CHATTERTON LECTURE ON POETRY

RICHARD LOVELACE AND THE USES OF OBSCURITY

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USING biography is the brief of the Chatterton Lecture. E. H. W. Meyerstein, who bequeathed it, used biography to recover Thomas Chatterton's poetic achievement from the obscurity in which labels like *boy* and *forger* had left it. I want to give a reconsideration to the life of Richard Lovelace and question the degree to which his poetry has been obscured by the label *cavalier*, used either as a noun or an adjective. I know that subjecting cavalier poetry to the rigours of criticism is sometimes held to be a breach of decorum, at best; but I hold a counter view about the achievements of those poets who wrote in the 1640s and 50s. This is that during the twenty years at the centre of the seventeenth century, the novel not yet in existence and the theatres being closed down, any imaginative response to those trans-shifting times was likely to take the form of a lyric poem. Richard Lovelace's life and poetry provide a useful test-case, to tell how limited our responses to these poets have so far been. Any fresh approach must begin with our principal source of knowledge about Lovelace's life, Anthony Wood's biography in his *Athenæ Oxoniensis*.

When Wood came to write his account he seems to have been fascinated by the resplendent figure this poet cut. He repeatedly returns to the image of the glittering cavalier:

> . . . the most amiable and beautiful person that ever eye beheld, a person also of innate modesty, virtue and courtly deportment . . . much admired and adored by the female sex . . . [and then] he became as much admired by the male, as before by the female, sex . . . After he had left the University he retired in great splendor to the Court . . . when he was in his glory he wore Cloth of gold and silver . . . his common discourse was not only significant and witty, but incomparably graceful . . .[1]

[1] For Wood's account see *The Poems of Richard Lovelace* (ed. C. H. Wilkinson, Oxford, 1925), i, 132–4. All quotations from Lovelace's poems I have taken from Wilkinson's single volume edition (Oxford, 1930), hereinafter referred to as *Poems*.

All the contemporary evidence bears out Wood's account. The Dulwich Gallery portrait shows us the flowing locks, soulful eyes, sensuous mouth, and shining armour of this Philip Sidney of the 1640s, soldier and poet in one—*tam Marti quam Mercurio* as one of his elegists put it, echoing the motto which that flamboyant figure of a previous generation, Walter Ralegh, had taken as his own. The poems which greeted Lovelace's first volume, *Lucasta*, in 1649, describe a forward youth who had contrived to continue with books and armour; and not surprisingly they add to their warrior poet figure the image of the great lover. This tradition went back at least five years. A poem by John Tatham, written sometime before September 1645, and titled 'Upon my Noble friend, *Richard Lovelace* Esquire . . .', salutes him with the refrain 'Then lov'd *Adonis* come away, / For *Venus* brooks not thy delay'.[1]

The name, of course, presents a temptation impossible to resist —not only a *love-lace*, some reminder of intimacy worn on the body, but, if we think of Richard the unrequited lover, then Richard *Loveless*; or Richard the requited, *Lovelass*; or the poet warbling his *love-lays*. Indeed, the name was attractive enough for one of his friends to christen his daughter *Lovelice*; and two of the commendatory poems to *Lucasta* contrive to come to a resounding end on the word *love* (one of these is Andrew Marvell's). *Lovelace* is the first name to come to mind when we think of Pope's mob of elegant gentlemen or hear the phrase *cavalier poet*, with all its overtones of the amorous and the amateurish.

Lucasta seems designed to consolidate the image. After the congratulations of friends and kinsmen, it opens with two lyrics which are quintessentially cavalier, 'To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas' and 'To Lucasta, Going to the Warres'. Those who have considered the matter have concluded that *Lucasta*, as a volume, has no reason to the ordering of its poems beyond the very understandable one of putting the most attractive at the front, thereby luring the casual browser into a firm sale. These are the Lovelace poems remembered by every one, his contribution to English poetry, that in an age of great lyricists, he gave us some of the purest lyrics of all—lines whose clarity has fixed them upon our cultural consciousness as definitive renditions of the cavalier experience.

But the third poem in the volume, directly following the two farewells to Lucasta, points towards another Lovelace, a figure of dirt and obscurity, who developed as a poet through his whole life, rather than burning his talent out in the most flashy lyrics of

[1] Tatham's poem is given in *Poems*, pp. xliii–xliv.

Lucasta. Its title is 'A Paradox', and its plot is one familiar to any reader of seventeenth-century poetry, a defence of inconstancy. Lovelace's defence is not one of the most familiar ones, such as, 'I love others in order to appreciate you all the more'. Rather, he argues that he forsakes 'the beauteous Starre' to which he 'first did bow', despite his knowledge that this star 'Burnt quicker, brighter far / Then that which leads me now', simply because the new one is fouler:

> Through foule, we follow faire
> For had the World one face
> And Earth been bright as Ayre,
> We had knowne neither place.

'Faire' will stay only a memory, while 'foule' is pursued eternally, all in the name of freedom:

> The God that constant keepes
> Unto his Dieties,
> Is poore in Joyes, and sleepes
> Imprison'd in the skies:
> This knew the wisest, who
> From *Juno* stole, below
> To love a Beare, or Cow.

The word 'imprisoned' in this stanza is, despite the poem's earliness in the volume, by no means Lovelace's first glance at confinement. He is, after all, even more than Ralegh or Wilde, our chief prison poet, and 'To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas' had already introduced the prospect of an 'after-fate' where the two lovers 'Can speake like spirits unconfin'd / In Heav'n'; and 'To Lucasta, Going to the Warres' had seen Lovelace running from 'the Nunnerie / Of thy chaste breast, and quiet minde'. The rest of the volume is shot through with images of imprisonment and hiding away, not only in those poems which claim actually to derive from Lovelace's two spells of incarceration, but in poems which probably antedate the civil war, such as 'The Vintage to the Dungeon', and poems on quite other topics. When Lovelace looks at a glove, he describes it as an '*Ermin* Cabinet', whose only tenants are Ellinda's fingers: any others will find it impossible to 'fit / The slender turnings of thy narrow Roome'. And, on another tack, he observes the burial service of Cassandra Cotton as taking place in a dismal chancel with the corpse surrounded by a stifling ring of black-veiled mourners.[1] Even a poem in praise of movement, 'Gratiana dauncing and singing', has its central

[1] 'Elinda's Glove' and 'An Elegie. On the Death of Mrs Cassandra Cotton'.

image in the idea of the lover's thoughts and hopes being 'chain'd to her brave feet'. Best known is 'The Grasse-hopper', which opposes to that insect's thoughtless openness to the entire joys of earth and heaven the image of Richard Lovelace and Charles Cotton confined to one house in the middle of dark December, finding consolation in wine, poetry, and their blazing hearth.

We have come to see this last form of confinement as the cavalier winter, so well described by Earl Miner, as the period of waiting out the horror of the external world turned upside down, with a trusted friend and the salvageable consolations of civic culture in a rural retreat: a retreat into obscurity made necessary not only by the understandable desire to save oneself by keeping as low a profile as possible, but also by a refusal to be contaminated by the values of the Commonwealth.[1] And we no longer think, as C. V. Wedgwood wrote about the cavalier poets in 1946, that while 'their experience of life was vivid, harsh and dangerous, anxious and despairing . . . hardly a breath of it reaches their verse', for we have now come to see that in many of those apparently mindless, or at least thoughtless, lyrics of the 1640s the political and cultural anxieties are only thinly disguised.[2] But we need also to recognize that they are less simply defined than the division of England into cavalier and puritan would lead us to believe. Lovelace, our quintessential cavalier, is a good example of a man for whom the external pressures, powerful as they were, seem only to have reinforced strong interior needs for self-concealment.

Chief among the pressures were the two periods of imprisonment he endured in the 1640s. The second, between October 1648 and April 1649, came at the time of the uprisings in his home county, Kent, which were in large part responsible for the army's purge of Parliament and the eventual execution of Charles I. Lovelace had helped present the Kentish petition to Parliament six years earlier, the direct cause of his first imprisonment. But between his release, in June 1642, and his reimprisonment in 1648, there is no evidence that he fought in the war between Parliament and the king—this despite the involvement of at least three, and probably all four, of his younger brothers. Richard Lovelace fought instead with General Goring's men in the service of the French king, and was wounded at the siege of Dunkirk. He returned to England in 1646, and was probably arrested two years

[1] E. Miner, *The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton* (Princeton, 1971). Miner has many good things to say about Lovelace's poetry but, as will become clear, I do not agree with his 'cavalier' bias.

[2] *Velvet Studies* (London, 1946), p. 27.

later as a preventive measure, in case he were to exacerbate the Kentish disturbances. *Lucasta* had already been licensed (in February 1648) but it was not allowed to be published until May 1649. Why it should have been subjected to such censorship is the concern of only one of the volume's dedicatory poems, the one by Andrew Marvell.

