

**‘The Radical Restoration: Andrea Dworkin’s ‘Intercourse’ and Female Sexuality in the
Seventeenth-Century’**

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“Everything is about sex, except sex; sex is about power”

(Michaels, qtd. in Glick, 118)

Restoration literature is particularly rife with depictions of the anxious, insecure male, shuddering not with orgasm, but with fear of the woman he desires. As Andrea Dworkin astutely testifies in her book, *Intercourse*, “[t]he woman appears to control sex. The man needs it. This causes his rage at her perceived power over him” (19). Male anxiety, thus, forms the bedrock of heterosexual intercourse. Sex becomes no longer about pleasure, but about power: who possesses it, and who might take it away. To evidence this claim, I will adopt a feminist critical framework, inspired by Dworkin, de Beauvoir, and Glick, to consider a range of Restoration texts which grapple with this theme. Namely, John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), The Earl of Rochester’s *The Imperfect Enjoyment* (1680), and the anonymously written *The London Jilt* (1683). In doing so I aim to analyse the emergence of the male fear of female sexuality and how it manifests in Restoration literature.

In discussions of sexuality, the symbolic power of the phallus cannot be overstated. Man covets his penis as the nucleus of his being: it represents all he is, and all he may become. In the figurative sense, Man *is* his penis. This type of sexual reductionism is promoted by Rochester in *The Imperfect Enjoyment*, as his “speaker appears not merely to address but to actually become his penis” (Clark, 37). The “imperfect” nature of Rochester’s enjoyment lies within the failure of the phallus to fulfil its masculine duty. During intercourse, the phallus enacts two prospective functions of dominance. Firstly, the God-ordained requirement to “[b]e fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth” (Milton, 7: 531), and secondly, to possess and subjugate its female object, as “[t]he fucking conveys the quality of the ownership: [the man] owns [the woman] inside out” (Dworkin, 82). Rochester’s speaker, ejaculating prematurely, fails both of these ambitions. What should have been a virile display of accomplished masculinity—“penis in vagina, vagina around penis, with seminal emission uninterrupted” (Benedict, 73)—becomes a humiliating spectacle of impotence. And what was the cause? *Woman*. Rochester’s speaker accuses: “A touch from any part of her had done ‘t: / Her hand,

her foot, her very look's a cunt" (17-8). Women, here, are blameable by sole virtue of their womanhood. The female body is highly and pejoratively sexualised, so vastly imprinted with the sexual fantasies of the male that even an unassuming "look" from her excites arousal. As Dworkin argues, "[a]ny woman who acts on a man's sensuality by provoking[,] which she does just by being a sexual object in looks and behaviour[,] [...] dominates him" (19).

Emerging, thus, in *The Imperfect Enjoyment*, is an intense fear of women's "innate" sexuality and its ability to compromise masculinity through intercourse.

This anxiety behind women's inherent sexuality can be traced back to scripture, namely, the allegorical tale of Eve's original sin which has served historically as a paradigm of male/female relationships. Phallocentrism—that is, the symbolic primacy of the male phallus, and the broader dominance of maleness in defining gender relations—forms the basis of Eve's seduction in *Paradise Lost*, with Satan assuming the overtly phallic shape of the serpent (9: 85-92) to beguile and dominate her. Notably, Milton applies the language of flaccidity to the prelapsarian Eden:

[S]o thick the roses bushing round
About her glowed, oft stooping to support
Each flow'r of slender stalk whose head, though gay
Carnation, purple, azure or speckled with gold
Hung drooping unsustained. (9: 426-30)

What is notable in this passage is Satan's (the phallic serpent) seduction of Eve can be classified as symbolic rape. The prelapsarian Eden, untainted as yet by sin, is desexualised and placid, "stooping" and "drooping" like a flaccid penis. Imposing on Eden, Satan materially penetrates this image of innocence with his eroticised serpentine self. Once again, the phallus becomes the vehicle of dominance. In pedagogical interpretations of scripture, "misogynist readers have blamed [Eve's] ambition instead of God's plan, which invariably

leads to the conclusion that she is a satanic agent, or that her desire for agency is by its nature satanic” (Festa, 178). Milton and his readers’ failure to allocate male accountability to sexual corruption qualifies as justifying the male psyche to fear and condemn female desire. As *Paradise Lost* advocates, original sin is not the fault of God or Satan, but rather the fault of “[Eve’s] bold decision to work alone in the garden away from Adam[,] deliver[ing] her directly into hands of Satan” (Bare, 106). Female autonomy, and distinctly female desire and sexual appetite, thus, becomes a significant harbinger of anxiety within the male cultural consciousness.

