, dismay and yet abiding hope that the "national proclivity for lawless violence" is not genetic but is instead constructed by political manipulation. There is much in *The Widow Ranter* that rejects propaganda and demands something more straightforward.

Visconsi asserts that *The Widow Ranter* makes two crucial points to its Restoration audience: "first, the national civilizing process is fragile and tenuous; and second, the lack of disciplined absolutist government in the colonies is reactivating barbaric tendencies which the nation has only recently overcome" (Visconsi 675). The first point hardly bears mentioning to a population that has

seen so much upheaval and expects much more. As for the second, there's no reason to presume that Behn thinks the nation has overcome brutality, but she is certainly tapping into the structures of feeling that imagine overcoming it – and fear failing to do so. Furthermore, as an Atlanticist, Behn knows that England is hardly the only nation to indulge in brutality. The Dutch, at that moment still the dominant economic and political power of Europe and beyond, were masters of it.<sup>94</sup> The period shuddered with a brutality that we even now struggle to overcome.<sup>95</sup>

Adam R. Beach agrees with the assessment of Europe's zeitgeist, but points out that "Writing to an already hostile audience, many of whom would share Dryden's scorn of English colonials, Behn takes advantage of the mixed tragicomic form to outline an attractive, complex colonial society, but this positive depiction had little appeal to her contemporaries and expresses what continued to be a minority view in England far into the eighteenth century" (213). In Dryden's prologue and epilogue, Beach notes that Dryden's adherence to the poetic trope of the time of "America as England's chamber pot" reflects the explicit policy of pro-colonials who "presented overseas territories as penal colonies into which England could metaphorically void or vomit detested castoffs from mainstream society" (214). Dryden is all for the colonial project and therefore put off in the extreme by the colonists themselves. Beach examines Behn's more "positive view" in *The Widow Ranter*, a view I call mediational.

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<sup>94</sup> See below on de Witt. Also see Giles Milton, *Nathaniel's Nutmeg: or the True and Incredible Adventures of the Spice Trader Who Changed the Course of History*, among many other histories.

<sup>95</sup> We STILL debate torture and execution!

A very small moment in the play is at the heart of this complexity. In that moment, Jamestown Councilman Dullman complains “I am forc’d to be guarded to the Court now, [because] the Rabble swore they would De-Wit me” (III.i). Councilman Dullman is worried about his safety now that many of Jamestown's people have thrown their noisy armed support behind the "rebel" Bacon. In the previous scene, Dullman was briefly seized by "the Rabble" which threatened to “barbicu this fat rogue” unless the Council freed their beloved Bacon from arrest (II.iv). The audience would have first laughed uproariously at the suggestion of "barbicu'd" Bacon or a "de-witted" "Dullman." But then they would have shuddered deliciously at the reference to the brothers Johan and Cornelius DeWitt (1625-72) who had, as one annotation for the line delicately put it, “been killed by a mob” just before William of Orange regained power in the Netherlands (Jehlen 261). The full tale is much more interesting and, given her spying history and political obsessions, front and center in Behn's mind as she writes this play.

In 1653 Johan (or Jan or John) DeWitt was elected councilor pensionary of the States of Holland,<sup>96</sup> the dominant province of the Dutch Republic of the United Provinces. He held this office for twenty years controlling the affairs of state, particularly the economic affairs. He successfully upheld the Act of Seclusion of the Williams of Orange, father and son, from power in Holland. Due to his brilliant statesmanship and economic policies, along with the maritime policies of his brother Cornelius, the Netherlands reached its Golden Age during his reign, the peak of its political and economic power world wide and the extent

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<sup>96</sup> details of this history are taken from Herbert H. Rowen. *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625-1672*, 1978.

of its colonial power. He was instrumental in pushing Spain out of the Low Countries for the final time and for negotiating agreements with surrounding countries like Sweden, Denmark and England. But when France pushed into the southern provinces, the populace suddenly turned against de Witt and his brother and turned back to the House of Orange.

Herbert H. Rowen's exhaustive account of de Witt's life and death makes a convincing case for the manipulation of the populace by contending forces in the Low Countries, an arena Behn knew well from her own mission to Antwerp in 1667 just as the monarchist conspiracy began to heat up against de Witt.

Monarchists capitalized on the populace's fear of the encroaching French and their pent up love for William of Orange who, they felt, would rally the country's valorous traditions. But fear was the greater part of the people's feeling, as Behn's character Friendly illustrates after receiving false information when he cries, "Oh, I am mad, I'll fight away my life, and my despair shall yet do greater wonders, than even my Love could animate me too" (*Ranter V*). Dutch and British monarchists spread false rumors that de Witt's brother Cornelius had plotted with a barber named Tichelaer to assassinate William, and that John himself had been traitorously negotiating with the French to save his fortune, both charges soon after proven false. Cornelius was arrested, tortured and sentenced to banishment to satisfy the demands of the populace. Tichelaer was released as innocent.

Rowen writes: "Although the jailer warned the judges that Tichelaer would stir up the crowd, they ordered him released, ...he told the crowd about [around] the door...One of us has to be guilty and should have been condemned to death.

...Instigators were observed at his side" (874). The anxious furious crowd bought Tichelaer's story whole.

While the wily monarchist agent stirred up the crowd outside the jail, John de Witt was lured to his brother's bedside to help him limp home to prepare for exile. The troops protecting the jail were called away suddenly, leaving the unguarded jail open to the irate mob which immediately stormed the jail and dragged the brothers onto the street. Both were killed by the burghers and merchants who then hung them by their feet from the nearby scaffold. At this point the larger mob snapped. They stripped the bodies, cut off parts and eviscerated both men. "The desecrators speared the parts each had got upon quills and ran through the streets selling them" (Rowen 882). Some of the parts were never recovered, but John's heart was recovered after three years and reunited with his body. However, the "de Witted" horror Dullman refers to was not these horrific events. Rowen reports "Worse desecration followed. Parts of the cadavers were roasted by a few of the spectators and eaten – a cannibalism neither of hunger nor of ritual, but of a hatred almost unparalleled in the history of the country" (882). Or of Europe.

The irony of Behn's reference to De Witt is that the murder was a monarchist conspiracy engaged in at the epicenter of "true freedom" – i.e. a republican democracy – by a "rabble" that, by 1688, she knew very well had been carefully manipulated by agents of William of Orange. The horrific behavior of the Dutch rabble was instigated by Dutch and British monarchists, as Behn had reason to know. As she began to write *The Widow Ranter* and *Oroonoko*, that

same William of Orange was about to step onto the British throne and depose Behn's beloved James II. If she ever was single-mindedly royalist – which I contend she was not – that single-mindedness was now impossible. The European cannibalism circulating in Behn's reference in *The Widow Ranter* is hilariously and horrifically ironic and completely missed by modern readers. In this tiny moment, Behn confronts the reality that, royalist ideals aside, the relationship between the rabble and the leader(s) is tenuous and whoever controls the rabble's perceptions ultimately holds the power.

This observation invokes the cynical use to which young Behn, just prior to her mission to Antwerp, puts the rabble in *The Young King* when Princess Cleomena abdicates the Dacian throne and manipulates the Dacian population to create a furor on behalf of her brother's ascension. As a fervent monarchist, it must have rankled young Behn that the Dutch Republic(s) had had nearly one hundred years of economic and political dominance and managed to be at peace within its borders most of that time. In support of the "antipathy" for the rabble, Visconsi asserts that "Behn sees her republican and Whig opponents as a pastiche of undesirables incapable of government—they are the *mobile vulgus*, a subversive, noisome crowd of 'ignoramus' Whig politicians, the monstrous mercantile middle class, and a deluded multitude of rabble" (Visconsi 674). Yet in her final year, in her final play, she begins the action with encounters with "the Rabble" on this horrific note and moves beyond that encounter to include honest and honorable men and women among those who both support and oppose Bacon. The political complexities of *The Widow Ranter* insist that Behn could not ignore

– if she ever did – the dissonance between monarchism and the emerging concepts of democracy.

In *The Widow Ranter*, the rabble is, by comparison to their Dutch analogues, well-informed. Referred to variously as "the People" (I.ii, III.i), "the Rabble" (II.i, iv), and the "body of Souldiers" (III.ii), they name, flock to and worship Bacon.<sup>97</sup> As Bacon himself remarks "I am beholding to the Rable for my Life," a decidedly un-de Witt outcome (II.vi). When the Rabble first appears in the Council chamber in Bacon's support, they know the facts of his ambush. When they appear soon after demanding Bacon's freedom, they know the facts of his arrest. As "souldiers," the Rabble's loyalties become fractured and confused. After having the Council's proclamation read to them by Councilman Duncce, they respond with cheers and, when Bacon approaches, they all shout "Let's fall on *Bacon*---let's fall on *Bacon* hay---[*Hollow*" (III.ii). But when Bacon arrives with the Council's "Loyall Honest" Col. Downright captured, the soldiers fall silent.

Bacon taunts them:

Bac.

All silent yet---where's that mighty Courage that cryed so loud but now? A Council a Council, where is your Resolution, cannot three hundred Pound Excite your Valour, to seize that Traytor *Bacon* who has bled for you?---

All.

A Bacon, a Bacon, a Bacon.---  
[Hollow

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<sup>97</sup> "...young *Bacon*, whom the People have nick nam'd *Fright-all* ( I.ii)

"...the People dayly flock to him" (I.ii).

"...the people worship him" (I.ii)

"Say? they Curse us all, and Drink young *Frightall*'s Health (II.i).

"...Go *Cant*, Sir to the Rabble---for us---we know you" (II.i).

"...I'd meet him at the head of all his noisy Rabble, and seize him from the rout" (II.iv).

"...Thrust out his following Rabble" (II.iv).

They mutiny in the middle of battle to join him, falling under the influence of his "voice like a Gorgon...like a cherubim" (III.ii). Despite – or perhaps because of – what they know, by Act V the Rabble's loyalties are so divided that they appear in every scene as an amorphous "body of souldiers"<sup>98</sup> behind each faction's leader, as if the same ten recognizable men showed up over and over in different costumes, including those of the Amerindians, each time devoted heart and soul to their leader's cause.

And each cause is just. Every faction has a legitimate aim, which Behn emphasizes by excising Jamestown's governor from the action. For that reason, Hughes writes that in *The Widow Ranter*, "Bacon challenges a power vacuum, not established government" (181). By this he means that Behn eliminates Governor Berkeley from the scene so that she can examine Bacon for potential noble leadership without the contradiction of having it already represented in the presence of Berkeley. The thought via Todd is that if Berkeley were present, Behn would have to defer to him in her undying celebration of monarchy and divine right - or overtly abandon this view. I submit that Berkeley's absence signifies Behn's abandonment of monarchy in this play because there is not a power vacuum in Behn's Jamestown at all. In fact, the absence of Berkeley lets Behn examine more closely the power struggle taking place throughout Europe and the colonies between the born nobility and the republican leaders and the practice of both types of frightening and tricking "the rable" into doing their dirty work.

But the rabble is not the only element in the social hierarchy that is subject to manipulation. Behn's farcical representation of the middle-men illustrates the

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<sup>98</sup> or "some souldiers" or "a party of men" and "*about a Duzen Indians*."

extent to which cowardice, self-interest and moral insipidity make mid-level bureaucrats easy prey to manipulative leaders or even just the changing political winds. Aptly named clowns Whim, Whiff, Timorous and Dullman are batted about during the battle scenes like their women – except that the men have all the trappings of agency and refuse to use them. A stage direction in III.ii on the Sevana as the Councilmen assemble to plan their attack on Bacon's forces directs "*Enter Dull. Tim. Whim. and Whiff, all in Buff, Scarf and Feather [...].*" The Jehlen and Warner version ignores the absence of a word in the manuscript here, when ordinarily it offers a suggestion, and instead notes "Indian dress" (265). However, the missing word is "cockade" because the costume note describes the battle uniform of British Officers. From a "UK"<sup>99</sup> website on the proper dress for 17<sup>th</sup> C reenactment comes this direction: "They might wear a buff coat made of thick leather, with a small armour 'gorget' around their throat. Because the officers of both sides came from the same social class they would have looked identical, differentiated by a coloured scarf (sash) worn around the waist or across the shoulder."<sup>100</sup> Cockades in hats (worn all the time, even inside) were made of feathers. Thus these four, with Parson Duncie as their leader, represent what Visconsi rightly calls "former pickpockets and cobblers rul[ing] Virginia oafishly, and with startling cowardice and treachery" (Visconsi 676). Young Friendly agrees with Visconsi, but manages to imagine something better:

Friend.

This Country wants nothing but to be People'd with a wellborn  
Race to make it one of the best Collonies in the World, but for

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<sup>99</sup> "uk" in the url indicates the website's home.

<sup>100</sup> A Guide to English Civil War Re-enactment <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/historyact/pages/guide/guide.htm> 3/15/08 alh.

want of a Governour we are Ruled by a Councill, some of which have been perhaps transported Criminals, who having Acquired great Estates are now become your Honour, and Right Worshipfull, and Possess all Places of Authority; there are amongst 'em some honest Gentlemen who now begin to take upon 'em, and Manage Affairs as they ought to be. (I.i)

In fact, this passage early in the play foreshadows the play's resolution in which honest people from both sides form just such a coalition. This imagined solution is far more optimistic a view of “the rabble” than Behn critics give her credit for. Behn's outcome is also more optimistic since, according to the historical record, Governor Berkley hanged more men for Bacon's small uprising than Charles II ordered hung for the death of his father (Todd J. *Secret* 413).

Behn poses this sometimes farcical representation of British socio-political structures in Jamestown against the sober Amerindian culture and the majestic New World forest nearby. The stage-notes play up the ridiculous exotic setting of an Indian temple, but far from making fun of Amerindians, it instead makes fun of the European penchant for projecting fantasies of the Greek ideal onto Amerindian culture. The scene is pure Sophocles with the misinterpreted prophecies of the enigmatic oracle and Virgil's temple sanctuary broken into by hotheaded warriors and repulsed by other hotheaded warriors. The scene ridicules Bacon's devotion to outmoded unworkable ideals and catches Europeans laughing at Amerindians for what Europeans themselves obsessively admire. The Amerindians in Behn's play are motivated by values that Europeans hold increasingly dear: land ownership. Even if they didn't know that Amerindians

would never make a land claim, English audiences would note that Carnavio's claim to the land trumped Bacon's.

King.

For your part, Sir, you've been so Noble, that I repent the fatal difference that makes us meet in Arms. Yet tho' I'm young I'm sensible of Injuries; And oft have heard my Grandsire say---That we were Monarchs once of all this spacious World; Till you an unknown People landing here, Distress'd and ruin'd by destructive storms, Abusing all our Charitable Hospitality, Usurp'd our Right, and made your friends your slaves. (II.i)

Hughes' comparison between colonial liminal culture and local Indian culture seems to take at face value Behn's representation of Indian culture as her sincere vision. Behn does in fact create a "historical deracination [that] is the ultimate cause of all the mergings and collapses of cultural and social opposites" but not into chaotic nothingness such as the Amerindians supposedly practice (Hughes 186). She collapses European superstructures in her effort to see and explicate the infrastructure of political leadership, theory and practice underlying it. As Hughes notes, when Behn's European idealized hero chooses to be engulfed by romantic love for a woman, his consequent actions show that "the European in the primitive land is the one most like the creature of the wilds" (Hughes *Theater* 187). Bacon's actions are far less honorable than his beloved Semernia's or her husband and king, Carnavio. Behn clearly sees the local Indians as NOT barbarians, but in claiming that view, she separates "primitive" from "barbarity" – which Visconsi, unlike Behn, clearly defines only in its modern sense as brutality. Behn's reference early on to De Wit's fate relocates her critique square in the

wilds of European politics, not in the uncharted regions of America. She has seen both and has no illusions about the difference.

This secondary plot of Bacon's relations with the Amerindian King and Queen operates more like a frame than a sub-plot since it surrounds the hilarity of the main story with the shadowy depths of forest and mystery. The physicality of the forest is especially intense as the play enters the final acts during which all the characters are on the move from town to tents to temples and finally end up simply running back and forth across the stage wielding swords, arrows, trophies, prisoners, and poisons. In the midst of it all, Semernia appears in drag, speaking of her feelings for Bacon as if she had contracted a disease that caused her to lose rational connection to her own culture. Her rescuers, Caravo and "her woman" ask her why, now that Carnavio is dead, does she flee Bacon's control if she loves him. She replies:

Quee.  
 Twelve tedious Moons I past in silent languishment; Honour  
 endeavouring to destroy my Love, but all in vain, for still my pain  
 return'd when ever I beheld my Conqueror, but now when I  
 consider him as Murderer of my Lord---[*Feircely*] I sigh and wish-  
 --some other fatal hand had given him his Death---but now there's  
 a necessity I must be brave and overcome my Heart: What if I do?  
 ah whether shall I fly, I have no *Amazonian* fire about me, all my  
 Artillery is sighs and Tears, the Earth my Bed, and Heaven my  
 Canopy. (V.i).

Placed back in its context, we see that Semernia's lack of Amazonian fire is attributed to being engulfed by romantic love. Yet she resists in the end, believing herself free to love him only in death at his hands.

Bacon does not resist romance. He simply suicides. However, not in a passion of grief over having killed his beloved himself – his answer to that is to engage in frenzied fighting. Once his passion is spent and he thinks his side has lost, he moans "I have too long surviv'd my Queen and Glory, those two bright Stars that influenc'd my Life are set to all Eternity" (V). He informs Daring that he has poisoned himself and thus "Secur'd my self from being a publick Spectacle upon the common Theatre of Death" (V). Again, the horrific public spectacle of de Witt's death floats before us as well as the irony that their death was now seen as a martyrdom that amplifies their honor. The comparison is deliberate, since the historical Bacon had no love at all for Amerindians, as a group or individuals, unlike Capt. John Smith, whose Pocahontas narrative Behn has invoked to intensify the image of a European aristocrat who fails his own ideals. The fictional Bacon is an anti-martyr who dies ignobly of self-inflicted poison. He avoids being "feminized" through penetration and death at the hands of a virile male and instead is feminized by choice. He chooses engulfment in a romantic ideal and infusion through the ingestion of poison – a willing feminization, a "sin" in a masculinized world, a soft coward's death for the sake of "effeminate" love and romance. The historic Bacon trumps suicide in a seeming birth, the monstrous "bloody flux" (malaria) like a woman dying in child birth. Bacon's failure and effeminate death(s), his prosthetic penetration of Semernia in a fit of passion to reclaim her, her celebration of that moment as liberating, all illustrate the insanity of romantic motives – compared to the logical Daring/Ranter match woven through the center of the play.

Semernia's heroism also trumps Bacon's, neatly overturning the associated Semiramis legend that misogynists loved to quote against any manifestation of female strength and power. Todd claims that Semernia is no Amazon, but is an "Indian Queen", a delicate Europeanized conception – she is 'timorous as a dove' with 'no Amazonian fire' about her" (413).<sup>101</sup> But Todd J. mistakes Semernia's description of her emotional state as a summary of her character. Hughes takes in more of Semernia's character, noting that "the Indian Queen Semernia ... is a partial throwback to Behn's earliest heroines, given (like Erminia in *The Forc'd Marriage*) as an unwilling bride to a warrior-hero, and (like Cleomena in *The Young King*) experimenting with an Amazonian role in battle, to the point of fighting the man she loves in male disguise" (*Theater* 182). Behn would have been aware of Amerindian amazonian behavior through Mary Rowlandson's captivity narrative, *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*, published in 1682, first in Cambridge, Ma, then in London (Salisbury viii).<sup>102</sup> Furthermore, invoking the notorious Assyrian Queen Semiramis connects Semiris to an Amazon<sup>103</sup> who is not, as many think, mythical but an actual historical leader whose story has been corrupted by patriarchal myth and legend. Unlike Semiramis (whatever the truth

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<sup>101</sup> This is itself a resistance – to suggest that a "savage" could be as delicate as a Euro woman. A parallel in fact to her suggestions about Oronooko.

<sup>102</sup> Colley says that the British edition was not followed with a new edition until 1900, suggesting that "on the other side of the Atlantic, the market was far less avid" than in NE where 3 editions sold out in 1682 and then in 1720. Still, Behn may have read it based on Beach's suggestion that she had seen the private MSS version of the Narrative of Virginia.

<sup>103</sup> "She was reputed to have conquered many lands and founded the city of Babylon. After a long and prosperous reign she vanished from earth in the shape of a dove and was thereafter worshiped as a deity, acquiring many of the characteristics of the goddess [Ishtar](#). The historical figure behind this legend is probably Sammuamat, who acted as regent of Assyria from 810 to 805 BC." (<http://www.questia.com/library/encyclopedia/semiramis.jsp>).

of her story is), Semernia chooses not to betray her king – when he is alive or dead.

Whether or not she is an Amazon figure, Semernia is a moral figure, her confusion echoing Behn's effort to figure out to whom she owes or feels allegiance when those she loves kill or usurp those she is honor bound to support. Ignoring Semernia's honorable actions, Hughes writes, "Widowhood for the European women is a condition of economic power rather than (as it is for Semernia) passive moral paralysis" (183). But Semernia makes an active choice to adhere to her cultural origins and values over her flaming passion for Bacon. Her own people question her choice, suggesting that she has the power to reject culture in favor of romance, but she chooses otherwise: "...not fly the Murderer of my Lord? ... I wish there were in Nature one excuse either by force or Reason to compel me" (V.i). She is dressed like a man and chooses principle, like men supposedly do, suggesting that given the right context – being literally clothed in the right conditions – anyone, male or female, is capable of moral choices made willfully on principle. And, like a man, she is vulnerable to military penetration and death, equal in that to her husband the king. She asserts to Bacon that he would place honor above love, as she does:

Queen.

Indeed I would not ask your Honour, Sir, That renders you too  
Brave in my esteem. Nor can I think that you would part with that.  
No not to save your Life. (II.ii)

He ultimately fails to live up to her image of him, just as every Englishman Oroonoko encounters fails. As Hughes puts it, "Bacon's own death shows that the

increased latitude given to women [by Behn in this play] is made possible by the extinction of that brash machismo" (*Theatre* 189). Whether or not "Behn always found [that machismo] in equal measure attractive and dangerous," she clearly found it expendable (*Theatre* 189). If machismo must die before egalitarian matrimonial happiness is possible, then the whole hierarchical property-owning system must die before social justice is possible because it is founded upon – though by no means limited to – sexual inequality.<sup>104</sup>

Which brings us to what should be the central question of the play: who is the Widow Ranter? With all its focus on Bacon, Semernia, Carnavio, the farcical and logical Councilors, and the rabble, the first question that arises after reading *The Widow Ranter* is why it isn't called *Bacon's Rebellion* or *Nat and the Indian Queen* or *The Rise of the Fall of Yet Another Male Ego*. If the play is, as Todd J., and Hughes, among many others claim, about Behn's final attempt to figure out what legitimate authority is (Todd J. 412), or the "portrayal of a world in which the gentry is losing its grip" (Hughes *Theater* 181), it also provides what Maureen Duffy calls "the last of her spirited women, the Widow Ranter...the ultimate in Aphra Behn's pleas for equality" (*Passionate* 296). Duffy actually describes the Widow as one "who is successful in getting a new husband" (*Passionate* 296). This is true in the play. It is also true in the play that, as Todd puts it, "there was such chaos that no one managed to be hanged at all and the play concluded with multiple marriages" (*Secret* 413). It is true, as Hughes claims, that "all the women are ultimately distributed via the network of military rivalry and brotherhood" (*Theater* 183). This would seem, again, to mean that Behn falls back into

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<sup>104</sup> See Gerda Lerner's classic re-gendering of history in *The Creation of Patriarchy*.

conventional gender constructions, in particular the heterosexual marital economic system.

However, these marriages are markedly different from those portrayed in the early plays that featured forced marriages, arranged marriages and punitive marriages. If order under patriarchal monarchs and merchants means women traded in marriage as vessels of familial wealth, then in "the dispersed social picture" (Hughes *Theater* 184) of the colony of Virginia, a Widow Ranter can prosper despite her criminal past, can rant to her heart's content and can even be "successful in *getting* a new husband" (Duffy *Passionate* 296) – that is, in being the active agent in parlaying her own fortune to attract a man whom *she* desires, and who prefers her in pants. As her new husband happily proclaims when Ranter offers to don women's clothes in his honor:

Dar.  
Nay, prithee, take me in the humour, while thy Breeches are on---  
for I never lik'd thee half so well in Petticoats. (IV:iii)

As the battle of Bacon's Rebellion rages on, we see "Ranter fighting like a Fury by his side, he putting her back in vain; they fight out" (Act V.i, stage directions). Like the Amazons in *The Young King*, Ranter is no poser. Nor does Dareing see her as anything less than valiant.

Ran.  
Faith General you left me but scurvily in Battel.

Dar.  
That was to see how well you cou'd shift for your self, now I find you can bear the brunt of a Campaign you are a fit Wife for a Souldier. (V:iii)

A fit wife for a Daring man and thus for a play's title. The Widow's agency, her fortune, her ranting, her gender-bending, her delight in it all, in short her straightforward encounter with life and what it offers is seen as masculine confidence and female monstrosity by patriarchal culture when it is actually the healthy human ideal of gender equality that Behn has been trying throughout her plays and writings to account for and imagine in free operation. To the extent that behavior, policy, and ideology are products of machismo – the irrational pride in ostentatious masculinity and hierarchical power – patriarchal culture will produce Bacons who self-destruct in cowardly outbursts, taking many others with them into death. That is the way of the old world.

What does the New World offer in Behn's view? The death of old Surelove in England offers a promise. His death frees Madam Surelove to marry Hazard – not without risk but nevertheless with promise and hope. Behn lays out the contrast in this exchange among Ranter's party guests:

Tim.

But if these fears were laid and *Bacon* were hang'd, I look upon *Virginia* to be the happiest part of the world, gads Zoors,---why there's *England*---'tis nothing to't---I was in *England* about 6. years ago, & was shew'd the Court of Aldermen, some were nodding, some saying nothing, and others very little to purpose, but how could it be otherwise, for they had neither Bowle of Punch, Bottles of wine or Tobacco before 'em to put Life & Soul into 'em as we have here: then for the young Gentlemen---Their farthest Travels is to *France* or *Italy*, they never come hither.

Dull.

The more's the Pitty by my troth,  
[drinks.

Tim.

Where they learn to Swear Mor-blew, Mor-Dee:<sup>105</sup>

Friend.

And tell you how much bigger the *Louvre* is then *White-Hall*; buy a sute A-la-mode, get a swinging Cap of some *French* Marquis, spend all their money and return just as they went.

Dull.

For the old fellows, their bus'ness is Usury, Extortion, and undermining young Heirs.

Tim.

Then for young Merchants, their Exchange the is Tavern, their Ware-house the Play-house, and their Bills of Exchange Billet-Deaxs, where to sup with their wenches at the other end of the Town,---now Judge you what a Condition poor *England* is in: for my part I look upon't as a lost Nation gads zoors.

Behn clearly sees more promise in the death of relations between the doddering corrupt old regime and the transfer of the sure love of good government to a hazardous but potentially more egalitarian world. By the end of the play, the most rational and brave of the settlers on both sides of the conflict have joined forces. To Dareing, the leader of the winning side, Wellman, the Council chair, announces "Your offering peace while yet you might command it, has made such kind impressions on us, that now you may command your Propositions; your Pardons are all Seal'd and new Commissions" (V). Dareing happily accepts the proposal, whereupon Wellman proclaims:

Come my brave Youths let all our Forces meet,  
To make this Country Happy, Rich, and great;  
Let scanted *Europe* see that we enjoy  
Safer Repose, and larger Worlds than they.  
FINIS.

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<sup>105</sup> Jehlen and Warner say this is "imitation of Mort-dieu, a French oath" probably meaning "god's death" (254).

Far from being a royalist, racist, complicit, conservative, Behn couldn't make it more clear in this, the last of her plays, that she believes that if men and women are brave, courageous and determined in joint ventures like the marriage of Hazard and Surelove, Dareing and Ranter, the people and the wise councilors, then perhaps a "new world" will develop that proper civilized order she spent her career trying to imagine.

*Chapter 4*MARIA SIBYLLA MERIAN'S SUBALTERN LIFE: MADAME MEDIATOR IN  
THE FIELD WITH INSECTS

On October 14, 2007, Richard Attenborough was interviewed by Steve Curwood on *Living on Earth* about his new book *Amazing Rare Things: The Art of Natural History in the Age of Discovery*, compiled in collaboration with Susan Owens, Martin Clayton and Rea Alexandratos. The two men went immediately to the crown jewel of the collection: works by Leonardo da Vinci, about whom Attenborough gushed:

Yes, I mean 'artist' is an inadequate word, really, for Leonardo da Vinci. I mean it's an accurate word of course. Leonardo's curiosity into how things worked is just mind-blowing. And the details and of course the sheer beauty of the drawings is absolutely extraordinary.

This gushing is, of course, justified in da Vinci's case. But it took several more minutes and a question from Curwood before the work of Maria Sibylla Merian, also in the collection, was brought up. About her, Attenborough quipped:

Yes she—Sibylla Merian was her name—she was a widow and she earned her living selling insect specimens in Holland. And in the mid 50s she decided that she'd like to go and see many of these specimens that she had been selling, and draw them in the wild. And so off she hopped, with her daughter, to Suriname. And there she collected caterpillars and watched them as they metamorphosed into the adult insects, not knowing what they were going to turn into, and produced, as a result of this, some magnificent plates which subsequently became very famous indeed, and very beautiful they are, too. You can certainly tell a

Merian drawing. She has a deep affection for curls. I mean she can't resist a curl.

"Off she hopped"? What about Merian's "curiosity about how things worked" which she had spent thirty-nine years exploring as a pioneer in the new field of science? What about how her methods of observation challenged long-held views on insect generation and were "mind-blowing" to the foremost theorists of her day? The phrasing of Curwood's question to Attenborough sums up the problem that Merian and her sisters in science clearly still face: "One of the most interesting characters, that *I'd never heard of before* I'd read your book, was this woman who'd went [sic] to Suriname. Can you tell me her story, please?" (Curwood my emphasis). I wonder what, exactly, possessed Attenborough to allow into his tome a curl-obsessed woman who "hopped, with her daughter, to Suriname" like an early modern jet-setter? She is also the woman whose work he put on his cover.<sup>106</sup> And it is from her letter that he draws his title.<sup>107</sup> He credits neither.

My task here is to credit Merian. While projects like Attenborough's – through the capable work of his contributor Susan Owens – recover her beautiful art and revolutionary science, I seek to credit her as a mediator between the contending cultures she encountered. Despite her privileged status as a middle class educated European woman, Merian's point of view as an oppressed female

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<sup>106</sup> He doesn't mention in his text or interview with Curwood that her work is on his cover. The image is, however, properly cited by the publisher on the Copyright page of *Amazing Rare Things* as "Front cover: Maria Sibylla Merian, Passion flower plant (plate 59, detail)." Also, look at Susan Owens "Great Diligence, Grace and Spirit" in *Amazing Rare Things*.

<sup>107</sup> Letter 7 to Georg Volkammer, Clara's cousin and a physician, dated October 2, 1702, after her return from Surinam, she resettled in Amsterdam "this country" and he in Nuremberg (Rücker 64). Merian writes: "I am now painting in the same way as I did when I was in Germany, but everything on vellum in large format with the plants and creatures life-size, very interesting, for it contains many amazing rare things which have never been seen before" (Rücker 64).

makes her a subaltern, a material condition of her life that she develops into a libratory standpoint. As a white middle class female, her liminal class and gender status place her between the imperial patriarchal capitalist power of her ethnicity and race and the tropicopolitan subaltern existence of colonized, exploited and enslaved subjects of empire. As a white European, Merian is powerful enough to choose Atlanticist and tropicopolitan standpoints and expresses them through ecumenical gestures in her "texts:" writing, art work and revolutionary scientific methods. These claims are also true of Behn, whose texts defy late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminist presumptions about her racism, elitism and sexist collusion. Merian has not suffered such reductionism by late 20<sup>th</sup> century feminists, with whom I am ordinarily allied. Thus, my task with Merian is less complicated by divided loyalties between a fully developed feminist analysis and an anti-racist anti-colonialist social justice ideology. Merian has instead suffered the more common fate of professional women working in western patriarchy: that of sexist dismissal of her work and life even while that work remains central to hegemonic scientific ideas and practices today. Sexist dismissal continues, as Attenborough so airily demonstrates, but sexism is only the dismissive guise western culture has devised to obfuscate the more profound work of women like Merian in resisting the imperial project of their own people.

Like Behn's literary vocation, Merian's choice of science as her vocation despite her subaltern status positioned her as a mediator in several arenas, as we shall see. The most obvious is in science itself. However, "science" doesn't mean modern science, which by the 20th century became primarily a hegemonically

controlled sexist, racist, capitalist industry. 17<sup>th</sup> century science was not the industrial political project it is now, even though it was already entwined with the politics of conquest and the economics of power. Since Merian "earned her living selling insect specimens in Holland," as Attenborough glibly but erroneously put it, she was also entwined in the workings of power and politics (Curwood). In fact, Merian spent the first fifty years of her life working out how the contending ideologies of religion, mysticism and politics contradict each other and how she could resolve the contradictions into a rational approach to natural events and a tolerable living. The task required Atlanticist circulation.

Of course, personal attributes and events affected her choices and achievements, just as they did with Behn. As we shall see below, the effect of early childhood trauma and loss may have been, as Norman Simms and others propose, that Merian found the world of nature – especially insects – the only one she could sufficiently control and explain. However, Merian's equally traumatized and privileged half siblings did not make the same choices Merian did. I suggest that Merian, even at eleven when her vocation first manifested itself, chose insects because in observing them she could resolve the paradox that religion and alchemy failed to explain: the dialectic between natural conditions and human will. The key contribution of her work to contemporary and modern entomological science is her challenge of cultural presumptions about what nature does, as well as her determination to observe actual events in minute detail and represent her observations in paradigm-challenging detail and form. This required creating to what have become core values of modern science: empirical

observation, skepticism and an ecumenical openness to multiple explanatory paradigms that transcend cultural biases. This required her to transcend subalterity with an Atlanticist standpoint that begins in an Atlanticist point of view.

**Subalterity – dissolution of the solute**

Both Merian and Behn understood the subaltern experience because they were subaltern even as Europeans in the Atlantic region. In her classic essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Guyatry Chakrovarty Spivak considers the condition of the subaltern in European colonialism and western culture. With a flare for drama atypical of theorists, she withholds the answer to her own question until the penultimate paragraph of her long discussion: “the subaltern cannot speak” (308). But if this is so, then how do we account for Beryl Gilroy’s work? Or Paul Gilroy or of Spivak's herself? As people of color and descendents of colonized people, are they not subaltern in western culture? If they are, then what does “speak” mean? A first step in defining "speak" is to recognize that “the subaltern” does not refer to a specific individual but instead to the conditions in which specific individuals live. In this way the term "the subaltern" is similar to the term "the solute" in that many substances can be in the position of solute and some can be in the position of solute in one solution (water in air as mist) and of solvent in another (water in a saline solution). Thus, Spivak herself can be subaltern in the context of a post-colonial analysis of international power hierarchies and a powerful authority in the context of academia and the classroom, a division that her essay addresses. Spivak can speak and is heard around the world as an

academic and a scholar, but when she speaks of her standpoint as a subaltern – in this case as a native-born Indian and a woman – she cannot make her position clear to hegemonic patriarchal power brokers, European or not. The Big Eight don't consult her. They have probably never heard of her. There is no space for her voice in this hegemonic structure.

She speaks to this lack in the following passage in which she lays out the objective of her essay and of her activism as an academic:

As a postcolonial intellectual, I am not troubled that [Derrida] does not *lead* me (as Europeans inevitably seem to do) to the specific path that such a critique ["of European ethnocentrism in the constitution of the Other"] makes necessary. It is more important to me that, as a European philosopher, he articulates the *European Subject's* tendency to constitute the Other as marginal to ethnocentrism and locates *that* as the problem with all logocentric and therefore all grammatological endeavors (since the main thesis of [Derrida's] chapter is the complicity between the two). *Not* a general problem, but a *European* problem. It is within the context of this ethnocentrism that he tries so desperately to demote the Subject of thinking or knowledge as to say that '*thought* is... the blank part of the text' (OG, 93)<sup>108</sup>; that which is thought is, if blank, still *in the text* and must be consigned to the Other of history. That inaccessible blankness circumscribed by an interpenetrable text is what a post colonial critic of imperialism would like to see developed within the European enclosure as *the* place of the production of theory. The postcolonial critics and intellectuals can attempt to displace their own production only by presupposing that *text-inscribed* blankness. (her italics 293-4)

That text-inscribed blankness is precisely what I want to enter in the works of my subjects. That Spivak calls this not only a place but "*the* place of the production of theory" (her italics) gives the subaltern condition a materiality that is crucial to accessing it. Spivak makes the space Euro-specific, however, by noting, rightly

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<sup>108</sup> "Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976)" (Spivak 309 n 11).

enough for this historical period, that the "tendency to constitute the Other as marginal" is "*Not* a general problem, but a *European* problem" (her italics). The specificity of this observation must never be turned aside in considering the history of culture in the Atlantic and in other regions colonized by Europe.

Yet, the larger ecumenical view of this process must also always be present: the tendency of (most likely) *any* hegemonic ethnocentrism to constitute the Other as marginal in all logo centric and therefore all grammatological endeavors. Certainly, as a post-colonial critic of *European* imperialism, analyzing the European tendencies in the process of Othering is central. But Spivak's slippage from general to specific imperialism obscures both realms. The corrective for this slippage is the Derridian recognition that deconstruction does not mean that nothing has any meaning, as some deconstruction critics claim. It means that nothing has only one fixed meaning and everything has many and thus *specifically contingent* meanings. This rhizomatic view of meaning is what leads Spivak to hear in Derrida the possibility that "philosophy" and "the subject" in modernity is culturally specific as "western" and even more specifically as "European" in a particular time period. That specificity, which undoes the phallus of the universal, opens up, for example, philosophy as a general but not universal realm in which European philosophy is a specific part. That opening in turn clears cultural space where the Other also becomes specific, awaiting, for example, post-colonial analysis of philosophies other than western European philosophies of modernity enacted in radical contemporaneity – enacted by mediators like Merian, Behn and, as we shall see, Beryl Gilroy.

Whether or not other cultures hold Western “truths to be self-evident,” the European Subject – as opposed to nature or the universe or the cosmos – thinks ethnically in terms of margins and centers, hierarchies of race, class and sex, etc. Moreover, the universalizing of these observations and analyses of the function of culture by modern critics and philosophers has been dominated and shaped by ethnocentrically European concepts. The universalizing move of western philosophers works in culture like racism and sexism in that it is born of and fed by economic, military, political and gender power. Cultural concepts can only be universalized and hegemonized by those with the most power operating in a hierarchical cultural structure. Everyone else – i.e. the Other, the subaltern – already knows and is forced daily to acknowledge their cultural specificity – i.e. lack of inclusion in the illusion of universality – and to do comparative cultural analyses based on that knowledge in order to survive from day to day. In other words, even though Merian is white European and comfortably in the middle class, her access to education is a fluke, her control over her own property and life is a rebellion she was lucky to pull off, and she is grudgingly granted a place in the naturalist pantheon of her day, a place that eroded to nothing until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century and, even restored to its original position, does not fully acknowledge the pioneering work she did.

Maria Sibylla Merian remains a subaltern who doesn’t speak in the context of western European patriarchal white-supremacist capitalist heterosexist culture because she is still exiled in Derrida’s blank cultural space. To explain this, Spivak turns to the example of widow sacrifice in the Hindu community in

India – a practice I will call funeral suicide in order to degender it for this discussion since in Western culture a "widow" is presumed to be female. According to Spivak, suicide is allowed in Hindu law or the *Dharmasastra* in only two specific situations: grief or funeral suicide; and final enlightenment – *tatvajnana* – in which “the knowing subject comprehends the insubstantiality or mere phenomenality ...of its identity” (300). Enlightenment suicide is allowed because of an elevated state of consciousness – which, by the way, Hindu law presumes women do not achieve. Funeral suicide is allowed only in one place and moment: on the funeral pyre of the deceased. Very few men have engaged in funeral suicide and then not for their wives but as “proofs of enthusiasm and devotion to a master or superior, [which] reveal[s] the structure of domination within the right" to suicide (Spivak 300). Yet, men's funeral suicide shows that the concept is not a gendered act.

However, as Spivak explains, the act is known primarily in modern gendered terms: “The Hindu widow ascends the pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it. This is widow sacrifice” (Spivak 297). Spivak writes that this concept comes from the story of the death of a Hindu Goddess: "the luminous fighting Mother Durga" (Spivak 307). In the story, Durga manifests herself as Sati, the good wife, when she "dies in pain" because her offended father, Visnu, had killed her husband, Siva. Throughout the story, Durga is called *Sati*, which means "the good wife," an appellation containing an attribute rather than the name of the goddess, like Pallas, the appellation for Athena that signifies her grief over the death of her friend Pallas. Modern readings of the myth of

Durga's death as a suiciding Sati gender funeral suicide as feminine and as the ultimate act of "the good wife." But these modern readings are not based in European sexism. According to Spivak, in centuries prior to British rule, when Bengali widows could inherit property and the social rights to it, a widow woman's male relatives would fan her sincere grief with images of "the good wife" Sati, hoping to get her to prove her love through suicide and thus return her property to the husband's family (Spivak 300). Thus, the practice of "good wife" suicide culturally gratified and incorporated Hindu structures of feeling into useful patriarchal economic institutions.

However, European culture also shaped Indian and non-Indian views of funeral suicide in late modernity. The practice was not called *sati* – i.e. was not explicitly linguistically gendered – until the British Empire sought to criminalize funeral suicide. The colonial authorities generated the grammar of the practice – based on the structure of feeling in both cultures that widows are female – by itself naming the practice after the Hindu word for "the good wife" and translating it as widow *sacrifice*, the reflexive element is erased: sacrifice herself by choosing suicide becomes sacrifice her by urging her suicide. Here is an example of the logocentric and grammatological endeavors Derrida refers to above. As Spivak concludes, this linguistic move completes the inversion from the original meaning of the Hindu law authorizing the choice of funeral suicide in cases of extreme grief over the death of a beloved to the British Empire's definition of funeral suicide as brown men sacrificing female widows on their husband's funeral pyre, to paraphrase Spivak. Furthermore, Spivak reports that under colonial rule in

India, Hindu funeral suicide defined as *sati* also served colonized “groups rendered psychologically marginal by their exposure to Western impact...[who] had come under pressure to demonstrate to others as well as themselves, their ritual purity and allegiance to traditional high culture” (Spivak 298). As Spivak grammaticizes the colonial British view, “White men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak 297). I add: white men are justifying policing brown men to save brown women from brown men. However, in “the Indian nativist argument, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: ‘The women actually wanted to die’” (Spivak 297). One could even say they were as good as dead already, since the figure of the Hindu woman is subordinated in and by both cultures to the battle between the contending patriarchies. The women themselves are completely invisible and silenced and have no ground upon which to make the choice for or against funeral suicide – and choice, in rare and extreme cases, was the element that the original Hindu law sought to recognize. Thus, in Hindu culture, “there is no space from which the sexed subaltern can speak” (Spivak 307). In the racist Imperial culture, the female of the marginalized race is doubly subalterned.

This is not to make an essentialist claim for female bodies and silence but simply to say that subjectivity other than male – and thus called feminine or effeminate by patriarchy – is erased. It is in fact to point to the essentialist phallus that constructs the female as feminine in order to create a binary in which female proves the supremacy of male. In the equation female + feminine (defined and imposed by culture) = woman, the female and all non-binary-sexed bodies are erased. The female is not visible unless it is feminine and then it has no

subjectivity – no power to speak on its own terms. Spivak turns to the problem of the female in patriarchy to explain that the female cannot speak because female is not recognized by and thus not included in the text of any patriarchy. Her example, which is unfortunately almost universally experienced by females and other non-males and non-men, provides an opportunity for readers from any ethnic background to ecumenically understand the subaltern condition. The female can become woman (i.e. feminine) and seem to speak in that role within patriarchy, but she is speaking as a patriarchally constructed figure and she is heard by patriarchy only to the extent that she gives voice to values that patriarchy can tolerate by accepting, misreading through assimilation or using as productive alternative resistance that proves the hegemonic patriarchal cultural rule. This, of course, describes the mediator role in Western culture that I am examining in this project. In Spivak's construction, in no way does the female as such – as marked, bracketed off and excluded by patriarchy – speak of its subalterned self. And any body or identity that is neither male or female, or gendered by sex-type is also unable to speak of its subalterned self.

The reason Spivak's recourse to the female subaltern is not, by her own definition, a feminist move – at least not as feminism was practiced when she wrote this essay before 1988 – is that a reading of the *sati* Durga myth as evidence of Hindu's feminist foundations is on a par with the "imperialist [move] to erase the image of the luminous fighting Mother Durga and invest the proper noun Sati with no significance other than the ritual burning of the helpless widow as a sacrificial offering who can then be saved" (Spivak 307). Neither move

recognizes the subjectivity of woman as such, never mind female. Moreover, Spivak doesn't address class or sexuality explicitly in this example. Nor does she speak of race – at least not as we do in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century US race discourse, i.e. as a matter of phenotype. She doesn't speak of these things because she doesn't have to, since in subalterity she is always speaking of them. She is critiquing discourses of dominance and speaking of the subaltern as a consequence of such discourses. Thus she concludes that, since the subaltern condition is a consequence of discourses of dominance, the subaltern as such can not speak within these discourses.

Thus, male or female, the subaltern has no voice in discourses of dominance since dominance – a product of hierarchical assumptions modeled on patriarchal presumptions – defines the subaltern as silent, without voice, without the power to speak and be heard authoritatively. Yet subalterity *seems* gendered because, as Gerda Lerner shows in *The History of Patriarchy*, the first and foundational paradigm in the discourses of dominance that constitute western (and other) cultures is patriarchy, i.e. the subordination of women within a male-ordered social structure. Women were the first slaves because women were more necessary to nascent communities than men – a sufficient supply of young, healthy fertile women was essential in order to produce new members of the community. Moreover, women were easier for men to dominate than were other warring men when the women in question were young newly fertile females. Thus early communities in competition with each other for resources would kill the

men and capture the women as slaves and breeders.<sup>109</sup> This set of assumptions has become so naturalized and pervasive that there is no longer any clear way to point to it in language. That's why "women" often make catachrestic use of the concept of slavery to explain their subalterity and why divisions like class, race, and sexuality are so important in our culture: to keep the majority-minority class of non-men from coalescing as a class. But that is also why racism is so devastating to its victims: because racist discourse feminizes people "of color." Accusations of femininity – "you throw like a girl!" – are still the ultimate insult within that most primitive patriarchy, the playground culture. The body subalterned as female cannot speak; the "non-female" body subalterned as feminine (i.e. not sufficiently masculine in a racist culture) also cannot speak. Not subordinate in any way to sexism, racism expands on and is maintained by sexism. Their relationship is interpenetrable and dialectic, not hierarchical. Their existence depends on the belief among individuals in our culture that racism and sexism are unrelated except as competitors for resources. Their destruction depends on changing that belief.

Thus it is no coincidence that Spivak moves to no less than three examples of female subalterity to explain what a subaltern is. Nor does she do so because she is a feminist or because she thinks females should or could band together as one monolithic class in action. The subalterning of females is so effective

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<sup>109</sup> At first blush, this assertion seems to bracket off the existence of Amazons either as a culture or as powerful individual females. However, young newly fertile males are also easier to control than fully mature adults and any mature adult can be either overwhelmed and killed or followed as an authoritative individual no matter what sex they are. In a culture that depends on replenishment of warring or laboring bodies, fertile young females as a class are more valuable and thus more desirable to capture and control. One man, in power or not, can fertilize many many women, but many many women are required to produce healthy offspring to replenish a population. Captured enemy male soldiers thus have little value and lots of risk.

precisely because females and even the smaller category called women are much too diverse to be drawn into effective collective class action. Bodies completely erased by the sex binary (not male or female, masculine or feminine) thus have unfigured subaltern status – sub-subaltern if you will, not even granted a place in the hegemonic hierarchy. To speak of the subaltern in Western culture, which has been internationally dominant for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, is to speak of all kinds of bodies that are not male, masculine, white and productively heterosexual. For patriarchy, it is a constitutive triumph that females – and even women – are too divided by class and race and other categorizations to organize in class action. Categories of class and race and other social groups are feminizable through subalterity because possession of power is defined as masculine and lack of power as feminine. The ability to organize to end patriarchy depends on organizing subaltern resistance using imposed categories while at the same time understanding that eliminating those categories – because they never existed – is the ultimate social justice objective.

