

## The Essential Displacement: Lordship and Sovereignty in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave*

Fereshteh Zangenehpour, University of Gothenburg

### *Abstract*

For Oroonoko, to be both royal and slave, is to dwell within the split of self, a division that mirrors Hegelian dichotomy of the master and slave relationship, which, according to Derrida, is a restricted economy that reproduces meaning. Derrida's studies, on the other hand, show that Bataille's reinterpretation of Hegel's discourse on the question of the dialectic of the master and slave and absolute knowledge submits to an essential displacement, which expresses a non-discursive existence; the absence of meaning, that resembles Oroonoko's final sufferings and his death. Additionally, his indifference to the outcome of his sacrifice pulls him out of the Hegelian dialectics. Instead, through a burst of laughter, which is the rupturing of the concept of subjectivity, Oroonoko exceeds the limits of his phenomenological desires, the realm of meaning and reason, thereby dies a sovereign.

The dialectical interaction between Hegelian lordship and bondage, and Derrida's readings of Bataille's concept of laughter are the main focuses of my paper where I examine Oroonoko as a sovereign, as a totally other.

\* \* \*

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave* is a novel that lends itself to Hegelian analysis because its theme, structure, and language replicate self-consciousness, desire for recognition, a fight to the "death for pure prestige", and ultimately, the attainment of lordship.<sup>1</sup> To be both royal and slave is to dwell within the split of self, a division that mirrors an inner struggle between two different segments of Oroonoko's inner self, one who fights to the "death for pure prestige", to gain recognition as an independent and autonomous Self-consciousness, and another who does not dare to risk his life for his reality to come into being, to become what Hegel calls becoming pure "being-for-itself". But the text also manifests

---

<sup>1</sup> My discussions of dialectic of Lordship and Bondage or Master and Slave in this essay are based on Hegel's discussions in *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

the transgression of all the boundaries of reciprocal exchange encouraged by the dialectical opposition inherent in the dichotomy of the Lord and bondsman relationship. This, in turn, encourages a further Derridian reading of the text. Consequently, this essay will examine Oroonoko's paradoxical position as the Royal Slave, and his inner struggle to exceed the limits of his dialectical situation. It will also reflect on his rupturing of the realm of knowledge, of all that is meaningful, and his emergence as a sovereign, and consequently the erasure and silencing of dialectical continuity.

In this novel, Behn foregrounds not only Oroonoko's fragmented identity and his dilemma of dueling simultaneously in two states of consciousness, namely lordship and bondage, or servitude and mastery, but also his failure to recognize and acknowledge his contradictory situation. This intensifies his inner perplexity, which necessarily pushes him outside the realm of dialectics, and results in his "essential displacement".<sup>2</sup> His own simulation of lordship when he is actually a slave, and his profound desire to be recognized and admired by his white masters as a respected nobleman, conspire with the other slaves' attitudes towards him to mislead him regarding the reality of his situation. However, as he becomes increasingly disillusioned by the constant betrayal of the white community around him (his white masters), who dissimulate to his mastery but consider him a slave, he comes to understand that excelling, or as Hegel would put it, "superseding" his paradoxical position is the only solution to his inner division. Therefore, in order to free himself from his slave self, he negates his false mastery, which has a slavish consciousness, and then by risking his life for "recognition", he accedes to lordship. However, as Hegel explains, lordship is not a fixed position, but a dialectical one, since in the process, the bondsman or the Slave loses his instinct for preservation, therefore he frees himself from his slavish nature, and consequently from the Master. He might even one day rule himself. In the act of fighting as a rebel,

---

<sup>2</sup> In his essay, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," *Writing and Difference*, page 254, Derrida uses this term in order to show Bataille's thoughts on the Hegelian concept of the Master and Slave relationship, where Bataille transforms mastery into Sovereignty by displacing it.

