

Dialogue in Aphra Behn's Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave

Aphra Behn'in Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave adlı Eserinde Diyalog

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Abstract

The article deals with the issue of dialogical communication in Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave (1688) by Aphra Behn. The theoretical basis for the article is M. Bakhtin's concept of the dialogue and R. Sell's idea of dialogicality in literature. The topical questions of race, nationality and religion are discussed in relation to seventeenth-century England. After a brief overview of the representation of the nations other than English in Aphra Behn's plays, including her contribution to the prejudices against the Dutch, the main attention is paid to her novel Oroonoko, where a set of binary oppositions of Black and White, Christian and Heathen can be found. The prejudices towards Blacks in English culture are revealed, above all, the association of the black skin with vice, monstrosity and sexuality. Behn's subversion of traditional oppositions of civility and barbarity in relation to England and English colonies and Africa is made explicit using the example of Oroonoko, the hero of the novel, who conforms to all the standards of beauty and good education. The problem of family honour traditionally associated with the East is raised in the analysis of the first part of the novel. Oroonoko's attempt to have a dialogue with White people is traced throughout the novel: first he tries to communicate with the treacherous English captain, then with local authorities in Surinam. The failure of this dialogue is attributed to the absence of common moral values and the refusal on the side of the Whites to treat a Black as a human being equal to them. The end of the dialogue means the end for the hero, who becomes concentrated only on revenge and death. An optimistic possibility of a dialogue between people of different races, nations and religion can be found in the episode of a meeting of three nations – Whites, Blacks and South American Indians. Despite their differences, all the participants of this meeting share common moral values. Behn's attitude to woman's position in Oriental and Christian societies is also discussed in brief, as well as Oroonoko's anti-Christian opinions stimulated by the hypocrisy of the Christian people. The conclusion is drawn that the dialogicality we see in Oroonoko is very important nowadays.

Keywords: Aphra Behn, Oroonoko, dialogue, race, religion.

Öz

Bu makale Aphra Behn'in *Oroonoko, or the History of the Royal Slave* (1688) eserindeki diyalojik iletişim sorununu ele almaktadır. Makale teorik olarak, Bakhtin'in diyalog kavramını ve R.Sell'in edebiyatta diyalojiklik fikrini temel almaktadır. Irk, ulus ve din gibi güncel konular on yedinci yüzyıl İngilteresi ile bağlantılı olarak tartışılmaktadır. Bu makalede Aphra Behn'in oyunlarında Felemenkçe'ye karşı olan ön yargılara katkısı da dahil olmak üzere, İngilizler dışında diğer ulusların temsiline dair kısa bir değerlendirmeden sonra esas ilgi Siyah ve Beyaz, Hristyan ve Dinsiz ikili karşıtlıklarının bulunabileceği *Oroonoko* romanına yoğunlaşmaktadır. İngiliz kültüründe siyahlara karşı ön yargılar, daha da önemlisi siyah tenin hizmetçilik, çirkinlik ve cinsellik ile özdeşleştirilmesi ortaya koyulmaktadır. Behn'in İngiltere, İngiliz kolonileri ve Afrika ile ilişkili olan uygarlık ve barbarlık gibi geleneksel karşıtlıkları tahrir etmesi, romanın güzellik ve iyi eğitim normlarına tümüyle uyan kahramanı Oroonoko'dan örneklerle açıkça gösterilmektedir.

