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BEHAVIOR IN A WORLD OF FLUX:
ROCHESTER'S POETIC VISION

A thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

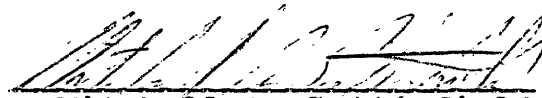
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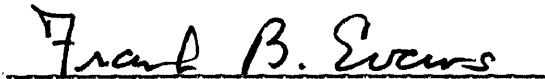
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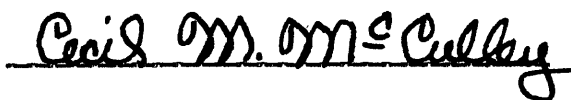
Master of Arts


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ABSTRACT

Rochester's poetry embodies a vision of a world of flux. He forms a vision of this world in philosophical poems, such as "Upon Nothing," and in his love lyrics. Behavior in this world is described in the satires, notably "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind." The most comprehensive treatment of his world of flux is "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country."

By the second half of the seventeenth century, the idea that the world is in a state of flux was beginning to re-establish itself in European thought. Sensationalism, materialism, and the denial of supernatural influence (though not necessarily of the supernatural) are all elements of this idea, along with, by definition, Heraclitus' "flowing," the motion and transience of things. Classical thinkers were quite familiar with the idea of the world of flux, which ran in a straight line from Heraclitus to Democritus to Epicurus to Lucretius, but the Christian era consigned it to temporary obscurity. As Thomas Fujimara writes:

Christianity. . . set up a transcendental realm inaccessible to reason. . . man then had his being in two worlds, the natural realm where he exercised his reason, and the supernatural realm where he depended on faith.¹

Medieval thought had been able to reconcile reason and the natural world with Christian transcendence, but post-Renaissance intellectuals often found themselves unable to do so.

Says D. C. Allen:

The dike of faith was going down as the sea of rationalism burst through.²

The new science exemplified this resurgent rationalism; it had aroused much skepticism about the old world of faith. The clergy were quick to see that their comfortable system of a priori ideas was crumbling, and tried to enlist the new ideal, reason, to their aid. The Cambridge Platonists

were the best examples of this new turn of mind. Henry More in his Psychodia Platonica (1647) asserted that he was "unassisted and unguided by any miraculous Revelation." Ralph Cudworth, with his doctrine of "plastic nature" (The True Intellectual System of the Universe, 1678), made a major concession to materialism and rationalism in his defense of orthodoxy.³ Reason, however, did not always return to Christian absolutes:

The conflict of the 'new philosophy' with Christian supernaturalism produced an attitude of skepticism among men of rationalistic bent, who were left 'wandering between two worlds.'⁴

Allen and Fujimara have outlined the philosophical conflict of the Restoration, when men were "wandering between two worlds": the naturalistic world of flux, and the Christian system of absolutes. The debate was not merely a religious one; politics, the nature of man, and the proper code of conduct also entered in.

This essay accepts the notion of such a conflict, and seeks to apply it to the poetry of John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester (1647-1680). Though long notorious for occasional scurrility and for its reflection of Rochester's riotous living, the poetry of Rochester also embodies his peculiar vision of this world of flux and his idea of behavior in it, both of which this essay will examine.

Rochester's poetry, some of the most underestimated in the language, has had little critical attention; and, except for a largely theological treatment by Allen, his extraordinary

vision of the world of flux has had almost none. Rochester forms this vision in his love lyrics, describes behavior in this world in his satires, and expresses his vision best in a masterpiece: "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country." I will treat of Rochester's lyrics and satires first, and then end with the comprehensive "Artemisia."

