

# Protean Lovelace

Jocelyn Harris

When Clarissa calls Lovelace "a perfect Proteus," more variable than the chameleon (II, 82),<sup>1</sup> she points to him as a very icon of the mutability that once meant man's paradoxical potential for creation and destruction. To Erasmus, Vives, Pico della Mirandella, Ariosto, Montaigne, Burton, Spenser, and Shakespeare, the shape-changing sea-god Proteus was at once lawmaker and lawbreaker. As Spenser says in the *Mutability Cantos*, men "their being doe dilate" by their changes.<sup>2</sup> Civilization itself results from their restless aspirations to learning and the creative arts. But when like Proteus in his other manifestations men hide malignity behind a benevolent mask, creative art turns to illusion, verbal distortion, acting, deception, rape, and chaos in civil society.<sup>3</sup> Lovelace, who parodies Richard III's most famous line (III, 421), might boast like him,

I can add colours to the chameleon,  
Change shapes with Protheus for advantages,  
And set the murderous Machiavel to school.

(III Henry VI, III, ii, 191-93)

- 1 Richardson references are to the Everyman edition of *Clarissa*, based on the revised third edition, ed. John Butt, 4 vols (London and New York: J.M. Dent, 1932, reprinted 1962); *Pamela*, ed. T.C. Duncan Eaves and Ben D. Kimpel (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971); *The History of Sir Charles Grandison*, 3 parts, ed. Jocelyn Harris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972 [reprinted in one volume, 1986]).
- 2 *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J.C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912, reprinted 1959), *Mutability Cantos*, vii, 58.
- 3 See A. Bartlett Giamatti, "Proteus Unbound: Some Versions of the Sea God in the Renaissance," *The Disciplines of Criticism: Essays in Literary Theory, Interpretation, and History*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene, and Lowry Nelson, Jr (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 437-75.

To identify the exuberant Lovelace, who is "so light, so vain, so various, that there is no certainty that he will be next hour what he is this" (II, 95), with the sinister shapechanger Proteus and various of his avatars goes some way to explaining the powerfully ambivalent responses he gives rise to.

In his masterpiece, *Clarissa*, Richardson opposes the Protean flux of Lovelace to the fixity of Clarissa. To do so, he draws on two vigorously competing world-views of his time, Hobbism, which perceives a materialistic universe based on restlessness, power, corruption, and self-interest, and Christian Platonism, which assumes the universe to be spiritually informed. Hobbist attitudes lie behind everything that Lovelace is and does, whereas ideal visions of an immanent being, expressed on earth in the power of law, sustain his victim and antagonist, Clarissa. The philosophy of Hobbes was expressed most clearly for the age by that "perfect Hobbist" John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester,<sup>4</sup> and details from Rochester's life, works, and reputation flesh out Richardson's emblem of mutability, Lovelace. Rochester-Lovelace merges with other Proteus figures to whom he is explicitly linked in the novel, Jupiter (I, 175; II, 98), Faust (III, 210), Shakespeare's Proteus, Richard III, Shadwell's Don Juan,<sup>5</sup> Satan, and Macheath. Their changing natures confirm that he is essentially a Proteus.

To Hobbes the Protean nature of man is self-evident. His philosophy of flux begins in Galileo's theories of motion, and his own notion of physiology. Man, he observes, is naturally restless, and out of his imperative motion comes desire, from desire power, from power war, and from war the obliteration of absolutes and restraint. He concludes that the commonwealth requires a central controlling power, if it is not to collapse into anarchy.

In Hobbes's materialistic universe there are no souls, only bodies. Hobbist man is a mechanical apparatus consisting of sense organs, nerves, muscles, imagination, memory, and reason, responsive but also self-moving because of inbuilt appetites and aversions which maintain motion

4 Antony à Wood, *Athenae Oxoniensis* 3, 229, cited by Dustin H. Griffin, *Satires against Man: The Poems of Rochester* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), p. 15. At the end of his life Rochester was said to have repudiated the philosophy of Hobbes, although Griffin points out that Rochester was attended at the time by noted anti-Hobbists who would have been putting pressure on him (p. 15, n. 28).

5 For Lovelace as Proteus and as Don Juan, see my "Richardson: Original or Learned Genius?" in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays*, ed. Margaret Anne Doody and Peter Sabor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 188–202, and my *Samuel Richardson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 68–69.

and prevent death.<sup>6</sup> "Life it selfe is but motion," says Hobbes (p. 32). He characteristically figures the life of man in the similitude of a race: "continually to be outgone is misery: continually to outgo the next before is felicity: and to forsake the course is to die." "To have no Desire," he says, "is to be Dead: so to have weak Passions, is Dulnesse" (p. 139). Men, though, demand different degrees of power, riches, and honour, depending on their complexions, customs, and education (pp. 32-33).

All desire may be reduced to "Desire of Power. For Riches, Knowledge and Honour are but severall sorts of Power" (p. 139). "Power simply is no more, but the excess of the power of one above that of another."<sup>8</sup> Desire for power rapidly becomes harmful and invasive, especially as some men's desires are without limit: "I put for a generall inclination of all mankind, a perpetuall and restlesse desire of Power after power, that ceaseth onely in Death" (p. 161).

There are many kinds of power: "to have servants, is Power: To have friends, is Power: for they are strengths united." Eloquence also is power (pp. 150-51), but above all, kings provide prime examples of the lust to conquer (p. 161). So Lovelace too will find.