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Romanın ilk bölümünün analizinde, geleneksel olarak Doğu ile ilişkilendirilen aile onuru sorunu konu edilmektedir. Roman boyunca, Oroonoko'nun beyaz insanlarla olan bütün diyalog girişimleri takip edilmektedir; ilk olarak o sahtekar İngiliz kaptanla, sonra da Surinam'da yerel yönetim ile iletişime girmeye çalışmaktadır. Bu diyalogun başarısızlığı ortak ahlaki değerlerin olmaması ve beyazların siyahlara kendilerine eşit insanlar olarak davranmayı reddetmeleri ile ilişkilendirilmektedir. Diyalogun sonu yalnızca intikam ve ölüme odaklanan kahramanın da sonu anlamına gelmektedir. Farklı ırk, ulus ve dinden insanlar arasında iyimser bir diyalog ihtimali üç ırkın – Beyazlar, Siyahlar ve Güney Amerikalı Kızıldereli– buluşma kısmında bulunabilir. Farklılıklarına rağmen, buluşmadaki tüm katılımcılar ortak değer yargılarını paylaşmaktadır. Oroonoko'nun Hıristyan halkının ikiye bölünmesi tarafından uyarılan Hıristyan karşıtı fikirlerinin yanı sıra Behn'in Doğulu (Oryantal) ve Hıristyan toplumlarda kadının yerine dair yaklaşımı da kısaca tartışılmaktadır. Makalenin sonunda, Oroonoko'da gördüğümüz diyalojikliğin bugünlerde çok önemli olduğu sonucuna varılmaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Aphra Behn, Oroonoko, diyalog, ırk, din.

The problem of 'otherness' is inseparable from the binary oppositions of West and East, North and South, Black and White etc. In turn, these oppositions give way to a wide range of mutual prejudices that are very difficult to overcome. Apparent globalism of the contemporary world is challenged by the struggle to acquire and shape local identities. The conflict between the nations, cultures, and states is best resolved through dialogue which implies the ability to respect each other, listen to each other's opinion, while sharing the common system of basic values. As Roger Sell optimistically points out in his *Communicational Criticism*, "living side by side with human otherness not only calls for responsible and decent kinds of behaviour, but should, and could, be rewarding and enjoyable" (Sell, 2011, p.2). The reading and discussion of literary works can help create this feeling of acceptance of the 'others' and respect towards them. The history of literature reveals that, for example, racial issues are not limited to contemporary literature, but were raised by the authors from quite distant times. In this article the problem of race as well as the issue of a dialogue using Aphra Behn's novel *Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave* (1688) will be discussed. First an overview of the role the debates and the genre of a dialogue played in Restoration culture will be given, and next most attention will be concentrated on Aphra Behn's representation of other cultures, her treatment of race and the function of dialogue in *Oroonoko*.

In seventeenth-century English literature racial issues existed on the margins. The main debates were going around religion, tradition, human nature, human development, as well as man's and woman's place in family and society. The most famous literary "quarrels" of that time concerned gender system and priority of Antiquity in Art: "Quarrel on Women" and "Quarrel between Ancients and Moderns." Restoration period (1660–1688) is especially remarkable for contradictory attitudes to these fundamental issues.

Restoration culture is marked by the flourishing of playwriting and further development of the genre of "dialogue," inherited from the Antiquity, but appropriated for the acute questions of that time. The dialogue which incorporates contemporary topics concerning literary tradition and the ways of writing a good play can be found in John Dryden's *Of Dramatic Poesie, an Essay* (1668). Dryden achieves the effect of plurality of voices in it. Some of his 'characters' defend the norms established by the ancient writers, as well as ancient literature as a model for modern writers, while other 'characters' prove the relativism of ideas about beauty and their dependence on the time and place. Despite different approaches to cultural problems, Dryden's "characters" understand each other quite well and are able to come to common ground. Dryden, a major playwright and literary critic of Restoration

period, seems to reflect in his theoretical writings his experience of conversations in literary coteries of his time, first of all, of those held in Will's coffee-house, famous for bringing together various important literary figures discussing acute cultural problems (Wheatley, 2011, p.520). It was a place where many of the debates connected with the famous "Quarrel of Ancients and Moderns" were held.