The theoretical task required to lay the ground for this series of unlikely coalitions is even more daunting. If, as Spivak writes "what a post colonial critic of imperialism would like to see developed within the European enclosure as *the* place of the production of theory" is Derrida's inaccessible blank space, then "postcolonial critics and intellectuals can attempt to displace their own production only by presupposing that *text-inscribed* blankness" (Spivak 294). In short, a post colonial critic would like to see theory produced in the blanks, silences and grounds imperialist – i.e. patriarchal – texts leave open. The theoretical work that

Spivak calls for is what I claim as a 21<sup>st</sup> century third wave feminist move. Spivak deploys the extra clarity of the female subaltern doubly silenced by sex and race/ethnicity to clear space for making visible the condition of the all subalterned bodies. Maria Sibylla Merian is such a subalterned body because she was raised in subaltern conditions even as a European Atlanticist.

### *Merian's Life*

Maria Sibylla Merian's Atlanticist standpoint begins with her birth into a family entirely dependent on colonial enterprise for its prosperity. She was daughter, stepdaughter, sister and wife of men whose graphic work then and now literally illustrates 17<sup>th</sup> century European core cultural beliefs about conquest, colonization, and difference. However, as a beloved talented daughter, sister, wife, her resistance to feminine roles constitute mediation with patriarchy as subversive as any spy's in Antwerp. Nancy Hartsock's foundational feminist standpoint theory explains the structure of Merian's mediating subversions:

...like the lives of proletarians according to Marxian theory, women's lives make available a particular and privileged vantage point on male supremacy, a vantage point which can ground a powerful critique of the phallographic institutions and ideology which constitute the capitalist form of patriarchy. ...a feminist standpoint can allow us to understand patriarchal institutions and ideologies as perverse inversions of more humane social relations.  
(36)<sup>110</sup>

Of course, Merian is not taking a "feminist standpoint," which is what Hartsock is describing. I'm doing that. But Merian is not simply circulating like a little

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<sup>110</sup> See also Sandra Harding, "a standpoint is an achieved and collective position, not an ascribed position or an individual opinion" in *Science and Social* (85).

feminine craft(s-person) among the venerable large ships of capitalist patriarchy. As her choices demonstrate, she recognizes and applies her what she learns from her situation as a woman. She takes what she needs from patriarchy, shoves off from it, and charts a new venture into biology – that is, toward the emerging discipline – that those large, institutionally supported craft would later finally recognize and follow.

As decades of challenge and refinement of standpoint theory have clarified, claiming for Merian – for Behn and Beryl Gilroy in this study and other women writers – a feminine or even proto-feminist standpoint is not an essentialist move. None of these women were born knowing their standpoint or essentially positioned as feminine any more than anything essential can be claimed for Beryl Gilroy or Phillis Wheatley as black women. Nor is their standpoint – manifested in their work – based on unexamined bias. Only those who completely match the hegemonic ideal have the luxury of not examining their biases. As Hartsock explains:

A standpoint is not simply an interested position (interpreted as bias), but is interested in the sense of being engaged. ...the vision [of the “real” material relations] available to the oppressed group must be struggled for and represents an achievement which requires both science to see beneath the surface of the social relations in which all are forced to participate, and the education which can only grow from struggle to change those relations. (37)

Merian achieves both.

These achievements are clarified by the distinction Hartsock and others see between point of view and standpoint. A subject's point of view or cultural location is unearned, inherited, and a product of the social environment into which

she is born and raised. A standpoint, on the other hand, is earned, a product of point of view (cultural location) plus the subject's choices, experiences and social expectations. For Maria Sibylla Merian, this distinction exposes rather neatly the extent of her deliberate choices to resist and mediate with the western patriarchal capitalist colonial project she was born into. As we will see, her unchosen sex marginalizes her, but she repeatedly chooses an even more alternative gender liminality. Her unchosen socio-economic class subalternizes her, but she repeatedly chooses resistance to both the privilege and disadvantage of her class through her vocation. Her unchosen birth location in time and space at the heart of 17<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic trade empires gives her an Atlanticist perspective, but she repeatedly chooses to develop the cross-cultural ties that make her an Atlanticist.

Merian's life is nearly coincident with Behn's, and, although they never met, they circulated in the same regions, but at different times. Unlike Behn's life, Merian's is well documented and her genealogy illustrates her Atlanticist point of view. She was born in 1647 in Frankfurt am Main, now in central Germany, but then its own city state. Religious civil wars had just ended, but the social upheaval continued in the form of the last gasp of the Inquisition and its persecution of Protestants in defiance of the Edict of Nantes. The unrest forced the families of both her parents to take refuge in Frankfurt. Merian's mother, Johanna Sibylla Heim "came from an émigré Walloon family who had settled in Hanau, and her brother Wilhelm Christoph, with whom she lived for a while, even became a preacher" (Rucker 10). Her father, Mathäus (Merian) the Elder of Basil, Switzerland, had apprenticed himself to "the de Bry family, Calvinists who fled

Belgium when the Catholics took over" two generations earlier (Todd K 20). As the French Catholic encroachment continued after open war ended, driving Protestants north, enterprising families like Merian's prospered in the Golden Age of the expanding Dutch empire.<sup>111</sup>

Despite this common background, Johanna Heim and Mathäus Merian the Elder were not well-matched. Mathäus the Elder was fifty years old and a widower when Johanna married him. He was already well "known throughout Europe for his engravings of cityscapes and landscapes, his scientific books, and his editions of the illustrated *Grand Voyages*," based on accounts of journeys to the New World, begun by his first wife's grandfather, Théodore de Bry (1528-1598) (Davis 142, Todd K 20). Johanna, on the other hand, was probably quite young when she married Mathäus the Elder in 1646, since she lived another 44 years, until 1690, despite bearing three more children between 1652 and 1657. It's possible she was even younger when she married Mathäus the Elder than her then twenty-six year old step-son, Mathäus (Merian) the Younger.

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111 Referring to an ethnic group, a language and a region, Walloon is a German term for the Celtic tribes that originated in Wallonia, meaning "the hilly region," which is south-east of the Meuse River in modern Belgium. Via linguistic and historical connections, Wallonia also includes a few villages just into France and Germany. Walloon is the language that the mainland Walloons retained in everyday use until WWII. No longer taught in schools or used as official language, Walloon has been reduced to a dialect of French and is dying out. Wallonia is traditionally Calvinist and part of the larger Huguenot community that suffered constant turmoil as French and Spanish Catholics battled back and forth across the region with northern European Protestants. As the French pushed inexorably north, they invited in the Spanish inquisition, forcing waves of Walloon immigration north to fan out into England, Sweden and Germany. Many settled in Kent, England, near Behn's family, and were given the undercroft of Canterbury Cathedral for their worship. As Huguenots, the French Protestants also went to South Africa, where they flourished, and to Florida, where they succumbed to Spanish invasion and to North American colonies, where they assimilated.[NOTE: This information is culled from references in Janet Todd *Secret Life*, K. Todd *Chrysalis*, Norman Simms "Maria Sibylla Merian in the Cocoon: Childhood Confusions," Rucker "Introduction" and several websites, beginning with <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walloons> ]

Maria Sibylla was Johanna's first child, but she was Mathäus the Elder's seventh child. His first six were born of his first wife, Maria Magdalena de Bry, granddaughter of Théodore de Bry of *Grand Voyages* fame. Maria Magdalena's father, Johann Théodore de Bry, had been Mathäus the Elder's mentor and when he died in 1623, his widow (Maria Magdalena's mother) "helped ensure that Matthaüs [the Elder] took over the print shop" even though some de Bry sons and sons-in-law had more legal claim to it (Todd K 21). Maria Magdalena died in 1646 after more than twenty years of marriage. Her eldest child, Mathäus the Younger, became a well-known painter, and Caspar Merian, more than twenty years old when Maria Sibylla was born, followed in his father's and grandfather's footsteps as a master engraver.

The de Bry/Merian print shop was prominent in the northwestern region of Europe where the products and profits of colonial empire were controlled at that time. In "Maria Sibylla Merian in the Cocoon: Childhood Confusions," social scientist Norman Simms succinctly situates Maria Sibylla Merian at the heart of European discourse on science, religion and art. Simms explains that "This family consisted of key players connecting the Germanic world of Renaissance publishing and Rosicrucianism to the explorations of the New World conducted by the English and French" (Simms). The work of the de Brys and Merians on *Grand Voyages* covered "navigations to what was called at the time the 'West Indies,' namely, the Americas and Oceania, and the Small Voyages, dealing with the East Indies, which included India, Japan, China and sometimes Africa"

(Bucher qtd in Simms).<sup>112</sup> Thus Maria Sibylla Merian was born into a family that had been deeply engaged for three generations in the portrayal of and trade in Atlantic images, concepts and artifacts.

### *Gendered Subaltern Life*

On one hand, Maria Sibylla Merian was an only child, the only off-spring of the union between Mathäus Merian the Elder and Johanna Sibylla Heim. Yet she was awash in siblings spanning more than thirty years in age<sup>113</sup> and flowing in and out the door through birth, marriage and early death. As noted above, Maria Sibylla Merian was born the seventh child into a busy artisan household,<sup>114</sup> In addition to her six half-siblings, several young apprentices as well as journeyman printers and engravers kept the prosperous print shop humming around her as she learned to speak and walk – and draw. When her father, Mathäus the Elder, died in 1650, she was just three years old and a year later moved with her mother into the household of artist and art dealer Jacob Marrell, a widower with three young children<sup>115</sup> of his own as well as two young apprentices. In addition, Merian's mother and her new husband conceived three more children in six years.<sup>116</sup> Thus, when Maria Sibylla Merian was seven, she lived with eight other children: her three step siblings (Sarah (12), Franciscus (11), and Fredericus (7)); three half-

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<sup>112</sup> Simm's note: Bernadette Bucher, *Icon and Conquest: A Structural Analysis of the Illustrations of de Bry's Great Voyages*, trans. Basia Miller Gulati (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1981[1977]) p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> The eldest, Mathäus Merian the Younger, born 1621, to Maria Elizabeth Marrell, born 1655.

<sup>114</sup> Mathäus Merian the Younger (1621-87); Susanna Merian (?); Margaretha Merian (?); Caspar Merian (1621-86); Maria Magdalena Merian (?); Joachim Merian (1646-50).

<sup>115</sup> Sarah Marrell, (1642), Jacob Marrell (1643), and Johan Marrell (1647).

<sup>116</sup> Johann Maximian Marrell (1652-4); Jacob Mathias Marrell (1653-5); Maria Elizabeth Marrell (1655-6).

siblings (Johann (2), Jacob (1) and Maria (infant); and two apprentices (Johan Graf (17), Abraham Mignon (14)). With her five surviving<sup>117</sup> Merian half-siblings (15 to 27 years), Maria Sibylla had eleven half- and step-siblings. And she was close to the apprentices, admiring Abraham Mignon and eventually marrying Johan Graff whose drawing of Marrell's young daughter Sarah while sewing illustrates the close relationships between family and employees. Typical of the period in size and complexity, Maria Sibylla's family was also typical in its experience of death. Her father, Mathäus the Elder, was a recent widower when he married her mother, and both her mother and her step father were recent widows four years later when they married. The youngest of the six Merian half-siblings died as a child and all three of the Marrell half siblings died as toddlers, along with both of Marrell's sons. By 1656, when Maria Sibylla Merian was nine, she had lost five of her eleven step- and half-siblings as well as her father in a span of six years.

Typical or not, all this family fluidity must have made life seem tenuous indeed to young Maria Sibylla Merian. However, the fluidity combined with her class and gender created unusual opportunities for a girl child. Her future began to take shape when, as legend has it, her dying father "prophesied [that three year old] Maria would ensure the name Merian would live on in fame" (Todd, K 21). He likely had drawing and painting in mind and probably not the alchemical sciences he and the de Brys had dipped into. Thus he might have been surprised to learn that her life's work would be about "worms and flies," a vocation she would begin at the tender age of thirteen. Simms suggests that Maria Sibylla Merian

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<sup>117</sup> Joachim Merian had died in 1652 at age six.

began to study the natural world around her because "she could control and gain praise for [it], and she could take over the role of progenitor, care-giver and divine protectress by concentrating on flowers, insects and small animals" (Simms). However, Simm's mildly sexist view obscures a grieving child's deeper concern with predictability in a life full of bewildering inexplicable losses in a culture still swirling with memories of war, plague and inquisition. Insects were predictable enough to study and changed quickly enough to manifest reliable – and reassuring – patterns. Various Maria Sibylla Merian biographies suggest that her mother's disapproval of Maria Sibylla's messy unladylike pursuits<sup>118</sup> was offset by her precise observational skills and artistic talent, by her father's authoritative declaration of her work's importance, and – most productively – by her step-father's approbation and artistic mentorship.

This family fluidity in combination with the family's artisan class status permitted Merian a more flexible approach to women's education and vocation. Social, religious, legal and guild strictures on women's work were oppressive. However, as Kim Todd writes "household industries depended on the work of women" at every level, from fetching materials at the market, feeding the staff and providing a comfortable residence, to mixing paints and inks and even to "daughters engraving illustrations" (30). Seeing women's contributions as unpaid and unfair competition, "throughout Germany, the powerful craft guilds that governed each industry tried to curb this female participation and excluded women from the steps to professional acceptance: apprentice, journeyman,

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<sup>118</sup> Though none offer more than hearsay or supposition. Maria Sibylla Merian's closeness to her mother until her mother's death suggests that the disapprobation wasn't all that formidable.

master" (Todd K 30). Women were forbidden the use of oil paints, which pushed Maria Sibylla Merian to use water colors, a much more delicate medium for representing with scientific precision the details of small animal life (Todd K 63). Women were excluded from "large-scale history painting and from the representation of the nude body" (Davis 143). A married German woman had little legal status on her own: "she couldn't make a contract, file a lawsuit, or cast a vote ... [and] there were few legally sanctioned ways she could make a living" (Todd K 37). However, as a widow, she could speak in court or run her spouse's licensed workshop. In fact, Simms points out "What is not told by ... most other commentators is that both the *Voyages* project and the other business of the [de Bry] firm were also under the direction of the elder Theodor's<sup>119</sup> widow, Maria Sibylla's so-far unnamed grandmother" (Simms). But on no terms could a German woman set herself up in business.

However, as Todd quips "the reality of making a living dictated these [gender] rules be subverted," at least in the family setting (30). Merian began to draw well enough as a toddler to impress her famous father, but she learned the art of drawing and painting and the skills of engraving from her step-father, Jacob Marrell and his young assistant, Johann Andreas Graff. Her half-brother Caspar Merian also contributed to her training. And from her mother, Merian learned elaborate embroidery skills. Thus, by the time she married young Johan Andreas Graff, she had combined art and skill to produce exquisite embroidery patterns treasured among Frankfurt's upper class women also used by goldsmiths,

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<sup>119</sup> Simms seems to be working from Davis's error in reporting Theodor de Bry as Merian's grandfather when he was her great-grandfather and it was his son, Johann Theodor de Bry, to whom Mathäus Merian the Elder was apprenticed (Todd K 20).

glasspainters, and etchers and amourers, and even by furniture makers for marquetry” (Rücker 6).<sup>120</sup> Thus when she and Graff moved to his hometown, Nuremberg, she continued to pursue her vocation despite being awash in domesticity and young motherhood. She bore two daughters: Johanna Sibylla (1668) and Dorothea Helena (1678). She conducted a lively social life, ran a busy household, and published *Blumenbuch* (1575), her first book of illustrations (Todd K. 67).<sup>121</sup> And she taught drawing and embroidery to young women and joined a women's group herself. Despite her accomplishments, skills and knowledge at this point in her life, Maria Sibylla Merian was primarily a married mother of two engaging in the carefully structured and policed "women's activities" of flowers, motherhood, housekeeping and socializing. Comfortable and fairly privileged, Merian was nevertheless subalterned as a typical German housewife. More than three decades passed after her father's death before she emerged as a full-fledged professional naturalist. Several events had to occur first.

### ***Labadist Divorce***

The events began in 1681 with the death of Maria Sibylla Merian's stepfather, Jacob Marrell, which drew Maria Sibylla into the most undocumented, mysterious and – of course – life-changing period of her life. In the title of his

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<sup>120</sup> When Merian lived and worked, embroidery designs were big business. “Since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, single sheets, sets of sheets or even whole pattern books provided the engravers with a considerable proportion of their income (Rücker 6). So the fact that Maria Sibylla Merian could both design and engrave positioned her well to provide for herself.

<sup>121</sup> "Merian sold the loose sheets together in bundles of twelve" (Todd K. 67). She engraved and painted them herself and "issued two more sets of twelve" in 1677 and 1680, bound as books. Todd reports that in Merian's introduction to the bound version, Merian voiced her "ambiguity about this useless beauty...[and] warns of the dangers of pretty flowers. ...She describes the buyers who ransomed everything – houses, estates, the tools of their trade – to get their hands on tulips" some so rare that they "couldn't be purchased for any amount of money" (Todd K. 69).

essay,<sup>122</sup> Norman Simms calls Merian's childhood a cocoon, but in my view it is this period of her life that serves that purpose. Davis agrees, writing "Wiewurd turned out to be just that: a time of chrysalis, of hidden growth and learning for a woman who could not be pinned down" (166). When Marrell died, leaving Merian's mother alone, Maria Sibylla immediately returned to Frankfurt with her daughters and Graff. Marrell's death threw Merian's complex family structure into furious turmoil over the valuable property of three famous families of engravers: de Bry, Merian and Marrell. Mathäus the Elder's children attacked each other over Marrell's complicated estate, which included "his house, moneys, extensive library, and art collection" (Davis 157). They charged Johanna Heim Merian Marrell with mismanaging it,<sup>123</sup> and filed a claim on Marrell's estate. Marrell's remaining daughter, Sarah, tried to gain access to a larger share of Marrell's assets, which she claimed a right to by virtue of Marrell's marriage to Merian's widow (Davis 157). Maria Sibylla's "only child" status relative to Marrell's widow situated her squarely between the warring Merian and Marrell siblings to protect her mother's interest in both estates. However, instead of surfacing in Frankfurt on a wave of documents, letters and income-generating projects as she had in

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<sup>122</sup> "Maria Sibylla Merian in the Cocoon: Childhood Confusions,"

<sup>123</sup> Any wealth that women inherited as survivors – widows, daughters, step-daughters - went legally into the hands of their husbands. Thus, what Mathäus Merian the Elder inherited from the de Bry family because of his favored status with de Bry's widow passed to his own widow (not to his eldest son) and, when she remarried, the wealth of both the de Bry and Merian families passed to Jacob Marrell. Johanna then inherited again when Marrell made her a widow for the second time and left his estate to her, to Maria Sibylla Merian's husband, and to his own daughter Sarah's husband. It was Sarah's husband who sued Johanna from the Marrell side and Mathäus the Younger from the Merian side (Davis 157). As angry and Mathäus the Younger was, the patriarchal inheritance laws actually disinherited him rather than protected him in this case.

Nuremburg, Maria Sibylla suddenly documentarily vanishes<sup>124</sup> from Frankfurt and resurfaces a year or so later in the Netherlands with her mother and two daughters at Waltha, the main Labadist commune in Wieuwerd, Friesland (Davis 157).

This sudden sparsely accounted-for move calls for a reexamination of what seems from the surviving Nuremburg documents<sup>125</sup> like Merian's domestic and artistic bliss with Graff.<sup>126</sup> However, whatever was really happening between them was apparently less desirable than a religious conversion, a renunciation of worldly goods, abandonment of property, severing of meaningful and lucrative social connections, and commitment to a Spartan life in a closed religious community on the radical fringes of an already fragmented religious movement. The move sheds interesting light on the fact that Merian bore only two children to Graff and that they were ten years apart. Were there miscarriages, deliberate abortions and/or resistance to marital sex?<sup>127</sup> Davis concludes that Merian's marriage "was ultimately a disaster, foundering perhaps on a deep sexual incompatibility and surely on the religious split of her conversion" (208). Indeed, documents referring to Maria Sibylla's stay at Waltha report that when Graff tried to retrieve her, she wouldn't see him until the commune protected her refusal to

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<sup>124</sup> There ARE court documents for the estate case; Zemon Davis and K. Todd both quote from them. However, there are no surviving letters, journals, bills or any other documents explaining why the marriage failed or when and why Maria Sibylla Merian went to Waltha and rejected all Graff's efforts to reconcile.

<sup>125</sup> K. Todd notes "The letters preserved by chance are not the ones we might choose. Those to her close friend Dorothea Auer and to her brother [Caspar Merian] when he lived with a pietist religious sect are lost" (7).

<sup>126</sup> After describing Merian's life in Nuremberg in terms similar to mine, Davis writes "In short, a seemingly perfect life for a female artist of the time. Nothing to suggest rebellion or startling transformations" (145).

<sup>127</sup> See Todd K 91-2.

return based on "Papa" Yvon's belief that "Christian marriage could be sustained only by true believers and by 'holy temperance' in regard to matters of sexual union. If these conditions were not met, the believer was freed of the religious tie" no matter what her partner thought (Davis 160). The scene of Merian and Graff's single encounter at Waltha was public, loud and appalling according to Labadist witness Petrus Dittelbach, who found Merian's response to Graff "hard and unyielding" (Todd K 100). Graff hung around the Waltha area, doing odd jobs and even drawing a plan view of the castle grounds. Todd reports that Graff "tried to join the sect, and was refused admittance...and grew sick and thin" with waiting and grieving. He finally left after a year and Todd found "no evidence that she ever saw him again" (100). He divorced Merian finally in 1692 in order to remarry. Long before the divorce, an event of particular scandal, Maria Sibylla began to portray herself as the widow Merian – no doubt from complex motives including wanting to gain some of the social power widows were granted compared to married women (never mind divorced women). In any case, ever after, Merian barely spoke of her married life and only then with cryptic and intense anger. Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach, visiting Merian in her later years, reported that "her memory of her marriage was still bitter, and that she still concealed the truth about the divorce and her Labadist years" and he summed up his impression of her life with Graff as "Evil and miserable" (Davis 198-9).

If something in Merian's marriage pushed her toward Waltha, something at Waltha drew Merian in at a moment of upheaval in her life – and may have even helped create that upheaval. Rücker explains that the Wieuwerd move

“should not be interpreted as an indication of sectarianism on Maria Sibylla Merian’s part, for the Labadists were just one of the numerous groups in the 17<sup>th</sup> century attempting to infuse new life into the rigid orthodoxy of the Lutheran faith” (Rücker 10). These groups were part of the Pietist Movement which also called for less showy and costly church ritual, less involvement with government<sup>128</sup> and more attention to the responsibility of each individual to learn to hear the voice of God. Quakers and Labadists in particular spoke of the "light within" each person that should be granted more, or equal, or even all the authority – depending on which sect – for knowing God's will. These claims called for a corresponding reduction in respect for external authorities and for learning authoritative (i.e. ancient) texts and sometimes even for a generalized rejection of learning as such. The insistence upon an internal light, an ability given and guided by God to each individual to interpret scripture and know the will of God, justified the participation of women in preaching and writing for the Pietist movements, which, according to Lucinda Martin, women, so constrained in other areas, took full advantage of. These concepts justified Maria Sibylla Merian's challenge to contemporary "science" based on authority (deduction) and theology (analogy) and authorized her to trust her own perceptions, observations and analyses (induction). Furthermore, Labadists and Quakers credited individuals regardless of class, sex or education with the ability to hear the voice of God and to interpret his word and world, and this belief authorized Merian to respect the authority of non-Europeans like Amerindians and Africans.

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<sup>128</sup> Because of a deep distrust of church hierarchies and religious political power after more than a century of bloody costly religious wars, Quakers and other Pietist women, called for a separation of church and state (Martin 38).

The Labadists themselves were a Protestant sect named after founder Jean de Labadie (1610-1674), who had been a Jesuit then a Protestant before embarking on his radical retirement from modern life (Rücker 10, Todd K 86). Labadie was "chased from Amsterdam to Herford and Altona, gathering disciples as he went, [and] envision[ing] himself as John the Baptist, a voice crying in the wilderness, in rough clothing, preaching the second coming of Christ" (Todd K 86). He also preached celibacy, communism (or perhaps communalism), self-denial of worldly goods, and retirement from corrupt society and decadent church life. As we saw in Merian's marital negotiations with Graff, he called for individual responsibility for knowing God and god's works and "a complete immersion in holy life" (Todd K 86). However, soon after the sect formed, things changed. Celibacy, for example, was abandoned early on when "young female disciples began to turn up pregnant" (Todd K 87). In 1671, when it was discovered that Catherine Martini was pregnant by Pierre Yvon [Labadie's eventual successor<sup>129</sup>], the policy was reconsidered and Labadie, Yvon, and other single men and women took partners" (Davis 308 n81). Labadie was sixty-six when he married the youngest sister<sup>130</sup> of Cornelis Aerssen van Sommelsdijk, the man who had loaned Castle Waltha to the sect. In a period when "marriage for love" meant for God's love, this match suggests some complicated worldly motivations on his part. By the time Merian appeared at Waltha, Labadie had died

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<sup>129</sup> Anna Maria van Schurman was Labadie's immediate successor in 1674 and led the sect until her death in 1678. She is the one who moved the Labadist congregation from Herford to Wieuward into Waltha castle in 1675. Caspar Merian joins the sect at Waltha in 1677 and van Schurman dies the following year. Then Yvon takes over.

<sup>130</sup> Lucia Aerssen van Sommelsdijk was twenty-two when she married Labadie and her elder brother, Cornelis Aerssen van Sommelsdijk (1637-88), who we will meet below, was in Suriname serving as governor.

and his young widow had married his successor, "Papa" Pierre Yvon, suggesting complicated motives indeed on the part of both Lucia and Papa Yvon.<sup>131</sup>

Natalie Zemon Davis writes that Maria Sibylla Merian was very interested in "the legitimation, nay, the sanctification of her entomological task by religion" and goes on to give evidence of that conclusion from Merian's first Raupen (i.e. caterpillar) book in 1679 (156). Davis also suggests that this interest was "more explicitly important to Maria Sibylla Merian than her gender" (156). However, Merian's gender is very closely tied to what she sought from religion and from what Labadism offered her: protection from the vestiges of the Inquisition's attack on women of learning as witches. Women's knowledge of nature in general and insects in particular was deeply suspect during this period.<sup>132</sup> Labadist creed justified such interest and Labadist withdrawal, communalism and rejection of worldly showiness – read as piety – were necessary to protect a woman of Merian's prodigious and unique talents. While many women drew and others studied nature and some analyzed it, Davis claims that "Maria Sibylla Merian is a sample of one" since she combined all three activities and rejected accepted "scientific" authority in the process. Rücker notes that the "total spiritual transformation" Labadie expected from his followers was "not unlike that which fascinated Maria Sibylla" in her studies of metamorphosis (10).

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<sup>131</sup> Despite my innuendo, it should be noted that "Streiterehe" or "a marriage for God" was frequently seen among Pietists. Lucinda Martin reports "'Streiterehe' means literally 'fighter marriage' or 'champion marriage.' The central notion is that one is called to serve the Lord through the medium of marriage. Such a calling took precedent over the usual reasons for marrying, which mainly had to do with making an appropriate financial and class match" (51 n 15). Of course, these motives are the inverse of modern marriage motives in western cultures when we ideally marry for "love" (romantic rather than religious) and abhor marriages based on finance and class. My innuendo reflects my modern bias.

<sup>132</sup> See Kim Todd, 64-5, and discussion below.

If Labadist retirement, communal life, and simplicity drew Maria Sibylla Merian to Waltha, her life there was not about poverty and hardship. The commune at Castle Waltha was “a spacious building with canals, a park, a garden, and many scattered outbuildings, ...situated in West Friesland not far from the village of Wieuwerd” (Rücker 10). Waltha belonged to the Sommelsdijk family, the patriarch of which, Cornelis van Aerssen van Sommelsdijk, “was governor of Surinam...[and] he placed his castle in Friesland, in which his three sisters lived, at the disposal of the sect” (Rücker 11). The plan view in Rücker's text (11) was done, ironically, by Johann Graff himself in 1686, probably as part of his “construction work” undertaken during the year he stayed in Waltha in the hope of convincing his family to come home to Nuremburg with him (Todd K. 100).<sup>133</sup> The castle was surrounded by a wide canal and other canals encircle an adjacent garden. What appears on the map to be roads and paths are all waterways. Rücker explains that:

These canals must have been fairly large for they could be navigated by ships which could unload their cargoes with the help of a crane in front of the castle. There were windmills, farm buildings, a smithy, a tannery, a brewery, beer and wine cellars and a rope-making workshop. ...The numerous gardens and the broad meadows and fields surrounding the castle complex certainly afforded adequate living space for a large number of people...”  
(12)

...not to mention for collection specimens. The web of waterways, "the gate [that] ringed a city in miniature...[and] was high and forbidding," and "the long

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<sup>133</sup> Todd writes "Graff lingered in Wiewert a while [after the confrontation at Waltha with Merian], living outside the gate, working construction, sketching the compound (the only picture of it that survives) ...He tried to join the sect, and was refused admittance...he grew sick and thin. Merian visited him, but didn't change her mind. Then, finally, he left. There is no evidence she ever saw him again" (100).

approach" to the castle all suggest a Cavendish-like "Convent of Pleasure" designed for study, reflection and perhaps recuperation from the misery of Merian's marriage (Todd K. 94).

Gerda Lerner's discussion of the remarkable career of Labadist Anna Maria von Schurman suggests that what drew Maria Sibylla Merian to Labadism was less about religious creed or the charm of Labadie or "Papa" Yvon and was instead more about the role of women in the Labadist commune.<sup>134</sup> In fact, Merian's attraction to Waltha may have been due Anna Maria van Schurman, "who would become the Labadists' spiritual leader after Labadie's death in 1674" (Martin 36). In his many (missing) letters to Merian at Nuremburg while he was at Waltha, Caspar Merian likely wrote and spoke of van Schurman's singular work. Born in Cologne in 1607 and raised in Utrecht, van Schurman was educated by tutors and became known as "the 'tenth muse,' the 'Star of Utrecht,' the 'most noble virgin who excels in every form of virtue,' the most educated woman of her age [who] threw over her life as an intellectual superstar to join the sect" (Todd K. 87). Caspar knew van Schurman from 1677 when he arrived at Waltha until she died in 1678 (Davis 158, 308 n75). Lerner writes that Schurman:

...became during her lifetime the model and inspiration for other women throughout Europe and in England who aspired to intellectual emancipation. Schurman is unique in this respect; her name appears more frequently and more widely in the writings of other women than that of any previous woman. (Lerner *Feminism* 196)

Of course part of the reason for that is the printing press, but that's precisely the point: she was very widely distributed – and read. Caspar probably sent

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<sup>134</sup> See *Feminism* 155-6 and 229-30.

Schurman's writings to Maria Sibylla Merian in Nuremburg and Frankfurt. In Frankfurt, Merian very likely encountered other Pietists like Jacob Spener and Johanna Eleonora Merlau Peterson, both at their peak in the 80's.<sup>135</sup>

Given Merian's sudden exodus to Waltha, it is very likely that Caspar's letters and increased Pietist proximity in Frankfurt were a major source of Merian's marital stress. Van Schurman insisted that the women have "freedom from domestic cares" and, as Lerner put it, "She vigorously defended women against the various male objections to female education and challenged men to support women in their desire to learn" (Lerner *Feminism* 196). Van Schurman's vigor echoes Maria Sibylla Merian's in rejecting Graff when he attempted to reclaim her after Caspar's death in 1686. Did Graff resist van Schurman's logic? It seems unlikely he did since he first knew Maria Sibylla Merian as a precocious girl whose education was well supported by his master, her step-father Marrell. On the other hand, as he watched her read Caspar's letters – and perhaps Schurman's writings – and grow increasingly unhappy even as she was becoming known as more talented and capable than he was, he may have suddenly been overcome with masculine shame and done something drastic to earn her life-long rage and bitterness – as well as his daughters'. All of these considerations in addition to Davis's assertion that Maria Sibylla Merian's commitment to religion waned as the years passed as well as Rücker's warning not to take Merian's retirement at Waltha as a sectarian move suggests that the escape to Waltha was more like a necessary relocation away from a miserable marriage, crushing

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<sup>135</sup> See Lucinda Martin, "Female Reformers."

domesticity, an envious husband and a threatening superstitious Lutheran city than a deep spiritual conversion.

### *Sexuality of Silence*

An aspect of Maria Sibylla Merian's life seems especially enigmatic may point to another reason she suddenly left the marriage and sought sanctuary in a religious community with unconventional views of marriage: her sexuality. Because she married at an age (18 years) and phase (mature for her age) appropriate in almost every culture and time period, because she bore children and had what Davis calls "a seemingly perfect life for a female artist of the time," it's easy to assume she was a(n un)happy heterosexual (145). However, as many scholars of sexuality have shown,<sup>136</sup> not only is this assumption of heterosexuality (never mind happiness) an anachronism, but this 20<sup>th</sup> century identity-based assumption misreads and erases evidence of other sexual behaviors. Graff, for example, was rumored to have engaged in "shameful vice," though no evidence survives except his grief at that final meeting with Merian. Of Merian's desires, there is mostly an enigmatic silence because letters to two beloved people – Caspar Merian and Dorothea Maria Auerin – were destroyed. Could one reason for the destruction be that they indicated a more complex sexuality than was acceptable even in that more fluid period? Since Merian never remarried, could something intimate or even sexual about some relationship have set off the bitter

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<sup>136</sup> Emma Donoghue, Lacquer, Faderman and many others.

divorce and caused Merian's life-long secrecy about the reasons? About the moment of separation, Rücker writes:

the letter dated 1685 [to Imhoff] confirms that she [Merian] returned to Frankfurt together with her husband but that he "now desired to journey to Nuremberg, though I do not yet know how soon this will happen..." What she in fact meant by this somewhat cryptic phrase was simply that after 20 years' marriage she and her husband were going to separate. (9)

Her letters – and lack of letters – indicate that it wasn't so simple. The combination of missing letters, "cryptic phrases" in the surviving letters, and Merian's life-long silence about the end of their marriage suggests her motives for ending the marriage, seeking protective religious retreat, and never remarrying were about her own desire not Graff's.

The absence of a single letter from her beloved half-brother, Caspar Merian, "a painter and engraver twenty years her senior" with whom she was very close, seems particularly odd (Rücker 12). Kim Todd explains that, while older brother Mathäus the Younger toured Europe for ten years to hone his painting skills, Caspar spent those years working beside his father on...

...hundreds of landscapes of European towns that appeared in the series *Theater of Europe*. He had been in the house when Maria Merian lived there as a child and continued publishing as she became a young adult. If anyone told her stories about her father, let her copy de Bry's flowers, took her to visit the book fair, and showed her how to hold the burin, guiding the blade by the wooden handle nestled in her palm, it would have been Caspar. (Todd K. 33)

Caspar had married Rachel Morian of Nuremberg in 1650,<sup>137</sup> so it is no surprise that he "had visited Maria Sibylla in Nuremberg [Rücker says "often visited"], unlike her other half siblings, with whom there appears to have been no contact" (Hollman 13). Elisabeth Rücker notes about Caspar that "it was through him that [Merian] first came into contact with the Labadists" (Rücker 12). After his wife of twenty-seven years died in 1677,<sup>138</sup> Caspar joined the Labadists in Amsterdam, where he lived, and followed them to Waltha under the leadership of Anna Maria van Schurman. Caspar also never remarried. And, when Merian fell into marital crisis, she went to join this widowed and single half-brother almost twice her age in a closed religious commune. Letters to a fatherly brother don't seem likely candidates for necessary destruction unless something in them – like confused or illicit desire – might produce scandal. When Caspar died, he was more prominent than Merian was and his letters would probably have been archived if they hadn't been purposely destroyed.

Besides Caspar, another thing that drew Merian to Waltha was that women were treated as equals and expected to speak and learn just like men. While common in many of the Pietist sects, Labadist egalitarianism was largely due to Anna Maria von Schurman's leadership. A brilliant scholar who refused to marry, von Schurman was part of a circle of learned aristocratic unmarried women<sup>139</sup> who in some cases had life-long female companions. Some of these relationships

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<sup>137</sup> Davis 299 n 21.

<sup>138</sup> See Walter Merian and Margaretha Falkner's "Jüngere Linie Merian."

<sup>139</sup> For aristocratic women, remaining unmarried was a fierce struggle (e.g. the constant pressure on Queen Christina of Sweden and on Queen Elizabeth I of England) since, no matter what their personal attractions, they were intensely pressured to take their proper place as vessels of the homosocial patriarchal transfer of property and power.

were proto-"Boston marriages" about which Lia van Gemert notes "Amongst the Dutch 18<sup>th</sup>-century middle classes, for example, 'friendship of the soul' was very important" (15). The religious language points back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century Pietist women. For example, Lucinda Martin mentions Johanna Eleonora Merlau with "Maria Juliane Baur von Eyseneck, a wealthy widow and Pietist" who encouraged Merlau to hold Pietist conventicals in Frankfurt (35). Martin also mentions that Princess Elisabeth of the Palatinate rejected marriage with the King of Poland, "dedicate[d] her life to piety and learning...[and] formed close friendships with other noble women activists, especially Anna Maria von Schurman and Anna Maria van Hoorn, her life-long companion" (39). Queen Christina of Sweden (1626-1689) was also widely known for her close companionship with Ebba Sparre, whom Christina called "Belle" because of her beauty. Veronica Buckley writes that Christina "drew deliberate attention to [the relationship] before the prudish English Ambassador, Bulstrode Whitelocke, whispering into his reddened ears that Belle's 'inside' was 'as beautiful as her outside'" (Buckley 72). Van Gemert discusses several couples in "Hiding Behind Words?: Lesbianism in 17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Poetry": Catharina Questiers (1630-1669) and Cornelia van der Veer (1639-1702); Cornelia van der Veer and Katharina Lescailje (1649-1711); and Katharina Lescailje and Sara de Canjoncle (1651-1723). These women all lived in Amsterdam when Merian did and account only for poets. In Amsterdam's theater world, van Gemert reports that "women [were] dressing as men to attract females *as well as* males" (16, her emphasis). These findings echo among poets

and theater people in other places and times<sup>140</sup> – a fluid milieu in which artists also travel.

Merian herself appeals for patronage in 1704 to another woman widely believed to be in a sexual relationship with a woman: Queen Anne Stuart of England (1665-1714). In Letter 12, 1704, two years after Anne's coronation, Merian writes to James Pettiver, her agent in London:

At the same time I am considering whether it would not be good to print a very carefully painted or illuminated exemplar with a dedication to the Queen of England. I ask you to tell me if that would be proper. For my part I find it understandable as a woman to do this for a personage of my sex; and in which language should the dedication be drawn up? (Rücker 70, my translation)<sup>141</sup>

Why would this be a question? Why ask about what Rücker translates as "the same sex"?<sup>142</sup> I suggest that Merian was familiar with Anne's long passionate relationship with Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough.

In 1704, Anne was childless, twenty years very happily married<sup>143</sup> and just getting in the swing of her rule. Anne and Sarah, the elder by fifteen years, had

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<sup>140</sup> See Faderman's several studies as well as Donoghue's.

<sup>141</sup> Here's the German: "Gleichzeitig erwäge ich, ob es nicht gut wäre, ein sehr sorgfältig gemaltes oder illuminiertes Exemplar mit einer Widmung an de Königin von England zu richten. Ich bitte Euch, mir zu sagen, ob das richtig würde. Ich meinerseits finde es als Frau verständlich, dies zu tun für eine Persönlichkeit meines Geschlechts; und in welcher Sprache sollte die Widmung abgefasst sein?" (Rücker 70).

<sup>142</sup> Here's Rücker's translation: "at the same time could you please advise me whether it would not be a good idea to send a very carefully painted or illuminated copy [of her almost completed *Metamorphosis*] with a dedication to the Queen of England [i.e. Anne]. Please let me know if this would be proper coming from a woman to a personage of the same sex. In what language should the dedication be composed?" (Rücker 70)

<sup>143</sup> This is not necessarily evidence of Anne's single-minded heterosexuality since, especially among aristocrats who had several levels of obligation to fulfill, desire, sexual behavior and duty were both carefully compartmentalized and dynamically fluid (e.g. Edward II, Christina of Sweden, etc). For example, the happiness of Anne's marriage is manifest by eighteen pregnancies in sixteen years. She lost every child in infancy or before except the one who died in 1700 of hydrocephalism at the age of 11 (Williamson 91). But the pregnancies also indicate the intense pressure on Anne to produce a Protestant heir – even a female – which she ultimately failed to do, ending the Stuart family's hold on the British throne.

grown close "in childhood, as miniature ladies-in-waiting" when Sarah provided trustworthy devotion to the small princess who was "always under the critical eyes of courtiers" in her father's crumbling court (Donoghue 158). Their code of friendship included leveling class difference by referring to each other as Mrs. Morely (Anne) and Mrs. Freeman (Sarah) (Williamson 91). After the "Bloodless Revolution" of 1688 and her father's narrow escape into the exile, Mary, now Queen, insisted that sister Anne drop Sarah for political reasons. But Anne responded "there is no misery that I cannot readily resolve to suffer, rather than the Thoughts of parting with her" (qtd Donoghue 159). Sarah rose in Anne's esteem and intimacy and, when Anne was crowned in 1702, was made "Groom of the Stole (in charge of clothes) and Keeper of the Privy Purse (accountant), while her husband leads the army" (Donoghue 159). Sarah's power over Anne began to cause so much public concern that, even now, the most superficial accounts of Anne's reign report Sarah's heavy influence. In David Williamson's one page summary of Anne's court, Sarah takes up two full sentences, including how Anne "formed an intense attachment to the masculine-minded Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough" (91).

Anne and Sarah's relationship was not secret or approved of by England's public. In her more lengthy examination of the relationship, Emma Donoghue notes that "the partnership was often attacked in print as a matter of bad political influence, but not as a lesbian affair" (162). Yet Sarah herself, Donoghue explains, raised sex as a potential scandal in a jealous fit after she confirmed that her own "poor relation Abigail Hill Masham...spends 'two hours every Day in

private' with the Queen" (Donoghue 160). Sarah's secretary, Arthur Maynwaring, is the most likely author of "A New Ballad" (1708) that "begins by commenting that the queen 'dearly loved/ A Dirty Chamber-Maid' called Abigail, and goes on to speculate what 'sweet Service' Abigail offers her employer and how she takes care of 'some dark Deeds at Night'" (Donoghue 162). A second Maynwaring pamphlet imagines a dialogue between Anne and Abigail in which Abigail confesses to being "rather addicted to another Sort of Passion, of having too much great a Regard for my own Sex, insomuch that few People thought I would ever have married." In a letter, Sarah later described the pamphlet to Anne as containing "stuff not fit to mention of passions between women" (qtd Donoghue 163).<sup>144</sup> If these pamphlets safely circulate in 1708, then the rumor they are based on must have circulating much earlier. Living in Amsterdam for decades, consulting with the upper crust of the cosmopolitan city and with people living or traveling in England, indeed being herself by this time a port of call for learned travelers, Maria Sibylla Merian would have known this story and would, facetiously or not, have been referring to it. With her experiences in Nuremburg, Frankfurt and Waltha in mind, perhaps Merian saw Anne as a Christina-like figure with whom she wished to claim alliance through patronage.

These connections later in her life shine a different light on the connections she formed early in her life in Nuremburg and Frankfurt, since whatever happened there propelled her toward the differently-gendered life-style of her later life. While in Nuremburg as a young mother and artist, Merian was active in several women's groups. She taught drawing and embroidery to groups

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<sup>144</sup> Donoghue takes the title of her examination of lesbianism from this passage.

of young women, and, for her own edification, she was joined groups of women colleagues. These groups formed in large part because women were excluded from academies and professional vocations and guilds, no matter what their wealth and qualifications were.<sup>145</sup> Women were forbidden to paint landscapes, living models or historical scenes – anything, in other words, that had socio-political importance and, as a result, earn them a good living. However, in his introduction to *Maria Sibylla Merian: The St. Petersburg Watercolours*, Eckhard reports:

Maria Sibylla would not accept that. She joined forces with other artistically- and scientifically-minded women to found a Jungfrauenkompanie ([young] women's group). They met to paint and study together in joint reading sessions. Though this was no substitute for an academic education, it was a courageous and successful attempt on her part to overcome existing restrictions. (10)

No substitute, for sure, but it paralleled the networking among religious noble women and produced sufficient education to facilitate prodigious work by many of these women.

In this rich woman-focused milieu, Merian's extant letters reveal that she developed two very close female relationships. One was with Clara Regina Imhof, an upper class young woman who studied with Merian and was the center of a dynamic social circle of similar women Merian taught and supplied with embroidery designs. Most of Merian's letters to Imhoff deal with the exchange of Imhof's money for Merian's art work or supplies, yet glimpses of their close

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<sup>145</sup> Hollman reports that Joachim von Sandrart in Nuremberg founded one of the many artists' academies – for men. Hollman writes: "Women, though, were excluded from it, as everywhere else in Germany at the time" (10).

friendship slip through. Letter 3<sup>146</sup> to Imhoff, in which Merian explains that "Aurwin" is to receive money from Clara in payment for what Merian has expended to supply Clara with varnish and paint, is full of the effusive "honourable and virtuous" language of someone appealing to her social superior and patron. However, in Letter 4, dated May 8, 1685, most of the effusive formality is replaced by a more informal and direct tone, indicating the close friendship of the women as the Graff marriage is breaking up. Merian sends greetings to Clara's cousin Christoph Volkamer, with whom she will later correspond, writes chattily of her move from Nuremburg to Frankfurt and how everything was thrown into turmoil from which she will soon obtain order. Letter 5 is even more intimate since she omits even the address and simply begins "Mademoiselle." This is the letter in which she writes:

There is no more news except that my husband would like to go to Nuremberg, but I do not know how soon this will materialize. If you want to have anything else, you have only to let me know and he will bring it with him and call upon you...and if he should need good advice, I beseech you to look kindly upon him, unimportant though he is, for he will probably need good advice. (Rücker 63)

Dated June 3, 1685, just a few months before she departs for Waltha, this request for advice on behalf of Graff is telling. If the marriage was so bitter, then why was she pleading with her good friend Imhoff on his behalf for advice? Why does he still publish her second volume of *Raupen* and why does she still refer to him affectionately in her dedication? The much later rumors that he was guilty of a "shameful vice" and that she was guilty of "caprice" in wanting to leave him don't

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<sup>146</sup> These letters can be found in Elisabeth Rucker & William T. Sterne (ed) 1982 English translated edition of *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*.

seem to fit this evidence. But her lifelong anger as well as her daughters' complete estrangement from their father both point to something that the surviving evidence doesn't account for. Clearly, Letter 5 indicates that she is firming up her plans to escape the marriage. Moreover, if Merian asked Imhof to advise Graff, then it seems likely Graff still held Imhof in esteem and that she was not a source of tension in the marriage.

Twelve years later, on August 29, 1697, Merian wrote Letter 6 to Clara Imhof in Nuremburg in which she refers with brief intensity to what may have been her most precious relationship. By then, Merian's mother had died (1690) and Merian, her daughters and many other disenchanted Labadists had abandoned the sect. Merian moved to Amsterdam with Dorothea (13 yrs) and Johanna (23 yrs) where Johanna soon married Labadist-turned-merchant, Jacob Herolt, and began to travel to Surinam with him. Clara Imhof had also married in Nuremburg and all the formalities of cross-class correspondence came back into Letter 6. After a visit from Clara's brother, Merian put herself again at the service of Clara's family "as many years have passed since I last heard from all the dear friends I had in Nuremberg" (Rücker 64). She offered "many rarities here in Holland from East and West Indies...in exchange [for] all kinds of creatures to be found in Germany such as snakes of all kinds, and all kinds of butterflies or stagbeetles and such creatures" many of which she obtained from Johanna and Jacob's travels (Rücker 64). Merian explains to Clara how to preserve the butterflies and also offers "all kinds of seeds of Indian spices," very valuable

items (Rücker 64). In this first letter to Imhof in Nuremburg, Merian reaches shyly toward those she abandoned for Waltha:

...many years have passed since I last heard from all the dear friends I had in Nuremberg. I confess that it gives me great pleasure to hear something about them or to see some of them; although I regard myself as unworthy of this, I would consider it an act of friendship if I were to receive a few lines. (Letter 6 Rücker 64)

No surviving letters or documents indicate whether any friends responded until after Merian's Surinam trip. However, even though the contents of the letter suggest that whatever was between the two young women was now a business friendship, Todd reports that Merian's handwriting in the letter is "exuberant," written "in a large, boisterous script" suggesting genuine pleasure in the friendship's renewal (124).