Often, such anxiety manifests as sexual violence. As Glick advocates, “[w]hen men experience real or imagined inflations and/or deflations in their sense of power, they may express it sexually” (Glick, 117). Consequential of her sin, Eve is punished with the pain of childbirth and eternal subordination to Adam:

[T]o the woman thus his sentence turned:

Thy sorrow I will greatly multiply

By thy conception: children thou shalt bring

In sorrow forth and to thy husband’s will

Thine shall submit: he over thee shall rule. (Milton, 10: 192-6)

Intercourse, then—the act of conception and its subsequent pregnancy and labour—is paradoxically weaponised against women. The dominance and pleasure which penetration instils within men becomes divinely ordained and legitimised. And, so too for women, sexual suffering and submission becomes necessary; more than that, it becomes women’s God-given right. Any deviation from this patriarchal model becomes blasphemous: against God.

Befalling men, then, is the ideological responsibility of upholding this version of morality: a goal achievable through intercourse. Naturalised intercourse is “forceful (manly) or nearly violent” explains Dworkin, “Both conceptual systems—the theological and the

biological—are loyal to the creed of male dominance” (79-80). Intercourse, then, to the pious male, needs be acquired by any means, including force, particularly when dealing with a sexually deviant women, for their sacred punishment must be realised—the Eve within them must suffer.

Anonymously written, *The London Jilt* advances the ideas of *Paradise Lost*, using biblical context to relay the narrative of its antihero: an emboldened prostitute, Cornelia. *The London Jilt* makes overt its allusion to Eve’s original sin, cautioning and encouraging men in its preface to “[a]void all [woman’s] Cursed Allurement, and be mindful that a Snake lies concealed under such bewitching Appearances, and how beautiful and attractive soever the outside of the Apple may be, that it is Rotten and Pestilent at Core” (42). Notably, here, women, symbolised by Eve, the figurehead for all Restoration women, are defined exclusively by their corrupting symbols. Eve was not seduced by the snake, she *is* the snake. She did not eat the apple, she *is* the apple. As Glick develops, “when unconscious fears of women burden self-esteem and impulse control, such men tend to defensively regress to those rageful, distorted images of women as [...] destroyers of men” (120). When threatened, the male author makes every attempt to reduce the woman to her “essential” perverse features. She is dehumanised, diminished often to her sexual organs, as in *The Imperfect Enjoyment*, “her very look’s a cunt” (18), and *The London Jilt*, “what filthy, nasty, and stinking Carcasses, are the best and finest of our Common Whores?” (41). Alternatively, she is reduced to an animalistic unanthropomorphic entity, as in *Paradise Lost*, “Out of my sight, thou serpent! That name best / Befits thee with him leagued, thyself as false / And hateful!” (10: 867-9), and *The Imperfect Enjoyment*, “With arms, legs, lips close clinging to embrace, / She slips me to her breast, and sucks me to her face” (5-6). Such violent and degrading language becomes synonymous with the term “woman” and oftentimes supersedes it. The typological category of “woman” is dissolved to reveal a haunted house of monstrous

identities conjured up by the insecure and anxious male psyche which fears her. As de Beauvoir puts it:

The word 'female' evokes a saraband of images: an enormous round egg snatching and castrating the agile sperm; monstrous and stuffed, the queen termite reigning over the servile males; the praying mantis and the spider, gorged on love, crushing their partners and gobbling them up. (de Beauvoir, 28)

Male vilification of the sexual female (that is, opposed to the sexualised female, a picture of docility and submission idyllically conceived by the male) is perceived as dangerous only because she is autonomous. A woman may be everything a man says she is—deceptive, animalistic, perverse, sacrilegious—and still exercise what he *perceives* to be power over him.

Innately, men desire sex: libido is a natural component of the male condition. The fundamental truth of sexual power, argues Glick, is that “[w]omen control access to sex. Men want sex [...] For heterosexual men, women have the power to grant sexual access and sexual satisfaction. Women have used sex to gain power” (118). Within the context of *Paradise Lost*, Glick’s theory is manifest in Eve’s seduction, facilitated by her desire to obtain sacred knowledge which might “render me more equal and, perhaps, / Superior: for inferior who is free?” (9: 823-5). Desire, here, is enacted in pursuit of power. Comparatively similar is the exploitation of sexuality for monetary gain in *The London Jilt*, Cornelia cautions her client, “if you refuse to [pay] be assured, that as long as you live, you shall never touch my Naked Body” (85). Lust makes men vulnerable, “intoxicated, deranged, stupefied” (Dworkin, 19). Sexually enlightened, Cornelia weaponizes this knowledge, turning man’s naturalised, carnal craving for intercourse against him, becoming a villainous caricature of the seductress who has “never been subject to a silly Compassion for men” (138) and “cannot forbear laughing when [she] think[s] on those poor innocent Cullies” (145). In *The London Jilt*, thus, through