I

Rochester's Vision of the World of Flux

The notion of the world of flux has, as most ideas do, a pedigree--the classical "natural philosophy" that culminated in Lucretius' De Rerum Natura. Not surprisingly, the doubters of the Restoration looked to their classical forebears for comfort and support. One of the best ways of understanding Rochester's vision, especially, is to examine the Lucretian influence on it. The Roman poet was available to some extent to every educated man of the seventeenth century, and his heterodox ideas, though widely familiar, were naturally held in wide disesteem. Lucretius was certainly no stranger to Thomas Hobbes, who was converted to materialism by the French priest Gassendi, "the first great modern student of Epicureanism."⁵ John Evelyn had translated part of Lucretius in 1656 and even Dryden, though carefully distancing himself from Lucretian doctrine, considered him important enough to translate at some length (1685). Thomas Shadwell, at the beginning of his play

The Virtuoso (1676), has two young-men-on-the-make invoke Lucretius as they set out to pursue their pleasure. It is a dramatic example of how the lush poetry, egocentric hedonism, and solemn speculations of the philosopher arrested the age.

There is good evidence that, even as popular as Lucretius was at the time, Rochester had an especial affection for him. For instance, an anonymous admirer penned these lines in the "Prologue" to Rochester's Valentinian to be spoken by Mrs. Barry (1684):

Alas! his too great heat went out too soon!
So fatal is it vastly to excel;
Thus young, thus mourned, his lov'd Lucretius fell.⁶

Also, Dryden wrote the Earl an obsequious letter (c. 1673) in which he said: "You are the Rerum Natura of your own Lucretius, Ipsos suis pollens opibus, nihil Indigo nostri."⁷ The Latin sentence is a line from Lucretius that Rochester had translated:

Rich in themselves, to whom we cannot add,
Not pleased with good deeds nor provoked by bad.⁸

The pair of short translations that survive are the firmest evidence of Rochester's interest in Lucretius. Rochester's deep sympathy with the philosophy of Lucretius can best be seen by contrasting his translation of the opening lines of De Rerum Natura with that of John Dryden, who found Lucretius' opinions disagreeable.⁹ The first quotation is from Rochester, the second from Dryden, the third from a modern

prose translation in careful metaphrase, and the last from Lucretius himself:

Great Mother of Aeneas, and of Love;
 Delight of mankind, and the powers above;
 Who all beneath those sprinkled drops of light
 Which slide upon the face of gloomy night,
 Whither vast regions of that liquid world
 Where groves of ships on watery hills are hurled,
 Or fruitful earth, dost bless, since 'tis by thee
 That all things live which the bright sun does see.¹⁰

* * * * *

Delight of human kind, and gods above,
 Parent of Rome, propitious Queen of Love,
 Whose vital pow'r, air, earth, and sea supplies
 And breeds whate'er is born beneath the rolling skies;
 For every kind, by thy prolific might,
 Springs, and beholds the regions of the light.¹¹

* * * * *

Mother of the race of Aeneas, delight of men and
 of gods, fostering Venus, it is you who fill with life
 the ship-bearing seas and the fruitful lands beneath
 the gliding constellations of heaven. For because of
 you, the whole race of breathing creatures is conceived,
 and when born beholds the sunlight.¹²

* * * * *

Aeneadum genetrix, hominum divomque voluptas,
 alma Venus, caeli subter labentia signa
 quae mare navigerum, quae terras frugiferentis
 condelebras, per te quoniam genus omne animantum
 concipitur visitque exortum lumina solis:
 te, dea, te fugiunt venti, te nubila caeli
 adventumque tuum, tibi suavis daedala tellus
 summittit flores, tibi rident aequora ponti
 placatumque nitet diffuso lumene caelum. (ll. 1-9)¹³

Lucretius' invocation of nature's fertility seems to have impressed Rochester, who echoes it in some of his other efforts, notably these mocking lines from "Upon His Leaving His Mistress":

Whilst, moved by an impartial sense,
 Favors like nature you dispense
 With universal influence.

See, the kind seed-receiving earth
 To every grain affords a birth.
 On her no showers unwelcome fall;
 Her willing womb retains 'em all.
 And shall my Celia be confined?
 No! Live up to thy mighty mind,
 And be the mistress of mankind. (ll. 12-18, p. 83)

But more importantly, Rochester is faithful to Lucretius in this respect: his translation captures, in a way Dryden's does not, the shifting, shimmering sensations in the atomistic world of Lucretius. Phrases like "sprinkled drops of light" which "slide" evoke sensory experience which Dryden does not convey.

