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II

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The authorial ciphers of Aphra Behn

"Aphra Behn has always been an enigma," Paul Salzman observes at the outset of his introduction to a new edition of her novella *Oroonoko*.¹ The wild fluctuations in her literary reputation, tied to changing sexual mores, changing views of women writers, and changing moral and political judgments of the Restoration period itself, comprise one part of this enigma.² Another (and related) part is comprised of the problem of her biography. This problem arises from the many shady moments in her life story, moments that have teased readers from her own time to ours to fill in and thus to "master" the gaps. The problem this poses for the critic has both theoretical and strategic implications: how much and what kind of attention should the serious student of her writing expend on the story (or rather, competing stories) of her life?

For some the debates about Behn's biography have contributed substantially "to the devaluation – and neglect – of [her] . . . *writing*."³ Even the recent feminist focus on "reconstructing" her life has not remedied the neglect of her literary techniques typical of older critical emphases on her alleged moral "looseness" and on the question of whether or not she was "truthful" ("realistic").⁴ Robert Chibka wittily wonders why critics have been so doggedly concerned with the historical truth or falsity of Behn's claim, at the beginning of *Oroonoko*, that "I was myself an eye-witness to a great part of what you will find here set down,"⁵ when similar autobiographical truth-claims – by Defoe, for instance, in *Robinson Crusoe*, or by Swift, in *Gulliver's Travels* – have tended to prompt sophisticated attention to the feints and ruses of seventeenth-century prose-fictional narrators ("Oh! Do Not Fear," p. 511). Chibka contrasts the many studies of *Oroonoko* focusing on whether Behn "really" went to the British colony of Surinam with the history of criticism of *Robinson Crusoe*; it is, he remarks, "hard to imagine an article concerning whether Defoe lived in goatskins near the mouth of the Orinoco River entitled, 'New Evidence of the Realism of Mr. Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*'" (p. 512).

While I agree with Chibka that Behn's gender – and other (related) aspects of her biography – have colored critical approaches to her works in all sorts of troublesome ways, I do not think that separating the author from the works is the solution to the problem. "Believe the tale, not the teller," said Henry James – but in a Jamesian text like *The Turn of the Screw*, as in many of Aphra Behn's texts, the "authority" of the tale is intimately bound up with the representation of a narrator with a distinct "interest" (psychological and economic) in her materials. While it is true that attention to Behn's biography has often worked to impede analyses of "the premises and structure" of the quite remarkable body of writing – prose fiction, translation, drama, and lyric poetry – which she produced between 1670 and her death in 1688, it nonetheless seems possible, at this historical juncture when sophisticated criticism of Behn's works is burgeoning, to repose the question of biography in a way that can not only notice but also attempt critically to account for her numerous if always partial self-representations. These occur not only in her prose fictions and poetry, but also in her translations of others' works and even in her drama, that most apparently non-autobiographical of genres. The Restoration theatre, however, had a socioeconomic structure that solicited, even depended on, authorial self-advertisement in the small world of London's theatre-goers. Behn, as Catherine Gallagher has forcefully shown, developed dramatic personae designed to attract spectators and sustain their interest in a production until the "third night" of the run, when playwrights finally received house receipts.⁶ Behn's authorial personae both build on and seek to revise contemporary images (mostly negative) of the female playwright, especially the image of the "public" woman writer as a prostitute: "Punk and Poesie agree so pat," one of Behn's male contemporaries wrote in 1691, "you cannot well be *this*, and not be *that*."⁷ Making some of her authorial personae complement characters represented in her plays (mostly comedies, but also some tragicomedies and one tragedy), she sought to transform the liability of her gender into an asset. Quite insistently in the prologues, epilogues, and epistles that frame her plays; in her unusual preoccupation with sexualized "discovery" scenes in which an actor or actress is revealed – undressing for bed – behind painted "Scenes"; and in her construction of striking "breeches" parts for actresses,⁸ Behn invited her contemporary readers and spectators to perceive authorial self-references and to enjoy the titillating pleasures of decoding those allusions, recognizing "likenesses" in the texts to the shape-shifting public character known variously as "A." or "Astrea" or "Aphra" Behn.⁹ Moreover, the question of whether the spectator or reader should *believe* a given persona created by Behn's "female pen" is central to the interpretive knots she so

often creates by tying fictional images with ones that seem to be drawn from the (authorial) life, itself being constructed and constantly altered in texts by Behn and others.

In this essay, I propose, then, to look at some of the ways in which she creates what might be called "cipher" or "enigma" effects; I will also look at some of the reasons – both social and aesthetic – for her fashioning of herself as a "cipher" in two senses of that term. The first is the meaning of "nothing" or zero (from the Arabic *sifr*), a meaning traditionally associated with the female genitals.¹⁰ The second meaning of cipher relevant to my essay – and to Behn's many literary allusions to her biographical experience as a spy – is that of a type of code or secret writing that invites (but may also resist) full deciphering by readers and spectators with varying amounts of information about the authorial subject(s). This is the meaning elaborated by several Renaissance men of letters who seem to have regarded cipher-systems as a second-order mode of literacy, like Latin, which had for centuries served as a social as well as an epistemological marker distinguishing elite literate men, priestly or secular, from others.¹¹ As vernacular literacy spread in the early modern period, as scripts became standardized and easier to read through the technology of print, and as even women and some lower-class men were able to pick up some Latin, the men of letters who served as diplomats, letter-writers, and spies for the monarchs of Europe grew increasingly interested in a "Renaissance" of the ancient art of ciphers. Behn participated in this Renaissance, I argue, albeit from a necessarily eccentric subject position and in ways that have been little remarked.

There is no scholarly consensus about Behn's parents' identity, their social class, the year of her birth,¹² or how she acquired the unusually good education her writings display. Like most seventeenth-century women, she seems not to have had access to the education in classical languages that gave one "full" literacy in her era; Dryden says that she knew no Latin, but his statement, like many about Behn by contemporaries, raises more questions than it answers: "I was desired to say that the author, who is of the fair sex, understood not Latin. But if she does not, I am afraid she has given us occasion to be ashamed who do," Dryden wrote in his preface to a collaborative translation of Ovid's *Epistles*; his preface is a sort of advertisement for the volume at a moment in the early 1680s when he like Behn and other dramatists had fallen on hard economic times.¹³ If Behn herself "desired" Dryden to say that she understood no Latin, she may have been slyly displaying herself both as a "typically" uneducated person and as an unusual scholar; and Dryden's gallant rhetoric may well signal his awareness of this female writer's value in advertising his book to a range of readers.¹⁴

Despite her alleged lack of Latin, Behn was mysteriously able to add classical allusions absent from the original to her translation of the Abbé Paul Tallement's *A Voyage to the Island of Love*; and she seems, intriguingly, to have known enough of the Greek alphabet to make the code she invented for her Netherlands spying activities resemble Greek characters.¹⁵

Her early history has provoked much scholarly speculation; so have many other moments in the life story she herself did much to shape as a mystery and, probably, as one of those socially "self-improving" stories so common in her era.¹⁶ Shakespeare made himself a second-generation gentleman by purchasing a knighthood for his father, and Behn was suspected early on, it seems, of not truly being (as she claimed in *Oroonoko*) the daughter of a gentleman named Johnson with high aristocratic connections. Behn's self-positioning in her fictions was confirmed by a biography written soon after her death. The anonymous biographer described her as a "gentlewoman by birth, of a good family in the city of Canterbury in Kent";¹⁷ her father or adoptive father, Mr. Johnson, is said to have been related to Lord Willoughby, through which connection Johnson acquired the position he was about to assume when he died at sea: the position of deputy governor of the colony of Surinam.

