

The Liberating Power of Oroonoko's Third-Person Point of View

Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* is a powerful narrative that exposes the cruelties of slavery and colonization while presenting an inspiring tale of resistance and human dignity. A key aspect of this literary work lies in its narrative point of view—the omniscient third-person perspective. This essay argues that the third-person point of view in *Oroonoko* not only enables a multifaceted portrayal of characters but also serves as a catalyst for readers' empathy and understanding of the struggles faced by enslaved individuals. Through close analysis of pertinent quotations from the text, we will explore how this narrative choice liberates both the characters within the story and the readers engaging with it.

The multifaceted third-person point of view in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* not only enables a nuanced portrayal of its eponymous protagonist but also offers insight into the motivations and complexities of other characters within the narrative. Alongside *Oroonoko*, the character of Imoinda, *Oroonoko*'s beloved, is presented with depth and authenticity through this narrative lens. The text describes Imoinda as having "a thousand charms, an agreeable person, a sprightly wit, and that uncommon beauty" (Behn, *Oroonoko*). This detailed characterization draws readers closer to Imoinda, making her more than just a damsel in distress, but a fully realized individual with her own desires and agency. As the third-person perspective delves into the thoughts and emotions of both *Oroonoko* and Imoinda, readers are granted access to their intimate struggles, aspirations, and the complexities of their relationship. By inviting readers into the inner lives of these characters, the narrative establishes a profound connection between the readers and the story's protagonists. This connection fosters a heightened emotional investment in the characters' fates and intensifies readers' engagement with the larger themes of slavery, love, and resistance in the narrative.

The third-person point of view in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* plays a pivotal role in vividly unraveling the harsh realities and horrors of slavery. Through an objective yet deeply empathetic narrative voice, Behn confronts readers with the brutal mistreatment and dehumanization endured by the enslaved characters. For instance, when *Oroonoko*'s fellow slaves rebel against their captors, the text recounts, "And here they passed the women and children, whom they slaughtered, as they did the feeble and infirm" (Behn, *Oroonoko*). The matter-of-fact tone of the narrator forces readers to confront the violence and cruelty inflicted upon innocent lives, leaving an indelible impact on their conscience. Moreover, the third-person perspective consistently presents the enslaved individuals as fully realized human beings, with their own aspirations, emotions, and familial ties. For instance, Behn describes an enslaved woman's emotional turmoil, stating, "an unhappy wife and mother, not knowing the condition of her husband and children, was comfortless" (Behn, *Oroonoko*). Such intimate glimpses into the lives of the enslaved evoke a profound sense of empathy, making readers acutely aware of the dehumanizing effects of slavery. The third-person perspective serves as a powerful conduit for readers to bear witness to the atrocities of the slave trade, compelling them to grapple with the moral implications of human suffering and societal injustice. By emphasizing the horrors of slavery through this narrative choice, Behn challenges readers to confront uncomfortable truths and motivates them to question the prevailing systems that perpetuated such cruelty.

The third-person point of view in *Oroonoko* also draws readers closer to the emotional turmoil experienced by the enslaved characters. By delving into their inner thoughts and feelings, the narrative evokes a profound sense of empathy and humanizes the victims of this oppressive system. For instance, when *Oroonoko*'s fellow slaves rebel against their captors, the text recounts, "And here they passed the

women and children, whom they slaughtered, as they did the feeble and infirm" (Behn, Oroonoko). Through the third-person perspective, readers are confronted with the brutality of this scene, but they are also given access to the psychological toll it takes on the characters. The text further describes an enslaved woman's emotional turmoil, stating, "an unhappy wife and mother, not knowing the condition of her husband and children, was comfortless" (Behn, Oroonoko). By witnessing the characters' internal struggles, readers are compelled to reflect on the profound impact of slavery on both the enslaved and their loved ones, heightening their understanding of the inhumanity and cruelty of the institution.

The third-person point of view in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* not only serves as a vessel for exposing the brutalities of slavery but also fosters a powerful call for empowerment and resistance against oppression. By employing an objective yet emotionally charged narrative voice, Behn challenges readers to confront the injustices of the colonial era and advocate for change. One poignant example of the narrative's call for empowerment is evident when Oroonoko, after enduring the horrors of enslavement, resolves to reclaim his freedom and lead a rebellion against his captors. The text describes Oroonoko's determination, stating, "he resolved to attempt the recovery of his liberty, and of the glorious title of a conqueror" (Behn, *Oroonoko*). This declaration encapsulates Oroonoko's defiance against his oppressors and his unwavering belief in his own agency and strength. Through the third-person perspective, readers are given intimate access to Oroonoko's journey, witnessing his transformation from a dignified prince to a resolute leader of resistance. The narrative's immersive portrayal of Oroonoko's empowerment inspires readers to reflect on their own capacities for resilience and action in the face of adversity.

Additionally, the third-person perspective extends its call for empowerment to readers beyond Oroonoko's narrative. By presenting the enslaved characters as multidimensional individuals with dreams, desires, and the will to fight for their rights, the narrative challenges prevailing stereotypes and prejudices of the time. Behn highlights the strength of enslaved women, such as Clemene, who bravely protect their children amidst the violence and chaos of rebellion. The text notes, "Clemene encouraged and led the women to bathe in the dead bodies of their husbands, and to go, loaded with swords and muskets, to destroy the white Christians" (Behn, *Oroonoko*). This portrayal subverts the passive and subservient depiction of enslaved women, presenting them as agents of change and resistance. The third-person perspective draws readers closer to these characters, prompting them to recognize the significance of their struggles and the resilience they exhibit in the face of dehumanization.

Through the lens of the third-person perspective, readers are not only witness to the oppressive systems of the past but are also urged to reflect on contemporary social and political issues. The narrative's call for empowerment resonates with readers today, inspiring them to challenge and dismantle systems of injustice and oppression. By presenting Oroonoko and other enslaved characters as symbols of resistance, the third-person perspective encourages readers to envision a world where human dignity and freedom prevail. In doing so, Behn's narrative invites readers to actively engage in advocacy and stand against the perpetuation of unjust power dynamics, making the call for empowerment and social change a timeless and relevant message that transcends historical context.

The close reading of the third-person point of view in Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* elevates our understanding of the novel by intertwining the horrors of slavery with a profound call for empowerment and resistance. By drawing readers closer to the characters' struggles and emotions, the narrative evokes empathy and humanizes the victims of oppression, fostering a deeper connection between

readers and the themes explored in the text. Oroonoko's transformation from a prince to a leader of resistance inspires readers to reflect on their own capacities for resilience and action in the face of adversity. Additionally, the third-person perspective challenges prevailing stereotypes and amplifies the voices of the oppressed, compelling readers to confront historical and contemporary systems of injustice. In this way, the third-person point of view in Oroonoko transforms the novel into a timeless testament to the enduring strength of the human spirit and a resolute call for empowerment and social change.