It follows in Hobbes's "Warre of every man against every man" that "nothing can be Unjust. The notions of Right and Wrong, Justice and Injustice have there no place. Where there is no common Power, there is no Law: where no Law, no Injustice. Force, and Fraud, are in warre the two Cardinall vertues. Justice, and Injustice ... are Qualities, that relate to Men in Society, not in Solitude" (p. 188). Good and evil, says Hobbes, are merely relative "to the person that useth them" (p. 120). Nor is there any right to property, "no *Mine* and *Thine* distinct; but onely that to be every mans that he can get; and for so long, as he can keep it." In a state of nature "every man has a Right to every thing; even to one anothers body" (pp. 188-90).

All that matters in a state of nature is self-preservation, and a man is entitled to do anything he considers the aptest means for it. Consequently, "the condition of meer Nature, that is to say, of absolute Liberty ... is Anarchy, and the condition of Warre" (p. 395). Hobbes knew from experience that civil war meant "that dissolute condition of masterlesse

6 Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. MacPherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968, reprinted 1971), p. 28. References are to this edition.

7 Hobbes's *Human Nature*, in *Works*, IV, 52-53, cited in Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth-Century Background* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1934, reprinted 1962), pp. 100-101.

8 Hobbes's *Elements of Law*, part I, chap. 8, sec. 4, p. 26, cited in *Leviathan*, p. 35

men, without subjection to Lawes, and a coercive Power to tye their hands from rapine, and revenge" (p. 238).

War within a household brings insurrection—quite literally—home. The Family provides "a little Monarchy ... wherein the Father or Master is the Sovereign" (p. 257), with all that monarchy's potential for disaster, as Hobbes saw when he wrote, "some have attributed the Dominion to the Man onely, as being of the more excellent Sex; they misreckon in it. For there is not always that difference of strength or prudence between the man and the woman, as that the right can be determined without War" (p. 253). So Clarissa's family and suitors will find.

To prevent anarchy, Hobbes proposes the Social Contract, in which men give up the right to invade others if others would do the same. To be successful, such a contract requires the transfer of rights to some sovereign power (pp. 40–45). Every man has a property in his own person, and the sovereign's job is to provide the conditions in which each man can make the fullest use of it (p. 48). "Of things held in propriety, those that are dearest to a man are his own life, & limbs; and in the next degree, (in most men) those that concern conjugall affection; and after them riches and means of living." Even a king must be subject to such a law as this (pp. 382–85).

Hobbes, then, as an empirical follower of Bacon and Descartes, describes what he saw at a time of civil war: men's irresistible propensity to bloodiness, avariciousness, violence, and conquest. He speaks as a dispassionate observer of "the characters of man's heart, blotted and confounded as they are, with dissembling, lying, counterfeiting and erroneous doctrines" (p. 83), and calmly proposes his solution, a sovereign power.

Lovelace's restlessness marks him as Hobbist man.<sup>9</sup> He has always to be doing, and not just in his own person. He acts multiple parts, he multiplies his restlessness through agents whom he animates to impersonate yet other characters again. Ovid, he boasts, "was not a greater master of metamorphoses than thy friend" (II, 13). Dissatisfied with one scene, he creates many, the reflections of his own divided mind. A whirling restless man, he seeks variety and change. He abandons each conquest as

9 In *Virtue in Distress: Studies in the Novel of Sentiment from Richardson to Sade* (London: Macmillan, 1974), R.F. Brissenden remarks that the dominating motive in the world as portrayed by Richardson is a Hobbist lust for power (pp. 172–73), while Margaret Anne Doody explains just how Hobbist Lovelace and the Harlowes are, and notes a connection with Rochester's *Valentinian*. See *A Natural Passion: A Study of the Novels of Samuel Richardson* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 119, 123–24, 342, 344.

soon as it is done, and puts off consummation with Clarissa so that love will not end. He fears that marriage weakens passion and leads to dullness (II, 187), for like Shakespeare's Troilus (III, ii) he acknowledges that desire is boundless and the act a slave to limit. He prides himself on his superior desires on account of his finer fashioning and kinglike aspirations, and justifies all he does from these vaster and more Faustian needs. But when he loses Clarissa, the object of his desire, his life and very motion are at an end.

Lovelace inhabits a state of nature, which for Hobbes is a state of war. His liberty is actually licence, as he boasts when he says, "I who think I have the right to break every man's head I pass by, if I like not his looks" (II, 67). He enjoys absolute power, even over the body of Clarissa. Lovelace believes he has a right to it when he abducts her, locks her up, deceives, drugs, and rapes her. He asserts his right to invade and possess, and though he says he will be honest in most affairs, "had I been a *bad* man in *meum* and *tuum* matters, I should not have been fit to live. As to the girls, we hold it no sin to cheat them" (II, 468). He declares war on Clarissa and her family, he calls himself General, Emperor, Grand Signor. Families, says Richardson in *Sir Charles Grandison*, are "little communities ... so many miniatures [of the great community]" (I, 25). The domestic civil wars in *Clarissa* are played out in a vocabulary of tyranny and slavery, power and subjection. Clarissa is indeed the woman Hobbes foresaw, whose superiority in prudence forces her into war with her family and her lovers.

Everything is relative, to Lovelace. He typically analyses words away. Rape he says is not rape but a yielding reluctance; friendship is not friendship when it is between women (II, 495; III, 169). He can talk his way out of any charge, like the lawyers in Westminster-hall who prove black white (III, 400). He justifies his deceits by pointing to his Hobbist, Jonsonian world of knaves and hypocrites, lawyers, clergymen, doctors, relatives, and their gulls. All things seem to him corrupted by self-interest and the desire for power. Assuming even Clarissa to be tainted by humanity, he accuses her of avarice, her family's besetting sin, for mourning the loss of her virginity.

