

**"if buizy Love intrenches"**

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**"if buizy Love intrenches":**

**Adorno and Rochester on Pleasure and Love**

**Lacey Ann Conley**

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Some writers simply do not lend themselves to easy analysis. The application of concrete theory to their work almost always yields unsatisfactory results because it stringently resists generalization and categorization. One example of such an author is John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester, whose enigmatic and seemingly contradictory worldview as represented in his poetry is a common topic of discussion amongst his most dedicated critics.<sup>1</sup>

Marianne Thormählen identifies the “fundamental paradox that confronts a student of Rochester’s stances

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and values as expressed in his verse” which is that “the mind pursues satisfaction through the body;” but “minds are particularly unreliable guides and bodies are lamentably fallible” (27). Similarly, according to Melissa E. Sanchez, “a neat division between the idealism of romance and the cynicism of libertinism is untenable, for in Rochester’s hands the two thought systems emerge as equally artificial attempts to transcend the frustrations that arise from humanity’s situation between god and beast” (441). It is necessarily perplexing for the reader to observe Rochester’s attempts to negotiate such paradoxes, leading to critical observations like Paul Hammond’s, who claims that “His poetry often disturbs ... continuity through the fragmentation of experience into discrete moments which may be severed from any possible narrative by abrupt changes of argument or of register” (49). It makes sense then that a body of work lacking narrative continuity

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<sup>1</sup> Dustin Griffin laments the fact that “Freudian analysis is usually brought to bear upon literary material in order to uncover hidden or disguised fears, anxieties, or obsessions, something the poet himself is not conscious of. This is not the case with Rochester. [. . .] Freudian analysis can tell us little that Rochester does not tell us himself” (115). Interestingly, this does not stop Griffin from attempting a Freudian analysis anyway, perhaps due to a lack of any more satisfactory option.

can best be analyzed through the application of a theory that shares the same fragmented construction. Despite the near 300 years separating the two authors, Hammond’s description of Rochester’s poetry sounds a great deal like Devra Lee Davis’s assertion about Theodor Adorno that “His [thought] models are not duplicable, system-bound expressions: they are moments, expressions, and sketches,” and are arguably “mood betraying.” She cites an example of this moodiness in Adorno’s discussion of metaphysics in *Negative Dialectics*, which she describes as an “orchestrated cacophony of outrage” (396), as if the author’s mood itself were the center of the interpretation, which is then “orchestrated” around it.<sup>2</sup>

From these critical observations it can be concluded that Rochester and Adorno are both notable for an intense authorial presence in their writing, revealing inconsistencies that can only come from the changeability of an active, individual mind that is not content with constructions of abstract theory about life, but also insists on the importance of individual experience. As Adorno says, “In the face of totalitarian unity, which cries out for the elimination of differences directly as meaning, something of the liberating social forces may even have converged in the sphere of the individual. Critical theory lingers there without a bad conscience” (qtd. in Davis 393). For Adorno, theory is only valuable when it considers individual difference, which makes his theory an ideal method of approach to consider the writing of an individual as unique as the Earl of Rochester. Reading Adorno’s collection of aphorisms, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, alongside a selection of Rochester’s poems, I examine intersections in the observations and beliefs of Adorno and Rochester—specifically as they are expressed in ideas about pleasure and love—and explore the implications of

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<sup>2</sup> The link between Rochester and Adorno is by no means immediately obvious. In fact, it derives from my own realization that what I find “pleasurable” about reading the work of both authors derives from their similar perspectives on the issues discussed here. From that initial awareness, I began to see how the work of each could provide a useful lens through which to analyze the other.

these shared viewpoints as they manifest themselves in Rochester's life and writing. The desired result is to retrieve Rochester's work from its often overhasty placement squarely within the Libertine tradition, a style of writing characterized by the amoral pursuit of physical pleasure in any form. While this aspect of the Earl's work deserves consideration, it is also limiting insofar as it leaves no room for the exploration of what I believe to be moments of deep philosophical contemplation by the poet on his own personal despair and his fallen, corrupt society.<sup>3</sup>