In contrast to Merian's relationship to Clara Imhof is Merian's life-long affection for Dorothea Maria Auerin, a celebrated Nuremburg artist who was godmother and namesake to Merian's younger daughter, Dorothea Maria Graff, born as the Graff marriage began to sour. If Merian wrote "exuberantly" to Imhof, she referred lovingly to Auerin. Davis reports that while the Marrell family estate case "was being fought, Maria Sibylla ...taught painting to a group of Frankfurt maidens, and wrote letters to her painter friend Dorothea Maria Auerin back in Nuremburg" (157). As noted above, these letters to Auerin, which must have been numerous and even more loving when addressed directly to Auerin, are missing. The Imhof letters indicate that Auerin was frequently in Frankfurt with Merian as the marriage dissolved and that Auerin was the trusted carrier of correspondence

between Merian and friends in Nuremberg. While using friends as mail carriers was common practice prior to national postal services, Auerin's role as mail carrier makes it all the more curious that none of Merian's letters to or from her survive.

In contrast to Merian's varied tone when addressing Imhoff, her tone in reference to Auerin was consistently loving. For example, in Letter 8 in 1702 after she returns from Surinam, Merian responds to a letter from Clara Imhof's cousin, physician Christoph Volkammer, in which he had ordered "the creatures in the alcohol, 34 in all, as follows, cost[ing] a total of 20f[ranks?]" (Rücker 66). Merian crisply describes how he should store them and offers to send "the recipe for the best liquid, in which amateurs here preserve their creatures" (Rücker 66). Then, suddenly, without breaking for a paragraph or sentence, she writes

"Please send our very best wishes to my dear Miss Auerin, I would give a ducat to be turned into a fly so that I could fly to her. I should have so much to tell her that she would be amazed. I should have written to her long ago, but I am like a pan on Shrove Tuesday, I have so much to do that I keep putting off" (Rücker 66).

Significantly, Auerin had remained unmarried. The passion is even more obvious in the original German. Rücker's English translation is punctuated in short sentences, but in German the clauses are all linked by commas in one long sentence that exceeds even 17<sup>th</sup> century German standards of grammatical convolution and suggests poetic enjambment. The rhyme, the lineation (via the commas), the flige/fliege pun, are all poetic:

meiner liebe Jungfer gevatter Auerin  
bitte ich inserentwegen auf das allerschönste Zu grüssen,

ich wohlte gehrn einen Ducaten darumb geben,  
 das mir einer flige kont machen,  
 das ich halter Zu ihr fliegen könnte,  
 ich solte iher so viel zu erzehlen haben,  
 das sie halter sich verwunden solte,  
 ich hetter ihre schon lange geschrieben,  
 aber es geht mir wie der pfane an dem fastenagt,  
 ich habe so viel zu thun,  
 das ich es noch aufschiebe. (Rücker 66 my lineation)

Even in English translation from the German, this passage is rich with symbolism for Merian.

The ducat, for example, represents a lot of money even in modern terms. Todd reports that "A florin was roughly equal to a guilder, which was roughly as much as a vat of honey or three hundred pints of beer; a ducat, a little more than three guilders" – or \$655.88 in modern US dollars.<sup>147</sup> That's a lot of beer in any century. In Letter 12, Merian had offered to provide James Pettiver the *Metamorphosis* manuscript for "6 imperial talers or 3 ducats" (Rücker 70). So, in 2009 US beer dollars, Merian was asking for \$1644.04 for a limited edition hand-painted bound portfolio of her finest work. A considerable sum for a single book, and an indication of Merian's sense of the value of her life's most important work – and of the value she placed on her relationship with Auerin even after so many years away. Similarly, the fly image<sup>148</sup> is a profound connection to Merian's work since it was among the earliest subjects of her scientific study and, in its everyday ordinariness, represents her passion for the banal details of scientific observation

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<sup>147</sup> Based on the lowest price of a case of 24 "pints" (12 oz) of beer on <http://beerpricelist.com> 07 22 09, the average cost of a case of beer is \$17.49 (six different beers sold at BJ's and Pricechopper, five at \$15.99 and one (Heineken) at 22.99). If one ducat is worth three guilders, each of which is worth 300 pints of beer in 17<sup>th</sup> C Holland, then one ducat is worth 900 pints of beer or 37.5 cases, which, at \$17.49 a case, equals \$655.88 in 2009.

<sup>148</sup> See Kim Todd 36; also 41 for flies on Patroclus

others had ignored. Ubiquitous, flies are found in every home, so that, like gazing at the moon and knowing your beloved sees the same romantic image, this passage invokes for both women their shared connection in the flight of a fly. However, the fly was not a simple friendly connection, since it was (and is) associated with death and corruption,<sup>149</sup> giving an edge of sin to its ubiquity, and of suggestion to their connection.

The most complex image in the passage is the "pan on Shrove Tuesday." Shrove Tuesday is a Christian festival day, the final day of Mardi Gras, the fair day of all fair days, which invokes decidedly impious behaviors before the Lenten season begins. The pan in the image – a crepe, pancake or king cake pan – is employed most frantically on Shrove Tuesday as carnival draws to a raucous close. Since no rich foods are allowed in Christian households during Lent, the pan produces the final indulgence ("I am the pan"), constantly in the fire cooking up sinfully delicious food to use up perishable rich ingredients before Lenten fasting begins. When Merian says "I have so much to do that I keep putting off," she invokes the housekeeper saving up the best ingredients for Shrove Tuesday's celebration in a show of plenty, a big indulgence to make the denial of Lent more tolerable. As the pan and the housekeeper, she is both saving up and cooking as fast as what she considers most desirable and indulgent. The sentence about Auerin is full of ordinary dailiness, indulgent passions, culminating pleasure, and finally of loss, denial and plenty of wistful memories.

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<sup>149</sup> Davis notes that Merian's step-father's Utrecht teacher, Jan Davidsz de Heem was one among many still life painters who used "the butterfly as the symbol of the resurrected soul, [and] the fly as the symbol of sinfulness" (149).

Two more letters refer to Dorothea Auerin. Letter 13 is to Clara Imhof's cousin "Volckamer" again in Nuremberg, dated "last day of July 1704" (Rücker 71). After covering several business topics, Merian, now fifty-five herself, asks Volkhamer to "Please pass the enclosed letter to my dear Miss Auerin. I am delighted that she is still alive; she has only to let me know if there is any way I may be of assistance to her and all the many acquaintances" (Rücker 70). Almost a year later, in Letter 14 dated April 16 1705, Merian, writing again to Volkamer, discusses the further production of *Metamorphosis*, and then writes:

[I] have received (through Mr. Schey) the letter from my beloved maiden Godmother and intimate friend Auerin and see her prosperity with internal joy. I want to wish her from my heart all grace and blessing on her soul and body, and greet similarly the whole family and all good friends of the heart, when I can find time, so then I will permit myself the honor of writing to her at once.<sup>150</sup> (Rücker 71, my translation<sup>151</sup>)<sup>152</sup>

Note the exact same term of endearment – "meiner lieben Jungfer gevatter Auerin" – as in Letter 8 seven years before. Whatever Maria Sibylla Merian's feelings of connection to Dorothea Auerin were obviously deep even through the

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<sup>150</sup> Here's the German: "den brif von meiner lieben Jungfer gevatter Auerin, habe wohl empfangen (durch herr schey) und ihren wohlstant mit freuwden darinnen ersehen, ich Wünsche ihr von herzen alles heyl und Segen an Seehl und leib, und grüsse sie Samb der ganssen familie und allen guten frendten herzlich, wan ich werde Zeit aussfinden, so werde ich mir die Ehre geben ihr eins zu schreiben" (Rücker 71).

<sup>151</sup> My translation notes: [I] have received (through Mr. Schey) the letter from my dear/beloved [lieben] miss/virgin/maid/spinster/chambermaid/maiden fortress/Venus shell [Jungfer] Godmother/gossip/intimate friend [gevatter] Auerin and her prosperity/wellbeing/wealth/comfort see with joy inside. I wish her from my heart all grace/favor/affection/kindness [heyl or Huld, also related to Hulde, a goodly spirit and an uncanny female mountain sprite, heh] and blessing [Segen] on soul [Seehl or Seel] and body, and greetings to all [samb or samt] the whole family and all good friends of the heart. When I can find time, I will give myself the honor of writing to her at once.

<sup>152</sup> Rücker's translation: "I have received (through Mr. Schey) the letter from my dear Miss Auerin from which I learn with pleasure that she is well. From the bottom of my heart I wish every blessing for her, both in body and in soul, and send best wishes to her and the whole family and close friends. When I can find the time I shall permit myself the honour of writing to her" (Rücker 71).

paltry record that remains. Despite the cataclysm of divorce, conversion, retreat – at Waltha and then in Surinam – and re-emersion into the worldly cosmopol of Amsterdam, twelve years later Merian's interest in "my dear Miss Auerin" clearly continued to be deep.

Labadists were accused of sexual lasciviousness and they did attempt to deal differently with sexual passion than the rigid patriarchal heterosexual systems. However, as stated above, they quickly recognized the cultural utility of rigid sexual systems and, by the time Maria Sibylla Merian joined them, promoted heterosexual marriage. Even so, their withdrawal from the world and their egalitarianism may have provided a safe space for homosexuality and/or aid in resisting it. Perhaps Caspar found a comfortable home with a partner there safe from the Inquisition's vestiges and invited his half-sister to partake of that comfort when he recognized her distress in Nuremberg over her feelings for Dorothea Auerin. Perhaps Graff tried so hard to reclaim her after Caspar died so that the Labadists wouldn't further corrupt her – or his impressionable daughters. Whatever the cause, Graff finally accepted the futility of his suit, divorced Merian in 1692 and married Anna Maria Hofmann who bore him a daughter (Rücker 13). He died in 1701 just before Merian returned from Surinam and resumed her relationship with Clara Imhof and – I hope - Auerin. His daughters both married happily, Dorothea twice. And Merian never married again nor do any signs of another "passionate friendship" survive.<sup>153</sup> Whatever the details were of the end of Maria Sibylla Merian's marriage to Graff, one thing is clear: the marriage was

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<sup>153</sup> Although, Marion Zemon Davis found evidence that Merian brought an indigenous woman back to Amsterdam with her. See next chapter.

miserable, she never remarried and she began at last in Amsterdam to liberate herself from the religious, gender and social expectations of her culture, safe on its hegemonic outskirts even as she carefully maintained relations with it.

### *Religion as Chrysalis*

#### *Cocoon as Sanctuary*

For Maria Sibylla Merian, the Labadist commune at Waltha was sanctuary from marriage, gender liminality, witchcraft charges, family discord and alternative sexual desires – a cultural chrysalis, if you will. However, her conversion was no cynical ploy. Consider a parallel situation of enslaved Africans converting to Christianity as part of their bid for freedom in *The Two Princes of Calabar: an Eighteenth Century Atlantic Odyssey*. Historian Randy Sparks describes the travails of Little Ephriam Robin John and his nephew, Ancona Robin John, two young Efik slave traders from Old Calabar in the Bight of Africa, "one of the most intensely trafficked slave-trading regions anywhere in Africa" in the 1760's (6). As the son and brother of Grandy King George Robin John, who ruled Old Town, they were "mistaken" by the English as hostages during a bloody battle between King George's rival, Duke Ephriam of New Town, a battle King George lost. The men were taken to Dominica, sold into slavery, then rescued by another English captain and taken to Virginia and sold into slavery again, then rescued by a third English captain who took them to Bristol and attempted to sell them a third time to a captain about to embark on a slave run

to the Caribbean. They were rescued from that fate by a trial that was "the first dealing with slavery in Britain following the landmark Somerset case in which Mansfield ruled in 1772 that James Somerset...could not be forced to return to bondage in America because slavery was not supported by British Law" (Sparks 8).

As part of the preparation for their case – and as many Africans in such cases did – the Robin Johns were baptized as Christians because of their belief – a structure of feelings – that they would deserve and be emancipated by the Christians if they were Christian. Linda Colley reports that many English held as slaves in the Ottoman Empire converted to Islam for similar reasons and, when their conversions were sincere, were rewarded with assimilation and often freedom and civil authority.<sup>154</sup> This belief among Africans enslaved by Europeans was based on the Protestants' reputation for protecting individual Africans from slavery by sponsoring court cases to free them. Methodism was the Robin Johns' choice for protection because, when the two men were enslaved in Virginia, Methodism had "spread to the Tidewater [region]...where the Robin Johns would have traveled on their master's ship" and would have seen that Methodism actively included Africans, free or not, among them (Sparks 110). Sparks notes that of those Africans who converted to Christianity, "almost all of them joined dissenting sects, and a surprising number converted to Methodism" (Sparks 113).

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<sup>154</sup> See Colley *Captives* p. 39 discussing defections among British troops stationed at Tangiers in the 1680's; p. 59 for relative freedoms Ottoman slaves enjoyed, especially religious freedom; p. 113 for greater religious tolerance for Quakers among Muslims than there was among Christians in England; p. 115 explaining that only non-Muslims could be enslaved by Muslims; and p. 117 describing the range of responses of Britons to Ottoman enslavement, including "a minority [that] reacted to Barbary captivity by abandoning Christianity."

As Sparks explained, "Methodists reached out to humble folk...[through] a supportive and emotional network of believers where each individual was considered precious in the sight of God...Ultimately, Methodists sought 'a collective, emancipating sense of divine power.' It is no wonder that Africans and African Americans were drawn to them" (113). Opportunism might have initiated a frightened slave's first contact, but many slave narratives illustrate how the richness of the connection became a deep commitment.

The reasons for the Robin Johns' conversions parallel Maria Sibylla Merian's reasons. As Sparks sums them up this way:

"Throughout the Americas, slaves found in Christianity a language of protest, liberation, and reform, and they appropriated it, melded it with traditional African beliefs, and created their own rich, synthetic religious systems. ...In this sense, conversion was an act of defiance, an effort to erase concepts of difference and inferiority based on race through religion, the only belief system that militated against the prevailing racial ideology" (Sparks 114-5).

Women like Maria Sibylla Merian, trapped in a misogynist culture that colonizes women's lives and bodies, claimed conversion to one of many pietist sects circulating in Europe in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in order to enact resistance and obtain empowerment. Sparks explanation also frames women's conversions: throughout Europe, women found in Protestant pietist sects a language of protest, liberation, and equality, and they appropriated it, deployed it against traditional sexist beliefs, and joined in the development of rich, synthetic religious systems they hoped would grant them full humanity. In this sense, conversion was an act of defiance, an effort to erase concepts of difference and inferiority based on sex through religion, the only belief system that militated against the prevailing sexist

ideology and provided them a safe cultural refuge. This is exactly what Merian sought among the Labadists and what many women like her spoke of finding among Pietists in general. Moreover, reaching for sufficient personal freedom to claim one's full humanity is not counter to or even different from "real" spiritual conversion. If oppression crushes the soul, then escaping it is profoundly spiritual.

As noted above, some of the evidence supplied by Merian's letters suggests a deep passionate – perhaps erotic – attachment to Dorothea Auerin that may have endangered her marriage as much as her activities with "worms and flies" endangered her life as the Inquisition waned. However, the work and life Merian pursued after leaving Waltha indicates that Merian was after much more than safety, security or protection at Waltha. Labadism offered Merian a way to perceive her desire for the freedom to work, analyze, think and perhaps love as a religious quest rather than simply individual rebellion. Seeing her personal and intellectual fulfillment as a religious quest meant that she could pursue it within a loving, supportive, closed (i.e. safe) community. The community that presented itself through her brother Caspar had harbored other women who chafed at the limits of sexism and in particular of marriage. Jeannette Bloem argues that van Schurman's own Labadist conversion was an act of "self-care" in the Foucauldian sense "that draws on the concepts of 'freedom practices,' 'aesthetics of existence,' 'askesis' and 'the care of the self,' ...forms of practical rationality, with which the ethical self is achieved" (16). Based on van Schurman's *Eucleria*, Bloem concludes that van Schurman believes:

A woman's self needs not to be constrained by gender stereotypes or clerical institutions. Van Schurman reaches her ethical life-goal, and changes from the inside out the dominant stereotype of the Christian woman. She shapes her own Christian identity and with this reformation she transforms her life into an 'experiment of living,' an intriguing example of a freedom practice in a religious context. (24-5)

In other words, Merian's conversion was not a cynical play for freedom but a retreat into religion through the Labadist sect in an effort to make sense of her vocation and desire. That it took five long years of self-denial, and the submission of her daughters to the strict, punitive Labadist lifestyle before she realized that religion did not provide the answers she sought is evidence of the strength of her sincerity and disappointment.

### *Cocoon as Confinement*

Maria Sibylla Merian's liberation began with her realization that the Labadist commune was profoundly hierarchical and patriarchal despite granting women autonomy when the husband was a non-believer like Graff. Natalie Zemon Davis speculates that Merian agreed with other lapsed Labadists who felt "impatient with the spiritual hierarchy at Waltha and its excesses of discipline and control ...[as well as] excessive mortification" (Davis 164). In addition, the supply of insects to observe and materials to record and analyze was sparse. Merian had finished revising her journal of early sketches and observations begun when she was thirteen. Her beloved brother Caspar was gone, her youngest daughter was entering puberty and her eldest daughter was marrying age in a community where marriage was a public performance. She now found that the

bare cell of Waltha's sanctuary had become a barren one. The death of Merian's mother in 1690 finally freed her to emerge with her daughters from the Labadist cocoon into the cosmopolitan world of Amsterdam. There she took a house, resumed an active social life, and began finally to pursue her work life as a professional scientist and painter, for the first time making an independent living. Johanna soon married Jacob Hendrik Herolt who brought Merian tales of his travels in the East and West Indies along with samples of plants and insects that Merian longed increasingly to see in the field.

### *Amsterdam Emergence*

Life in Amsterdam deepened immeasurably Maria Sibylla Merian's Atlanticist standpoint through access to international people, ideas and markets. On her own in Amsterdam, Merian still styled herself in relation to a man – a "Widow" to her "dead" husband. This deliberately misleading styling was a sly mediation of her gender status, since widows in this period had economic, social and legal standing that other single and married women did not. Any property in her possession was hers to dispose of and not under the power of a father, brother or husband. Moreover, the social standing of a widow was far better than that of a divorced woman. Most importantly, she could avoid the spinster label, which was "identified as a sure sign of lesbianism," which in combination with the study of worms and flies would have put her at the mercy of a vestigial Inquisition (Donoghue 163). Even though Merian was living a rather revolutionary life as a professional artisan and scientific woman, she did not overtly claim a

revolutionary standpoint until she broke down the last gender barriers to her vocation and journeyed as a naturalist into the field on her own terms – like a man, perhaps, but as very few scientific men did.

*Chapter 5*

## MARIA SIBYLLA MERIAN'S UNSUBALTERN TEXTS

**Merian's Work**

Maria Sibylla Merian was an Atlanticist through the experience of her family's investment in the European imperial project, and a subaltern through her class and gender status, Maria Sibylla Merian was what Srinivas Aravamudan calls a "tropicopolitan," and from that distinction springs the importance of her work. Aravamudan defines the term tropicopolitan as a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial tropology and actual resident of tropical space, object of representation and agent of resistance. In many historical instances, tropicopolitans – the residents of the tropics, the bearers of its marks, and the shadow images of more visible metropolitans – challenge the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans (Aravamudan 4).

As we saw in Chapter 4, Merian's prosperous family was of the artisan class. The de Bry, Merian and Marrell families all had a major role in producing European artifacts of the "fictive construct of colonial tropology," but all three families were dependent on the patronage of a ruling class determined to advance its imperial project. In other words, Merian's class status was both privileged and subaltern. Chapter 4 also explored how Merian's sex, gender and possibly alternative sexuality indicated subaltern status, indicating that Merian was also an

“object of representation and an agent of resistance.” As a woman in a sexist patriarchal culture, she was the object of representation both in general and, as we shall see, in particular through visual and textual images of her produced for promotion of her work. But she was also a resistant agent. Her resistance to European gender expectations manifested in her divorce, her claims to a vocation reserved for men, to property ownership, as well as her travel to Surinam unchaperoned by “protective” males. Finally, despite being born European, Merian achieves tropicopolitan status through her two year residence in Surinam and the fact that she valued native and African expertise as much or more than prominent European experts and gave them voice in her own work. Although she wielded European privilege, Maria Sibylla Merian, was a colonized female subject of patriarchy who existed as a fictive construct of sexist tropology making her an object of masculine representation of femininity, while at the same time being an actual resident of a fully human space figured as woman making her a potential agent of resistance to sexism and other oppressions built upon sexist presumptions.

My claim for Maria Sibylla Merian's tropicopolitan status may seem to undermine Aravamudan's and Spivak's efforts to bring into full theoretical view the lived experience of vast numbers of non-Europeans who have suffered most the consequences of European empire building. After all, the active grammar of my assertion that Merian “gave them voice in her own work” points directly to Merian’s agency as a European – she had access to the authority and power to “give voice” to non-Europeans, who had little access themselves within European

hegemony. For decades post-colonial and critical race theorists have operated on the presumption – not entirely without basis – that European privilege far outweighs sexist oppression in the lives of Euro-descended women in the colonial context. However, if we analyze the term “European” following the pattern of Aravamudan's examination of the vast array of tropes, metaphors and meaning for the term "blackamoor," we see that the metaphor's tenor, for which dark skinned Africans are the vehicle, far exceeds the concrete existence available from “the worlded historical beings” from Africa (5). The structures of feeling about what an African is, which are based on lived experience, are completely inadequate to support the imposed social meaning. Similarly, the term “European,” for which "white people" or light-skinned people has long been the vehicle, also exceeds the concrete existence of the vast majority of the mixed- and multi-racial born in Europe. If “tropicopolitans thus transgress their prescribed function and reanimate cultural discourses in response to different contexts and intentions” so do Europeans, particularly when they enter tropical spaces with resistance to Imperial "European" values in their hearts and texts (Aravamudan 5). In other words, the lived experience of tropicopolitans and the structures of feeling they generate for and about themselves is constantly in conflict with the cultural meaning assigned to them and in direct proportion to the extent to which that cultural meaning is based on “metaphors for which no historically adequate referent may be advanced” (Aravamudan 5). The more European hegemony falsifies the representation of the margins, the more intensely it must repress those who reside there. At the same time, those who reside in the margins as well as

their allies also err if they perceive residents of hegemony as all equally privileged and empowered. There are subalterns even among those within cultural hegemony.

Even so, a nuanced view of “European” still contains much more privilege through the historical effects of colonization than does a nuanced view of “blackamoor” or “African.” For that reason, post-colonial and critical race theorists have operated on the presumption – not entirely without basis – that those who are objects of colonization have no agency because they are oppressed. Therefore it must be specious to claim tropicopolitan status for a European woman. Yet, Spivak’s and Aravamudan’s (as well as Paul Gilroy’s and Toni Morrison’s) arguments demonstrate that assuming the oppressed have no agency simply intensifies that oppression and obfuscates the full subjectivity of colonize and/or oppressed people. Thus, even though representing the agency of the subaltern is, as Spivak concludes, practically impossible from within oppressive hegemonies, Aravamudan’s image of the tropicopolitan beings the theorization that Spivak calls for within Derrida’s “cleared space” where the oppressed can and have accessed sufficient agency to produce cultural artifacts. Similarly, assuming that Europeans all have unlimited access to cultural agency reinscribes and further inflates European privilege. As Aravamudan explains:

...recent theories [of the subaltern] have reified the subaltern as resisting native and radical other who is completely outside the discourses of domination. On the contrary, a search for the subaltern mostly reveals a subject who is an idealized and rediscovered metonymy of European repressions and projections [white guilt, in other words], even while critics find it necessary to reaffirm this subject as the site of resistance to hegemonic practices. (Aravamudan 6)

If the reification of non-European subalterns as idealized radicals still brackets off the lived experience of non-European subalterns, then so does the reification of Europeans as "colonizers" bent on the destruction of non-European people and cultures. The history is not the people. Even if Maria Sibylla Merian's European heritage offered her privileges, we must take care to analyze her access to and use of that privilege on her terms. Through her art, scientific observations and writing, Merian claimed the subjectivity and agency of a person oppressed on several levels and privileged on others.

There is unequivocal evidence of the full humanity of colonized people and of their history in to be read on their terms rather than on the terms of the colonizer. Histories of colonized people consist primarily of resistance and of efforts to change the socio-political power balance. This is also the case for females colonized as women by patriarchy. A major indicator and generator of socio-political change is linguistic change, most of which is contingent and unmotivated – a signal on the level of structures of feeling that change has or is occurring. Of the motivated portion of linguistic change, in particular the intentional linguistic changes that Aravamudan asserts “are one small part of motivated change,” he writes

I characterize motivated instances of such change within colonialist contexts as tropicalizations ...including discursive, historical, and psychoanalytical determinations in addition to the conscious intentions of agents [of change, in this case the tropicopolitans as agents]. Tropicalization means a tropological revision of discourses of colonial domination ...a contestation of European rule by tropicopolitans, in habitants of torrid zones that were the objects of Europe's colonial ambition. (Aravamudan 5-6)

Maria Sibylla Merian was also interested in intentional linguistic changes that, as noted above, cleared space for native and enslaved voices. She was also interested in intentional rejection of linguistic changes imposed by European colonizers in the form of the encyclopedic efforts to catalogue, categorize and name everything without regard for the actual context of generation and existence or for how a particular cultural point of view corrupted accurate observation. As a female colonized by patriarchy, Merian is tropicopolitan because she is expected to conform to the “fictive construct of the [sexist] tropology” of “woman” and yet she is also an actual resident of both the literal tropic (Surinam) and of the metaphoric tropic of “woman,” and object of both representation and an agent of resistance. In her location as a European woman, her vocation leads her to tropicalize scientific language through observation – i.e. lived experience – “a tropicological revision of discourses” or gender domination.

Tropicalization also refers to acclimatization of plants, animals and machinery to operations in the torrid zone. Here Aravamudan also means the acclimatization of transported people to their new location, an acclimatization that is usually against the interests of colonizers whose benefits depend on the conflict between populations. Aravamudan cites “Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of transculturation (modifying earlier uses of these concepts by Cuban Fernando Ortiz and Uruguayan Angel Rama)” (Aravamudan 6). This process is like “going native” which sounds to me like something expatriots – or colonizers – try to do without ever achieving “authenticity.” But he goes on to quote Aparico and

Chávez-Silverman saying that “tropicalizations ...function as ‘a tool that foregrounds the transformative cultural agency of the subaltern subject’” (Aravamudan 6). In this claim that people of color forced through the imposition of slavery or colonization achieve "transformative cultural agency" the implication is that Europeans who choose to "go native" do not achieve such transformation. Is this because they are not forced to do so or because they are simply unable to do so without being forced? Does this mean that one cannot choose transformative cultural agency? Is "transformative" the same as becoming "authentically" native? While there is little historical evidence that European cultural transformation occurred, that is because, in general, the extent of European cultural transformation is in reverse proportion to the amount of colonial power of the European in question. Historical evidence favors the powerful, so it is unsurprising that there is so little of it to contradict the authoritative view. But the reality is that, while governors and their plantation-owning cronies had the power to resist cultural contact and exchange by imposing their own culture upon all others, their underlings did not have such power and their survival in such harsh conditions depended on sufficient cultural transformation through successful exchange with natives and slaves. Stedman's journals provide vivid evidence of this process. However, like natives and slaves, European subalterns had agency and choice about transformation; they could reject it and die – a many did. Or they could choose, as Maria Sibylla Merian did, to engage in it and not only survive but benefit.

And, as mediators, Merian, Behn and other subaltern Europeans had access to the production of cultural artifacts that non-Europeans did not have. As tropicopolitan subaltern Europeans who had lived in the tropics and undergone transculturation, they also had knowledge that few subaltern or powerful Europeans had. Aravamudan explains that

Tropicopolitans function as residents of the tropics subjected to the politics of colonial topology [ie representations imposed by European colonizers], who correspondingly seize agency through contesting language, space and the language of space that typifies justifications of colonialism. ...tropicopolitans are projections as well as beings leaving stubborn material traces even as they [their projections?] are discursively deconstructed. (Aravamudan 6)

European subaltern tropicopolitans left stubborn traces of resistance, too, if we read them carefully enough. Maria Sibylla Merian achieved tropicopolitan status not just by being subaltern and living in Suriname, but by deconstructing the figure or metaphor for metamorphosis generated in and by religious superstition and then releasing tropicopolitans – non-Europeans and insect – from colonial representational control to perform metamorphosis on their own terms, a performance that Merian, herself released from patriarchal cultural metaphors, was able to observe, record and publish.

**Atlanticist Work: Science transmutes from Alchemy**

Even Richard Attenborough's evidence shows that Maria Sibylla Merian's professional work shaped – reshaped, actually – many foundational practices of

modern science.<sup>155</sup> In Merian's era, "science" referred to no particular body of knowledge but instead to a comprehensive understanding about any topic from the movement of the heavens to pugilistic strategies. The OED notes that "In the Middle Ages, 'the seven (liberal) sciences' was often used synonymously with 'the seven liberal arts', for the group of studies comprised by the *Trivium* (Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric) and the *Quadrivium* (Arithmetic, Music, Geometry, Astronomy)" (OED "Science"). Thus even in the academy, "science" encompassed all areas of study – was in fact study itself. In the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, modern science as such was beginning to precipitate from a rich soup of centuries-old alchemical traditions, religious symbolism, and classical mysticism. Kim Todd explains that the Renaissance rediscovered and adopted fairy tales, myths and philosophies about natural processes from ancient thinkers like Aristotle, Pliny, Homer and Ovid. Cobwebs spawn moths, fire spawns flies, snow spawns worms according to the ancients' observations and moral analyses (Todd K 41-2). Ovid's *Metamorphosis* is key sources for such stories about metamorphosis in Maria Sibylla Merian's life work, but even as she observed with Ovid's paradigms in mind, she reached out for structures of feeling about freedom and the individual circulating among Protestant fringe movements. The swirl of exploration, colonization, empire and concepts of individual freedom carried

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<sup>155</sup> As Rücker notes, "It is only as a result of recent investigation into the life and work of Maria Sibylla Merian that her importance as a scientist is gradually emerging in its true light" (1). When she moved from Waltha to Amsterdam, Maria Sibylla Merian "thus graduated into the stratum of leading natural scientists which amounted to a recognition of her working method and her previous research, especially in the field of entomology" (Rücker 14). K. Todd points out that Merian "pioneered some of the first field studies...[and] helped lay the groundwork for modern-day biological science" (5). Moreover, Merian "inspired a century of scientists...In books and articles they cited 'Madame Merian'...[and] Linnaeus, in compiling his systemization of natural life, used her drawings rather than actual specimens" (Todd K. 10-11).

naturalists toward the recognition that human observation and rational analysis trumped alchemical "beliefs."

However, the evolution of scientific practices was not a straight line from moralistic superstition to rational empiricism. In *Creations of Fire: Chemistry's Lively History from Alchemy to the Atomic Age*, Cathy Cobb and Harold Goldwhite cover 100,000 years of chemistry in a broad sweep that reveals the rational/mystical conflict and complicates it with regional and political forces. Before efficient print technology, scientific effort was disproportionately manifest in mentor/student genealogies that preserved scientific information via secret ritual, clever encoding and hidden texts rather than waves of discovery. This may explain why, until the 1600s, the scientific dichotomy was actually experimentation vs. theory since "the first experiments were performed by artisans and the first theories proposed by philosophers" (Cobb & Goldwhite xi, xii). Artisan work came first, around 6000 BCE, as metallurgy, while theory as a separate practice – i.e. philosophy – emerged in 2000 BCE when technological advances cleared time for "tasks not directly associated with the day-to-day business of staying alive" (Cobb 6-8, 15). Philosophers interpreted chemical results generated by artisan practice. Increasingly differentiated from artisans, philosophers became a proto-professional class: "mathematicians, astronomers, anatomists, and physicists...theologians and political theoreticians" (Cobb 16). The Greeks became "the most influential in the development of modern [i.e. Western] chemistry" (Cobb 16).

A hierarchy quickly developed in which artisans – metallurgists, apothecaries, physicians and later printers and artists – became a proto-middle class and provided “the mainstream, plodding accumulation of chemical fact...[which] would be the downfall of the theory,” as we shall see (Cobb xii). If artisans applied chemical theories while philosophers created the theories, then alchemists operated as mediators between the two poles, combining practices from both fields, often weaving in mysticism. Artisan work depended on the accumulation of fact by means of close observation devoid as much as possible of cultural overlays and moral presumptions, which was the approach Maria Sibylla Merian brought to her naturalist work. This dogged devotion to the concrete results upon which their livelihoods depended eventually undermined and disproved alchemical constructs built upon philosophical presumptions, religious superstitions and obfuscating mysticism. Yet alchemists, as opposed to "plodding" artisans or dogmatic clerics, were better positioned to apprehend revolutionary ideas – apprehensions many of them paid dearly for.

This complex duel between chemical theory and practice is broken down usefully by Cobb and Goldwhite into three revolutionary moments. In more than 90,000 years<sup>156</sup> of alchemical speculation and artisan application, alchemists in most cultures were routinely corrupted by patronage and dogged by political and religious persecution. Thus they shrouded their work in secretive mysticism that sensationalized failures and invited charlatanism, particularly in Europe where gold transmutation remained the primary objective long after India's and China's

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<sup>156</sup> This seemingly outlandish number includes all of human history from the first tool to the first Chemical Revolution, as Cobb and Goldwhite call it, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

alchemy had moved on to medicinal objectives. Increasingly, Europeans perceived alchemists as frauds until, in what Cobb and Goldwhite call "the Chemical Reformation" of the 1500s, European alchemists finally turned from their obsession with gold as the key to immortality, wealth and power to more altruistic work on medicines – from chemistry as mystical manipulation to the actual interaction of chemicals as such. "The Scientific Revolution" of the 1600s saw the foregrounding of systematic experimental methods employed by artisans in combination with carefully recorded observation and encyclopedic efforts to categorize. This is the chemical revolution in which Merian had a starring role. Finally, "the Chemical Revolution" of the 1700s spearheaded by Lavoisier, "rejected – firmly and finally – magic as an explanation, reliance on authority as proof, and nonverifiable speculations as chemical theory" and instead "established – firmly and finally – the need for accurate quantitative measurements in experimental analysis, the need for clear, explicit language in analytic thought, and the need for verifiable experimental results to support chemical theory" (Cobb xiii). This led to the transmutation of alchemy from a dichotomous science interwoven with secret traditions and religious symbolism and divided into artisanal and philosophical camps to an alloy of the two that smelted philosophy and religion into a useful but decidedly separate slag. As Cobb and Goldwhite put it, "Chemistry became a science; chemical reactions became controllable; chemical production became an industry; and the chemist became a professional" (xiii).

Like the alchemical traditions that preceded it, newborn modern science was sexist, but not in quite the same way as it is in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cobb and Goldwhite find evidence of female alchemists throughout history and certainly female artisans existed even in the most sexist periods and cultures as cooks, dyers, gardeners, healers, midwives and those doing any work that required – and created – knowledge of chemical interactions, both domestically and in artisan workshops. In the west, the sexism was more overt, more clearly connected to assertions about females, especially as the Inquisition explicitly tied women's knowledge to charges of and punishments for witchcraft. According to Kim Todd, women were especially prone to such charges if they worked with flies and worms (caterpillars), which symbolized death and the occult. French judge Henri Boguet was particularly concerned with shape-changing women and "cites insects as an example of where such transformation is possible. 'It is again instanced in the transmutation of all sorts of herbs and plants into various kinds of worms and serpents'" (Todd K 65). Conflating the alchemical "transmutation" with the biological "metamorphosis" Boguet sees it all as evil and as female. He "wrote in his 1602 witch-hunting handbook, '...there are witches by the thousand everywhere, multiplying upon the earth even as worms in a garden'" (Todd K 64). As if reluctant to end the atrocious slaughter of the religious wars, Europe – and especially Germany – indulged so ferociously in witch-hunting that "by 1666... the German Lutheran leader Benedict Carpzo boasted of sentencing 20,000 devil worshippers to death" (Todd K 64). Even more explicitly, Todd quotes a Spanish naturalist who reported "I have been suspected for one that Studys witchcraft,

Necromancy, and a Madman by some who observed me in following butterflies, picking of herbs and other lawful exercises and I have had much to do to escape the censure of higher powers" by which he means torture and burning, not a tongue lashing (Todd K 65). However, by the 1670's, the explicitness of sexism in (al)chemistry made it more likely a woman could mediate her knowledge with domestic and religious practices. She could surreptitiously obtain knowledge by being born into a family whose business depended on artisanal or philosophical knowledge and whose success depended on the education of its women. If she was born or married wealthy enough, she could pay to publish her own findings – or if skilled she could print it herself – and if politically powerful enough she could escape censure and ignore sexist criticism. Women like Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian were lucky enough to live in such circumstances.

Race also matters in science in this period, but not as the grotesque racist practices of the 18<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Far from indulging in racist rejection of non-white knowledge, well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century European alchemists, naturalists and philosophers actively sought access to and greatly prized the ancient and evolving knowledge of Eastern and African cultures. If the brand of rigorous observation Maria Sibylla Merian practiced had actually become the core value modern western science claimed it was, then perhaps 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century “scientific” claims about the fitness of African blacks for slavery, and projects like those of the Tuskegee Institute would never have occurred. But they did and that is due in part to the way alchemy shaped the foundation of capitalist

economics. The Philosopher's Stone, which eventually became an icon that still surfaces in modern culture in Harry Potter novels and Indiana Jones films, surfaced for Maria Sibylla Merian in 17<sup>th</sup> century texts like the incomplete *Historiea Animalium* by Swiss natural historian Conrad Gesner and *Theater of Insects* by insect specialist Thomas Moffet (whose little daughter found a spider beside her), which incorporates much of Gesner's work (Todd K 44). Merian's father (Matthäus the Elder) and grandfather (Johann Theodore de Bry) "illustrated at least two alchemical texts, *Atlanta fugiens*, by M. Maier, in 1618, and the *Tractatus*, by Mylius, in 1620" which she surely would have read (Simms).<sup>157</sup> She would have also read a preface by Moffet's publisher, Theodore Mayerne, in which he writes that he "sees hope for alchemy in insect metamorphosis. If these worthless creatures can transform, why not metals?" (Todd K 45).

Mayerne is referring, of course, to transmutation, the process of changing one material into another, as in metallurgy when copper is combined with tin to produce bronze or as in nature when fire transmutes wood into ash. Artisans first engaged in the transmutation of base metals to harder metals like bronze for agricultural, military and surgical implements. But the transmutation of base metals to gold quickly became the central objective and "was most diligently pursued from the first millennium BCE to the almost two millennia after" in three major world cultures: Indian (Southeast Asia); Chinese; and Mediterranean (Cobb xii). Aristotle predicted that transmutation was possible, which "was the hypothesis that alchemists ... would continue to test for the next 1000 years" (Cobb 30). At the center of this quest was the assumption that all matter shared a

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<sup>157</sup> Simm's note 12: Bucher, *Icon and Conquest*, p. 20.

core substance that, if isolated could shift the balance of the four Aristotelian elements, fire, earth, water and air in any metal and transmute it to a more refined state. That substance was the legendary Philosopher's Stone.

However, the quest for the Philosopher's Stone was a quest for a means, not an end. It was the means for obtaining the purest substance gold, considered the purest metal because it was incorruptible – it didn't rust or tarnish. Because language like "pure" and "incorruptible" have valence in both the material context of chemistry and the moral context of religion, obtaining the Philosopher's Stone required both chemical prowess and moral purity. Again, the dichotomy breaks down around practice and theory, but in each culture, the terms were slightly different. In China, gold was seen as "incorruptible" and thus "eternal," able to bestow immortality if it could be transformed into a digestible form – into an elixir. The Taoists who pursued this transmutation were at first interested in longevity and peace in a rustic setting, but soon "longevity" became "immortality" and "quiet contemplation" in retreat became pursuit of "magic" in secret (Cobb 44). In 600-0 BCE, the Indian objective, based on Tantric philosophy, was the production of medicines that strengthened earthly life enough to generate spiritual power and release from earthly ties, a post-mortal immortality (Cobb 48).

Meanwhile, in the Mediterranean region from 200 BCE to 600 CE, Hannibal finally gave up harrying Rome, which allowed the Roman Empire to assimilate Greek culture and engulf "southern Europe, Macedonia, Greece, Gaul, Britain, Egypt, Asia Minor and Persia" (Cobb 52). Interested primarily in the

breadth of empire, Rome added little to the development of chemistry and instead expressed its imperial scale through "the encyclopedias and compendiums they assembled [that] were still recognized as authorities in Europe in the 1600s (Cobb 53). When the vast Roman Empire split into the now iconic "east vs. west" empires, the western empire dissolved and was finally overrun by Attila the Hun and sacked by the Goths, sinking into the Dark Ages, while Byzantia in the east "protected" itself by exiling its alchemical intellectuals (Cobb 58). These took their Greek learning, manuscripts and tools into the welcoming arms of Persia at the dawn of 600 CE and the rise of Arabian Islam. Since Muslim imperialists were highly literate and intellectual and primarily interested in trade and wealth, they valued gold as currency and alchemy for its contribution to military might. Muslims were also an open society, eschewing proselytizing and welcoming traders and scholars from around the world. Between their vigorous trade activities and cross-cultural scholarship, they created a context of exchange that included transporting gunpowder from China to Europe and taking the first steps in imposing a more practical and less mystical alchemical approach. In China, then, the Philosopher's Stone would produce from gold an elixir for immortality, in India purer medicine and in the Mediterranean access to wealth. In each region, the objective was human achievement expressed through the incorruptibility of gold. Only in Europe did the desire for the elusive Philosopher's Stone transmute into the demand for gold itself.

In order to understand how race matters in this quest for science, we need to look at why alchemy does not arise in the global north until the 12<sup>th</sup> century,

and doesn't ever arise in Africa, Meso-America or Japan. The answers are prosaic: “there were ...two regions [besides the Mediterranean region] that met our conditions (a plenitude of mercury, a scarcity of gold, and motivation): India and China” (Cobb 42). Northerners were too preoccupied with surviving the brutal winters; in Africa and Meso America there was bountiful food and too much gold; in Japan there was no mercury (thought necessary for transmutation into gold) (Cobb 41-2). These differences set Europe up for an obsession with gold as wealth that eventually made tropicopolitan Africa and Meso-America irresistible targets of conquest. Thus, by the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the imperial economies of Europe began to see race as the means to transmute exploration and conquest into gold – racism became their Philosopher's Stone.

Among alchemists themselves, however, transformation was increasingly seen as more valuable than gold. Many alchemists' searches for transmutation primarily involved “dissolving, melting, combining, [and] distilling, but others used only magic incantation. Most used both” (Cobb 30). While Cobb does not discuss biology or nature, Merian's contemporaries like Thomas Mayerne quoted above explicitly connect alchemical transmutation to biological metamorphosis. As Maria Sibylla Merian herself might have pointed out, “alchemists believed in transmutation because they saw transmutation every day of their lives in cooking, dyeing, bodily functions, or producing metals from ores” (Cobb 30). In other words transmutation was constantly visible in the work of the artisans, domestic workers, and their own bodies – and, as Merian's work demonstrates, in nature. But Merian's contributions to science were not based solely on her scientific

acuity. Since, as Simms notes, enigmatic symbolism<sup>158</sup> and secretiveness was required to protect revolutionary alchemists from hegemonic religious forces, printers, engravers and artists like Merian and her family members were key figures in alchemical history, circulating theories and practices through the alchemy of ink and paper, acid and metal, eye and metaphor.

Unlike metallurgic transmutation, however, metamorphosis could not be discovered by “dissolving, melting, combining, [and/or]” things (Cobb 30). It could not be discovered by Socratic deductive reasoning (this way led to fallacies like autogenesis), nor by analogy (this way led to universalized presumptions), nor by mystical incantation (except maybe the odd muttered plea), or moral philosophy (which led to imposing metaphors that obfuscate function). Delving into the real nature of metamorphosis required inductive reasoning, a neutral observation of processes and outcomes – it required an observer who already understood liminality, the misreading of the marginalized, and the ignorance of presumed universality. It required someone who was both theorist and artisan. It required a mediator scientist like Maria Sibylla Merian.

If Maria Sibylla Merian's origins provided her with an Atlanticist world view (unearned, unchosen), she chose to develop that world view as an "earned" professional Atlanticist standpoint. As we have seen, developing this standpoint required several life-changes – conversion, marital break up, continuation of her work, scientific revelations – many attributable to Merian's choices. While her point of view positioned her to know about the tensions between alchemical discovery and religious mysticism, the professional standpoint she claimed helped

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<sup>158</sup> Also see M. E. Warlick's article on women in both the iconography and process of alchemy.

resolve some of those tensions. Her biographers note the thread of faith in God that runs through her work despite a surprising lack of piety. Many brilliant gifted women – Anna Maria van Schurman for instance – and men – like Swammerdam – gave up their studies upon conversion and distanced themselves from rational approaches to observable phenomenon. But Maria Sibylla Merian's clear-eyed observation of nature produced a similar clear-eyed faith in a God responsible for such amazements. Piety was useless to her. Continued observation, note-taking, representation and conversation was key.

In addition to her European subaltern tropicopolitan status, Maria Sibylla Merian was unusual – perhaps unique – among male and female naturalists for the combination of skills and aspirations she brought to her work and how that combination compelled her into new territory. Transforming a specimen in the tree to an entry in a published book required many tedious skilled steps: locating, collecting and observing the specimen, transporting it to a study, writing a descriptive text, drawing the specimen, engraving the drawing, setting the print, printing the document, binding the book, and marketing the book. Most European naturalists did only the writing and some sketching. They hired all the other steps done by travelers and artisans. Maria Sibylla Merian was professionally skilled in all of these steps and performed them for almost all of her works. Moreover, she added two key steps that have since become foundational to modern biology: she observed the specimen in its habitat; and she collected parts of the habitat required to create conditions for metamorphosis in her lab. Based on such close observation, she discovered or deduced new information about metamorphosis

and insect life. Then Merian combined artistic talent with artisan skill to enable an inductive rather than deductive approach to analysis of natural processes. Her artisan training allowed her to control publication and more accurately represent the "amazing rare things" she observed. As she exhausted the opportunities in Frankfurt, Nuremburg, and Waltha, she found exciting promise in specimens flooding in from the East and West Indies.

However, "something important was missing from all these collections" of foreign insects she was seeing in Amsterdam: "The beautiful specimens were stilled, wrenched from context, lacking process" (Davis 167). As Merian herself put it:

In Holland I saw with wonderment the beautiful creatures brought back from the East and West Indies, especially when I had the honour to be able to see the splendid collection belonging to the most honorable Gentlem[e]n [in Amsterdam] ... in which I found these and countless other insects, but without their origins and subsequent development, in other words how they develop from caterpillars into chrysalises and so on. All this stimulated me to undertake a long and costly journey to Surinam (a hot and humid land from where the above-named gentlemen had obtained these insects) in order to pursue my investigations further; accordingly in June 1699 I traveled there to carry out more precise investigations; I remained there until June 1701; then I returned to Holland, where I arrived on 23 September. (Merian *Metamorphosis*)<sup>159</sup>

She saw with wonderment and felt compelled to undertake a long and costly journey to a tropical land to carry out more precise investigations. When Maria Sibylla Merian stepped on board ship in Amsterdam at the peak of her

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<sup>159</sup> Elizabeth Rücker, translation, published in Rücker, Elisabeth and William T. Stearn. *Maria Sibylla Merian in Surinam: commentary to the facsimile edition of Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, 1982.

considerable and manifold skills, she stepped into the culminating project of her life.

**Merian in Suriname: Cracking the Chrysalis**

Merian's Suriname journey from 1699 to 1701 with her daughter, Dorothea, is well documented and transparently motivated compared to Behn's apparent spy mission in 1663 thirty-six years earlier. Merian's initial interest in Suriname – as opposed to other colonial outposts – came from encountering stories and specimens from Suriname from two sources: returnees to Waltha from the Labadist plantation in Suriname; and from her daughter Johanna's young husband, Jacob Herolt. Rücker lays out Amsterdam's close ties with Dutch colonies in the West Indies through its brisk trade in sugar and exotic specimens from the colonies, goods from Europe and enslaved West Africans. “Trade and research thus went hand in hand, leading to the foundation of many botanical and zoological collections, as well as influencing still-life painting and resulting in the publication of illustrated scientific books” (Rücker 14). These close ties between research and trade also led many 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century scholars to conclude that any research resulting from trade meant the "Triangle Trade" and thus scientific advances from the period were all corrupted by their connection to slavery and capitalism. When Merian wrote in her introduction to the Suriname book she published after her expedition "I was moved to take a long and costly journey to Suriname" it is difficult to disentangle her motives from the colonial project (Davis 167). However, disentangling them reveals the extent to which Merian was

acting like a tropicopolitan by, as Aravamudan puts it, performing tropicalizations in "a reworking of colonialist discourse through revisions" (15). Merian challenged presumptions about the colonial project, slavery and the humanity of Africans and Amerindians in both her text and her methods.