One of Dryden's followers and admirers was Aphra Behn (1640-1689), who is considered to be the first professional woman writer in England, the first woman in this country to earn money by writing plays, stories, novellas and novels. Brought up in the tumultuous period of English Civil War and Revolution, Behn was sensitive to the contradictions of her time. Aware of the contemporary debates, she turned to playwriting and produced lots of comedies and tragicomedies, as well as a tragedy and a farce. Her plays reveal her interest in different nations and cultures. Behn scholars have been attracted by this aspect of her dramatic works, but sometimes they tend to downplay the issue of nationality. J. Pearson points out that Behn "makes less obvious distinctions between the English and foreigners than we might expect, defying politics of polarity" (Pearson, 2005, p.40). M. Rubik noticed that "critics have... argued that class in Behn's works is much more relevant to the formation of a group identity than race" (Rubik, 2000, p.37). Sometimes Behn sneers at Englishmen, as, for example, in her most famous and, probably, best comedy *The Rover*. It is set in Naples, and tells a lot about the difference between Neapolitans and English people, but in a positive way. On the other hand, she ridicules Dutchmen –political enemies of the English – in *The Dutch Lover*. J. Pearson claims that "*The Dutch Lover* resists associations with gluttony, drunkenness, and perhaps effeminacy, which were the chief elements in the construction of the English stereotype of the Dutch in the period" (Pearson, 2005, p.40). It is true that drunkenness was the vice most frequently ascribed to Dutch people. Hence a popular expression 'Dutch feast,' which was used by many seventeenth-century authors, among them a famous diarist John Evelyn. But even if Behn's character Haunce van Ezel is not addicted to heavy drinking, the very word combination 'Dutch lover' contributes to a whole range of expressions reflecting English prejudices against the Dutch. Her epistolary novel *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister* (1684-1687) also reveals these prejudices, when Behn claims that Holland is "so degenerate from good manners and almost common civility" (Behn, 1996, p.121). There are very few men in this country who can behave politely with a woman.

Behn's plays concentrate on the themes of love, marriage, parental authority and, sometimes, politics. Despite the fact that plays imply the use of dramatic dialogue, Behn's dramatic writings lack the 'dialogue' as the meeting of different points of view, none of which is complete. When she laughs at her political opponents, she does not allow them to present their own opinion in full and makes the audience despise these characters, as they are usually immoral and ridiculous. The characters in Behn's plays may express different views on love and marriage, but are generally reconciled by uniting with the people they are attracted to. Lack of 'dialogue' in Aphra Behn's plays corresponds to Bakhtin's idea that "the whole concept of a dramatic action, as that which resolves all dialogic oppositions, is purely monologic" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.17). In Behn's later works of fiction the contradictions become more acute and less easily solved. They are visible in *Love-Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, in which the lovers belong to opposite political parties: the woman to the Royalists, the supporters of the king, and the man to the Republicans and rebels. Anyway, the conflict existing in the first part of the novel is modified by the end of it: Silvia and Philander are no longer true and faithful lovers, but a couple of tricksters, and ex-rebel Philander betrays his companions and is reconciled with the king. Though epistolary form is excellent for representing various points

of view and different opinions, Behn makes limited use of it and by the third part of the novel almost abandons epistolarity and returns to traditional narrative form and even includes a narrator.

Oroonoko, or The History of the Royal Slave (1688) is Aphra Behn's work in which she not only includes people of different races and nationalities, but also succeeds in creating two equally important points of view: those of the fictive "Aphra Behn" and of Oroonoko, the hero of the novel. It is not only an example of an adventure novel, a romance, a novel raising abolitionist and religious issues, but also a dialogical novel in the sense of meeting different points of view, text's ambiguity and openness to various interpretations and the use of dialogue as communication between the hero and the outside world, not only in the form of dialogue, but also in the form of the narrative. As David Fishelov observed, "literary texts sometimes exploit the fact that there may be a gap between the represented voice (and position) of the speaker (or narrator) and that of the author" (Fishelov, 2014, p.24). Such a gap is visible in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko*. This novel is also marked by the elements of heteroglossia, as it tells about the representatives of three races: Whites, Blacks and South American Indians, and even more nations: English, French and Dutch, as well as African nations. Much has been written about Behn's achievements in creating local peculiarities of Indians from Surinam, quite independent from European stereotypes and prejudices. Another aspect is hero's attempt at conducting dialogue with the world. But the dialogicality here may be traced deeper and is represented by the positions of the fictive "Aphra Behn" and Oroonoko, the main hero of the novel. Following Bakhtin's notion of polyvocality, we can say, that Behn was able to create a hero whose voice exists independently side by side with the narrator's voice and the voice of the fictive 'Aphra Behn.' Moreover, it is important to point out neither of these positions is finished or complete, and both these characters are depicted in a positive way.

