

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-68956-4 - Versions of Blackness: Key Texts on Slavery from the Seventeenth Century

Derek Hughes

Excerpt

[More information](#)

PART ONE

THE MAJOR
TEXTS

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HENRY NEVILLE

The Isle of Pines (1668)

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The ISLE of
PINES,

OR,

A late Discovery of a fourth ISLAND near
*Terra Australis, Incognita*¹

BY

Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten.

Wherein is contained.

A True Relation of certain *English* persons, who in Queen *Elizabeths* time, making a Voyage to the *East Indies* were cast away, and wracked near to the Coast of *Terra Australis, Incognita*, and all drowned, except one Man and four Women. And now lately *Anno Dom.* 1667. a *Dutch Ship* making a Voyage to the *East Indies*, driven by foul weather there, by chance have found their Posterity, (speaking good *English*) to amount (as they suppose) to ten or twelve thousand persons. The whole Relation (written, and left by the Man himself a little before his death, and delivered to the *Dutch* by his Grandchild) Is here annexed with the Longitude and Latitude of the Island, the scituation and felicity thereof, with other matter observable.

Licensed *July 27.* 1668.

LONDON, Printed for *Allen Banks* and *Charles Harper*
next door to the three Squerrills in *Fleet-street*, over against
St. Dunstons Church, 1 6 6 8 .

¹ The unknown southern land (*australis* means 'southern'). An undiscovered southern continent had been postulated by ancient geographers, and the idea was revived after the voyages of Vasco da Gama and Magellan in the southern seas. Europeans were driven off course to Australia in the seventeenth century, but it was not formally discovered until 1770.

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**Two Letters concerning the Island of *Pines* to a
Credible person in *Covent Garden***

Amsterdam, *June* the 29th 1668.

*I*t is written by the last post from Rochel, to a Merchant in this City, that there was a French ship arrived, the Master and Company of which reports, that about 2 or 300 Leagues Northwest from Cape Finis Terre,² they fell in with an Island, where they went on shore, and found about 2000 English people without cloathes, only some small coverings about their middle, and that they related to them, that at their first coming to this Island (which was in Queen Elizabeths time) they were but five in number men and women, being cast on shore by distress or otherwise, and had there remained ever since, without having any correspondence with any other people, or any ship coming to them. This story seems very fabulous, yet the Letter is come to a known Merchant, and from a good hand in France, so that I thought fit to mention it. It may be that there may be some mistake in the number of the Leagues, as also of the exact point of the Compass, from Cape Finis Terre; I shall enquire more particularly about it. Some English here suppose it may be the Island of Brasile³ which have been so oft sought for, Southwest from Ireland: if true, we shall hear further about it; Your friend and Brother,

Abraham Keek.

Amsterdam, *July* the 6th, 1668.

*I*t is said that the ship that discovered the Island, of which I hinted to you in my last, is departed from Rochel,⁴ on her way to Zealand. Several persons here have writ thither to enquire for the said Vessel, to know the truth of this business. I was promised a Copy of the Letter that came from France, advising the discovery of the Island abovesaid, but it's not yet come to my hand; when it cometh, or any further news about this Island, I shall acquaint you with it,

Your Friend and Brother,

A. Keek.

² A peninsula in northwest Spain.

³ Hy-Brasil (variously spelled). A mythical island in Irish legend. *O-Brazile*, a satirical pamphlet of 1675, narrates the discovery of an enchanted island off the coast of Ireland.

⁴ Rochelle, a port on the Atlantic coast of France.

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The Isle of Pines,

DISCOVERED

Near to the Coast of *Terra Australis Incognita*, by Henry Cornelius Van Sloetten, in a Letter to a friend in London, declaring the truth of his Voyage to the East Indies.

SIR,

I Received your Letter of this second instant, wherein you desire me to give you a further account concerning the Land of *Pines*, on which we were driven by distress of Weather the last Summer. I also perused the Printed Book thereof you sent me, the Copy of which was surreptitiously taken out of my hands, else should I have given you a more fuller account upon what occasion we came thither, how we were entertained, with some other circumstances of note wherein that relation is defective. To satisfie therefore your desires, I shall briefly yet fully give you a particular account thereof, with a true Copy of the Relation it self; desiring you to bear with my blunt Phrases, as being more a Seaman then a Scholler.

