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21L.001 Foundations of Western Culture: Homer to Dante
Fall 2008

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Paragraph Construction, Transitions, and Incorporating Quotations (in discussing the erotic poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester)

The author's thesis here is that Rochester's sustained (i.e., in multiple poems) association of sexual prowess with emotional distance or unavailability constitutes a satirical attack on the preening machismo of the period (late seventeenth century) in which he was writing. This excerpt discusses three poems, whose subjects will become clear from the author's analysis. I have included the latter part of the first paragraph, the entirety of the second, and the beginning of the third.

[Initial discussion of how the poem's narrator depicts himself as heroic despite

being impotent.] **Ultimately**, however, the epic analogy in "The Disabled

Debauchee" of a brave retired admiral reliving his past exploits through the

actions of others glorifies the actor being portrayed even as it dissociates him

from the action itself. **Indeed**, Rochester is so detached that physical involvement

in sex is unnecessary to his satisfaction. Like a veteran living vicariously through

his recruits, he is fulfilled merely in watching those whom he encourages to

follow suit; he is "absent, yet enjoys" (12).

Rochester makes similar claims about the power of uninvolved sexual

conquest in "The Imperfect Enjoyment." **Here**, however, complications arise from

his earnest love for his partner, Corrina; though he was once able to "carelessly

invade / Woman or man" (41-42), the eagerness of his feelings now causes him to

finish before intercourse even begins. **This** failure confounds Rochester, who –

asking himself incredulously "what oyster-cinder-beggar-common whore / Didst

thou e'er fail in all thy life before?" (50-51) – bitterly condemns his performance

as "true to lewdness, so untrue to love" (49). **Guilt-ridden** over his partner's

dissatisfaction, he reintroduces emotional disengagement in an effort to please

her, hoping that "ten thousand abler pricks agree / To do the wronged Corrina

Comment [r1]: analytic argument about significance of preceding close readings

Comment [r2]: terms from the overall thesis reinforce the relevance of this poem; the brief quotation juxtaposes these terms and so is a catchy ending.

Comment [r3]: Broad statement of purpose.

Comment [r4]: lays out paradox the paragraph will explore; marks contrast with previous statement.

Comment [r5]: contextualization; adverbs show author's awareness of tone

Comment [r6]: contextualization; again use terms from overall thesis to demonstrate relevance of this analysis

right for thee” (71-72). Rochester depersonalizes her partners not only by calling them “pricks” rather than men (an insult as well, of course), but also by numbering them in the impersonal thousands. Yet this explicit dehumanization of

Comment [r7]: close reading of the quoted line

Comment [r8]: broader analysis of the significance of the line

her prospective lovers only reinforces how thoroughly Rochester accepts the incompatibility of emotion and sex: detaching from Corrina enough to encourage her to have sex with others, and concluding that these outside encounters will be succeed precisely because they are emotionally meaningless. The real sadness of

Comment [r9]: looks still further outward by addressing the culture as a whole

“The Imperfect Enjoyment” is not Rochester’s impotence faced with true love, but his conclusion that his only option is to participate still more wholeheartedly in the callous culture that produced that impotence – and encourage his sweetheart to do so as well.

Comment [r10]: contextualizing summary

Considering the ramifications of emotion during sex, it is no surprise that the most successful of Rochester’s subjects is “Signior Dildo,” the Italian sex toy that takes England by storm. Women everywhere greet Signior Dildo as a welcome substitute for men, who, according to Rochester, either conquer emotionlessly or fail lovingly. As a gesture, this has the effect of broadening

Comment [r11]: mini-argument of this sentence which subsequent analysis will demonstrate

Rochester’s satirical attack: women are not simply victims of hyper-masculine rakes; their own superficiality encourages and valorizes such behavior in men. [Discussion and close reading of this poem follow.]