Marvell begins by lamenting the degeneration of the times, as if Lovelace really belonged to an earlier, nobler age:

> Sir,
> Our times are much degenerate from those
> Which your sweet Muse, which your fair Fortune chose,
> And as complexions alter with the Climes,
> Our wits have drawne th' infection of our times.[1]

This, I think, is saying something other than that Lovelace is the supporter of a losing side. Marvell finishes his first paragraph with an ominous image of poets under attack now that 'Our Civill Wars have lost the Civicke crowne':

> I see the envious Caterpillar sit
> On the faire blossome of each growing wit.

He then addresses Lovelace's specific predicament, giving three reasons for his being picked on by the authorities—that he wronged the House's privilege, that his possessions are confiscate, and that he had presented the Kentish petition (not, you may note, that he had actually fought against Parliament). It is characteristic of Marvell that this vision of an heroic, beleaguered Lovelace should then dissolve into mock-heroic, as he envisages a flock of 'undrest' ladies charging to the poet's rescue. This does not prevent the poem from being a serious analysis of the vulnerability of a man in Lovelace's position at the turn of the decade, but it is characteristic of Lovelace's fate, too, that what is serious in him should dissolve and give way to ridicule. Few good poets can have been subject to such critical contempt, with so little praise to balance against it.

The eleventh edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* summarized his achievement like this:

> The world has done no injustice to Lovelace in neglecting all but a few of his modest offerings to literature. But critics often do him injustice in dismissing him as a gay cavalier, who dashed off his verses hastily and cared little what became of them. It is a mistake to class him with Suckling: he has neither Suckling's easy grace nor his reckless

[1] Marvell's lines are sometimes emended to read 'with your fair Fortune'.

spontaneity . . . In many places it takes time to decipher his meaning. The expression is often elliptical, the syntax inverted and tortuous, the train of thought intricate and discontinuous.

And the writer goes on to explain that these faults are 'not the first thoughts of an improvisatore, but thoughts ten or twenty stages removed from the first'.[1] This represented an improvement in critical response to Lovelace. Previously the general complaint had been that in all but the few faultless lyrics, Lovelace's poetry was slapdash and therefore obscure. Now it was claimed that the obscurity was a consequence of trying to say too much.[2] We have progressed very little beyond this. Colonel Wilkinson, responsible for the Oxford edition, shrank from any but the most modest claims for his subject:

. . . he is neither sufficiently profound nor sufficiently clever to take quite naturally to this form of poetry [i.e. Metaphysical] . . . he is often careless and obscure because of his carelessness, not as Donne, because of the complexity or subtlety of his thought. His elliptical style is difficult and his 'wit' tends to be laboured and artificial. Lovelace is essentially an amateur, the 'idle singer of an empty day'.[3]

Reviewing Wilkinson's edition, Mario Praz wrote that 'behind Lovelace's conceits we too often find—emptiness'. He was one of those seventeenth-century poets who only too often 'succeeded in producing things only unintentionally humorous, and therefore ridiculous'.[4] There is only one book devoted to Lovelace's poetry, but even the critic who wrote this found it hard not to keep sneering—for example: 'although a poet circumscribed in talent and sensibility, Lovelace worked in many verse forms'; or, 'some of the difficulties in Lovelace's poetry—of which there are a considerable number—are due to his sloppiness, his topicality, his dilletantish dabbling in the art'; or, 'his many obvious faults—obscurity, discontinuity, frigidity, slovenliness, striving after effect, lack of the light touch . . . Lovelace writes reams of dull verse'; or, most damning of all, 'his tastes are simple; his mind bare of complex ideas . . . He has no theory of politics, love, or indeed

[1] Vol. 17, 71. The article is unsigned.

[2] W. C. Hazlitt, Lovelace's earlier editor, believed that he 'accepted from violence or haste, the first word that happened to occur to his mind'; Edmund Gosse ruled that 'a more slovenly poet it would be difficult to find'; and H. C. Grierson wrote that 'the majority of his poems are careless and extravagant'. These views are all collected by Willa M. Evans in 'Richard Lovelace's Mock Song', *Philological Quarterly*, xxiv (1945), 317–28.

[3] *Poems*, p. lxvii.

[4] In the *Modern Language Review*, xxi (1926), 320 and 322.

anything . . . he has no central vision, no abiding emotion . . . He is not haunted by time, death, or history . . . many great themes and issues pass by him—despite his having lived through a dramatic epoch'.[1] Critics who take a more general view also do not find much to admire. Douglas Bush, in his Oxford History, wrote that 'with much that is simply dull, Lovelace offers some miscellaneous and incidental attractions, but his achievement remains a handful of poems'.[2] In his study of poetic love J. B. Broadbent described Lovelace as 'entirely uninteresting' and 'almost invisible'.[3] Joseph Summers wrote that 'very few poets in the seventeenth century who wrote as much as Lovelace displayed such incompetence. One wonders sometimes whether he meant to say what he did, or even whether he always knew what he had said.' Again, the distressing sense is of a poet who frequently falls into needless obscurity: 'he has little sense of structure and his syntax is sometimes shaky or hopelessly wrenched'.[4]

There have been signs recently of a willingness to treat Lovelace more generously, in particular by Bruce King, in an essay which is usually dismissed as exciting but wrong, and by Earl Miner and Christopher Ricks; but the general belief still is that, the few priceless lyrics apart, Lovelace's poetry is uninteresting, amateurish, and above all obscure, either through his having taken too little or too much care with it.[5] And even friendly critics have found it useful to preserve this view. Randolph Wadsworth begins his essay on 'The Snayl' with the bald sentence '"The Snayl" by Richard Lovelace is obscure in both image and theme'; and after many pages of careful explication, he closes with the faint praise that 'to dismiss the piece out of hand is unfair to Lovelace, however deficient his limited intention appears to rigorous modern criticism'.[6] It is strange to compare these modern

[1] Manfred Weidhorn, *Richard Lovelace* (New York, 1970), pp. 135, 142, 163, and 167.

[2] *English Literature in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, rev. edn. 1962), p. 173.

[3] *Poetic Love* (London, 1964), pp. 249–50.

[4] *The Heirs of Donne and Jonson* (London, 1970), p. 49. Equally revealing is the way Lovelace's poetry has been ignored. Even as full a study as H. M. Richmond's *The School of Love* barely refers to him; and his later satirical poetry is entirely neglected by Raman Selden's *English Verse Satire 1590–1765*, and, surprisingly, given the 'Restoration' mysogyny of 'On Sanazar's being honoured', by Felicity Nussbaum's *The Brink of All We Hate*.

[5] Bruce King, 'Green Ice and a Breast of Proof', *College English*, xxvi (1964), 511–15; Christopher Ricks, 'Its Own Resemblance' in C. A. Patrides (ed.), *Approaches to Marvell* (London, 1978), esp. pp. 130–4.

[6] 'On "The Snayl" by Richard Lovelace', *Modern Language Review*, lxv (1970), 750–60.

complaints at Lovelace's obscurity with his contemporaries' broad and generous praise—unexpectedly generous, for it came from both sides, from men like John Hall and Andrew Marvell, and, a little later, from Milton's nephew Edward Phillips, whose assessment of Lovelace as a potential epic poet might very possibly reflect his uncle's favourable opinion.[1]

* * * * *

Really, there are fewer obscurities in Lovelace's verse than the modern criticism implies, and where they occur they repay consideration rather than automatic dismissal, for they show places where Lovelace has put his poetry under great personal and cultural pressure. A case in point is the opening of his poem addressed to his brother Francis, who was, as the title has it, 'immoderately mourning my Brothers untimely death at *Carmarthen*'. The poem is a translation of one of the great lyrics of the period, Casimir Sarbiewski's Latin ode against tears. Sarbiewski opens by saying that if tears were an adequate means of mourning, then he would buy them with his richest jewels. Here is how one seventeenth-century English poet rendered the first four lines of Sarbiewski's poem:

> If mournfull eyes could but prevent
> The evils they so much lament
> Sidonian Pearles, or Gems more rare,
> Would be too cheap for ev'ry teare.

And here is another version of the lines, this time by Henry Vaughan:

> If *Weeping Eyes* could wash away
> Those *Evills* they mourn for *night and day*,
> Then gladly I to *cure* my *fears*
> With my best *Jewells* would buy *tears*.[2]

Lovelace, in contrast, compresses the four lines into two, and while

[1] Phillips described Lovelace as 'a fair pretender to the Title of Poet . . . besides the acute and not unpleasant stile of his verses, a man may discern therin sometimes those sparks of a Poetic fire, which had they been the main design, and not Parergon, in some work of Heroick argument, might happily have blaz'd out into the perfection of sublime Poesy' (*Theatrum Poetarum*, 1675, p. 160). This is much fuller praise than he gives, for instance, to Herrick ('now and then a pretty Flowery and Pastoral gale of Fancy'), or Carew ('his extant Poems still maintain their same amidst the Curious of the present Age'). Milton would have been introduced to Lovelace's poetry by Marvell.