If the sexual transgression of a Proteus leads to civil destruction as Giametti says, a libertine like Lovelace proves the need for a social contract. In assuming the right to physical and sexual conquest, tyranny, violence, anarchy, and defiance of the law, Lovelace has shaped his life by Hobbes. But Mr B. had argued that the law is above kings and queens (*Pamela*, pp. 355-56), and Lovelace must also learn that he has no *droit*

*de seigneur*, no kingly rights, over a bourgeois girl whose family he despises. "Sprung up from a dunghill," he says scornfully, within every elderly person's remembrance (I, 170). As a self-appointed king, he asserts his royal immunity; as a noble male, he claims special sexual privileges over Female Cits. To Lovelace, as to Congreve in the epilogue of *The Double-Dealer*, the daughters of merchants are rightful prey. But like Wycherley's Pinchwife he will be cuckolded, when Clarissa takes Death for her lover.

Richardson could easily have read Hobbes's own words, for *Leviathan* was very often reprinted. But Hobbist ideas were also to be found in many other works that Richardson obviously knew and drew upon for *Clarissa*, for instance Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. As John Bender points out,<sup>10</sup> Macheath was at once hero and highwayman, husband and adulterer, hanged and reprieved, great man and scoundrel. He was another paradoxical Proteus, and Lovelace often resembles him.<sup>11</sup>

But the impact of Hobbes on Richardson was surely enlarged by John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, a man already mythologized in elegies, recollections, and fictional representations in plays as well as by the multiple self-projections of his works. Dead at thirty-three, Rochester epitomized wit and wickedness to the age. He was a true Proteus, combining high art with restlessness, licence, and destruction.

It is clear that the life and works of Rochester inspired the creation of Lovelace, as Margaret Anne Doody argues and James Grantham Turner confirms.<sup>12</sup> What could Richardson have known of him? In his play-going apprentice days, he could have learned about Rochester's play *Valentinian* and about Mrs Barry, Rochester's mistress, whom he trained as an actress. Samuel Johnson's remarkably sympathetic life of Rochester was not published until 1779, but this close friend of Richardson must have known of Rochester earlier and even spoken of him. Rochester's demonic reputation was in fact countered by his deathbed repentance, and Gilbert Burnet's account of it may have made Rochester's story seem safe even to Charlotte Brontë. Though brutal and amoral like Rochester,

10 *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth Century England* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 87.

11 For Richardson's use of Gay and Hogarth, see my "Richardson: Original or Learned Genius?"

12 See *A Natural Passion*, p. 373-74, n. 1. Turner, in "Lovelace and the Paradoxes of Libertinism," in *Samuel Richardson: Tercentenary Essays* (pp. 70-88), ascribes Lovelace's philosophy more generally to "the *mélange* of Ovidian seduction-theory and Epicurean philosophy that Richardson found in the court wits of Charles II and the seducer-heroes of Restoration drama and early eighteenth-century fiction."

Lovelace is rarely so obscene as he, except for the startlingly suggestive comment that if he had held Clarissa's and Anna's letters in his hand, "the seal would have yielded to the touch of my warm finger [perhaps without the help of the post-office bullet]; and the folds, *as other plications have done*, opened of themselves, to oblige my curiosity" (III, 472-73). One is reminded of that nasty "soft, obstetric hand" in *The Dunciad* (IV, 394).

Rochester's role-playing, disguises, pranks, contradictions, high-spirited wit, promiscuity, obscenity, oaths, violence, despair, and abduction of his future wife made him a legend and a type. One might speak of "the Rochester" as we speak of "the Machiavel." Astonishingly, though, Richardson appears to have grasped Rochester's Protean personality in all its complexity, and created a character as brilliant and as destructive as its original.

When Rochester questioned and undermined authority in the ways described by Griffin (p. 305) and dramatized in *Lovelace*, he was undoubtedly a lawbreaker. And yet his satire, its ferocity born of despair, proves him the one honest man in a corrupt world, a lawgiver attempting to restore society to civility. His *Advertisement* for his mountebank persona Alexander Bendo displays not only his Protean capacity to manipulate language by dazzlingly brazen word-play, but his courage in attacking "this Bastard-Race of Quacks and Cheats," and beyond that, the corrupt world. "So you see the *Politician* is, and must be, a *Mountebank* in State Affairs, and the *Mountebank* ... is an arrant *Politician* in Physick," he writes.<sup>13</sup> Rochester managed his dark vision through gaiety and the company of his merry gang, and wrote of himself that even when "half in the grave," he could not "leave off playing the fool and the buffoon."<sup>14</sup> Melancholic and filled with ennui, he claimed to be lashing the world of knaves and whores for its own good. Whenever he does so, he anticipates *Lovelace's* satirical and self-justifying condemnation of the world he lives in.

The grace and charm of Rochester's compulsive mutability were often remarked upon.<sup>15</sup> His restlessness proved Hobbes's physiological theories, as it would give life to *Lovelace*; it exemplified what Pascal

13 *The Collected Works of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, ed. John Hayward (London: Nonesuch Press, 1926), pp. 155-57.

14 *The Letters of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, ed. Jeremy Treglown (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), p. 202. References are to this edition.