Reading Rochester's poem alongside Adorno's *Minima Moralia* brings out not only the poet's reflection on his own "damaged life," but also the convergence of the individual and the theoretical in the work of both authors. In *Minima Moralia*, Adorno's objective is "the teaching of the good life" (17), which he attempts by supplying personal reflections on his own life and experience as "models for a future exertion of thought" (18). Adorno's aphorisms are expressed in language both poignant and poetic, and there is a sense of loss bordering on despair in the writer's view of the world in which he has lived; a place where true pleasure and happiness are imagined, but never achieved. His description of "A Damaged Life," though based on his individual experience, brings to mind the work of the Earl of Rochester because he too observes his world from a position on the brink of personal despair. Adorno and Rochester have similar ideas about the possibility of experiencing true and lasting pleasure, which is best defined as a sustained feeling of contentment, both physical and psychological, that is not tainted by the threat of its own disappearance. Therefore, Rochester's poems should, like *Minima Moralia*, be read as "models for a future exertion of thought," rather than celebrations of rampant lust and debauchery that have no philosophical bearing outside their

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<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Fisher and Matt Jenkinson's 2007 "Rochester and the Specter of Libertinism" draws attention to the considerable political power of the Earl in his lifetime (particularly as a memorable satirical voice). Yet, it is again his anger and aggression that is highlighted, rather than his capacity for inactive contemplation and philosophical expression.

historical context. The comparison of these authors is done somewhat self-consciously, however, with the acknowledgment that to present the argument that Adorno provides a much-needed theoretical context in which to place the poems of Rochester is an endeavour that might not meet with the approval of Adorno himself, who believes that “He who seeks to mediate between two bold thinkers ... stamps himself as mediocre: he has not the eyes to see uniqueness: to perceive resemblances everywhere, making everything alike, is a sign of weak eyesight” (74).

Pleasure, for Adorno as well as for Rochester, is, as it stands, fleeting and unfulfilling. According to Adorno, “the transience of pleasure ... attests that except in the *minutes heurueses*, when the lover’s forgotten life shines back in the loved one’s limbs there is, as yet, no pleasure at all” (176). This idea of reflection is crucial to Adorno’s concept of pleasure, which he sees as an impossibility in what Thomas Pepper calls “that fallen state of commodity fetishism” (924) where people are more often than not reduced to the status of objects. Adorno suggests that the capacity for happiness relies on “the unrestricted openness to experience amounting to self-abandonment in which the vanquished rediscovers himself” (200), and the only way to accomplish that rediscovery is through the recognition of the self in the other. He defines “the secret of sensuality itself” to be that, we find that the moment “[i]n the fixity of its gaze, until self-reflection dawns, is the very anonymity, the unhappy generality, that is fatefully reproduced in its negative, the unfettered sovereignty of thought” (90). Real pleasure, which is different from momentary sexual stimulation, is impossible to achieve in general. It relies on a specific connection with the other that can only be achieved through recognition of his or her individuality, since, as Pepper explains, “the monad is a mirror and a window—in relation to its complement” (923). Self-recognition in the other prevents the impulse to objectify that person, making him or her into a commodity with which one can have no special relationship because he or she is inherently different. Even if both partners

were being objectified by the other, in a situation like Adorno describes when "Sex, as an immediate craving, makes everything an object of action and therewith equal" (89), the relationship between equal objects is one of constant and arbitrary exchange, from which the commodities can derive no real pleasure. So while Adorno believes that "the experience of pleasure presupposes a limitless readiness to throw oneself away" (91), it is clear that this self-abandonment is for the purpose of retrieving the self as an image reflected in the specific "limbs" of the other.