Oroonoko only succeeds in regaining his lordship, nevertheless he is still in the circular system of dialectical reconciliation. It is not until his final sufferings that he is able to exceed the limits of his circular position, the enclosure which the dialectics of the Lordship/bondsman relationship creates, and thereby die as a sovereign.

In his essay "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve," Derrida discusses the difference between lordship and sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> By referring to Bataille's reinterpretation of Hegel's discourse, Derrida explains lordship as a "restricted economy" that not only reproduces meaning, but also has a "repressed origin" (255). "Lordship has a meaning", Derrida writes. It is the "putting at stake of life is a moment in the constitution of meaning, in the presentation of essence and truth. It is an obligatory stage in the history of self-consciousness and phenomenality, that is to say, in the presentation of meaning" (254). Therefore it is necessary for the master to retain his life. On the other hand, "sovereignty is totally other, Bataille pulls it out of dialectics", Derrida explains. "He withdraws it from the horizon of meaning and knowledge" (256). By risking one's life and rushing "headlong into death pure and simple is thus to risk the absolute loss of meaning" (Derrida 256). Likewise, in *The Accursed Share*, Bataille states; "Sovereignty is NOTHING" (AS 2/3 256). What Bataille means by first acknowledging sovereignty as a desired state, and then reducing it to "nothing" is that sovereignty is an impossible state to achieve. Sovereignty is Bataille's displacement of subjectivity articulated in Hegel's concept of Mastery or lordship. Therefore, sovereignty is the "slipping away" (AS 2/3 203) of the subject that detaches itself from an ontological interpretation. It is, however, a burst of laughter which interrupts the master's profane motivation of thought and his philosophical need to continue living, Derrida explains when reading Bataille. Therefore, to Bataille, laughter is a "*unique* interval which separates meaning from a certain non-meaning" (Derrida 254) or reveals the difference between lordship and sovereignty. It is the rupturing of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Derrida's discussions in this essay are based on Bataille's reading of Alexandre Kojève's explication of Hegel's discourse on the question of the dialectic of the Master and Slave in *Inner Experience*.

concept of subjectivity as manifested in Hegel's dialectics of Lordship and bondsman.

On the other hand, in Hegel man is self-consciousness, and it is through his conscious desire that he becomes known to himself and to others as an "object" is to a "subject"; he gains awareness of his own need to be "recognized", loved and valued as an independent Self-consciousness through another consciousness. He is ready to risk his life or fight to death and put his adversary's life in danger for "recognition" or prestige. Therefore, he becomes truly himself and his humanity comes to light if he is ready to risk his (animal) life for the sake of his (human) desire, i.e. for non-materialist values. Thus, the origin of self-consciousness is the desire to risk one's life for a non-vital end, or another Desire, and when two or more such people meet, their meeting can only be a fight to death.

Desire leads man to perform an action which would satisfy it (the desire) by negation, destruction, or transformation of the desired object and replacing it with, or creating in its place (by the very act of negation), a subjective reality. However, in order for one to attain recognition both parties must remain alive after the fight. In addition, they must be on unequal grounds; one must fear the other. Of course not all beings are ready to fight until death for recognition, or are willing to risk their life for the satisfaction of their desire for non-materialist values. Consequently, by not fighting until death for "recognition" or prestige, one has recognized the other as his master and himself as the master's slave, to the effect of which would be recognition, which is one-sided and unequal. Therefore, in the origin of his self-consciousness, man has either an independent existence, or a dependent one; he is either a Lord or a bondsman. According to Hegel, the revealed human reality or the history of human existence is necessarily the history of the interaction between lordship and bondage: a dialectical relationship, where, in the end, as will be discussed shortly, the servile consciousness of the bondsman is the truth of the dependent consciousness. Thus, this dialectical relationship finally necessarily ends with the recognition from both sides, or the reconciliation of the opposites.