Behn's (and her biographer's) claims about her gentle birth were disputed in a rhetorical sequence that uncannily anticipates much subsequent criticism of Behn: in a poem called "The Circuit of Apollo," Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea praised the wit but deprecated the loose morals displayed in Behn's writings ("amongst women," says Finch's Apollo, "there was none on earth / Her superior in fancy, in language, or wit, / Yet owned that a little too loosely she writ"); a marginal note to Finch's poem completes the sequence by suggesting that Behn's biographer, and by implication the author of *Oroonoko* who claims gentle birth, are liars: "Mrs Behn was daughter to a barber, who lived formerly in Wye, a little market town in Kent. Though the account of her life before her works pretends otherwise, some persons now alive do testify upon their knowledge that to be her original."¹⁸ Lying, pretense, and the problem of belief or "credit": these are themes that recur again and again in Behn's *oeuvre*, as they do in the historical documents that would-be decoders of her biography have unearthed to make various and competing cases for (and against) her. Although she was, after Dryden, "the most prolific and probably the most popular writer of her time, with at least eighteen plays, several volumes of poetry, and numerous works of fiction that were in vogue for decades after her death,"¹⁹ she was more like Defoe than Dryden in keeping her "true" identity an enigma.

Critical debate has swirled not only around the circumstances of her birth but also, as I have already suggested, around her (alleged) voyage to Surinam in the early 1660s, during which sojourn, novelistically represented by Behn herself in the year of her death, she was said by a hostile observer – William Byam, the man who replaced her supposed father as deputy governor of the colony – to have had a love affair in the colony with the Republican William Scot. I consider Scot, the son of a regicide executed for treason after the Restoration, a significant albeit shadowy presence in *Oroonoko*. Although Scot is not named in that text, other Republicans are, and in a remarkably favorable light, given Behn's apparent Tory loyalism and ardent Royalism in the 1670s and 1680s.²⁰ Behn's memory of Scot arguably colors the novella's concern with epistemological and economic credit – a key issue for Oroonoko himself and for the white female narrator who tells his story in Behn's exercise in "memorial reconstruction." The black prince loses his freedom because he naively accepts the invitation of an English sea captain – with whom Oroonoko has engaged in slave trading – to dine aboard ship. Behn excoriates the "treachery" of the captain, who entraps the too-credulous prince and transports him to Surinam. There he is bought by Trefry, the manager of the absent governor's plantation. Although Trefry and the narrator assure Oroonoko that he will be freed when the governor arrives, the promised emancipation never occurs; instead Oroonoko leads a slave revolt against the deputy governor, Byam, and is punished by torture and execution.

Oroonoko's story alludes cryptically to that of the historical Scot, for though we know little about Behn's youthful encounter with Scot in Surinam (nothing other than Byam's mocking testimony to a romance between "Celadon" and "Astrea," as he called Scot and Behn), we do have holograph letters from Behn describing later encounters with Scot when she was in the Netherlands in 1666, shortly after her return from Surinam. Her epistolary rhetoric in reports home, describing her efforts to persuade Scot to give information against the Dutch and the exiled English Republicans in Holland, suggests that the question of who should believe whom in an erotically charged and tensely dangerous game of "ciphers" – a game in which neither player could be quite sure of the other's intentions – made a profound impression on Behn. The experience of spying with (and perhaps against) Scot had a strong effect on the woman who would turn to writing for her living upon discovering that she herself had been financially duped in her labors as a spy for the Crown, and the memory of her complex relations to Scot haunted her particularly when she imaginatively revisited Surinam in the year of her own death, writing about the dead and betrayed Oroonoko.

It was highly uncommon for a young woman of ambiguous class origins to be recruited for intelligence work in this era, as Behn herself pointed out in a late poem:

by the Arcadian King's Commands
I left these Shores, to visit Foreign Lands;
Employed in public toils of State Affairs,
Unusual with my Sex, or to my Years.²¹

Her acquaintance with Scot in Surinam may well have led Thomas Killigrew, Groom of the Bedchamber, to recruit her for the king's spying service (see Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, pp. 93–94). Under the code-name "Astrea," ironically, the very name given her by her enemy Byam, she sought to convince Scot (code name "Celadon") that the Royalists would protect and – equally important – reward him for information about his fellow Republicans and about the Dutch, who were supporting the anti-Royalist English forces in the second Anglo-Dutch War. In her reports Aphra calls Scot a "Rogue" and at one point says she "must not trust him in Holland"; but at another point she assures her handlers, and perhaps herself, that "I really do believe that his intentt is very reall and will be very diligent in the way of doing you all the service in the world for the ffuter [future]; he expresses him self very hansomly: and I beleeve him in all things: I am sure he wants no witt nor adress: nor anything to manage this affaire with, but money."²² If *Oroonoko* dramatizes a naive hero's "education in skepticism," as Robert Chibka calls it ("Oh! Do Not Fear," p. 515), the education is tragic because the hero learns too late that the "good" Christians – the apparently admiring estate manager Trefry, for instance, or the narrator herself, who is explicitly enlisted to spy on him and to distract him from thoughts of rebellion – have repeatedly if perhaps not fully consciously deceived him. The narrator herself doesn't trust Oroonoko as fully (or as foolishly) as he trusts her: although she says that he had "entire confidence" in her and called her his "great mistress" (*Oroonoko*, pp. 46, 45), she tells the reader that she did not think "it convenient to trust him much out of our view, nor did the country, who feared him" (p. 46); she arranges to have him "accompanied by some that should be rather in appearance attendants than spies" (p. 47). Is Oroonoko playing Scot's role to Aphra's recreation of Astrea the spy's role – or vice versa? Do we believe her when she says Oroonoko believed her? He was of course long dead in 1688, so we have no way of knowing if she altered anything that came "from [his] mouth" (p. 6); Scot too was long dead by 1688, and hence could not challenge any refraction of his relation to her in *Oroonoko*'s complex relation to the woman who appropriates his story. In any case,

one of her first letters about Scot to her Royalist employers describes his movements as being extremely constricted – as Oroonoko's are – by the spies who surround him.²³

It is the narrative refraction of an epistemological and visual *situation*, rather than any simple allegorical correspondence between characters in *Oroonoko* and the characters in this episode of Behn's life, that seems significant to me. Someone is looking at someone looking back (and over his/her shoulder) – and neither party knows who exactly knows what, although both are bound by affection as well as by political and economic designs that may require each, at any moment, to "use" the other. The spying chapter of her biography is enigmatically inscribed in *Oroonoko*; and the enigma exists not only to titillate the reader but also to mirror a still perplexing and libidinally unresolved situation for the narrator/author. If in her representation of Oroonoko's and the narrator's vexed relation to each other and to other manipulators of words in the colonial setting Behn represents aspects of her own youthful naivety *vis-à-vis* Scot (in Surinam as well as a few years later, perhaps, in the Netherlands) and at the same time probes the problems of her "credit" with the Royalists who hired her but broke their promises to pay her, the authorial self-allusions Behn embeds in her novella are neither politically nor psychologically straightforward; sometimes the ciphers contain guilty or even self-critical charges, and sometimes they are tinged by anger and hurt at the images of the female author minted by others.