In "Epistle Dedicatory to the Lord Maitland" Aphra Behn reveals some of the principles she based on, while writing her most famous novel. She likens a writer to a painter, and points out that "a Picture-drawer, when he intends to make a good Picture, essays the Face many Ways, and in many Lights, before he begins; that he may chuse, from the several turns of it, which is most Agreeable, and gives it the best Grace" (Behn, 1997, p.5). Behn manages to develop this approach to the degree of polyvocality of her novel, though the logic of her argument expressed in the "Epistle Dedicatory" brings her to the major principle of neoclassicism – the idea of a beautiful nature. Making further analogy between painters and poets, Behn says, that writers "draw the Nobler part, the Soul and Mind" (Behn, 1997, p.5). She seems to explain the principle of creating her hero, who otherwise may be considered too ideal and unreal. Behn supports the idea of using plurality of sources to obtain knowledge. Addressing to Lord Maitland, she praises his curiosity: "Like the industrious Bee, from every Flower you return Laden with the precious Dew" (Behn, 1997, p.6). Such kind of curiosity is reflected in her novel. Moreover, Behn is eager to give in to centrifugal force and to enter a chaos of different voices.

The hero of the novel, prince Oroonoko, though named by means of oxymoron "the Royal Slave," contrary to the characters of other polyphonic novels, for example, Dostoevsky's novels, is very solid and stable inside. Behn apparently valued such kind of stability, as she revealed it in the "Dedication" to Henry Pain in the first edition of her novella *The Fair Jilt, or The History of Prince Tarquin and Miranda*: "But nothing cou'd press or deject your great Heart, you were the same Man still" (Behn, 1688, s/p). Oroonoko's opinions do not change throughout the novel, and his idealistic moral position remains the same. He never breaks his word, almost never doubts about what to do, what is good and what is bad. In this respect he is very normative and is a true representative of neoclassicist literature.

As well as with the issue of nation, racial issue in *Oroonoko* is sometimes underestimated by Behn scholars. While seventeenth-century England did not create a clear racist discourse with the explanation of superiority of one and inferiority of another race, the issue of skin colour was very much in vogue. A. Korhonen convincingly argues that in Renaissance England black skin was associated with deformity and monstrosity, as well as with sexuality and lack of reason and sense; moreover, “skin colour could act to define the borders of civility and barbarism” (Korhonen, 2005, p.95). Black skin aroused curiosity, but still “generated a whole range of negative qualities and suspicious attitudes” (Korhonen, 2005, p.100). Aphra Behn did not share such suspicions. The first Black character in her writings, Abdelazer from the play of the same name, was a villain, but not because of his skin colour, as Derek Hughes argues convincingly (Hughes, 2007, p.xxii). The source of Behn’s *Abdelazer, Lust’s Dominion* by T. Dekker (1637) did convey prejudices against Black people, and the character’s violence and treachery led to Negroes’ expulsion. Derek Hughes claims that Elizabeth I also planned “to expel Black Africans from England” (Hughes, 2007, p.xiv). Aphra Behn downplayed the racial issue in her play.