Hegel's theories will help to explain the presence of a dialectical dilemma within Oroonoko's state of mind in the context of his experiences in Surinam. In order to construe the existence of this dichotomy within one character, readers need to determine how the

master-self hides his latent adversary or his slavish-self within himself, that is, how Oroonoko, as a “recognized” Self-consciousness, evolves simultaneously into a “recognizer.” For this purpose, it is interesting to see how he unravels his dialectical identity, one of which is the Lord, or the prince, and the other is the repressed consciousness, therefore the bondsman.

If Self-consciousness is an “I” who is isolated and undivided, everything other than or outside this “I,” Hegel explains, is a negative entity, an object that has no essential reality. Nevertheless, the other entity too, is a Self-consciousness, but when they are face-to-face, both consider each other as common objects, that they have to defend or protect themselves against, and not as an independent conscious being that is *for itself* and represents independent values.

Hegel further explains that, in the final analysis, the truth of the independent consciousness, as explained above, is the slavish consciousness, and is imbued with the consciousness of the Other, and this gives rise to both Bataille’s and Derrida’s investigations wherein they find the circular movement to be limited, since, as Hegel explains, it is not only the bondsman who is a dependent consciousness, but also the Lord is not an independent being. He is objectivized and mediated by the bondsman’s recognition of him; he is the Lord because his bondsman recognizes him as such. In other words, pure *being-for-itself* exists for itself only through an other-entity.

Indeed, especially in Oroonoko’s case, there is a constant dialogue, or amalgamation between his independent and his dependent consciousness, since during his slavery, he is placed between both these situations simultaneously, which structures a never-ending reciprocity with the Other—this Other being his slave-self constituted by his circumstances in Surinam, the eternal position that is generated by the colour of his skin.

The question of the colour of his skin, of his race cannot be avoided when discussing Oroonoko’s inner perplexity, since it is strongly linked to his position as a slave in that white community and it creates further ambiguity. However, even though Hegel’s work provides the basis for a theory of the Other within the context of a postcolonial discourse, that could, in turn, lead to a rewarding investigation as far as this novel is concerned, my interest here is to study Oroonoko’s inner perplexity and witness how he negotiates between his two diverse selves throughout his

life in Surinam. Therefore, when dealing with his position as a slave, I will confine myself to studying the changes from a phenomenological perspective, and not pursue the intimated postcolonial or a political frames of reference.

*Oroonoko* is a story of an African prince who is captured and sold as a slave to a slave owner in the British colony of Surinam, West Indies. He is the grandson of the “King of Coramatiem,” and the legitimate heir to the crown; a victorious warrior, and a Lord in Hegelian terms, since he is ready to fight to the death for pure prestige. But when captured by the captain of the same ship he sold his slaves to, he experiences the violence of captivity for the first time, and its disillusionment. Although later, his master Trefry treats him with respect, the reality of his circumstances is complex, being both a slave and a prince simultaneously. He repeatedly asks to pay for his freedom from slavery, but he is never set free. Instead, by chance, he meets Imoinda, his lover from Coramatiem whom he had assumed dead, and marries her. However, his situation becomes more enigmatic when Imoinda is with child. He now sees an urgent need to free her and his unborn child from slavery, therefore he leads a slave rebellion. But the rebellion is suppressed, and in order to save Imoinda from the torture and humiliation which is awaiting her, he takes her life. Later he is captured and then slowly dismembered until he is killed.

Thus, this drama unfolds in three different stages, problematizing the question of Oroonoko's identity and his independent Self-consciousness. Firstly, Oroonoko's status as a prince in Africa, secondly, his position as a slave in Surinam, and thirdly, his rebellion against his white masters, which ends in his heroic death, and results in his entering into the realm of sovereignty.

When Oroonoko is still in Coramantien, his native land, he is already a split self, since he is an African prince who, in many ways, has adopted European characteristics, which places him both inside and outside his African heritage. As an African prince, he is proud and honourable. He is an outstanding personality whose bravery has him promoted to the position of a general at the age of seventeen, “one of the most expert Capitans, and bravest Soldiers, that ever saw the Field of *Mars*” (*Oroonoko* 12; Behn's italics). Therefore, he is a brave and respected prince, when with his own people, in his own country.