April the 26th 1667. We set sail from *Amsterdam*, intending for the *East-Indies*; our ship had to name the place from whence we came, the *Amsterdam*, burthen 350. Tun, and having a fair gale of Wind, on the 27 of *May* following we had a sight of the high Peak of *Tenriffe* belonging to the *Canaries*. We have touched at the Island *Palma*,⁵ but having endeavoured it twice, and finding the winds contrary, we steered on our course by the Isles of *Cape Verd*, or *Insulae Capitis Viridis*,⁶ where at *St. James's* we took in fresh water, with some few Goats, and Hens, where with that Island doth plentifully abound.

June the 14. we had a sight of *Madagascar*, or the Island of *St. Laurence*,⁷ an Island of 4000 miles in compass, and scituate under the Southern Tropick;

⁵ Tenerife and Palma, islands in the Canary Islands.

⁶ Cape Verde ("green cape"), a group of islands in the North Atlantic Ocean, west of Senegal.

⁷ A common name for Madagascar.

thither we steered our course, and trafficked with the inhabitants for Knives, Beads, Glasses and the like, having in exchange thereof Cloves and Silver. Departing from thence, we were incountred with a violent storm, and the winds holding contrary, for the space of a fortnight, brought us back almost as far as the Isle *Del Principe*,⁸ during which time many of our men fell sick, and some dyed, but at the end of that time it pleased God the wind favoured us again, and we steered on our course merrily, for the space of ten days: when on a sudden we were encountered with such a violent storm, as if all the four winds together had conspired for our destruction, so that the stoutest spirit of us all quailed, expecting every hour to be devoured by that merciless element of water. Sixteen dayes together did this storm continue, though not with such violence as at the first, the Weather being so dark all the while, and the Sea so rough, that we knew not in what place we were. At length all on a sudden the Wind ceased, and the Air cleared, the Clouds were all dispersed, and a very serene Sky followed, for which we gave hearty thanks to the Almighty, it being beyond our expectation that we should have escaped the violence of that storm.

At length one of our men mounting the Main-mast espyed fire, an evident sign of some Countrey near adjoyning, which presently after we apparently discovered, and steering our course more nigher, we saw several persons promiscuously^o running about the shore, as it were wondering and admiring^o at what they saw: Being now near to the Land, we manned out our long Boat with ten persons, who approaching the shore, asked them in our *Dutch Tongue* *Wat Eylant is dit?*⁹ to which they returned this Answer in English, *That they knew not what we said*. One of our Company named *Jeremiah Hanzen* who understood *English* very well, hearing their words, discourst to them in their own Language; so that in fine we were very kindly invited on shore, great numbers of them flocking about us, admiring at our Cloaths which we did wear, as we on the other side did to find in such a strange place, so many that could speak *English*, and yet to go naked.

Four of our men returning back in the long Boat to our Ships company, could hardly make them believe the truth of what they had seen and heard, but when we had brought our ship into harbour, you would have blest your

promiscuously: confusedly

admiring: wondering

⁸ An island off West Africa.

⁹ According to Bruce, the Dutch would be "Welk Eiland is dat?" (Susan Bruce, ed. *Three Early Modern Utopias: Thomas More, "Utopia", Francis Bacon, "New Atlantis", Henry Neville, "The Isle of Pines"* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], 241).

self to see how the naked Islanders flocked unto us, so wondering at our ship, as if it had been the greatest miracle of Nature in whole World.

We were very courteously entertained by them, presenting us with such food as that Countrey afforded, which indeed was not to be despised; we eat of the Flesh both of Beasts, and Fowls, which they had cleanly drest, though with no great curiosity^o, as wanting materials, wherewithal to do it; and for bread we had the inside or Kernel of a great Nut as big as an Apple, which was very wholesome, and sound for the body, and tasted to the Pallat very delicious.