In *Oroonoko* Behn goes further: she subverts this traditional attitude to Blacks and questions African ‘barbarity.’ Following Eurocentric notions of beauty, she makes Oroonoko an exception in terms of appearance: he does not have a flat nose and “great turn’d Lips,” as other Africans do (Behn, 1997, p.13). But his skin is utmost black, and this fact does not make the hero less attractive for the author: “There was no one Grace wanting, that bears the Standard of true Beauty” (Behn, 1997, p.13). Oroonoko’s beloved Imoinda is called “the beautiful Black Venus” (Behn, 1997, p.14). For Behn, black colour is not a synonym of ugliness, just a mark of the ‘other,’ who has the same right to be called beautiful, as a white person. As for barbarity traditionally associated with Blacks, Behn states explicitly that Oroonoko “had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature” (Behn, 1997, p.13). He is well-bred and well-educated. Behn says that Oroonoko’s “Discourse was admirable upon almost any Subject,” and he was an excellent example to get rid of the prejudice “that all fine Wit is confin’d to the White Men” (Behn, 1997, p.14). Oroonoko had all the potential of a good ruler despite his colour and nationality.

Throughout the novel Oroonoko is placed in communication with the outside world. The first part lacks dialogue as meeting point of different positions. It is set in an African Oriental world with parental authority, polygamy, and perpetual war. Behn reflects some of the English prejudices against Africa. Oroonoko is a part of this world, as he is a soldier, a lover, and a slave-owner. Nevertheless, the rules of the game in this world are more or less clear: women are subordinate to men, grandfather is an authority which cannot be questioned, and slaves are taken only in the war. Oroonoko submits to the laws of this world and acknowledges the supreme authority of the king.

Behn also raises an issue of family honour traditionally associated nowadays with Eastern mentality. The honour of a woman is the basis for man’s honour. A woman should guard her honour. If she violates it, she is subject to death. The conflict of honour Behn creates in the first part of *Oroonoko* is complicated by the actions of the grandfather – the king. It is the king who violates the laws of family honour and places his absolute power above everything. He makes Imoinda deny her lawful marriage and become his concubine despite her plea that “by the Laws, he cou’d not; and from his Royal Goodness, wou’d not take from any Man his wedded Wife: So she believ’d she shou’d be the Occasion of making him commit a great Sin, if she did not reveal her State and Condition” (Behn, 1997, p.17). The law itself does not make much difference for the old king; it is Imoinda’s actual

virginity (the marriage has not been consummated yet) that matters. For Oroonoko, on the contrary, it is the custom that has almost an absolute power. Reflecting on what happened to his beloved, he considers her “irrecoverably lost” for him, as “Custom... makes it so vile a Crime for a Son to marry his Father’s Wives or Mistresses” (Behn, 1997, p.18). If he violates this law, he will “either ignobly set an ill President,” or will be forced to abandon his country, “and fly with her to some unknown World,” where none heard their story (Behn, 1997, p.18). Nevertheless, the fact that the king could not, due to his impotence, “rob” Imoinda of her “Virgin-Honour” is also valued by Oroonoko (Behn, 1997, p.24). In the first part of Behn’s novel woman’s honour is limited to woman’s actual virginity. After Imoinda has had a sexual encounter with Oroonoko, she becomes “a polluted thing” for his grandfather, “as it is the greatest Crime in nature amongst ‘em to touch a Woman, after having been possess’d by a Son, a Father, or a Brother” (Behn, 1997, p.26). Imoinda’s attempt “to save her own Life” claiming she was raped turns out to be successful, as the king decides “she shou’d not die” (Behn, 1997, p.26). But king’s decision to sell her off as a slave is a “sentence, worse than Death” (Behn, 1997, p.26). After doing it Oroonoko’s grandfather comes to a conclusion “he ought in Honour to have kill’d her,” “to have nobly put her to death,” than to make her “a common Slave,” as slavery is the utmost disgrace (Behn, 1997, p.26). So, the king violates the laws of family honour once again, preferring to revenge on his ex-mistress in an ignoble way and not grant her honour killing. He is even afraid of letting Oroonoko know the truth and sends him a lie that Imoinda was “secretly put to death” (Behn, 1997, p.27). Oroonoko, in his turn, tries to escape the “web” of the laws of honour they are all entangled in, and decides not to revenge on his grandfather. Despite the loss of the beloved, the hero remains in his country and even returns home as a “Victor,” defeating his country’s enemies (Behn, 1997, p.30). He is pulled out of his world almost artificially and is placed in the situation of leading a dialogue with the outsider, an English captain whom he was acquainted with before, but whom he does not know as a person at all.