An example of the changeability of thought of which Davis accuses Adorno can be seen in the fact that there is another, possibly contradictory, image of pleasure presented in *Minima Moralia*. In "This Side of the Pleasure Principle," Adorno attacks Freud because his "unenlightened enlightenment plays into the hands of bourgeois disillusion. ... Reason is for him a mere superstructure ... because he rejects the end, remote to meaning, impervious to reason, which alone could prove the means, reason, to be reasonable: pleasure" (60-1). So far, so good: the idea that pleasure is a reasonable end in itself is too full of common sense to be contradictory. However, Adorno continues on to say that: "He alone who could situate utopia in blind somatic pleasure, which, satisfying the ultimate intention, is intentionless, has a stable and valid idea of truth" (61). This definition of true pleasure has a lot in common with the first; however, it is the "blindness" of this second pleasure that is troubling, given the importance placed on wide-eyed self-recognition of one's image in the other to achieving true happiness described in the first example. Does not "blind somatic pleasure" necessarily imply a general anonymity, since recognition is impossible when one's eyes are closed? Reconciliation of this contradiction is possible if the blindness Adorno proposes is taken to mean blindness to "intention." In other words, this simply adds to the idea that pleasure should be an end in itself, thus strengthening one's ability to recognize oneself in the other by avoiding the distraction of outside motivations or agendas. The "somatic pleasure" Adorno describes is only blind to things outside

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the specific subject of one’s contemplation. His criticism of Freud makes sense when considering the objective of Freudian analysis to uncover the repressed motivations of human action. Adorno is arguing that the pursuit of pleasure as an end in itself is empty of these repressed elements because it is an ultimate recognition of the self in the other. Blind somatic pleasure is “remote to meaning” because it is individual and therefore it rejects any attempt at totalization through insertion into psychoanalytical categories. By experiencing true pleasure, a person experiences him or herself completely, and nothing is repressed.

For the Earl of Rochester, pleasure is something that is ever pursued and never achieved. He seems to share Adorno’s view that the only reasonable end to reason is pleasure, and would agree that thinking about pleasure turns it into an object, and therefore takes away the ability to experience it:

I own right reason, which I would obey;  
That Reason which distinguishes by Sense,  
And gives us Rules of Good and Ill from thence:  
That bounds Desires with a Reforming Will,  
To keep them more in vigour, not to kill.  
Your Reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,  
Renewing appetites yours would destroy,  
My Reason is my friend, Yours is a cheat,  
Hunger calls out, my Reason bids me eat;  
Perversely yours your appetites does mock,  
They ask for food, that answers what’s a clock. (“Satyre  
Against Reason and Mankind” 99-109)

The response of Rochester’s “right” reason to hunger is to eat, while reason that recognizes an objective order would wait until the appropriate time to eat, thereby making its end the conformity to an imposed plan rather than pleasure. The way that Rochester’s reason “distinguishes by Sense” and “bounds Desires” in order to “keep them more in vigour” is based on the same principle as Adorno’s insistence on the specificity of pleasure. In both cases

action must be taken without thought, the satisfaction of desire must be immediate in order for it to be free from thought's objectification. In fact, Adorno also uses the image of hunger to outline his argument when he states that the only "goal of an emancipated society" that reveals any "tenderness" is "the coarsest demand: that no-one shall go hungry any more" (155-6). Any demand beyond that is the instrument of an imposed system.

Although Rochester reveals an understanding of the kind of reason necessary to achieve pleasure, many of his poems reflect an inability to apply this method to his own experience.<sup>4</sup> The trouble is that he does not draw a line between unfettered action and impulse. His reason does not simply bid him eat, it bids him gorge himself on the kind of arbitrary pleasure-seeking that Adorno condemns for its "anonymity" and "unhappy generality." This surfeit of wanton impulse is particularly evident in the poem "The Imperfect Enjoyment." The first few lines suggest the possibility for the true pleasure of identification and self-reflection in the other:

*Naked* she lay clasp'd in my longing Armes,  
I fill'd with Love and she all over Charmes,  
Both equally inspir'd with eager fire,  
Melting through kindness, flameing in desire.  
With Armes, Leggs, Lipps, close clinging to embrace  
She clips me to her breast and sucks me to her face. (1-6)

The image presented is one of lovers so entwined that they are almost indistinguishable. They are "melting" together, a collection of limbs "equally inspired." The speaker recognizes his lover as an individual with specific "Charmes," who is also a reflection of him in that he recognizes his own "eager fire" in her as well. Their connection seems to be one of "true affection" as Adorno defines it: "one that speaks specifically to the other, and becomes attached to

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<sup>4</sup> Although it is always important to recognize the distinction between a writer's life and his work, it is generally believed that, in Rochester's case, there is a strong autobiographical element to most of his writing. Griffin observes that "his songs are intensely personal" (115), a claim I would extend to the bulk of his poetry.