[2] The full texts of these poems are given by J. C. Arens in 'Sarbiewski's Ode Against Tears Imitated by Lovelace, Yalden, and Watts', *Neophilologus*, xlvii (1963), 236–9.

he keeps the image of buying tears with jewels, he does something which radically obscures it:

> If teares could wash the Ill away,
> A Pearle for each wet bead I'd pay.

Tear . . . pearl . . . bead, because they all mean the same thing, muddy what should be the clear distance between tenor and vehicle. Whatever way you read it, the image becomes self-defeating. Either one pays jewels for jewels, or tears for tears, or there is no difference between jewels and tears. This is deliberate and powerful. A poem which opposes immoderate mourning for one's younger brother dead in the civil war must, equally, say that any mourning, no matter how immoderate, is insufficient. As the poem goes on to say, 'I'ron decrees of Destinie / Are ner'e wipe't out with a wet Eye'. But what does wipe them out? An act of will perhaps—'One gallant thorough-made Resolve'—for in another poem Lovelace raises the possibility of wiping out iron:

> Stone Walls doe not a Prison make,
> Nor I'ron bars a Cage;
> Mindes innocent and quiet take
> That for an Hermitage.

The word *that*, used there indeterminately to refer back to stone walls, prison, iron bars, and cage, might well be taken by the kind of criticism I have quoted from as another example of Lovelace's sloppiness, had not William Empson shown how craftily it obscures the apparent clarity of the first two lines of the stanza: '*that* is the *cage* or *prison* itself, and by being singular, so that it will not apply to *walls* or *bars*, it admits that they do, in fact, make even for quiet minds a *prison* and a *cage*'.[1] Often the obscurity of Lovelace's metaphors derives from his perception that there are no distinctions between things; that everything is, essentially, the same as everything else.

Formally, Lovelace's obscurity is a part of his apparent facility, the verse being so lyrical that syntactic and metaphorical imprecisions are masked. Take the opening stanza of 'To Lucasta. From Prison'. It sounds simple, but stop to think about it and there is a puzzle:

> Long in thy Shackels, liberty,
> I ask not from these walls, but thee;
> Left for a while anothers Bride
> To fancy all the world beside.

[1] *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London, 2nd rev. edn. 1947), pp. 236–9.

Lovelace's editor, Colonel Wilkinson, recognized the reader's problem here, and unusually for this generally unhelpful edition, provided a paraphrase:

> The meaning is 'I do not ask liberty from my prison but of thee, Lucasta, whose prisoner I have long been, in order that leaving thee for awhile I may be able to turn my fancy to anything else.[1]

Lovelace has packed together his actual physical constraint in prison, his being shackled to Lucasta, his wish for freedom from her, but his need to stay within the prison walls: outside them he will think only of her and ignore the world; inside the prison he sees the possibility of thinking about the outside world rather than her. This is all crammed into twenty-five words—hence the knottiness—but it introduces a poem whose progress from this point is carefully languid, as Lovelace ranges before his fancy all the new possible objects of his love, searching for something to which he can 'confine' his 'free Soule'. Having cast off Lucasta, he ranges through virtually all the institutions which go to make up the mid-seventeenth-century experience—peace, war, religion, Parliament, liberty, property, a Reformation, and the Public Faith. All, like Lucasta, are found wanting, not because they possess him too much, as she does, but because they have either chosen to reject him or have failed to satisfy him. He ends with only one possible confinement left—the king, 'th'only spring / Of all our loves and joyes'—but the stability of even this image is threatened as Lovelace sees the clouds obscuring the divine light of majesty:

> He who being the whole Ball
> Of Day on Earth, lends it to all;
> When seeking to ecclipse his right,
> Blinded, we stand in our owne light.
>
> And now an universall mist
> Of Error is spread or'e each breast,
> With such a fury edg'd, as is
> Not found in th' inwards of th' Abysse.
>
> Oh from thy glorious Starry Waine
> Dispense on me one sacred Beame
> To light me where I soone may see
> How to serve you, and you trust me.

The images are Marvellian, I hope you notice. Not the least value

[1] *Poems*, p. 265. Wilkinson cannot get into his paraphrase other possible meanings which occur when we read the verse; e.g. that *liberty* is addressed in the opening line.

of a more serious estimation of Lovelace's poetry is that it will throw more light on Marvell, for we have not sufficiently realized that for Marvell Lovelace was the most influential of contemporary poets.[1] This is not only a matter of words and images, but of the way Lovelace approaches his subjects too. It is characteristic of him to make his way to the king through a devious route which begins with Lucasta and then traverses everything else of importance in the country. A consequence is that the import of the final stanza I have just read is hard to determine.

In Marvell's poetry we would be tempted to call this kind of approach to the subject oblique or indirect, but in Lovelace's case obscure seems the more fitting word, not sneeringly, but because of its connotations of darkness and hiding away. At the point of greatest clarity 'To Lucasta. From Prison' refuses to deliver its expected cavalier sentiment. Now, for a cavalier, Lovelace is unusually reticent. There is nothing in his *corpus* which proclaims the openly Royalist sympathies found in such works and poems as Stanley's *Psalterium Carolinum*, Herrick's 'To the King Upon his Welcome to Hampton-Court', Vaughan's 'The Proffer', Cowley's *The Civil War*, Cartwright's 'November', Suckling's 'On New Year's Day 1640: to the King' or Cleveland's 'Upon the King's Return from Scotland'. The absence of such explicit praise for Charles has led us to read it as implicit in a number of poems. For example, it has become taken for granted that the 'Golden Eares' which are cropped by the sickle in 'The Grasse-hopper' signify the execution of Charles I. The best-known critical discussion of the poem opens with the assertion that the poem was written 'sometime after the collapse of the royal cause and the execution of King Charles'.[2] This may be so, but it needs to be explained just how the poem came to be inserted into a volume which was ready for the press many months before Charles's execution. The ears, I am sure, are Charles's, but Lovelace is actually making a grim and bitter joke against him, for *crop-eared* was a common term of contempt in the 1640s for the

[1] L. N. Wall, in 'Some Notes on Marvell's Sources', *Notes and Queries*, ccii (1957), 170–3, shows some of Marvell's borrowings from Lovelace, but does not take the matter very far. Christopher Ricks is more imaginative in showing the way Lovelace's influence worked, in the essay cited above (n. 5, p. 209).

[2] Don Cameron Allen, 'An Explication of Lovelace's "The Grasse-Hopper"', *Modern Language Quarterly*, xviii (1957), 35. The political doubt which so obscure an ending as the one to 'To Lucasta. From Prison' might thinly hide is obvious when one compares it to the way another poem of the early 1640s, on the same theme, ends. This is called 'Loyalty Confin'd', and purports to be by an imprisoned cavalier. He closes with the confident assertion

[*footnote cont. on p. 214*

puritans.[1] This has some bearing, too, upon 'To Lucasta. From Prison'. It still seems to be the common belief that this poem's dating should be during the time of Lovelace's second imprisonment. One recent editor notes that 'this poem was presumably composed while Lovelace was confined in Peterhouse Prison, from June, 1648, until April, 1649'.[2] But a good few years ago H. M. Margoliouth threw severe doubt upon that dating. He chose to

that, in spite of the gaol's darkness, he is the king's and the king is his:

> I am that Bird whom they combine,
> Thus to deprive of Liberty;
> But though they do my Corps confine,
> Yet maugre hate, my Soul is free.
> Although Rebellion do my Body bind,
> My King can only captivate my mind.
> (*Rump: or an Exact Collection of the Choycest Poems and Songs Relating to the Late Times* (London, 1662), p. 244)

[1] The cropping of puritan ears in punishment, and the possibility of their doing it to others when in power, is a common refrain in the popular poetry of the 1640s: e.g. from 'A Prognostication on Will Laud, late Archbishop of Canterbury' (1644):

> Within this six years six ears have
> Been cropt off worthy men and grave,
> For speaking what was true;
> But if your subtle head and ears
> Can satisfy those six of theirs,
> Expect but what's your due.
> (In *Political Ballads of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (ed. W. Walker Wilkins, London, 1860), i. 15)

and, from 'Thanks to the Parliament' (1642):

> Who did regard our povertie, our teares,
> Our wants, our miseries, our many feares,
> Whipt, stript, and fairely banisht as appeares;
> You that are masters, now of your owne eares
> Blesse the great Counsell of the King,
> And the Kings great Counsell.
> (In *Cavalier and Puritan* (ed. Hyder E. Rollins, New York, 1923), p. 140)

and, from 'Englands Woe':

> Zealous P—— has threatned a great downfall,
> To cut off long locks that is bushy and small,
> But I hope he will not take ears and all,
> Which no body can deny.
> (In *Rump*, p. 40)

[2] Hugh Maclean (ed.), *Ben Jonson and the Cavalier Poets* (New York, 1974), p. 312.

do so in a review, rather than an article, so it has been generally unnoticed, but its logic seems persuasive to me. For a start, just as with 'The Grasse-hopper', how do we explain the 'addition of new matter to books after they had been licensed . . . there must be a *prima facie* assumption against any poem being later than the date of licensing'.[1] To this negative point Margoliouth added the positive one that, in essence, this poem is a restatement of the Kentish petition, for the delivering of which Lovelace suffered his first imprisonment; and he offers the clinching point that the *Public Faith*, made much of in stanza ten, was 'pledged by Parliament on June 10th 1642, when Lovelace was still in prison'.