Having refreshed our selves, they invited us to the Pallace of their Prince or chief Ruler, some two miles distant off from the place where we landed; which we found to be about the bigness of one of our ordinary village houses. It was supported with rough unhewn pieces of Timber, and covered very artificially with boughs, so that it would keep out the greatest showers of Rain; the sides thereof were adorned with several sorts of Flowers, which the fragrant fields there do yield in great variety. The Prince himself (whose name was *William Pine* the Grandchild of *George Pine* that was first on shore in this Island) came to his Pallace door and saluted us very courteously, for though he had nothing of Majesty in him, yet had he a courteous noble and deboneyre spirit, wherewith your English Nation (especially those of the Gentry) are very much indued.

Scarce had he done saluting us when his Lady or Wife, came likewise forth of their House or Pallace. Attended on by two Maid-servants, she was a woman of an exquisite beauty, and had on her head as it were a Chaplet of Flowers, which being intermixt with several variety of colours became her admirably. Her privities were hid with some pieces of old Garments, the Relicts of those Cloaths (I suppose) of them which first came hither, and yet being adorned with Flowers those very rags seemed beautiful; and indeed modesty so far prevaieth over all the Female Sex of that Island, that with grass and flowers interwoven and made strong by the peelings of young Elms (which grow there in great plenty) they do plant together so many of them as serve to cover those parts which nature would have hidden.

We carried him as a present some few Knives, of which we thought they had great need, an Ax or Hatchet to fell Wood, which was very acceptable unto him, the Old one which was cast on shore at the first, and the only one that they ever had, being now so quite blunt and dulled, that it would not cut at all. Some few other things we also gave him, which he very thankfully accepted, inviting us into his House or Pallace, and causing us

curiosity: elegance

to sit down with him, where we refreshed our selves again, with some more Countrey viands which were no other then such we tasted of before; Prince and peasant here faring alike, nor is there any difference betwixt their drink, being only fresh sweet water, which the rivers yield them in great abundance.

After some little pause, our Companion (who could speak *English*) by our request desired to know of him something concerning their Original and how that people speaking the Language of such a remote Countrey should come to inhabit there, having not, as we could see, any ships or Boats amongst them the means to bring them thither, and which was more, altogether ignorant and meer strangers to ships, or shipping, the main thing conducible to that means, to which request of ours, the courteous Prince thus replied.

Friends (for so your actions declare you to be, and shall by ours find no less) know that we are inhabitants of this Island of no great standing, my Grandfather, being the first that ever set foot on this shore, whose native Countrey was a place called *England*, far distant from this our Land, as he let us to understand; He came from that place upon the Waters, in a thing called a Ship, of which no question but you may have heard; several other persons were in his company, not intending to have come hither (as he said) but to a place called *India*, when tempestuous weather brought him and his company upon this Coast, where falling among the Rocks his ship split all in pieces; the whole company perishing in the Waters, saving only him and four women, which by means of a broken piece of that Ship, by Divine assistance got on Land.

What after passed (said he) during my Grandfathers life, I shall show you in a Relation thereof written by his own hand, which he delivered to my Father, being his eldest Son, charging him to have a special care thereof, and assuring him that time would bring some people or other thither to whom he would have him to impart it, that the truth of our first planting here might not be quite lost, which his commands my Father dutifully obeyed; but no one coming he at his death delivered the same with the like charge to me, and you being the first people, which (besides our selves) ever set footing in this Island, I shall therefore in obedience to my Grandfathers and Fathers commands, willingly impart the same unto you.

Then stepping into a kind of inner room, which as we conceived was his lodging Chamber, he brought forth two sheets of paper fairly written in *English*, (being the same Relation which you had Printed with you at *London*) and very distinctly read the same over unto us, which we hearkened unto with great delight and admiration, freely proffering us a Copy of the

same, which we afterward took and brought away along with us; which Copy hereafter followeth.