As well as being brave, he is also refined; he is honourable, generous, graceful, and “capable of the highest Passions of Love and

Gallantry” (*Oroonoko* 12). If viewed from the western perspective, he has the characteristics of a western “well-bred” noble prince, and as the narrator explains, he “had nothing of Barbarity in his Nature, but in all Points address’d himself, as if his Education had been in some *European Court*” (*Oroonoko* 13; Behn’s italics).

The narrator’s attitude (who is a white woman, a friend of the governor) would, of course, modify and influence the reading of the text, but as mentioned above, it will often be ignored in favour of reading the text as a phenomenological affirmation of Self and Other. However, having said that, in Oroonoko’s case, the question of colour is necessarily the starting point for the dialectic of the Lordship and Bondage in this novel. It defines and limits the successive possibilities of the character’s determination. Consequently, at times, his colour is unavoidable, as his body is the ground for and is engaged in irreducible differences. As mentioned before, the split is already embedded in his looks and upbringing, his social, political and phenomenological situation, which modify his behaviour, and expectations.

Here, of course, the narrator’s desire and interest in recognizing Oroonoko as Self (as one of them), not as the Other, should not be undermined, since they also represent the sentiments of some of the other white characters, such as: the Governor, Trefry, who was his owner, and Colonel Martin. Their view of him influences the reading of the text. It also overshadows and undermines Oroonoko’s independent Self-consciousness, since their view of him, ironically, is at the root of his enslavement, influencing the future steps he takes, as he identifies himself with the whites, who consider him a slave. Thus, neither Oroonoko’s ambivalent and complex attitude towards the white colonial power, nor the narrator’s split between her sympathy with the Africans and her white cultural supremacy should be ignored. These conflicting issues are, of course, problematic, and determine the impossibility of reconciliation, since the obvious pressure of his inner division and his inherent displacement, generated by the colour of his skin, push him to the cutting edge that reveals no final resolution.

The view the whites have of him adds to the complexity of Oroonoko’s situation. As an African prince, as was the custom, he circulated low ranking prisoners as slaves, either as gifts, or sold them to make a profit. But as Laura J. Rosenthal in *Playwrights and Plagiarists* explains, most of the British colonists, “indiscriminately considered all

Africans as commodities or potential commodities” (135). Therefore, his constitution placed him within the network of slavery, vulnerable to be turned into a commodity.

Being unaware of his vulnerability, his captivity is inevitable. In his aristocratic frame of mind, caught up in the compelling and powerful bond of friendship and trust that overrides and interrupts logical thinking, he trusts the captain of the ship he sold his slaves to. Therefore, when captured by the captain, he is confused, since he considered the captain to be his friend, whereas to the captain, an African, even an African prince, was a potential commodity; in this case, to the captain, Oroonoko's title and position were irrelevant.

Oroonoko's slavery, which marks the second stage of his drama, gives rise to a complex dilemma. As a slave, he would lack the obvious fantasy of political and social power he had possessed as a prince (or as an independent Self-consciousness). He is sold as a slave to Trefy, who treats him as a prince. He then lives in a state of absolute depersonalization, since from now on, and as long as he is treated with respect as a nobleman by the whites, he pretends not to see the gravity of his situation, his real position as a slave.

