

Impact Factor: 6.017

ISSN: 2278-9529

# GALAXY

International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Peer-Reviewed e-Journal

Vol.13, Issue-1 January 2024

**13 years of Open Access**

Managing Editor: Dr. Madhuri Bite



[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

About Us: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/about-us/>

Archive: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/contact-us/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.galaxyimrj.com/faq/>



## **Rereading of Aphra Ben's *Orunoko***

**Dr. G. Kiran Kumar Reddy**

Assistant Professor in English,  
Rajeev Gandhi Memorial College of Engineering and Technology,  
Nandyal, Andhra Pradesh

**&**

**P. Nagarjuna**

Lecturer in English,  
Government College Men,  
Anantapur,  
Anantapur District.

**Article History:** Submitted-09/01/2024, Revised-23/01/2024, Accepted-24/01/2024, Published-31/01/2024.

### **Abstract:**

Literature is a big canvas; on this sphere, many writers beautifully portrayed their words. This paper examines Afra Behn's Oroonkoo and restoration period lifestyle. It relates the protagonist's struggle, the lifestyle of Caribbean islands, colonial oppression, and slavery. As a leader of organized struggle, leads great victory in war. He shows bravery towards his goals. His grandfather's influence, slave trade, author's view on slavery, orunoko responses, the life of Afrabhn. The novel is notable protest against slave trade. It is a reflection of writer's childhood memories. Author's views, her humanity towards oppressed slaves in this novel is discussed.

**Keywords:** Oroonko, slavery, protest.

### **British author Aphra Behn – Orunoko**

Virginia Woolf, in her famous work *A Room of One's Own*, says: 'All women should go together and sprinkle flowers on the tomb of Afra Ben. Because she was the first woman to show that women have the right to speak their minds.'

Aphra Behn was a 17th-century British author (1640-1689). She was the first British woman to earn through her writings. She was a rare woman who became famous through her

performances, writing extensively during the period when English writers occasionally wrote poems and plays. She lived during the reign of Charles II of England. Although two women wrote plays before her, she was one of the most popular playwrights of the 17th century British playwrights. Most of the 19 plays she wrote became famous and brought her some income as well. But despite the notoriety of the name and the small amount of money it received, Afra Ben also faced harsh criticism from fellow writers. Her works are not the only reason for that; Speaking rudely in life, even sharply refuting the criticisms leveled at him. A society that could not bear her fearlessness denounced her works as immoral. In fact, there is nothing more immoral in her writing than the fact that all the features of the British literature of the Restoration era were present in her writings.

### **Restoration lyrics**

The period between 1660-1700 in English literature is known as Restoration Literature. It is also known as the John Dryden era. Literature in this age is, in a sense, loose literature. It rejected the earlier Puritanism. In the late 16th and early 17th centuries, new genres of writing and writing came into being, as if to reject the Puritanism that had influenced literature and public life. Literature of the Puritan age was merely informative and a means of propagating the teachings of the Bible. Most of the best men's poetry, letters, and historical stories came from that era. In contrast, humor, romance, supremacy, politics, loyalty to the monarchy, and the heroic couplet process became major features of literature during the Restoration period. It is not surprising that literature that rebels against a tradition goes somewhat 'exaggerated'. That is why obscene conversations and descriptions are considered ubiquitous in this age. There is no opposition or ban on them. Although such works were started by men, women followed the same trends. Even Afra Ben was no stranger to his time. But she had a special place among the writers of that time because there were some works in her novels and plays that were unique, original, creative and fearless beyond the epoch.

She was probably the first rebel writer in British history. Mentioning female sexuality in poetry and criticizing the marriage system in plays angered her fellow male writers. They even started the slogan of boycotting the works of Afra Ben. But she did not hesitate to repel criticism of herself. If someone criticizes his play from a gender perspective, the next play is to respond to



it in the preface. This would have angered her critics. Probably a factor as to why they're doing so poorly in Virginia Woolf and Afra Ben.

‘The reason women write less is not because they have talent; Afra Ben repeatedly accused his contemporaries of male writers of trying to push him back.