From this episode onwards Aphra Behn creates “dialogues,” most of which are reported, but some of them using direct speech, where one interlocutor (Oroonoko) means what he says, and another side (English captain, Governor Byam and others) just utters words that have no meaning at all, using a mere manipulation. In the first case, trying to communicate with the captain, Oroonoko is “too generous, not to give Credit to his Words” (Behn, 1997, p.33). He even calls the captain “his Friend” (Behn, 1997, p.34). But for the latter a word given to a heathen and a Black is just nothing. Aphra Behn does not specify if this captain fulfils the promises made to his countrymen, but it is clear he does not accept the idea of universality of honour in all the people regardless their colour or religion. Oroonoko, on the other side, believes that honour is universal. It remains unclear whether English captain really *believes* that only Christians are worth trusting, and all other people are inferior to them, and therefore cannot be considered human beings and can be turned slaves without hesitation, or he just uses difference in religion as an excuse for treating the “other” as a commodity. Anyway, Oroonoko’s silent and pathetic reproach “forc’d Blushes” on captain’s “guilty Cheeks,” but it is too late to change anything (Behn, 1997, p.34). Captain’s repentance does not go further than blushing. A true dialogue between Oroonoko and English captain is impossible.

In the second part of the novel the hero is in dialogue with the world turned upside down, a kind of a carnival world in Bakhtin’s meaning, although, lacking regenerative forces, a world doomed to destruction. This carnival world, though placed in South America, is presented by the author as the real one, not fantastic. Surinam does not submit to any supreme power. The power here belongs to the “notorious Villains as Newgate never transported,” people who “understood neither the Laws of

God or Man; and had no sort of Principles to make 'em worthy the Name of Men" (Behn, 1997, p.59). The traditional power structure, where decisions are made by people distinguished by noble birth, old age and moral qualities, is totally destroyed. Oroonoko tries to negotiate with the representatives of the local authorities, while the supreme authority is absent. Global power is nonexistent in Behn's Surinam, while local power is everything. Oroonoko fails again, though he even attempts at making a written agreement with the Englishmen: "Demanding... that it shou'd be ratify'd by their Hands in Writing, because he had perceiv'd that was the common way of contract between Man and Man, amongst the Whites: All this was perform'd..." (Behn, 1997, p.56-57). Oroonoko does not understand again, that despite all his attempts to accept the rules of the Englishmen, these rules do not exist for him, but only for themselves (if they do). As a Black and as a Heathen he is excluded from the system of the laws made only for Christian people. The hero is cheated again: he is whipped "like a common Slave" (Behn, 1997, p.57). As well as in the episode with the English captain, Oroonoko silently and pathetically reproaches the "Faithless Governor" Byam for his treachery, but his reproach does not affect Byam at all (Behn, 1997, p.57). Behn calls Oroonoko's whipping "Barbarity," thus subverting the traditional opposition of civility and barbarity attributed to Whites and Blacks respectively. Those are Whites in her novel who are much more barbarous than people of any other colour.