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beloved features and not to the idol of personality, the reflected image of possession" (79). In these lines, the woman is able to be both the reflection of the speaker and an autonomous individual because her charms, limbs, and actions are still and specifically hers. However, this attempt at "true affection" is not sustained:

Her nimble tongue (loves lesser lightning) plaid  
Within my Mouth; and to my thoughts conveyd  
Swift Orders, that I should prepare to throw  
The all dissolving Thunderbolt below.

.....

But whilst her buizy hand would guide that part  
Which shou'd convey my soul up to her heart  
In liquid raptures I dissolve all o'er,  
Melt into sperm and spend at every pore.  
A touch from any part of her had don't:  
Her hand, her foot, her very look's a Cunt. (7-11, 13-18)

At the precise moment when Adorno's image of "the *minutes heurueses*, when the lover's forgotten life shines back in the loved one's limbs" might have taken place, the intimacy of the couple is violently shattered and the speaker melts, not into the woman, but into the proof of his own failed attempt at pleasure. Consequently, once the connection is broken, the woman is immediately turned into an object by the speaker's generalization of all her parts into one category. Everything that was once specific about her is now subsumed under the name of "Cunt." The speaker's premature ejaculation is distressing to the woman, and as she "from her body wipes the clammy Joyes" (20) she asks him, "All this to Love, and Raptures due-- / Must we not pay a Debt to pleasure too?" (23-4). Her language reveals an understanding of the difference between instant sexual gratification (rapture/orgasm) and true pleasure, which requires some sort of investment, the paying of a "debt." The "clammy Joyes" are a necessary part of "Love and Raptures;" but in this case, things have gone awry because real pleasure has been sacrificed for one-sided sexual gratification. Despite her

seemingly superior understanding, the woman's use of the word "debt" is problematic, because it suggests that she too is under the spell of commodity fetishism, since she finds the language of commerce unavoidable.<sup>5</sup> As Adorno says, "Loving means not letting immediacy wither under the omnipresent weight of mediation and economics" (110). "Immediacy" here must be taken to mean closeness, rather than quickness. Rochester quite literally withers under this pressure, revealing the mediation of his experience through the use of images of lightening and thunderbolts to replace the physical features of the lovers. They are no longer limbs, but are nonspecific forces of nature. Also, the experience takes on the language of an economic transaction with the use of the word "spend" to describe the speaker's uncontrolled action. The rest of the poem all but forgets about the woman, becoming a frustrated attack by the speaker on his "Dart of Love" (37) that "Breaks every stew, does each smale whore invade, / But when great Love the onsett does Command, / Base recreant to thy Prince, thou durst not stand" (59-61). Under the pressure of habit induced by arbitrary indulgence of impulse, the immediacy of sexual gratification is irreconcilable with the longevity necessary for the achievement of true pleasure with a specific and individual partner. The speaker reveals the same kind of "inhibition, impotence, [and] sterility of the never changing" that Adorno lists as characteristic of a "bourgeois society" (156) under the control of commodity fetishism.

Another "omnipresent weight" imposed on society according to Adorno is what he calls the "abstract temporal sequence" which "plays in reality the part one would like to ascribe to the hierarchy of feelings" (78). This inevitable march of time is "irreversible" (78), and is not a product of commodity fetishism, but is its source: "In fact, it is the matter of this already announced abstract sequencing operation itself, structurally unavoidable, that is

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<sup>5</sup> The terminology is, of course, anachronistic. But members of Restoration society would have had no trouble understanding sexual gratification's potential to function as a system of commercial exchange.