Merian's journey to Surinam was unusual, but not because women didn't go to Suriname and other places in the New World. Nor was it because naturalists didn't go to the New World. It was unusual because reputable single women like fifty-two year old Maria Sibylla Merian and her twenty-one-year-old daughter Dorothea were only supposed to go if they were attached to reputable men – preferably as wives. Single women who traveled to the New World on their own were considered – and usually were or became – disreputable. As Davis notes, even though they traveled "under the protection of their skipper, [they] were anomalous, traveling without men on strange business" (Davis 168). Aphra Behn had also faced this perception problem and may have acquired her surname to deflect it, but Merian did not indulge in any such cover-up. She and Johanna were traveling on their own agency on their own business. And it was "their" business, since Dorothea had by this time taken Johanna's former role as apprentice in Merian's vocation. They were not looking for husbands. They were looking for insects to study, portray, describe and to sell upon their return to Amsterdam.

Merian's trip was also unusual because women didn't travel for professional scientific reasons. In fact, almost no men traveled for purely scientific reasons until the 1630's. Prior to that, observations of nature were made as side projects of a larger mission for a monarch or corporation. For example,

Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo made his 16<sup>th</sup> century observations from Hispanola while serving as Spain's overseer of mines and then as governor of Cartagena and Santo Domingo and Georg Everard Rumpf (Rumphias) made his late 17<sup>th</sup> century observations of Amboina while serving fifty years as administrator for the Dutch East India Company (Davis 168). When men began to make scientific journeys in the 1630's, their trips and publications were paid for by aristocratic, governmental, religious or merchant sponsors. Rucker begins her discussion of Merian's work with a quote from Johann Wolfgang Goethe meant to celebrate Merian's fame:

Sibylla Merian, probably inspired by the fame and reputation as a traveler of the highly deserving, much younger Charles Plumier, ventured to Suriname and in her depictions moved to and fro between art and science, between nature observation and artistic goals...(Werke. Complete... vol. 39. 233)

Plumier was not only "highly deserving [and] much younger," he was also highly paid and facilitated by "the secretaries of state who had seen to it that his trip and the publication of his book had been financed by the [French] king's treasury" (Davis 169). Meanwhile, "Merian had no formal connections with government or religious institutions to pave her way" (Davis 169).

Moreover, these men usually traveled in the large entourages of princes and noblemen and lodged for free on their plantations. Rucker notes that "it is possible that she [Merian] might have traveled straight from Waltha to Suriname, where Cornelius van Sommelsdijk was governor from 1683 till 1688, had not the violent death of this man suddenly deprived her of this direct contact" (14). And Davis offers the "elite families" Sommelsdijk and Verboom as "connections to

help her get started" (175). However, such a cordial relationship with van Sommelsdijk seems unlikely for Merian, who left the Labadist commune in part because of an "excess of mortification" practiced among them. Although Somelsdijk was not a Labadist, when he arrived in Surinam in 1683, with his youngest sister Lucia, Labadie's widow, he quickly established himself as "the enemy of everything loose, vicious, or immoral, and without regard to the offenders being of high position or low degree he condemned them fearlessly" (contemporary qtd in Todd K 112). His harsh treatment of workers and soldiers was so bad that they mutinied and shot him to death along with his commanding military officer, Lawrence Verboom. Perhaps such sternness seemed justified to him, since when his second sister, Maria, came to Surinam with a new wave of colonists, her ship was invaded and taken by pirates who left crew and passengers literally naked in the abandoned pirate ship near Cape Verde. An English ship rescued them, gave them clothes and dropped them on the beach at Paramaribo (Todd K 113). And there is plenty of historical evidence of constant resistance among the enslaved West Africans as well as continual raids by maroons from nearby hidden settlements.

However, contemporaries like Maria Sibylla Merian herself felt such brutality was uncalled for and extreme. In any case, none of the La Providentia people received the Merian women or contributed to their support. If any of them were still at Providence Plantation when Maria Sibylla Merian finally made her way upriver, they were in no position to provide more than Spartan accommodations in the remnants of the plantation's facilities. Todd suggests more

credibly that Merian may have had connections among acquaintances of her son-in-law Herolt in Surinam or among people known to her colleagues in Amsterdam. But as Todd's lush detailed descriptions of the area illustrate, few of these people would have had much to offer in the way of support in such a harrowing environment, even though what they might have had was more than what remained upriver at Providence Plantation.

Merian's journey within Surinam covers almost exactly the same ground as Aphra Behn's and her notes provide much more detail. Both arrived at Paramaribo at the mouth of the Suriname River and eventually sailed about forty miles inland (i.e. south) to plantations near Marchal Creek. Rücker and Todd both conclude that Merian settled in a house for several months near Paramaribo, even though she doesn't mention the town once in *Metamorphosis*. However, "in the Leningrad study book, ...her 232<sup>nd</sup> entry reads: 'In Suriname at Fort Baramaribo my first caterpillar metamorphosis, I found many on the Coyabes trees...'" (Rücker 26). Comparing the 1675 English map by J. Thornton, which shows Parnum Hill where Behn stayed, to the 1718 Dutch map by J. Ottens, which shows the Sommelsdijk Plantation, Providentia, which Maria Sibylla Merian visited, we can see that Providence Plantation was across the river from Parnham Hill where Behn stayed and about a mile further along the river.<sup>160</sup> When Behn visited Parnham Hill, enslaved Africans were just beginning to escape in significant numbers. By the time Merian arrived in Suriname and embarked on the "forty mile paddle upstream to Providence Plantation during the rainy season of April 1700," maroon settlements had formed along Marchal Creek beyond

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<sup>160</sup> These maps are available in Rücker.

Parnham Hill (Davis 176). When Merian arrived at the Sommelsdijk plantation, she saw that "along with his heirs lived his Carib concubine, a chief's daughter taken 'in marriage' as a gesture of peace with the Caribs" (Davis 175). Another household Merian visited was that of Sommelsdijk's "slain military commander Larens Verboom, whose young daughter would later travel with Merian to Amsterdam" (Davis 175).

Merian and her daughter seem to have traveled into the Surinam back-country on different terms than Behn did, whose account in *Oroonoko* suggests that she was received like a tourist by a gracious host into the protective embrace of an active ex-pat community with colonial power over all local populations. Yet, the few details Merian offers of the hardships of her own trip suggest that Behn's journey might not have been the lark she seemed at times to be enjoying. For example, the heat, which Behn also barely mentions, was overpowering to Europeans used to seasons of frost. In a letter to Georg Volkhamer, Clara's cousin and a physician, dated October 2, 1702, after her return from Surinam, Merian wrote:

And no one would easily undertake such a difficult and costly journey for such a purpose, for it is very hot in that country, so that one can only work with the greatest difficulty, and I almost had to pay for it with my life which is why I could not remain there any longer; also all the people there were amazed that I came out of it alive, for most people there die of the heat, so that this work is not only rare, but will also remain so. (Rücker 64)

Also disease, of which Behn makes no mention, was rife. Europeans have been rightly charged with bringing diseases to the New World against which Amerindians were defenseless, but Kim Todd points out that unfamiliar diseases

moved in both directions: "the French, Spanish, English and Dutch had little defense against the mosquito-borne diseases that course through the tropics. The deeper one went into the forest the more likely one was to be struck down by debilitating fevers that stole the ability to work if they didn't kill outright" (Todd K 152). Kim Todd speculates that the illness Merian speaks of was insect-born, specifically mosquito-born, either yellow-fever or malaria. Either one would have reduced Merian to severe weakness, chills and sweats, pounding headaches, backaches and nausea (Todd K 191). And those were the dangers just from mosquitoes. Todd further reports that "diseases plagued the entire country from dock to dense jungle – leprosy, yaws, guinea worms, worms that crawled under the ankels, worms of the stomach and intestines, dry gripes, the bilious putrid fever of the West Indies. It was frightening to breathe" (Todd K 2). Davis, Todd and Rücker agree that Merian planned a five year stay in Suriname. So it must have been with enormous disappointment that she wrote in her preface, "I did not find in that land the opportunities I had hoped for to observe the insects, for the climate there is very hot and the heat did not agree with me; for this reason I was compelled to return home sooner than I had planned" (Rücker 64).<sup>161</sup> After the great cost and sacrifices she made to reach the forests of Surinam, the fact that such a determined woman came home less than half way through her planned visit speaks to the difficulties of life in Suriname. Given the hardships and costs of travel to Surinam for nature study, one of the most amazing rare things in Suriname in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century was Maria Sibylla Merian herself.

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<sup>161</sup> Trans. Rücker from *Metamorphosis*.

*Metamorphosis Completed: Amsterdam Again and Finally*

Merian's 1701 return to Amsterdam after two years in Suriname was in several ways parallel to her move from Waltha to Amsterdam exactly ten years prior. Her sojourns in Suriname and Waltha were both retreats from the European socio-cultural mainstream and her (re)entry into Amsterdam was (re)immersion in cosmopolitan business and busyness. Just as Johanna quickly married her Labadist beau in 1691, so Dorothea, ten years younger, almost immediately married Heidelberg surgeon, Philipp Hendriks (1671-1711), ten years later.<sup>162</sup> In 1691, Merian's mother, Johanna, had just died while in 1701 her ex-husband, Johann Graff, had just died, making Merian in reality the widow she had styled herself for two decades. Both times she took up residence in Amsterdam, she quickly set up shop and wrote letters to reestablish old connections while also proactively making new ones. Just like her first entry, after this second and final entry into Amsterdam, she immediately took up production of her work again, this time the plates for her culminating work, *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*. As before, she renewed professional contacts, writing to naturalist colleagues and collectors offering her Suriname specimens for sale, seeking and providing advice on their preservation and working to find subscribers for *Metamorphosis* (Davis 177).

One major difference between the two arrivals in Amsterdam is that after the Suriname expedition, she needed money. She could have had enough money

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<sup>162</sup> Kim Todd finds in this timing a hint that part of Merian's motive for taking Dorothea to Suriname was to impose a hiatus on the couple in the hope of preventing a marriage as miserable as her own had been (Todd K 153).

fairly quickly by selling her Suriname specimens and the original paintings she would produce to illustrate her findings. Her reputation as an artist was already good enough that money earned from these endeavors would probably have supported her household, especially with Dorothea married to a doctor. Merian briefly considered this option. If she simply sold single copies of paintings to collectors, she would recoup her travel costs. As she muses in the foreword to *Metamorphosis*:

For if I were to sell the paintings, it would be for their great rarity and worth the money and travel costs, but then only one person can have them and, as I said already it costs a lot of money to have them printed; but if many amateurs wanted to subscribe and pay for it when taking out their subscription, so that I need not be out of pocket, then I would still take the risk. (Letter 7 Rücker 54)

In the end, her need for money<sup>163</sup> was exceeded by her desire to share her findings. By compiling her notes and art into a reproducible book, more than just rich aristocrats and merchants would know and use the material – a more scientifically desirable outcome. Much of the added expense of producing a book went to pay for Amsterdam's best engravers, since Merian's tropical illness combined with age made it impossible to do the engraving herself.

Other decisions included whether to publish in scholarly Latin, which would elevate the work, or in vulgar Dutch or German, which would broaden the appeal; she chose to do both. Should an English translation be printed in Amsterdam by Maria Sibylla Merian or in London under Pettiver's auspices,

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<sup>163</sup> Her biographers all agree that the post-Suriname letters – in particular the correspondence with James Pettiver (1658/63-1718) in London (apothecary, naturalist and collector and Fellow of the Royal Society) uncovered in the 1980's and with Johan Georg Volckamer (1662-1744) in Nuremberg (physician and cousin to Clara Imhof) – “all ... make it unmistakably clear that Merian needed money” (Rücker 33).

which would cut into Merian's profits? Should the volume contain all of Merian's Surinam observations or a mere 60 examples? In fact, at one point, it looked like she could only afford to publish twenty plates due to larger than expected expenses and the smaller than expected subscription rate. Ultimately, as Rücker explains, Merian chose the solution that put the maximum amount of material in circulation: she published 60 plates in a smaller (and thus more affordable) edition than she had hoped for, some in Latin and some in Dutch. Rücker notes that Merian's few letters about these difficulties "inform us about the way the sales and payment of a private publication had developed beyond the national boundaries. It was all very tiresome and the author was very dependent on honest middlemen" like the aptly named Pettiver (57).

Much of this financial dilemma is a consequence of Merian's gender status and her gender choices. Since, as described above, she had no financial backers, no personal fortune and no spouse to support her, she had to undertake all this work on her own ability to raise and manage funds. She may have had a loan from an Amsterdam Burgomeister, Nicolas Witsen, but a loan compounded rather than relieved her problems (Davis 169). As a result, she accepted the request to illustrate the notes of the unfortunate late George Rumphius whose collection, illustrations and notes from forty years of collecting on Ambon Island near New Guinea went up in smoke in 1687. Widowed and nearly blind, Rumphius had just enough time before he died to reconstruct his notes and his publisher was eager to cash in on the project (Todd K. 194). Though the resulting *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet* was a "jewelry box jumble of flash and sterility" common to

collectors of the day and thus "diametrically opposed to Merian's" work, the Ambon project paid for a good bit of the Surinam book's publication, as did Merian's tireless trade in specimens that went on almost until her death (Todd K. 200). Since Merian refers to still having many copies of the book in her possession "six years after its publication," Rucker concludes that "the book *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* did not cover the costs of the journey to South America and that it may even have made a loss" (58). The copper plates remained in Maria Sibylla Merian's possession "which was probably the only advantage of having printed the book privately" since hired publishers kept the plates (Rucker 58). However, Maria Sibylla Merian died before she could do a reprint and after seven printings in Latin, Dutch, and German, the plates, apparently "no longer usable" disappeared. No English edition was ever published and nor any modern English facsimile. However, Rucker's and Stearn's project contains the first published English translation of the text next to "thumbnail" prints of each plate.

At each turn in the process then, Merian chose the less elite option even when it entailed more expense and effort on her part. Thus, as Rucker notes, Merian followed her "daring journey" with a "financial adventure," which pretty much sums up the spirit of this era in Europe of exploration, conquest, acquisition, colonization and profit (54). Maria Sibylla Merian was "in the spirit," no doubt about it. She made use of the existing systems of promotion, collection and discussion – she was a well-known participant at the cosmopolitan center of empire in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, Davis's notes on the history of the

frontispieces included in subsequent additions of *Surinamensium* indicate Merian's "own disquiet...at placing her book at the center of an imperial enterprise" (202). Davis concludes from this that "once again we cannot pin the woman down," but I think we can say much more than that (202). Merian's reluctance in combination with other evidence indicates that she had one hand on the growing hegemonic "crystal" of European culture while the other reached – literally and figuratively – into Atlantic currents for alternative structures of feeling about gender, race, ethnicity, art and science. Why did she reach? Why did she grasp – literally, conceptually, culturally – material that challenged the cultural structures to which her other hand clung? At first she was forced to because of her Atlanticist artisanal female point of view that located her near the margins of 17<sup>th</sup> century Atlantic culture struggling to engage in her vocation. And that force never waned in her life. But as her life progressed she increasingly chose to examine the unincorporated cultural material that she could see from her position near the margins and that she could, as a result, examine with fewer cultural obstructions, especially as she self-consciously looked around those obstructions in repeated acts of radical contemporaneity. Recording and publishing her challenging observations was tropicopolitanist action. From her standpoint as a woman with some powerful connections to the expanding hulk of European colonialism, Merian used her gender marginality to slip into places a woman was not supposed to go and do work that a woman might be burned at the stake for doing. And then she really got subversive.

In choosing to publish a book about her Surinam journey, Merian eschewed scholastic elitism, secretive alchemical mysticism, and religious prohibitions put in place by elite and elitist men in service of patriarchal structures that explicitly, by law and with force, excluded women. Instead of yielding to the great force of this exclusion, she chose to democratize her information by producing printed editions of her work. Rücker writes

Her sumptuous folio *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, published in 1705 with Latin and Dutch text, was the first work to illustrate the close association of certain tropical insects and plants. ...she was the first to illustrate in colour the various tropical economic plants then little known in Europe... Thus her work has a botanical as well as entomological value. (xi)

Moreover, even though *Metamorphosis* was to culminate her life's work as a naturalist, Merian continued her practice of speaking directly to Europeans in their own languages. As Todd explains it, "The initial run [of *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surnamensium*] would be two versions – Dutch, language of newspapers, idle conversation and Leeuwenhoek; and Latin, language of The Royal Society, universities and scientific papers" (213). This was the first time Merian published in Latin,<sup>164</sup> but even this was in order to broaden her reach to a scholarly audience.

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<sup>164</sup> Caspar Commelin did the translation.

To further broaden the reach of her book, Merian offered three levels of completion at different prices: the cheapest was a black and white engraving at 15f; next was engraving plus hand-coloring with watercolors at 30f; and finally she did original paintings probably for individually negotiated prices (Rücker 71). Rucker reports that Maria Sibylla Merian's work appeared in the collections of two competing London collector scientists, musing: "rather puzzling is the fact that there should be no fewer than two sets of the original watercolours by Maria Sibylla for the plates in the Suriname book in London" (42). Apparently, Merian completed the same paintings several times in order to sell paintings to fund the book of engravings and yet still keep copies of her evidence.



Merian also eschewed sensational exoticism widely deployed by European Imperialists in works like *The Grand Voyages* published by her forefathers. To de-exoticize the New World, Merian compared unfamiliar Surinamese species to common European species like ducks, bears, nut trees and fruit trees, and especially apples. On Plate 3,<sup>165</sup> she portrays a large moth and compares the 'dust' on its wings to "the feathers of a variegated hen," its body surface to "hair

<sup>165</sup> All of plates mentioned here they can all be seen in color and with her German text at "Maria Sibylla Merian: *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*" <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/msdeu.htm>

like that of a bear,” and its proboscis to “the neck of a goose or duck” (Rücker 89). Her subject is Surinam's "amazing rare" insects but she mediates their exoticness for her European reader by placing them on Surinamese flora that she familiarizes through comparison to common European plants she encountered as a



wife among her circles of women friends, colleagues and students in Frankfurt and Nuremburg. On Plate 28 she explains to such women that the citron's “leaves and blossoms are identical to those of the ordinary [i.e. European] lemon except that they are larger and thicker in proportion to the fruit, which fruit has little pulp within but a very thick skin” (Rücker 111). About "American cherries" she insists on Plate 7 that they “do not come near

the taste of our European cherries;” the sweetsop tree fruit on Plate 14 “resembles a melon; it tastes sourish like grapes;” and on Plate 33, “Vygens [figs][sic] in America are entirely the same as those found in Europe” (Rücker 93, 98, 113).

Then, as an overt cultural mediator, Merian brings Europeans into Amerindian and West African kitchens by comparing the preparation of fruits and vegetables on both continents. Two vegetables are compared to carrots: papaya

(Plate 40<sup>166</sup>) “When ripe, they are yellow; when half-ripe and cooked, they taste like the best carrots”); batatas (Plate 41) “are somewhat paler than the European carrot; they can be cooked like carrots or with meat; their taste is very like that of chestnuts, but they are softer and even sweeter” (Rücker 120, 121). Papaya fruit (Plate 40) “are cooked on their own in water and are eaten cut into pieces ” while citrons (Plate 28) “are candied; in Holland they are baked in gingerbread and know as Zuccade; in Germany they are called Citronaat” (Rücker 120, 111). Some items, like the grapes on Plates 34<sup>167</sup> are too familiar to describe and on Plate 37 she writes “This plant was called in Surinam *Okkerum* or *Althea*. It is sufficiently well known among botanists” (Rücker 118). Plate 33, “Vygens [figs][sic] in America are entirely the same as those found in Europe; it is thus unnecessary to describe them” (Rücker 93, 98, 113). This language of familiarity used to present the commonness of tropical food in its own setting through tastes and textures her audience knew well provided the European reader with a radical contemporaneous lens. Using her audience's own daily experience to contextualize the unfamiliar, Merian confronted Europeans with the common experience of common people like themselves living a world away from their own common experience. Maria Sibylla Merian was mediating across cultural lines.

Of all the plants Merian uses for comparison in *Metamorphosis*, she most

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<sup>166</sup> All images are from this source and retrieved from *Maria Sibylla Merian: 1647-1717*. "Maria Sibylla Merian: *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium*, XXVII: Abbildung." Tal.de Klaus Internet Service. See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su40.htm> 08 12 09 alh.

<sup>167</sup> I include this plate because it features the curls Attenborough calls Merian's obsession. In fact, of 72 plates, only 10 feature curls at all and in each case they are biologically correct; five are vines, two of which are grape and several are antennae. See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su34.htm> 08 12 09 alh.

frequently refers to the apple tree. Seldom comparing the apple as food, Merian does claim on Plate 12 that the banana “has a flavor like apples in Holland” (Rücker 96). Most of her comparisons are to the physical features of the apple and its tree. On Plate 44 she writes “the Rocu is a large tree producing a reddish blossom similar to that of the apple tree in Europe” (Rücker 124). Many Surinamese trees compare in height to the European apple trees. The cocoa tree (Plate 26) and the guava tree (Plate 19) both grow “as tall as an appletree in Germany” while the guava “leaves are like those of the plum” (Rücker 102). Both the “*Appels van China-Boomen* [apples of China trees][sic]” (Plate 52) and the citron (Plate 28) “grow ...as tall as the largest apple trees in Europe” (Rücker 111). Here, Merian's use of a very common tree in Europe, one that even city-dwellers and women left at home in Europe would know for scale, accomplishes seemingly opposed goals. On one hand, the familiar apple tree continues to draw the reader into association with the author in shared knowledge of the apple tree. On the other hand, the comparison repeatedly replaces the outlandishness of tropical trees with the commonness of the humble apple. As Kim Todd's comparison illustrates, Merian underplayed the vast difference in scale and density:

In Amsterdam's Botanical garden...flowers perched knee- or maybe waist-high. Collecting a German butterfly could be as simple as reaching out a finger. In contrast, the rain forests of Surinam grew out of all proportion to human need and scale. To walk along the bases of 150-foot-high trees was to stroll far from the action. Life teemed in the canopy, in the high branches. (167)

The lack of sensationalism in Merian's comparisons mediates against stereotypical European value judgements about such vast differences. Her language is matter of

fact, as if difference is to be expected rather than feared as abhorred or sinful.

Things are different, yes, but consider the common apple; an interesting objective in view of the apple's symbolism for European women.

At the same time, Merian's language also makes sure that her readers do perceive difference as concrete, having material effects that could be useful to humans and thus should be cultivated. She notes on Plate 17 that the lime tree



constantly produces

blossoms, unripe fruit and  
ripe fruit all at once because

“it is never winter here”

(Rücker 99). Plate 25

portrays the largest kind of  
vanilla, the leaves of which

are “every bit as thick as the  
houseleek in Europe” (108).

She compares the lime tree  
to “the juniper tree in

Germany,” says the cocoa

tree (Plate 26) can “grow to

the height of apple trees” and estimates that the American plum tree (Plate 13) is

“as tall as a walnut tree in Holland” and “its leaves are very similar to the elder

tree” (Rücker 99, 109, 96). The gum tree (Plate 20) that she found on the

Sommelsdijk plantation "grows almost as the birch in Europe ...it is known to

anyone who works with paints” while the papaya tree (Plate 40) "trunk is as soft as a cabbage stalk and hollow inside; it is used for gutters to catch the rain water" (Rücker 103, 120). But even these larger differences are so carefully couched in familiar scale and sensation that Merian avoids the sensationalist overlay of most of her contemporaries. In particular, comparing Merian's drawings and her text to the grossly inaccurate images of Amerindians and their environment which her father helped publish for de Bry's *Grand Voyages* shows how far she has traveled in her methods and world view – and where most of her culture still was when she published.

However, the one place Merian's European morality explicitly appears in *Metamorphosis* is in her comparison of the European "Apple of Sodom" and with the one she encountered in Surinam. On Plate 27<sup>168</sup> she writes that, in Suriname, the Apple of Sodom is a plant “covered all over with sharp spines, including even the leaves, as if nature intended it to be a warning sign, as in others [ie European] the leaves are soft to the touch. The fruit or apples are yellow there, but on this plant they become red and very poisonous, so that men and cattle who ate them would die” (Rücker 110).<sup>169</sup> "A warning sign" is her only concession to the dense significance of a plant that carries such a storied name. In the context of so much non-chalant comparison of Surinam's wonders to Europe's apple trees and fruit, it

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<sup>168</sup> See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su27.htm> 08 12 09 alh.

<sup>169</sup> The German: "XXVII. ABBILDUNG - Diese Frucht wird der *Apfel von Sodom* genannt. Er wird von einem Gewächs hervorgebracht, das ein und eine halbe oder zwei Ellen hoch ist. Er ist rundum mit scharfen Dornen besetzt, selbst die Blätter sind davon nicht ausgenommen, als ob die Natur damit ein Warnzeichen gesetzt hätte. Sonst sind die Blätter weich, wenn man sie berührt." "Maria Sibylla Merian: Leben und Werk." Tal.de Klaus Internet Service. <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su27.htm>

is tempting to see this as merely another botanical notation. And it is that, certainly. Yet, as people whose weekly comparison of apples and bananas in 21<sup>st</sup> century food shops generates a cliché about categorical difference, we modern readers recognize in Merian's analogy a literary device – a deliberate one, since she knew what the comparison invoked. It is a device that, like the grape and the gum tree, is apparently “unnecessary to describe” to her contemporary readers, since she doesn't.

To fully perceive Maria Sibylla Merian's meaning, we modern readers need to examine the device more closely on 17<sup>th</sup> century terms. Modern material on the Apple of Sodom divides neatly into its iconography and its extremely diverse biology. Websites describing it are either about its religious significance or about its control as a noxious weed; Apple of Sodom is apparently a scourge in Australia and New Zealand. Both categories – icon and weed – appear in the earliest account by Jewish historian Flavius Josephus,<sup>170</sup>

The country of Sodom borders upon [the Dead Sea]. It was of old a most happy land, both for the fruits it bore and the riches of its cities, although it be now all burnt up. It is related how, for the impiety of its inhabitants, it was burnt by lightning; in consequence of which there are still the remainders of that Divine fire, and the traces [or shadows][sic] of the five cities are still to be seen, as well as the ashes growing in their fruits; which fruits have a color as if they were fit to be eaten, but if you pluck them with your hands, they dissolve into smoke and ashes. And thus what is related of this land of Sodom hath these marks of credibility which our very sight affords us. (*Wars Book IV*, Chapter VIII, section 4)

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<sup>170</sup> Emil Schürer writes: "The best known historian of Jewish affairs in the Greek language is the Palestinian Josephus, properly Joseph, the son of Matthias, a priest of Jerusalem (*The Literature of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus*, pp. 221-222).

Several online sources suggest that what Josephus saw was *solanum sodomium*, the eggplant or aubergine, a member of the potato family, brought into the Mediterranean region from India by Arab travelers. Echoing Josephus, Richard Folkhard, Jr., wrote in 1884 that "the Apple of Sodom, has acquired a sinister reputation, and is regarded as the symbol of sin" (Folkland). More precisely, recent research has found that, in the 17th century, the Apple of Sodom symbolized a multiplicity of sins.

In the Americas, a tropical version of Josephus's Apple of Sodom is *solanum mammosum*, along with several other common weeds known as deadly nightshade for the poison in its green fruit and leaves (ripe fruit is not poisonous). *Solanum mammosum* reflects the symbolism of sexism in the Edenic apple and of the monstrous erotic disorder of Sodom in the plant's common names in English: "Nipple Fruit, Tit Plant, Apple of Sodom, Terong Susu, Cows Udder, Nyun Wenkibobi, Soresumba, Mackaw Bush, Titty Fruit, Pig Face" (toptropicals.com). Some names refer to the fact that the plant produces a "Very unusual bright yellow fruit [that] looks like small pear-shaped tomatoes, with nipple-like protrusions" (toptropicals.com). However, what Maria Sibylla Merian saw in Surinam was the spiked *Solanum barbadense spinosum*, as Commelin noted in his Latin addendum. Described in comprehensive detail at *Solanaceae Source*, *solanum barbadense spinosum* is a particularly vicious version of the plant Josephus saw at the Dead Sea.<sup>171</sup> The plant's connection to Josephus's find is evident in its common names. In North America, the spiny Apple of Sodom or

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<sup>171</sup> Description based on taxon concept by Nee, M. pages 89-90 in Nee, M. 1993. *Solanaceae II*. *Flora de Veracruz* 72: 1-158. Instituto de Ecología, Xalapa, Veracruz.

solanum americanum or solanum carolinense is also known as "Bull nettle, Carolina horse nettle, Horse nettle, Apple of Sodom, Radical Weed, Sand Brier and, Tread-softly" (Wikipedia "solanum carolinense").<sup>172</sup> The bull and horse symbolize sexual excess and monstrosity while names like Radical Weed and Tread Softly invoke political unrest and violence.

The botanical connections of the Apple of Sodom plants are confusing and the symbolic connections are even more tangled. While the Ednic "apple" is fairly clear to modern ears, the term "Sodom" suggests sexuality – even homosexuality – to us, but for 17<sup>th</sup> century readers, sexuality plays a much smaller role in this trope than most modern readers suspect. In a brief reference to the meaning of Josephus's plant, William Godbeer reports that "When Jonathan Mitchell [a New England minister] referred to the 'Apple of Sodom' in 1653, he combined two potent images to invoke not any particular sin but general depravity and its fruits. In 1673, Willard [another minister] interpreted 'Sodom's overthrow' as an admonition against 'security and degeneracy' in all their manifestations sexual and non-sexual" (Godbeer 265). Godbeer argues in "'The Cry of Sodom': Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England" that even though early modern European reference to a plant called "Apple of Sodom" proves that homosexuality existed and was frowned upon and punished, it was not condemned as a sin unto itself and certainly not as an identity. He agrees with Emma Donoghue and Alan Bray that homosexuality was one of several sexual behaviors considered sodomic, and not one of the worst offenses. Furthermore, sex itself was only one of many types of behaviors condemned in the story of Sodom, and not one of the more

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<sup>172</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solanum\\_carolinense](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solanum_carolinense)

prominent ones. Depravity, debauchery, and vice included "pride, excess of diet, idleness, and contempt of the poor" (Coke qtd Bray 16). Alan Bray notes that "effeminacy" was also included in this sin but not directly linked to homosexuality as it (erroneously) is in modern times. The sins of Sodom were about ostentatious displays of wealth and pleasure that disrupted the social order. Certainly, overblown sexuality is experienced as disruption by hegemonic culture in both periods, but the condemnation of it in the 17<sup>th</sup> century is more about "overblown" than about "sexuality." Since the central concern is preserving order, treason, as Bray notes, is also part of this constellation of sins. Charges of sodomy as a disorder of nature in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century sounds vague to modern ears but to 17<sup>th</sup> century ears it is a very particular crime described by Edward Coke as "*contra ordinationem Creatoris et naturate ordinem*" (qtd Bray 26).<sup>173</sup> Fear of disorder in this period in Europe was not a conservative ideology of the generation gap but part of a progressive effort to liberate the masses from despotic brutality – both of the leaders and the mob.

Thus Merian's comments about the Apple of Sodom's dangerous juices, thorns and apples – "as if nature intended it to be a warning sign" – seem at first to expose her conflicted feelings about her relationship with Dorothea Auerin. However, in light of Bray's and Godbeer's arguments about the modern perception of sexuality in that specific historical moment, it seems at least as likely that Merian was thinking instead of Graff's "vices" because of how they disrupted the order of their marriage. Bray writes that "the bulwark against sexual debauchery,

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<sup>173</sup> Trans: against the Creator's order and natural order (translation confirmed by Sr. Elizabeth Cawley, PhD Classics, Regis College).

in the minds of Protestant reformers, was marriage" and Graff's vices had made their marriage "miserable." If his vices included a homosexual affair, so much the worse and so much more of a contrast with Merian's intimate relationship with Auerin, which would have been seen at the time, even if demur "sex" was involved, as unthreatening, admirable, devoted, even pious. However, decades had passed since Merian had summarily rejected Graff and his vices. Perhaps the worldliness of Amsterdam and the other worldliness of Surinam had permitted her to recognize some elusive structure of feeling regarding her experience with Auerin that warned her away from further intimate relationships.<sup>174</sup> No wonder the Apple of Sodom Merian encountered in Surinam rose up in her text as a potent spiked swirl of disorder with its lovely fruit masking deadly danger.

Merian's response to the spiny Surinamese Apple of Sodom, with all its European symbolism in full sway, mirrors the typical European reaction to cross-cultural contact that is evident from Columbus's journals onward. However, her response to cross-cultural contact in the field was more like the radical contemporaneity described by Laura Brown.<sup>175</sup> Davis notes the "ethnographic tone" of Merian's *Metamorphosis* text: "she did not concern herself about whether Christianity would or would not improve Amerindians and Africans. ... The word 'savage' she used not at all" (Davis 188). Staying on the coast for a while bought Merian the time required to do something that few colonists, soldiers, politicians

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<sup>174</sup> Rosalind Palermo Stevenson's ethereal story, "Insect Dreams," about Maria Sibylla Merian's Surinam journey imagines that she is pursued by a young plantation owner, but she finds the situation too fraught to consummate in marriage, even though it seems she did consummate it in the forest, a story equally as likely as mine.

<sup>175</sup> See discussion in Chapter 3, "Aphra Behn's Atlanticist Work."

or naturalists report doing: listen to the local residents as equals in the careful observation and interaction with the local region. For example, Merian writes:

The maggot crawling up the stalk is orange-coloured; it was brought to me by a black slave woman [einer schwarzen Sklavin gebracht, die mir berichtete, dass/ da schöne Grashüpfer hervorkämen.] who told me that beautiful grasshoppers would emerge from it. The maggot turned itself into a brown bubble from which (according to the unanimous testimony of the natives) a green creature would come out which would then gradually grow wings like those of the flying grasshopper. I was unable to see this for myself, for the round chrysalis died. But since others assured me that their own observations bore this out, I did not want to pass over it in silence in order to give other amateur naturalists the incentive to find out about it for themselves. (Plate 27<sup>176</sup> Rücker 110)

For an obsessive empirical observer, trusting anyone else with accurate observation is already a leap, but Merian's trust in "einer schwarzen Sklavin," "natives" and "others" makes this a leap of radical contemporaneity. Similar evidence of how seriously Merian took the information provided to her by Africans and Amerindians runs throughout her *Metamorphosis* commentary as she repeatedly cites Amerindians and West Africans as expert sources. Merian met, lived among, conversed with and treated as colleagues Africans and Amerindians in the regions she explored, considering their experience just as valid in their context as her experience cites them in her greatest work.

When Maria Sibylla Merian speaks of "others," she often includes her European colleagues, but here she explicitly refers to "a black slave woman" and "the unanimous testimony of the natives." She does not ignore the social hierarchy or the cost of it to those involved. She owns or is given slaves when she arrives in Paramaribo and refers to the Amerindian woman she brings back to

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<sup>176</sup> Note that Plate 27 is shown above, the Apple of Sodom plate.

Amsterdam as "my Indianen" (Davis 175). But she also purposefully blurs the lines by referring to the population in general in inclusive terms. Of her first specimen, the cockroach, she writes in the first entry in *Metamorphosis*

Kakkerlakken are the most infamous of all insects in America on account of the great damage they cause to all the inhabitants by spoiling their wool linen, food and drinks...the young cockroaches run out [of their bitten-open nest] very fast and because they are as small as ants they are able to get into chests and boxes through slits and keyholes where they then destroy everything. (87 my emphasis)

“Chests and Boxes” might suggest European inhabitants but Africans and Amerindians also had access to such things at the very least in their work maintaining European goods. If they did not otherwise use such materials, radical contemporaneity asks whether theirs was a wiser strategy of tropical living rather than poverty or primitiveness. Often Merian doesn't distinguish between Europeans or Amerindians or Africans when she explains how a plant, insect or animal is used. Applying our modern stereotypes to decode what she's saying, we're tempted to guess and in doing so notice that she speaks with the same matter of fact respect for practices of Europeans and non-Europeans. This tropicopolitan move values all cultural practices on the same plane challenging the presumptions of modern and contemporary readers with her radical contemporaneous vision. In the process, she makes tropicopolitan practices and cultural material visible as they circulate among Europeans, Amerindians and West Africans in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

Her radical contemporaneous vision is not utopic. She is shamed and

angered by what she sees – as was Behn. She is astounded by the European tunnel vision that is obsessed with sugar, slaves and profit, but leaves fallow vast plant resources. Plate 36 hints at the nature of relations with her fellow Europeans:



I found this plant in the forest, and since one cannot cut any plants there because of the heat as they would wither immediately, I had it dug up with the roots by my Indian and brought back to my house and planted in my garden. ...Its name and properties are not known in

Suriname; the people there have no desire to investigate anything like that; indeed they mocked me for seeking anything other than sugar in the country; yet (in my opinion) one could find a great many other things in the forest if it were passable; but it is so densely overgrown with thistles and thorn bushes that I had to send my slaves ahead with an axe in hand to hack an opening for me to proceed even to a certain extent, which nevertheless was very difficult. (117)

Moreover, she is appalled by the treatment of laborers and speaks explicitly several times of the suffering of the slaves. For example, on Plate 45<sup>177</sup> in *Metamorphosis*, she writes:

The Flos Pavonis [peacock flower][sic] is a plant nine feet high; it

<sup>177</sup> See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su40.htm> 08 12 09 alh.

bears yellow and red blossom; its seeds are used by women who are in childbirth in order to quickly promote labour. Indians, who are not well treated when in service to the Dutch, use it to abort their children so that their children should not become slaves as they are. The black slaves from Guinea and Angola must be treated benignly, otherwise they produce no children in this their state of slavery; nor do they have any; indeed they even kill themselves on account of the usual harsh treatment meted out to them; for they consider that they will be born again with their friends in a free state in their own country, so they told me themselves. (Rücker 124-5)

They told her themselves, and she listened, then wrote, then published at great expense and some risk this tale of "the usual harsh treatment." Both Davis and Kim Todd report some of the horrific details of "the usual harsh treatment" of slaves. Kim Todd reports that "of the slave colonies that stretched up through the Caribbean islands to the east coast of North America, Surinam was the worst. ...some estimates say a plantation could go through four full staffs in twenty-five years" (158). She adds that "among slaves and maroons, La Providence had a particularly vicious reputation" for brutality. Both Kim Todd and Davis report on an oral history among 20<sup>th</sup> century descendents of the maroon Amerindians and West Africans that recalls how Providence Plantation stood out as an extreme example in a region already oppressed by extreme brutality.

How do we think about this environment and the effect it had on individuals like Maria Sibylla Merian and on Atlantic culture? As modern US readers we are appalled by photos and stories describing the inhumane treatment of undocumented meat-packing laborers in Postville, Iowa, or New Bedford, Massachusetts. We are incensed by the unconstitutional incarceration without legal recourse of Iraqis at Guantanamo Bay. We are shocked by water boarding,

sleep deprivation, humiliation and terror by dog and beside ourselves at stories of physical abuse, especially when it is sexual in nature. We think we live in a terrible violent world – and we do. But tales of what the Dutch did to each other in the 17<sup>th</sup> century make modern violence seem like the Teddy Bears' picnic. Recall from Chapter 4 how in 1674 the townspeople actually cannibalized in the town square at the Hague not one but two de Wit brothers who had for decades led the federation through its golden age. Events on the Island of Amboyna in the Dutch battle with the English over control of the spice trade in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century led to the Massacre of Amboyna in which, among many other atrocities, the Dutch applied a water torture that "left the person grotesquely deformed" to Englishmen they had just been ordered by the Treaty of Defense to "live and converse [with] as trusted friends" (Milton 328, 311).<sup>178</sup> A wider context of brutal violence does not justify the brutality in Surinam. However, modern readers gain a clearer picture of what observers like Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian saw if we can peer through some of their experiential lenses. The English were also skilled torturers as were (and are) people in many other cultures then and now. And slavery was a key aspect of every culture that Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian knew about. As discussed in Chapter 4, many Amerindian and African cultures practiced slavery, including those Merian and Behn met in Surinam and both Behn and Merian knowingly risked enslavement in the Ottoman Empire sailing out of Europe to the New World and back.<sup>179</sup> With that in mind, it would have been astounding if either Behn or Merian had spoken against

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<sup>178</sup> See especially "Chapter Eleven: Trial by Fire and Water" in *Nathaniel's Nutmeg* by Giles Milton.

<sup>179</sup> See Linda Colley, *Captives*, referenced in Chapter 4.

the institution of slavery. It is an indication of how terrible West African enslavement in the Americas already was that Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian were compelled to risk expressing their horror and shame about it.

Reading Merian's text in *Metamorphosis*, I was struck by the fact that both she and Aphra Behn write of their Surinam sojourns in first person. Some Behn critics have interpreted Behn's first person voice as a common rhetorical strategy and certainly it fits the objective of Behn's invocation of the popular captivity narrative in *Oroonoko*. However, when Maria Sibylla Merian's first person text is compared to Behn's, another objective in both texts emerges. Maria



Sibylla Merian eschews the patriarchal objective voice that would evolve problematically in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific discourse. Instead, she claims her own voice in first person as an individual authorized to see, name and record – a claim we can make for Behn as well. In making this claim for her own authority, Merian creates

the Derridian space Spivak calls for in which to authorize Amerindian and West African voices. For example, on Plate 20 Merian describes the gum tree she found on the Sommelsdijk plantation and places herself actively in the scene: “In the year 1700 during April I was in Surinam on the plantation belonging to the Misses Sommelsdyk [sic] and called Providentia where I carried out various observations of insects; while walking around I found a number of *Gummi Guttae Boomen* growing wild, of which I show a branch here. It grows almost as the birch in Europe ...it is known to anyone who works with paints” as she obviously does (103). Here, as in all her entries since she was thirteen, she is the active speaking subject with a particular point of view and thus present in the scene to hear and record voices almost completely obscured by European presumptions of patriarchal superiority.

She reinforces her material presence in the scene she is describing when, on Plate 49<sup>180</sup>, she tells a humorous story about her encounter with the lantern fly that undermines the all-powerful façade of patriarchal imperialism. Upon a pomegranate tree, Maria Sibylla Merian finds a beetle that metamorphoses into a fly that:

...flies very fast and so I had to walk for hours before I could catch one. ...They make a sound like a lyre...which is why they are also known as the ‘Lierman’ [hurdy gurdy man]. ...The Indians assured me that these flies develop into the so-called ‘Lantarendragers’ [lantern flies *Fulgora Laternaria*] of which a male and a female specimen are shown resting and in flight. Its head or cap glows at night like a lantern ...bright enough to read the paper by. (Rücker 128, Rücker’s inserts)

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<sup>180</sup> Look closely at this small representation of this large drawing. The animal portrayed here is amazing. See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su49.htm> 08 12 09 alh.

Of a second similar fly Maria Sibylla Merian writes:

the Indian call these flies the mother of the lantern fly, in the same way that they call the first beetles the mother of this fly. ...One day the Indians brought me a large quantity of these lantern flies (before I knew they gave off such a gleaming light at night) which I put in a large wooden box. At night they made such a noise that we awoke with a fright and jumped out of bed and lit the candle, not knowing what the noise in the house could be; we soon realized that it came from the box, which we opened with amazement but dropped with even greater amazement, for on opening the box a fiery flame came out; some of the creatures, and hence some fiery flames burst out; but we calmed own, collected the creatures together again and were very astonished at their luminosity. (Rücker 128-9)

What a funny story. It is an inversion of the "funny story" usually told at the expense of the natives and their stereotypical over reaction to strangeness. Here, it is two genteel respected European women who are hopping up and down in bewilderment, whites of their eyes popping in fear as they peer into a box at midnight that is lighted from inside. It is the natives who giggle politely behind their hands at the naive of ignorant foreigners.

Maria Sibylla Merian also resists the colonial imperial masculine efforts to control nature by categorizing and naming everything in it. Kim Todd, for example, speaks of the 17<sup>th</sup> century fad for encyclopedias, a particularly cavalier project in the face of evidence through exploration of how little European explorers and collectors knew. These encyclopedic productions – and the smaller projects that supplied them with material – focused primarily on imposing on each item a Latin name indicating its place in a categorical hierarchy that begins by dividing all living things into two kingdoms (animal and plant) and ends at the twelfth or so level with a name indicating genus and species. Pressing all natural

items into such an order requires first conceiving of them as ordered, as marching in straight lines across a page carefully numbered and correlated to bits of descriptive text. From the beginning, Merian pushed against this rigid formalization. Even though she published *Surinamensium* in Latin for the first time directly addressing scholars whose methods she eschewed and hoped to influence, her text and drawings still cleverly and beautifully disrupted the order her male colleagues were obsessively imposing on nature.<sup>181</sup>

This is such a remarkable feature of her work that I have to disagree with Rücker and Kim Todd who maintain that Plates 71 and 72 are not her work.

Rücker writes:

The first issue (1705) of the *Metamorphosis Insectorum Surinamensium* has 60 plates... In 1719, two years after the death of Maria Sibylla Merian, the Amsterdam publisher Johannes Oosterwyk issued Latin and Dutch editions, each with 72 plates. Of these extra twelve plates ten were engraved from watercolours found among the deceased's possessions, and two from designs in the collection of the pharmacist, merchant, and collector Albert Seba. As stated in *Natural History*, New York, 71(10):37 (1962), '...certainly it would be difficult to attribute the book's last two plates to her, textually, artistically or scientifically', but there seems no reason to doubt the authenticity of the others. (Rücker 139)

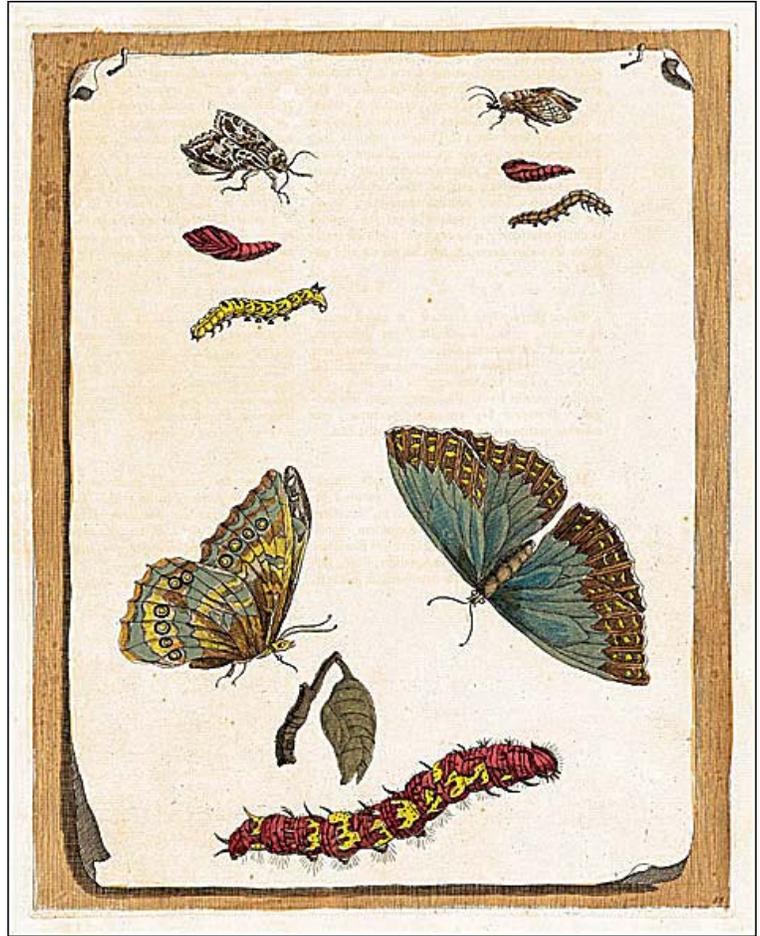
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<sup>181</sup> Without withdrawing an iota of my stern assertions about the great taxonomy project, I also recognize that there is enormous value in the archive it created. It is not the cataloguing itself that I – or Merian – quarrels with. It is the presumption of objectivity, ownership and the “divine right” to profit from it all that I – and many before me – reject, if only because of the dangerous obfuscation such presumptions promote. The core of the scientific method – what I would at this point call a radical contemporaneous empiricism – has for too long been corrupted by such presumptions and only with the inclusion of observers able to deconstruct them has reliable scientific advancement occurred.