It is precisely this desire to be recognized by the whites that articulates the severity of his situation, since it constrains him within this circle of dichotomy. This desire expands beyond its limits which forces him into silence; subdues his lordship, his autonomy, thereby causing him to behave as a slave. As he is desperately engaged in this irrational struggle for recognition, which is the simulation of his real mastery, the dualistic aspect of his situation, namely the dichotomy between being lord and being in bondage within him becomes even more visible than before. Whereas before his captivity he was generally a brave and respected prince, a Lord, now he is actually a slave but is simulating lordship. Caught in an irreducible difference, in this situation, he is never really free from his inner conflict:

The Royal Youth appear'd in spite of the Slave, and People cou'd not help treating him after a different manner, without designing it: As soon as they approach'd him, they venerated and esteem'd him; his Eyes insensibly commanded Respect, and his Behaviour insinuated it into every Soul. So that there was nothing talk'd of but this young and gallant Slave, even by those who yet knew not that he was a Prince.  
(*Oroonoko* 36)

Oroonoko becomes fascinated by the flattery he receives from the whites, and gives himself completely to the act of pretence. But he is the “Other”, and is always observed with suspicion, never fully accepted into that society. He is under observation at all times, which points to the whites’ fundamental mistrust of his Otherness.

Thus, as the sub-title of the novel also suggests, the questions of lordship and bondage are both integrated and put into juxtaposition in the body of Oroonoko, the royal slave, and this is where Hegel’s theories will help explain this paradoxical situation. In his theories, as discussed earlier, the importance of becoming an independent Self-consciousness defines the desire for recognition, thus disclosing the necessity and obligation to risk one’s life by fighting to the death for pure prestige or to become a pure *being-for-itself* (and the risk that it implies). In other words, it is through the risk of life that the Lord is liberated and recognized. In Oroonoko’s case, since both the Lord and bondsman reside within him, and he is a slave to Trefy, his slavery is double-edged. Therefore, in order to free himself from this entanglement, he must first acknowledge his real situation as a slave, before he can risk his life for his “freedom”. Acknowledging his enslavement (subjugation) should therefore be considered an essential necessity, a crucial step in becoming an independent Self-consciousness. And this initiates the third stage of this drama.

The third and final part of the story is also its turning point. It is when Imoinda is with child that he becomes fully aware of the danger awaiting his coming child, who will be born a slave. Having himself experienced the entire operation of servitude (by being first a master, and then a slave, who simulates mastery), his and his family’s freedom therefore become an urgent and desperate concern. He offers to buy himself and his wife, Imoinda, from Trefry, but Trefry uses delaying tactics (*Oroonoko* 40-41).

Determined, Oroonoko gathers all the slaves together, and encourages them to wage war against their masters, and convinces them that even though this is a dangerous mission, its rewards are doubly great, “the more Danger, the more Glory” (*Oroonoko* 53). It is more honorable to die in war, than to live as a slave:

And why, said he, my dear Friends and Fellow-sufferers, shou’d we be Slaves to an unknown People? Have they Vanquishe’d us Nobly in Fight? Have they Won us in Honourable Battel? And are we, by the chance of War, become their Slaves? This

wou'd not anger a Noble Heart, this wou'd not animale a Souldiers Soul; no, but we are Bought and Sold like Apes, or Monkeys, to be the Sport of Women, Fools and Cowards. (52; Behn's italics)

In the case of Oroonoko, his master-self here supersedes his slavish-self since he is ready to risk his life for non-materialist desires; honour, love and freedom. His heroic behaviour, however, is motivated by fear. As Hegel explains, a bondsman, without having the sense of power generated by fear, which is inflicted by his Lord, will never transcend his position and take his life into his own hands. This fear causes his slavish consciousness to melt internally, and dissolve everything that was fixed or stable within his inner being as a bondsman. It is therefore this fear and his family's dark and uncertain future in the hands of his white masters that encourages Oroonoko to rebel against them.