Many questions remain unanswered about Behn's spying mission to Flanders and about the imprisonment for debt – or near-imprisonment – that ensued upon her return to England.²⁴ Between her return in 1666 and 1670, when her first play, *The Forc'd Marriage, or the Jealous Bridegroom*, was produced by the Duke's Company in London (one of two licensed theatre companies in the city), her biographers surmise that she married a Mr. Behn (or Ben or Bhen or Beene). Some have speculated that he was one of those wealthy, sexually greedy but repellant "old" husbands depicted so often, and with such scathing irony, in Behn's comedies. There is, however, not one shred of historical evidence for his existence, much less his character, other than the posthumous biography, which describes him as "a merchant of this city through Dutch extraction." Behn herself never mentions a husband, and I suspect that he was an invention of convenience, as was his apparently prompt demise;²⁵ being a widow was more respectable than being an unmarried woman working in a public arena, and being a widow certainly was less constricting than being someone's wife: according to the Common Law doctrine of *feme covert*, the wife was owned by the husband, her being literally "covered" by his.

A series of *Love-Letters* ("by Mrs. A. Behn," first published posthumously as a short story in *The Histories and Novels of the Late Ingenious Mrs. Behn: In One Volume* [1696]), dramatizes the difficulty of distinguishing fiction from fact in Behn's life story or stories; in the second edition of *The Histories and Novels* (1698), the *Love-Letters* – allegedly addressed to a bisexual lawyer named John Hoyle, with whom Behn is supposed to have had an affair in the 1670s – are no longer printed as a piece of short fiction; rather, they have become part of the biography of Behn prefacing (and advertising) the new edition of the works and probably based – as the shorter version in the 1696 volume also was – on a two-and-a-half page "Account of the Life of the Incomparable Mrs. BEHN" included with the posthumously printed play, *The Younger Brother* (1696).²⁶ All subsequent biographies depend on these textually variable early biographies, published completely without authorial attribution in the *Younger Brother*; ascribed to "A Gentlewoman of Her Acquaintance" in the eighteen-page "Memoir on the Life" of the 1696 *Histories and Novels*, and then ascribed, in the sixty-page version of the biography published in 1698 and entitled "Life and Memoirs," to "One of the Fair Sex."²⁷

The ambiguity and gaps in the evidence provided by the early biographies make it quite understandable that even twentieth-century accounts of Behn's life, as well as assessments of her place in literary history, should offer competing narratives; many modern as well as earlier accounts of her life and works read like novels gemmed with clues that readers are invited to pursue, with satisfaction of our curiosity a prize always just around the next corner. Instead of defending or refuting absolute positions critics would do well, I think, to analyze the possible aims as well as the aesthetic and political effects of the intermixing of fiction and biography in works by Behn and in many contemporary (not to mention later) works about her.

Given the strong likelihood that the early posthumous biographies were based largely on materials written by Behn herself (and found among her literary "remains"), it does indeed seem that many of that biography's lurid details were part of her own economically, politically, aesthetically, and erotically motivated efforts at self-fashioning. The early biography's denial of a rumor that she had had a romantic liaison with the black hero of *Oroonoko*, for instance (a denial present in the 1696 and 1698 versions of the "Memoirs," and rearticulated both in the *Dictionary of National Biography* article about her by Edmund Gosse and in the introduction to the Norton edition of *Oroonoko* of 1973), is a striking example of a narrative device that piques the reader's curiosity without satisfying it. The rumor clearly builds on hints from the novella itself, which Thomas Southerne had revised and produced as a play in the very year that the

posthumous edition of Behn's work, with the "advertising" biography, first appeared.²⁸ Critics often register some sense that Behn is deliberately withholding information from them, but I propose that we take that refusal to tell all – on Behn's part as well as on that of her first biographer, her "intimate" acquaintance and perhaps her double – as part of an intriguing authorial strategy aimed at generating "news" or, as Behn calls the commodity, "novelty": "for where there is no novelty, there can be no curiosity," as she remarks in *Oroonoko* (p. 8). The strategy of generating curiosity and novelty is prompted both by individual authorial agency and by the social circumstances of Behn's writing, circumstances shaped by her gender and mysterious class origins among other factors.

Catherine Gallagher has taken just this interpretive tack by relating the specific economic requirements of the Restoration London theatre – in particular the requirement that a play "survive" until the third night's performance – to Behn's development of a scandalous and intriguing persona that Gallagher calls the "newfangled whore" (*Nobody's Story*, p. 14). To fashion this persona, and a related one based on the figure of the (oppressed Stuart) monarch, Behn deliberately played on the "early modern concept of female 'nothingness,'" what I have referred to as the first meaning of "cipher." This concept encompasses both women's presumed genital lack (with its bawdy figuration as a hole or zero) and women's "secondary ontological status in relation to men" (p. xv). The idea of woman as a "nothing" is famously articulated in canonical texts such as *Hamlet* and *Clarissa*.²⁹ In Gallagher's view, Behn plays in innovative ways on the notion of female nothingness, portraying the author as a commodity (and seller of commodities) in an expanding international market and hence dramatizing the links between the female author and "the conceptual disembodiment that all commodities achieve at the moment of exchange"; this overlap between different kinds of "nothingness" allows Behn to construct remarkable composite personae that are characterized by identity-effects designed to pique and hold an audience's interest and, however paradoxical it may seem, to generate outraged criticism from her political opponents (p. 14).

Behn's use of autobiographical personae in her drama (including many prologues and epilogues, some written for others' plays), her lyric poetry, and her prose fiction, which ranges in length from short stories (e.g., "The Black Lady") through novellas (*Oroonoko*, *The Fair Jilt*) to the long, generically hybrid *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (1683–86?), is intricately bound up with her allegorical use of historical "facts" for political purposes; what she writes might justly be called "factional" in at least two senses of that word. Deliberately exploiting her reputation as a

Tory in many plays attacking Puritans or “Roundheads,”³⁰ Behn nonetheless displays in some of her writings, especially, I think, those set in the “American” colonies (the posthumously produced *Widow Ranter, or the History of Bacon in Virginia*, and *Oroonoko*), a more complex political perspective than most critics allowed until recently. The complexities arise in part because Behn’s dramatic representations of women’s economic oppression by patriarchal marriage make her views of male absolutism at times more fractured than those of contemporaries like Thomas Hobbes or Robert Filmer. And although she relentlessly satirizes Cromwell’s followers and their Whig descendants, she differs from Rochester and other Tory writers in her analysis of the cost of masculine libertinism for the women who fall for men like the rake Willmore in *The Rover*. Critics are beginning to explore the ways in which “Behn’s treatment of gender often seems to complicate and refract, if not indeed to contradict, her party politics, creating in her work the sense of multiple and incommensurate ideological agenda.”³¹ Moreover, as several recent critics have remarked, the differences between Whig and Tory views in the late seventeenth century were not always clear; certainly the modern stereotype of the Tories as committed to “antiquated notions of hierarchy and patriarchy,” in contrast to Whigs committed to “bourgeois individualism”³² is challenged by Behn’s sympathy for characters oppressed by a “bad” monarch or monarchical representative, as Oroonoko and his wife Imoinda are, for example, in the part of the novella set in Oroonoko’s grandfather’s absolutist court, and as Oroonoko, Imoinda, and the white female narrator all are in the Surinam colony ruled by Byam, the English king’s corrupt representative. Decoding the political allegory of *Oroonoko* is in short very difficult: the black prince has sometimes been read as a composite symbol for Stuart monarchs such as the “martyred” Charles I and the soon-to-be-deposed James II;³³ the Stuarts’ color was black, and there is no doubt that the novella attaches complex and perhaps competing meanings to the “ebony” color of Oroonoko’s and his wife Imoinda’s skin. Parts of *Oroonoko*, moreover – the opening depiction of innocent Indians living like Adam and Eve – remind us that Behn’s deep fascination with an ideal “golden age” – an ideal fueled by her knowledge of South and North American colonial sites – sometimes works against a coherent articulation of a recognizably Royalist political view. In “The Golden Age: A Paraphrase on a Translation out of the French” (1684), she elaborates on Tasso’s evocation (in his pastoral drama, the *Aminta*, 1573) of a paradisaical realm in which “Each Swain was Lord o’er his own will alone, / His Innocence Religion was, and Laws,” and neither “Right” nor “Property” – much less “Honour” – existed.³⁴ Behn’s abiding concern with relations of erotic equality and her attacks on the

institution of marriage – a fundamental element in the patriarchal absolutism advocated by Robert Filmer among others – make her at times a highly idiosyncratic defender of the monarchy and the Tory party.