15 *Rochester: The Critical Heritage*, ed. David Farley-Hills (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), *passim*.

described as man's condition, "inconstancy, ennui, unrest."<sup>16</sup> Rochester attacked constancy on principle, as Burnet reports: "The restraining a man from the use of women, except one in the way of marriage, and denying the remedy of divorce, he thought unreasonable impositions on the freedom of mankind."<sup>17</sup> In his "Dialogue between Strephon and Daphne" he wrote, on the analogy of the birds, "Since 'tis Nature's Law to Change, / Constancy alone is strange" (lines 31-32).<sup>18</sup> Lovelace makes the same assumption in his Valentine's Day scheme to change partners every year, like the birds. Rochester believes in a state of nature, and sees relationships as brutal and rapacious. He portrays courtship as hawks hunting for prey, as does Lovelace. Rochester turned for security to male friendship and the rakish life, and discovered only "pain and perplexity, insecurity, and enslavement to the vagaries of passion."<sup>19</sup> The same might be said of Lovelace, dependent on friends and his own image. His passion traps, defeats, and finally silences him.

Rochester's early death shocked those who had known him into setting their recollections down in print, so that details from his life were widely available. Gilbert Burnet's account of his deathbed repentance in *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester* (1680) was many times reprinted, as was the sermon preached at Rochester's funeral in the same year. For instance, the preface to *Valentinian* remarks on his "publick chiding of his servants, which would have been ill-breeding and intolerable in any other man, became not only civil and inoffensive, but agreeable and entertaining in him." The same is true of Lovelace. Rochester like Lovelace set his servants into disguises, ordering one dressed as a soldier to stand outside ladies' lodgings, while he himself was a renowned mimic, disguising himself as "a porter, or as a beggar; sometimes to follow some mean amours, which for the variety of them he affected."<sup>20</sup> Just so Lovelace pursues a lowly Rosebud for the sake of change. At other times, "merely for diversion, [Rochester] would go about in odd shapes, in which he acted his part so naturally, that even those, who were in the secret, and saw him in these shapes,

16 *Pensées*, trans. H.F. Stewart (New York, 1950), p. 31, cited by Griffin, p. 18.

17 *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester* (1680), Folcroft Library Edition (1973, reprint of the 1878 edition), p. 67.

18 *The Poems of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, ed. Keith Walker (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, Basil Blackwell, 1984), p. 13.

19 Griffin, p. 20.

20 Rochester, *Works*, p. xxxix.

could perceive nothing by which he could be discovered" (*Life*, p. 32). His most celebrated escapade was to present himself as an old itinerant quack, by which he gained the confidence of women. In his most elaborate guising, and with scrupulous attention to detail, Lovelace also dresses himself as an old man to gain access to Clarissa at Hampstead. Like Rochester, he pretends to age and impotence in order to seduce.

Rochester was "able to adapt himself to all capacities and humours," and could "make himself good Company to all kind of People at all times," but soon tired of their "cramming and endless invitations."<sup>21</sup> So too Lovelace wins over the bourgeois Harlowes while secretly despising them and planning to seduce their daughter.

Rochester was also familiar through other people's dramatic representations of him. George Etherege drew him as Dorimant in *The Man of Mode* (1676), the most famous of all stage rakes. Dorimant is witty, violent, high-handed, and inconstant; takes many mistresses including a whore; swears oaths; and ridicules other people—just as Lovelace does. He is "the Prince of all the Devils in the Town, delights in nothing but in Rapes and Riots."<sup>22</sup> Dorimant quotes often from Waller, as Lovelace would. Mrs Loveit explains something of Rochester's appeal when she says, "I know he is a Devil, but he has something of the Angel yet undefac'd in him, which makes him so charming and agreeable that I must love him be he never so wicked" (II, ii). She gestures here to traditional representations of Proteus as half-demon and half-angel, to the fallen angel Satan, and to the Satanic Lovelace who was to come.<sup>23</sup> Nathaniel Lee represented this doubleness by means of two characters in his *Princess of Cleve* (1689), "the Spirit of Wit" Count Rosidore, and the darker Duke of Nemours, both based on Rochester. The appeal of the fallen angel was Richardson's frequent subject: Anna at the ball admires a man she knows has destroyed her friend, a rake in whom humane and demonic qualities oddly mix, and even Sir Charles Grandison is portrayed as a rake in his address and a saint in his heart (III, 93). Richardson cited Medea in Ovid's *Video meliora proboque; Deteriora sequor* in *Grandison* (II, 138) to describe the terrible dilemma of a rake, uncontrollably and endlessly metamorphosing between angel and demon. Perhaps Burnet's citation of the tag reminded him of it.<sup>24</sup>

21 Rochester, *Works*, p. xxxix.

22 *The Dramatic Works of Sir George Etherege*, ed. H.F.B. Brett-Smith, 2 vols (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927), III, iii.

23 See my *Samuel Richardson*, especially pp. 66–67.

24 Burnet, *Life ... of Rochester*, p. 41.

Thomas Shadwell's violent and vicious play *The Libertine*, which has often been thought to be based on Rochester, is most obviously influential for Lovelace. First produced in 1675, it played frequently thereafter to packed houses. Here another Proteus figure, Don Juan, closely prefigures Lovelace's worst violence. Lovelace's rapes, his murderous Isle of Wight plot, and his anarchic Valentine's Day plan all share many significant details with Shadwell's play.<sup>25</sup>

Richardson also seems to have known and used Rochester's own poetry, as Doody argues, especially his recognition of man's wanton destruction beyond necessity, compared to the animals, in "A Satyr Against Mankind." He probably knew Rochester's letters as well, as we may deduce from the similarities between the styles of Lovelace's and Rochester's heroical epistles.<sup>26</sup> Like his own merry monarch, Rochester rolled about from whore to whore ("A Satyr on Charles II"), and boasted to have taken ten thousand maidenheads in "The Imperfect Enjoyment." Lovelace too takes maidenheads, and turns his victims into whores. Both complain of impotence.