By rebelling against his white masters, by putting his life at stake, by risking his life for freedom, he regains his lordship, or his independent Self-consciousness. Nevertheless, as Hegel explains, in this murderous fight, it also becomes clear to the Self-consciousness that the animal life (physical life) is as important as pure Self-consciousness. Everything is preserved in the process of this dialectical circulation, where Oroonoko's independent Self-consciousness perpetually enslaves and then is enslaved by his slavish consciousness. In his essay "From Restricted to General Economy" Derrida explains: "everything covered by the name lordship collapses into comedy. The independence of Self-consciousness becomes laughable at the moment when it liberates itself by enslaving itself, when it starts to *work*, that is, when it enters into dialectics" (256; Derrida's italics). What Derrida means here is that in the Hegelian dialectics it is the self-evidence of meaning which is laughable, that in his philosophical world nothing should collapse into non-meaning, or "definitely lost in death" (256). Hegel "knows no other aim than knowledge" (256), Derrida writes. Similarly, in Oroonoko's case, in this state of his life, reason still prevails, since to him, both constituent-elements (his animal life and his independent Self-consciousness) are essential. As a result, Oroonoko is still situated within the dialectical world of Hegelianism, which according to Derrida, when reading Bataille, is an "economy of life" that "restricts itself to conservation, to circulation and self-reproduction as the reproduction of meaning" (Derrida 255-56).

However, Oroonoko's attempt to gain his and his family's freedom is interrupted. The other slaves betray him by surrendering themselves to their white masters, and he is captured. In spite of this, Oroonoko is still determined to fight for his freedom, but since he knows there is no hope for escape, death becomes necessary for both he and Imoinda. He is not only aware that through his actions he defies and trespasses his ethical duty, he also understands the unbearable, ceaseless pain of absolute loss that the act would necessarily contain. She admires him for his courage and his love, since he is ready to take the responsibility for killing her and experience the agony of loss rather than to see her enslaved. So, he takes her into the forest and kills her by giving her "the Final Stroke; first, cupting her Throat, and then severing her yet Smiling Face from that Delicate Body, pregnant as it was with Fruits of tend'rest Love" (61).

Soon after beheading her, Oroonoko comes to himself, and his first reaction is to kill himself immediately with the same knife. But he cannot cut himself free from her non-presence, instead he enters mourning; he falls deep into the well of self-reproach, self-loathing, and remorse. He lives and re-lives the instant of madness by perpetually negotiating between the moment before she died, and the moment after, by trying to arrest it, freezing it in an endless series of moments, where every single moment becomes separate, privileged, and rare. Feeling tenderness, love, and sorrow, he experiences the extreme agony of loss. He is caught in this agonizing state for a week, unaware of the passage of time, and canceling all knowledge of himself and the world around him, he is in the state of oblivion. Therefore, his plans and his final resolution for revenge are postponed.

Eight days later, a party which was searching for them, finds Oroonoko by his wife's dead body. But not having eaten for eight days, he is weak, and it is with great effort that he gets up. He tries to kill himself, but because of his weakness, he is not able to. He tells the men; "*Look ye, ye faithless Crew, . . . 'tis not Life I seek, nor am I afraid of Dying*; and, at that Word, cut a piece of Flesh from his own Throat, and threw it at 'em" (62-3; Behn's italics).

He is eventually captured and brought back to town to be killed, but he still retains his indifference to death. His life to him is unessential; it has neither positive nor negative connotation. Whereas, before, when Oroonoko rebelled against his masters, his actions were within the realm

of reason, now, by looking at death directly, he escapes the circular system of dialectics. He exceeds the limits of rationality, precisely because he has no more illusion about the continuous chain of meaning and its significance, which constitutes and describes the nature of metaphysics of presence.

In town, they tie him to a pole and make a fire near the pole. But he asks to be untied, and promises to stay still if they intend to kill him, "and assur'd them, they need not tye him, for he wou'd stand fixt, like a Rock; and indure Death so as shou'd encourage them to Dye. *But if you Whip me, said he, be sure you tye me fast* (64; Behn's italics). Oroonoko then asks for a pipe. And while the executioner is cutting his body piece by piece with a blunt knife and throwing the pieces into the fire, "he still Smoake'd on, as if nothing had touch'd him; then they hack'd off one of his Arms, and still he bore up, and held his Pipe; but at the cupting off the other Arm his Hed sunk, and his Pipe drop'd; and he gave up the Ghost, without a Groan, or a Reproach" (64).