Also, Rochester's choice of words conveys much more animation than the comparatively static translation of Dryden's. For instance, there is that strange use of "hurled." The word is rich in denotation; not only does it have the present meaning of "tossed," but it contains in seventeenth-century usage a more general sense of "commotion" and even "a rush of water."¹⁴

Perception, for both Rochester and Lucretius, is not a clear hard light on sharply-defined things, but a transitory, almost dreamlike series of sensory phenomena, which occur in a world of constant animation. Lucretius wastes little time in applying his world of sensory flux to the condition of men:

O wretched minds of men! O blind hearts! Amid what shadows of life, amid what grave perils, do you spend your years, few as they are! Are you blind not to see that a man's nature demands nothing for itself except that in some way pain be banished and kept far from his body, and that, with a mind freed from anxiety and fear, he enjoy a sense of happiness?¹⁵

The key words here are "shadows" and "a sense of happiness." The former is all we can perceive; the latter is all we can hope for. This depiction of reality as slippery and unfocused crops up again and again in Rochester, especially in his love lyrics. "Love and Life" is one example:

All my past life is mine no more;
The flying hours are gone,
Like transitory dreams given o'er
Whose images are kept in store
By memory alone. (ll. 1-5, p. 90)

"Flying hours" and "transitory dreams" evoke the world of flux. Other examples of flux can be found in "The Mistress" and "Absent from Thee," treated below.

Such a doctrine of change implies a rejection of Providence, which is made explicit in lines such as these from "A Dialogue Between Strephon and Daphne," spoken by Strephon:

Change is fate, and not design
Be by my example wise,
Faith to pleasure sacrifice. (ll. 59, 63-4, p. 9)

In choosing pleasure over faith, Rochester dismisses conventional fideism; but in choosing fate over design, he goes further, and rejects the teleological notion of design, the cherished argument that such a well-organized universe could have been created only by a benevolent and rational Will (God).

Rochester's treatment of religion in his poetry, like the influence of Lucretius, is a major aspect of his vision of the world of flux; he was no trifling exploiter of religious images and concepts, but an active and inventive skeptic who formed his poetic vision to a large degree upon doubt of faith and the fixities of religion. As D. C. Allen says, he was "the atheist's laureate."¹⁶

A central document in Rochester's restless questioning of religious belief is a philosophical tour de force, "Upon Nothing" (pp. 118-120). The poem is a mock-panegyric to Nothing, out of which all creation, according to orthodox Christian theology, is supposed to have come. Rochester ironically inverts the Christian values, praising nihil itself rather than Creation ex nihilo. He praises Nothing, gives it character and sympathy, and opposes to it Something, which, in his inversion of Christian theology, approaches the orthodox view of Nothing.

The first part of the poem is the ironical encomium, like Pope's later praise of Dulness:

Nothing! Thou elder brother even to Shade:
Thou hadst a being ere the world was made,
And well-fixed, art alone of ending not afraid.
(ll. 1-3, p. 118)

Nothing, in Rochester's view, is "alone" in being "well-fixed"; only it, rather than God, Creation, or Providence, can be assured of everlasting existence.

The ironical thesis is continued in Rochester's account of Creation, which is not a positive act, but a usurpation of Nothing's rightful reign:

9
Matter, the wicked'st offspring of thy race,
By form assisted, flew from thy embrace,
And rebel Light obscured thy reverend dusky face.

* * * * *

Is or Is Not, the two great ends of Fate,
And True or False, the subject of debate,
That perfect or destroy the vast designs of state--

When they have racked the politician's breast,
Within thy bosom most securely rest,
And when reduced to thee, are least unsafe and best.
(ll. 13-15, p. 118; ll. 31-36, p. 119)

The shift from cosmic to terrestrial concerns reveals one of Rochester's favorite topics, the hollowness of religion as practiced in this life:

Though mysteries are barred from laic eyes,
And the divine alone with warrant pries
Into thy bosom, where the truth in private lies,

Yet this of thee the wise may truly say:
Thou from the virtuous nothing dost delay,
And to be part of thee the wicked wisely pray.
(ll. 22-27, p. 119)

Rochester's anticlericalism, so vividly presented in "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind" (below), is again apparent in ll. 22-24. The high and ghostly matters of priestcraft are reduced to a busy prying into nothing. Non-priests can expect no better; the virtuous (l. 26) receive their reward (again, nothing) without delay, and the wicked welcome oblivion as an alternative to hellfire.