Rochester's despairing lines, "Huddled in dirt, the reas'ning Engine lyes, / Who was so proud, so witty, and so wise" (*Poems*, p. 92), are closely echoed by Richardson's account of rakes dying miserably in attics (III, 483). Rochester's understanding that "all Men would be *Cowards* if they durst" (*Poems*, p. 95) reflects his special pleasure in Falstaff (*Letters*, pp. 96, 193), and Lovelace too becomes a Falstaff at the end when he meets his friends at Gad's Hill and plays the buffoon (IV, 483–86). In "A very Heroicall Epistle in Answer to Ephelia," Rochester shows his egotism when he writes, "In my dear self I center ev'ry thing," his variety when he argues "For 'tis as Natural to change, as love," and his lust to power when he says,

Oh happy Sultan! ...  
 Who envies not the Joys of thy Serail?  
 Thee like some God, the trembling Crowd adore,  
 Each Man's thy Slave, and Woman-kind, thy Whore.  
(*Poems*, pp. 112–14)

25 See my *Samuel Richardson*, pp. 68–69.

26 For details, see *A Natural Passion*, p. 373 n. 1, p. 341. For the letters, see Doody's *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 271, n. 5.

All these qualities appear in Lovelace, the "Grand Signor" (II, 369). And finally, Lovelace's whole aim seems summed up in Rochester's "Sab: Lost":

Shee yeilds, shee yeilds, Pale Envy said Amen  
 The first of woemen to the Last of men.  
 Just soe those frailer beings Angells fell  
 Ther's noe mid way (it seemes) twix't heav'n and hell,  
 Was it your end in making her, to show  
 Things must bee rais'd soe high to fall soe low?  
 (*Poems*, p. 26)

*Clarissa* seems to have been equally inspired by Rochester's play *Valentinian* (1685), which is based deliberately and significantly, like *Clarissa* itself,<sup>27</sup> on the story of Lucretia, the Roman matron raped by Tarquin simply because she was good. The play tells of the Emperor Valentinian's rape of Lucina, wife to Maximus, but Richardson's version radically departs from its models because *Clarissa* is single, rejected by her family, friendless, imprisoned, and alone. This makes her resistance more heroic still.

Valentinian boasts of kingly power, as Lovelace will:

Have I not Praetors through the spacious Earth  
 Who in my Name do mighty Nations sway?  
 Enjoying rich Dominions in my Right;  
 Their temporary Governments I change,  
 Divide or take away, as I see good;  
 Am I not Emperor? This World my own?<sup>28</sup>

Lovelace itemizes his powers in similar terms: "Preferments I bestow, both military and civil. I give estates, and take them away, at my pleasure. Quality too I create. And by a still more valuable prerogative, I *degrade* by virtue of my own imperial will ... What a poor thing is a monarch to me!" (II, 267). But the enormous difference is that he deludes himself. All his powers are illusory.

Valentinian is devotedly served by the "Dull, faithful, humble, vigilant and brave" general Aecius (p. 176) rather as Lovelace is befriended

27 See Ian Donaldson, *The Rapes of Lucretia: A Myth and Its Transformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

28 *Works*, p. 170.

by Belford, whom he despises. The Emperor instructs his servants to deceive, as Lovelace will:

To tempt, dissemble, promise, fawn and swear,  
 To make Faith look like Folly use your Skill,  
 Virtue an ill-bred Crossness in the Will,  
 Fame, the loose Breathings of a Clamorous Crowd—  
 Ever in Lies most confident and loud!  
 Honour a Notion! Piety a cheat!  
 And if you prove successful Bawds, be great. (p. 172)

Lucina (meaning moon) is imaged forth like Clarissa (meaning full of light) by light and by cold. She is “Cold as Crystal / Never to be thaw’d,” modest, “but chaster than cold Camphire,” a “Cake of Ice” (pp. 177–79), with vestal fire shooting from her eye—Lovelace mutters “something of *ice*” (II, 312) when he cannot win Clarissa, the vestal woman (II, 383). Valentinian constantly characterizes his passion as fire—Clarissa’s ice is also vulnerable to fire, Lovelace’s literal and figurative weapon. Fire reflects Lovelace’s passion and his own aspiring motion; fire flushes her out of her room, in a bold attempt to melt her resolve. Lucina describes Valentinian’s pursuit as that of the spider and the fly: “all the Nets you have pitcht to catch my Virtue, / Like Spiders webs I sweep away before me” (p. 183), and Lovelace uses the same image (II, 23). Claudia, Lucina’s woman, thinks the world “a dreadful Wilderness of Savage Beasts; / Each man I meet I fancy will devour me” (p. 191). Clarissa and Anna Howe learn to view their world in the same way.

Like Lucretia, like Clarissa, Lucina attracts because “She is such a Pleasure, being good” (p. 177). She resists temptation by jewels and by ambition, only pointing to a Lucrece that hangs by. Later, Valentinian orders a masque of the rape of Lucrece to be played, so that any woman’s shrieks can be said to be part of the play. As with Lovelace, his play-acting forms part of his counterfeiting (p. 205). In order to “possess her chaste and uncorrupted,” this Tarquin of an emperor sets up his “Master-piece” of a plot (p. 188). Using women whom Lucina calls devils rather than women (pp. 181–83), Valentinian lures her into the palace by a trick, as Lovelace would use his satanic crew of whores to lure Clarissa into the brothel. Act II ends with a brief respite of tension, Lucina’s release, swiftly followed by the announcement of the rape. Similarly Clarissa’s return from Hampstead will only be described once the rape has taken place. Lucina understands she will be betrayed when she is surrounded by whores and bawds, and so does Clarissa in the brothel, just before

the rape is accomplished. Proculus reports, "'Tis done Lycinus," just as simply as Lovelace writes, "The affair is over; Clarissa lives" (III, 196). Lucina vows that as long as there is life in her body, "I'll cry for Justice," to which the Emperor replies, "Justice will never hear you; I am Justice" (p. 207). Clarissa too will turn to the law, and Lovelace will respond by claiming all power to himself.