### **The life of Afra Ben**

Afra Ben knew very little about childhood, early life, and family. Some say the father is a barber and the mother a midwife. Historians believe that she married a man named John Benn, who separated after 1664 or died. Afra, who spoke eloquently and eloquently on many subjects, never spoke or wrote anywhere about his life and family. However, there is a story in her famous novel Royal Prince Orunoko in which she appears as a narrator and says that her father was a military officer and that he saw many places because of his duties. Although she wrote the novel in her best man, critics and literary historians disagreed as to whether the narrator could really be Afra Ben as a fictional narrator. Thus even modern writers (such as Janet Todd) who attempted to write her biography vaguely referred to her personal details. She was also a contemporary of John Dryden, a British poet, aggressor, and critic of the first court poet in the Kingdom of England. The so-called Restoration Age, also known as the Dryden Age (Age of Dryden), is a testament to the desolation of all the writers who preceded him. Afra Ben made his presence felt in such a literary environment.

One of the most obvious things about Afra was that she had acted as a spy for King Charles II of England during the trade war between England and the Netherlands. The opportunity came because of contacts in Rajasthan for her maternal relatives. There she had to work with William Scott, a Member of Parliament. But Scott, as a double agent (some even suspect he was a triple agent), took the Dutch's money, told them the secrets of England, and again worked for England as a very mysterious spy. Afra Ben, who was largely inexperienced as a spy, could not work properly with him, not knowing how much to trust him. Hence the publicity that she had failed somewhat as a spy. According to some reports, after Afra's return to England, he spent some time in prison for not working for the government or for not paying the money owed to the government. Overall, Charles II did not even pay her the salary she deserved

for working as a spy abroad. Afra was very embarrassed for the money when she was in Antwerp city. Survived by selling some of the existing jewelry. After completing her spy duties to pay off her debts, she began writing plays that would bring in a lot of money. She wrote her plays under her own name, not Atria. Poverty haunted her for the rest of her life. Her plays reflect the life of the second Charles court. Her plays were well-blooded, with good humor, active female characters, and naughty male characters.

Later the play ceased altogether, and the writing of the text began. Has authored four novels and three novels. Her first novel, *Love Letters Between a Nobleman and His Sister*, was critically acclaimed for its "romance". There has also been speculation as to whether this is her work. The novel not only created a sensation, but also sold out. 16 editions were published and received much publicity. That is why modern critics of the novel have commented that Afra Ben played a constructive role in the development of the English novel. Two subsequent novels - *The Nun (The Perjured Beauty)* and *The Nun (Fair-Wo Breaker)* - are about nuns' romance. Looking at the story of this second novel, it seems to be the matrix for many subsequent novels and films. The protagonist is in love with a young man, saddened to learn that he has died in battle, while another young man escapes for her love and eventually falls in love with her and marries her, with the first young man surviving, and the crisis that ensues in her life – as we know it. However the ending of this story is different. Hitchcock ends up like a movie.

The heroine Isabella is deeply in love with the Henoi she is married to. That means the old girlfriend has forgotten that. But her ex-boyfriend Villenva is confident that she belongs to him. Started harassing her. Eventually she decides that the solution to her problem is to get rid of her ex-boyfriend, who, while he is asleep, presses on the pillow and kills her by holding her breath. When her husband returns from outside Henou, with him, Villenva tells him that his heart stopped beating in shock and that his corpse had to be dumped somewhere without anyone seeing. She sews the corpse in a gonad bag, including the clothes he brought, so that it does not look like a corpse, and asks her husband to throw the bag into the sea. The stitch did not fit properly and the husband accidentally put another stitch near the butt of the coat. It even tells him to stand on the bridge and swing the bag so hard that it falls into the middle of the sea. The husband could not refuse her words, could not imagine the calamity that would ensue if the



corpse came out, and if he did, the corpse would have to be thrown with greater speed to the load. However, due to the stitching on his coat, he also falls into the water along with the bag containing the corpse and dies. Isabella surrenders to the court and commits the death sentence, telling herself that she has killed the villain, out of remorse that her sin has been punished appropriately. Love, romance, and a woman's extreme emotional conflict (determined by Nanga's father, and the emotional portrayal of her emotions in her mind from the moment she surrenders to love until she can not kill her desires and finally kill her ex) is a thriller that makes the novel a good, ending novel.