A Way to the East *India's* being lately discovered by Sea, to the South of *Affrick* by certain *Portugals*,^o far more safe and profitable then had been heretofore;^{io} certain *English* Merchants encouraged by the great advantages arising from the Eastern Commodities, to settle a *Factory*^o there for the advantage of Trade. And having to that purpose obtained the Queens Royal Licence *Anno Dom.* 1569. 11. or 12. *Eliz.*ⁱⁱ furnisht out for those parts four ships, my Master being sent as Factor to deal and Negotiate for them, and to settle there, took with him his whole Family, (that is to say) his Wife, and one Son of about twelve years of age, and one Daughter of about fourteen years, two Maidservants, one *Negro* female slave, and my Self, who went under him as his Book-keeper, with this company on Monday the third of *April* next following, (having all necessaries for House-keeping when we should come there, we Embarqued our selves in the good ship called the *India Merchant*, of about four hundred and fifty Tuns burthen, and having a good wind, we on the fourteenth day of *May* had sight of the *Canaries*, and not long after of the Isles of *Cape Vert*, or *Verd*, where taking in such things as were necessary for our Voyage, and some fresh Provisions, we steering our course South, and a point East, about the first of *August* came within sight of the Island of *St. Hellen*,^o where we took in some fresh water. We then set our faces for the Cape of Good hope, where [we arrived] by Gods blessing after some sickness, whereof some of our company died, though none of our family; and hitherto we had met with none but calm weather, yet so it pleased God, when we were almost in sight of *St. Laurence*, an Island so called, one of the greatest in the world, as Marriners say, we were overtaken and dispersed by a great storm of Wind, which continued with such violence many days, that losing all hope of safety, being out of our own knowledge, and whether we should fall on Flats or Rocks, uncertain in the nights, not having the least benefit of the light, we feared most, always wishing for day, and then for Land, but it came too soon for our good; for about the first of *October*, our fears having made us forget how the time passed to a certainty; we about the break of day discerned Land (but what

Portugals: Portuguese

Factory: trading station

St. Hellen: St. Helena

^{io} Vasco da Gama had rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1497, and the Portuguese had discovered the Moluccas in 1512.

ⁱⁱ Referring to an act passed in the eleventh or twelfth year of the reign of Elizabeth I, who became queen in 1558.

we knew not). The Land seemed high and Rockey, and the Sea continued still very stormy and tempestuous, insomuch as there seemed no hope of safety, but looked suddenly to perish. As we grew near Land, perceiving no safety in the ship, which we looked would suddenly be beat in pieces: The Captain, my Master, and some others got into the long Boat, thinking by that means to save their lives, and presently after all the Seamen cast themselves overboard, thinking to save their lives by swimming. Only my self, my Masters Daughters, the two Maids, and the *Negro* were left on board, for we could not swim, but those that left us, might as well have tarried with us, for we saw them, or most of them perish, our selves now ready after to follow their fortune, but God was pleased to spare our lives, as it were by miracle, though to further sorrow. For when we came against the Rocks, our ship having endured two or three blows against the Rocks, (being now broken and quite foundred in the Waters), we having with much ado gotten our selves on the Bowspright, which being broken off, was driven by the Waves into a small Creek, wherein fell a little River, which being encompassed by the Rocks, was sheltered from the Wind, so what we had opportunity to land our selves, (though almost drowned) in all four persons, besides the *Negro*. When we were got upon the Rock, we could perceive the miserable Wrack to our great terrour. I had in my pocket a little Tinder-box and Steel, and Flint to strike fire at any time upon occasion, which served now to good Purpose, for its being so close, preserved the Tinder dry. With this, and the help of some old rotten Wood which we got together, we kindled a fire and dryed our selves, which done, I left my female company, and went to see, if I could find any of our Ships company, that were escaped, but could hear of none, though I hooted and made all the noise I could; neither could I perceive the footsteps of any living Creature (save a few Birds, and other Fowls. At length it drawing towards the Evening, I went back to my company, who were very much troubled for want of me. I being now all their stay in this lost condition, we were at first affraid that the wild people of the Countrey might find us out, although we saw no footsteps of any not so much as a Path; the Woods round about being full of Briers and Brambles, we also stood in fear of wild Beasts. Of such also we saw none, nor sign of any. But above all, and that we had greatest reason to fear, was to be starved to death for want of Food, but God had otherwise provided for us as you shall know hereafter; this done, we spent our time in getting some broken pieces of Boards, and Planks, and some of the Sails and Rigging on shore for shelter. I set up two or three Poles, and drew two or three of the Cords and Lines from Tree to Tree, over which throwing some Sailcloathes and having gotten Wood by us, and three or four Sea-gowns, which we had dryed, we took up our Lodging