Those who sustain the image of the cavalier Lovelace will find it comforting to date the poem some six or seven years after the petition, to show the unwavering constancy of the man. I want to propose a different Lovelace: a man who developed politically from an instinctive cavalier into one who shares with Andrew Marvell the claim to be the great poet of the most wide-ranging political belief of the 1640s and early 1650s. If we accept Margoliouth's early date for 'To Lucasta. From Prison', then we can see, in its final stanzas, the beginnings of Lovelace's movement towards what Ronald Hutton, in his study of the Royalist war effort, has called 'militant neutralism'.[2]

In those stanzas Lovelace sees that 'an universall mist / Of Error is spread or'e each breast'. The inclusiveness is important. The condition of the country spreads to all, from Parliament and the Public Faith right down to the imprisoned poet. Prison begins the poem as more a metaphor than a reality: the literal *these walls* being dwarfed by the figurative *shackles* in which Lucasta has confined him. But at the poem's end we are in the real darkness of a prison—a double obscurity, for the prisoner who has no light to see by, and for others who can not see him and do not know of him. In the poem's strange final lines Lovelace calls for one sacred beam 'To light me where I soone may see / How to serve you, and you trust me'. One might reply that to have suffered incarceration

[1] Reviewing Wilkinson's edition, in *Review of English Studies*, iii (1927), 93–4.

[2] *The Royalist War Effort 1642–1646* (London, 1982), p. 10, where he describes the phenomenon like this:

> . . . neutralism and moderation in the Civil War covered a huge spectrum, stretching from men who obeyed the commands of both parties to those who refused the commands of both and took up arms to defend this position. To avoid at least some of the worst semantic difficulties of the subject, it is proposed here to omit the term 'moderate' altogether and to use the term 'neutralist' to denote only the latter, activist, end of the spectrum, which may be more precisely termed 'militant neutralism'.

for the courageous act of presenting a loyal petition ought to have been sufficient for the poet to be sure of the king's trust. Still, Strafford's example must have loomed large for any loyal prisoner, and I suspect that the doubt conveyed here signals the beginnings of Lovelace's abandonment of the king. To understand why, we need to consider the humiliating experience of the Kentish petition: the climacteric moment of Lovelace's life, when he realized the futility not merely of the grand gesture, but of the whole Royal Cause.

* * * * *

Kent, despite its repeated Royalist risings in the 1640s, was a fiercely independent county, overwhelmingly neutralist in its attitudes. This independence was deep-rooted—there was a Lovelace among the gentlemen who took part in Jack Cade's rising in 1450. The events of the 1640s were largely conditioned by the county's proximity to Parliamentarian London, and its attempts to resist this influence: had it bordered Oxfordshire the story might well have been quite different. Early in 1642 a few Kentish puritans began to draw up a petition to support Parliament's reforms, and a large number of Kentish moderates, led by Sir Edward Dering, were committed to resisting this attempt to dragoon the county behind Parliament. A counter petition was prepared. Alan Everitt describes its terms as 'moderately royalist, or at least non-parliamentarian, but essentially local in outlook'.[1] Before this could be presented Parliament stepped in to suppress it—the one specific act, according to S. R. Gardner, which started the civil war. Dering and his fellow organizers of the petition were taken into custody, and the petition was burned by the hangman. With their moderate elders in prison, a hot-headed faction of younger Kentish gentlemen decided to challenge Parliament by presenting to it the prohibited petition. They were led by two of their company, Richard Lovelace and William Boteler. In April these young men burst into the Maidstone quarter-sessions, where a new puritan petition was being drawn up, shouting 'No, no, no', and keeping their hats on as a show of contempt. Lovelace cut

[1] *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester, 1973), p. 96. Compare his comments that in the 1640s there emerged

> a kind of concealed schizophrenia in the neutrality of Kent. The sympathies of the bulk of the gentry veered mildly towards the king, because it was parliament that was now the innovator and autocrat: but circumstances forced them either to remain aloof from politics or to support the parliamentarian County Committee in the interests of local order. (p. 15)

the petition to pieces after waving it above his head on his sword's point. A few days later thousands of Kentish men were assembled at Blackheath, and 280 of them went on to the House, Lovelace and Boteler at their head, to present Dering's petition.

Brief as they are, the surviving accounts show how total was the humiliation of these young men when they came face to face with the hard men of Parliament. Lovelace was disarmed of his sword—presumably the one he had used so melodramatically at Maidstone—by a Captain Bunch.[1] He and Boteler were brought before the House, interrogated, and summarily committed to the Gatehouse. The remainder were told that since they were 'young Gentlemen, misled by the Sollicitation of some not affected to the Peace of the Kingdom', they would be let off this time, but should watch their future behaviour.[2] The two imprisoned ringleaders had to petition Parliament for their release, which came late in June. Wilkinson prints the text of Lovelace's plea, pertinently contrasting its self-abasing tone to the 'manly and sensible' appeal which John Cleveland sent to Cromwell in similar circumstances some years later.[3] The careers of the two young Kentish men are significantly different after their release. Lovelace went beyond the seas, while Boteler stayed in England, suffered a second spell in prison, and died in battle at Cropredy Bridge in 1644. Indeed, if we had no knowledge at all of Lovelace's whereabouts in 1644, then we would certainly have expected him to be present at the battle of Cropredy Bridge. There was a strong Kentish contingent

[1] And on the 29. of Aprell. 1642. a Cording to ther apointment thay Came from Blakeheath a bout the number of 14 score marching 2 in a ranke and when thay came in the Boro the Chane was dran our whart the Bredg and Captene Bunch. with his Cumpnie, at the Bredg fot and demanded of them ther intent, and the 2 foremast told them that thay came to delivre ther petsiou to the Parlemeut and ther petsione was red and Captene Bunch asked them why thay came armed and thay told him thay had no harmes but the armes of Gentlmen and delivred there Sordes there.

(From *Strange Newes from Kent* . . . 1642, in *Poems*, p. xxix)

[2] From the *Commons Journals*; see *Poems*, p. xxxiii.

[3] . . . Hee therefore humblie prayes that in your wonted Clemencie you would be pleas'd to make a favourable, milde construction of his actions, from whence he may receiue your gentle thoughts, and by your gratious Order be admitted to his former Libertie, or if your well-knowne Wisdomes shall conceiue this Course more fitt; to be allow'd but a conditionall freedome, & for the certaintie of his attendance on your future pleasures he will humblie offer the ingagement of some able friends as a sufficient bayle, and hee shall euer pray that a most happie ende may close up all your labours and Indeuours.

(*Poems*, p. xxxix)

there, which fought bravely, and among the few Royalist deaths was one other of the Kentish petitioners, William Clerke.[1]

By appreciating Lovelace's growing neutralism, we can begin to see how passionately analytical is his perception of the country's condition. 'The Grasse-hopper' is only a Royalist poem if one approaches it with cavalier assumptions—which, of course, a number of Lovelace's readers had. But others would have been attuned to the irony of Charles's cropped ears—history's retribution for the barbarities inflicted upon Prynne perhaps—and to the criticism in the final stanza of a king who, although he had everything, could not rest untempted. 'Lord of all what Seas imbrace' might well recall Ship money: it certainly comes uncomfortably close to the name of the great ship launched just before the civil war, which Charles took so much pride in, because its title was so apposite to his position, the *Sovereign of the Seas*.[2] Likewise, 'The Snayl' analyses Charles, but not from the committed Royalist position which Wadsworth assumes. It opens with

[1] See Margaret Toynbee and Peter Young, *Cropredy Bridge 1644: The Campaign and the Battle* (Kineton, 1970), pp. 35, 94, 98–9. The explanation offered by Wood, and by Stanley in his *Register of Friends* (see n. 1, pp. 227–8), is that Lovelace had given his oath not to leave London without permission. Wood mentions a security of £40,000. But Boteler is not likely to have been treated any differently, yet he was quite prepared to go and fight for his king.