Rochester's protagonists fall to blaming each other. Valentinian accuses Lucina of "Witchcraft," of fair eyes and heavenly beauty, and for being good (p. 208), just as Lovelace would charge Clarissa with being a witch, too beautiful, and too good for envious mortals to bear. Lucina says that he has murdered her honour, "And can there be a love in Violence?," "I am lost for ever, / And if thou let'st me live, thou'rt lost thy self too" (p. 208):

Gods! what a wretched thing has this Man made me?  
 For now I am no Wife for *Maximus*;  
 No Company for Women that are vertuous,  
 No Family I now can claim or Countrey  
 No Name but *Caesar's* Whore ... (p. 209)

Clarissa too refuses to marry the man who has violated her, and Lovelace knows damnation to be his purchase (IV, 342). After the rape her name is "*Wretchedness*" (III, 427). She is no longer Harlowe but harlot, having lost her name, her identity, her connections with her family. If Lucina sees that this is the end of goodness, remarking, "Why then I see there is no God—but Power" (p. 210), Clarissa knows too that her reputation's gone.

Both women prefer death to that loss. Lucretia stabbed herself in public, but Lucina and Clarissa both die privately, of grief. Clarissa sinks her head down on her bosom like "a half-broken-stalked lily" when she is brought back to the brothel (III, 193), an image repeated in the lily on her coffin and her hands, white as a lily (IV, 332). After the rape Maximus calls Lucina "Lilly," "Thou sweetly drooping Flower" (p. 210), and in the masque written to accompany the play, the moon throws down lilies, "arm'd for thy defence," "As white and cold as Snow or Innocence." Lucina's tears fall like "chrystal Fountains" (p. 210), like Clarissa's "charming fountains" of tears in Lovelace's baroque speech (III, 264).

Maximus asks why Lucina was chosen "*among Millions of thy Sex*" (p. 210), the question that Clarissa, in echo of Job, will ask herself. Lucina's remedy is death. Decius, like Belford, urges her to live and

draw "from that wild man a sweet repentance," but she replies only that "his penitence is but increase of pleasure, and his prayers are said to deceive us" (p. 212). Like Belford promising to edit Clarissa's papers and present them to the world, Aecius promises Lucina enduring fame, memory, a monument and "The Praises of a just and constant Woman" (p. 212). "The pleas'd expiring Saint" Lucina dies peacefully and gladly, "Choakt with a thousand Sighs," dead of "Grief and Disgrace" (acts IV-V). She meets death as a lover. The saintly Clarissa also dies of sighs and "grief," smiling, in serenity and happiness, calling upon Jesus with her last breath (IV, 334, 342, 347). Valentinian at first denies the fact of Lucina's death, as a limitation on his power: Lovelace likewise will not "bear the word *dead* on any account" (IV, 344). Chylax tries to comfort Valentinian by saying that "All Women are not dead with her," as Lovelace's friend Mowbray attempts to comfort him with the question, "what was there in one woman more than in another?" (IV, 344). The Emperor replies that Lucina was simply unique, explaining, "A common Whore serves you ... / A meer perpetual Motion makes you happy," whereas for himself, "was there but one / But one of all the World that could content me, / And snatcht away in shewing?" (p. 220). Lovelace learns the same tragic lesson.

The epilogue to *Valentinian* by a "Person of Quality" curiously anticipates objections that would be made to *Clarissa*. Lucina turns to the women in the audience with "Tell me ye fair ones, pray now, tell me why / For such a fault as this to bid me dye?" Lovelace himself would argue the same. Many a critic too would remark unkindly on the inflaming tendency of the work, as Lucina does:

Did you not pity me, lament each groan,  
When left with the wicked Emperor alone?  
I know in thought you kindly bore a part,  
Each had a *Valentinian* in her heart.

In a masque written for the play by Sir Francis Fane, the gods are a cynical and vicious crew who gang up on Lucina, defended only by the moon. "None e'er was ravish'd, but with close consent," says Mercury, an idea echoed by Lovelace when he argues that women always give way "with a yielding reluctance; without which I will be sworn, whatever rapes have been attempted, none were ever committed, one person to one person" (II, 495). Richardson may then have noted even the addenda to Rochester's play.

Whenever Lovelace looks back to Hobbes, to Rochester himself, to the various theatrical representations of Rochester, or to Rochester's

works, the consequences for him are fatal. Trapped in his own mechanistic world-view, he is "a machine at last, and no free agent," as Belford tells him (III, 146). His body controls him, his heart chokes him, circumstances change him and modify his behaviour, his plots work on without him. Libertines, said Belford, are narrow-souled wretches who "move round and round (like so many blind mill-horses) in one narrow circle" (IV, 15). When Lovelace loses all sense of free will, liberty, and choice, he foregoes his mutability, and with it, identity itself.<sup>29</sup> Like Rochester he has become a Signior Dildo, a sexual machine sundered from the thinking mind, a mere mechanical device. He rapes a body he has reduced to matter by an opiate, and can expect no return of love. Impotent at last, he is a debauchee disabled by the consummation of his wishes.