It remains difficult to decipher not only her party politics but also, on a more local level, her politically charged relations with literary contemporaries. She is usually described as a great admirer of the free-thinking Tory the Earl of Rochester, for instance – but since Behn encoded aspects of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester’s character and name, especially with the pun on “will” and the French “mot,” word, in her portrait of Willmore in *The Rover* Part 1 (1677) and Part 2 (1681),³⁵ we may surmise that her admiration was leavened with a certain critical irony. Willmore, the penniless Cavalier “rover” of the play’s title, is a witty, ebullient fortune-hunter with great sexual charisma. The prostitute Angellica Bianca – who bears Aphra Behn’s initials and hangs out a “sign,” significantly, a self-portrait, to advertise her wares – swiftly falls in love with Willmore but also interrogates some of his most egregiously self-serving and misogynist views. Having fallen in love with her picture (which a man “may gaze on” for “nothing,” he bawdily remarks³⁶), Willmore berates her for charging money for her favors rather than offering them for free, as a true lover would: “Though I admire you strangely for your beauty,” he says to Angellica, “Yet I condemn your mind” (p. 185). Specifically, he condemns her mercenary practice as a prostitute, but his words place him in a long tradition of men who criticize women’s mental powers as inferior to men’s – a tradition that the historical Rochester had wittily illustrated in a poem arguing for the superiority of men’s erotic (and conversational) relations to each other over relations to any woman:

Love a Woman! y’are an Ass,
 ’Tis a most insipid Passion,
 To choose out for your happiness
 The idlest part of Gods creation!³⁷

Behn’s Angellica Bianca, whose name wittily inverts the traditional association of prostitutes with the color black and with devils’ agents, clearly emerges from a cultural context that equated women writers and actresses – *public* women – with whores. But Angellica’s rhetorical skills, like those of the author Angellica figures, allow her to parry if not perfectly destroy Willmore’s opinion of her “trade”: he is the man with the mote in his eye, she suggests, with a scathing glance at the rake who marries an heiress to remedy a chronic absence of funds, as the historical Rochester did, at the king’s request: “Pray tell me, sir,” says Angellica to Willmore, “are not you guilty of the same mercenary crime [as what you accuse me of

committing], when a lady is proposed to you for a wife, you never ask, how fair – discreet – or virtuous she is; but what's her fortune – which if but small, you cry – she will not do my business – and basely leave her, though she languish for you – say, is this as poor?" He grants that it is – but goes on to marry the heiress Helena, who is reported dead from childbirth in the first scene of *The Rover*, Part 2. Loving Willmore is dangerous to women, it seems. But for those who can read her allegorical signs, Behn probes Rochester/Willmore's character here (and perhaps also in the portrait of Philander in *Love-Letters*) without offering any clear moral judgment for or against it. Critique lurks in admiration until she comes to write her elegy for Rochester, where – with the subject dead – the portrait becomes more unequivocally positive – and completely silent on the supposed death-bed conversion to Christianity that preoccupied Rochester's biographer Gilbert Burnet.³⁸ Perhaps she didn't credit it.

Her relations to Dryden were, in their lifetimes, even more complex than her relations to Rochester. Critics disagree about whether she wrote a poem satirizing Dryden's conversion to Catholicism, "A Satyr on Doctor Dryden."³⁹ Since Behn herself may have been raised as a Catholic – which doesn't mean that as an adult she "believed" in Catholic doctrine – and since we have a letter from her to the publisher Jacob Tonson stating that she would rather be esteemed by Dryden than by anybody in the world,⁴⁰ some critics have felt that she could not have written the satire, which is quite bitterly critical of Dryden. The riddle of Behn's possible authorship of the satire on Dryden cannot, I suspect, be empirically resolved.⁴¹ It does, however, seem symptomatic of the problem of "deciphering," in the sense of finding a single fixed meaning, Behn's political, religious, and social views at various moments in her career. The satire on Dryden, unpublished in Behn's lifetime, exists in only two manuscript copies, and only one of these has Behn's name on it; does the name signal authorship or simply that she copied it out in a book?⁴² I suspect that Behn could well have written the satire – and could have regretted offending Dryden too. The poem is quite within her stylistic register(s), and an author capable of mocking even her revered king – as she does in a satire entitled "Caesar's Ghost"⁴³ – would have been perfectly able to criticize Dryden for what appeared to many to be an opportunistic, even favor-currying act. A few courtiers converted to Catholicism under the Catholic James II, and Dryden himself had to protest, in *The Hind and the Panther* (III. lines 376–85), that such conversion brought no worldly rewards. After the Glorious Revolution, when the Protestant William of Orange and his wife Mary came to the throne, Roman Catholicism once again became a serious social liability – and indeed Dryden experienced it as such, but that was after Behn's death.

Hypocrisy in religious matters seems to have been something that deeply angered Behn; herself accused of atheism by Rochester's pious biographer Burnet, she excoriates the so-called "Christians" who break their word to Oroonoko in her novella. The satire attacks Dryden for an act of hypocritical opportunism unworthy of "a poet" of "great heroick th[e]ames" and inspiration, and suggests that Dryden was content to be a Protestant when the king was one, but converted after the king did: "for when the act is done and finish't cleane / what should the poet doe but shift the scene[?]" (Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 231).

Leaving the question of Behn's authorship of this poem open – as I think we must, given the extant evidence – we can use the attribution problem to address once more the larger question of her authorial ciphers: the fact cited by Mary Ann O'Donnell as conclusive proof against Behn's authorship of the satire – namely that she copied satires not her own into a miscellany⁴⁴ – seems to me to point precisely to a question central to her writing career and its critical reception: how do we tell the difference between a copy and an "original"? Several poems now attributed to Behn (the witty poem on male impotence, for instance, entitled "The Disappointment") were originally published as Rochester's, and the question of her "canon" is still highly unsettled, partly because so many of her poems and fictional works were published posthumously.⁴⁵

The question of how to distinguish genuine from counterfeit texts clearly preoccupied Behn's age, when works circulated in manuscript as well as in print and multiple copies of anonymous works often made attribution very difficult.⁴⁶ In her Textual Introduction Janet Todd cites a note preceding a poem in the March 1707 issue of *The Muses Mercury*, a miscellany printed in 1707–08, inviting any suspicious reader "to inspect the manuscripts 'at the Booksellers who publishes this Paper.'" The manuscripts in question were by Behn, and contrary to the claim "Never before printed" on the title page, "all but two of the twelve poems by Behn had already appeared," albeit in somewhat different forms (Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. xliii–xliv). The text included the following general note about the problem of "certifying" Behn's texts as her property:

If it were proper to make publick what we have learnt of the Story of the Author of the following Verses, 'twou'd be an unquestionable Proof of their being *genuine*. For they are all writ with her own Hand in a Person's Book who was very much her Friend; and from thence are now transcrib'd for the *Mercury*.
(cited in Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. xliii)