What happens next is very significant. Being mortally offended, Oroonoko does not want to talk even with the people who are sympathetic to him: "Aphra Behn"-the heroine and her friends. He promises not to do them any harm by lifting up his hand. "He refus'd to Talk much," the narrator notices (Behn, 1997, p.58). A little further the hero says "you shall see that Oroonoko scorns to live with the Indignity that was put on Caesar" (Behn, 1997, p.58). It is remarkable this is the last phrase he says in direct speech in "Aphra Behn's" presence. "All we cou'd do cou'd get no more words from him," the narrator concludes (Behn, 1997, p.58). What we see here is the end of the dialogue Oroonoko tried to lead with the gloomy carnival world. The hero proves to be unable to discuss anything with his enemies any longer. Behn's logic refers to Bakhtin's idea that "To be means to communicate dialogically. When dialogue ends, everything ends" (Bakhtin, 1984, p.252). It also corresponds to Roger Sell's idea that "as long as people go on exchanging words, there is still a chance that life may improve" (Sell, 2001, p.25). This chance does not exist for Oroonoko in Aphra Behn's novel. From this point onwards hero's only thought is about revenge and death. Oroonoko is meditating on Imoinda's future and understands she will be a "Prey, or at best a Slave, to the inrag'd Multitude" (Behn, 1997, p.60). The hero cannot suffer the thought his wife will be subject to rape and "then a shameful Death" (Behn, 1997, p.60). Realizing there is no future left for him, his wife and his future child, Oroonoko decides first to kill his beloved Imoinda, then all his enemies, and then himself. In Behn's novel he fulfils only the first part of his plan. After murdering his wife Oroonoko becomes incapable of doing anything else. He tries to show to his opponents the rest of his courage, but is totally crashed. "Aphra Behn" and her friends attempt at bringing him back to life, but fail, as he wants only to die, and their interaction is no longer a dialogue, but just questions on the side of English people, and a monologue dealing with death on Oroonoko's side. The end of the novel shows impossibility of communication between the people with no common values. The final irony is that it is "one Banister," "a wild Irish Man," "a Fellow of absolute Barbarity, and fit to execute any Villany," who is called by Oroonoko "the only Man, of all the Whites, that ever he heard speak truth" (Behn, 1997, p.64). This Banister sends Oroonoko to execution, which the hero bears very honourably and dies almost like a martyr.

What is interesting about Oroonoko's function in Behn's novel is the fact that he can interact dialogically with the people who respect him and share his values. In the episode where three nations meet: English people, Africans and Indians, it is the hero who becomes a mediator between them: "In this Voyage Caesar begot so good an understanding between the Indians and the English, that there were no more Fears, or Heartburnings during our stay; but we had a perfect, open, and free Trade with 'em" (Behn, 1997, p.50). Despite their difference in nationality and even race, all of them hold honour and courage in high esteem. All of them are able to talk to each other, they are open for communication and are ready to come to mutual understanding. This optimistic encounter remains an ideal of a dialogue between different folks, the interaction which enriches all the participants with new knowledge and positive experience.

One of the people with whom Oroonoko is able to communicate dialogically is fictive "Aphra Behn," who plays an important part in the novel, but is different from the narrator in her religious and political views. The narrator is more radical and stands closer to the main hero. "Aphra Behn," a nice and smart young woman very curious about other cultures, is, nevertheless, a part of the Christian (or pseudo-Christian) society of English colonizers. She is pious, probably Catholic, not Protestant. She tells Imoinda "Stories of Nuns" and even tries to convert her to Christianity, "to bring her to the knowledge of the true God" (Behn, 1997, p.41). She does not question the justness of slavery system in the colonies. Despite her friendliness towards Oroonoko, she suspects him of malicious intentions and is terrified, when he leaves the plantation together with other slaves: "We were possess'd with extream Fear... that he wou'd Cut all our Throats" (Behn, 1997, p.57). "Aphra Behn" sympathizes with Oroonoko, but at the same time she is always absent when he needs her help. She goes away just before his whipping because of her fright, and she consciously escapes before his execution, as she cannot bear the sadness of his end. Despite all her claims to authority in the colony, "Aphra Behn" remains powerless and is unable to save her Black friend.

The narrator in the first part of the novel holds much bolder opinions than "Aphra Behn"-the heroine. The narrator criticizes hypocrisy in Christian countries, especially relating to women. Stating that the worst treatment of a woman in Africa is "to turn her off, to abandon her to Want, Shame and Misery," she notices that "such ill Morals are only practis'd in Christian Countries, where they prefer the bare Name of Religion; and, without Vertue or Morality, think that's sufficient" (Behn, 1997, p.15). On the other hand, African women in the novel are totally subordinate to their men, above all, their husbands, whom "they have a respect" "equal to what any other People pay a Deity" (Behn, 1997, p.60). Behn does not idealize woman's condition in Africa, but at the same time she reveals the powerlessness of women in the West. The narrator is also very critical about English captain's deed, which she calls "Treachery" and even wind is "treacherous" (Behn, 1997, p.31). Oroonoko is called by her "an innocent Prize," and after such words she allows herself to leave it to the reader, what to think about captain's "act" (Behn, 1997, p.31). Such kind of detachment is also typical of Behn's descriptions of cruelties executed upon Oroonoko in the second half of the novel.