Todd writes: "The final plate looks as though its author sampled rain forest hallucinogens as well as cassava and pineapple" (234). Funny, and she's right.

However, everyone seems to agree that Plate 68<sup>182</sup> is Merian's work and it takes a similar swipe at masculine categorization and representation. In fact, taken together, the three plates (68, 71 and 72) seem to be a progression from a sly joke in Plate 68 to full blown hilarity on Plate 72.

Plate 68 represents a page of paper (vellum?) pinned at the top to a board, its edges curling, and on the paper are

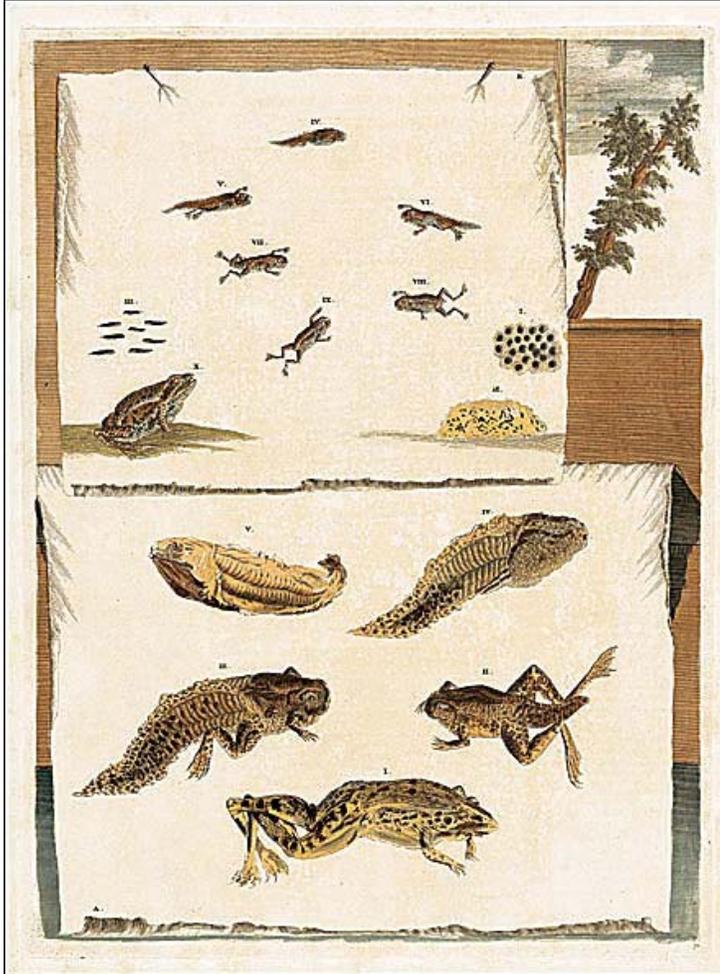


representations of three winged insects life size showing caterpillar, cocoon and fly. Even though this is more like the traditional "line 'em up" composition of her colleagues, Maria Sibylla Merian couldn't resist a little visual wink wink at their expense: the visible edges of the "paper" insist on the artifice of such a

<sup>182</sup> Oppenheimer Editions.

[http://www.oppenheimereditions.com/images/catalog/MER/OKMER\\_068\\_01.jpg](http://www.oppenheimereditions.com/images/catalog/MER/OKMER_068_01.jpg) accessed 08 12 09 alh

composition. Plate 71<sup>183</sup> is another more traditional depiction, but this time with two sheets of paper pinned up, the top showing a small frog and its life cycle in scattered composition, but numbered, and the bottom doing the same for a larger



frog. In the upper right corner, over the top of the lower board and to the right of the upper board (or maybe this is out the window and the “board” is a wall) a scraggly mature tree cranes right up to the corner leaning out of the frame as if tired to death of its own existence – a tree

structure being the framework for biological taxonomy. Funny she is.

Plate 72<sup>184</sup> is a fascinating layered composition, in effect the punch line of the three images. As if dispensing with the artifice of representation all together, while in fact intensifying and parodying it, specimens of progressive maturation of a small frog form a circle in the lower half, as if on a plate of glass and are

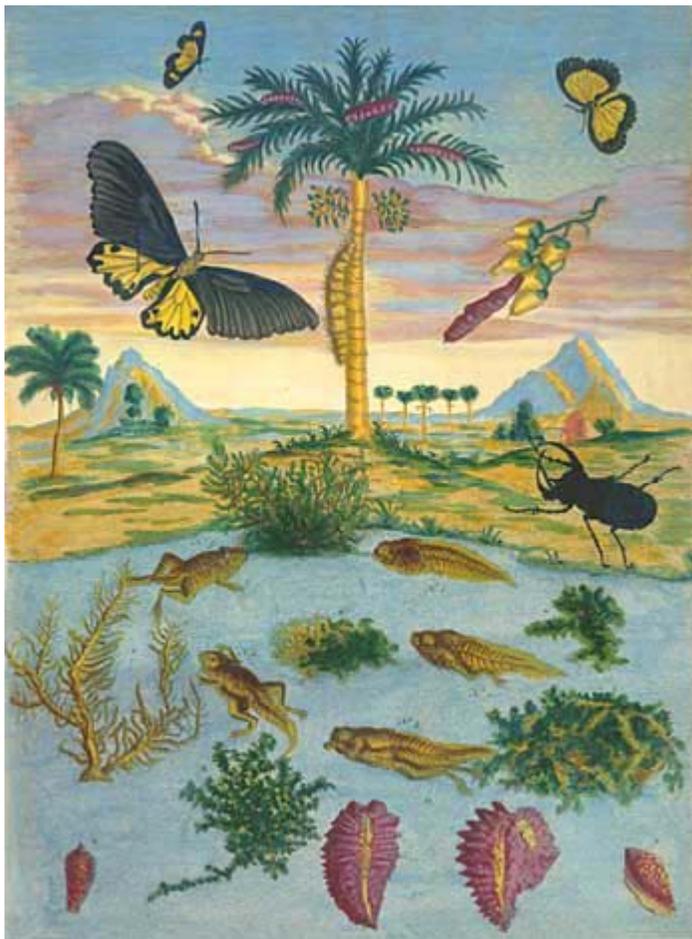
<sup>183</sup>Oppenheimer Editions.

[http://www.oppenheimereditions.com/images/catalog/mer/okmer\\_071\\_01.jpg](http://www.oppenheimereditions.com/images/catalog/mer/okmer_071_01.jpg) accessed 08 12 09  
alh

<sup>184</sup> See this one with German text at <http://home.wtal.de/hh/merian/suribuch/su72.htm> accessed 08 18 09

surrounded by water plants and shells that move Escher-like into the background and foreground. Some of the specimens of plants – or maybe coral – are rooted to the “ground” beyond the “glass”, ground which also appears to be still water in the foreground of the landscape beyond the “glass.” Against the shore in the middle ground of the landscape, a big beetle stands on the glass on the right. At the top of the glass, against the sky, a large butterfly, cocoon and caterpillar lay, the caterpillar seeming to climb a palm tree in the middle ground of the landscape in an optical illusion that makes the caterpillar appear to be 30 feet long or the tree to be only 5” high. In the far background of the landscape is a house on the right and several (5) palm trees in its back yard, indicating that the palms are 30-40 feet high. Behind the house is a small mountain, or even a large mountain, depending on how much depth you’re brave enough to assign it. A similar mountain is to the left. The horizon is clear and the sky is streaked with cloud and, in a painting, with colour. Some versions of this engraving are garishly painted with the sky ululating in shades of royal blue and bruised maroon. Hilarious. Terrifying. Fierce.

As if to complete the metamorphosis she began when she abandoned European-style domesticity and cocooned among the Labadists at Waltha, Merian brought home with her from Surinam an Amerindian woman who, according to Davis, "would be part of the creation of her new book on America" (Davis 187). In a footnote, Davis explains that "A few other families took Amerindians and Africans back to Amsterdam each year, often families with children" (321 n158).



In other words, they probably took them as servants, perhaps as slaves, and too often as sex slaves, but certainly as exotic specimens, a practice that began with Columbus's very first expedition. He writes to Isabella and Ferdinand in February, 1493, in advance of his return "Here there is a

vast quantity of gold, and from here and the other islands I bring Indians as evidence" (Cohen 122). But Merian desired no sex slaves, had no children who needed a nanny, and was interested in exotic bugs, not exotic people. Why did she bring this woman and on what terms? Davis writes "all we have is that tantalizing

reference from the boat list. I assumed for my book anyway that the woman had lived long enough to be a resource for Merian when she was writing the *Metamorphosis*." <sup>185</sup> Merian's writing in *Metamorphosis* compels us to imagine with Davis that Merian sat with the Amerindian woman during the long return voyage, talking and talking about what they knew of Surinam in Neger-Engels, which Merian had learned for just this purpose. We are compelled by this vision to agree with Davis that this unnamed knowledgeable companion contributed crucial information to Merian's work, which would have been a balm for the frustration of cutting the time for her work short by more than half the planned five years even as the woman was about to break from the chrysalis of her American upbringing and step with Merian into her own amazing cross cultural encounter on the docks of Amsterdam.

**Conclusion: Who Gets To Educate The World?**

An acquaintance of mine, S. Bear Bergman is a big handsome female with a deep voice that she cultivates as a bear dyke masculinity. Bear has chosen a hard path, overt about lesbian desire and masculine-associated behaviors, claiming the full beauty of hir<sup>186</sup> body, but perceived by most people on the street as

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<sup>185</sup> ...though Davis never explains how and I have not encountered the texts that do explain. I emailed Davis on this point and she responded: "That one sure reference--the presence of the Indian woman on the return boat with Maria Sibylla and her daughter-- is all I have. I searched and searched in the Amsterdam records for any mention of the Indian woman back in Amsterdam--especially to see if she was mentioned in Merian's wills--and looked in other possible sources. Found nothing. How long she lived with the Merians in Amsterdam I don't know, not even her name. So all we have is that tantalizing reference from the boat list. I assumed for my book anyway that the woman had lived long enough to be a resource for Merian when she was writing the *Metamorphosis*" (personal email 7/22/08).

<sup>186</sup> I use the pronouns here that Bear and many trans people prefer when referring to those living outside of gender dichotomy: hir (genitive, dative), ze (nominative, accusative).

unreadable, unplaceable, uncategorizable – as culturally foreign. Ze said once that walking out hir front door each morning is political activism because just by walking down the street hir appearance demands an acknowledgement of the cultural construction and constraints of gendered daily life. When Maria Sibylla Merian walked out the door of 17<sup>th</sup> century married domesticity, she became as unreadable and foreign to her neighbors in Frankfurt and Nuremburg as Bear is in Jamaica Plain, as Merian's Indianen was when she stepped onto the Amsterdam docks, as Behn was when she arrived in the Amerindian village in full 17<sup>th</sup> century regalia, as Merian was when she stepped out onto the banks of the Surinam River at Paramaribo and invited Amerindians and West Africans to share their expertise and experience with her. Although I see Merian as a mediator, I am continually struck by how radical her life choices were – how radical many of them still seem. In a time when institutionally sanctioned violence was the way of the world, complaining about violence against colonized and enslaved people was political activism of particular prescience. Modern readers and researchers assume that any rational (feminist, civilized, Christian, Enlightenment, you name it) person would erupt in selfless sacrificial protest in the face of evidence of such brutality. It seems obvious to us. However, a radical contemporaneous reading of a life like Maria Sibylla Merian's reveals that the range of the tropicopolitan/subaltern population was much broader than we thought, that practices like slavery and torture were much more deeply embedded in 17<sup>th</sup> century hegemonic European cultures, less remarked upon, and thus less visible to contemporary observers as cultural material affecting 17<sup>th</sup> century people. A

radical contemporaneous reading of Merian's life and work reveals that the social structure – or cultural crystal, if you will – of the 17<sup>th</sup> century did not foreground the same cultural institutions and social structures that are silhouetted to historians looking back through 21<sup>st</sup> century discursive lenses. Race was not yet an "ism"; slavery was as ordinary and, in many cultures, more beneficent than capitalist wage labor is today; conquest was a godly pursuit of salvation and charity, the ungodly consequences still looming in the future. Yet, even through her own cultural lenses, Merian saw in Surinam as she could not have seen had she stayed in Amsterdam – never mind Frankfurt am Main – that the institutional practices of her time and her culture caused more waste and suffering than was rational and she chose to risk pointing that out. She befriended people across class, race and national borders, giving voice to people who would soon be declared incapable of human converse, their vast knowledge systematically disregarded and lost to inhuman brutality.

That Merian took these actions as a mediator rather than as a radical explains why her work garnered widespread attention in her time and why it remains available to 21<sup>st</sup> century readers as excavatable evidence and example of alternative cross-cultural practices. Graphing Merian's life choices onto Raymond Williams' cultural model, we can see Maria Sibylla Merian moved in this period from culturally marginal (primarily due to her gender status) to alternative/oppositional gender, religious and class status. As Williams explains this position, it is necessary both for keeping hegemony vibrant and also for

nudging it toward emergent social structures.<sup>187</sup> As Attenborough's comments about Maria Sibylla Merian attest, appreciation for mediational approaches to social change is still minimal. If the radical is contemptible and the revolutionary is brilliant, the mediational is condemned as weak and complicit. Attenborough's dismissive attitude toward Merian is an echo of Johann Wolfgang Goethe's in a passage Rucker uses as an epigraph:

Sibylla Merian, probably inspired by the fame and reputation as a traveler of the highly deserving, much younger Charles Plumier, ventured to Suriname and in her depictions moved to and fro between art and science, between nature observation and artistic goals..." (Werke. Complete... vol. 39. 233. qtd Rucker).

Radical or not, Merian has no use for the inspiration of a "much younger" man. Evidence presented here confirms her internal motivations and her professional aspirations. Her resistant texts with their wide contemporary readership helped spark what eventually became the abolitionist movement. Her methods were revolutionary in her field, challenging patriarchal paradigms of production, categorization, emergent racist marginalization, cultural erasure and brutal exploitation of labor. She mediated limits on women's artistic practices with rigorous scientific observation and notation, portraying them with artistic beauty that has been one of the most scientifically accurate sources for centuries. She transcended limitations on and denigration of women's artistic and scientific work. She rejected patriarchal efforts to categorize and name nature in order to clear her eye of moral and religious presumptions that obscured the events of nature.

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<sup>187</sup> This is not to say "progress" since that determination depends on who is assessing the culture and since cultures do not move in a straight line in any sense, nevermind one that carries it inexorably toward "perfection."

As Merian's post-Surinam life filled with increased production and renown, one way in which her Amerindian companion may have worked with her is as a replacement for Johanna's and Dorothea's assistant apprenticeship. In both Davis's and Kim Todd's exhaustive biographies, there is little information about Merian's daughters, but what there is indicates apprenticeship, mutual dependence and crucial contributions to Merian's work by her daughters. Merian treated her daughters as full apprentices, positioning them for professional careers, and both succeeded. However, as Davis notes, "Merian, who acknowledged her African and Amerindian informants in the *Metamorphosis* and credited her slave assistants, said not a word in it about her daughters" (200). This offers an explanation for the invisibility of the Amerindian woman in Amsterdam: Merian saw her work as she saw her own daughter's work.<sup>188</sup> Showing Merian spirit, Dorothea corrected her mother's omission regarding herself. In the third *Rupsen* volume, "Dorothea Maria Henricie [sic for Hendriks], the youngest daughter,' was given on the title page as publisher of the book by her late mother Merian, and the text promised an appendix on insects of Suriname, 'observed there by her daughter Johanna Helena Herolt, at present living in Suriname'" (Davis 200 her sic). No information on Johanna's children appears in either Kim Todd or Davis, but both note that she and Jacob Herolt moved to Surinam around 1711, took on the running of an orphanage, with Herolt as a rector in Paramaribo, while "Johanna collected specimens of reptiles, fish, and insects, which she hoped to sell for a good price in Europe, and studied and painted insects and plants. ...

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<sup>188</sup> Of course, it's more likely the woman died rather quickly of cold and disease in Amsterdam, just as Merian herself nearly did of the heat and disease in Surinam.

Johanna Helena and Jacob Hendrik Herolt may have stayed in Suriname the rest of their lives” (Davis 201). As Merian's former apprentice and an artist in her own right who contributed to her mother's work even after her death, as a woman who chose a life of service with her husband in Suriname, Johanna Graff Herolt is clearly worthy of study herself.

But it would be Merian's younger daughter who would facilitate preservation of Maria Sibylla Merian's work. Dorothea's first husband, Dr. Phillip Hendrik, died between 1711 and 1715, when Swiss painter Georg Gsell (1673-1740) moved into the house with Dorothea and Maria Sibylla Merian with his “two daughters aged 17 and eight” (Rücker 38). For two years they formed a household. Only after Maria Sibylla Merian died on January 13, 1717, at seventy years old, did Dorothea and Gsell marry. After settling her mother's affairs, Dorothea then “moved with [Gsell] on the invitation of the Czar to St Petersburg” taking along his two teenagers, her three children and their infant daughter (Rücker 38). Gsell became "director of the Galley of Art [in St. Petersburg] and from 1726 on teacher of drawing at the Imperial Academy of Sciences, and one of the monarch's [i.e. Peter the Great's] closest confidants” (Rücker 36). Thus it was easy for the Czar to collect Merian's insect studies, which he considered to be “among the most outstanding achievements of his time” (Rücker 36). “Dorothea Maria also taught drawing at the Academy” and had a large role in the preservation process (Rücker 37). Czar Peter gave her the first commission given to a woman "to design the exhibits and document the artifacts in watercolor" of his vast collection of "dried plants, bird bones, shells, and books" (Todd K 230).

Like her sister, Dorothea Maria Graff Hendriks Gsell deserves study as a woman who made enormous contributions to cross-cultural exchange and to European culture in general.

Rücker points out that Maria Sibylla Merian has been “read” since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century “only” as an artist and not as a full-fledged scientist, no doubt because it was simply unimaginable to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy that women could do science that transcended the guidance of men. As Rücker notes, “It is only as a result of recent investigation into the life and work of Maria Sibylla Merian that her importance as a scientist is gradually emerging in its true light” (1). However, her importance as a scientist is also a truncation of her importance as a 17<sup>th</sup> century figure. Merian was liminal on several cultural levels, which positioned her to see late 17<sup>th</sup> century European culture as a woman with considerable social power and as a woman marginalized by class, sex, sexuality. This complex social vision gave her an alternative standpoint as an Atlanticist Tropicopolitan Mediator between the core of 17<sup>th</sup> century European culture and the margins where life depended on tenuous connections to that core. Yes, she works hard to create, maintain and benefit from her socio-cultural connections to the core of European society and culture, but repeatedly chooses to push herself away from its rigid limitations. Davis speaks of how hard it is to “pin down” Merian, an interesting image that invokes the pinning down of an amazing rare butterfly. Perhaps the difficulty in pinning Merian down is precisely the point of her life and work: to be constantly on the move in liminal space observing many

layers of life at once on their own terms. Merian's legacy in Surinam suggests this is so:

There are two editions of the *Metamorphosis* today in the library of the Surinaams Museum. ...the Merian volumes, together with Waiyana wasp mats, Saramaka talking drums, and Javanese shadow puppets, are now part of a collection that Suriname intellectuals consider a 'national heritage' for a multiethnic postcolonial society. (Davis 214)

Maria Sibylla Merian demonstrates impressive resistance against European hegemonic cultural expectations when she claims her voice as a female, as a person of liminal class status and as a professional whose work is eagerly exploited by others (e.g. Rumphius's family; Pettiver in production of *Metamorphosis*). She even manages to keep control of her work and avoid most efforts to alienate her from it. And as she claims her own voice, she also gives voice to the otherwise almost totally silent Amerindians and enslaved Africans in Surinam.

*Chapter 6*

## BERYL GILROY'S TROPICOPOLITAN LIFE: MADAME MEDIATOR THE SCHOLAR

*"I had always believed...that imagination came in one variety, the same for all of us. I was amazed to discover that there were different types of imagination which triggered various forms of creativity...and every form of self-expression"*

Beryl Gilroy (*Leaves* 12)

**Exploring Derrida's Blank Space**

In this chapter, I turn to late 20<sup>th</sup> century writer Beryl Gilroy (1924-2001) whose Atlanticist, subaltern and Tropicopolitan credentials are more obvious to modern eyes than are Aphra Behn's or Maria Sibylla Merian's. Gilroy was a mixed-race Guyana-born woman who earned graduate degrees in London where she met and married a white man, Patrick Gilroy. She taught grade school and wrote for young children for several decades before writing the first of several novels for adults. Although her historical novels, in particular *Inkle and Yarico* (1996), are my subject here, Gilroy's work as a whole manifests the ecumenizing effort of text and reader that I have been exploring in the work of Maria Sibylla Merian and Aphra Behn. Gilroy is one of many 20<sup>th</sup> century women writers of color particularly well-positioned to gather up the structures of feeling preserved through the genealogy of women writers in which Merian and Behn are major figures. She initially interested me because she grew up near the Surinamese

region Merian and Behn documented and she fictionalized moments of that same region in their time. As it turned out, there were many other and ultimately more compelling connections between this lesser-known writer and the cultural project I am working here to delineate.

Beryl Gilroy's work de-universalizes European colonialism by exposing its universalizing operations. About *Inkle and Yarico*, she writes that “impreciseness renders history open to creative manipulation by writers. We need to *explore the space* between writing about people who are seen as ‘the other’ and western ethnocentrism that regards difference as pathology” (*Leaves* 78 my italics). Gilroy’s work pulls readers into the Derridian blank space Spivak describes (see discussion above) where they must rethink ethnicity and culture – where they can see these concepts as always needing further reading, observing and engaging. She insists that “Those of us who write historical fiction...attempt to underscore new systems of objectivity, intellectual honesty and perceptual understanding” (*Leaves* 79). As a tropicopolitan writer, Beryl Gilroy positions her readers do the same.

The question, then, is whether Gilroy remains a subaltern with no voice in the context of western European patriarchal white-supremacist capitalist heterosexist culture. Is she still exiled in Derrida’s blank cultural space? If, as Spivak writes, “what a post colonial critic of imperialism would like to see developed within the European enclosure as *the* place of the production of theory” is Derrida’s inaccessible blank space, then “postcolonial critics and intellectuals can attempt to displace their own production only by presupposing that *text-*

*inscribed* blankness" (Spivak 294). In short, a post colonial critic would like to see theory produced by non-European writers in the blanks, silences and grounds that imperialist – i.e. patriarchal – texts leave open. The theoretical work that Spivak calls for is described by Aravamudan as tropicalizations enacted by tropicopolitans and their allies in the tropical spaces that empire has overwhelmed but can not erase. In what I would like to claim as a 21<sup>st</sup> century third wave feminist move, Spivak deploys the particular lived experience of the female subaltern doubly silenced by race/ethnicity to levantinize, if you will, the condition of all subalterned bodies. In short, Beryl Gilroy's work picks up the resistant Madame Mediator efforts of writers like Merian and Behn to challenge colonial and imperial social systems by clearing space among hegemonic tropes in authorized history for the lived experiences and voices of excluded tropicopolitans. Her subaltern Tropicopolitan life positioned her in that space, but, like Behn and Merian, her Atlanticist life positions her to speak of alternative and oppositional history as Madame Mediator on a more diverse stage.

One delightful indication of Beryl Gilroy's broader agenda is that her work is intensely humorous and ironic. In a 2000 interview with Roxanne Bradshaw for *Callaloo* just months before she died, Beryl Gilroy herself remarked on it:

GILROY: The next book I want to write is about two lesbian women. . . [about] coming out. . . she [a married woman] brings the [other] woman in the house as a lodger, and he [the first woman's husband] tries to make passes at the [other] woman. I am still working on the ending.

BRADSHAW: So at this point, he is still unaware that his wife has a love interest in this boarder?

GILROY: Yes. He thinks that she is brought into the house for him, because they have stopped having any kind of conjugal relationship. And he thinks so, and he is thanking her. He says, "Well, thank you for thinking about me in these terms," and he is a professional man. [*Laughter*]

BRADSHAW: It also sounds like it is going to be very funny.

GILROY: Humor! A lot of people miss the humor in my writing. I think it is excruciatingly funny. All the things I write. ....

BRADSHAW: I have found what I have read of your writing to be very funny, especially in *Gather the Faces* and *Frangipani House*. I would say that it's one of the things that has intrigued me about your work, because I think that it showed a fine element of artistic talent to be able to combine humor with very serious issues of society and concerns for humanity. (Bradshaw 395)

Maryse Condé said something similar at Regis College in 1998 accompanied with a deliciously convincing laugh, which she also spoke of in *Conversations with Maryse Condé*, an interview with Françoise Pfaff. Condé confessed that "I split my sides laughing while writing this book [*I Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*]. ...I don't see how people could read [it] with any seriousness" (60). I remember feeling stunned by this revelation since I had read and written on *Tituba* and took it very seriously. As a new scholar, I struggled with the expectation that novels – and texts in general – deal in "Truths," especially historical "truths." The harrowing content of these works by women writers of color was so serious for me as a white reader that it was beyond my comprehension that the author being humorous, ironic, or sardonic. In my view, anachronistic elements completely undid the novel's authority.

When I heard Condé speak of laughing as she wrote, I realized that laughter was precisely the point. It was what Aravamudan has described as a tropicalizing gesture a misuse of the king's English, of the novel's authority as defined in western discourses of dominance and control. When Condé's and Beryl Gilroy's novels enter culture laughing, they engage in a wider ecumenizing of the cultural elements encountering each other in the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries than tropicopolitans resistance. For 21<sup>st</sup> century readers, Beryl Gilroy's certainly challenges the social systems that crystallized around certain structures of feeling like the oriental despot, the seraglio, the African yard and the cannibal king, but she goes beyond resistance to actively mediating between Tropicopolitans and non-Tropicopolitans to position them all to see each other more clearly.

**Beryl Gilroy's *Black Atlantic***

***Child, Teacher, Wife***

Beryl Gilroy was born Beryl Agatha Anwich in British Guyana in 1924 in the sugar town of Skeldon on the Cormantyne River that forms the border with modern Surinam. She reports in an interview with Roxann Bradshaw near the end of her life that she did not attend the local colonial school as was, by the 1930's, more typical even in that remote town. She was instead home-schooled largely by her "Gran," Sally Louisa James, "a cat-sized woman" who took her everywhere on social rounds that put her in the way of endless stories about family, heritage and culture. The two of them would pack up six "food carriers" – each one a

series of tin containers held together by a snap clasp – and deliver meals to elder women: “Miss Bunchie, Dadafunda, all these old women. They used to bring them out in the sun. Tanta and I would be there . . . you know, I wouldn't go to school. We would go and sit with them, and they would tell me all their proverbs. That's what I did” (Bradshaw 387). Gran/Tanta was a member of

...the Negro Progress Convention. They had a branch in our village, and they encouraged us to write about the customs there. They used to come up from Georgetown, to go and visit the old people. There used to be a lot of old, old people in the village, and they used to tell us stories about their lives. They were slave children, most of them, because emancipation came—but they experienced the slave culture through schooling, through their parents' discipline. They used to tell me about their stories . . . [when] I would sit down with them . . . (Bradshaw 387)

Among the stories were those of her Dutch grandfather Cornelius James Mancow: “he was so beautiful, a lovely man, my grandfather. My grandmother was a little shrunken woman; I used to tell her not to come to the school because the kids say she had cat size . . . [laughter]” (Bradshaw 388). She also heard stories of and from her Tutsi grandfather and his sister who was named Tutsi because “You know, they used to name the girls for the tribe and she was named Tutsi [because] they came from East Africa. She was tall, like the Tutsis” (Bradshaw 387).

Gilroy says of herself as a child that:

One did not expect prompt obedience from me. As one of the youngest of the girls I talked back to my uncles, especially the one who consistently emptied my piggy bank. I rarely met anyone's specifications for a good little girl with clean face and spotless dress. I was a tomboy climbing trees and playing marbles and cricket with my cousins, who hardly ever let me bat . . . and I had boy cousins. (Bradshaw 389)

In addition, from her earliest years, Gilroy was both a reader and a writer:

Well, when I was little, I started writing stories because we didn't have any storybooks. So I started writing stories for my cousins; they used to swap things with me and I would write them stories. And the first book that I ever read with colour in it was Alice's Adventures in Wonderland... And it had this magic, all these wonderful things happening in it; it was magical . . . And then I love *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales* and any other fairy tales of India, Greece, and Roman tales, my cousin's books—I would read them. All the time I would read these books. (Bradshaw 384-5)

So the child Beryl was schooled in the deepest sense in both Guyanese mixed-race culture and in British colonial culture. But clear priority was given to experience and to attention to the child's own interests. Gilroy explains that as an older child,

...I started reading English writers. ...I read *Daniel Deronda*, *Dracula*, all those early books. And then we got a library in school, but it was all these shortened copies of the fortunes of Nigel, Sir Walter Scott, and all that . . . in shortened form and that is what I read as a child. And then when I grew up, I just liked to read essays . . . Stevenson . . . all different essays I used to read. And the usual things, you know, . . . *Treasure Island* and *Robinson Crusoe* and all that stuff—but it was all English stuff. And to get to read black stuff . . . I had to write it. (Bradshaw 384-5)

Through this rich complex education, Gilroy learned early on that in order to bring the subaltern tropicopolitan voices of her Guyanese heritage into contact with the hegemonic mainstream, she had to convert them from their marginalized oral form to written form, a conversion she began to produce as a child.

Eventually, at age twelve, Beryl Gilroy did attend the local schools where she soon made herself known as a star student and then a gifted teacher. In *The Guardian's* obituary, Peter D. Fraser wrote that:

...she grew up in a family with a commitment to learning - rather than the current rigid system of schooling. The interplay between valuing curiosity and the thorough acquisition of skills helped

foster a mind of great creativity. She was also growing up at a time when anti-colonial radicalism and pro-worker politics inspired hope. From 1943 to 1945, Beryl attended Georgetown's teachers' training college, leaving with a first-class diploma. After graduation, she taught and lectured for the UNICEF's nutrition programme (Fraser)

Beryl Gilroy's upbringing in rural Guyana, fully detailed in her memoir of childhood, *Sunlight on Sweet Water*, clearly positioned her as a self-consciously radical thinker around whom swirled structures of feeling preserved by both European women writers and Guyanan women storytellers. At 26 in 1950, Beryl Gilroy was selected to study further in both Britain and the US; she chose Britain because of the "exchange rates rather than visions of Britain" (Fraser). She went to London as a Guyanan born, bred, and fully grown in a colonial state as what she called "a child of Empire" – insistently hybridizing the native/colonist dichotomy. She did not return to her homeland for forty years (*Leaves* 3).

Between 1951 and 1953, Beryl Gilroy earned her degree in Child Development at the University of London and married white<sup>189</sup> Englishman Patrick Gilroy. These were difficult years. She was stunned by the racism she encountered as she tried to sustain herself while studying. "Although a qualified teacher, racism prevented her getting a post for some time, and she had to work as a washer-up at Lyons, a factory clerk and lady's maid" (Peepal Tree). Once she received her degree, she obtained a teaching post with the Inner London Education Authority from 1953-56, when her first child, Paul, was born. She took

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<sup>189</sup> Here is the evidence, which is not explicit but is quite compelling: "As the parent of "mixed-race" children - a curious term seeming to question the humanity of one parent - she encountered as much nonsense from the supposedly better-educated as she had in her working-class schools. Her own good sense and Patrick's support helped her remain unscathed." Peter D. Fraser. "Beryl Gilroy: Innovative Caribbean Writer."

twelve years off from her career to raise him and his younger sister Darla, two mixed-race children who became “first world” professionals born and raised in England. When she returned to full-time teaching in 1968, "Gilroy was appointed first a deputy head teacher, and, in the following year, enjoyed the prestigious distinction of being appointed first black woman head-teacher in the London Burrough of Camden" (Anim-Addo viii). By most accounts, she was the first black teacher ever appointed head-teacher in England.

In many ways, Beryl Gilroy's life was bifurcated. Mixed-race marriage and mixed-race children in late 20<sup>th</sup> century "first world" culture represents one of the most fundamental structures of feeling about racial difference in the Atlantic region: the dichotomy of black and white. The division of her life roughly into halves: nearly 30 years in a tropical colony followed by 40 uninterrupted years in the colonizing nation was a profound bifurcation of her personal history and ideology. Her home country of Guyana experienced a line of bifurcation when it gained independence from Britain on May 26, 1966. In an undated entry in *Leaves*, Beryl Gilroy writes, "I know nothing of post-independence Guyana. My knowledge is retrospective and consequently valueless as comment on a new time" (*Leaves* 19). With this claim, she points to the historical specificity of the structures of feeling and colonial ideologies circulating when she was growing up in pre-independence Guyana. She also acknowledges the continuing effect of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Guyanese cultural forces on her individual life in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. She writes, "when I arrived in Britain the howl from colonials for independence was everywhere, but loudest of all in the poorest countries

including British Guiana" (*Leaves* 19). This sense of bifurcation is the framework of Beryl Gilroy's Madame Mediator status.

Because Beryl Gilroy's life was so profoundly bifurcated, the two sides clung tightly together. Her experience in colonial Guyana proved valuable in her post-independence life in Britain when she drew on it to devise pedagogy to help her young mostly white English students who were "still talking about the trauma of evacuation" during World War II (*Leaves* 6). These children, whose "close relatives had vanished" and who "were still coping with the bomb-sites which in some cases surrounded the war-time prefabricated houses, or the hastily constructed apartment blocks in which they lived," were bewildered by "Janet and John, the school book children who lived in a pleasant bungalow with low-growing flowers around the door, a mother and father and a lively little dog in the garden. When I presented these readers to my class, I could see the terror in their eyes" (*Leaves* 6). Seeing across racial lines, Beryl Gilroy knew the terror of loss of family and connection to the past too well from the stories of the grandparents in Guyana. Beryl Gilroy responded as a mediator to the working class white children's trauma with gathered "supplementary reading material" produced by the children themselves. Feeling a heightened sense of control over their own forms of expression, the children found that "the social familiarity of the texts released a desire to read. ...The illustrations and language of our homemade books were naturally theirs and the narrative so sustained them that involvement was complete" (*Leaves* 6). She also helped them form a community in which to share and compare and gain a perspective on their experiences by "set[ting] aside

periods of the day for talking. We called this 'Problem Time,' or 'News Time,' or 'Story Time'" (*Leaves 6*). In other words, she helped them access, share and process war-time experiences in a way that made the various cultures actually represented in their classroom visible and valid. If Beryl Gilroy was still unable to make her own subaltern experience available to these white children, whose indoctrination about race caused them to identify her, their black teacher, with "the souls of the heathen" for whom they prayed in class every day, she was very successful at making their own position available to them for their own therapeutic and cognitive benefit (*Leaves 5*).

***Author, activist, mother***

"I decided," Beryl Gilroy writes, "to make this explicit" (*Leaves 7*). From the stories generated in discussions with her students, Beryl Gilroy wrote the books that eventually became "the controversial series, 'Nippers,'" but not before the series was rejected by several publishers who considered them "too radical for publication" (*Leaves 7*). Those publishers were right: texts about "real-life people, and about powerless people who had learnt to express their anger and antagonisms" in a constructive way were not only alternative but downright oppositional to a post-war hegemony still steeped in the Atlantic cockpit strategy of glorifying – not to mention profiting from – the us-them social, economic, and political mind-set (*Leaves 7*). Stemming from her teacher-activism, *Little Nippers*

was Beryl Gilroy's first foray into author-activism, her first published efforts to bring her radical up-bringing to mainstream attention.

Beryl Gilroy speaks to some of her activism as a mother in her interview with Roxann Bradshaw when she recalls her efforts to obtain a full education for her home schooled children, Paul and Darla-Jane. She writes:

I did not want anyone to bring up my children and give them complexes. I did not send Paul to school for a while . . . See, I had his sister [Darla Jane], and we did not want to push him out when the baby came. I taught him [at home], so, when he went to school, he knew everything. He could read, he could write, he had a good vocabulary and everything. Yes, so I went to the headmaster and I said, "You know I want Paul to go to University College (London)." He said, "Oh! Mrs. Gilroy, I don't know. I must warn you. I must prepare you. I have Jewish boys." . . . You see, they had a Jewish quota. So he continues, "They take [only] so many Jewish boys and they don't get in and they have never had a black boy there before." I said, "Oh! Mr. Raphael, leave it to me. You have him in the morning, and I'll have him in the afternoon." And so I taught him; he was one of the three youngest boys there, and he got invited for interviews and then got placed and then, gradually, he became head boy there, head of the class. And then when we went there, when he got a prize for valedictorian, my husband said, "Make a statement for our son, he has done well." And the boys were . . . they were cheering for him. Paul is a very modest, self-retreating boy. He would say, "Mommy don't tell anyone about this." He does not like to be talked about; he had experiences of prejudice that I don't know about. Once he told me some woman said to him, "Go back to your own country." She thought that he was African or something. He was laughing about it. He is a very wise boy; he knows what to react to, while my daughter, she is very political. She would tell you what she thinks. She would not have any nonsense from anybody . . . I don't know where she got it from . . . you know it is that faciness, Indian side . . . I don't know where she got it but she got it, but it is not from me . . . maybe it is from going to the kind of schools that she attended because she was the only black girl there. When she went to Camden, she was one of the top dogs there; everyone wanted to be like her. And then she got a first, she did very well in her Art, and she went to Art College"<sup>190</sup> (Bradshaw 382-3).

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<sup>190</sup> Darla-Jane Gilroy was "one of the four people with David [Bowie] in the Ashes to Ashes video." Bowie's website explains that "Darla-Jane Gilroy, who went on [to] open her own fashion

Where did Darla-Jane get her faciness, indeed. From the same place Beryl Gilroy did: her place in two genealogies: Women Writers of English and Guyanese descendents of slaves.

When Madame Mediator becomes a mother, her children often adopt her mediation practices, as is the case for Beryl Gilroy and her children. Darla-Jane Gilroy made a name for herself in The New Romanticism Movement of youth fashion in 1980's London where she worked with, among others, David Bowie. Now she teaches fashion accessory design at Central Saint Martins in the University of the Arts London. Beryl Gilroy's son, Paul Gilroy, author of *The Black Atlantic*, became a public intellectual. He was twelve when his mother returned to teaching in 1968 and thirteen when she was appointed the first black head teacher in England. He was fifteen (and Darla-Jane was thirteen) when his father died in 1975, a devastating loss to the close family. But the following year, his mother finally succeeded in publishing the *Little Nippers* series and the next year published her first adult text, *Black Teacher*, an account of her teaching career in England and of the conditions under which England's working class obtained an education. By the time Paul published *The Black Atlantic*, in 1981, his mother had earned her masters in ethno psychology at age fifty-five. She went on

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shop in the King's Road in London. Darla-Jane is a graduate of the St. Martin's School of Art and is a free-lance fashion and footwear designer. She is currently a tutor at the Royal College of Art in Accessories in the School of Fashion and Textile, and has her own practice as a consultant designer and trend predictor." (Paul Kinder at <http://www.bowiewonderworld.com/faq.htm> accessed 3/11/10). She was part of The New Romanticism fashion movement of the 1980's in London.

to earn her PhD in psychology in 1987 at age sixty-one and most of her career in fiction still lay ahead of her.

To call Beryl Gilroy “author, activist, mother” is to invoke these terms in their fullest sense as well as in an interconnected sense few people achieve – especially when considering the life of Beryl Gilroy's son, Paul Gilroy. Oddly enough, when I first chose Beryl Gilroy as a subject for this project, I did not know the two authors were related. However, given Gilroy's many ties into the genealogy I examine here, it was not really very surprising that she is Paul Gilroy's mother. His 1993 publication of *The Black Atlantic* is a wonderfully rich genealogical move. He seems to invoke this genealogy himself when he writes, "I have become fascinated with how successive generations of black intellectuals have understood this connection [between themselves and "one of their adoptive, parental cultures: the intellectual heritage of the West since the Enlightenment"] and how they have projected it in their writing and speaking in pursuit of freedom, citizenship, and social and political autonomy" (P. Gilroy 2).

Beryl Gilroy's first novel, *Frangipani House*, which she calls “a praise song for grandmothers,” came out in 1986 (Bradshaw 392). In it she revisits her experience as a child among Tanta's elderly women friends and their stories and celebrations, including an elaborate ritual around menopause, but this time as a woman nearing her own elderly phase. About the initial idea for the novel she writes, “I was in Barbados when my friend was running a care home and saw all of these women and I said, ‘Why doesn't one of these women get away?’ and she said, ‘They don't want to get away!’ and I said, ‘You try keeping me here, and I'll

be off.' [*Laughter*]" (Bradshaw 394). Interlocutor Roxann Bradshaw comments that, in *Frangipani House*, "the focus [is] on the confinement of the aged to institutions, who find themselves in that position after their loved ones emigrate from the Caribbean or Guyana" (394). The contrast between the reverence shown to Tanta and other elderly women in Guyana in the 1930's and 40's and the abandonment of the elderly women of Beryl Gilroy's generation could hardly be starker. But Gilroy is not speaking simply of the prospect of her own later years. She seeks, as she puts it, to "try to lift the blind, not only for white people [but] for black people. That is what *Frangipani House* is all about; lifting the blinders from black people" (Bradshaw 393). The blinders obscuring elderly women are, at least in part, erasing the crucial role Tantas have in carrying the oral histories and marginalized structures of feeling to the next generation of women, leaping over the mothering generation who, as Gilroy put it, "had no time to give [to her own children] . . . she was busy getting food for her brood, so she had no time to enjoy them" (Bradshaw 388).

In 1991, when she was sixty-nine, Beryl Gilroy turned to the work in which she dissolves the lines of bifurcation she had experienced – black/white, colonial/indigenous, slave/master, colony/independent state. To begin her *Madame Mediator* work, she harvested not only the structures of feeling I have examined here in the lives and works of Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian, but in the lives and work of Atlanticist women writers of color from Phillis Wheatley to Maryse Condé, Michelle Cliff, Jamaica Kincaid and dozens of other powerful authors of the 1990's. Her first novel in this vein was *Stedman and*

*Joanna – a Love in Bondage: Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century*, a novel based on the marriage John Stedman describes in his journals between himself and a beautiful, well-educated mulatto girl in Surinam in the 1740's. In addition to comprehensive journals of this period in his life, Stedman made dozens of sketches and watercolors of events and places in his life in Surinam. In their abridged modernized edition of Stedman's journals in 1992, Richard and Sally Price note that "by this time [1759], Suriname had developed into a flourishing plantation colony and had earned a solid reputation, even among such rivals as Jamaica and Saint Domingue, for its heights of planter opulence and depths of slave misery" (xi). Joanna was a house slave, about which the Prices note "As Stedman describes, planters were routinely served at table by nearly nude house slaves, who also fanned them during their naps (and sometimes all night long), and put on and took off all their clothes each morning and evening, bathed their children in imported wine, and performed other similar tasks" (xii). Stedman was a 28 year old, "friendless, in debt, and saddened by the recent death of his father [who] resigned himself to 'the desperate resource of going as a common sailor to North America...for a voyage of not longer than 9 months'" (Price xix). He stayed five years in Surinam fighting Maroon rebels for the British and meticulously documenting Surinam's sugar society. In 1791, Stedman delivered his edited manuscript and 106 drawings and watercolors to Joseph Johnson, a London publisher who was "a prominent figure in radical British political and intellectual circles" (xxxiv). His compatriots included "Thomas Paine, Joseph Priestly, William Godwin, Erasmus Darwin, Richard Price, Mary Wollestonecraft, and

Henry Fuseli" (xxxiv). And his stable of engravers included William Blake who was commissioned to engrave what became the most important images of the abolitionist movement. By reimagining Stedman's rich first hand archive of that most brutal period of European enslavement of West Africans from the point of view of a beautiful, educated enslaved woman, Beryl Gilroy exposed many layers of presumption about subaltern experience. Not only did she foil foolish attempts to romanticize anything about life in this region in this period, but she also exposed the folly of presumptions of unrelieved brutality and absolute disempowerment of the enslaved and colonized. *Inkle and Yarico*, as we shall see, took this project even deeper by exposing the fallacies of late 20<sup>th</sup> century presumptions about race and sex difference.

*Stedman and Joanna* and *Inkle and Yarico* both required extensive historical and literary research. In addition to research and writing, Beryl Gilroy had also become a sought after speaker for everyone from young children, who knew her as the author of *Little Nippers*, to scholars and students at academic conferences all around the Atlantic region. Her only publication after *Inkle and Yarico* is *Leaves in the Wind: Collected Writings* (1998). Five years later, in 2001, she was dead of a heart attack. One of Beryl Gilroy's last projects, *Inkle and Yarico* is a culmination of seventy-two years of work and experience as an Atlanticist. Itself profoundly Atlanticist, the novel rewrites an 18th and 19th century British and European "urban myth" set in the mid-17th century New World that examines the dynamic engagement of three major cultures (Felsenstein 7).

*Ethno-psychology*

Beryl Gilroy's choice of academic discipline – ethno-psychology – is provocative and clearly a product of the connections in her life. As a context in which to articulate and theorize those connections, ethno-psychology in 1979, when Gilroy earned her Masters in the field, was defined as the "Comparative psychology of races and peoples."<sup>191</sup> However, by the time Beryl Gilroy earned her PhD in 1987, the field was moving toward a more multi-cultural approach, initiated in part by Paul Gilroy's 1981 publication of *The Black Atlantic* and the rise of cultural studies from Marxist circles. By 1997, comparative psychologist, Dr. Alain Tschudin, wrote about the limitations of ethnopsychology that:

Ethnopsychology investigates indigenous representations of the psyche and focuses on the study of ethnic variation in psychological theories. Were ethnopsychology to be more concerned with the psychology and subjectivity of the individuals studied in terms of mind, emotion, identity and gender, it would then be cultural psychology, which [Richard] Shweder (1991) proposes is the ethnopsychology of a functioning psyche. (2 of 10)

As Tschudin explains it, cultural psychology subsumes ethno-psychology, as well as cross-cultural psychology and psychological anthropology. The latter two discourses presume that a “psychic unity already exists and is waiting in the wings of culture” for all cultures to rise to as a universal achievement. Based on this presumption, the difference between "etic" and "emic" observers is perceived as those who understand social relations rationally (etic) and those (emic) who “still” operate irrationally – for example enlightenment vs. superstition. Like Laura Brown deploying the concept of “radical contemporaneity,” Tschudin

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<sup>191</sup> Biology online dictionary: <http://www.biology-online.org/dictionary/ethnopsychology> accessed by 3/4/2006.

recognizes that the rational should not be determined by the observer's position either inside (emic) or outside (etic) the cultural frame of reference. Tschudin explains that cultural psychology requires observers to:

... blur the line between subjectivity and objectivity, by speaking of 'divergent rationality,' the notion that not all rational processes are universal and that objectivity is thus subject dependent. Thus liveable realities, or cultures, are functional examples of divergent rationalities (Shweder 1986). ...To paraphrase a definition of cultural psychology: it is the study of relationship of social behaviours and cultural traditions to ethnically diverse forms of psychological functioning (Shweder 1991). A sociocultural environment is an intentional world, and in this world we have intentional constructs. People and reality are socially constructed (Miller 1991) and as thematically described thus far, to understand the person and her representation of reality, we need to dive into the depths of the subject and explore the coxes of meaning within this domain. (2 of 10)

Beryl Gilroy applies cultural psychology – a term she would likely endorse for the same reasons Tschudin does – in small contexts like classrooms, neighborhoods, ships and towns. Rather than comparing one culture or cultural element or experience to another as either an etic or emic observer, Gilroy actively negotiates and teaches others to negotiate multiple streams of cultural rationality. And she does this by revealing structures of feeling that underpin, maintain and generate these forms of rationality. As Tschudin describes it and Beryl Gilroy applies it, cultural psychology:

...is an interpretative discipline, cultural psychology achieves 'thinking through others' in four possible ways, namely thinking in the frame of reference of the other, understanding this frame, deconstructing the frame and transcending the boundaries of the other and finally conceiving of the self through the frame of the other, (Shweder 1991, Geertz 1988). We now focus on discourse as a means of achieving this end. (Tschudin 3 of 10).

This focus on discourse leads us to the work Spivak calls for in the Derridian cultural space.

*Tropicopolitan – the solvent and its process*

Beryl Gilroy's life and work illustrates one individual's lived experience within Derridian cultural space, an experience that Srinivas Aravamudan theorizes as "tropicopolitan". Aravamudan's formulation analyzes the lives and works of individuals defined by Guyatri Spivak and others as subaltern. However, his analysis transcends the concept of subalterity as a condition to examine the lived experience of subalterity by individuals in particular cultural contexts. This analysis of actual lives retrieves the individual subalterned subject and exposes for analysis the power of that individual within her social context to "tropicalize" or transcend her subalterity by accessing the power she always already has, both as an individual and as a member of various coalitions. Beryl Gilroy's obvious tropicopolitan status distinguishes her clearly from Behn and Merian and positions her as a more far-reaching Madame Mediator than they could have been, which requires further explanation.