Behn often raises questions about what constitutes literary originality. Forced, like other women writers (Katherine Philips and Anne Bradstreet,

for example), to defend herself against charges that she had “stolen” material from men (the lines between translation, imitation, and plagiarism being even blurrier in Behn’s time, before copyright laws were formally introduced, than they are today), she defended herself vigorously in various prefaces and epistles to readers.⁴⁷ In the epilogue to *Sir Patient Fancy* (1678), she yoked a defense against “bawdiness” with a discussion of “copying” that defines the latter as a positive (and original) act. In the original production, the famous actress Nell Gwynne spoke Behn’s words defending her (their) play against a “coxcomb” who cried:

Ah, Rot it – ’tis a Woman’s Comedy,
 One, who because she lately chanc’d to please us,
 With her damn’d Stuff, will never cease to teeze us.
 What has poor Woman done, that she must be
 Debar’d from Sense, and sacred Poetry?
 Why in this Age has Heaven allow’d you more,
 And Women less of Wit than heretofore?
 We once were fam’d in story, and could write
 Equal to Men; cou’d govern, nay, could fight.
 We still have passive Valour, and can show,
 Wou’d Custom give us leave, the active too . . .
 We’ll let you see, whate’er besides we do,
 How artfully we copy some of you:
 And if you’re drawn to th’ Life, pray tell me then,
 Why Women should not write as well as Men.⁴⁸

With such a defense of the actress’s or writer’s right to “copy” men artfully, the female author portrays her mimetic work positively while giving notice that she will adopt different genders as well as different costumes for different occasions. Indeed she often plays the role of a “hermaphrodite” or member of what one contemporary called a “third sex,” as, for instance, in her witty poem “To the Fair Clarinda, who made love to me, imagin’d more than a Woman.”⁴⁹

Behn’s ciphers, as they pertain to the realms of national (and colonial) politics, interpersonal relations, gender roles, and textual issues, are no less difficult to interpret than are her biographical ciphers. And these various strands, I have been arguing, are often complexly intertwined. The interconnections or allegorical “translations” among these realms seem, indeed, to be at the heart of the verbal wit she used to delight – and covertly to instruct – her theatre audiences and, in the last decade of her life, the “unseen” public that comprised the (potential) audience for her lyrics, translations, and prose fictions. The theatre itself functioned as a kind of allegory for court politics; in Behn’s era “political relationships were acted

out in tableaux in the boxes under the same illumination as the stage, while references were made onstage to events in the bedrooms of Whitehall” (Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxv). Alert to the links between plots onstage and at court, comically willing to suggest that masked prostitutes in the audience were the “Poetess’s spies,” bringing her rich material for dramatization and interpretation, Behn often constructed her prologues and epilogues to frustrate readers’ attempts neatly to define her views or identity and to insinuate allegorical political messages to members of her audience or readership. Plays, she wrote, “are secret instructions to the people, in things that ’tis impossible to insinuate into them in other way.”⁵⁰

Behn’s authorial personae are at once remarkably disembodied and tantalizingly carnal; they frequently occupy an eroticized subject position *vis-à-vis* the male or female spectator or reader.⁵¹ They include not only the prostitute and the monarch so well analyzed by Gallagher but also the lusty, economically independent widow (as in *The Widow Ranter* or the *City Heiress*) and the related persona of the “scheming” woman who manages the “property” of the female body, her own or another’s. In *Oroonoko*, for instance, the aging courtesan Onahal becomes a striking figure for the author when she exclaims to a man, “Oh, do not fear a woman’s invention!” (p. 23). Onahal uses her inventive powers both to manage Imoinda’s body by smuggling her into Oroonoko’s chamber so he can take the prize of her maidenhead and to pursue a complex erotic and epistemological game with a young man Onahal herself fancies – and upon whom she spies, even as he thinks he is spying on her. Another example of a woman who learns to manage the property of the female body is Sylvia in *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and His Sister*. Here Behn creates a morally complex portrait of a lady: Sylvia’s “education” in vice goes hand-in-hand with an increasing awareness that she must depend on her wit and counterfeiting talents to survive in a world where no man can or will provide for her.

Behn’s ciphers – in the sense both of figures for the author and a coded type of writing – seem to amalgamate an emergent (Baconian) notion of a cipher as a second order of literacy similar to the humanist man of letters’ ability to communicate in Latin or Greek with an older notion of allegorical writing as a sugar-coating of difficult theological doctrines – or dangerous philosophical ones. In this hybrid notion of cipher-allegory, aimed at an audience mixed along lines of class as well as gender, the writer simultaneously *deciphers* problematic ideas for ordinary readers or spectators and *bides* (reciphers) certain aspects of the meaning. The double hermeneutic activity is as dangerous as spying, for the authorities may misconstrue one’s allegorical efforts, seeing in them ambitions to seduce and usurp. Behn

herself acknowledges the potential danger of a type of writing – vernacular translation of the classics – that puts certain kinds of elite knowledge in the hands of lower-class people and, in particular, of women. In a poem of 1683 commending Sir Thomas Creech on his translation of Lucretius's *De Rerum Naturae* (*On the Nature of Things*), she initially depicts herself as an “unlearn'd” woman who benefits from Creech's work; as she develops a parallel between Creech's female reader and Eve, however, we realize that the poem explores a relation between author and reader that could pertain as well to her relations to her own readers as Creech's to her or Satan's to Eve:

The god-like *Virgil*, and great *Homers* Muse,
Like Divine Mysteries are conceal'd from us.
We are forbid all grateful Theames,
No ravishing thoughts approach our Ear . . .
[until Creech comes]
. . . by this *Translation* . . . [to] advance
our knowledge from the State of Ignorance
And Equallst Us to Man!

(Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 25–28, lines 29–32, 41–43)

Here she wittily and subversively plays on Milton's characterization of Eve falling because of her ambition to equal Adam through the acquisition of forbidden knowledge. In this poem and elsewhere in her writing, Behn probes a fear that Creech himself articulated in his defensive preface to the second edition of his translation. There he worried that the “pill” of his translation might be covered in “venom” rather than in sugar for (some) Christian readers. Lucretius's proto-libertine arguments that “there was no life after death and that happiness should be gained on earth” (Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 384) clearly challenged Christian doctrines, as Behn indicates when she compares the translation of the pagan philosopher to something “As strong as Faiths resistless Oracles . . . / Faith the secure Retreat of Routed Argument” (lines 56–58). Praising Creech for decking “The Mystick Terms of Rough *Philosophy*” in “so soft and Gay a Dress, / So Intelligent to each Capacity; / That They at once Instruct, and charm the Sense” (lines 45, 47–49), Behn follows Sidney and Milton in exploring the knotty aesthetic and social problem of the potentially amoral – or worse, morally subversive – power of poetry or of rhetoric more generally. As a kind of cipher, allegorical writing could protect the free-thinking writer against censorship even as it allegedly supported that writer's traditional claim to teach (in a socially acceptable fashion) through delighting. If in her early writing Behn firmly eschewed a moral aim for her playwriting,

polemically aligning herself with Shakespeare as opposed to the “well-educated” Jonson,⁵² by the time of Creech's translation of Lucretius, when she herself had been attacked for a politically “incorrect” position expressed in the epilogue to the anonymous play *Romulus and Hersilia*, Behn was evidently developing a notion of secret allegorical writing to define a specifically political educative function for the drama. As she wrote in the Dedicatory Epistle to *The Lucky Chance* (cited in note 50), “'Tis example that prevails above reason or DIVINE PRECEPTS . . . I have myself known a man, whom neither conscience nor religion cou'd perswade to loyalty, who with beholding in our theatre a modern politician set forth in all his colours, was converted . . . and quitted the party.” To promote herself and her political agenda, she developed many tactics of partly exposing, partly concealing “secrets” about her life and self in her writings. These tactics constitute a symbolic cryptography that reveals Behn's fascination with modes of disguise, deceit, and such para-cryptographic practices as “counterfeiting” one's handwriting – her character Philander, for instance, in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, begs his illicit lover Sylvia to burn one of his letters because “writing in haste I have not counterfeited my hand.”⁵³