Rochester believed like Hobbes that if man has no soul, he must be set among the brutes. His animal imagery for humanity reflects it. Lovelace, who uses the same Iago-like imagery, makes the same charge: "Women have no souls ... . And if so, to whom shall I be accountable for what I do to them?" (II, 474). But just as Rochester was persuaded at the point of death about the existence of souls (*Life*, pp. 28-29), Lovelace comes to see Clarissa as "soul all over" (II, 149). Having lost her even temporarily, he writes in despair, "my whole soul is a blank: the whole creation round me, the elements above, beneath, and everything I behold (for nothing can I enjoy) is a blank without her" (III, 388). Without Clarissa, its informing soul, his universe of matter is meaningless.

Hobbes had said that in a state of nature the life of man is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" (p. 186), a statement which Richardson proves by his closely corresponding image of rakes dying young, diseased, poor, and friendless, "Reduced, probably, by riotous waste to consequential want, behold them refuged in some obscene [obscure] hole or garret; obliged to the careless care of some dirty old woman, whom nothing but her poverty prevails upon to attend to perform the last offices for men who have made such shocking ravage among the young ones" (III, 483).<sup>30</sup> Belford escapes from a brutish life to a life of rea-

29 Margaret Anne Doody observes, "No one is a stable identity, nor can consciousness ever know a self; we are each a bundle of perceptions, and by looking within we catch only the perception of the moment," in "Disguise and Personality in Richardson's *Clarissa*," *Studies in the Eighteenth Century 7: Papers Presented at the Seventh David Nichol Smith Seminar*, ed. Jocelyn Harris, with the co-operation of Robert P. Maccubbin and David F. Morrill, a special issue of *Eighteenth Century Life* 12, 2 (May, 1988), 18-39.

30 Cf. Rochester's Corinna in "A Letter from Artemiza in the Towne to Chloe in the Country." "A decayed and diseased *memento mori* scorned by all, forsaken and oppressed, she must lie all winter "in some darke hole." "And Want, and dirt endure" (*Poems*, p. 88).

son, but Lovelace's other friends die hideously as Rochester's had done, and Lovelace himself turns mad and "brutish" at Clarissa's death. No longer the noble hawk he liked to call himself, he is now a dog, a puppy, chicken-hearted, creeping into holes and corners like an old hedgehog hunted for its grease (IV, 343-44). He dies young, in a duel, among strangers.

In Lovelace Richardson portrays the sheer *cost* of being a Rochester, that Hobbist example of the Protean potential in man. To a large extent Lovelace creates the corrupt world of change and illusion that he inhabits, shines in, and ultimately quits. Clarissa provides another world-view altogether.

What Lovelace longs for, has within his grasp, and loses, is the sovereign power that Hobbes recommends to prevent anarchy and meaninglessness. If Lovelace lives by reaction, Clarissa lives by absolutes. She represents that still centre in the material world proposed by Hobbes, as well as the spiritual peace for which Lovelace feels both appetite and aversion. To her as to the Cambridge Platonists, God is immanent in all creation, a divine mover as well as an original creator. The task of the reasoning human being is to become as godlike as possible by imitating Christ in faith and works. Richardson signals this philosophy most clearly when Clarissa keeps Thomas à Kempis's *Imitation of Christ* in her room, the most widely read book in Catholicism after the Bible. A man like Sir Charles Grandison can imitate Christ by being godlike in daily life, but even a woman like Clarissa can still believe in her own inner light, conscience, and its outward manifestation, the law. Unlike Hobbes, she sees a spark of divinity in the soul of each human being, and spurns the riches, pleasures, and powers of the world for eternal life.

Her model may well have been Mary Astell, the feminist and Christian Platonist whose life and ideas resemble Clarissa's in so many respects—a life lived in imitation of Christ, charity, intense female friendships, longing for a Protestant nunnery, impatience with praise, belief in men as predators, and preparation for a better world to make up for the disappointments of this. She too kept a coffin in her room as she lay dying. Richardson could have known of her through their mutual acquaintances, the High Tory Atterburys, and when her life was to be published in George Ballard's *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (1752), he subscribed to it and offered to advise him on its publication through his friend Mrs Sarah Chapone in 1750. But Richardson may have already read Ballard's comment on Astell's modesty, that she was "as ambitious to slide gently through the world without so much as being seen or taken notice of, as others are to bustle and make a figure

in it,"<sup>31</sup> because Anna writes in *Clarissa's* first letter that she is "so desirous, as you always said, of sliding though life to the end of it unnoted ... though now, to your regret, pushed into blaze, as I may say" (I, 2). He seems to have been familiar with Astell's treatises on women's education (1694) and on marriage (1700),<sup>32</sup> and could have encountered her letters on the love of God written to John Norris, the last of the Christian Platonists, which made her such a significant figure in the literary world of London by 1705.<sup>33</sup>

Wherever Richardson found *Clarissa's* philosophy, she believes in a fixed good. Against all the evidence of avaricious, violent, self-interested parents and siblings and society, the proven duplicity of Lovelace and his agents, and her betrayal by church and society, *Clarissa* trusts in God, in the social contract, the Leviathan, and the power of words to move. She believes that the law exists to protect her: "the LAW shall be all my resource: the LAW," she says (III, 289). Men only succeed in vilest attempts "if they can once bring themselves to trample on the sanctions which bind man to man" (IV, 77), she says, referring to the settlements, licences, provisos, and reparations that Lovelace presents to her, then annuls.