precisely the explanation for why commodity production is inevitable” (Pepper 924). The “hierarchy of feelings” is thus replaced by “the notion of time” that “is itself formed on the basis of the order of ownership” (79). In other words, our relationships with other people are dictated by the order in which we meet them, and since time is only understood through the order of ownership, a partner is reduced to an object through “possessiveness” which “loses its hold on its object precisely through turning it into an object, and forfeits the person whom it debases to ‘mine’” (79). Once the abstract label “mine” is used, the person who it is meant to describe becomes an object, and is therefore replaceable and indistinct. How can one sustain love, then? Again, the answer is timing: “One might almost say that truth itself depends on the tempo, the patience and perseverance of lingering with the particular” (77). We have already seen that, for Adorno, specificity is key to true affection. As he puts it—somewhat paradoxically—in the section of *Minima Moralia* titled “For Anatole France,” “The universality of beauty can communicate itself to the subject in no other way than in obsession with the particular” (76). Experiencing the “universality of beauty” in the contemplation of a person’s particular qualities can be nothing other than true love. He continues on to explain that it is a selfish, yet necessary, attribute of love that one must submit to the “injustice of contemplation,”<sup>6</sup> which involves an insistence on the part of the lover to focus only on the specific attributes of the other despite the fact that “No gaze attains beauty that is not accompanied by indifference, indeed almost by contempt, for all that lies outside the object

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Pepper makes a somewhat offhand comment that the “fallen state of commodity fetishism” is “Adorno’s supposedly secular equivalent for Pascal’s state of Man’s Fallenness” (924). It seems in fact that Adorno and Pascal have similar views on a number of subjects, reflected here in Pascal’s statement that: “It is untrue that we are worthy to be loved [preferentially] by others. It is unfair that we should want such a thing. ... We are born unfair” (qtd. in Kreeft 156-7). Both men would agree that there is something both wrong and unavoidable in the desire for preferential (and therefore specific) love.

contemplated" (77).<sup>7</sup> Once that indifference ceases to exist, "if the particular is startled from its rapture,<sup>8</sup> interchanged and weighed up, the just overall view makes its own the universal injustice that lies in exchangeability and substitution" (76). So, time will march on, but it is possible for love to withstand the order of ownership as long as the lovers keep their eyes on the particular attributes of the beloved, and not on the abstract movement of the clock's hands, or the distracting smiles of anonymous passers-by.

Rochester also recognizes the pressure imposed by the abstract temporal sequence. In his poem "Love and Life" he contemplates the passing of time and also admits that he is incapable of the "injustice of contemplation" necessary to resist it:

All my past Life is mine no more,  
 The flyeing hours are gone  
 Like Transitory dreams given o're  
 Whose Images are kept in store  
 By memory alone.

What ever is to come is not:  
 How can it then be Mine?  
 The present moment's all my Lott  
 And that as fast as it is got  
*Phillis* is wholly thine.

Then talk not of Inconstancy,  
 False hearts and broken vows:

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<sup>7</sup> Although Adorno is technically talking about beauty, not love, he uses similar language to describe them, as we can see, and so I think it is safe to draw the conclusion that Adorno's understanding of beauty and his understanding of love are based on the same principles. Also, the placement of "For Anatole France" and "Morality and Temporal Sequence" back-to-back in the book contributes to the idea that Adorno might have seen a connection between the two, or at least that they are products of the same "mood."

<sup>8</sup> This is, of course, a different kind of rapture than the one referred to by the woman in "The Imperfect Enjoyment." In this context, it has little to do with the sexual gratification she is describing, but is rather used to indicate intense concentration on the other.

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If I by miracle can be  
This livelong Minute true to Thee  
Tis' all that Heaven allows. (1-15)

The speaker of this poem presents himself as a victim of the passing of time. He is unable to control any moment but the precise present, which he turns into an object and gives away, thereby ensuring that it will be replaced by another moment, which he can then give to whatever abstract lover is then present. His question, “What ever is to come is not: / How can it then be mine?” confirms Adorno’s assertion that “whatever is, is experienced in relation to its possible non-being” (79). Inconstancy is here meaningless because the speaker has given Phillis all he can give; the present moment, which will soon become part of his past life that he can no longer lay claim to as something that belongs in the category of “mine.” Rochester would certainly agree that “nothing past is proof, through its translation into mere imagination, against the curse of the empirical present” (Adorno 166). His passivity in the face of time’s progress suggests that this speaker will never achieve true love because he makes no resistance to the surrender of one moment to the next. For him, the false wisdom Adorno warns against is potentially true: “they are all only people, which one it is does not really matter” (79-80).