Due to Beryl Gilroy's subaltern condition, much of her tropicopolitan power is social material that is unintegrated into hegemonic cultural formations – in other words, much of it exists as structures of feeling. The structures of feeling she accesses also circulate in culture as vestiges of cultural formations explicitly abandoned but still influencing social relations. As bonds and potential bonds, structures of feeling are not limited to units of subaltern social material, but form

in response to negative attractions generated in any cultural space. Counteracting such stimulation requires exposing the fallacies – or phallusies – as such, as task Beryl Gilroy takes up with glee. However, obtaining enough power, authority and access to hegemonic channels of social connection – publishing power, for example – to expose fallacy-ridden social material is another issue altogether, as Beryl Gilroy found when she tried to publish *Little Nippers* for several years.

In the context of the colonial history of the west, Aravamudan names the agent of one source of contentious alternative social material “tropicopolitans” which he defines as “the colonized subject who ... [as] the residents of the tropics, the bearers of its marks, and the shadow images of more visible metropolitans” (4). Beryl Gilroy fits this description because she was born and raised in the tropics, bears the mark of colonization and of the tropics in her moderately dark skin of African, indigenous and European heritage, and, when she arrives in England, is treated as a shadow next to even the children of metropolitans. Beryl Gilroy’s work qualifies her as tropicopolitans, too, since she “challenge[s] the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans” which Aravamudan calls tropicalization (4).

Unlike a subaltern, a tropicopolitan is not just a concept or condition, but is also an individual subjectivity. Aravamudan explains that tropicopolitan is “an adjective used mainly in natural history, describing species dominant in the tropical regions...from botanical discourse of the late nineteenth century” (4). The Oxford English Dictionary agrees: “Belonging to or inhabiting the whole of the

tropics, or tropical regions generally” (OED).<sup>192</sup> So tropicopolitan is not a particular species but an attribute of many species – including but not limited to Africans and indigenous groups – each of which ranges widely throughout the tropics. As Aravamudan explains, tropicopolitan is “a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial tropology and actual resident of tropical space, object of representation and agent of resistance” (4). We can speak of the conditions – like metropolitan living, enslavement, poverty – of such individuals, but as a group of individuals who share these experiences and the subjectivities that result, when we say tropicopolitans, we mean a group of individuals, not an existential condition like subalterity.

For that reason, the subaltern and the tropicopolitan are not coterminus. The subaltern cannot speak, as Spivak has shown, because the speech, text, art, she produces is always misheard, misread, misprisoned by a culture that refuses to read or make cultural space for the subjectivity of subalterned individuals. As shown above, the subaltern is not a person or set of persons, but a condition. It is true – and thus confusing – that Aravamudan's model is concerned with particular bodies most likely to experience subalterity and historically most represented in accounts of subaltern conditions. As Aravamudan points out, tropicopolitans are, after all, ubiquitous in spaces around and within metropolises and make the life of the metropolis and the cosmopol possible. However, the difference between tropicopolitans as individuals and subalterity as a condition becomes apparent

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<sup>192</sup> 1878 P. L. SCLATER in 19th Cent. Dec. 1050 ‘Tropicopolitan’ forms, by which I mean tropical forms that are found in the tropics of both hemispheres. 1879 A. R. WALLACE *ibid.* Feb. 254 The tropical land...which afforded the passage of the tropicopolitan forms from one continent to the other. 1895 C. DIXON in *Fortn. Rev.* Apr. 652 We have many tropicopolitan families that are confined absolutely to the great equatorial zone round the entire earth.

when tropicopolitans do the work of tropicalizing western imperial texts by insistently representing – intentionally and unintentionally – what European ethnocentrism obscures. Tropicalization is most effective when tropicopolitans do this work intentionally and lift themselves out of subalterity by speaking of their condition as inherently rational, to use the terms of cultural psychology. Or, to use my term, when they act as Madame Mediator as Beryl Gilroy does when she teaches, mothers, studies and writes.

More ambitious than Salman Rushdie's model in which "the subaltern writes back to empire," tropicopolitans actually "deform the culture" that oppresses them (5). Most of these deforming acts are not intentional and don't compel active reading, listening or processing by the imperial culture. For that reason, Aravamudan focuses primarily on intentional tropicalizations like Beryl Gilroy's work that deliberately initiates counter-hegemonic cultural processes. Such work include artistic acts like literature, drama and film, political acts like nationalism, revolution and resistance, and ideological acts like cultural comparisons, historical revisions and linguistic appropriation. Aravamudan breaks these intentional tropicalizations into three "kinds:" virtualization, levantinization and nationalization. Through virtualization, tropicopolitans and their allies uncover, recover and reinsert the alternative and oppositional cultural material that the hegemonic structure occluded in its texts and practices. Through levantinization, tropicopolitans and their allies locate a contrasting or oppositional cultural ground against which their own culture manifests more distinctively, exposing its structure for more precise analysis, a process I have proposed to call

ecumenization when engaged in by non-tropicopolitans. But unlike orientalization, which is based on European fantasies like that of the Oriental despot and the seraglio, "levantinization makes visible the dynamic interaction between orientalist and anti-orientalist figuration," between projected hegemonic figures of the Other (i.e. tropes and stereotypes) and the lived experience of the Other (Aravamudan 160). Through nationalization, tropicopolitans and their allies resist imperial and, in modern times, globalizing forces by insisting on the autonomy of nations – including nations created for the purpose of asserting the autonomy of a powerless group, for example the Sierra Leone relocation project (Aravamudan 253-69). But nationalization is also a tropicalizing process of reading the development of "nation" or of a particular imperialist nation as a universal construct in which "the nation is also the *universe* that appears to anchor literature – and literacy – within sociological, aesthetic, and political parameters that are resolutely [in the current historical moment] Anglocentric" (Aravamudan 234). Tropicalizing nationalizations reveal the particularity of the hegemonic nation and expose its literary and philosophical projects as also economic and political strategies of dominance. Put simply, tropicalization is the insistent "reality" of the Other pushing against hegemonic tropes and fantasies representing them like the insistent presence of figures hidden in the ground of a text. Beryl Gilroy is deeply engaged in tropicalization, particularly in her historical novels, as we shall see in Chapter 7 below.

However, Aravamudan's model of tropicopolitan contains several patriarchal flaws that Beryl Gilroy transcends in her work because of her life as a

female tropicopolitan. For example, Beryl Gilroy's ethnopsychology studies taught her that despite that lack of attention from imperial forces, unintentional tropicalizations still produce cultural effects. And women's lives are full of what have been dismissed as "unintentional" tropicalizations. We can see this in Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle and Yarico* when Inkle, who seems unaware of how his sojourn among Caribs has deformed him, is nevertheless deformed and, in fact, literally crippled because of how Yarico responds to him. As a result of his deformation at Yarico's hands, he then deforms Barbadian culture when he finally arrives there and English culture when he retires to England. While Aravamudan's concept of tropicalizing tropicopolitans is useful to feminists and other cultural critics, his subsets of virtualization, levantinization and nationalization are male-ordered concerns. Not that female subalterns have no stake in such conflicts, but as subalterns in a sexist economy, female concerns like family structure and reproductive choice are consigned to invisibility by Aravamudan's theorization of subaltern lived experience. With the exception of his grudging recognition of Mary Wortley Montagu's insights, the 18<sup>th</sup> century examples of tropicalization that Aravamudan analyzes by and large exclude women from the categories he recognizes as art, from the intellectual elite in either cosmopolitan or tropicopolitan groups who can engage in levantinizations, as well as from the actors – the ones whose stories are told – in military and nationalist projects. Nevertheless, among the most important features of tropicalizations are the revelations that all genders participated in revolution and resistance. Women

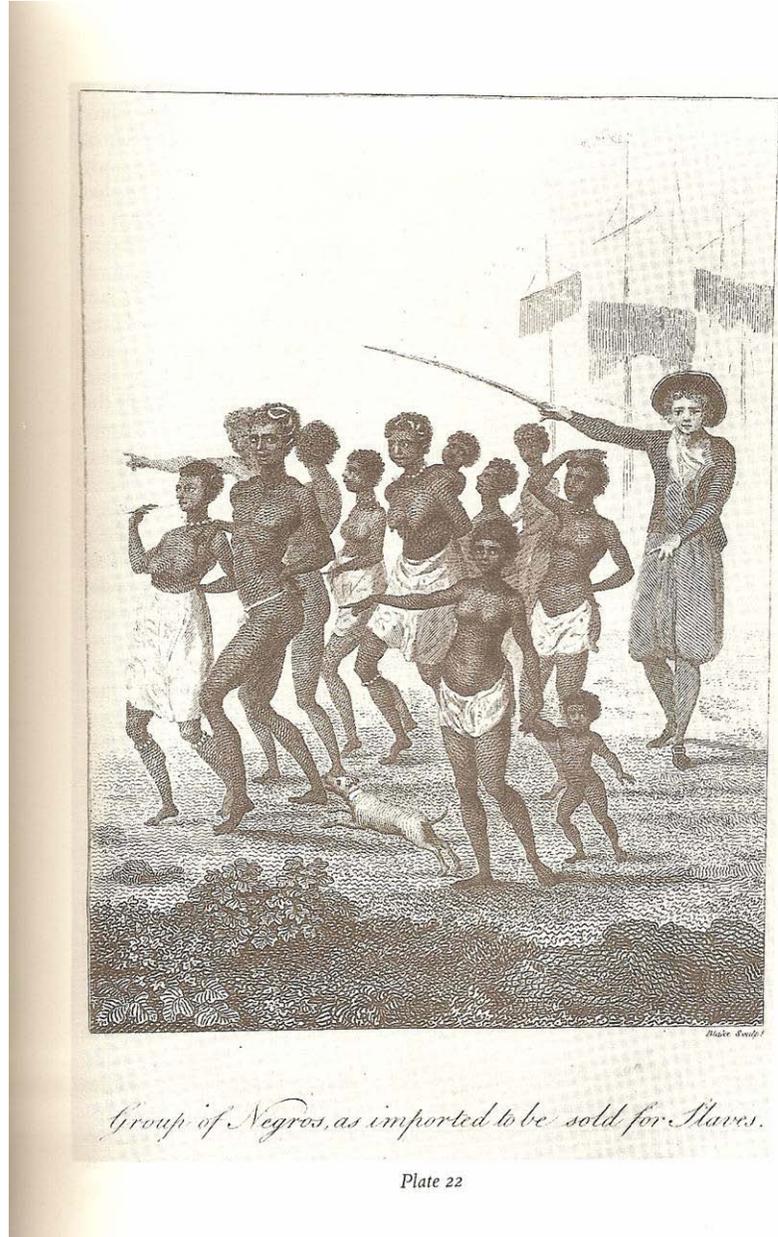
figured as leaders and fighters and strategists in “male” roles and provided key elements of support through the subversive nature of their “female” roles.

Aravamudan's lapse – as well as what is at stake in such a lapse – is clearest in his reading of an illustration by John Stedman engraved by William Blake called “Group of Negros, as imported to be sold for slaves.” The image portrays a group of recently landed Africans at the center of the composition, moving through it from the ship in the background at right to the slave market just outside the frame at left. Behind them on the right, a young white English man holds a whipping rod aloft pointing over their heads in the direction they are walking. Most of the Africans are looking in the direction they are walking, but several look at the viewer, as does the young Englishman. Aravamudan is interested in the meaning of what he calls “the triangulation of gazes among the viewer, the slave driver and the [African male] slave who returns the gaze” (9). “The [African male] slave” is the largest of the Africans, walking at the front of the group on the opposite side of the composition from the young Englishman. As Aravamudan notes, the foremost and most attractive of the female slaves gazes intently at the viewer from “inside the triangle of gazes” (9). Her raised arm points toward the big African male as if to mark him as the father of the child whose hand she holds. Her gaze and beauty breaks the triangulated gaze of the Englishman, the African man and the “viewer,” who, Aravamudan claims is eyeing her from his “position of an eager purchaser, rushing to the port to greet the arriving party in order to make a choice pick” (8). Since white women are not often noted among such purchasers (though they were there as purchasers), it is

clear that Aravamudan has a male viewer in mind when he claims that the presence of the “young mother and infant...young nubile and attractive” has altered the effect of the male slave’s reproachful gaze at the viewer: “What we may have liked to read as political reproach in the eyes of the male slave has collapsed into the more predictable narrative of sexual desire, jealousy, and impending tragedy” (8). This “collapsed” reading is based on seeing the male slave’s expression as jealous fear that the young mother and his child will be taken from him. Thus a western-produced image, Aravamudan's tropicalizing analysis asserts, foils its ostensible political resistance by reducing its message to a mere domestic drama.

Only in a patriarchal setting could this reading be characterized as a “collapse,” as if this taking of family members from each other is unpolitical. Aravamudan bases his reading on the fact that the nubile female slave that might be taken away is the male slave’s wife – which *was* common practice when slaves were sold – thus “reducing” the situation to a mere domestic problem, merely sexual, merely personal. A feminist “tropicalization” of this African woman’s experience of slavery in the racist west, where she is doubly marginalized as female and black, points to how political the personal is in this image – and how sexist racism is.

Aravamudan's reading of this image suggests that his own positionality – his sex, gender, sexuality, race, native region – clouded his analysis in the very orientalist manner he rejects. He identifies the largest black male as “the most stylized and eroticized” body in the group (Aravamudan 8). Yet this man is accompanied by no less than five bare-breasted women, three decidedly nubile whose eroticization Aravamudan is unmoved by. Two of the nubile women are in the foreground and are the most attractive from a European standpoint as well as being the only two wearing their scanty wraps



drooping down to expose the top of their pubic hair (Aravamudan 9). Of these two, the one with the triangle-breaking gaze discussed above, is the same figure Stedman uses to represent his beloved Joanna several times throughout his

illustrations: face symmetrical, wide-eyed, and small-lipped, the typical English rosebud mouth. Similarly, the young Englishman is the same figure Stedman uses to represent the subaltern male English body<sup>193</sup> in his drawings: young-looking, with perpetually blushing cheeks (hard to achieve in pen and ink), a slight innocent and enigmatic sad smile and a slightly averted shy gaze. Both the foregrounded "Joanna" figure and the subaltern English man figure have softly rounded curly hair that forms a framing cloud or halo, even when they wear a hat. In this picture, their poses are identical, both pointing left-handed off in the direction the slave group is moving and both right hands leading to the toddler that she holds by the hand. This mirroring of English soldier and young African girl that Aravamudan misses appears quite personal once we know the story of Stedman's love for and marriage with Joanna and the son they produce.

Yet even a closer look at this picture out of context shows Aravamudan has misread key aspects of the drawing. Price and Price include a much clearer version of the same image in their publication of Stedman's journals (89). But even in Aravamudan's version, it is perfectly clear that the male slave's hands are not "tied behind his back forcing him into a most stylized and eroticized body..." (8). In fact, his left hand (on his obscured side) rests on the shoulder of the woman walking near him on that side, the figure furthest away from the slave driver on the far left. This means that the male slave's right hand, which does seem uncomfortably close to the small of his back, as if forced by being tied, is actually

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<sup>193</sup> He uses other white male figures when other white males are included in the composition and when portraying a particular man, like his captain. His one portrait of a non-subaltern white man is of a planter who is as craggy, angular and as full of evil as his typical English male figure is of innocence.

placed there by the African himself. Thus, what Aravamudan reads as the male slave's "eroticized" position – i.e. arched lower back, awkwardly bent legs, protruding belly as if to offer his genitals for erotic display – is actually a painful flinching after being struck by the slave driver's upraised rod. Despite the crowding of bodies in the center, itself a reminder of both the close confinement aboard ship from which these people have just been released, a careful look at the position of bodies and their feet shows that the slave driver has reached across a clear space to deliver the blow that forced the male slave to leap forward and flinch in pain. In this reading, the expressions of the other slaves around him, all women, are reactions to that blow. The young woman in the foreground, who is as likely to be the sister or guardian of the toddler walking behind her and quite unlikely to be its mother given her nubile body. She is clearly pointing at the injury done to the male slave who is far more likely to be *her* father than the toddler's, given the conditions on the slave ship they just exited, and most likely to be a complete stranger to her, given that slave coffles were randomly assembled to avoid conspiracy among the new slaves. With Aravamudan's triangular gaze broken, even the young Englishman now shows his own pain and confusion at his role in this system. There is no collapsing at all of this image into a predictable "love triangle" except in Aravamudan's careless perception and glib reading (Aravamudan 13). In fact, Aravamudan's reading dismisses what he acknowledged as "Blake's abolitionist sympathies" as well as Stedman's revulsion for the treatment of slaves that he explicitly notes and graphically describes in his journals, even as his actions as a soldier are complicit (9). In

short, in reading this image out of context and through a patriarchal tropicopolitan lens, Aravamudan gives precisely the reading that he rails against.

Even though the focus of this chapter is on tropicopolitans as individuals with lived experience and on one such individual tropicopolitan writer, understanding Beryl Gilroy as an individual is not the key to understanding interactions among elements of culture. Knowing her actions and thoughts will not explain tropicopolitan experience or even Guyanese experience. Williams's model of culture explains why. No aspect of social material in solution represents individual humans. All aspects of Williams's model represent interactions between human *experiences* (solvent) and social material (solute) that produce, deconstruct, and reproduce culture. Like social material, human experience always occurs in relationship and never in isolation. That is why the "bourgeois myth of individualism" is such an ineffectual way of explaining social process and formations. Trying to explain culture based on individualism is like trying to explain chemical processes based only on the internal workings of an atom. Individual units are not individual and unique humans, but are instead units of experience, atoms as elements of human experience moving from loosely bound structures of feeling in solution to precipitated molecules of social relations to crystallized social institutions and formations.

By taking the myth of individualism out of cultural analyses we can see more clearly the presence of forces external to human agency that work to form, deform, reform and unform social structures. In chemistry, these forces are heat, pressure, contamination, etc. In culture, the forces are war, leadership, nature,

slavery, peace, famine, technological advance, revolution, etc. Combinations of these forces can purify cultural material produced by previous social processes. Just as when crystals are dissolved into solution and then reformed in supersaturation after heating or evaporation, impurities drop out or float away. Socially, we can see how colonial policies like forced religious conversion and erasure of indigenous languages are useful in “purifying” a colonized population and eliminating resistant elements. The language of colonial policy reflects a dehumanized understanding of this process. Tropicopolitans like Beryl Gilroy – in the present moment of solution act on the elements of social material to pull them out of their molecular formations to be reengaged, recrystallized, reformed over and over and over on the terms of the present moment.

Although Williams speaks of culture in the singular, his model of culture applies to multiple cultural – as well as multi-cultural – formations. The fluidity of Williams’s model explains why comparative analyses of the rationality of cultures – what Aravamudan calls levantinizations – can affect the rationality of both cultures, as in Spivak’s example in the case of *sati*. Analytical problems begin when a culture is lifted out of the dynamic solution for analysis – resulting in a false sense of universality, illusions of rigid borders, and presumptions of superiority. Not only does this analysis in isolation obscure the crucial fluidity of a particular culture, it also obscures the fluid relationships among cultures. As Gilroy’s work asserts, the constitutive nature of the relations among cultures – i.e. the “water” – brings into view the marginalized human experience and structures of feeling that escape hegemonic accounts and systemization. In this way, Beryl

Gilroy is a Madame Mediator, making waves around the headlands of imperial historical accounts to bring other cultures into clearer view.

In Paul Gilroy's terms, *The Black Atlantic* is a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure of transcultural, international formation." Cautioning against universalizing presumptions that "nation" defines culture, he writes:

This book addresses one small area in the grand consequence of this historical conjunction ["the fatal junction of the concept of nationality with the concept of culture" (2)] – the stereophonic, bilingual, bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing communicating and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world. (3)

Thus the black Atlantic is not the entire geographic Atlantic arena, not an inversion of five hundred years of European Atlantic history in which Europeans assumed the entire region should belong to, be run by, and be predominantly populated by Europeans. For Paul Gilroy, the Black Atlantic paradigm seeks to recognize the role of Africans in the Atlantic by considering African experience as a whole, on its own terms. When nationalism is conflated with culture – that is to say cultures are assumed to inhabit geographical spaces with militantly guarded borders – diasporic Africans, indigenous people, and many other "others" are erased. They are in these nations but not "of" them, people whose experience drifts undetected in the water/solute of cultural production, people hidden in the ground and consigned to the blank inaccessible space. If Paul Gilroy's primary motive for writing *The Black Atlantic* was to "have blacks perceived as agents" – as people always already active in history and intellectual and cultural debates, Aravamudan's motive is to do the same for a more broadly defined population he

calls tropicopolitans. Even if they can't speak in the culture that defines them as silent subalterns, they can articulate, create and affect – or as Aravamudan says deform – structures of feeling that circulate around incorporated hegemonic culture and generate new cultural formations. Through Aravamudan's model, they can escape subaltern status without being seized by colonialist hegemony. Through Beryl Gilroy's work as Madame Mediator, they can do so even if they are female, queer or children.

*Chapter 7*

## BERYL GILROY'S TROPICOPOLITAN TEXTS

*"When they [the young students] painted my house...there were plates full of people for me to eat. Some were ordinary people, very frail and delicate and fully clad with salt, pepper and tomato ketchup beside them"*

Beryl Gilroy *Leaves* 10

**The ecumenizing novel**

When I began this study of 17<sup>th</sup> century Atlanticist Madame Mediators, I imagined them as handmaidens or priestesses of alternative and oppositional structures of feeling, collecting, reporting, preserving, archiving and passing them forward along semi-hidden genealogical lines of feminist connection. They were mediators because they managed to negotiate enough power within the racist sexist patriarchal colonial hegemony to publish their works and thus fan the flames of contention around the European imperial project. I divided their work into feminist archives and anti-racist archives. I imagined these white European women writers passing structures of feeling about sexism to their white sisters and passing structures of feeling about race relations along until a woman writer of color appeared to receive them. I imagined Phillis Wheatley as that woman and I still do. But I thought that the anti-racist Madame Mediator function ended with Wheatley's reception, as if she took over the structures of feeling about race from white women writers and transferred them to women writers of color creating "real" women writers on race justice. But the Madame Mediator function on race

didn't end with Wheatley at all. Nor has the Madame Mediator function around race justice been confined to women writers of color. Claiming that Beryl Gilroy has some kind of authentic claim on the history of Inkle and Yarico because she herself is a tropicopolitan woman of color is like saying only professors of color should teach literature of color. Such a claim is a racist abdication of our shared human responsibility to understand race – and sex – and know each other's culture well enough on an ecumenical level to collaborate in the realm of social justice.

I realized then that Beryl Gilroy is also Madame Mediator and for the same reasons Aphra Behn and Maria Sibylla Merian are. From her position in Guyanese culture – a colonized culture – she encountered imperial British culture and negotiated enough power within that racist sexist patriarchal colonial hegemony to publish her works and thus fan the flames of contention around the European imperial project. Beryl Gilroy's life and work in the Black Atlantic as a tropicopolitan subaltern Madame Mediator illustrates what I mean by ecumenical reading and writing. Beryl Gilroy generates rhetorical strategies in *Inkle and Yarico* that challenge European cultural projects – even anti-hegemonic projects like post-colonialism. She pushes her readers beyond the fantasy of oriental despotism and the seraglio to expose the euro-phallusies behind them. Her text operates in that blank space within European hegemonic influence that Spivak clears by means of Derridian deconstruction. As Beryl Gilroy's texts emerge in this space, they deploy all three of Aravamudan's tropicopolitan strategies to ecumenize colonial history – and then scramble them with feminism.

The novel, *Inkle and Yarico*, tropicalizes Caribbean colonial history by virtualizing the European ideologies and structures of feeling with levantinizing and nationalizing gestures. However, as Spivak notes through Derrida's insight, the fantasy of the oriental despot and the seraglio represent the patriarchally expressed and articulated problem created by European-style cross-cultural encounter that presumes the right to conquer and colonize – a problem of how to read and understand the “other” from the European point of view as if that point of view was the universal and most advanced truth. Moreover, the problem of encounter expressed in the tropes of the Oriental Despot and the seraglio is Christian Europe's struggle specifically with encountering the dominant and hegemonic Muslim cultures of Turkey and northern Africa. The Oriental Despot and the seraglio, however, don't address European encounter with non-Muslim non-Christian cultures any better than they address Europe's internal cultural struggles. Beryl Gilroy's ecumenical (re)reading and (re)writing of colonial history channels Caribbean structures of feeling into imaginative leaps that first point to and then move beyond the problem of encounter as expressed in tropes specific to the New World: the cannibal king and the African yard.

The West Indian arm of the European Age of Exploration was set in motion when, in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, Ottoman military might controlled access routes to Sudan where the gold that fueled Mediterranean trade was produced. Historian Edward William Bovill reports *The Golden Trade of the Moors* that, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, “the interior [of northern Africa] was closed to all but a very few, and Europe long remained in profound ignorance of what lay

beyond the greater part of the coast” (107). Failing to penetrate Arab and Berber defenses from the north – as well as the desert hazards of the Mahgrab – forced European merchant-adventurers to abandon efforts to reach north Africa’s golden heart and turn south instead along Africa’s west coast to look for friendlier inland routes. What they found disrupted European’s emerging cultural, political and economic coherence, launching new structures of feeling about race and sex that disrupted imperial ideology. These new structures of feeling triggered new tropes that justified the social relations empire-building Europeans required with the new Africa cultures they encountered along the route around Africa's horn to India – tropes they would transport west to a new world with gold in its heart and sugar for every tongue.

### ***The bones of the story***

The story Beryl Gilroy selects to deform these new world tropes originates in two spare paragraphs from Richard Ligon's *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* published in 1657 about his 1647 journey. The first paragraph describes Yarico as "an Indian woman, a slave in the house, who was of excellent shape and colour, for it [her color] was a pure bright bay<sup>194</sup> ...[who] chanced to be with child, by a Christian servant" (Felsenstein 73). Ligon describes the birth of Yarico’s child "in three hours time...a lusty boy, frolick and lively" (Felsenstein 74). In the second paragraph, Ligon tells Yarico’s story in a few spare lines:

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<sup>194</sup> Felsenstein's note: "bay Reddish brown" (73 n45)

This Indian dwelling near the Sea-coast, upon the Main,<sup>195</sup> an English ship put in to a Bay, and sent some of her men a shoar, to try what victuals or water they could find, for in some distress they were: But the Indians perceiving them to go up so far in to the County, as they were sure they could not make a safe retreat, intercepted them in their return, and fell upon them, chasing them into a Wood, and being dispersed there, some were taken, and some kill'd: but a young man amongst them stragling from the rest, was met by this Indian Maid, who upon the first sight fell in love with him, and hid him close from her Country-men (the Indians) in a Cave, and there fed him, till they could safely go down to the shoar, where the ship lay at anchor, expecting the return of their friends. But at last, seeing them upon the shoar, sent the long-Boat for them, took them aboard and, brought them away. But the youth, when he came ashoar in Barbadoes, forgot the kindness of the poor maid, that had ventured her life for his safety, and sold her for a slave, who was as free born as he: And so poor Yarico for her love, lost her liberty.<sup>196</sup> (Mulford 213)

Ligon's spare outline provides only Yarico's name and a vague heritage, her protection of a "young man" or "youth" for what appears to be only a few hours, their boarding of his former ship still waiting in the harbor, and his sale of her into slavery in Barbados.

While Yarico tells Ligon her feelings for the "youth," we know only the youth's actions and at third hand. A "youth" at this historical moment could have been as young as twelve. John Stedman, for example, began his military service at sixteen "first with rank of ensign, then as lieutenant – in the Scots Brigade" (Price xix). As a young sailor pretty enough for Yarico to fall in love with at first sight and abandon her home for, "the youth" could have been another sailor beloved, or

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<sup>195</sup> Mainland of South America, probably what is now Venezuela, Guyana or Surinam.

<sup>196</sup> Mulford's note: The text is based on *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* as first published in London (1657).

the darling his of shipmate's, or a gay convert to the sailing life itself.<sup>197</sup> While the youth violated a universal human value in selling a benefactor into slavery, his upbringing and context may have caused him and those around him to see her as his "natural servant" – both as a female and as a “native” – and her devotion as baffling and inconvenient. He could have been otherwise uninterested in detecting her feelings or even unable to do so across the linguistic and cultural divide – especially in only a few hours. Moreover, from the tone of other passages in Ligon's account, his own mention of "poor Yarico...her love" might have been ironic. Even if we take Ligon's account at face value, he gives no indication that the youth responded to Yarico's affection at all, much less made her vows, and Ligon makes clear that the youth did not father her child, a key point altered ignored in all subsequent versions of the story.

The story lay fallow for fifty four years, from 1657 until Richard Steele resurrected it in 1711 for the 11th edition of *The Spectator*, where he "frames the tale within a broader discursive argument concerning relations between the sexes" (Felsenstein 1). Steele first names the "youth" Inkle and describes his character. He also lengthens Inkle's stay under Yarico's protection, and has him father the child she's holding when they are rescued by a passing ship. Felsenstein suggests that Steele's name choice emphasizes Inkle's ordinariness "as a small tradesman, for inkle was a common haberdasher's term for a 'kind of linen tape,' sometimes of an inferior quality" (81). Inkle tape is used inside a garment to hide raw edges and reinforce structural weakness. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, this

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<sup>197</sup> See Rediker and Linebaugh as well as B. R. Burg's *Sodomy and the Pirate*, which includes analysis of motives and practices of military and merchant sailors, too.

Inkle exposed the brutal raw edges of racist slavery that were mostly hidden from imperial subjects in the homeland, giving them an “inkling” of the brutality of the European Christian slave system.<sup>198</sup>

After Steele's popular version of Inkle and Yarico circulated in England, the story began to morph into a romance and then an international abolitionist morality tale. "During the eighteenth century" Frank Felsenstein writes, "the [Inkle and Yarico] story was among the most popular and widely retold within its country of origin, Great Britain, as well as elsewhere across Europe and into North America" (1). According to Felsenstein, Inkle and Yarico continues to circulate even now in the Caribbean: "in Barbados, where the unfortunate Yarico lost her freedom..., the story thrives as a local folk song...[and] close to where she toiled, one of the springs that is still used to provide drinking water and to irrigate the adjacent fields of sugarcane even bears the name of 'Yarico's pond'" (Felsenstein 44).

Beryl Gilroy found the story while researching *Stedman and Joanna: a Love in Bondage*, her "first taste of writing 'her stories' or rather the fiction"<sup>199</sup> of colonial gender encounters" (Gilroy B *Leaves* 53). She "spent the Xmas holidays of 1986 reading it," and was moved to read "about the Enlightenment and socio-economic life, the literature and the cultural life of sailors and soldiers" (Gilroy B *Leaves* 53). Her first encounter with the Inkle and Yarico tale was Steele's, which

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<sup>198</sup> Felsenstein's research assistant, Andrea Verhoeven, also pointed to the ink connection in that Inkle "was an accountant ['a perfect master of numbers'] and would frequently be seen using ink" (Felsenstein 81). Verhoeven makes an interesting connection to Franz Fanon's story in *Black Skin, White Masks* about a woman who douses the white man she loves with ink, hoping to make him black and thus her love for him acceptable.

<sup>199</sup> The text actually says "the faction of colonial encounters" but I assume that is a typo.

she found in *Colonial Encounters*, Peter Hulme's 1987 analysis of encounter texts beginning with Columbus's and ending with Inkle and Yarico. She followed Hulme with Lawrence Marsden Price's 1937 "definitive study," *Inkle and Yarico Album*, where she saw Ligon's version. Frank Felsenstein's "definitive version" cited here would not appear for 13 more years (1999). While she found the research "so interesting [that] I found myself wandering off course," she ultimately set it all aside and relied primarily on Stedman's journal for her novelization of Stedman's romance with the slave girl Joanna. She returned to the research soon after, however, and published *Inkle and Yarico* five years later. She was seventy-two that year and it was her last novel.

***Playing in the Dark of History: At First Virtualization***

In *Inkle and Yarico*, Beryl Gilroy complicates, erases, explodes, laughs off western patriarchal history and the resulting concepts of sex and race. Aravamudan's concept of tropicopolitan virtualization requires historically recontextualizing Ligon's tale: returning to Ligon's Barbados in 1647 and, through exhaustive research, uncovering alternative cultural material that represents the subaltern life of tropicopolitans in that period. A virtualizing novel of this tale would narrate the material from any standpoint other than white male European - for example Yarico's. At first glance, Beryl Gilroy seems to be virtualizing the tale with vivid details of pre-conquest Black Carib life on southern St. Vincent. Even though readers know the novel is a fictionalized expansion of scant historical knowledge of 17<sup>th</sup> century indigenous Caribbean

cultures, the novel's rich description compels a sense of its veracity. The travel journal voice of the novel intensifies this trust by presenting the text as a journal edited for publication long after composition, like John Stedman's *The Narrative of Five Year's Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam* (1796).

Signifying on<sup>200</sup> the published travel journal allows Beryl Gilroy to virtualize the Inkle and Yarico mythology from Steele's expansion and through the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

*Inkle and Yarico* also signifies on the slave narrative. The similarities between Inkle's account closely follows the elements of classic 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century slave narratives written by black Africans like Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and Olaudah Equiano. She comments in her essay, "Black Carib Girl," that "Those of us who are willing to scour the annals and revive these stories, do so out of compulsion to take our history as fiction to a wider audience of young readers" (*Leaves* 77). *Inkle and Yarico* also shares elements of white slave narratives like those familiar to Aphra Behn of Britons captured and enslaved by the Ottoman Empire. Three of the four elements Beryl Gilroy lists as common to versions of Inkle and Yarico are also common to white slave narratives: shipwreck or other sailing catastrophe; cross-cultural encounter near the sailing catastrophe; rescue and transportation home or to the intended destination. As a male, Inkle's cultural experience was "succourance by Yarico," adding the fourth *Inkle and Yarico* element common to the slave narrative of a

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<sup>200</sup> This term refers to a practice common among African American preachers, musicians, poets, writers, and scholars of beginning with the ideas of a revered predecessor and building on them toward a more perfect articulation of the ideas. See Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s classic discussion of this practice in *The Signifying Monkey*.

woman: betrayal of an exploited and pregnant woman into slavery (Leaves 77).

As a mashup of travel genres and slave narratives, *Inkle and Yarico* compels readers to trust the novel's premise.

However, Beryl Gilroy goes far beyond Aravamudan's concept of virtualization through historical recontextualization when she runs the history of the tale through the blender of her cultural imagination. Historically, Ligon heard Yarico tell her story on a dock in Bridgeton, Barbados, in 1647. However, Beryl Gilroy sets her tale one hundred and twenty five years later, around 1772, when John Gabriel Stedman visited Surinam. Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle* writes that "During the Commonwealth period, when Cromwell ruled the kingdom, my great-grandfather had bought lands on the British island of Barbados" (Gilroy, B *Inkle and Yarico* 9)<sup>201</sup>. This would put *Inkle's* great grandfather in Richard Ligon's generation and points to the genealogical cultural connection between Ligon and Stedman. Reinforcing the connection, the novel often uses words directly from Stedman's journals, including basing *Inkle's* description of Yarico at first sight on Stedman's description of an Arawak Indian girl.<sup>202</sup> The later setting also permits *Inkle* a prize possession after his shipwreck on St. Vincent: a book of Sanskrit poetry from which he often quotes during his time on "No Man's Land."<sup>203</sup> Placing Sanskrit poetry in *Inkle's* hand invokes 19<sup>th</sup> century Orientalisms, inviting

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<sup>201</sup> From here forward in this chapter, unless otherwise indicated, page numbers refer to Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle and Yarico*.

<sup>202</sup> For Stedman's exact words, see *John Gabriel Stedman, Narrative of a Five Years Expedition against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*.

<sup>203</sup> It was given to him by his language teacher, Mr. Koenig, "which had come into his possession when he served the East India Company as a clerk" (8). The earliest literary translation of Sanskrit poetry directly into English was *The Bhagavad Gita* completed in 1784 by Charles Wilkins, though one Nathaniel Brassy Halhed (1751-1830) translated some Sanskrit poetry for A Code of Gentoo Laws (1776) to show how difficult the language is (*Norton Topics Online*).

close comparison. Thus, Beryl Gilroy's Inkle is a far more feckless far less observant John Gabriel Stedman – an unreliable narrator capable of overlooking the obvious even as he illustrates it by omission and distortion.

Arguably the most important anachronism in *Inkle and Yarico* is that Inkle's beloved Alice Sawyer marries Dr. John Clarkson whose "Uncle Thomas is, in England, a founder of the cause [of abolitionism]" (126). Stedman quotes Thomas Clarkson (1760-1846)<sup>204</sup> in "Chapter 9<sup>th</sup> ...reflections on the slave trade..." (Price 85). Recovering from a miserable series of health problems and unable to walk, Stedman is ordered by his doctor to ride out in a carriage each day. One afternoon, he stops along the road to observe "a drove of newly imported Negroes, men and women with a few children, who had just landed from on board a Guineaman...walking skeletons covered over with a piece of tanned leather" (Price 88). This incident inspired Stedman's determination to "note down what I could learn from the best authority, both white and black, what is really the fate of these people" (Price and Price *Stedman's* 88). Stedman began with "Mr. Clarkson's essays" which he read "with pleasure" (Price and Price *Stedman's* 88). The presence of John Clarkson in Inkle's journal brings onto one page Thomas Clarkson, Richard Ligon, John Gabriel Stedman, and the whole intervening genealogy of western European thought on race and slavery. Inkle's beloved Alice explains the abolitionist's logic: "In Christ there is no black or white. All men are brethren. That is right" (126). Inkle recites the values of capitalist plantation owners: "Oh, Alice! Alice! What is right is what keeps us in

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<sup>204</sup> See Roxanne Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race* (255-6 and 356 n 49).

our separate places. We are a superior race. We need others lower than ourselves" (126).

The result of Beryl Gilroy's blending of the historical record, then, is to put into play in *Inkle and Yarico* the entire evolution of western European racism from the earliest inklings of capitalist empire to its fully developed pre-industrial machinery. Ligon's version of *Inkle and Yarico* occurs just before the beheading of Charles I, when England was a boiling mess of political rebellion, religious violence, and economic takeovers, all of which motivated Ligon's voyage to Jamaica at the age of sixty. Still to come was the wasteland of Cromwell's Interregnum, the cultural carnival of the Restoration, the so-called Bloodless Revolution when England becomes finally and firmly Protestant, and the lusty birth of British<sup>205</sup> Imperial capitalism in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. An 18<sup>th</sup> century Inkle merchant was very unlikely to be a hapless young man tossed about by cross-cultural encounters, an innocent young adventurous European befuddled by newness as he represents his questing culture. By the late 1700's, Inkle's British culture had finished questing and was busy gorging – and producing feckless young men willfully ignorant of empire's business. The British capitalist empire would explode internationally in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but Stedman's historical moment occurs just as the first seed of the British Empire's decline takes root in the American Revolutionary War for independence. By creating this delicious historical frieze, Beryl Gilroy can examine in *Inkle and Yarico* both the hegemonically virile sexist racism of the British Empire and the

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<sup>205</sup> Capitalism in Holland, for example, was well-established by this time.

alternative structures of feeling circulating in the entire collection of *Inkle and Yarico* narratives.

***Men and The Cannibal King: Nationalization Plus***

*Inkle and Yarico* contains two Euro-phallusies that are particular to European cross-cultural encounters in African and American regions of the Atlantic: the Cannibal King and the African Yard. Based on the fear most often mentioned in explorer's Atlantic travel journals, the Cannibal King of Africa and the Americas is a fantasy analogous to the Oriental Despot. However, the Cannibal King projects a far more terrifying demon than a despot's tyranny. As we saw in the discussion of Behn's *The Widow Ranter* above, projecting the Cannibal King onto "primitive" cultures is an attempt to mediate the fear of falling back into uncivilized brutal chaos. As Inkle notes after he has been rescued and resettled among English planters on Barbados, "In the end, I gave up defending the Caribs against such beliefs. My people needed to think evil of those in circumstances different to theirs" (104). *Inkle and Yarico* is doing much more, however, than invoking Europe's well-explored obsession with cannibalism and the fiercely contested notion that indigenous people practiced it. Acting as Madame Mediator between Tropicopolitan populations and the 20<sup>th</sup> century constructs of empire they struggle against, Beryl Gilroy takes up cannibalism in *Inkle and Yarico* at its patriarchal foundation. She admits to cannibalism in indigenous and African cultures by explaining its role and undemonizing it

without damning, condoning, or apologizing for it. In this way, Beryl Gilroy decouples cannibalism from nationalist efforts to accuse, shame, retaliate against or dehumanize other cultures in the name of national pride.

*Inkle and Yarico* takes up sexist patriarchal structure underpinning cannibalism and its obsessions when Beryl Gilroy chooses Inkle for her narrator rather than Yarico. 1990's anti-racist and post-colonial writers would have chosen tropicopolitan subaltern Chief Tomo to speak back to empire. In the 1990's after second wave feminism crested, choosing Alice to provide a woman's narrative point of view was a commonplace feminist gesture in literature. Choosing Yarico as narrator would have covered the tropicopolitans, post-colonial and feminist objectives. Nevertheless, Beryl Gilroy's choice of Inkle as narrator is tropicopolitans, post-colonial, and feminist because cultural phallusies are particularly obvious when expressed by an unreliable narrator who sincerely and completely believes them.

Unrelenting loyalty to his race through the ruse of nation and empire is the central value of young Inkle's colonizer life. His loyalty foregrounds what Aravamudan calls tropicopolitan nationalization: when a people claims nation status independent of a colonizing empire, even if that means forming a new nation where none existed before, like Liberia, Sierra Leone or modern Israel. But the concept of nation is tied to geographical location, boundaries, and concepts of property and ownership, all of which requires internationally acknowledged and maintained political structures. Since *Inkle and Yarico* does not call for independent nation status for a particular colony, the novel doesn't seem to engage

in this aspect of Aravamudan's tropicopolitan construct. As the only character in *Inkle and Yarico* authorized to engage in tropicopolitan nationalization, Chief Tomo, the novel's Cannibal King, does not see himself as protecting his territory from white men or from other indigenous groups on the island, as his historical colleagues did in fact see themselves. Nor does he imagine himself struggling against a colonial power since none has, as yet, successfully invaded his island. Tomo does foretell European take over after his own death, but for him the concept of political action and conflict is simple invasion "for our daily food," followed by cannibalistic celebration (62). The novel seems to declare that nationalizing in response to Inkle's arrival or as an African colonizer among St. Vincent's natives was farthest from Tomo's mind and was actually not in the best interest of Carib culture.

Tomo's concept of socio-political relations in the 1780's is certainly ironic in *Inkle and Yarico*. He is represented as having limited encounter experiences with Europeans, all of which ended on St. Vincent with clubbing them to death and consuming their delectable blue eyes. However, the historical reality of Tomo's life from 1770 to 1790 was quite different. The nationalization Aravamudan describes was already underway in St. Vincent, which was the last of the Caribbean islands to fall to European colonization. Peter Hulme reports that, in this period, Black Caribs were subjected to a brutal British Campaign to colonize the island for sugar plantations: "Sir John Fortescue...calls what happened in the West Indies in the 1790's the 'darkest most forbidding tract' in the whole of that history" (184). St. Vincent fiercely resisted European invasion until

1763, the end of The Seven Years War, "when the island became – as far as the British were concerned – British" (Hulme "Black" 184). Far from forest-bound cultural innocents, the Black Caribs Hulme describes had "an astute sense of what was at stake" in allowing British colonization to advance (Hulme "Black" 184). In this way, their alliance with French colonizers was a nationalizing effort to prevent colonization by the more brutal British.

Hulme also reports that St. Vincent's Caribs operated perfectly happily within the monetary economy of the Caribbean. Paraphrasing Moreau de Jonnès, Hulme writes that:

Carib pirogues were constantly on the move between the mouth of the Orinoco and the Islands of the Bahamas, which meant they were well-informed about everything that was happening in the Caribbean. They were, he says, Victor Hugue's eyes and ears, the intelligence force for revolutionary insurgence. He also has much to say about the prominent role that women played in the Carib councils and in the actual fighting, of which there is no hint in the British sources. (189)

St. Vincent's Caribs were organized, settled, prosperous, astute, successfully defensive of both property and culture, and clever at cross-cultural politics and economics. They were evolving along side the European invaders. And that was the problem – not their primitiveness but their sophistication. The British needed to decrease their Carib power, which meant reducing the Carib population.

As Hulme explains, the British reduced the racial and social complex on St. Vincent to two major categories, Yellow Caribs and Black Caribs, in order to associate the "black" Caribs with African savagery and justify reducing the number of Carib families requiring, as British humanitarian and Christian missionaries loudly insisted, the protection of the British government. Imposing

the one drop rule, "the British estimated around 5,000 Black Caribs and a very small number of Yellow Caribs; Moreau's numbers are 1,500 Black Caribs and in excess of 6,000 Yellow Caribs" (Hulme "Black" 189). The British then spoke of the Black Caribs as African invaders – and themselves as "settlers" – and of Yellow Caribs as victims whose women the Black Caribs abducted and raped. This trope justified massacre and deportation of the majority of St. Vincent Caribs. After the final loss of St. Vincent to Britain, French agent Moreau found "massacred village[s] – men, women, children, old people – all hacked to death and their houses burned" (Hulme "Black" 193). One hundred and two of the surviving Caribs were allowed back on St. Vincent – "on account of their lighter skin color despite the fact they had fought against the British" (Hulme "Black" 193). The rest were forcibly transported to the "mosquito coast" near Guatemala's Rio Dulce where they became the Garifuna people.<sup>206</sup>

So, Beryl Gilroy places Inkle on St. Vincent just before this transportation, and she elides Tomo's likely intercourse with the Caribbean at large and with French-aided revolutionary insurgency. This elision positions Tomo to propose an alternative to the patriarchal notion of nation. Although Tomo is seen by British imperial history as a Cannibal King and he is in fact by his own admission a practicing cannibal, he is not a king. He is a chief among other chiefs. He does not consider nation the way European invaders do. Neither does he consider the concept of empire. When asked by Inkle "Who is bigger in all that is good? The Carib who seizes people or the white man who also seizes people?" Tomo's

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<sup>206</sup> According to Garinet, a website dedicated to modern descendants of the Garifuna, "On April 12, 1797, approximately 5,000 Garifuna men, women, and children were put ashore on the coast of Trujillo."

response is simple: "We raid for our daily food. We lay no whips upon our people. We don't brand them, nor do we torture them. Death is noble when it comes in war. Your people took my pride away [during his middle passage]. They made a beast of me" (62). Since there is so much historical evidence indicating that almost all historical cultures are patriarchal and almost all cultures feature some form of "power-over" actions against an "other," Tomo's pronouncement must be taken in two ways. First, that he is as oblivious to his culture's patriarchal phallusies as Inkle is to Britain's. But second, and more interestingly, that Tomo has accessed some combination of structures of feeling that lets him make a quantum leap into an imagined utopian space where dignity for all humans (at least the males) is a primary value, a place where profit, property and possession – if they continue to exist – do not justify genocide. Tomo points off screen to a cultural space beyond nation, a cultural effect that even transcends post-colonial nationalization. Rather than conquering Carib culture, he and his fellow West African captives joined Carib culture, assimilated, became prominent based on local standards of merit. They conquered by cultural assimilation.

The funny thing about Beryl Gilroy's cannibal king – I'm falling off my chair laughing here with Beryl Gilroy and Maryse Condé – is that Tomo is a cannibal king who speaks French, like Oroonoko, and who, like Oroonoko, learned French from a tutor at court in Africa. While Tomo's tutor is unnamed, Oroonoko's was "the French governor he had from his childhood...who was banish'd out of his own Country for some Heretical Notions he held" (Behn *Oroonoko* Bedford 61-2). Like Oroonoko, Tomo is sent on a royal mission: "I

was sent by my king, the ruler, the King of Dahomey, Emperor of Popo” to accompany a captured homesick white man back to his own king’s court (33). But once Tomo enters the ship for the journey to Europe, “the white man put me among the slaves and treated me like a slave” (34). Like Oroonoko, Tomo is not a subaltern in his original African culture, nor would he have been one if he had made it to Europe in his role as his king’s ambassador. Oroonoko’s ship captain and Tomo’s European, on the other hand, both have state-sanctioned authority to betray, enslave and dehumanize Africans, which is far more immoral than Tomo’s post-battle cannibalism. Positioning Tomo as an educated high-ranking man both in Dahomey and Carib culture – as he would have been in contemporary European culture – demonstrates that Europeans have seen the cannibal king and he is us.