Of all her works, however, *Orunoko* or the *Royal Slave* is still the most notable in literary history. Afra Ben died of an illness the year the novel was written.

A look at the novels she wrote reveals two main features. They are romance, violence. She balances the two in her novels. While the first novel is more about romance, the last novel, though she loves the main story in *Orunoko*, the most famous of her novels, *Vainam*, who describes violence, is surprising. But the reason this novel is so historical is not because a female author describes violence so vividly. This was the first novel to describe the enslavement of blacks.

### **The first novel about slavery**

*Orunoko* (The *Royal Slave*) by Afra Ben was published in 1688. Suriname, one of the Caribbean islands we now call the West Indies, is the plot of the novel. It was a time when the French, Dutch and English were competing in the 16th and 17th centuries to bring the region under their colonial rule. In this competition the British Negi Lord Willoughby prepared to establish a colony in Suriname. Even though they came there for trade reasons, as in the case of our country, governance, political strategy and exploitation of the local people were common to the British. The main crop there is sugarcane. The workers required for sugar production are Native American Indians. Attempts to convert them to Christianity began as usual by the British authorities. The British government was the first to import blacks from Africa, as they did not have the required number of workers. Earlier, Portuguese and Spanish authorities used African slaves as laborers. The first Royal African Company was formed by the British government in

1630, paving the way for the slave trade. In the novel, Afra writes about African slaves bought in Suriname for British colonial rule. Afra Ben was the first author to describe the slave trade of the British rulers in literature.

However, the vision she saw of this slave trade was not entirely progressive. There is no justification for that. Before going into those details, one should know the story of *Orunoko* novel in general. Afra Ben says she is a direct witness to this story.

*Orunoko's* grandfather was the head of the place. All his sons die in wars. We are left with only *Orunoko*. That is, he is the only one capable of sustaining the grandfather clan. Grandpa makes him a great warrior. But even at the age of one hundred, the grandfather does not have the girl craze. So, his harem was full of very young women of all ages. He was the villain who held these young women hostages, feeling his touch only when his body could not perform the sexual act. In a battle on behalf of such a grandfather, *Orunoko* is shot and killed by an enemy general, and their general, the royal dynasty, risks his life by covering his body, especially his life. From there *Orunoko* assumes command of the army. When the war was over, *Orunoko* went to visit the family of the General who had died for him. There the General's daughter falls in love when she sees *Emoinda*. She, too, is intrigued by his beauty and demeanor. He promises to marry her.

Meanwhile the king learns about the beauty of *Imoinda*. It is also known that his grandson loves her and is determined to marry her. However, he decides to own her and sends her the gift of the 'sacred veil', the symbol of his innermost being. Its sense that she was no longer his property. *Orunoko* and *Imoinda*, however, meet one night with the help of two friends and enjoy their marriage. The next day the king finds out about the incident and decides to punish the two. However, he can do nothing to stop his family, and orders the execution of his girlfriend. He also tells *Orunoko* that the order has been executed. With that *Orunoko* sinks into grief. But pretending to be elegance upwards, performing his duty as commander-in-chief. After winning another battle (the author says that all these battles took place between different tribes), *Orunoko* sails with his friends on a British ship for fun at the invitation of an English captain. Upon his arrival, the captain captures him and his friends and takes them to Suriname, an



English colony, to sell them as slaves. The British officer, who pretended to be friends with his grandfather and claimed to have only trade relations, was in fact a slave trader. Orunoko did not know that thing until the boat was up. The narrator of this novel is also one of the British entourage in Suriname. Orunoko is bought as a slave by a British businessman named Trefree. But looking at his monarchy, mastery of English and French, he sees him as a little more respectful than other slaves. Occasionally chatting with Orunoko. In that sequence Trefree mentions a great blonde who once stole his mind from his slaves. Shows her to Orunoko. That blonde is Emoinda. Orunoko realizes that his grandfather sold her into slavery and deliberately convinced her that she was dead. There the secret love continues again because all the slaves are in one place. Emoinda gets pregnant for a while.