Rochester's mordant paean to Nothing as the end of all is sustained in the last stanza:

The great man's gratitude to his best friend,
Kings' promises, whores' vows--towards thee they bend
Flow swiftly into thee, and in thee ever end.
(ll. 49-51, p. 120)

The apocalyptic note (Nothing is ever the end) accompanies a significant choice of words: actual things "bend" toward Nothing, and "flow" into it, "flow" recalling Heraclitus' statement concerning the world, that "all things are a flowing." Rochester's rejection of Christian absolutes reaffirms his world of flux.

Rochester continues his exploration of nothing in his translation of these lines from Seneca's Troades:

post mortem nihil est ipsaque mors nihil,
 velocis spatii meta novissima.
 spem ponant avidi, solliciti metum;
 tempus nos avidum devorat et chaos.
 mors individua est, noxia corpori
 nec parcens animae. Taenara et aspero
 regnum sub domino limen et obsidens
 custos non facili Cerberus ostio
 rumores vacui verbaque inania
 et par sollicito fabula somnio.
 quaeris quo iaceas post obitum loco?
 quo non nata iacent. (ll. 397-408)¹⁷

In literal translation, the lines read thus:

There is nothing after death, and death itself is nothing, the final goal of a course full swiftly run. Let the eager give up their hopes; their fears, the anxious; greedy time and chaos engulf us altogether. Death is a something that admits no cleavage, destructive to the body and unsparing of the soul. Taenarus and the cruel tyrant's kingdom and Cerberus, guarding the portal of no easy passage--all are but idle rumours, empty words, a tale light as a troubled dream. Dost ask where thou shalt lie when death has claimed thee? Where they lie who were never born.¹⁸

Rochester's "A Translation from Seneca's 'Troades',

Act II, Chorus" reads:

After death nothing is, and nothing, death:
 The utmost limit of a gasp of breath.
 Let the ambitious zealot lay aside
 His hopes of heaven, whose faith is but his pride;
 Let slavish souls lay by their fear,

Nor be concerned which way nor where
 After this life they shall be hurled.
 Dead, we become the lumber of the world,
 And to that mass of matter shall be swept
 Where things destroyed with things unborn are kept.
 Devouring time swallows us whole;
 Impartial death confounds body and soul.
 For Hell and the foul fiend that rules
 God's everlasting fiery jails
 (Devised by rogues, dreaded by fools),
 With his grim, grisly dog that keeps the door,
 Are senseless stories, idle tales,
 Dreams, whimsys, and no more.¹⁹

What ~~are~~ interesting in Rochester's translation ~~are~~ the references to Christianity not in the original that wrench the poem out of its exclusively classical context and reveal once more Rochester's concern with the failure of the Christian ideal.

Rochester goes beyond mere agreement with Seneca to add a statement of his own. He shortens the description of the pagan world (Taenarus, Pluto, Cerberus) to one line about the "grisly dog" so that he could interpolate a reference to the Christian: "Hell and the foul fiend that rules/God's everlasting fiery jails/ (Devised by rogues, dreaded by fools)." The two main elements of Rochester's religious skepticism, rejection of orthodox theology and anticlericalism, are here also, as they are in "Upon Nothing." Rochester diminishes the idea of Hell to a lockup, and equates priests and rogues, believers and fools. At the end of the poem, they all descend to nothingness, another parallel to "Upon Nothing," though Rochester is using Seneca's thought here, not his own.

The beginning of the poem has a similar anticlerical addition by Rochester. Where Seneca refers only to the hopes and fears of the eager and the anxious, Rochester substitutes

an "ambitious zealot," whose "hopes of heaven" are vain, whose "faith is but his pride." This contemporary figure will be "hurled" (the word recalls the translation from Lucretius above) to nothingness. Verbs such as "hurled" and "swept" evoke once again the restless animation of the world of flux, which overcomes the stability of the world of faith.