[2] The intellectual background of 'The Grasse-hopper' has been explored, but not its relation to the more popular poetry of the period. For the idea of Charles as a lost lord of the seas, compare, from 'The Sence of the House . . .':

> You Citizen Fools, quoth W—— d'ye talk to me of Peace,
> Who not only stole his Majesties Ships, but rob'd him of his Seas,
> No no I'le keep the Water still, and have my ships well man'd,
> For I have lost and stole so much, I know not where to land.
> (*Rump*, p. 101)

And, for the king who 'wants himself', compare, from 'Upon His Majesty's Coming to Holmby':

> Hold out, brave Charles, and thou shalt win the field,
> Thou canst not lose thyself, unless thou yield
> On such conditions as will force thy hand
> To give away thy sceptre, crown, and land;
> And what is worse to hazard by thy fall
> To lose a greater crown more worth than all.
> (*Political Ballads of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, p. 38)

The same poem plays on the word *poor* very much as 'The Grasse-hopper' does:

> Thy poor distressed Cavaliers rejoiced,
> To hear thy Royal resolution voiced,
> And are content far more poor to be
> Than yet they are, so it reflects from thee . . .

the sun, and closes with the hermit, a satiric evocation of a career which moved from courtly luxury to the austerity of salads. Its companion poem, 'Another' on the snail, aims at his son, in permanent exile on the continent, whose self-absorption denies him the wit to appreciate that his country can exist without him:

> Yet the Authentick do beleeve,
> Who keep their Judgement in their Sleeve,
> That he is his own Double man,
> And sick, still carries his Sedan:
> Or that like Dames i' th' Land of Luyck,
> He wears his everlasting Huyck:
> But banisht, I admire his fate
> Since neither Ostracisme of State,
> Nor a perpetual exile,
> Can force this Virtue change his Soyl;
> For wheresoever he doth go,
> He wanders with his Country too.

The poem which shows how shrewdly Lovelace analysed the movement of men's minds in the 1640s is one which initially promises to be his most explicitly Royalist piece. Its title is 'To my Worthy Friend Mr *Peter Lilly*: on that excellent Picture of his Majesty, and the Duke of Yorke, drawne by him at *Hampton-Court*'. Lely's portrait belongs to the period when Charles was held at Hampton Court, and it depicts one of the occasional visits which his son was allowed to pay him. The first half of the poem seems uncannily prophetic of the *Eikon Basilike*, as it develops a series of rapturous paradoxes very much in the manner of a Counter Reformation poet praising a martyr. Its opening image of a clouded majesty recalls the closing image of 'To Lucasta: From Prison':

> See! what a *clouded Majesty*! and eyes
> Whose glory through their mist doth brighter rise!

And for the value of wine and friendship in a context of political neutrality, compare 'The Safety':

> I account him no wit, that is gifted at railing,
> And *flirting* at those that above him do sit,
> While they do out-wit him, with *whipping* and *gaoling*,
> Then his *purse* and his *person* both pay for his wit,
> 'Tis better to be drinking;
> If sack were reform'd into twelve-pence a quart,
> I'ld study for money to Marchandize for't,
> And a friend that is true, we together will sport.
> Not a word, but we'l pay them with thinking.
>
> (*Rump*, p. 263)

See! what an humble bravery doth shine,
And griefe triumphant breaking through each line;
How it commands the face! so sweet a scorne
Never did *happy misery* adorne!
So sacred a contempt! that others show
To this, (oth' height of all the wheele) below;
That mightiest Monarchs by this shaded booke
May coppy out their proudest, richest looke.

Whilst the true *Eaglet* this quick luster spies,
And by his *Sun's* enlightens his owne eyes;
He cares his cares, his burthen feeles, then streight
Joyes that so lightly he can beare such weight;
Whilst either eithers passion doth borrow,
And both doe grieve the same victorious sorrow.

The picture has come to be known as 'Clouded Majesty' after Lovelace's poem, and it fits its apparent purpose well. Majesty can be obscured, but it uses such obscurity to emerge all the greater—whether those clouds and mists be the confinements which it is subjected to or the tears through which it must look (tears, of course, for its suffering people). Eyes are the key to the poem, and Lovelace looks carefully at the eyes of both sitters, seeing the younger take lustre from his father's eyes. At this point in the poem we see the triumphant image of a pair of royal eagles, so that the clouds and mists which began the poem now turn out only to have been those which hide the mountain top from our eyes, but through which the eagle himself can see clearly. The obscurity is ours, not his. All this is reinforced by a Crashaw-like series of baroque paradoxes, of which *clouded majesty* is the first, followed by *humble bravery*, *grief triumphant*, *happy misery*, and *sacred contempt*.

Structurally this poem is very like 'The Grasse-hopper'. Both take up their first half in describing an image of the king. Then, exactly half-way through, they turn in direct address to a friend, a manœuvre which asks us to revise our allegiances. These are the next four lines of the Lely poem:

These my best *Lilly* with so bold a spirit
And soft a grace, as if thou didst inherit
For that time all their greatnesse, and didst draw
With those brave eyes your *Royall Sitters* saw.

Here the syntax is doubly elliptical, the kind of thing which those who want Lovelace to be merely a cavalier dilettante might label slipshod. But these are revealing obscurities because here the Royalist vision comes under pressure as our scrutiny turns from

the *basileus* to the *ikon*. For a start, the sentence turns out to be no sentence at all, 'These my best *Lilly*' being neither the subject nor object of a verb. Then there is the compression of 'those brave eyes your *Royall Sitters* saw'. I guess that the principal sense requires us to insert something like *through which* between *brave eyes* and *your Royal sitters*, reinforcing the idea that Lely, during the time he painted this picture, put on much of his subjects' greatness. But this is, itself, a shrewd appreciation of the whole curious phenomenon of having such a picture painted at such a time. The one thing we know about Charles's strategy in the last years of his life is that his overriding concern was to preserve the image of majesty which he embodied: he carried it through his trial, right down to the two shirts he wore at his execution. He became, as this poem puts it, a pattern for princes to 'coppy out their proudest, richest looke'.

This is how Lely's sitters intended to be seen and, were they artists, how they would have portrayed themselves. That Lely should see through their eyes is Lovelace's recognition of the total work of art which Charles's life had become. But Lovelace, it turns out, is more interested in Lely's art than in Charles's suffering, and a more straightforward interpretation of that piece of syntax makes the eyes Lely's, not Charles's, requiring only *which* to be inserted between *brave eyes* and *your Royal sitters*. In her 1983 Chatterton lecture Elizabeth Cook showed what protean words *brave* and *bravery* were in the Renaissance, ranging in meaning and connotation from a virtually meaningless cliché of admiration to a specific artistic sense of 'crafty, well made, technically fine'.[1] Something like that transference of meaning happens here as the bravery shifts from the royal couple's eyes to the artist's. As those sitters came under Lely's scrutiny they saw how bravely he saw them—artists are eagles as much as monarchs are, because of the keenness of their sight, and also because they can so fearlessly look on suffering monarchs.

We might now see how, through all the apparent excesses of the first half of the poem, Lovelace's eyes are actually fixed on the artistic process through which the suffering monarch has been portrayed. *Clouded majesty* is literally true, for the whole right half of the double portrait is dominated by its backcloth of thick, dark clouds, behind the Duke of York's head, mirroring his taller father's expression on the left half. The ecstasy of suffering in *grief triumphant* is tempered by the phrase *breaking through each line*, for

[1] 'The Bravery of Shakespeare's Sonnets', *Proceedings of British Academy*, lxix (1983), esp. 191–3.

line, like other words in the first half of the poem—*show*, *shaded*, *copy out*, *lustre*, *borrow*—carries a technical, artistic sense too. The lines on Charles's face are the lines of art, no less than Cromwell's warts would prove to be. *How it commands the face!*—grief, of course, but the grief the artist has, to take a word from later in the poem, *designed*. This is, after all, a very technically absorbed poem, and it should not surprise us that its use of the word *sitter*, in the sense of one who sits for a portrait, is the first recorded in English. The remainder of the poem concentrates on the details of the craft:

> Not as of old, when a rough hand did speake
> A strong Aspect, and a faire face, a weake;
> When only a black beard cried Villaine, and
> By *Hieroglyphicks* we could understand;
> When Chrystall typified in a white spot,
> And the bright Ruby was but one red blot;
> Thou dost the things *Orientally* the same,
> Not only paintst its colour, but its *Flame*:
> Thou sorrow canst designe without a teare,
> And with the Man his very *Hope* or *Feare*;
> So that th' amazed world shall henceforth finde
> None but my *Lilly* ever drew a *Minde*.