Oroonoko, the hero and the moral norm of the novel, is an African prince brought up by a French freethinker. He is a Heathen, and he is anti-Christian because Christianity in its modern variant is hypocritical. Moreover, Oroonoko refuses to accept the notion of the Trinity he does not understand. He firmly believes in universal principle of honour which almost replaces pagan gods in his system

of thought. Answering the English captain, he points out he swears by his “Honour, which to violate, wou’d not only render” him “contemptible and despised by all brave and honest Men, and so give” himself “perpetual pain, but it wou’d be eternally offending and diseasing all Men” (Behn, 1997, p.33). For him “honour” is “the First Principle in Nature, that was to be Obey’d” (Behn, 1997, p.53). His speech is full of such maxims, confirming his inner solidity. Oroonoko advocates the abolition of slavery in the colonies because such slaves are not taken by the just right of war, but by slyness and treachery. He dreams of establishing a temporary colony of former slaves on the sea shore. Oroonoko wants his companions to feel themselves human beings, not dogs or asses. His speech sounds proto-abolitionist: “Should we be Slaves to an unknown People?... We are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards” (Behn, 1997, p.52). His idealism fails, as most of his fellows abandon him. Oroonoko is very critical about his former supporters: “He was asham’d of what he had done, in endeavoring to make those Free, who were by Nature Slaves, poor wretched Rogues, fit to be us’d as Christians Tools; Dogs, treacherous and cowardly, fit for such Masters” (Behn, 1997, p.56). The hero concludes that such people are incorrigible. Oroonoko is true to his principles and opinions up to the end of the novel.

The points of view of Oroonoko, the narrator in the first part and fictive “Aphra Behn,” despite all the differences that have been discussed above, have quite a lot in common. Both the narrator and her hero share the lively interest in the world other than their own. They hold honour, courage and fortitude in high respect, and value love as something very precious. They have common ground for dialogue, which can be traced from the beginning till the tragic final of the novel. As Roger Sell points out, “the most crucial distinction is between modes of communication in which people fully acknowledge and respect each other’s human autonomy, and modes of communication in which people’s way of treating each other is more dictatorial, manipulative, coercive, instrumental” (Sell, 2014, p.4). In Aphra Behn’s novel a fully dialogical communication is possible only as the first kind of intercourse. She dismisses manipulation and shows that it leads to a complete failure of the dialogue.

In conclusion one can say that all the contradictions in Aphra Behn’s *Oroonoko* originate from the social, political, economical and cultural situation of the Restoration period in England. This novel follows seventeenth-century ideas on beauty, but contradicts the views on race. *Oroonoko* exploits a lot of stereotypes on Oriental culture: it raises the issue of family honour, the absolute power of the king, and total subjection of women to their husbands. On the other hand, Aphra Behn remains very critical on the West, the Christians and their behaviour. The hero of the novel Oroonoko communicates with the world from the beginning of the novel, but the first part lacks ‘dialogue’ in full sense, while the second part reveals the conditions on which the dialogue may become possible. Such conditions include the common views on honour, as well as eagerness to communicate and to learn more about each other. The dialogicality we see in this novel is very important nowadays: it is about the impossibility of dialogue between a person with moral principles and people without them, but it is also about mutual understanding between different nations, if people are open to each other and are ready to talk. Behn’s *Oroonoko*, paraphrasing R. Sell, still “inhabits the social category of literature,” stimulating discussion of the problems of race, nation and religion (Sell, 2011, p.21). The complicated structure of the narrator in this novel anticipates the works of fiction from the twentieth century. The novel itself inspired several contemporary writers to create their own dramatic versions, among them Biyi Bandele and Joan Anim-Addo.

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