The contest between the two philosophies is expressed by light and dark. This is traditional enough, but frequently Richardson seems to be thinking of the Platonic meanings of Spenser in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*, the book of Chastity. Richardson admired Spenser, and Harriet Byron refers to the first sighting of Florimell riding on a "milk-white palfrey" (III, i, 15) in *Grandison* (I, 285). Florimell represents cosmic beauty manifest in the sublunary world,<sup>34</sup> and *Clarissa's* Platonic beauty is also constantly imaged by light. Her very name suggests light, and images of light, of suns and stars, surround her. She is especially represented as a comet. This image of streaming, blazing hair leads her directly back to Britomart, an aspect of Gloriana, the Elizabeth to whom *Clarissa* is

31 *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain who have been Celebrated for their Writings or Skill in the Learned Languages, Arts and Sciences*, ed. Ruth Perry (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1985), pp. 382-92. I am grateful to Ruth Perry for sending me copies of letters in the Bodleian Library relating to Richardson's connections with Ballard and Chapone (Bodl. Ballard MSS 43: 132, 106, 155).

32 See my *Samuel Richardson* for instances where Richardson seems to be drawing on Astell's life and ideas.

33 See Ruth Perry, *The Celebrated Mary Astell: An Early English Feminist* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 75.

34 See Stevie Davies, *The Idea of Woman in Renaissance Literature: The Feminine Reclaimed* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1985), p. 71.

several times compared, and to Florimell. Britomart's shaken-out hair shines out like an aurora; Florimell's

... faire yellow locks behind her flew,  
 All as a blazing starre [comet] doth farre outcast  
 His hearie beames, and flaming lockes dispred,  
 At sight whereof the people stand aghast. (III, i, 16)

The pattern of their stories is remarkably similar.<sup>35</sup> Florimell is pursued by satyrs and monsters; "I am to be wedded to a *monster*," says Clarissa in disgust, when Solmes squats froglike on her hoop (I, 79). Florimell escapes into the boat of an old fisherman who defiles her garments with fish-scales when he attempts to rape her. Clarissa's old lover Solmes is equally characterized by images of smearing and spoiling. Florimell is delivered by the lustful Proteus to another captivity in an underwater Hades, just as Clarissa's deliverer imprisons her in a brothel. Proteus tempts Florimell daily "with this or that," and transforms himself to dreadful shapes, "But euermore she him refused flat." Like Clarissa, she would rather die (III, viii, 39-42). Clarissa's story follows the same path, with Richardson adding as if by natural association details from Pluto's abduction of Proserpina to Hades as Perdita describes it in *The Winter's Tale* (IV, iv, 119-27). Shakespeare's pale primroses, violets, and lilies recur in the hymeneal colour of Clarissa's pale primrose yellow dress, the violets embroidered on it (I, 512), and the fleurs-de-luce, which mean light, the light of her name.

Not just one but two Protean artist-enchanters hold women in tormented captivity in Book III of *The Faerie Queene*. Proteus's cruel analogue is Busyrane, guardian of a bound Amoret, whose breast is pierced and heart drawn forth, transfixed with a deadly dart (III, xii, 21). If he figures the "straunge characters of his art" in Amoret's living blood, one could equally say of Lovelace writing letters about his torture of Clarissa that his intention was

... all perforce to make her him to loue  
 Ah who can love the worker of her smart?  
 A thousand charmes he formerly did proue,  
 Yet thousand charmes could not her stedfast heart remoue.  
 (III, xii, 31)

35 Roxann Wheeler first drew my attention to the similarities. I also gladly acknowledge the inspiration of Lynn Hall's MA thesis, "The Straying Fool: Division and Collapse in Rochester's Writing" (Auckland University, 1988), for renewing my interest in Rochester.

Spenser makes his sexual meanings explicit by describing a tapestry of raped women from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the House of Busyrane in canto xi. Many of them recur in the web of allusion and significance that is *Clarissa*.

If Florimell, Britomart, Amoret, and Clarissa represent light, Proteus, Busyrane, Pluto, Satan, and Lovelace stand for darkness. Their demonic deceptions turn men away from God. "Beelzebub," says Hobbes, "is Prince of Phantasmes ... and these Daemons, Phantasmes, or Spirits of Illusions, signifie allegorically, the same thing. This considered, the Kingdom of Darknesse ... is nothing else but a *Confederacy of Deceivers, that to obtain Dominion over men in this present world, endeavour by dark and erroneous Doctrines, to extinguish in them the Light, both of Nature, and of the Gospel, and so to dis-prepare them for the Kingdome of God to come*" (p. 627). If Sir Thomas Browne saw Truth as "that obscured Virgin half out of the Pit,"<sup>36</sup> Clarissa dreams a hideously prophetic dream that Lovelace tumbles her into a deep grave ready dug, throwing the dirt and earth upon her, and trampling it down with his feet (I, 433). Nothing, says Clarissa, not even rape, can be worse than Lovelace's falsehoods, forgeries, perjuries, and impersonations (III, 336, 461). His deceptions test her belief in her own perceptions, his trials test her trust in God. Lovelace's real crime is his attempt to put out the light in Clarissa, his determination to destroy in her the candle of the lord, the reason that leads her to heaven.

Silence falls at the end of *Clarissa*. The contest between fixity and flux ends with the deaths of their defenders, and we are left to judge. Belford, like Hamlet's friends, like Rochester's, must sense that all that was extraordinary has vanished from the world. All he can do is record, and pass his knowledge on. Lovelace abandons a world of matter without meaning, and ends transfixed by death; Clarissa exchanges her fixity for new life. Their conflict has been immense, on a scale unattempted yet in the English novel. Here in *Clarissa* Richardson the humanist explores man's Protean paradoxical capacity to create and to destroy.

University of Otago

36 Sir Thomas Browne, *Christian Morals*, in *The Prose of Sir Thomas Browne*, ed. Norman Endicott (New York and London: New York and London University Presses, 1968), II, 5.