Approaching Behn as an adept in versions of cipher writing understood broadly as including esoteric types of writing such as political and autobiographical allegory decodable to greater and lesser degrees by different members of the audience may help us gain a sharpened perspective not only on some of her characteristic themes and writing practices, but also on the vexed question of her names. “Name” had a double metaphorical meaning in Behn's time, signifying both personal virtue and renown. Since, for women, personal virtue was defined as a sexual modesty incompatible with any appearance in the public sphere of the sort that would lead to “renown,” women with literary ambitions could not pursue fame without risking the loss of their “good name.” This dilemma underlies some women's decisions to write anonymously or to deny their responsibility for their works' publication. Although Behn developed authorial personae very different from those more “chaste” ones constructed by aristocratic near-contemporaries such as Katherine Philips (the “matchless Orinda”) or Anne Finch (“Ardelia”), Behn like these other women assumed a pen name to gain some of the prerogatives of naming ascribed to Adam and exercised by many of his sons.⁵⁴ Designated “A. Behn” or “Ann Behn” on most title pages of her early printed works,⁵⁵ she referred to herself as “Astrea,” as did her early biographer. Although the name had initially been used as a weapon against her by Byam, in his letters from Surinam, Behn appropriated it for new purposes, conjuring up not only the heroine of a

popular French romance by Honoré d'Urfé but also the historical Elizabeth Tudor. That famous queen had been honorifically associated with Astraea, the classical and virgin goddess of justice who fled the earth after the end of the Golden Age and whose imagined return was celebrated by Virgil in his Fourth Eclogue.⁵⁶

Although most readers have assumed that "Astrea" is somehow more fictional than "Aphra" is, a few recent critics share my suspicion that "Aphra" is also a *nom de plume*.⁵⁷ However the name came to be attached to the writer, "Aphra" works as a particularly appropriate and ironic counter to "Astrea," for the latter name is associated with royal virgins, while the former is associated with prostitutes. A third-century courtesan named "Afra" or "Aphra" was worshipped as the patron saint of prostitutes during the Renaissance, although her existence (and hence her popular cult) was deemed a fiction by the Counter-reformation church – another detail Aphra Behn might have relished.⁵⁸

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, had remarked that daughters were like "moveable goods," unable to keep or preserve a family "name" (in the sense of honor).⁵⁹ I want to conclude by suggesting that Behn's last name as well as her first ones are part of the specular and rhetorical cipher-field we have been exploring. In one of the first documents mentioning "Behn" as her surname, a syntactically enigmatic diary entry by one Thomas Culpepper probably made in the 1690s, the name is the occasion for a witty allusion to the Hebrew word for son and to an earlier writer in whose footsteps Behn hoped that her "masculine part, the poet" (preface to *The Lucky Chance*) would be able to tread: "BEENE the famos female Poet di[e]d 29 April 1689," Culpepper remarks. "Her mother was Colonell Culpeper's nurse and gave him suck for some-time, Mrs. Been was Borne at Sturry or Canterbury, her name was Johnson, so that she might be called Ben Johnson, she has also a fayer sister maryed to Capt. [there follows an illegible name which could be Wrils, Eris, Erile, or Write] their names were frfranck, & Aphora, was Mr. Beene."⁶⁰ "Mr. Beene," perhaps a scribal error for "Mrs. Behn," since it is in apposition to "Aphora," seems like a curious and tenuous grammatical appendage to this sentence. Most scholars who cite the diary entry have done so to argue for the historical existence not of Mr. Behn but of a father named "Johnson";⁶¹ I want to focus attention, however, on Culpepper's play on "Ben Johnson," with its suggestions of a literary identification based on the past tense of the verb "to be" and on the notion of a literary genealogy: Aphra *son of* ("ben") Johnson. For Astrea or Aphra Behn seems to me quite capable of presenting herself as a somewhat unruly son of Ben by using a name that plays on his Christian one and that, moreover, neatly rhymes with the instrument both

writers deployed to construct their name in the sense of fame: the pen. That Behn pronounced her name to rhyme with "pen" seems likely, on the evidence of Culpepper's play with "Ben Johnson."

The author who for some still mysterious reason took the name Behn, and who, in *Oroonoko*, called attention to the power of her "female pen" to make a subject live beyond death, had a playfully Oedipal relation to the historical Ben Jonson. In *The Amorous Prince* of 1671 she defiantly anticipated criticism from educated male readers and spectators who admired "rule-bound" authors like Jonson and Dryden: "you grave Dons, who love no Play / But what is regular, Great Johnson's way."⁶² Nonetheless, although she set her mode of playwriting against Jonson's in various polemical passages, she also aspired to a professional renown like Jonson's, and mockingly suggested that he was not so different from Shakespeare and herself (the "unlearned" dramatists) as one might think. She yoked Jonson's and Shakespeare's great names together in the "Epistle to the Reader" prefixed to her early play *The Dutch Lover*; there she remarked that "Plays have no great room for that which is men's great advantage over women, that is Learning. We all well know that the immortal Shakespeare's plays (who was not guilty of much more of that [i.e., learning] than often falls to women's share) have better pleas'd the World than Johnson's works, though by the way 'tis said that Benjamin was no such Rabbi neither, for I am inform'd that his Learning was but Grammar high; (sufficient indeed to rob poor Salust of his best orations").⁶³ Through the playful undermining of Jonson's claims to be a learned poet – by accusing him of plagiarizing Sallust Behn actually brings Jonson closer to herself and Shakespeare, both of whom were accused of stealing others' materials – Behn assumes just that "hermaphroditical authority" Jonson had attacked in his play *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*.⁶⁴ Anything but a "silent woman," Behn is nonetheless a writer whose authentic voice is hard to find, for she changes her voices and names with Shakespearean or Ovidian finesse. And since, as Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus says, quoting Ovid, "Terras Astraea reliquit" ("Astrea has left the earth," *Metamorphoses* Book 1, line 150), the modern quest for Aphra Behn takes us inevitably to the ciphers of identity she left us in the products of her pen.