There are implications here, I suspect, that the days of such *ikons* as Charles and his son are numbered; but, in any case, the striking thing is how, by the end of the poem, the intensity of their suffering has given way to a panegyric on the power of the new realism in art, in which Charles is diminished to the shadows of *the man* and *a mind*. The artist himself is not affected by what he is supposed to see: 'Thou sorrow canst designe without a teare' refers principally to Lely's ability to penetrate the stoical appearance of his royal sitters, but it also describes the artist's necessary detachment, that he paints their sorrow without himself feeling it.

One of Lely's critics, defending him against the charge that he was a turncoat who first painted for one side and then the other—through the 1650s he made much money from portraits of successful puritans and he even scouted a plan for covering Whitehall with scenes of Commonwealth glory—writes that 'as a professional painter from abroad, Lely was a neutral observer of the domestic struggle . . . his only personal interest would be in the possible extension of patronage which a return of the court might bring'.[1] Lovelace had no qualms about

[1] R. M. Beckett, *Lely* (London, 1951), p. 8. For details of Lely's career, including his plans for Whitehall see Oliver Millar, *Sir Peter Lely 1618–80*

Lely's shift of allegiance. In the 1650s he wrote a second poem addressed to him, in which the praise and fellow feeling is even more intensely expressed.[1] The detachment of the first Lely poem is no exception. It reflects a response which Lovelace frequently makes to the characters and events of the civil war. In 'The Falcon', a poem which allegorizes the war into a beast fable, the battle in which both sides kill each other he beholds 'with mingled pleasure and affright'. This is the heart of his vision of Lely's painting. What he admires in Lely he desires for himself, because it should be obvious that everything I have said about the technique of the painter refers to the technique of the poet too—right down to the same vocabulary of *line*, *shaded book*, *copy out*, and *design*—that is, a perspective which can give him the detached realism of the Dutch artists he so admired. But he could not share Lely's obvious claim to be neutral, for he was irreparably tainted by his association with

(London, 1978), p. 14. Pertinent are Millar's remarks on Lely's connections with

> a group of peers, closely related by marriage, interest, political sympathy, and a puritan dislike of Laudianism . . . who had remained in London during the conflict. (p. 11)

It should be clear that I do not agree with Earl Miner's judgement that in this poem 'Lovelace seeks to catch what must be called Lely's loyal art, or art of loyalty', although I do agree with the rest of the sentence: 'and the praise he gives the painter is praise of which he is worthy himself as a poet (*The Cavalier Mode*, p. 62).

[1] Lovelace addresses him as 'my best *Lilly*' and proposes that they 'walk hand in hand, / And smile at this un-understanding land'. The most interesting part of this second poem, 'Peinture. A Panegyrick to the best Picture of Friendship Mr. *Pet. Lilly*', is the passage directly preceding this address to Lely, where Lovelace uses the language of political wheeler-dealing to describe the artist's achievement:

> O sacred *Peincture*! that dost fairly draw
> What but in Mists deep inward *Poets* saw;
> 'Twixt thee and an Intelligence no ods,
> That art of privy Council to the Gods,
> By thee unto our eyes they do prefer
> A stamp of their abstracted Character;
> Thou that in frames eternity dost bind,
> And art a written and a body'd mind;
> To thee is Ope the *Juncto* o' th' Abysse,
> And its conspiracy detected is;
> Whilest their Cabal thou to our sense dost show,
> And in thy square paint'st what they threat below.

This not only shows how, as the rest of this lecture will argue, Lovelace began to develop a language for Restoration satire, but, in its image of hell's conspiracies, it looks forward to *Paradise Lost* too.

the Royalist cause. After the second imprisonment the *camera obscura* needed to be one which he actually inhabited.

* * * * *

I want to extend the interest in design and composition which the Lely poem shows to the whole of *Lucasta*. I do not subscribe to the view that it is a miscellany, with no principle to its ordering of poems other than putting the best first.[1] Without attempting to justify the placing of every poem in it, let me at least compare the way the volume opens and closes. It opens with 'To Lucasta, Going beyond the Seas' and 'To Lucasta, Going to the Warres'. The sentiments are cavalier, but the situation is not so easily described. If we take these poems as being addressed to an audience in the year the volume appeared, the situation matches the sentiment. The truest cavalier response to total defeat was to carry on the fight from the Continent. But if these poems are meant to recall, as they surely do for most readers, the opening of the civil war and the early 1640s, then they come closer to a confession than a boast. For whatever complex reason, while a civil war was being waged in England, involving all his family and many of his friends, Lovelace had fought in a side-show in France—a strange honour to have embraced in preference to the nunnery of Lucasta's chaste breast. The next poem, you will remember, is 'A Paradox', where he describes his destiny as the pursuit of foulness.

Lucasta, I have no doubt, was a real enough person, but she stands for much more. She embodies not only the female identity which Lovelace must abandon, in order to embrace the mistress of war, but the whole country of England too—in a later poem he describes her as 'that bright Northerne star'. At a time when the forward youth must appear in armour, Lovelace proposes that to fight honourably now can only be done beyond the seas. The two poems repeat themselves, both abandoning the various identities of Lucasta. I say various, because the third element in her complex identity is the one which Marvell's youth also has to abandon, that is the muse. More than anything else, she is the image of Lovelace's art.

The final poems in the volume are also concerned with Lucasta (incidentally, only fourteen of the poems in the volume are either

[1] Manfred Weidhorn (see n. 1, p. 209) says that 'as far as the order of the poems in the printed volumes, no clear design is discernible'; and 'taking note perhaps of the importance of first and last impressions, Lovelace placed these ... poems—which he himself may have considered his best—at the beginning of the volume and rounded it off with "Aramantha"' (pp. 142–3).

addressed to her or feature her as a character). One is the last poem of the volume proper, called, significantly, 'Calling Lucasta from her Retirement'; the other is Lovelace's most ambitious poem, the long pastoral added to the end of the volume, and separately advertised on the title-page, *Aramantha*.

'Calling Lucasta from her Retirement' is the climax to a series of poems which gradually proclaim female ascendancy. Its immediate predecessor, 'A Lady with a Falcon on her fist' ends with complete male submission to the lady and her female bird of prey. Then a volume which began by wishing farewell to Lucasta, and virtually consigning her to a nunnery, ends by welcoming her—and what we now see is a Lucasta profoundly changed. At the volume's opening she was all passivity; now she has a total transforming influence:

> Arise and climbe our whitest highest Hill,
> There your sad thoughts with joy and wonder fill,
> And see Seas calme as Earth, Earth as your Will.

In contrast to those opening poems, this is a poem of peace—or, at least, a poem which asserts the resolve to live in peace. It ends like this:

> Awake from the dead Vault in which you dwell,
> All's Loyall here, except your thoughts rebell,
> Which so let loose, often their Gen'rall quell.
>
> See! She obeys! by all obeyed thus;
> No storms, heats, Colds, no soules contentious,
> Nor Civill War is found—I meane, to us.
>
> Lovers and Angels, though in Heav'n they show
> And see the Woes and Discords here below,
> What they not feele, must not be said to know.

It is a resolve to live obscurely too, for to live like a lover or angel is to remove yourself from the common experience: in the words of that final stanza, to show and see, but not to feel (rather like Lely painting Charles, or Lovelace observing Lely's portrait). The implications of this idea are worked out in the long pastoral poem added at the end of the volume, *Aramantha*.

In this poem Lovelace, having encountered the rural nymph Aramantha, is lectured by her on the self-defeating behaviour which he, like all other men, has exhibited:

> Fond man thus to a precipice
> Aspires, till at the top his eyes
> Have lost the safety of the plain,
> Then begs of Fate the vales againe.

Perplexed by this charge that to his own precipice he goes, he tells her that she is cruel, and that Lucasta would have consoled him for the sorrow he feels, rather than have offered him criticism. Aramantha replies with a taunt that between Lucasta and her are no odds, apart from Lucasta's prouder livery. Stung by this, he makes to kill her: and at this point of male violence imposed upon the innocent countryside, the poem turns to the imagery of civil war. This is the moment when eyes are opened and obscurities stripped away:

> Now as in warre intestine, where
> Ith' mist of a black Battell, each
> Layes at his next, then makes a breach
> Through th' entrayles of another whom
> He sees nor knows when he did come
> Guided alone by Rage and th' Drumme,
> But stripping and impatient wild,
> He finds too soon his onely child.
> So our expiring desp'rate Lover
> Far'd, when amaz'd he did discover
> *Lucasta* in this Nymph, his sinne
> Darts the accursed Javelin
> 'Gainst his own breast, which she puts by
> With a soft Lip and gentle Eye . . .