Contrary to the Hegelian Lord, who, by looking at death directly, accedes to freedom, therefore the risking of his life has a productive end, Oroonoko's death takes a different turn. His death is not productive, since when he dies, he does not see the result of his bravery. He does not gain anything; instead, by refusing to be absorbed within what Derrida calls, "the economy of life," he challenges and renounces all that is generally considered meaningful and negotiable. It is what Hegel would call "absolute negativity". By looking at death directly, he loses the effect or the profit of meaning, thus he dislocates the horizon of presence and knowledge, transgressing all boundaries.

However, as Derrida by quoting Bataille in *Inner Experience* tells us, "death, in truth, reveals nothing" to a person other than "his natural, animal being" since "the revelation never takes place" as the human being ceases to exist when his animal being is dead. "For man finally to be revealed to himself he would have to die, but he would have to do so while living—while watching himself cease to be. In other words, death itself would have to become (self) consciousness at the very moment when it annihilates conscious being" (*Inner Experience* 193ff quoted in "From Restricted" 257). In the case of Oroonoko, this is what takes place. He watches himself die while he dies. This way, Oroonoko experiences self-revelation. Nevertheless, this self-revelation is outside the constitution of meaning and knowledge which is associated with

lordship. His sacrifice is a non-meaning that escapes the dialectics of lordship and bondage and gives birth to sovereignty.

Derrida explains in “From Restricted to General Economy” that, according to Bataille, the difference between lordship and sovereignty, is a burst of “laughter”. Laughter makes the difference between Lordship and Sovereignty shine “without *showing* it however and, above all, without saying it” (256). It is a “laughter that literally never *appears*, because it exceeds phenomenality in general, the absolute possibility of meaning. And the word ‘laughter’ itself must be read in a burst, as its nucleus of meaning bursts in the direction of the system of the sovereign operation” (Derrida; From Restricted 256). Similarly, Oronoko’s behaviour here is that of a sovereign, since he no longer is caught in the circuit of reciprocal exchange, he exceeds and challenges the realm of meaning and knowledge by bursting out of limitation, not by being predestined – but, as Derrida would put it, by an “undeducible act of liberty” (Derrida; From Restricted 254).

Let me just conclude by restating that the dichotomy of the lordship and bondage, which is embedded in the title, *Oroonoko, or the Royal Slave* suggests a Hegelian reading of this novel. However, according to Derrida, Hegelian dichotomy is a restricted economy that reproduces meaning. Whereas, Derrida’s studies show that Bataille’s reinterpretation of Hegel’s discourse on the question of the dialectic of lordship and bondage and absolute knowledge submits to an essential displacement, which expresses a non-discursive existence; the absence of meaning, that resembles Oroonoko’s final sufferings and his death. His non-productive end, or his indifference to the outcome of his sacrifice and all that is sensible and belongs to the metaphysics of presence, pulls him out of the Hegelian dialectics of the lordship and bondage. Instead, through a burst of laughter, Oroonoko supersedes the limits of his phenomenological desires, the realm of meaning and reason, thereby dies a sovereign.

#### *Works Cited*

- Bataille, Georges. *The Accursed Share Volumes Two and Three*. Trans. R. Hurley. New York: Zone Books, 1991.
- . *Inner Experience*. Trans. Leslie Anne Boldt. New York: State University of New York Press, 1988.

- Behn, Aphra. *Oroonoko*. 1688. Ed. Joanna Lipking. W. W. Norton and Company: New York and London, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve". *Writing and Difference*. Trans. Alan Bass. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1978. 251-277.
- Hegel, G. W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. A. V. Miller with Analysis and Forward by J. N. Findlay. Oxford UP: Oxford and New York, 1977.
- Rosenthal, Laura J. *Playwrights and Plagiarists in Early Modern England: Gender, Authorship, Literary Property*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996.