NOTES

- 1 Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko and Other Writings*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. ix.
- 2 For discussions of her reputation, see Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670–1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 1–4; Jacqueline Pearson, "History of

- the *History of the Nun*," in Heidi Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn: History, Theory, and Criticism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), pp. 234–52; Pearson, *The Prostituted Muse: Images of Women and Women Dramatists, 1642–1737* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1988); Jeslyn Medoff, "The Daughters of Behn and the Problem of Reputation," in Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman (eds.), *Women, Writing, and History 1640–1740* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1992); Nancy Cotton, *Women Playwrights in England, c. 1363–1750* (London: Associated University Presses, 1980); Frederick M. Link, *Aphra Behn* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1968), chapter 9; Angeline Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra: A Social Biography of Aphra Behn* (New York: Dial Press, 1980); and Janet Todd, *The Secret Life of Aphra Behn* (London: André Deutsch, 1996).
- 3 Quoted from Dale Spender, *Mothers of the Novel: One Hundred Good Women Writers Before Jane Austen* (London: Pandora, 1956), p. 50. See also Robert Chibka, "Oh! Do Not Fear a Woman's Invention: Truth, Falsehood, and Fiction in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 30, 4 (1988), p. 511.
 - 4 "As contemporary standards of female chastity often overshadowed Behn's work" in the past, Robert Chibka remarks, "so our century's fear that she lacked another sort of fidelity, to the ideal of historical truth, has distracted attention from her work" ("Oh! Do Not Fear," p. 511).
 - 5 All quotations from *Oroonoko* are from the text edited by Paul Salzman, cited above, note 1.
 - 6 See Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, pp. 10–11, and the introduction by Emmett L. Avery and Arthur H. Scouten to *The London Stage, 1600–1800, Part 1: 1660–1700*, ed. William Van Lennep (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965), pp. lxxix–lxxxiv.
 - 7 Robert Gould, "Satirical Epistle to the Female Author of a Poem called 'Sylvia's Revenge'"; the connection between female writer and whore is a commonplace of the age, as Catherine Gallagher, who quotes these lines, notes in *Nobody's Story*, p. 23.
 - 8 In *The Ornament of Action: Text and Performance in Restoration Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 41, Peter Holland argues that no other Restoration dramatist is "even half as preoccupied with bedroom scenes" as Behn is. Gallagher discusses the significance of Holland's observation in *Nobody's Story*, p. 32, and Elin Diamond, in "Gestus and Signature in Aphra Behn's *The Rover*," *ELH*, 56 (1989), pp. 519–41, discusses the technical innovation of discovery scenes. See also Pat Rogers, "The Breeches Part," in Gabriel Bouce (ed.), *Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp. 244–58.
 - 9 My argument here parallels that of Diamond, "Gestus and Signature," although I seek to historicize the notion of "deciphering" an authorial "signature" more than she does.
 - 10 This meaning has recently been explored by Edward Tayler, "King Lear and Negation," *English Literary Renaissance*, 20 (1990), pp. 17–39; by Terry Castle, *Clarissa's Ciphers: Meaning and Disruption in Richardson's Clarissa* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); and by Catherine Gallagher in *Nobody's Story*.
 - 11 The best-known Renaissance cryptographer was John Trithemius, whose *Polygraphia*, published in 1518, inspired Francis Bacon's work on the "double cipher" system of cryptography. For a useful general history of cryptography, see David Kahn, *The Codebreakers: The Story of Secret Writing* (New York: Macmillan, 1967).
 - 12 Maureen Duffy thinks Behn was born in 1640 (*The Passionate Shepherdess: Aphra Behn, 1640–89* [New York: Dial Press, 1980]), p. 16, whereas Sara Mendelson proposes 1649 in *The Mental World of Stuart Women* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987), p. 2. Behn's grave in Westminster Abbey states that she died on 16 April 1689.
 - 13 The theatrical depression was the result, in part, of the amalgamation of the two great theatre companies (the King's Company and the Duke's Company, for which latter Behn chiefly wrote) in 1682. With the lessening demand for new plays, many playwrights turned to translation.
 - 14 Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy, etc.*, ed. George Watson (London, 1692), p. 273. Janet Todd also suspects that Behn knew some Latin; see Todd's introduction to *Seneca Unmasked and Other Prose Translations*, in *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Janet Todd, 7 vols. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992–96), vol. IV, p. x.
 - 15 Introduction to *The Poems of Aphra Behn: A Selection*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Pickering, 1994), pp. xviii–xix. On Behn's code, see Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, p. 76.
 - 16 For a discussion of her mysterious origins see Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women*, pp. 117ff.
 - 17 *On the Life of Mrs. Behn, Written by a Gentlewoman of her Acquaintance*, in *Histories and Novels* (London: printed for S. Briscoe, 1696), sig. A7v.
 - 18 Cited and discussed in Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 9.
 - 19 Gallagher, *Nobody's Story*, p. 3. Gallagher also remarks that four of her plays were produced at court – an accomplishment only Dryden, again, surpassed. See Fidelis Morgan (ed.), *The Female Wits: Women Playwrights of the Restoration* (London: Virago, 1981), p. 12.
 - 20 See Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women*, p. 123, for a discussion of the "unexpected" Republican perspective in *Oroonoko*. Mendelson, however, oversimplifies the question of the novella's political allegory by explaining the republicanism of the narrative just as a function of Behn's youth and the fact that she loved William Scot.
 - 21 Entitled "A Pastoral to Mr. Stafford, Under the Name of Silvio, on his Translation of the Death of Camilla: Out of Virgil," the poem is addressed to John, son of William Howard, Viscount Stafford and is printed in full in Janet Todd (ed.), *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 185–98 (no. 64).
 - 22 Public Record Office, State Papers, 29/169, 117; cited in Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 101.
 - 23 Scot is "not suffered to go out of [Colonel Bampfield's] ... sight," according to the letter (cited in Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 96).
 - 24 For information on Behn's spying activities, including reprinted documents, see William J. Cameron, *New Light on Aphra Behn* (Auckland: University of Auckland Press, 1961); Janet Todd and Francis McKee, "'The Shee Spy' and *The Younger Brother*," *Times Literary Supplement*, July 1993.

- 25 Maureen Duffy, who has expended much labor in trying to track Mr. Behn down in shipping records and other documents, rightly remarks that he has "less substance than any character [Behn] ... invented" (*The Passionate Shepherdess*, p. 48).
- 26 On the "Account" and the 1696 "Life," see *Poems, A Selection*, ed. Todd, pp. viii-ix; for a detailed description of the different versions of the biography in different editions of the *Histories and Novels*, see Robert Day Adams, "Aphra Behn's First Biographer," *Studies in Bibliography*, 22 (1969), pp. 227-40.
- 27 Janet Todd follows Behn's previous editor, Montague Summers, in suspecting that all three accounts were written by Charles Gilden, "the main editor of the posthumous Aphra Behn and himself a playwright, manipulator of the literary marketplace, and author of well-known 'fictional letters and tales'" (Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. x).
- 28 See *On the Life of Mrs. Behn* by a "Gentlewoman of Her Acquaintance," in *Histories and Novels*, 1696, sig. b1r: "I knew her intimately well, and I believe she wo'd not have conceal'd any Love-affair from me ... which makes me assure the World, there was no Affair between that Prince and Astraea." Behn hints in her own story of Oroonoko at the possibility of a romance between herself and the hero; for an elaboration of this argument, see my "News from the New World: Miscegenous Romance in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* and *The Widow Ranter*," in David Lee Miller, Sharon O'Dair, and Harold Weber (eds.), *The Production of English Renaissance Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), esp. pp. 185-86.
- 29 Terry Castle's study of *Clarissa* take its title from the heroine's statement, "I am but a cypher, to give him [Lovelace] significance, and myself pain." See *Clarissa's Ciphers*, p. 15; see also *Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 2, lines 117-18, where Hamlet plays with bawdy double meanings and entraps Ophelia into saying "I think nothing" - to which Hamlet responds, "That's a fair thought to lie between maids' legs" (cited from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974], p. 1163).
- 30 See Robert Markley, "'Be Impudent, Be Saucy, Forward, Bold, Touzing, and Leud': The Politics of Masculine Sexuality and Feminine Desire in Behn's Tory Comedies," in J. Douglas Canfield and Deborah C. Payne (eds.), *Cultural Readings of Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theater* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), pp. 115-40.
- 31 Ellen Pollak, "Beyond Incest: Gender and the Politics of Transgression in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister*," in Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p. 155; see also Robert Markley and Molly Rothenberg, "Contestations of Nature; Aphra Behn's 'The Golden Age' and the Sexualizing of Politics," in Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, pp. 301-21.
- 32 Ros Ballaster, "Aphra Behn and the Female Plot," in Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, p. 189; see also Susan Staves, *Players' Scepters: Fictions of Authority in the Restoration* (London and Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979).
- 33 For a reading of the novella as a Stuart allegory, see George Guffey, "Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*: Occasion and Accomplishment," in George Guffey and Andrew White, *Two English Novelists: Aphra Behn and Anthony Trollope* (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1975).