The discourse describing a capitalist imperialism as cannibalism is long and rich. Carol Houlihan Flynn's exploration of this discourse in *The Body in Swift and Defoe* is particularly useful here in its focus on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century materials Gilroy read as she prepared to write *Inkle and Yarico*. In her chapter "Consumptive Fictions: Cannibalism in Defoe and Swift," Flynn notes Michel Eyquem Montaigne's "morally neutral model" of cannibalism when he claims "there is more barbarisme in eating men alive, then to feed upon them being dead" (150-1). Contextualizing Swift and Defoe's work with references to writers such as Montaigne (1533-92), Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), and Joseph Addison (1672-1719) as well as more ordinary denizens of the late Enlightenment Era like Lord Orrery (aka John Boyle, 1707-62, Swift's biographer), Joseph Banks (1743-

1820, author of *The Endeavor Journal... 1768-71*) and Lord Clonmell (John Scott, 1739-98, Chief Justice in Ireland), Flynn argues that Defoe and Swift use the trope of capitalism as cannibalism to inform readers of the dear cost of "civilization." Flynn writes "Both Swift and Defoe insist in their explorations of physical economy that the cost of life may in fact be so dear that to survive we may find ourselves consuming each other" (149).

Capitalist economies as deployed historically by several European-based empires are aptly analyzed on this cannibalistic model. As Marx shows, capitalism cannibalizes laborers by alienating them from their own labor economically, socially, physically and emotionally, breaking the laborer's bonds with what they produce, the people they know, and their own health and well being. Capitalism transfers the value of those bonds from the laborers to elite Capitalists in return for a subsistence living – a living that consumes every moment, calorie and emotion. However, the cannibalistic model of capitalism does not account for all aspects of capitalism any more than historical atrocities committed in the name of religion account for all aspects of religion. Williams's model of cultural evolution suggests that the European capitalist economic system is also an efficient system of exchange that might not be exploitative in a just and equitable society. In other words, capitalism is not the problem. Capitalism is a tool, perhaps particularly effective at manifesting and intensifying exploitation. Sexist and racist exploitation occurs when capitalist cultures are ruled by an imperial patriarchal hegemony controlled by masculinists intent on justifying the empire to itself. A non-sexist culture might use capitalism differently. The mass

projection of a culture's fear of transition and fear of failing to complete transition is not produced by capitalism nor does it produce capitalism, but it certainly has used capitalism to consume its enemies.

Evolving European capitalist cultures created a complicated system of exploitation nearly impossible for its people to acknowledge while also maintaining sanity sufficient to lead a civilized life. For example, as early 18<sup>th</sup> century England barreled toward its 19<sup>th</sup> century Imperial destiny, Joseph Addison "crow[ed] that 'the Muff and the Fan come together from the different Ends of the Earth,' that the 'Brocade Petticoat rises out of the Mines of *Peru* and the Diamond Necklace out of the Bowels of *Indostan*,' but Swift saw more clearly that the muffs and fans came from rents 'squeezed out of [the] very Blood and Vitals' not only of Indostan, but of Ireland and the Irish natives" (Flynn 161). People like Addison, and the Lords Orrery and Clonmell mightily resisted acknowledging the high cost of their civilized lives – as Montesquieu noted "for one man to live elegantly, a hundred must labor ceaselessly" (Flynn 161). However, as Flynn argues, Defoe and especially Swift's energetic efforts to expose the costs of empire, were complicated by their need to protect their own place in the empire and their culturally-conditioned resentment of the laboring classes. A European reader/observer/citizen – a Madame Mediator, in other words – experiences an excruciating tension between compassionate outrage against exploitation's violence and self-protective resentment against laboring classes that make themselves available for exploitation, that even exist, and that are in fact required for the existence of the elite classes. While Swift argues with "energetic

exasperation" against "cannibalistic" exploitation of the poor, he "views the lower classes as a threat to the commonwealth" that depends on them. Flynn notes that "Swift's own record of his masterly skirmishes with [his servant] Patrick is hilarious and disturbing" as it reveals the "extent of [Swift's] notorious irritation" – the extent of his personal struggle with this tension. Swift seeks to "topple the gentry out of their soft-cushioned chairs" while at the same time retaining his own place in such a chair from which he obtains both the necessary authority and the leisure to mount such a quest (Flynn 167). Although Beryl Gilroy's invocation of the discourse of capitalism as cannibalism is less complicated by this internalized resistance, nevertheless, as she portrays Carib culture, she must still maintain the delicate balance Swift tried to strike. Paraphrasing Flynn's summation of Swift's task, Beryl Gilroy must be able to overcome not only her reader's blindness to capitalist colonial cannibalistic exploitation of the Cannibal King – i.e. of tropicopolitan populations in the Caribbean – but also her reader's impulse to hurl the Cannibal King into the shark-infested Caribbean Sea.

That is why Tomo, as Beryl Gilroy paints him, operates outside of this economic system all together, the better to point out its failings. He is uninterested in nation and profit. His economy is not pre-currency; it transcends currency, seeing all elements of his environment as items of trade. His power comes not from ownership, profit and conquest but from his social connections, from his merit, from his personal prowess as a warrior, procreator, provider and planner. However, Tomo, who fits Aravamudan's description of a tropicopolitan to a T, is no better than Inkle's racist sexist capitalist imperialist because, even though he

transcends patriarchy's concept of nation, he doesn't transcend patriarchy. Unlike his actual contemporaries on St. Vincent, Tomo remains oblivious to new insights his encounter with Inkle could inspire. He tells Inkle, that he and his fellow Africans marooned on St. Vincent "admired a way of life so close to our own...and since that time we have put to death all men who come here, who threaten our way of life. You Inkle are the only one whose life we have not ended with our faithful clubs" (34). Even here, when he comes closest to considering all three cultures in one exchange – Dahomean, Carib and European – he worries not about nation and property but about a "way of life," not about what Inkle initiates within his community, but about Inkle's assimilation – Inkle's acceptance of the Carib way of life. No matter which culture Tomo lives in, power is power. He easily moves into the Carib power hierarchy because both of Dahomean and Carib hierarchies are patriarchal.

Inkle, on the other hand, member of a patriarchal empire, converts Tomo's tears of homesickness to a nationalizing effort: "I saw tears in his eyes and I knew that he carried a great need inside him – the need for his own country" (34). Through the sexist imperative of ownership and power-over, Inkle's culture has expanded patriarchy to nation and then to empire. Inkle's observations of Carib culture expose the operation of patriarchy underneath nation and empire as well as underneath cannibalism. If Inkle completes Tomo's nationalizing move, he does not complete the ecumenizing cross-cultural cognitive move himself, despite very compelling motivations and evidence. Even at twenty, Inkle has a more worldly education than Tomo and more recent experience of the workings of Empire from

observing his father and brother in "the mercantile world, importing and retailing artifacts and antiquities to discerning as well as gullible customers" (7). He connects men's business and war negotiations on both St. Vincent and Barbados to what he saw when his father "had often taken me to the 'House of Lords,' a club which met each week at the Three Herrings, an ale house in Chancery Lane" (10). Inkle knows more than Tomo about capitalist economies, so he should have been able to make insightful comparisons at least on that level, as Hulme's Moreau does.

Moreover, Inkle's experience as a white man othered in a tropicopolitan-dominated culture should have made the ecumenizing move almost impossible to avoid, but Inkle's cultural lens proves too cloudy. If Tomo was able to slide into Carib society because it was so like his own, Inkle found Carib society radically different from his own. Inkle could not avoid comparisons. Some he made deliberately and others with hilariously unintentional irony. Faced with Tomo the actual cannibal king, Inkle was first compelled to see around his cultural assumptions about the "cannibal" tribe and then to see himself as an analogue for the cannibal king, as Beryl Gilroy emphasizes with their similar names: Tommy and Tomo. Tommy describes Chief Tomo this way when he first encounters him: "There were a number of Africans among [the Caribs crowding around the captive Inkle], one obviously powerful and feared by the assemblage. He alone wore a feathered headdress, a necklace of animal's teeth and a piece of puma hide over his shoulders" (22). Combined with "the box-like shape of their skulls" and the "bamboo pegs through their noses," Inkle picks out attributes of jungle

savages that are so stereotypical that the easy conflation of Carib and African slips right by until, with Inkle, readers (maybe not just white readers) are “amazed at the words [he] heard [from Tomo] which, although heavily accented, were in the French tongue” (23). Inkle can’t see Tomo as human until Tomo manifests a European trait.

Over time, Tom and Tomo share the experience of astonishment at their first contact with each others’ racial group. Tomo explains “he had seen...Toobab or white men on the coast of Africa” and remarks sardonically, “they say you are like a worm, a grub that lives in the belly of the earth” (24). Later, when Tom and Tomo establish a real friendship, Tomo describes reactions of the Dahomey court that exactly parallel those of Europeans to the capture and parading of exotic people in their courts. “The king’s wives shook with fear...what is this thing? Is it a man? It eats like a man but it is not a man! ...the white man became a favorite and told wonderful stories of the country from which he had come” (33) This exchange occurs early in Tomo’s and Tom’s relationship when Inkle recognizes in Tomo a shared “yearning for his homeland far across the mysterious seas. I understood the chief’s yearnings” (33). In recognizing Tomo’s yearnings, Inkle virtualizes the despot: he turns the feared fantastic fetish of the Cannibal King into a fully rounded figure with whom the reader can relate through Inkle. Inkle explains that “Chief Tomo was an educated man. When I spoke to him about enlightened matters, I forgot his savagery, and, had it not been for the colour of his skin, I would have admitted that the quality of his wisdom was not unlike my

father's" (40). It's not hard to imagine Inkle as Hulmes's Moreau, a young idealistic man ready to see and abet Tomo's desire to nationalize St. Vincent.

By eliding Tomo's more likely nationalizing efforts, Beryl Gilroy transcends Aravamudan's patriarchally limited concept of nation and nationalizing. She points explicitly to the brutalities Tomo elides – no doubt laughing all the while at the fact that all patriarchal cultures elevate themselves on the phallus that society must be hierarchical and that brutality against men and women is natural. For example, twice in the Carib's campaign to capture women to aid their own overworked women, Tomo's men abandon groups of women and children from other tribes because no men accompany them. The women are desperate to be taken as slaves into a prosperous community, but Tomo's tribe leaves them to starve. As Tomo puts it, "women must be fought for and won with dried blood on the club and the head of the enemy for a trophy" (*Inkle and Yarico* 63). In another instance, Yarico tells Inkle of the one time before he came when she had seen white men. "They came to our village and while the people fought them, my father buried their boat in the water. They started running and we caught them and killed them. My father took out their eyes. They were blue so we ate them" (75). If Tomo's Caribs do not make beasts of other men, they do make food of other men and beasts of their women to protect their way of life.

Lest we miss the sexist implications of the novel's argument in this moment, Yarico's casual description of her community's cannibalism invokes Montaigne's morally neutral view, which is emphasized when Inkle follows up with a most startling confession. He writes "I was disgusted by her story, but

many tribes ate parts of their enemies," for example the "tribe" of Orange that assassinated and cannibalized the de Wit brothers in Holland (75). Then Inkle admits, "I could have eaten any part of Zeze just to have her with me" (75-6). In a flash of raw grief, he momentarily grasps a context in which cannibalism is not only imaginable but profoundly meaningful to him as a sacred act of love – or, from a feminist standpoint, as a sexist act of ultimate patriarchal possession. However, Inkle makes no cognitive leaps from this insight. Indeed, Beryl Gilroy determined that Inkle would be unable to make sense of the comparisons he observes. She writes in her essay about the novel, "he maintains his belief in the myth of blood and the negative emotions associated with blackness" (*Leaves* 83). To emphasize Inkle's lack of complete ecumenical understanding, Beryl Gilroy makes his next sentence an astonishing *non sequitor*: "We gathered shells and edible seaweed and then went home again" (76). But the reader can complete Inkle's ecumenization of patriarchal brutality: as men – if we were lucky enough to be men – it would surely be preferable to die quickly under the bloody club and be cannibalized, which after all is a gesture honoring the enemy's now insensate body as worthy of possession through literal consumption, than to be reduced within the dominant culture to the status and treatment worse than that of a dumb beast – worse than "a grub that lives in the belly of the earth" – i.e. like a woman (24). Virulent sexism underpins Carib and capitalist cannibalism.

Of course, cannibalism cannot be reduced to a sexist gesture, nor does *Inkle and Yarico* suggest that. In Beryl Gilroy's text, Chief Tomo, as Yarico's story illustrates, is explicitly a cannibal. Tomo's – and the novel's – first comment

on cannibalism is not a denial, "Those who say we [Black Caribs and indigenous Caribs] eat men do not regard us as people, but as monkeys and dogs. We are good people, taking only what we need from the forest and listening to its voices" (34). The taking of heads is subsequently mentioned several times when the prospect of encountering people from other tribes or from the sea arises, but cannibalism itself is not mentioned again until after all the accounts of battles and hunts are given, after the birth of Waiyo, the advent of Zeze and both their deaths, and the death of Paiuda the head priest, 40 pages later, nearly at the end of the Carib half of the novel. Paku, the arrowmaker's son, "added his flavoursome bit: 'We took no prisoners...we clubbed them to death and drank blood to give us strength'" (76). Beryl Gilroy is thus suggesting that cannibal practices existed among Caribs, but, like any other cultural element, cannibalism did not define a whole culture. Cannibalism was simply one of many elements of a rationally constructed patriarchal society.

However, the troubling question of the cannibalism of the cannibal king should not be naively elided by ecumenical relativism. Indigenous Americans did not choose cannibalism as a gustatory practice, despite the "evidence" engraved and published by Maria Sibylla Merian's de Bry relatives. An ecumenical reading of cannibalism with analogous European practices reveals that in both cases leaders act as if they have no control over the law's endless hunger for blood and the supposed demands of the people and their gods. Collis claims, "It was a nightmare, but mankind had no choice" (52). *Inkle and Yarico* asserts that cannibalism is a nightmarish consequence of obsessive patriarchal power which

those men in control can choose to stop as easily as cockpit bosses stop a battle royal.

**Women and the African Yard: Levantinization Plus**

***Levantinization***

In 1498, during his third voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus recorded the following observation:

I have found such great irregularities that I have come to the following conclusions concerning the world; that it is not round as they [Ptolemy and others] describe it, but the shape of a pear, which is round everywhere except at the stalk, where it juts out a long way; or that it is like a round ball, on part of which is something like a woman's nipple. (218)<sup>207</sup>

Columbus's feminizing structure of feeling is one of many widely disseminated feminizations of conquered lands. Populated by the darkest complected populations, structures of feeling about Africa and the Americas – especially the fabulous El Dorado – are epitomized by the most dangerous phallus of all: the African Yard or the enlarged female phallus. The African yard is invoked in Beryl Gilroy's *Inkle and Yarico* by her chosen genre: 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century travel journals and "scientific" inquiries. The African yard is both analogous to and a warning against the Oriental seraglio as a tool of female control. If the Cannibal King represents western culture's fear of "regression" from civilization to savagery, the African yard represents patriarchy's fear of women living free of sexism. The trope of the African yard is meant to convince western European women that their sexist subjugation is normal and protective, and that any other

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<sup>207</sup> See Christopher Columbus, *The Four Voyages*, "Narrative of the Third Voyage."

form of female behavior deserves brutal suppression as monstrosity. As Madame Mediator, Beryl Gilroy takes on this trope in *Inkle and Yarico*, exposing the African yard as not exclusively African, and as a tool for expanding patriarchal power.

The African yard appears very early in the European Age of discovery. Not long after 15<sup>th</sup> century explorers took to the sea, Columbus made a shocking discovery in a previously unknown region much closer to home. As Thomas Lacqueur explains in *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*:

In 1559, for example, Columbus – not Christopher but Renaldus – claims to have discovered the clitoris. He tells his ‘most gentle reader’ that this is ‘preeminently the seat of woman’s delight.’ Like a penis, ‘if you touch it, you will find it rendered a little harder and oblong to such a degree that it shows itself as a sort of male member.’ Conquistador in an unknown land. Columbus stakes his claim: ‘Since no one has discerned these projections and their workings, if it is permissible to give names to things discovered by me, it should be called the love or sweetness of Venus.’ Like Adam, he felt himself entitled to name what he found in nature: the female penis. (64)

Renaldus Columbus’s discovery was probably prompted by reports in 1488 from Portuguese sailors under Bartolomeu Dias who first made it to Africa’s southern tip, anchoring at Mossel Bay where they saw residents of that region for the first time (Welsh). Since patriarchy in Italy would not discover the clitoris for another seventy years, it’s no wonder European explorers were so alarmed by the large genitals on women, mostly naked in tropical African regions, as ships sailed by looking for India:

their most interesting peculiarities, which all travellers noted with excited curiosity, were that not only were Khoikhoi and San possessed of remarkably protruding buttocks, but the female

genitalia were particularly interesting. ...The women 'were shame-faced at first; but at our returne homewards they would lift up their Rat-skinnes and shew their privities'. Hottentot anatomy continued to captivate travellers; examining the extraordinary elongated labia of Khoi-San women - a small fee payable in tobacco was exacted – became a recognized diversion, but the modest Francis Galton, two and a half centuries after Copland, had resort to measuring Khoikhoi ladies with a sextant. (Welsh)

Lacqueur's humorous rendition of this history certainly gives new meaning to the age of discovery, or perhaps uncovering. The historical juxtaposition of the "discovery" of the perfectly obvious features of the female body with the "discovery" of already populated lands in Africa and the New World illustrates the pervasiveness of the masculinist imperial mindset in the efforts of empire: to see is to discover, to touch is to own.

Emma Donoghue, writing about "Female Hermaphrodites," explores the way in which abnormalities of female genitalia were used to express "social fears of female sexuality" (27).<sup>208</sup> Donoghue writes:

A tribade was often described as having a 'female member' (imagined as either a prolapsed vagina or an enlarged clitoris) which allowed her to have penetrative intercourse with other women. This 'member' was seen as a phallic or male organ, making her double sexed, or at least visually indistinguishable from the truly double-sexed. (4)

The "problem" of an enlarged clitoris in a female signified three things: a) that heterosexual intercourse would be difficult *for the male*; b) that the female was too lusty, either because she had a large phallus or because too much sex caused her phallus to enlarge; and c) that she was a lesbian or hermaphrodite trying to displace a male in copulation. Heterosexist as well as sexist, these 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Also see Valerie Traub, "The Psychomorphology of the Clitoris; or the Re-emergence of the Tribade in English Culture."

century critiques conflated lesbianism, tribadism and hermaphroditism with the enlarged female yard in order to make them all seem like rare pathologies within western European culture and thus easily and justifiably controlled. As Donoghue notes:

What matters most about the concept of lesbians as hermaphrodites is not its accuracy, but its function: this theory served the interests of those who wanted to frighten women into heterosexual passivity. By cutting off lesbians from their own femaleness, writers could reduce them to exceptional (and therefore harmless) freaks of nature. (28)

However, the “rare freak” trope was useless to an empire encountering a culture where “freak” is normal. When the encountered culture “owns” something – gold for example – to which empire needs to justify its entitlement, demonizing “rare” non-conforming females within the empire becomes mass racist demonizing of an entire people. Fortuitously, when empire went to market, mass sexist racism also drove its own females deeper into heterosexual passivity and encouraged them to brutalize men and women of color to demonstrate their purity and preserve their protected status. Donoghue writes:

British writers in general admit to the existence of only the occasional female hermaphrodite in their own ‘civilised’ nation, while claiming that vast numbers are found in Asia and Africa. As Sharp puts it, ‘in the Indies and Egypt they are frequent, but I never heard of but one in this country. ...Some Sea-men [sic] say that they have seen Negro Women go stark naked, and these wings hanging out.’ Nakedness is used here to heighten the voyeuristic appeal, to make the black woman into a living illustration of abnormality. (35-6)

If queer European females were rare freaks, then a conquered culture where women with monstrous yards were normal required state-sponsored measures of brutal mass control.

For European patriarchy, then, the African Yard signified the worst fear: re-engulfment by uncivilized dark people with determined to literally consume their fragile patriarchal civilization, a vagina dentate of a very different kind of “heart of darkness.” No wonder empire was (is) so brutal. No wonder European patriarchs were so eager to confine such possibilities to the exotic edges of their cultural imaginations. European racism, then, is the feminizing of bodies of color on the model of sexism, making the connection between the cannibal king, the vagina dentate and the African yard or the “African” enlarged female genitals a thick mass of structures of feeling floating in the Atlantic cockpit. The African yard reinforces patriarchal European displacement onto female bodies of color the sexuality denied to European women. These racialized and sexualized structures of feeling justify the efforts of European patriarchy to impose civility on cultures they deem barbaric. Meanwhile at home, delicate, pure, asexual European women must be confined to cultural seraglios for their protection – or cast out to starve when they don’t conform, like the molls Bessie and Stella on the smuggling ship that rescues Inkle. Voluptuous sexually carnivorous women of color like Awana, the smuggler captain's favorite moll or Yarico of the Back Caribs or Delvina the abducted Irish girl are said to love brutal rape, expect betrayal, and be controlled only by violent slavery. Similarly, barbarous fierce and rapacious men of color, possessing the male African yard, must be violently prevented from attacking and

corrupting delicate pure asexual European women, and can only be controlled by violent slavery.

For Aravamudan, levantinizing means engaging head on a trope imposed on the tropicopolitans' culture by imperial western European cultural forces. An example could be the trope of seraglio in which women are confined at the sexual whim of the Oriental despot. We can, following Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism, point to the projection by one culture of its most taboo practices onto an exotic culture it seeks to subjugate in order to justify, by favorable comparison, its own culture's actions. Western Europeans might force heterosexual marriage onto its young women, but at least it doesn't crowd them into seraglios where they are forced to serve a sexually perverse male tyrant. So, we Europeans a) don't have to change how we treat our women and b) are justified in invading and colonizing any exotic culture that features females monstrous enough to imprison. Levantinization undoes this Orientalist projection. For example, *A Sister to Scheherazade* by Assia Djebar describes women's lives in 1980's Algiers. A Parisian affair is narrated in multi-vocal experiences of the seraglio, the harem, and the hamman to unlink Orientalism from the lived experience of Oriental women. Djebar writes:

*Hamman*, the only temporary reprieve from the harem... The Turkish bath offers a secret consolation to sequestered woman (such as organ music offered in former times to forced religious recluses). This surrogate maternal cocoon providing an escape from the hot-house of clostration... (152 her ellipsis and emphasis).

Yet, if the confinement of women in Muslim cultures is difficult, it is not without its power. Djebar also writes of:

...the shabby veil of unbleached wool which had been worn by Kenza. When she accompanied her mother to work, carrying buckets and saucepans hidden under its folds!...anyone wearing this veil could be taken for an old woman or a peasant. Especially when she wore slippers and thick socks on her feet. (18).

Djebar's work in this novel levantinizes because it counters fantasies of the seraglio with lived experience of particular women in a particular Muslim location. It also connects that particular experience to all women: "I fear lest we all find ourselves in chains again, in 'this West in the Orient', this corner of the earth where day dawned so slowly for us that twilight is already closing in around us everywhere" (160). Even the western women's modern liberation is, in Djebar's view, too little and too fragile. "Levantinization," as Aravamudan explains, "makes visible the dynamic interaction between orientalist and anti-orientalist figuration," between projected hegemonic figures of the Other (ie tropes and stereotypes) and the lived experience of the Other (Aravamudan 160).

At first it seems as if, again, Beryl Gilroy is not levantinizing, since, unlike Djebar, she does not choose Yarico, her female tropicopolitan, as narrator, but instead Inkle, the male colonizer. She allows him to project all over her text his colonizer views of the "other" he encounters on St. Vincent. If she was levantinizing properly, she would compare the contrasting or oppositional cultural ground of European culture against which her own (or Yarico's) culture manifests itself more distinctly, exposing Carib culture's structure for more precise analysis. Instead Beryl Gilroy deploys what Laura Brown calls radical contemporaneity<sup>209</sup> as she surrounds Inkle's Euro-centered narration with evidence from three other

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<sup>209</sup> See discussion in Chapter 3 above.

cultures. This strategy exposes his misreadings while also illustrating the potential for ecumenical engagement as ironies are revealed by characters marginalized by patriarchy: the female, the queer and the child. In doing so, she levantinizes the trope of the African Yard.

### *Inkle's Women Levantinize*

In Beryl Gilroy's hands, the African yard as portrayed by Yarico is more proactive, more autonomous, more sexually empowered than both her Carib sisters and the European women Inkle abandons her for. Yet, in a novel titled *Inkle and Yarico*, where Inkle is the narrator, Yarico is largely absent. She does not appear until Inkle is shipwrecked and ensconced in her cave that he "discovered." As soon as she arrives on Barbados with Inkle, she is marched off stage in chains. Taking Inkle's narrative at face value, Yarico's role is that of a typical female in a typical text written by a patriarchal male: nearly silent, beloved and feared, productive and destructive, and ultimately unreadable, a complete Spivakian subaltern. But Inkle is an unreliable imperial male narrator representing the incorporated hegemonic views of a capitalist sexist colonial empire and Yarico is the novel's levantinizing trope, bearer of the African Yard covered by a tiny beaded apron. If Yarico is nearly silent in Inkle's journal, she speaks very loudly in the novel by levantinizing with the women around her. Reading Yarico in Inkle's journal— i.e. in the context of empire – requires decentering Inkle and centering Yarico as she floats in and out of the story's surface.

The novel is carefully segmented by location, each one featuring three types of woman in Inkle's Atlanticist life: mother, wife and beloved. These three female tropes, common in English literature, certainly levantinize patriarchal empire in two opposing cultures: Carib and English. However, levantinizing women in *Inkle and Yarico* reveal a third culture to complicate Aravamudan's dichotomy: Barbadian culture, as distinct from both English and Carib culture. Undoubtedly influenced by her son's (Paul Gilroy) work in *The Black Atlantic* published fifteen years earlier, Beryl Gilroy's novel complicates levantinization even further with a fourth cultural location: the Atlantic ocean. Like a sailor with a woman in every port, Inkle has one of each kind of woman – mother, wife, beloved – in each of these four locations.

***Mother: Levantinized Gender***

Inkle has a mother or mother substitute in each of the novel's locations. About his own English mother, he says decidedly little about and never names her. Pointing proudly to being "greatly petted by my mother," the longest passage about his mother is a narcissistic account of her feelings for him:

I reflect though that never once did any of those elderly women, cleaning, smoking or drying fish, or carrying heavy loads that converted them into cart horses, remind me of my dear, kind mother. I imagined *her*, silent and suffering, working away at her embroidery, and praying for my soul. Poor mother! If only I could have written to her to enquire of her health and her well-being. She had perhaps grown tired of waiting for me to return. But who could remonstrate with her? (40 his emphasis)

The lives native women lead, which Inkle cannot imagine for his mother, are also led by the majority of women in England, but he considers his mother's life of embroidery, prayer, and doting on him to be the norm. He tersely mentions her four more times: perhaps being dead (87); being similar to Lady Sybil (97); actually being dead (99); and in his final reference to her 48 pages from the end of the 160 page book, he remarks to Lady Sybil "Mama surely is [in heaven]. She was an angel to her family and her friends" (102). A perfect woman of empire, this ostensibly most important of women appears less often in Inkle's account than some of the unnamed women of color on St. Vincent and Barbados.

Of Cocoro, Yarico's mother and Inkle's mother figure on St. Vincent, less is said than of Inkle's mother, and yet what IS said is far more telling. Cocoro never appears "on the scene," yet she is named and her back story is told by both Yarico and Tomo. An Arawak, Cocoro was taken in battle by Tomo's Carib group and impregnated by Tomo that night with Yarico then "returned to her people because the women in this tribe would not work after Chief Tomo had captured her" (34). Even though Carib custom was to give girl children to their mothers and boy children to their fathers to raise, Cocoro gave Yarico, the product of rape, to Tomo, her rapist. Nevertheless, Yarico planned to give any daughter she bore to Cocoro, following Carib custom. Inkle speaks of Cocoro as a font of knowledge and support whom he wishes to visit (41) and whom Yarico "asks to be put ashore several times" to visit on her way off island with Inkle (85). In this way, the novel asserts the active role of indigenous mothers in Carib families. They create powerful connections among themselves and with their daughters.

More than that, what Europeans would call Cocoro's "desertion" of the "family" created by Tomo's rape is respected by the Caribs as her right. Cocoro's story foreshadows the pragmatism that motivates Yarico's infanticide as she is sold into slavery. Through Cocoro's example, the novel emphasizes the imperative of diverse family structures. Cocoro's story levantinizes tribal family practices as rational, sophisticated and fluid.

On Barbados, Inkle claims Lady Sybil de Vere as his mother figure when he asserts modestly:

My good looks and comparative youth and my ordeal among the Caribs made me the recipient of motherly care from those women who had lost their sons to war or adventure in foreign parts. One of the women who could easily have been my mother, so alike was she in manner and nature, was Lady Sybil De Vere. Although imperious and self-assured, she readily placed youth at ease in her presence. (98)

Lady Sybil provides Inkle all the motherly advice required to (re)orient himself to Barbadian society ordering Inkle to "take your tea...and then tell me what you did on No Man's Land for seven long years" (98). Lady Sybil represents the lived experience of women living close to and complicit with the productive heart of Empire. Inkle pushes back against her European "hatred of the heathen," but eventually Lady Sybil mothers Inkle into a bona fide British colonist and slaveowner.

Inkle's most effective mother, almost submerged by the novel's land-based cultures, appears when the Atlantic Ocean is seen as a location. An Atlanticist group of women appears: Alice, Yarico and the smugglers' three prostitutes, Bessie, Stella and Awana, but the Atlantic mother figure is actually

John, the sailor who had been “set adrift for being dubbed a 'Jonah',<sup>210</sup> [and] had been enslaved on some islands off Sierra Leone" (79). John pragmatically advised Inkle that "A man of your quality, ...Oh no, you won't be able to keep her [Yarico] around you, oh no! ...In another island she might be kept as a mistress, but 'wife' is only kept for ladies from Europe" (87). If John's advice is harsh, his compassion for Yarico is clear. "He was kind and attentive to Yarico" as she gave birth, recovered, and was betrayed by Inkle in Barbados (79). After reluctantly celebrating the sale of Yarico with Dunbar and his club cronies, Inkle "came upon John" who "had already heard of Yarico's outrageous and defiant behavior" (97). But John was not outraged: "Poor child" he said, "Poor heathen child. Acted in a fit of devilry. A sailor I know has promised to let her swim if she can, when close to her island. I'm sure he'll let her go. She wouldn't last long in slavery." (97). The sailor is true to his word since Alice, by then on St. Lucia, "found a woman put on this island from a ship. She was in a sorry state, but we tended her and she returned to her island: No Man's Land" (127). Inkle gives more text to John than even his own father. And John gives Inkle more effective parenting than anyone else in the novel.

John's queering of motherhood emphasizes the marginalization of mothers in patriarchal cultures. John is in the masculine smuggling culture, but not of it.

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<sup>210</sup> As a reference to the prophet Jonah, to be "a Jonah" means to be a jinx, since the sailors on the ship Jonah sailed on to escape God's demand that Jonah prophesy in Ninevah reluctantly threw him overboard to escape the storm God sent to foil the escape. There seems to be no undertones of homosexuality in this label. David Hackett Fischer notes in *Champlain's Dream* that "In their [i.e. Champlain's] day and ours, sailors who survive these [disastrous sea] events come to believe in fortune as a driving force in their dangerous world. ...Modern naval officers trained to reason and empiricism...like to sail with lucky captains and dread a leader who is thought to be a jonah" (320). In religious terms, a Jonah also runs away from responsibility or his destiny or God's plan for him.

He insists "It's naught to do wi' me" since he is simply on his way "home to Ireland to be at the side of [his] sick father" (80). John's gender is also compromised by his relationship to "an Englishman, a slave trader [in Africa], who invited me to live with him on an island off the coast of Sierra Leone. ... I got on well with him until he fell in love with a domineering black woman who ... set out to torment me" (83). John's story inverts the "inversion" tales of Boston marriages in which the manly woman is supplanted by the feminine woman's marriage to a male. John is further queered even among queers by his effeminate nature. B. R. Burg explains that effeminacy like John's was condemned by buccaneers (pirates, smugglers, etc) because, as with modern homosexual men, "it is a threat to their own masculinity" and does not "hold universal attraction to men for whom women as sexual partners have little appeal" (169).<sup>211</sup> As a mother figure of alternative gender, John mediates for Inkle between the yo ho masculinity of the smugglers, sailors and planters of English and Barbadian society on the one hand and, on the other hand, Inkle's experience of emasculation among the Caribs just as the meanderings of the smuggler's ship among the islands before docking in Barbados mediates Inkle's (re)entry into Barbadian society.

***Beloved: the Virgin as Pedophilia***

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<sup>211</sup> Capt. Sparrow's flamboyant Restoration style in *Pirates of the Caribbean* is explained by Burg as a demonstration of his aristocratic background, and of a successful battle (Burg 168).

In a last gasp of his adventurous youth before proposing to Anne, Inkle neatly lines up his beloveds, the better to mourn them all:

"She was all sunshine and showers."

"Who was?" Dunbar asked.

"And dew beads and flowers," I continued.

"What are you talking about?"

"Yarico, Zeze, and Delvina. All of them," I said dully. (153)

Ever the unreliable narrator, Inkle leaves out Alice, the one beloved who connects them all. The similarities among the beloveds Alice, Yarico, Zeze and Delvina across racial and cultural differences are readily apparent: they are all teenagers and they are all, as Inkle sees it, devoted heart and soul to him.

Inkle was near thirty when he uttered the words above, but only twenty when his odyssey began. At their betrothal, Alice was probably around eighteen. Similarly, when twenty year old Inkle meets Yarico, he guesses that she was "no more than eighteen," making her his Carib Alice (18). She may have been much younger since Inkle was likely misled by her naked self-assurance and sexual experience. Alice and Yarico initiated Inkle's desire for young girls, but these relationships were not pedophilia because both women were near Inkle's age. Delvina O'Hara and the young Iaruma girl, Zeze, on the other hand, are both very young. Zeze "was no more than fourteen years of age with tiny fleshless knots of breasts peaking up from under her smooth brown skin" (67). And Delvina is "but a youth! A mere flower" Inkle likens to "Zeze, my youthful delight" (111). If twenty-year old Inkle had been pursuing 14 year old males, he would be seen as a pedophile – then and now – which very nicely levantinizes western European patriarchy's obsession with virginity.

Inkle is around twenty-five when he meets “fourteen year old” Zeze, who, not quite out of puberty, may be even younger. While not excluded as an object of rape at fourteen, Zeze would have been excluded at least one more year from eligibility as a sexually active wife in almost any culture. Inkle gushed with the pleasure he derives from her youth:

I took her, gently relishing her virtue, savouring her virginity, making her mine and offering this innocent faun my soul. For me she was no heathen Carib, who stained her skin with annatto dye. I imagined her, even among the wildest awnings of nature, white-skinned and golden-haired and, like Alice, dressed in the finest softest of silks. I held her close to me, a fragile and precious receptacle for the most rapturous moments of my life. (67)

He continues for two pages about his love for Zeze, putting into play all of the patriarchal tropes of the ideal woman possessed by the ideal protective European man. For him, her virginity and youth far outweigh her race and cultural differences, suggesting that white men will transcend race hatred for pleasure, but are committed heart and soul to misogyny. In fact, all the men on St. Vincent betray Zeze’s innocence. When she is murdered by Paiuda for being a witch, Tomo shrugs off his authority to punish Paiuda because he is busy grieving for his dead grandson. Inkle’s frantic grief over losing his pleasure when Zeze dies causes him to inadvertently kill his own son. Paiuda, the shaman murderer, retains his power to “protect” the tribe from witches like Zeze. Echoing Inquisition witch hunts, Caribs agree that any woman, no matter how young, with the “rare” power accorded the African yard must not survive even though her innocence and powerlessness make her an ideal primitive object for a European male.

Delvina O'Hara, on the other hand, the abducted girl with the pale Irish complexion, is everything a European woman should not be. To a modern reader, Delvina seems white, but to Inkle, Lady Sybil, and her friends, Anne and Olivia, Delvina is as profoundly black as Awana on the smuggler's ship. Inkle remarks that "I was unable to enjoy the countryside, sullied by decrepit Irish people tending their meagre gardens, more like wasteland than cultivated land, and jabbering in their native tongue one to the other" (135). The scene closely invokes Swift's report that "Dublin's public thoroughfares were 'crowded with living Spectres, Bodys of our Species with half Life, rambling about for Sustenance" (Flynn 163). Moreover, Delvina's back-story has all the elements of a slave narrative: like Oroonoko and Tomo, she was tricked into slavery in an Irish port when she jumped to the aid of a young mother herding her children aboard a ship bound for the Caribbean and got trapped on board when the ship suddenly set sail. The young mother died three days later and her minister-husband sold Delvina into sex slavery when they arrived on Barbados, just as Inkle sold Yarico. When Delvina stricken with gonorrhoea, Inkle sees her as "a small, helpless creature caught in the web of men's lust and intrigue," a rare astute insight on his part (134). He enjoys her body for sex and her childish mood for uplift, even as he encounters Alice again and continues to hold Anne off from her quest to marry him. For Inkle, Delvina is a slave, not a real woman. When Delvina becomes pregnant, Inkle manages to reject Dunbar's suggestion that he allow the slaves to murder her. But following his pattern of breaking vows of protection, he does just that.

Lest we conclude that Inkle's pedophilia with Zeze and Delvina is a rare freakish case, the novel provides him a pedophilic mentor, plantation-owner Tim Dunbar, a respected and celebrated rake on Barbados who schools Inkle and as he systematically betrays him. A committed practitioner of child rape, Dunbar claimed Delvina's virginity at Mary Bella Green's whore house just before she gave the girl to Inkle. Soon after Inkle pays Mary Bella for the privilege of moving Delvina permanently into his home, he returns after a day's work to find in Delvina "a hint of indifference" (114). After sex with Inkle, Delvina:

...remarked that Dunbar had not only called whilst I [Inkle] was out at my office, but that she had gone horseback riding with him. She chuckled softly to herself.

"I ran alongside his horse. It amused the slaves. Running against a horse is hard work. How do they do it?"

I was furious. I knew Dunbar as a lecherous card, and I imagined the leering looks he gave my love, his suggestive comments, his brash touches. (115)

Inkle "knew Dunbar [w]as a lecherous card" and had already made clear several times that he never intended to marry Delvina, so his choices cannot all be attributed to Dunbar (115). Nevertheless, Inkle willfully ignores the full significance of Delvina's tale of "horseback riding with" Dunbar and "running alongside his horse" (115). The scene clearly signals erotic sex between Delvina and Dunbar, but Inkle stubbornly ignores her meaning while catching her tone completely. "'Madam,' I said, 'you seem to caper around like a bitch in season. Mr. Dunbar will certainly bed you, but never wed you'" (115). Will?? Delvina laughs and points straight at "the green-eyed monster" (115). Her references here

to slavery and a gilded cage indict Dunbar and Inkle for their pedophilic cross-racial sexual slavery.

Worse than his moral failings, Dunbar knowingly spreads gonorrhea to Inkle and Delvina, who reports to Inkle that she had signs of gonorrhea before being assigned to him by Mary Bella at Dunbar's request. Later, when the symptoms reappear in her and then in Inkle, she apologizes to Inkle saying "but my benefactress assured me that it would pass" (133). They each appeal separately to Dunbar, who takes them separately to the same doctor, swearing them to absolute secrecy to conceal his own role. Dunbar's biggest betrayal of Inkle is second only to Inkle's astonishing refusal to acknowledge it. After yet another "evening [spent] in the most blissful of embraces" with Inkle, Delvina tells him she is pregnant and Inkle, refusing to acknowledge the significance of Dunbar's visits, immediately assumes the child and the problem are his (141). He turns again to Dunbar, who "had proved his friendship to me in countless ways, ...He was in my heart where Adam and Jonathan [Inkle's brothers] had once been" (139). Dunbar sagely advises one of two paths: let her go to either his or Anne's plantation to deliver the child and then allow her to marry the overseer with "a sizeable sum [with which] you could buy her silence or [the second path] even have the slaves dismiss her" – i.e. kill her, a euphemism even Inkle does not miss (142). Instead, Inkle decides to "see her wed! And then for a fee her husband would turn a blind eye to the nights she spent with me" (142). After all, Dunbar had already advised Inkle to do as he had done: marry "an heiress... We do not love. She is happy in Georgia and I am deliriously happy here" (120). All the

familiar tropes of European patriarchal use and betrayal of even its most prized “heiress” women are at play in Inkle's plan.

However, Delvina’s whiteness allows her to access social power in ways Yarico, Zeze and Awana could not. Delvina is ready for Inkle's betrayal. When she announces her pregnancy to Inkle, her only claim about paternity is that the father is not Inkle’s cruel overseer, Reginald Carey: "Carey is a decent Christian man and gets all he needs from the slaves" (141-2). Ignoring her implication, Inkle responds just as he did to Yarico pregnancies: "There is nothing I can do about it. Leave it here when it is born and all will be well for it. It will belong to the plantation and free of concerns" (142). *It*. Five times, he calls their child "it." Delvina does not miss "it." She responds, "You have laid bare your heart and I understand" (142). As is later disclosed, she has already been in contact with Alice who taught her the workings of the patriarchal slave system. Like Yarico, Delvina sees her ship docking and knows what to do. Unlike Yarico, Delvina does not have to kill her son to prevent his suffering. Delvina asks Inkle again "I wonder who *is* the father of this poor thing with its seven months of life?" (142 Inkle’s italics). Her question is literal – whose sperm sparked conception? With heroic narcissism, Inkle continues to assume the child is his even though Delvina all but tells him it is Dunbar's. However, her question also asks who will nurture this child as a father? She knows it will not be Dunbar or Inkle, because she has already chosen the abolitionist, John Clarkson. This resolution of Delvina's pregnancy levantinizes the trope of the virgin beloved with the lived experience of the young virgins pushing through the ardent young male lover’s willfully

ignorant narrative, exposing its effect on every female in the system from the youngest nubile slave to the most cynically complicit aristocratic woman.

***Wife: Marriage as the European seraglio***

Inkle's wife figures include Alice, his betrothed in England and the model for all other female relationships in his mind, Yarico, his Carib and Atlantic wife and the mother of two of his children, and Anne on Barbados, whom he marries at the end of the novel and with whom he retires to England to write his memoir.<sup>212</sup> Only Anne and Yarico obtain cultural status as wife in each cultures Inkle lives in. Even though Alice never became Inkle's wife, Alice, Yarico and Anne all levantinize the marriage in the four cultures: English, Carib, Barbadian and Atlantic. Similarities among the cultures' concepts of wife and marriage predominate, but the differences between Yarico's Carib and Atlantic marriage and Anne's Barbadian and English marriage foreground strategies for female power within patriarchal marriage. Anne's marriage to Inkle represents the European seraglio: the safe space in which sufficiently "pure" – white, virginal, compliant – women are confined for their own safety and security and for their ornamental display value. Alice's marriage undoes it all.

Unlike every other woman he seeks as a mate, Anne is a sexually experienced adult widow when Inkle first meets her, though she may be as young as eighteen. Inkle meets Anne and Delvina on the same day and carefully refrains

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<sup>212</sup> Inkle never married Delvina, with whom he lived on his plantation on Barbados and who bore Christian, Inkle's possible third and only surviving child.

from mentioning his "adventure at Mary Bella's" whore house, the first of a series of secrets he thinks he keeps from her. Inkle describes Anne as one of Sybil de Vere's "young widowed friends...sweet, fashionable and self-contained," exactly what he imagined Alice would become as a young married woman (108).

Blaming it on his forest sojourn, Inkle wonders "how she [Anne] would look in a natural state in the forest, and whether or not it would be a sweet encounter to make love to her" (108). Anne resonates with Yarico for Inkle connects them as astute women of power in their respective cultures. Anne is the trope of the wealthy female consumer of colonial slave economy, a figure represented in paintings and novels of the period. While visiting Inkle's new furniture store, she asks him to buy her a child slave "very black. Not sickly. One that would enhance my porcelain vases" (117). She is the ultimate complicit female in the colonial slave economy. In *Things of Darkness*, Kim Hall explains:

Before he reached puberty, [a young African slave] might have been made to sit with his master or mistress for a double portrait that would demonstrate his European master's wealth or status, a status largely derived from his own subjugation. The "black skin" of both male and female attendants becomes a key signifier in such portraits: associated with wealth and luxury, it is the necessary elements for the fetishization of white skin, the "white mask" of aristocratic identity. (211)

An aristocratic European woman's "white mask" operates in turn as a signifier for the wealth and power of her men.

However, in Beryl Gilroy's novel, Anne is not connected to any man's wealth when she requests a "very black" child from Inkle. Inkle himself notes "Anne had a most disarming manner. She saw dread in every enterprise or adventure and then, as if to reassure herself, she added an errand to complicate it

further. I promised to buy her a slave child as soon as I could" (117). Anne's disarming complication is a consequence of the imperative for a young widow of obtaining a new rich husband and a safe secure space in colonial culture. Her fear of every colonial endeavor is real and pragmatic since 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century enterprises and endeavors often killed even well-connected men and left dependent European women very vulnerable indeed. Anne's request to be provided a very black slave child reminds she could raise his mercantile wealth to the aristocratic realm where a very black slave child is a necessity. Requesting this errand of Inkle is a marriage proposal of sorts, which Inkle accepts at least in part by agreeing to obtain the child. Inkle's relationship with Anne builds slowly as he attempts with each encounter to reduce it to devoted friendship, worrying that "her unselfishness, her goodness and her charity" was produced by "a rigid narrow-mindedness...[like] those forest plants that shriveled and died even though there was sufficient air, water and food available for them" (119). The irony of Inkle's observation is that having access to "sufficient air, water and food" guarantees nothing since resources in excess of the requirements for life – e.g. very black child slaves – places a female in what Delvina astutely calls "a gilded cage" (114). Nevertheless, Anne presses Inkle "to consider having a wife to grace [his] table" and strives to become his "cherished friend" (116, 130).

In the process of acquiring the role of the good colonial wife to Inkle, Anne convinces him that Africans and native people deserve, require, and even enjoy slavery. Tellingly, as he tries to conceal from Anne that the sickness she nursed him through was gonorrhoea, he likens the secret to slavery: "like the

triangular trade, affecting Africa, Barbados and England, my secret must be known only to myself, Dunbar and the physician" (130). However, Anne learns all of Inkle's secrets, the last one coming out just before he proposes to her. After he tries to rape Alice, after Toru/Tim stops him with a crippling blowgun dart, after Inkle spends several days recovering, Anne comes to see him with Dunbar. Inkle immediately asks about "the abolitionists," John and Alice Clarkson, injured during the plantation owners attack. "And Delvina?" Inkle demands, "I want her here to tend me" (152). Dunbar hems and haws, but Anne announces bluntly "Dead! ...Delvina is dead. ...she gave birth and died" (152). In response, Inkle "once more wept unashamedly," causing Dunbar "barely concealed astonishment," while "Anne sniggered" (153). When Inkle then confessed that his other wife was Yarico, Anne declared "No more of the past. We must carry on and never forfeit the future" (154). Inkle then unceremoniously "took her hand and kissed it. 'Would you marry a cripple, Anne?' he asked (154). Signaling Inkle's full acceptance of the slave economy as well as his place in it, Alice quips "I don't know...I'll have to examine you as the slaves are examined before purchase" (154). They marry and move to his estate, though we get no details of this event since Inkle turns immediately to the pomp of Delvina's funeral which "brought the whole island together" (154). Life on Inkle's estate fell into routine for many years until they retired to England. Inkle sums up his life with Anne this way:

Today, I hold no doubt in my heart. I have enjoyed all that could be purchased with wealth. I have gained solace from marriage to a wife who had an aristocratic poise and a simple, endearing manner, and with whom I relieved myself of a great burden and found piece

of mind. With her, long after I escaped from the Black Caribs, my fragmented mind was made whole. (156)

What did Anne gain? A very safe space in a very nicely gilded seraglio.