Aramantha is Lucasta. This carefully wrought personal allegory still has more than sixty lines to run as Lovelace explores his own reconciliation with those elements of himself which Lucasta represents. These lines are explicitly political too, for in her narrative of how she came to be where she is, Lucasta tells him how she was hounded by *Hydraphil* and *Philanact*. *Hydraphil* is, as commentators have pointed out, the lover of the many-headed multitude, i.e. Parliament. *Philanact* seems to have foxed them, but its derivation is fairly obvious; from the Homeric ἄναξ, ἄνακτος, it signifies the *lover of the prince*, the Royalist cause. These two, she says,

> . . . whilst they for the same things fight,
> As BARDS Decrees, and DRUIDS rite,
> For safeguards of their proper joyes,
> And Shepheardes freedome, each destroyes
> The glory of this Sicilie;
> Since seeking thus the remedie,
> They fancy (building on false ground)
> The means must them and it confound,
> Yet are resolv'd to stand or fall,
> And win a little or lose all.

From this sad storm of fire and blood
She fled to this yet living Wood;
Where she 'mongst savage beasts doth find
Her self more safe then humane kind.

Lovelace's response is to hang his own arms up, break his sword, fold his ensigns, and betake him to the shepherd's life with Lucasta.

Aramantha is an ideal, pastoral summation of Lovelace's neutrality. But how to live it in reality? This is the topic of most of the best poems in Lovelace's second volume, *Lucasta: Posthume Poems*, and our reading of them gains much when we set them in the context of the life which he lived in the 1650s, until his death in 1657. This is Anthony Wood's account of it:

After the Murther of K. *Ch.* I. *Lovelace* was set at liberty, and having by time consumed all his Estate, grew very melancholy, (which brought him at length into a Consumption) became very poor in body and purse, was the object of charity, went in ragged Cloaths (whereas when he was in his glory he wore Cloth of gold and silver) and mostly lodged in obscure and dirty places, more befitting the worst of Beggars, than poorest of Servants . . . He died in a very mean Lodging in *Gun-powder* Alley near *Shoe-lane* . . .[1]

[1] As early as 1821 Wood's account had been called into question, and Wilkinson felt able to pour scorn on virtually the whole story:

> Wood's account of the miseries of Lovelace's last days and his death in 'a very mean Lodging' is also, in all probability, misleading.
>
> Till Death with slow and easie pace,
> Snatcht the bright Jewell from the Case
>
> is hardly the language one would expect Dudley Lovelace to have used had his brother died in the circumstances mentioned by Wood and by Aubrey. (*Poems*, p. lv)

Aubrey's account, much terser than Wood's, was 'Obiit in a Cellar, in Long-acre a little before the Restoration'. Wilkinson's view has been generally accepted: e.g. H. Berry and E. K. Timings, in *Modern Language Notes*, lxix (1954), 397, write that 'Wilkinson has already disposed of much of Wood's account: notably . . . the story of Lovelace's miserable death'. But Wilkinson's argument, that such comments as the one he cites, from Lovelace's elegies, are unlikely had he lived out his last days in penury, do not persuade me: much the opposite, I consider the idea of snatching a jewel from a case to be exactly appropriate to Wood's story. More important is the evidence of the two scholars who have studied Wood's biographical method. J. Milton French, who tested his accounts of literary figures against the findings of more recent scholarship, found that 'it is Wood's trustworthiness that is astonishing . . . he seems to me unusually dependable for a biographer of his time . . . Wood sticks as closely as one could ask to facts' ('The Reliability of Anthony Wood and Milton's Oxford M.A.', *Publications of Modern Language Association*, lxxv (1960), 29–30);

[*footnote cont. on p. 228*

Where *Lucasta* had traced Lovelace's experiences through the 1640s, the *Posthume Poems* volume explores those obscure and dirty places which he inhabited in the 1650s. Its first two poems reintroduce the complex figure of Lucasta, whose 'Reserved looks' in the first poem convey the 'sad indifference' of the national and poetic muse which 'both kills, and doth reprieve'; and who, in the second, 'Lucasta laughing', 'laughs again / at our ridiculous pain; / And at our merry misery / She laughs until she cry'. In this volume Lovelace repeatedly looks through glittering outsides to the self-absorptions which they hide:

> Strive not, vain Lover, to be fine,
> Thy silk's the Silk-worms, and not thine.

'Love made in the first Age' parodies all Edenic visions, to show their ultimately crude origins. The target is both the rural idyll of the cavalier retreat and the primitivism of sects like the Adamites and Levellers. All are exposed as solipsistic, ultimately masturbatory. Female masturbation is the object of 'Her Muffe':

and Alan Pritchard, who has examined the sources Wood drew on, in particular the letters from his informants, found little reason to question his honesty or accuracy: 'he produced a collection of biographies totally unprecedented in England for its greatness of scale, its fullness of detail, and its generally high degree of accuracy . . . The manuscripts demonstrate that Wood frequently followed his primary sources very closely' ('According to Wood: Sources of Anthony Wood's Lives of Poets and Dramatists', *Review of English Studies*, NS, xxviii (1975), 268–89 and 407–20). Pritchard shows how, on 15 December 1687, Wood wrote to Sir Edward Sherborne, asking him to try to obtain information about Lovelace from the poet's sister, Mrs Caesar. It seems unlikely that Wood might have jeopardized the reputation of his whole enterprise—something he jealously guarded—by inventing tall tales about a man whose friends and relatives were still alive, and to whom he had applied for information.

One other source for Lovelace's life, which came to light in 1957, is Thomas Stanley's account of him in his manuscript, *A Register of Friends*, written some time after 1675. Notice the awkwardness of Stanley's attempt to deal with Lovelace's failure to fight on the Royalist side:

> No sooner by this headlesse Rout releast,
> But Fortune puts thy vertue to the Test;
> During our Civill Wars confin'd to peace,
> Expos'd to Forrein Wars, when ours did cease.

Lovelace's obscurity in the 1650s is tacitly borne out by the lines:

> Wasted with fatigue thou didst return
> That thy own country might possesse thy urn.

Here the last seven years of Lovelace's life are passed over in silence (in G. Miller Crump (ed.), *The Poems and Translations of Thomas Stanley* (Oxford, 1962), p. 360).

only hinted at in the Ostrich fan poem in *Lucasta*, here it makes a wider satirical point—that when we see the fine lady with her hands in her muff, what we see are hands in the hidden muff. The curious snail, that 'Deep Riddle of Mysterious State', is also sexually self-sufficient: 'That big still with thy self dost go, / And liv'st an aged Embrio'. If sexual self-absorption is one necessary ingredient of obscurity, the other is dirt (remember Wood's 'obscure and dirty places'). In 'Lucasta at the Bath' sex and dirt are combined, Lovelace's chaste heroine sharing the waters with bathers covered with venereal suppurations. The poem is an interestingly soiled companion piece to 'Lucasta, taking the waters at Tunbridge' in the first volume—but then I think that in many of this volume's poems Lovelace is rewriting his earlier verse. The change is the one signalled in the closing lines of 'Her Muffe':

> But I, in my Invention tough,
> Rate not this outward bliss enough,
> But still contemplate must the hidden Muffe.

In 'A Loose Saraband' his tough invention matches the cheapness of his whore to the sordid state of the whole nation:

> Love never was Well-willer
> Unto my Nag or mee,
> Ne'r watter'd us ith' Cellar,
> But the cheap Buttery:
> At th' head of his own Barrells,
> Where broach'd are all his Quarrels,
> Should a true noble Master
> Still make his Guest his Taster.
>
> See all the World how't staggers,
> More ugly drunk then we,
> As if far gone in daggers,
> And blood it seem'd to be.

Dirt is the condition of man's public honours as well as his private enjoyments. 'A Mock Charon' has the devils in hell welcoming an English statesman with trepidation because they sense his power to infect them:

> Welcome to Rape, to Theft, to Perjury,
> To all the ills thou wert, we cannot hope to be;
> Oh pitty us condemn'd! Oh cease to wooe,
> And softly, softly breath, least you infect us too.

This volume's insect poems also explore obscure, dirty places. 'A Fly caught in a Cobweb' opens by making its political allegory explicit:

Small type of great ones, that do hum,
Within this whole World's narrow Room . .

At the heart of the poem, worked out in careful detail, is the process by which the fly is digested by the spider and then transformed into the material from which the web is made to catch his own children: an image not without strong political overtones for supporters of the royal cause. Even dirtier are the mock-heroics of 'The Toad and Spyder'. Lovelace had already treated the futility of warfare in the mutual destruction of the falcon and the heron in the poem called 'The Falcon'; but that poem left some room for heroism. This one only piles filth on filth, as when the spider feeds on the toad's 'blew-checquer'd Scull':

And Vomiting her *Stygian* Seeds,
Her poyson, on his poyson, feeds

or when the toad, having the spider at her mercy,

fainting, sick and yellow, pale,
She baths him with her sulph'rous Stale.