Stunned by the deplorable living conditions of the slaves there, Orunoko decides to advocate on their behalf, since he is the most educated of them all, and his master is nominally friendly with him. The deputy governor applies to Bayam to send them back to their kingdom. The governor makes it clear that he does not intend to implement it by saying it is OK. With this Orunoko declares rebellion. Those slaves, who had not thought of rebellion until then, resisted with the slowness of what he had said. There was a deadly struggle between the British and the black slaves. The power of slaves gradually declined. Many surrender to British Deputy Governor Biam to save lives. There are three who did not surrender. Orunoko, his friend Tuscan, wife Imoinda. Both men are tortured and released by the governor's soldiers. Orunoko vows to avenge this. However, he is deeply disturbed by the fact that his wife will have to live a miserable life as a British slave after him, given the fact that he will lose his life because of his vow. Therefore, he decides to kill Imoinda himself before his last battle with the British soldiers. She wants the same. Orunoko kills his pregnant wife and fights the governor's party. Gradually in this fight he weakens and dies tortured.

### **What is the author's view on slavery?**

The story in this novel is short. But the ideas it provoked were new. The important thing is the enslavement of blacks. Although slavery was rampant in Britain at the time in the African colonies, the uprisings against it and the struggles for its abolition were not significant. There were no organized struggles then, except for a few oppositions here and there. Such struggles

began another century later, in the late 18th century. That is why this novel depicts Orunokoni as the leader of such an organized struggle. But there are some contradictions in Orunoko's character. His appearance is not like that of fellow blacks. The author describes his nose as long and his facial beauty glowing with the appearance of Roman deities. Here the author appears eager to describe him as a superior among those who accept him as black. The author also describes how Orunoko would send hundreds of slaves as a "gift" when he wanted to honor someone and make new friends. That kind of gives the impression that he is advocating slavery. That is, he must initially have a mindset limited to his aristocracy. After that, one has to wonder if the change in him came only after he got to know through self-experience what the life of a slave is like.

Change in Orunoko comes naturally. For the first time slavery pushes him into a vile tradition when he is sold into slavery in Suriname. At first he was held in high esteem by the Taknis. If he had not declared rebellion, he would have enjoyed some extra privileges as the governor's beloved slave if he had not continued his relationship with Imoinda. But the change that came in him was crucial to the story. That is why this novel has become a historical event. His discourse on the plight of fellow blacks led him to regard the novel as "the first anti-slavery novel".

“Why, my dear friends and fellow sufferers, should we be slaves to an unknown people? Have they vanquished us nobly in fight? Have they won us in honourable battle? And are we by the chance of war become their slaves? ... No, but we are bought and sold like apes or monkeys, to be the sport of women, fools and cowards, and the support of rogues, renegades that have abandoned their own countries for raping, murders theft and villainese.”

It is not wrong to enslave those who have won honorable victories in war, but Orunoko asks, "What is the point of selling monkeys?" Who bought and sold themselves over? Rapists, villains, murderers, cowards, thieves. Those who ran here unable to stay in their countries.

“Shall we render obedience to such a degenerate race, who have no one human virtue to distinguish them from the vilest creatures? Will you, I say, suffer the lash from such hands?”



Exclaims those on board. Shall we surrender to such a fallen nation? Should we be beaten at the hands of such people? He provokes the people. With such a discourse trend, this ideology was then new to British literature. The British deputy governor, after their uprising, tells him to surrender with his wife and protect their unborn child. To which he replied 'I do not believe in whites and their gods. No matter what theories they believe, not all honest people can live with them. I refuse to live with them unless I am always armed. '

In a way, Afra Ben seems to have added some fantasy to his leader's sympathy for blacks. When describing his beauty in comparison to Roman facial expressions, she seems to have romanticized somewhat when he says he is a practitioner of European education. But she describes how he learned European education but did not become a Christian and was able to see European culture critically. Shakespeare's play Othello, played by Afra Ben, a black man tragedy a few decades ago, is well known. Shakespeare and Ben Johnson are credited with describing the beauty and leadership qualities of blacks at the time. But Afra Ben is the author who has made it clear that black slavery must be resisted. There were scenes in England where even whites were considered slaves in that era. Protestants if Catholics are lords, there was a tradition that Catholics were slaves if Protestants were lords. They are, however, ideological contradictions. If one's ideology is in a dominant position they see the other as a slave. But this is racial discrimination. Simply, the slavery experienced due to color (color). Afra specializes in filming it.