***Rape: Controlling the African Yard***

Even though Alice never marries Inkle, she does become a wife in a way that levantinizes Anne's figure as a colonial wife and for which Inkle makes her pay dearly. . Alice seems safely ensconced in a European marriage. When Inkle first finds her again on St. Lucia, he calls her "My Alice, now beyond Eros, since I could never reconquer what was lost" (122). But when Alice confesses that she and her husband, John Clarkson, are abolitionists, Inkle's sense of "lost territory" intensifies. Inkle says Alice

...had changed from a frail girl into an adventurous woman with a cause. Compared to Anne and Sybil, she seemed full of something sturdier...there was nothing I could do to return her to that that simple state which had encouraged my parents to choose her as my lifelong companion. (128)

No longer a child innocent of "causes" like Zeze, Yarico and Delvina had seemed, Alice "would reduce good men to beggary" (128). His own way of life, as fathers Inkle, Tomo and Dunbar had called it, was at risk and he must "look to his advantage" or lose it all. In other words, Alice, who appears in all four locations and all three female roles in the novel, seeks to change Inkle's way of life right down to his access to females as sexual objects – and she must be stopped. Her

claim to power for her chosen abolitionist mission requires her expulsion from the European seraglio.

Thanks to Toru/Tim's timely blow dart, Inkle never penetrates Alice genitally and she is the only female with whom he seeks sex and doesn't obtain it. Because he wielded his physical power over her body with sexualized violence in a clear attempt to rape Alice, his attack is rape. In raping his beloved Alice, he exposed the foundational European masculinist perception of the female as an object possessed and controlled by male desire. He writes "My hatred of her sanctimonious airs had turned into a fierce desire for her" (149). When her purity and morality threatened his way of life, she was transformed from a sacred vessel protected by him from other men's violation to a corrupt thing requiring him to (re)establish his control by violating her himself. He dragged her "past the tethered horses," those ancient symbols of passion unleashed compared to his rage, into his father's slave-plantation house where he beat her, stripped her, and beat her again like a common slave – like an African yard (149). He pointedly blames his savagery on his forest experience:

I concentrated on Alice – prim, proper, dressed in clothes as if in armour. What was she hiding? I had roamed around the forest dressed in paint for seven long years. I plunged my hand into the neck of her dress and ripped it away from her. I was conscious only of the angry rip and tear of fabric. I was shredding her clothes as we ripped the leaves off the forest trees. She screamed. (149)

Alice was not accorded even the "primitive" respect Inkle reported for in Carib society. He screams at Alice "You want to be a martyr? To die defending your virtue! You will not succeed! I am the devil" (149). Blaming his violent sexualized aggression on Carib "savages" as "the devil in Mr. Inkle [that] has

come alive," Inkle chooses rape as the weapon of seraglian punishment for his most "beloved" woman.

In order to control the power of the female yard, particularly to prevent it becoming the normal for European women like Alice, European patriarchs constructed a cognitive seraglio of female power and confined it to the darkest and most distant space as the African yard where it could be demonized and punished on a mass scale as a terrifying warning to European women. Meanwhile, the ideal European woman was bleached of any taint of power, particularly masculine power, and confined to the social seraglio of marriage. Marital "confinement" is read by women, men, and cultural outsiders as physical and social protection for elite women from the poverty and abuse they would suffer outside the seraglio walls. Thus the marital seraglio excludes most women in the culture that deploys it leaving them exposed as females available for public consumption. However, rape always threatens women as punishment for escaping the seraglio or as the cost for staying in it. Whether a woman is imprisoned or "free" to roam outside of gendered cultural expectations, the question is not whether she will be raped but how often and by whom. So when darling sweet Alice innocent of "causes" grew up to be an abolitionist spy, she acquired an African yard that justified Inkle's most violent misogynist "self-defense." Analogous to the ejaculatory crisis of the traditional patriarchal novel, this novel's crisis is the unconsummated – ejaculationless – rape of Alice by Inkle. *Inkle and Yarico* has been touted for centuries as a story in which a man betrays a woman into slavery for which she vengefully commits the terrible crime of infanticide.

However, Beryl Gilroy displaces betrayal and infanticide as the central conflict of *Inkle and Yarico* from a tropicopolitans standpoint that patriarchal aggression is at the heart of violent acts against any woman. *Inkle and Yarico* is a rape narrative told by a perpetrator who, while uncontrovertibly proving otherwise, firmly believes himself to be the victim.

***Yarico as Cover Girl and Spirit Woman***

The image of a full-grown nulligravida young woman wearing a figured loin cloth<sup>213</sup> is printed in bright teal green on the cover of *Inkle and Yarico*. Her hair is worn close to her head, fringing around her pert face, with a small bright circlet sitting well back on her crown. Her legs and arms are well-muscled and her body beautifully rendered solid, smooth and graceful by the engraver in a fine stippling. She faces to her right and in her left hand holds an unstrung bow and round-tipped arrow<sup>214</sup> like two long-stemmed flowers pointing down along her straight left leg which bears her weight. She looks up at her raised right hand, arm outstretched to receive or release a red bellied macaw leaning in as if to speak to her.<sup>215</sup> Her right leg is also raised, the toes seeming to push off from a small rock

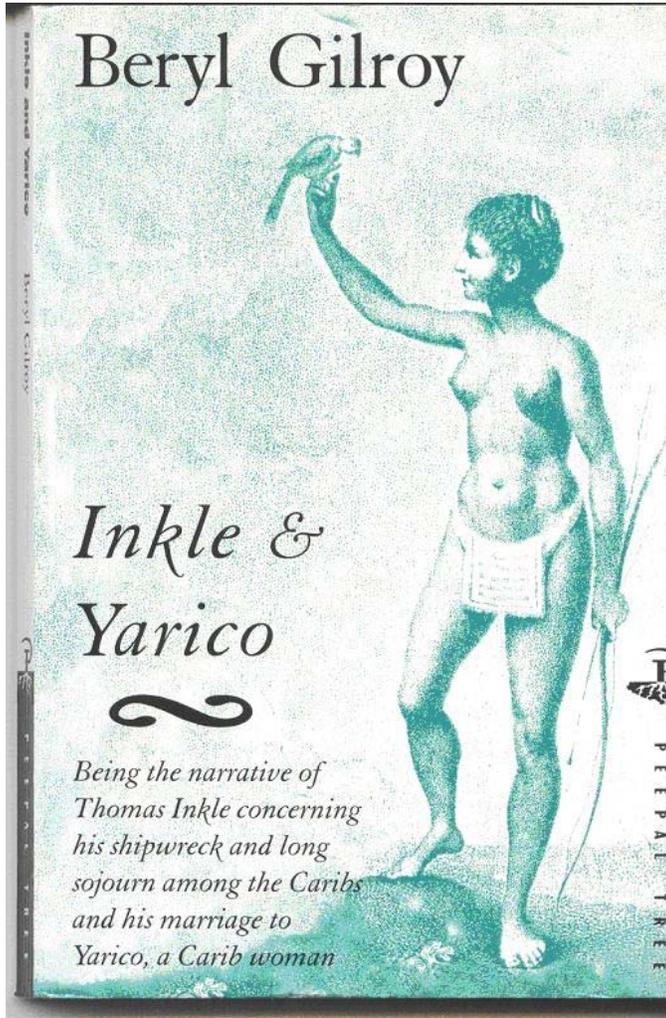
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<sup>213</sup> Or "apron call'd Queiou" on a wide cloth strap (Price Stedman Complete 318).

<sup>214</sup> "A blunted arrow for [shooting] birds" (Stedman Complete 318). According to Stedman, "Some arrows have blunted heads / in place of Points / about the Size of a large Chesnut, with which they don't kill, but stun the Macaws, Parrots, and Small Monkeys, so that they can take them with their hands, Soon after which they recover and are sent alive to Parimarimbo" (Stedman Complete 312). Stedman lists "—Macaws. Parrots. Monkeys—" along with slaves in his account of what the Indians trade to Europeans (Stedman Complete 316). Thus, the Indian Female could be examining a captured specimen prior to sending it off into captivity.

<sup>215</sup> A red-bellied macaw is the largest of the small macaws, around 17 inches long. In the wild, red-bellies live in large family groups and communities, sleeping shoulder to shoulder inside rotting palm tree trunks. Very shy and nervous in captivity, they often die in captivity of self-starvation because of the anxiety of isolation and the seed-heavy diet of pet birds instead of the fresh fruits and nuts of their crowded native habitat. This description parallels those explaining why indigenous people did poorly as slaves. Stedman explains: "But these kind of Slaves [Guiana

so that she, too, looks like she is both resting and about to step off. Her skin tone is light, and the features of her face in profile suggest a frontal view like that of an aquiline-featured British woman.



Beryl Gilroy has chosen<sup>216</sup> a quintessential Black Atlantic image to represent her Yarico to late twentieth century readers. Unattributed anywhere in or on the novel, this image is titled "Indian Female of the Arrowauka Nation" either by its engraver, Michele Benedetti<sup>217</sup> (1745-1810), or by its artist Lt.

Col. John Gabriel Stedman (1744-97), whose sketch or watercolor Benedetti

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Indians] are only for show [when held by "Christians" or Europeans] as they absolutely refuse to Work, and if at all illtreated, or especially beat, they Pine and languish like Caged Turtles, even refusing food, til by Heartbreak and Want they exhaust to nothing but Skin and bone, and finally expire----" (Stedman *Complete* 315).

<sup>216</sup>I assert choice based on the size and mission of Peepal Tree Press and on this quote from the end of Beryl Gilroy's biography on their website: "Beryl's death [2001] caused a silence on Peepal Tree's phone line that has been a painful absence. She rang us regularly, to encourage, sometimes to berate, to talk about the often delayed publishing of her books in progress, and sometimes just to talk. She was like a mother to us and we miss her badly." (peepal tree press.com )

<sup>217</sup>Michele Benedetti, artist, Italian, 1745 – 1810 (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco at <http://search.famsf.org:8080/view.shtml?record=57053&=list&=1&=&=And> accessed 3/27/2006)

follows. This image forms plate 61 for Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition*.<sup>218</sup> Richard Ligon's Yarico is a woman born one hundred and thirty years before Stedman sketched this young Arawak woman as one of "a Number of Indians and Black People of Both Sexes" and white men Stedman swam with in Surinam (Stedman Complete 465). As a cover for her novel, this image is less familiar to Beryl Gilroy's modern readers than those engraved by Blake for Stedman's *Narrative*, both because it was not engraved by Blake, and because it was not useful to the anti-slavery and abolitionist movements. There was no movement advocating for indigenous people.

When Beryl Gilroy claims Yarico is "the female protagonist" of *Inkle and Yarico*, she signals two things (*Leaves* 83). First, she points to the common presumption that the typical colonial-authored text makes: that it CAN represent Yarico at all, never mind as a protagonist. And second, that Yarico can be a protagonist even in Beryl Gilroy's text. The difference between protagonist and antagonist explains why. As *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* defines "protagonist," Inkle is, without doubt, the protagonist of the Inkle and Yarico urban legend and of the *Inkle and Yarico* novel:

The most important or leading **character** in a work; usually identical to the **hero** or **heroine**, but not always. The term comes from the Greek for "first combatant" and referred to the first actor (the person with the leading role, supported by the **chorus**) in **classical** Greek **tragedy**. (Murfin 310 their emphasis).

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<sup>218</sup> Images from Stedman's *Narrative* are used on the dustcover of the first (hardcover) edition of Beryl Gilroy's 1991 novel *Stedman and Joanna – A Love in Bondage: Dedicated Love in the Eighteenth Century* and are not acknowledged there either.

In spite of Beryl Gilroy's assertion, Yarico's name in the title, and her image as cover girl, Yarico is not the novel's female protagonist. She is Inkle's antagonist:

If the protagonist is in primary **conflict** with another character, that character is the **antagonist**; an evil antagonist is called a **villain**. Whatever the source of the conflict with which the protagonist struggles, that conflict sets the **plot** in motion. (Murfin 310 their emphasis).

Indeed it does here. If Yarico had not affected Inkle as an antagonist, his narrative might have sounded more like that of Alexander Moreau de Jonnés. Of Moreau's account written in his eighth decade, Beryl Gilroy's preliminary source, Hulme writes:

Moreau – just eighteen years old, but a child of Linnaeus and Rousseau – reveled in his tropical idyll [on St. Vincent], and the beauty of the chief's daughter, Eliama, also eighteen. In his memoir, he calls the village a paradise and says that it has always stayed in his memory as the place where he spent the happiest moments of his life: "During the three months I spent in the mountain Carbet with my Carib friends, my days were a tissue of silk and gold. This was truly Eden, as Milton describes it, with its perpetual spring, its shady forests, its magnificent views, its flowering groves, its singing birds, adorned with the most varied and brilliant colors. Nothing was missing, since a second Eve lived in this pleasant retreat" (187).

Eliama presented no cultural dissonance for the self-assured Moreau, despite his youth. By the time Moreau met Eliama in 1797, he had already left school and served the French revolution for 3-4 years, being present in both invasions of Ireland and "as a spy at the Nore during the great British naval mutiny, actually witnessing Samuel Parker's execution" (Hulme 187). Though a bit older than Moreau, Inkle was far more callow which meant that Yarico, his Eliama, challenged everything he knew and foiled his plan to marry Alice.

Spivak cautions about colonial-authored texts that "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernization" (Spivak 306). This describes Yarico in all her figurations from Ligon onward, and Stedman's Indian Female as well as his beloved Joanna. However, Beryl Gilroy makes the shuttling less violent by using modern research to recontextualize her representations of third world women with more particular lived experience. In accounts like Ligon's and Stedman's, when the figure of "the woman" disappears, fragments of individual women remain, hiding in the Bakhtinian shadows of the text. In her *Inkle and Yarico*, Beryl Gilroy brings up the light on those shadows, making them visible both as shadows that colonial culture throws and as material in their own right.

Barbadian culture is radically different from BOTH English and Carib culture, so the structures of feeling upon which it builds a perception of the "ideal woman" figure are in violent conflict with those built by empire and by empire's conquered subjects. However, the "violent shuttling" is not an egalitarian dialectic of cultural development as it was for Tomo in Beryl Gilroy's version of Carib society, but is instead about the destruction of a less powerful culture by a conquering culture. In this case, "the figure of woman" is *displaced*, the incorporated indigenous concepts of gender and the female body are reduced to the status of structures of feeling by the conquering culture. Spivak explains this phenomenon when she describes how the British colonial policy against Sati by

Indian widow women used brown female bodies forced into Sati by their male relatives as an excuse to suppress Indian culture. Meanwhile, Indian males use the same brown female bodies by increasing the pressure on them to engage in Sati as a demonstration of the Indian men's rightful power of control over their own patriarchy. Thus, the lived experience of Spivak's female subaltern as her own figure of alternative experience violently shuttles between both groups of males. However, their lived experience is not destroyed, as Spivak illustrates with the story of a young Indian woman commits Sati during menstrus so that when her body is examined, it will be known that her lover did not impregnate her. Similarly, *Inkle and Yarico* retrieves Carib structures of feeling from remnants of Carib cultural material and pushes them back into imperial view.

When patriarchal cultures battle over the figure of the female, violence to the figure of the non-dominant-raced woman is multiplied. For this reason, non-textual acts like oral traditions, craft traditions and subterranean Madame Mediator style interventions not recorded by patriarchal history like the young Indian woman's Sati must be seen as intentional expressions. These expressions, as women of color have long asserted, require preservation and analysis as part of a female genealogy continually at risk of extinction because of their lack of access to hegemonic textual representation. Non-textual female acts against patriarchy are often the only resistance female subalterns have, the only indication of structures of feeling passed on through a female genealogy.

We can see this in the symbolism of Inkle's first vision of Yarico as "a maiden contentedly swimming naked in the water" of a "creek of clear cool

water” that he has risked discovery to find, having himself gone two days without water (17). He writes further “I looked unashamedly at her and was astonished that, though black, all her parts were as those in the pictures in the hands of the gamekeeper’s lads,” his pugilistic tutors at home. Yet he knows enough to claim that “her figure was as perfect in every detail as a European’s, save for the little extravagance of flesh” (17). He was demurely referring to Yarico’s reassuring lack of an enlarged clitoris. She was simply “buxom, above middle height...voluptuous and yet tantalizing” (17). She was not monstrous. Using Stedman's description of the Arawak girl, Beryl Gilroy emphasizes the young men’s language of sexual consumption and ownership. Inkle notes "I feasted my young eyes upon" her and "all her parts were as those in the pictures" of naked European women. This visual and linguistic sexual cannibalism echoes the blazoning of female body parts begun in 15<sup>th</sup> century European poetry and still rampant in 21<sup>st</sup> century western culture. Though he notes the "adulteration with the woolen hair of Africans," he says "her body...drew my eyes as gold to a lodestone" because she was, as Moreau also put it, "an Eve in Eden" (17).

In Gilroy’s description of their discovery of each other’s bodies, Yarico clearly takes the lead. While Inkle is “irked” by “her uninhibited smile” and ways, this lack of inhibition is not the impudent wily sexuality that he is used to associating with sin in contrast to the “looks and sighs and subtle touches” of his fiancé, Alice, as she sent him off from the docks (18, 9). Beryl Gilroy’s descriptions of Inkle’s observations of Yarico’s behavior show Yarico claiming typically male rights of ownership, including the objectification of Inkle’s body.

In *Leaves*, Beryl Gilroy asserts that Inkle doesn't love Yarico, but trades his sexuality for safety among the Caribs. In other words, he acts "as a woman." Inkle knew that he was "an object that Yarico had found and as long as she valued me I was safe – safe from Paiuda, the shaman, and Paiu his son and heir" (30). In concluding this, Inkle projects his own culture onto what he perceives as an inverted situation, as if there are only two mutually exclusive readings of their encounter. In Inkle's view, if the woman has what he conceives of as male power, then he is feminized, owned, objectified. Yarico's sexual and gender agency is visible despite his unreliability as a narrator who can't imagine sharing power *with* her.

After being accepted by the Caribs, Inkle continues to have sex with Yarico and lives in her hut because he is not considered man enough to claim a place in the Carib men's house. He doesn't even have control over Yarico's reproduction. He whinily asks her father to "ask Yarico why she prevents children from coming to us" (30). Tomo complacently assures Inkle that Yarico "has no power over children. They come or they go...if the spirits call them," but even Inkle knows this is untrue (30). Inkle complains to Yarico about his sense of isolation and denigration in the community, saying "you know I am nothing among your people," and she replies immediately "as I would be among yours?" (31). Following this exchange, they sit on a hillock in view of the sea whereupon Inkle finds himself mopey "wish[ing] that some apparition would materialize and ...transport me to the love in whom my heart delighted" (31). He means Alice, in England. He does not fancy himself in love with Yarico. The children he charges

her with preventing are not for his paternal pleasure, but to gain a place as a man in the Carib community.

Without half trying, Yarico antagonizes and foils Inkle's intentions, values and desires at every turn. By claiming her normal place in Carib society, she simply refuses to vanish into nothingness, pristine or otherwise. She finds and claims Inkle as her own. She takes him sexually in return for her protection as matter of factly as Stedman takes Joanna or Dunbar takes Delvina. She allows him to assimilate into Carib culture as he is able, but provides little support in his efforts and less in the way of pride in him. He is simply a man to her, one of several types of human. As hard as Inkle tries in his narrative to keep her in her place as a primitive, sub-human African yard, she pushes back through his text to claim full visibility as a Carib woman, as a human with subjectivity.

Because she is not given to her mother, Cocoro, to raise as an Arawak, Yarico is under the fierce protection her Carib father, Chief Tomo. While she conforms to her gender roles within the tribe, never ceasing to work, as Inkle puts it, she has the freedom to succor very strange men, and then to own them. She plots with the priest, who is unlikely to have listened to a woman of lesser status. Perhaps, Yarico's mother Cocoro would have prevented her from bedding never mind accompanying Inkle to Barbados, but Yarico fails in her efforts to see her before the smuggling ship carries her to Barbados. When Yarico breaks her connection to patriarchal men by choosing to go with Inkle, she is ejected from the Carib seraglio and becomes a public woman, the property of all men. As a slave, especially a producer of babies, Yarico might have at least claimed a

genealogical place in the evolving Caribbean culture. After all, according to Ligon, her historical sister makes that exact choice 130 years earlier. If only the indigenous had more often made that choice to buckle down and cooperate with enslavement for a few centuries. But Yarico completely rejects membership in any colonial category. She destroys her claim to Inkle and to "civilized" life when she kills their son in a public act of vengeance. She knows, the novel knows, Beryl Gilroy knows that no one with a choice chooses enslavement – especially not for their children.

It's tempting to make the romantic claim, along with Inkle, that Yarico becomes the illusory Rabiël, the Spirit Woman who melts back into the forest of Inkle's mind where she thrives on nothing more than his occasional wistful memory of her. He writes that "she is the spirit of the woods and all that is good and green in Nature...But I must never think of love when I recall our life together. I must think of mystery and the articulate formations of shadows and sunlight in the forest" (156). Every time she reappears in his account after he betrays her, he reduces her to the state of "a demented nymph in the green" (127); "The Spirit Woman...strange and cadaverous" (148); "saved from the sea" having "exchanged [her mind] with the sea spirits for her life" (151). But, as the proliferation of these images indicates, Yarico stubbornly refuses to disappear from Inkle's account, reappearing at the most inopportune moments. In fact, by the end of the novel, it's clear that Yarico had already reclaimed herself in a new figure as Rabiël the Spirit woman and found Alice long before Inkle did. Though Inkle's account never makes the connection and keeps trying to bury Yarico deep

in the pristine nothingness of the forest, Yarico bursts through his figuration of her to reveal that she, Alice and Delvina formed coalition to fight slavery and displacement of the female in each of their cultures.

**Boy Children as Structures of Feeling in *Inkle and Yarico***

Beryl Gilroy explains that the children in the novel "showed Inkle's hunger for his own lost world of events to be hoarded in memory" (Leaves 84). Since Beryl Gilroy writes *Inkle and Yarico* after she has retired from a long career of as a black Carib teacher of young English children and a parallel career of scholarship about race relations, it seems unquestionable that the children in *Inkle and Yarico* are doing very important work. Most of the novel's children are Carib and all of the specifically identified children are boys: Inkle's three sons, Waiyo, Adam and Christian; Jimmy, the Captain's black boy; Waiyo's childhood friend, Toru or Tim; the gamekeeper's two sons; and several Carib boys. Children in *Inkle and Yarico* are ideas circulating in the European patriarchal mind. Beryl Gilroy's image of the Carib children as "hoarded memory" suggests they are structures of feeling in the novel, little half-formed units of potentially hegemonic cultural material.

"The children" Beryl Gilroy refers to are several unnamed Carib children sent by Paiuda, the tribe shaman, to spy and report on adult behavior. This explains how Paiuda knows when Yarico is pregnant, what the nature of Inkle's relationship is with Zeze, and where Inkle hid a stash of food and supplies just

before his initiation rite into Tomo's tribe. However, like structures of feeling, children don't always do as they are told. They are literal little things and they report unrelentingly on the facts. They "tell on" adults about to spring a deadly trap on another tribe. They sneak off behind the barn and share adult facts: "the gamekeepers sons assiduously taught [him] the arts of bare-knuckle fighting," and of proper gender performance because he "might be took for a maid with such a mass of golden thatch" (8). They provide taboo information like the pornographic "pictures" Inkle compared to Yarico's "parts" when he first encountered her (17). They offer visions of manhood that both reinforce a gentleman's education and expose it for the thin veil over civility that it is. As Inkle's cultural panic peaks just before he attacks Alice, his reaction to his slaves is that of a little boy with big powers over toys that won't do his bidding. When he is told after he awakens from a poison-induced coma that it was little Toru/Tim who struck him down, his response is pure playground: "Why did the boy want to hurt me? I never hurt him" (150).

Little boys also expose adult perfidy. The slave boy Jimmy, the captain's "black boy," is inadvertently left on Jamaica when *The Achilles* sails into the storm that deposits Inkle on St. Vincent. When he is rescued by Alice several months later as she searches for Inkle, Jimmy causes the biggest rupture in Inkle's life. Alice explains "When we were assured of your death by the slave-boy Jimmy, who was brought to me, I married John" (124). Similarly, Waiyo's bosom pal, Toru, later called Tim, is the agent Yarico refers to when she hisses "They will come" as she drowns her baby. Toru watched Waiyo die horribly and guesses

the cause. At six, he purposely let himself be abducted by white slavers so he would be drawn into Inkle's milieu to take his revenge for Waiyo's killing. When Yarico finds Turo/Tim in Alice's household, she spoke only to him, adding her betrayal to his reasons to hunt down Inkle. In Aravamudan's terms, Turo/Tim tropicalized the slave system itself, using what was meant to destroy him in order to get close enough to punish a powerful man who harmed his friends.

Inkle's three boy children are the most interesting structures of feeling in the novel. The infant Adam, Inkle's second born to Yarico on the smuggler's ship, is the iconic infant thrown into the sea. However, the death of Waiyo, their first child, at his father's hands levantinizes the European presumption in every single version of the tale that Adam's death was the desperate act of a woman too primitive respond civilly to being betrayed into slavery. Inkle kills Waiyo, a son he disdained for his Carib blood, in a blind rage over the loss of his lover, Zeze. Waiyo's death levantinizes Adam's death by emphasizing Yarico's merciful rescue of Adam from a brutal slave life. Christian, Delvina's son and either Inkle's third child or one of Dunbar's untold offspring, was given to Alice and John Clarkson with his mother's dying words: "Keep him from Inkle. Keep him and name him Christian" (153). Raised by prominent abolitionists who succeed in their work, Christian represents hopeful structures of feeling sent to circulate in western European racist sexist capitalist patriarchy by Madame Mediators like Aphra Behn, Maria Sibylla Merian, Alice Clarkson and Delvina O'Hara until modern Madame Mediators like Beryl Gilroy retrieve them as fuel for quantum leaps toward social justice.



*Chapter 8*ECUMENIZING LIFE AND WORK AS TEXT: MADAM MEDIATOR THE MARXIST  
FEMINIST***Ecumenical Reading and Radical Imagination Reprise***

One fall, I taught a very rambunctious first year composition class of women at Simmons College. Emulating my expository writing mentor, Tufts Professor Liz Ammons, I solicited discussion rules from the class, making sure to insert Dr. Ammons' favorite one: say ouch. If anyone in class says or does something offensive, find a way to bring it up - even if the only way you can do it is to speak to me in private. This class of young women debated EVERYthing, mostly at the top of their lungs and, increasingly, thank god, with reference to course readings and their expanding logical skills. They were difficult to handle, but I was cheered by their strong authoritative voices. After one particularly contentious class, "Daniela," who described herself as "half Italian and half African American," stopped me and said, "I just wanted to tell you that, in class today, Maya said, 'Those stupid middle class white bitches don't understand anything.' You said we should tell you if we are offended so I'm telling you the white half of me was very offended." She looked me in the eye, fist on hip, as we both called up an image of Maya, a red-haired porcelain-skinned freckled white girl from East Cambridge who was as upset by her colleagues' classist and racist remarks in class as I was. Neither Daniela nor I burst out laughing as I nodded professionally and promised to speak to Maya. Daniela heaved a dramatic sigh and walked away satisfied – on way too many levels.

Yes, Daniela had completely "gotten" the teacher's PC goat. But she also demonstrated that her generation has a bone-deep articulated sense of multiplicity, a "well, duh!" response to challenging the "given" my generation was brainwashed to accept: that the world is made up of two kinds of people – those who believe dichotomies are natural and universal and those who know they are. Black and white, male and female, good and bad, Jewish and Christian, Muslim and Christian, and, most importantly, us and them. Daniela has already accepted the main point I've been trying to make in this project: the material of human social is life not neatly categorical, never mind dichotomous, and the products of human effort, including physical products, artistic artifacts and culture itself, create meaning in many dimensions most of which is ignored by Western culture's hegemonic forces in a cockpit of false competition over who is the most independent autonomous individual with the most toys.

However, as I've shown, there is no analogue for the individual in Williams's chemical model of culture. The author is dead – and the reader probably is, too. We are to think not of individual psyches, individual experiences, individual achievements, but instead of the social construction of the individual, of author, of reader. Even some Marxists have turned away from the materiality of the individual's lived experience to "the 'individual,' abstracted and defined as 'creative subjectivity,' the starting point of meaning" or in Marxist-Freudianism "to comprehension of individuals as 'pre-social' or even anti-social" (Williams *Marxism* 31, 87). But, as Williams points out, that doesn't mean that the author, the reader and the individual are absent. It means that they are all far more alive – and alive indefinitely – than the dichotomy "dead or alive" recognizes. Without the filter of individual human minds and without the relations among individuals

– particularly as they manifest in the language of symbols – there is no product, artifact, or culture.<sup>219</sup> Williams argues that "if the social is always past, in the sense that it is always formed, we have indeed to find other terms for the undeniable experience of the present: not only the temporal present, the realization of this and this instant, but the specificity of present being, the inalienably physical, within which we may indeed discern and acknowledge institutions, formations, positions" – i.e. culture (*Marxism* 128). If what we call social material does not access the individual's personal experience, then we must clear space somehow to account for it. To bracket off from analysis the experience of individual humans in society is like asking Daniela to ignore the fact – the real material touchable fact – that she is *also* of Italian descent and to insist that she consider herself exclusively black. That is precisely what racist sexist Western culture has asked of its people beginning in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and culminating in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century: to bracket off what doesn't fit into the current cultural definition of the social.

When cultural hegemonies (crystals, in Williams' model of culture) insist on bracketing off a portion of individual social material or "identity" from analysis – an insistence that Williams finds in misguided Marxist cultural theories – they obscure cultural material that can continually revitalize the cultural core.<sup>220</sup> Aravamudan identifies some of this cultural material as the efforts of tropicopolitans – i.e. oppressed people – to deform hegemony, but I see it more positively as the efforts of oppressed people to push hegemony to fulfill its potential to represent the diverse culture of which it

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<sup>219</sup> As Raymond Williams puts it, "'thinking' and 'imagining' are from the beginning social processes (of course including that capacity for 'internalization' which is a necessary part of any social process between actual individuals) and that they become accessible only in unarguably physical and material ways: in voices, in sounds made by instruments, in penned or printed writing, in arranged pigments on canvas or plaster, in worked marble or stone" (*Marxism* 62).

<sup>220</sup> For example, efforts to prevent gay marriage ignore the fact that heterosexual marriage has never been the font of nurturing family relationships we are told it is. Permitting gay couples to marry is likely to increase the number of marriages that are nurturing family spaces.

is the center. To the extent that the ruling class manipulates the masses or institutions exploit cultural processes only for their own protection and benefit, they generate and merit resistance – and sometimes destruction. But if those of us who resist hegemonic corruption assume that the hegemonic center is anathema and any association with it is by definition corrupt, we, too, facilitate the protection and maintenance of rigid hegemonies since we limit productive exchanges necessary for human development. The goal of a successful human culture is – well – a successful human culture, but not as a destination or a particular spot where "it all" comes together and is finished. Like precipitant in a supersaturated solution, a successful human culture is a dynamic, flexible, evolving flow of human activity. To understand how it came to be the shape it is or to imagine what shape it could become requires that particular, concrete, material, historical moments and contexts be repeatedly examined and analyzed in light of as much social material as we can detect.

**Madame Mediator as a Marxist feminist**

To do so, Madame Mediator readers and analysts must understand and expand on a Marxist feminist ideological approach. I have referred many times in this study to the work of Rosemary Hennessy and her Marxist feminist colleagues, but I have saved for the after word the task of defining Marxist feminism and explaining how this ideological approach underpins my analysis because that discussion sums up both what I tried to do in this study and what I think needs to be done moving forward. Marxist feminism clarifies the importance of an ecumenical – as catachresis – understanding of patriarchy and its progeny, hierarchy (e.g. class). Patriarchal hierarchy is only one of many possible

foundational cultural paradigms and Marxist feminism insists on the immanence of other non-patriarchal – AND non-matriarchal – non-hierarchical foundational cultural paradigms. Combining Spivak's use of Derridian deconstruction with Marxist feminist analysis fissures hierarchical ethnocentricity and patriarchalism into its component parts, including the genealogies of structures of feeling they are generated from and that they generate. The result is an insistence on a non-hierarchization of oppressions, a presumption that a) no oppression is more important than another because b) they are all interconnected by mutually constitutive social processes.

Sexism is used to feminize men singled out for their racial attributes, for example, creating racism and then twisting sexist and racist concepts into a systemic noose of social relations oppressing men of color. Rosemary Hennessy and Chrys Ingraham assert that “if feminism is to be a social movement that aspires to meet the needs of all women, *it must also confront its own class investments in refusing to connect its analysis to a global social system whose very premise is that some women benefit at the expense of others*” (Hennessy & Ingraham 3 their italics). Expanding on that, I insist in this study based on the work and lives of Aphra Behn, Maria Sibylla Merian and Beryl Gilroy that, if social justice is to meet the needs of all humans, it must confront all of our culture's investments in an "us/them" hegemony by consistently engaging in ecumenical analyses of an increasingly global social system in which a very few people benefit at the expense of most others. In other words, successful Madame Mediators must develop a Marxist feminist ideology as they negotiate further social change in the Atlantic cockpit.

What is a Marxist feminist ideology? Not only are the terms of this standpoint highly contentious, but they are also historically variable. In *Profit and Pleasure*,

Rosemary Hennessy devotes an entire volume to explaining some of that history in both a collective and a very personal sense. After publishing the anthology, *Materialist Feminism*, with Chrys Ingraham in 1997, she came to recognize, as Williams had, that much was left out of analyses of culture conducted on either Marxist or feminist terms. In particular, from her point of view as an out lesbian academic and socialist feminist activist since the 1970's, she found that decades of work, including much of her own, on "how these markers of difference have shaped lesbian and gay history and the history of sexuality in general...still le[ft] unexamined *why* the cultural differences that shape identities [we]re organized as they [we]re, and the relationship between sexual identities and capitalism remain[ed] for the most part an unexplored – even unspeakable – area of inquiry" (Hennessy *Profit* 4 her italics).<sup>221</sup> She began her analysis with the chapter "Setting the Terms" in which she explained why she chose "Marxist feminist" to describe her analytic standpoint: "Recently the 'materialist' in materialist feminism has come to be synonymous with a cultural materialism that staunchly repudiates historical materialism's class analysis" (*Profit* 28). The problem with that view is that "materialist feminists tend to eschew the causal link between capitalism's economic arrangements and its politics and cultural forms" (Hennessy *Profit* 28). In other words, materialist feminists no longer see class as the central cause of social injustice, while Marxists feminists do. Furthermore, Marxist feminists insist that "...a feminist politics aimed at combating women's exploitation and oppression and eliminating the forces that divide women from one another must oppose capitalism" (Hennessy & Ingraham 3). Because patriarchy treats females as a class separate from males, and then further stratifies females into "women,"

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<sup>221</sup> See bottom of p 11 in *Profit* for how her view has changed.

raced women, and queer women, class analysis remains a crucial point of theorization for feminism.

Hennessy admits that the insistence on class analysis on the part of Marxist feminists “is continually misread as refusing nuanced cultural analysis or reducing social production to the economy” (Hennessy *Profit* 28). She could have accurately admitted that these charges are often not misreadings but actually accurate assessments of what some Marxist feminists have said. In fact, I find that Hennessy herself misses the importance of class in her slippage around terms like “men and women,” especially troublesome in a text focused on a class analysis of sexuality. In other words, her concept of class relations is limited to power differentials caused by economic stratification. As such, she elides class differences between "men" and "women" even as she examines class differences between "gay" and "straight" people. But she explains the importance of class in a feminist analysis here: “Marxists feminists maintain that capitalism is fundamentally driven by the accumulation of profit through the extraction of surplus labor and that it does so by way of historically varied patriarchal structures” (Hennessy *Profit* 28). Hennessy’s Marxist analysis – once the linguistic slippages are accounted for – describes how Williams’s model of structures of feeling in solution opens texts by all kinds of subalterns in the Atlantic to new readings that illustrate this point.

For me, then, Marxist feminist analysis as Hennessy defines it is a way to explain patriarchy expressed politically, economically, and socially as a vast Atlantic cockpit, which I have asserted here is the core metaphor for western culture and the global culture crystallizing around it. It is not too reductive or simplistic to say that patriarchy is the foundation of capitalism, but it may be inaccurate to conclude that capitalism can only

exist in a patriarchal cultural structure. I often wonder whether social justice energy aimed at ending capitalism is successfully misdirected away from the real cause of social injustice. Though many social problems and atrocities can be laid at the door of capitalism's institutions, I am struck by how similar these atrocities are to those that can be laid at the door of Christianity and other large scale religions, and at the door of nationalisms and patriotisms and other political loyalties. I am struck by how similar these atrocities are from culture to culture in the diverse economic, ethnic and political institutions. And I am struck by the fact that each of these units of culture are dominated by men, by masculinity and by patriarchy and that women bear most of the burden of male domination. Marxism explains why continual feminist analysis and action is the lynchpin of every social justice movement.

Marxism identifies the central problems of the west as class-based, but class is about hierarchy and hierarchy is the central tenet of patriarchy. If feminists know that the central problem of social justice is patriarchy, then Marxist feminists should explain why that is and how it plays out in class through patriarchal assumptions about hierarchy and despotic "power over" discursively defined and constructed subalterns. Does this mean that sexism is the only or even the most important social problem of our time? No, it means the opposite: that sexism is made to stand in for, mask and distract from the phallus at the core of the complicated social problems of our time, like dye injected into solution that obscures the nature of ongoing chemical reactions. Hennessy & Ingraham write "the tradition of feminist engagement with Marxism emphasizes a perspective on social life that refuses to separate the materiality of meaning, identity, the body, the state or nation from the requisite division of labor that undergirds the scramble for profits in

capitalism's global system" (1). Marxism and feminism both work to expose the connections among cultural elements that western culture seeks to mask.

And those connections amount to a phallusy: the patriarchal presumption that hierarchy justifies man's inhumanity to man – and doesn't even recognize man's inhumanity to woman and those it imposes woman status upon. Thus when Hennessy & Ingraham write that

...the socially produced differences of race and gender and nationality [ethnicity?] are not distinct from class, but they play a crucial role – both directly and indirectly – in dividing the workforce, ensuring and justifying the continued availability of cheap labor and determining that some social groups will be profoundly exploited while others will be somewhat cushioned (2 my emphasis)

...they are talking about populations divided by fear of suffering into hierarchies of loyal brainwashed, keepers of the social divides, populations made fearful of falling into one of the profoundly exploited social groups. Race, gender, nationality, body "norms," religion – any attribute that can be imbued with subaltern meanings – are not distinct from class because they all function like class, can be read as class difference and contribute to class formations founded on the model of sex difference as binary presumptions of male supremacy. Dissolving that crystal of patriarchal presumptions is the objective of tropicalizing and ecumenical readings generated by the lived experience of subalterned humans. And that crystal in Western culture develops in the Atlantic cockpit.

Structures of feeling that circulated in the work of prominent women writers of the late 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries before being reclaimed by modern tropicopolitan writers and their allies produced resistances as well as compliances and in both cases contained alternate and oppositional concepts of difference that could be useful to us

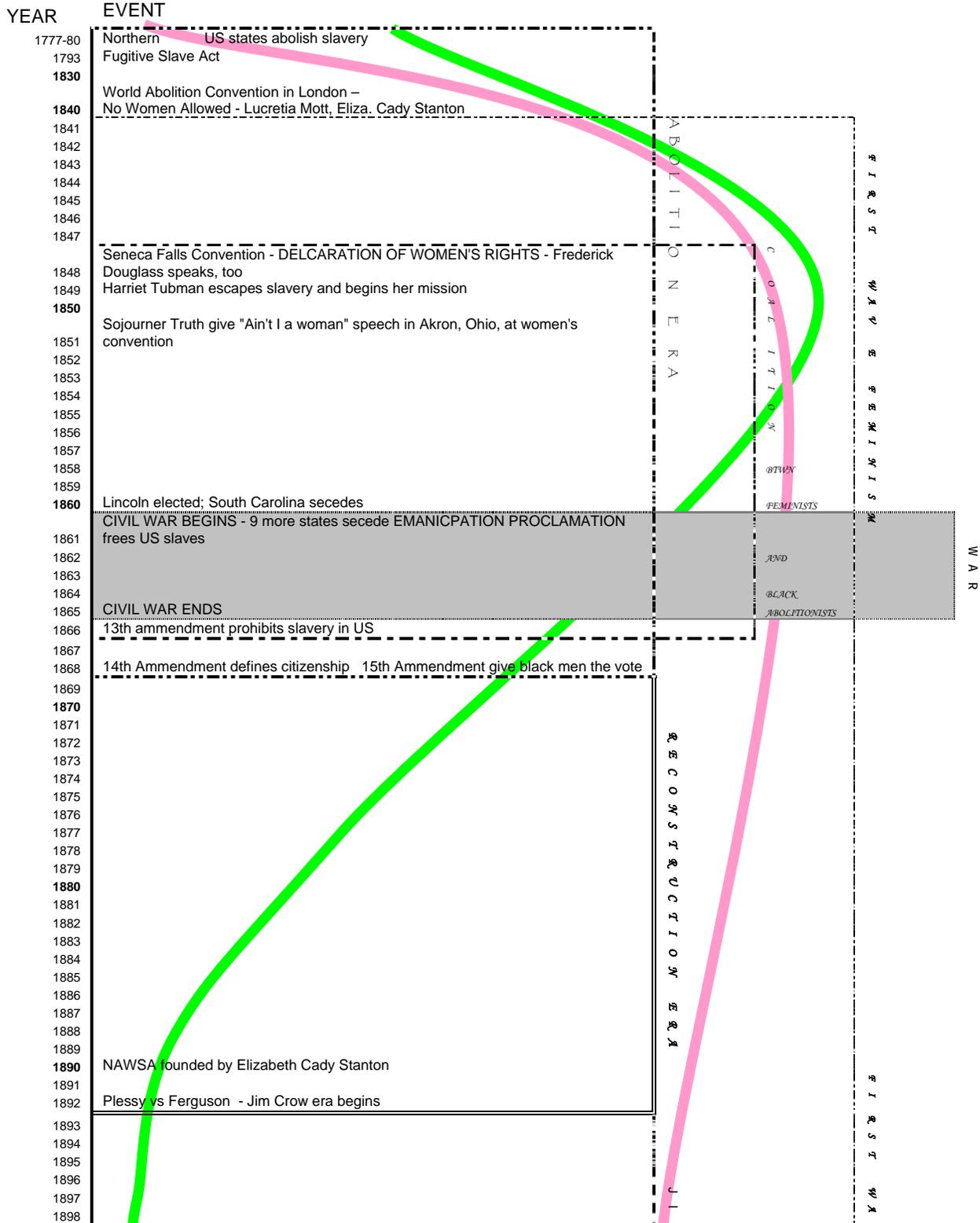
now. Continuing these analyses by tracing resistances in the work of women of color from Phillis Wheatley through Mary Prince and Mary Seacole to Beryl Gilroy shows that black women contributed to this resistance in published writings early and effectively. Furthermore, these published writings are themselves evidence of the unarticulated lived experience that led up to and swirled around them. The genealogy of all women's responses to imperial political projects in the Atlantic cockpit emphasizes the fact that "the woman question" was never about men's bewildered ignorance of women's aspirations but was always patriarchy's deliberate effort to circumscribe and control women's lives through carefully policed seraglios of fantasized difference. As Madam Mediator learned, whether kept inside or outside of seraglios of domesticity, femininity, race and class, all women – and thus all subalterns – in western capitalist patriarchy are deemed subversive, every female act – and thus every subaltern act – is always already treason against patriarchal empire. Maureen Dowd complains that "Maybe we should have known that the story of women's progress would be more of a zigzag than a super highway, that the triumph of feminism would last a nanosecond while the backlash lasted 40 years" (52). The women writers examined here might be dismayed to discover that so many 21<sup>st</sup> century feminists and social justice workers still don't understand the central role of patriarchal sexism in social injustice. However, they would be amused by Dowd's impatience, and heartened by her desire - as well as the desire of Daniela, Aphra Behn, Maria Sibylla Merian and Beryl Gilroy – to transform female treason into patriotic acts of social justice in the black, red and multi-cultural Atlantic.

I began this project by examining texts in which Madame Mediators captured oppositional and alternative structures of feeling in their work and preserved them

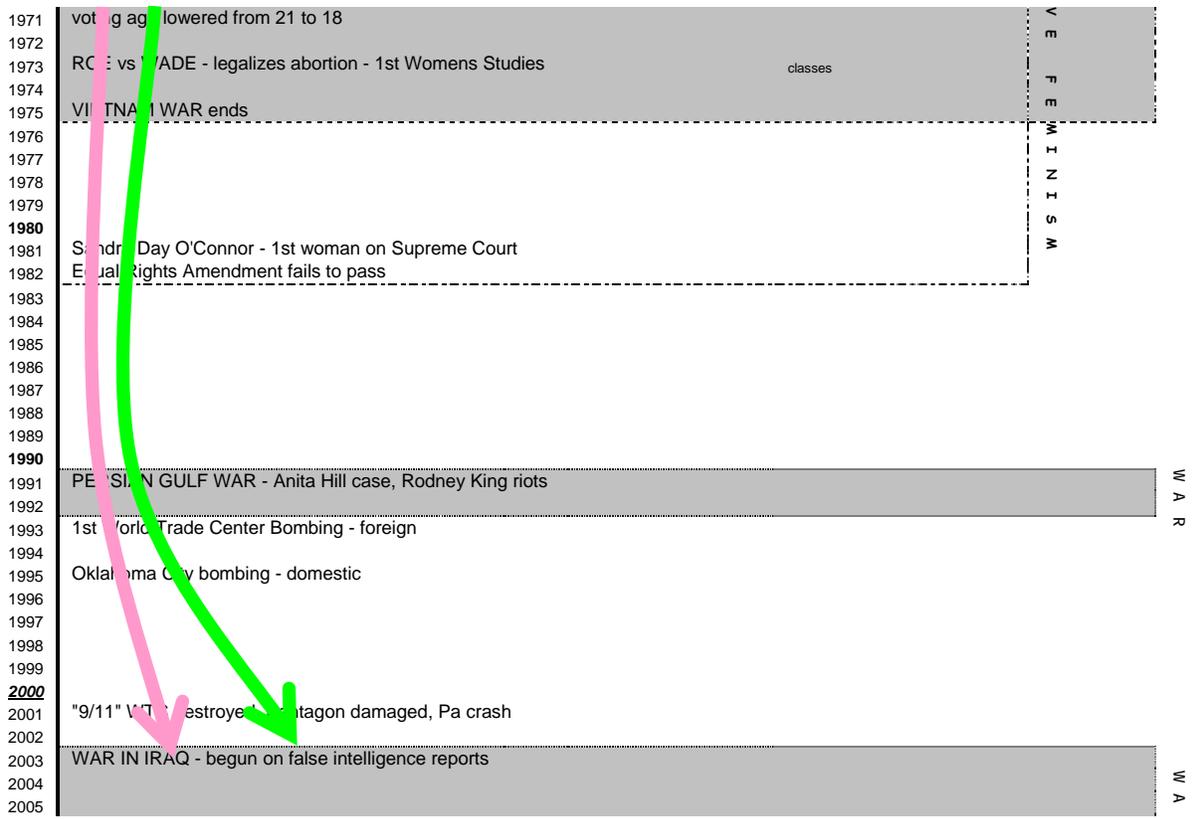
through complicity with hegemony to obtain the authority to publish them. As I have shown, Madame Mediator deploy an ecumenical reading strategy based on radical imagination, a change at the root of our presumptions about each other as individuals, races, classes, cultures, and also as each of these elements in various historical moments. This reading strategy assumes that a) any culture I "read" is a peer with my own culture and that b) any culture I read in a historical context is a peer with my own contemporary culture. I presume there are sophisticated reasons for the attributes and practices of the culture I engage and I set about to discover the rationale on its own terms. I call on 21<sup>st</sup> century readers to continually engage in ecumenical reading as we (re)read and (re)analyze texts from any historical moment in any form or genre – in other words, any text – continually raising feminist, anti-racist and social justice questions as we slowly renovate the Atlantic cockpit according to an emerging cultural imagination. Answering these questions relocates “women’s” lives as well as the lives of any "others" among "the human" and enfold ongoing feminist efforts to end sexism among the human efforts to end oppression and exploitation. However, this enfolding does not erase feminist concerns because, as I hope I have shown, while sexism is not the most important oppression, it is the foundational oppression that frames and justifies all others. No, I propose ecumenical reading as a strategy for entering the space we need to clear so that divergent cultural groups can “spark like a dialectic” as we coalesce to synthesize each day a more refined socially just practice and ideology. I propose that ecumenical readers think of ourselves as Madame Mediators collecting and archiving structures of feeling and then negotiating their dissemination (i.e. publication) and keeping the voices of resistance in the main flow of cultural debate.

APPENDIX I – THE TWO WAVE CHART

US ANTI-RACIST AND ANTI-SEXIST ACTIVISM HISTORIES







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