This poem brings up an interesting discontinuity between the beliefs of Adorno and Rochester; namely, their observations about memory. Rochester is able to let go of moments dispassionately, committing them to memory that is unaffected by the present. This is made clear through the very structure of “Love and Life,” which is episodic; each period of past, future, and present is contained in its own stanza. The past is “mine no more” and “gone.” It is “kept in store by memory,” which suggests that the speaker has no access to it. However, for Adorno, memory allows the present to affect the past: “The most blissful memory of a person can be revoked in its very substance by later experience. He who has loved and who betrays love does harm not only to the image of the

past, but to the past itself" (166). For Adorno, the past is never gone or stored away, but is always susceptible to corruption by the present. When a lover gives in to the pressures of exchangeability, he or she does real damage to the past: "[S]omeone ousted by a newcomer is always misused, a shared past life annulled, experience itself deleted" (78). This is precisely why the past is inaccessible for Rochester, his experience of love and time is based on the idea that every moment, every woman, is "ousted" into the vault of memory, essentially "annulled" and "deleted." Rochester is incapable of experiencing the kind of love Adorno defines as true. While the Earl may understand that the passage of time works against the ability to experience true love, he evokes a sort of cynical and defeated rejection of the possibility of resisting the abstract temporal sequence. Instead of actively seeking love, he buries himself in hedonistic pursuits in an attempt to find diversion in the constant exchange of arbitrary moments. What sets Adorno apart from Rochester is that he seems still to believe in the prospect of love, and he recognizes the unavoidable connection of moments and the violence that comes from ignoring the past.

Another of Rochester's poems that addresses the relationship between love and time is the song that begins "Absent From Thee I Languish Still":

1

Absent from thee I languish still  
 Then ask me not when I return,  
 The straying fool twill plainly kill  
 To wish all day, all night to mourn.

2

Dear from thine arms then let me fly  
 That my fantastick mind may prove,  
 The torments it deserves to try  
 That Tears my fixt heart from my love.

3

When weary'd with a world of woe

To thy safe bosome I retire  
Where love and peace and truth doe flow,  
May I contented there Expire

4

Least once more wandring from that heav'n  
I fall on some Base heart unbles'd,  
Faithless to thee, false, unforgiv'n  
And loose my everlasting rest. (1-16)

Again we are presented with a speaker who is helpless against the compulsion of exchange. Time is for him a malevolent force that draws him away from his lover and will not even allow him the power to control when he may return. Even though he recognizes the difference between this woman's specific "safe bosome" and the general "Base heart," he is unable to concentrate on his love. He is distracted by his "fantastick mind" that "tears" him from the necessary contemplation of her alone. Marianne Thormählen sums up the problem nicely when she explains that "his mind possesses no power to keep him off certain misery, and it is obviously unlikely ever to gain any such strength; in other words, only death can stop his straying" (25). The only way for Rochester to be free from the danger of submitting to exchangeability is by choosing to die in the woman's "safe bosome." Adorno also discusses the reasoning behind "freely chosen death" where "freedom has contracted to pure negativity," and the choice to die represents nothing more than "the wish to curtail the infinite abasement of living and the infinite torment of dying, in a world where there are far worse things to fear than death" (38). It seems that what is at stake for Rochester is certainly worse than death, since to continue living would be to risk the loss of his "everlasting rest." To be absent from the woman is to languish in wishes and mourning that are killing him anyway in a slow and tormenting deterioration, so the only freedom available to him is to choose to die in her arms, where he can at least be safe and contented. His true desires are frustrated by the abstract temporal sequence which he is unable to

resist, so the speaker wishes for the only means of escape of which he can conceive: death. However, the line "May I contented there Expire" suggests that he is still wishing, not choosing. It is interesting that, for all his inability to resist inconstancy, the speaker does not seem to consider the possibility that the woman might not want him after his repeated infidelities. So, constancy is possible, just not for him.<sup>9</sup>