- 34 Cited from Todd (ed.), *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 31-32 (the poem is no. 12 in her edition); she notes that Behn expanded from Tasso's play's the famous opening chorus evoking a primitive paradise where the only law was pleasure.
- 35 See Diamond's "Gestus and Signature," p. 528; for a longer discussion of Rochester's place in Behn's life and works - and for a discussion of the accusations against Behn made by Rochester's biographer Burnet - see Duffy, *Passionate Shepherdess*, pp. 195-203.
- 36 *The Rover*, in *Oroonoko, The Rover, and Other Works*, ed. Janet Todd (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 175. All citations are to this edition of the play.
- 37 Rochester, "Song," in *The Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 25.
- 38 For a text of the Rochester elegy, see Todd (ed.), *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 161-63 (no. 53); although she wrote a moving "pindarick" to Burnet at the end of her life, after he had inquired about her health, her earlier relations to him were troubled; he wrote to Anne Wharton, Rochester's cousin, whom Behn had commended in verse, that "some of Mrs. Behn's songs are very tender; but she is so abominably vile a woman, and rallies not only all religion but all virtue in so odious and obscene a manner, that I am heartily sorry she has writ anything in your commendation" (cited in Goreau, *Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 245).
- 39 For a text of this poem, which is sometimes printed under the title "On Doctor Dryden, Renegade," see Todd (ed.), *Works*, vol. 1, p. 231.
- 40 See Todd, *Works*, vol. 1, p. xxiii. Dryden's relations to Behn were certainly marked by an ambivalence equal to that which she displayed toward him, if indeed she wrote the "Satyr": his commissioning of her work for his volume of Ovid's *Epistles* indicates some degree of esteem, and he wrote a prologue and epilogue after Behn's death for her play *The Widow Ranter*; on the other hand, he advised Elizabeth Thomas in a letter not to write so "loosely" as Behn had. The letter is quoted and discussed in James A. Winn, "*When Beauty Fires the Blood*": *Love and the Arts in the Age of Dryden* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 430.
- 41 Mary Ann O'Donnell argues that the poem's "mistaken" attribution to Behn "probably came about because of the presence of this poem in ... a commonplace book into which Behn copied many contemporary satires, of which only a few are hers" (Mary Ann O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography* [New York: Garland, 1986], p. 308). Janet Todd (*Works*, vol. 1, p. xxiii), however, follows Montague Summers in printing the poem as Behn's, though she notes that it seems "at odds" with Behn's other expressions of admiration for Dryden.
- 42 Although in her introduction to the *Works* Todd suggests that Behn's failure to publish the satire may be evidence that she regretted writing it, in her headnote on the poem itself (no. 71 in her edition of the *Works*, vol. 1, p. 427), she notes that many satires were circulated in manuscript in this era, often unsigned.
- 43 See Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women*, p. 174, for a discussion of this poem and its implications for an understanding of Behn's complex political stance.
- 44 See O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn: An Annotated Bibliography*, pp. 308-10.
- 45 Todd discusses for instance the "eight rather dubious letters, supposedly by Behn," printed in 1718 in a volume entitled *Familiar Letters of Love, Gallantry, and Several Occasions, by the Wits of the last and present Age ...* (*Works*, vol. 1, p. xlv).

- 46 See Harold Love, *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and also Arthur F. Marotti, "Malleable and Fixed Texts: Manuscript and Printed Miscellanies and the Transmission of Lyric Poetry in the English Renaissance," in W. Speed Hill (ed.), *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-93 (Binghamton, NY: Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), pp. 159-73.
- 47 See, e.g., her defense against charges of plagiarism in the postscript to *The Rover* Part I; the "sign of Angellica," Behn claims, is the "only stolen object" from the play she was charged with appropriating, Thomas Killigrew's *Thomaso* (cited from *The Rover*, ed. Todd, p. 248).
- 48 Cited from *The Works of Aphra Behn*, ed. Montague Summers, 6 vols. (1915; rpt. New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), vol. IV, pp. 115-16.
- 49 For a text of "To the Fair Clarinda," see Todd (ed.), *Works*, vol. 1, p. 288 (no. 80); for the poem (by Daniel Kendrick) praising Behn as the sole exemplar of a super "Third Sex," see Montague Summers (ed.), *Works*, vol. VI, p. 363.
- 50 Dedicatory Epistle to *The Lucky Chance*, *Works*, ed. Summers, vol. III, p. 183.
- 51 See Jessica Munns, "'Good Sweet, Honey, Sugar-Candied Reader': Aphra Behn's Foreplay in Forewords," in Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*, pp. 44-62; Gallagher studies some of the same erotic dynamics in "Who Was that Masked Woman: The Prostitute and Playwright in Aphra Behn," chapter 1 of *Nobody's Story* and also reproduced in Hutner (ed.), *Rereading Aphra Behn*.
- 52 For a discussion of this self-positioning passage, from Behn's preface to *The Dutch Lover*, see below, p. 243.
- 53 Cited from Maureen Duffy's edition of the *Love-Letters between a Nobleman and his Sister* (London: Virago, 1987), p. 41. Ellen Pollak discusses an analogous instance of semiotic disguising in *Love-Letters*; see her "Beyond Incest," cited above n. 1, p. 178.
- 54 See Dorothy Mermin, "Women Becoming Poets: Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Anne Finch," *ELH*, 57 (1990), pp. 335-55.
- 55 See O'Donnell, *Aphra Behn*, p. 2, on the appearance of "Ann."
- 56 See Frances Yates, *Astraea: The Imperial Theme in the Sixteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), pp. 9-10.
- 57 Both Janet Todd and Sara Mendelson suggest that "Aphra" (variously spelled) may be an assumed name, despite literary historians' efforts to link "Aphra Behn" with an Aphra mentioned in baptismal records in the 1640s.
- 58 Angeline Goreau notes that the original "Aphra" had been a "sacred prostitute in the temple of Venus in Augsburg on the Rhine in the third century A.D. until her conversion by Saint Narcissus" (*Reconstructing Aphra*, p. 17), but Goreau does not link the name with Behn's own creation of "virtuous" prostitute figures in her plays, figures like Angellica Bianca and La Nuche in Part I and Part II of *The Rover* respectively.
- 59 Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Sociable Letters* (London, 1664), pp. 183-84.
- 60 *Adversaria*, MS. Harley 75988, f. 453v. Cited from Todd (ed.), *Poems: A Selection*, p. vii; see also Mendelson, *The Mental World of Stuart Women*, p. 16, and n. 3, p. 208.
- 61 See, e.g., Duffy, *The Passionate Shepherdess*, pp. 18-21.
- 62 *Works*, ed. Summers, vol. IV, p. 121.

63 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 224.

64 See *Epicoene*, Act 1, scene 1, line 76, and Paula Backscheider's discussion of the passage in *Spectacular Poetics: Theatrical Power and Mass Culture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 27.

FURTHER READING

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