intercourse, man is victimised, fallen prey to the charms of the manipulative female: a total inversion of the hegemonic function of sex, which is, as has been evidenced, to assert dominance and uphold patriarchy. Men, thus, both desire and fear the sexual female—simultaneously dependent on and threatened by her. It is this contention that renders him vulnerable.

More complex is Rochester's conceptualisation of male victimhood. Pushing beyond the limits of simple vulnerability, Rochester facilitates within *The Imperfect Enjoyment* an inversion of patriarchy through his use of gendered imagery. Wilcoxon asserts that "Rochester begins his address to the male organ on a note of veneration, much as the epic hero would address his trusted spear" (382). Failing to possess his lover and thus assert his dominance, Rochester's speaker takes on a hyperbolic, hyper-masculinised voice which attempts to restore the phallus from its vulnerable state of prey to its natural glory—a weapon, triumphant in battle. The phallus thus becomes, imaginatively:

[A] dart of love, whose piercing point
[...] nature still directed with such art
That it through every cunt reached every heart
[...] Woman or man, nor ought its fury stayed:

Where'er it pierced, a cunt it found or made. (Rochester, 37-43)

Moving the narrative from sexual fantasy to reality, Rochester's speaker surrenders his penis "[n]ow languid, / Shrunk up and sapless like a withered flower" (44-5) to illustrate his impotence. The flaccid penis, invokes womanhood, as Lenhof attests to the familiar trope of "conceptualiz[ing] maidenhood as a flower," and further to "[t]he association between blossoms and a woman's sexual body [...] [being] crucial to Milton's epic" (69-70). Equated with Eve—seduced, "[d]efaced [and] deflow'ed" (Milton, 9: 901)—Rochester's speaker

becomes, in his vulnerable state, as good as a woman. Through her sexual power, the female facilitates the symbolic transmutation of man into woman, and woman into man.

Reinforcing this inversion is the comparative masculinisation of the fallen, sexually liberated Eve in *Paradise Lost*, who appropriates the masculine language of weaponry: her “eye darted contagious fire. / Her hand he seized and to a shady bank / [...] There they their fill of love and love’s disport / Took” (9: 1036-43). Within these examples, women take on the dominant sexual role archetypally held by men. Given this, intercourse also breeds male vulnerability, wherein women can undermine their sexual supremacy. To further example Rochester, *The Imperfect Enjoyment* exhibits a symbolic “draining” of masculine power through the male orgasm. Benedict has suggested that “[b]ecause male ejaculate was considered the most “noble portion of the blood,” physicians believed its expenditure depleted the body’s reserves” (70). Such is the case for Rochester’s speaker, who “[i]n liquid raptures [...] dissolve[d] all o’er, / Melt[ed] into sperm, and spen[t] at every pore” (13-6). Through his sexual organ, the woman has drained his vitality, just as a vampire would draw blood from its victim. Leaving him lifeless in this post-orgasmic state, the woman snatches the sexual power once held by the male. Notable, here, too, is Rochester’s allusion to Humorism, which dictates that the dominant male is *hot* and *dry*, while the submissive female is *cold* and *wet*. Inverted, then, are these gendered tropes, as Rochester’s speaker becomes cold, willing “heat [to] return / To frozen age, and make cold hermits burn” (29-30), and wet, ejaculating in “liquid raptures” (13). Through his ejaculation, Rochester’s speaker is symbolically castrated—a microcosmic representation of the castrating power which female sexuality threatened men with more broadly. For the Restoration male, as a sexual agent, anything other than totalitarian dominance is as good as feminized submission; as good as castration.

In conclusion , the feminist voices of Dworkin, de Beauvoir, and Glick, among others, succesfully deconstruct the fear-driven depictions of female sexuality, offering valuable psychoanalytic insight into the anxious male psyche behind them. Be it *Paradise Lost* and the vilification of Eve, the lascivious corrupter of all mankind; *The Imperfect Enjoyment* and the emasculating female agent, obstructing the path of masculine dominance; or *The London Jilt* and the malevolent seductress, preying on the desires of men, Restoration literature most certainly concludes that “[m]en fear women, and with good reason! Women are power” (Glick, 115).

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