The cavalier response to defeat and Charles's execution was often to retreat into cynicism, nostalgia, regret, heroic idealism, or religious truth. There is little of any of this in Lovelace—he was the one poet of the interregnum who did not try his hand at a religious poem.[1] Instead he developed a form of satire rooted not in the accepted moral consensus, for he saw none he could share, but in the special form of his own obscurity. This was not the pseudo-obscurity of a cavalier retirement into a country retreat, or the Continent, but the genuine obscurity of one hidden away in the dirtiest corner of London, from where he could look out at the new England of the 1650s. The recurrent idea behind these *Posthume Poems* is that out of his own degradation comes the sense that he is, more than anything else, a poet. Hunger, want, and dirt sharpen the vocation: peace, contentment, and ease merely dull it. Something like this is the tenor of 'Advice to my best Brother. Coll: *Francis Lovelace*', which begins as if it were to

[1] The closest he comes is in the opening lines of 'To My Dear Friend Mr *E.R.* On His Poems Moral and Divine', but this is little more than a statement of intent:

Cleft, as the top of the inspired Hill,
Struggles the Soul of my divided Quill,
Whilst this foot doth the watry mount aspire,
That *Sinai's* living and enlivening fire.

The cleft quill image is much more powerfully used in 'On *Sanazar's* being honoured . . .', see *infra*.

recommend, in the convention of all the other cavalier poems of this type, the advantages of a rural retreat; but which confounds the whole genre by suddenly dissolving its image of peace and security into the horrified knowledge that man has no control over his state:

> Yet settle here your rest, and take your state,
> And in calm *Halcyon's* nest ev'n build your Fate;
> Prethee lye down securely, *Frank*, and keep
> With as much no noyse the inconstant Deep
> As its Inhabitants; nay stedfast stand,
> As if discover'd were a New-found-land
> Fit for Plantation here; dream, dream still,
> Lull'd in *Dione's* cradle, dream, untill
> Horrour awake your sense, and you now find
> Your self a bubled pastime for the Wind,
> And in loose *Thetis* blankets torn and tost;
> *Frank* to undo thy self why art at cost?

But Lovelace's response to the horror was to control it through poetry. The poem which shows how far he had travelled from the bright amateur of Charles I's court is one of the lightest in the volume. In 'To a Lady with child that ask'd an Old Shirt' he uses the custom of sending linen to ladies about to give birth to make the connection between his poverty—I guess he only has the one shirt—and the kind of poetry he now writes:

> And why an honour'd ragged Shirt, that shows,
> Like tatter'd Ensigns, all its Bodies blows?
> Should it be swathed in a vest so dire,
> It were enough to set the Child on fire;
> Dishevell'd Queens should strip them of their hair,
> And in it mantle the new rising Heir:
> Nor do I know ought worth to wrap it in,
> Except my parchment upper-coat of Skin:
> And then expect no end of its chast Tears,
> That first was rowl'd in Down, now Furs of Bears.
> But since to Ladies 't hath a Custome been
> Linnen to send, that travail and lye in;
> To the nine Sempstresses, my former friends,
> I su'd, but they had nought but shreds and ends.
> At last, the jolli'st of the three times three,
> Rent th' apron from her smock, and gave it me,
> 'Twas soft and gentle, subt'ly spun no doubt;
> Pardon my boldness, Madam; *Here's the clout.*

It is striking to see how easily and lightly Lovelace can manage so personal a poem, one which celebrates his neglect, obscurity, and

degradation. Out of these elements has come a new language for poetry—*Here's the clout*, which might well stand as the motto for the final poem in the volume, 'On *Sanazar's* being honoured with six hundred Duckets by the *Clarissimi* of *Venice*, for composing an *Eligiack Hexastick of* The City. A Satyre'. Its position makes it analogous to the pastoral *Aramantha* in the first volume, and it, too, is a taking stock of what has gone before; but now the passive ideal of living in quiet cultivation of the rural muse has given way to a vision of an embattled poet looking out from Grub Street at the city around him. Unlike Sannazar's poem, this is no elegiac treatment of urban life. The poet here is forced to beg for wine in December—an ironic echo of 'The Grasse-hopper' this—and has for his normal daily fare a fortified toast. The concern throughout is the uses of poetry: not its ideal, therapeutic uses, as in *Aramantha*, but its actual uses in the real world—beginning with a recollection of the last play to be performed at Court, nearly twenty years earlier, Fletcher's *The Scornful Lady*, and one of its central characters, a young rake who promised his servants satin clothes if his schemes prospered. The character's name was *Loveless*, spelt *Lovelace* in the poem, and raising his ghost gives Lovelace an opportunity for self-mockery, contrasting the dandy he once was with his present lice-ridden state—indeed, there is a bizarrely proleptic echo of Wood's description of him in his glory, wearing cloth of gold and silver—but the point is that now, in the late 1650s, a new set of poetic dandies should take the advice of Richard Lovelace on how best to prostitute themselves:

> You that do suck for thirst your black quil's blood,
> And chaw your labour'd papers for your food,
> I will inform you how and what to praise,
> Then skin y' in Satin as young *Lovelace* plaies.
> Beware, as you would your fierce guests, your lice,
> To strip the cloath of Gold from cherish'd vice;
> Rather stand off with awe and reverend fear,
> Hang a poetick pendant in her Ear.
> Court her as her Adorers do their glass,
> Though that as much of a true Substance has,
> Whilst all the gall from your wild ink you drain,
> The beauteous Sweets of Vertues Cheeks to stain;
> And in your Livery let her be known,
> As poor and tattered as in her own.
> Nor write, nor speak you more of sacred writ,
> But what shall force up your arrested wit.
> Be chast Religion, and her Priests your scorn,
> Whilst the vain Fanes of Idiots you adorn.

It is a mortal errour you must know,
Of any to speak good, if he be so.
Rayl till your edged breath flea your raw throat,
And burn all marks on all of gen'rous note;
Each verse be an inditement, be not free
Sanctity 't self from thy Scurrility.
Libel your Father, and your Dam *Buffoon*,
The Noblest Matrons of the Isle *Lampoon*,
Whilst *Aretine* and 's bodies you dispute,
And in your sheets your Sister prostitute.

All 267 lines of the poem are fixed on the state of poetry. Even the civil war has found its ultimate futility in an absurd war between the poets. And Lovelace finally turns on the abiding female principle of his earlier work and cuts this to ribbons too. The whole enterprise of writing poems to a mistress is mocked, followed by an ironic recapitulation of all those triumphant women at the end of *Lucasta* in the figures of the new tribe of women writers:

Each snatches the male quill from his faint hand
And must both nobler write and understand,
He to her fury the soft plume doth bow,
O Pen, nere truely justly slit till now!

Like that image of the slit pen, the poem as a whole is graceless and offensive. 'His common discourse', wrote Wood, 'was not only significant and witty, but incomparably graceful, which drew respect from all Men and Women'. That was the courtier Lovelace. Obscurity taught him the values of plain speaking, to pursue what he called in this satire 'nak'd poesie'. It made him, what we have so far been unwilling to grant, a true precursor of Rochester, Dryden, and Pope, as in this description of the poet operating like any other hustler on the streets of London:

There is not in my mind one sullen Fate
Of old, but is concentred in our state.
Vandall ore-runners, Goths in Literature,
Ploughmen that would *Parnassus* new manure;
Ringers of Verse that All-in All-in chime
And toll the changes upon every Rhime.
A Mercer now by th' yard does measure ore
An Ode which was but by the foot before;
Deals you an Ell of Epigram, and swears
It is the strongest and the finest Wears.
No wonder if a Drawer Verses Rack,
If 'tis not his 't may be the Spir't of Sack;
Whilst the Fair Bar-maid stroaks the Muses teat,
For milk to make the Posset up compleat.

The streets of London are a good place to end. Lovelace travelled the short distance from the Court to Gunpowder Alley, off Shoe Lane, and his poetry went with him. There is a street vigour in the rhythm and language of this poem, not least typified by his use of *barmaid* here antedating the *OED*'s first recorded use of the word by some 120 years. Lovelace chose the streets of London rather than Kent, the Court in exile, or any of the significant number of cavalier retreats. Within a year of this poem he was dead, and, according to Wood, was buried 'at the west end of the Church of *S. Bride* alias *Bridget* in *London*'. This church was destroyed by the Great Fire, but if Wood's account of his burial there, and his residence in Shoe Lane is right, then I can justifiably link him to another poet who played curious games with obscurity in the next century; who lived out his last days in poverty just around the corner, in Brook Street, and who was buried in the same burial ground, by then the Shoe Lane Workhouse Cemetery. He, of course, was Thomas Chatterton.