Afra Ben is also likely to be recognized as the first author to declare her political perspective when looking at poetry, plays, and novels. The political tone is evident in all her writings.

### **Orunoko responses**

The question raised by the first generation of readers who read the novel was - Afra, who had previously been known as a good playwright, why not write such a dramatic novel as a play. What is the reason for writing this as a novel. Perhaps the novel's emphasis on the characters of Orunoko and Imoinda alone would have written the play if she had intended to write it as a tragic love story. But here it is clear that as a narrator, he wanted to critique and analyze the English

patriarchy, colonial policies, and even slavery in secret. That is why this novel was written with a direct witness as the narrator. She may have felt that such phonological analyzes were not possible in the play. However, the drama of the novel fascinated the actors, and it was dramatized and performed by many in the 18th century.

### **A boon to the anti-slavery movement**

Another aspect of the immediate response to the novel was that despite her explicit reference to the political context, some critics considered the novel to be only "a profound love story". In a dictionary between 1731-34, Afran Ben described *Orunoko* as a "delicate and mysterious story of love." That's all but none of the analyzes of slavery have been done. When the French dramatized the novel in 1745, *Orunoko*, without depicting the tragedy of the Emoids, changed the story and concluded that they could both rule the country as kings and queens. That is, they were completely enslaved and completely romanticized by the torture they suffered as a result of being sold into slavery. That's not all. In the French translation of 1769, *Orunoko* gave three hundred slaves to the British deputy governor, bought his liberty and returned to the Swarajya! Thus, distorting an already published novel, whose conclusions are that the stories they wrote probably took place in the life of Afra Ben alone.

Afra Ben's novel did not receive the respect it deserved until two more decades later, when movements for the abolition of slavery began in England. After 1760, all the plays that rejected the slave ideology used it as a conduit for their movement. Afra Ben became a part of the debate on slavery in America and England in the 19th century. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* novel reviews written by American author Harriet Beecher Stowe in *Dublin University Magazine* and *St. James Magazine* in 1856 and 1863, *Orunoko's* novels appear to have been compared. Renowned critic Enst Baker, while rejecting the obscene and rude descriptions of other Afra Ben novels, said that *Orunoko's* novel could be highly respected. He described the novel as the "first anti-slavery novel". The novel gained another solid place in the 20th century. *Orunoko* gained prominence in postcolonial studies. Afra Ben received critical acclaim as the first author to record the discrimination that Europeans show towards Africans. In just a few hours, Afra Ben, who completed the novel in one fell swoop (she said it herself, wrote the novel faster than any



other work), could not have imagined that it would go down in history as the first author to describe an inhumane culture that would be debated for centuries.

## **Lightning**

Robinson Crusoe's Daniel Defoe is still widely regarded as the first novel in British fiction. The name of the novel is also mentioned in literary histories. The novel came out in 1719. However, even after the *Afra Ben* novels came under discussion, historians still do not seem to mind that the first novel in British literature was written by a woman and that it was not just a love story but a novel that questioned inequality.

## **Works Cited:**

<https://a-course-of-steady-reading.wordpress.com/2012/10/14/Oroonoko-or-the-royal-slavery-part-2>

Universal Women Novel: 3, *Afra Ben*. (Viswa Mahila Novel :3, *Afra Behn* in Telugu)

*Aphra Behn*, S.J. Wiseman Series: writers and their work, Liver pool University Press, Northcote House Publishers, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv5rf1zn>.

*Mothering the English Novel: Aphra Behn and the Anti-Racist Themes of Oroonoko*, Scholars International Journal of Linguistics and literature, ISSN 2616-8677, ISSN- 2617-3468, <https://saudijournals.com/journal/sijll/home>.

<https://heritage.humanists.uk>