Just as freedom can only be expressed through a negative action, pleasure too is subject to perversion by the negative, as Adorno shows in the form the experience of pleasure takes on in "Tough Baby." Adorno describes a group he calls "He-men" (46), who display "a certain gesture of virility" that "expresses independence, sureness of the power to command, [and] the tacit complicity of all males" (45). He finds this confident gesture suspicious, and goes on to explain that "the pleasures of such men ... all have about them a latent violence" (46); but while this violence may seem to be directed at others, it is in fact directed at the self because these men are all masochists who believe that "all pleasure has, preserved within it, earlier pain," and for them the "pride in bearing it, is raised directly, untransformed, ... to pleasure" (46). The exclusivity of this group relies on the lie of their sadism, that the pleasure sadism gives them is perversely rooted in their own suffering, a fact that allows them to become "agents of repression" (46). However, Adorno reveals this lie to be "nothing other than repressed homosexuality presenting itself as the only approved form of heterosexuality" (46). By excluding everyone, male or female, from their "club," the He-men create a generalized group of the Other that includes "the compliant [male] youth" as an object belonging to the same category as women. Thus, Adorno concludes that "Totalitarianism and homosexuality belong together" (46). A

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<sup>9</sup> Perhaps this double standard is simply based on the fact that a woman would not have the same choices as a man during this period. Her life would be lived in the private sphere of the home, while the speaker is necessarily drawn into the public sphere, and therefore exposed to considerably more frequent temptation.



sexualized totalization means that every Other since not part of the club, is a potential object for sexual domination, and is essentially genderless because defined only through membership in the category of Other.

Although it is hard to imagine the Earl of Rochester being described as a "He-man," there is certainly something of that "latent violence" in him, which can be seen in occasions like the lengthy attack he makes on his own impotence in "The Imperfect Enjoyment," since it only comes out when his ability to dominate sexually is threatened. This poem also shows that he is not afraid to make an exuberant "gesture of virility," which manifests itself in his excessive bragging about past sexual conquests. This bragging also contains a reference to sexual encounters with males: "Stiffly Resolv'd t'would Carelessly invade / Woman, nor Man, nor ought its fury stayd- / Where ere it pierc'd a Cunt it found or made" (41-3). Arbitrary sex threatens to be an act of violent domination, or furious invasion, but use of the word "careless" makes the violence latent. The speaker faces no opposition from woman or man, every object is willingly subsumed under the category of "Cunt," so there is no need for violent domination. Paul Hammond offers an interpretation of these lines that supports the idea of the sexual object as a generalized and genderless Other, arguing that "[t]he casual phrasing suggests that the gender of the partner is immaterial, though at the same time ... makes it clear that the male body is no more than a convenient substitute for the female. There is in fact no trace here of homoeroticism, no real responsiveness to the sexual attractions of the male body" (55). Although Hammond is right that these lines do not reveal an attraction to the male body specifically, I do not believe it is seen as a substitute for the female, either. There is no evidence of a preference for the specifically female, since "Cunt" as a category is something that "Woman," "Man," and "ought" else can be "made" into. A woman's anatomical structure is not what places her in that category, and the very anonymity of her place within it negates the possibility of preference. Like the "compliant youths" Adorno

describes, women are there simply due to their general acquiescence to domination by the “He-men.”

Rochester again displays a tendency towards “He-man” exclusivity and totalizing sexuality in “Love to a Woman,” where he proclaims:

Farewell *Woman*—I intend  
 Henceforth every Night to sitt  
 With my lewd well natur’d Friend  
 Drinking to engender witt.

Then give me health, wealth, Mirth, and wine,  
 And if buizy Love intrenches  
 There’s a sweet soft Page of mine  
 Can doe the Trick worth Forty wenches. (9-16)

These lines separate the speaker’s world into two groups. One can be described in Adorno’s words as belonging to “the club, that arena of a respect founded on scrupulous unscrupulousness” (46). The other is, just that, the Other, a category occupied by the “sweet soft Page” (or “compliant youth”), and “wenches,” who are all equal in the sense that they are available as sexual objects. Though these lines might appear to suggest an actual preference for the male sexual object, the fact that this Page can “doe the Trick worth Forty wenches” is more a result of proximity than attraction. In the words of Thomas Hobbes: “Felicity is a continual progress of the desire, from one object to another; ... the object of mans desire, is not to enjoy once only, and for one instant of time; but to assure for ever, the way of his future desire” (qtd. in Wilcoxon 196). Arguably, it would be much easier to arrange a sexual encounter with the boy who, as a page, would be under the speaker’s employ and in his vicinity most of the time. Arranging for “forty wenches” would certainly be more difficult, and might draw the speaker away from his “lewd well natur’d Friend” for longer than necessary. And why bother when “After all, they are all only people, which one it is does not really matter” (Adorno 79-80)? The page is not more attractive, just more convenient; the most reliable source for the continued “felicity” of the speaker.

## “if buizy Love intrrenches”

Despite his crudeness and misogyny, the speaker of “Love to a Woman” is aware of what it takes to find true love and pleasure. As we have seen, it is in fact a trend among Rochester’s speakers to be able to recognize the self-destruction they are nonetheless powerless to avoid. In this poem, the speaker’s compulsion to find satisfaction from a number of specific places, and not from a totality, reveals the correct *form* for happiness, but the wrong *content*. He “becomes attached to beloved features” (Adorno 79), but those features come from multiple places (his page and his friend), not belonging to one specific other. For him, “buizy Love” is separate from the companionship he finds with his friend; it is “buizy” and distracting. It can be satisfied temporarily by his “sweet soft page,” but will continue to “intrrench” upon the only lasting satisfaction he can find, which is with his friend with whom he intends “Henceforth every Night to sitt.” This fragmented happiness is self-defeating because the speaker must continue to move back and forth between the two forms of pleasure he identifies as mutually exclusive. While he is in some sense making a choice here, it is not a free choice because he is still subject to the “abstract temporal sequence” that dictates when lust will draw him from his “health, wealth, Mirth, and wine.” Rochester’s speaker is caught somewhere between the “true affection” and “He-man” club mentality described by Adorno. Characteristically unwilling to be characterized, he resists inclusion in any sort of pre-fabricated categories, even those of a man who himself rejects the totalizing impulses of concrete theory.

Reading Rochester’s poems through the lens of Adorno’s theories on love and pleasure in *Minima Moralia* highlights just how elusive an author the Earl can be. He identifies the principles of true love and happiness, but in what Adorno describes as the “fallen world of commodity fetishism,” the Earl is powerless to achieve these pleasures. He is the sort of subject who requires the time careful contemplate takes, one who must be loved for his specific parts that are both a reflection of ourselves and proof of his uniqueness. The intensely autobiographical nature of his poetry celebrates the

individuality of a real and complicated person who struggles with the endless contradiction between what should be and what is. Like Adorno, Rochester is subject to changes in mood and outlook, moving from expressions of extreme tenderness to those of extreme rage in a matter of lines, thereby fervently resisting the critic and theorist's urge to totalize. When Alex Thomson explains that "Adorno protests that this act of knowing is violent, in equating individual and particular objects, by imposing subjective categories on them" (110), he is reminding us that it is useless to try to "know" an author like the Earl of Rochester or Theodor Adorno, but it is certainly both pleasurable and fulfilling to take the time to appreciate each author in all his complexity. The apparent fragmentation of Adorno and Rochester's works is a necessary consequence of their autobiographical nature, and while these two "bold thinkers" certainly share some insights into the truth about pleasure and love, they also make it impossible to "perceive resemblances everywhere" (Adorno 74), because their reactions to this truth are quite different, and perhaps even "mood betraying." ●

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