Rochester's choice of Seneca's Chorus is itself significant, because it harmonizes with his own beliefs. So, too, is his only other surviving translation from Lucretius, this one a close rendering of I. 44-49:

The gods, by right of nature, must possess
 An everlasting age of perfect peace;
 Far off removed from us and our affairs;
 Neither approached by dangers nor by cares;
 Rich in themselves, to whom we cannot add;
 Not pleased by good deeds, nor provoked by bad. (p. 35)

If Rochester believed in a God at all, it would be the indifferent deity of Lucretius, whose description impressed Rochester enough to warrant translation.

Rochester's love lyrics, though they do not address as directly as the poems above the conflict between the world of faith and the world of flux, nevertheless continue his vision and infuse it with a wistfulness that is absent in the asseveration of his "theological" poems. An example is the fine lyric "Absent from Thee":

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

Dear! From thine arms then let me fly,
 That my fantastic mind may prove
 The torments it deserves to try
 That tears my fixed heart from my love.

When, wearied with a world of woe,
 To thy safe bosom I retire
 Where love and peace and truth does flow,
 May I contented there expire;

Lest, once more wandering from that heaven,
 I fall on some base heart unblest,
 Faithless to thee, false, unforgiven,
 And lose my everlasting rest. (pp. 88-89)

Dustin Griffin has noted the proleptic quality of the poem, how it anticipates future conditions in the present moment. The poet's mind is flitting restlessly, wandering in the moment from absence to return to absence again. Phrases such as "let me fly" and "fantastic mind" evoke the sense of movement and flux that characterizes the poet's mind.

The religious suggestion, which is particularly evident in the last stanza ("heaven," "unblest," "unforgiven," "everlasting") adds another plane of experience to the poem, enriching its theme of compulsive inconstancy. The poet and his mistress are metaphorically seen as the soul and the God it addresses (though a maternal deity, e.g., "safe bosom"). The soul (lover) aspires to faithfulness, but sin (inconstancy) is inevitable, and so is the turning away. The result is not irony or mockery, as in "Upon Nothing," or the translation from Seneca, but a plaintive realization of inexorable change, which is enriched by a sense of inevitable sin and dependence on divine mercy.

The last three stanzas of "The Mistress" evoke the same feeling of helplessness in the face of change:

Alas! 'tis sacred jealousy,
 Love raised to an extreme:
 The only proof 'twixt her and me
 We love, and do not dream.

Fantastic fancies fondly move
 And in frail joys believe,
 Taking false pleasure for true love;
 But pain can ne'er deceive.

Kind jealous doubts, tormenting fears,
 And anxious cares, when past,
 Prove our hearts' treasure fixed and dear,
 And make us blest at last. (ll. 25-36, p. 88)

The tone here, as in "Absent from Thee," resists irony.

"Blest," "fixed and dear," and "sacred" represent not crypto-religious absolutes subject to mockery so much as a distant unreachable ideal, the search for which founders on "fantastic fancies," "frail joys," and dreams.

A similar ambivalence can be seen in the lyric "Love and Life":

All my past life is mine no more;
 The flying hours are gone,
 Like transitory dreams given o'er
 Whose images are kept in store
 By memory alone.

Whatever is to come is not:
 How can it then be mine?
 The present moment's all my lot,
 And that, as fast as it is got,
 Phyllis, is wholly thine.

Then talk not of inconstancy,
 False hearts, and broken vows;
 If I, by miracle, can be
 This livelong minute true to thee,
 'Tis all that heaven allows. (p. 90)

The introduction of "heaven" and "by miracle" in the last stanza has at least a potential for cavalier impudence; Rochester could be saying that heaven itself sanctions inconstancy. More important, though, is the pervasive sense of powerlessness throughout the poem, the depiction of the

lover as beset by the world of flux.

Rochester's love lyrics, in contrast to his more philosophical poems, show a different attitude toward the world of flux and the opposing ideal, constancy. In his more philosophical poems, he mocks the absolute and upholds Lucretian epistemology. In confronting the pains of love, however, he wistfully contemplates impossible perfection, and regrets the uncertain world in which he is trapped.

II

Behavior in the World of Flux

How is one to behave in such a world? An early poem, "A Dialogue Between Strephon and Daphne," demonstrates anew Rochester's debt to Lucretius, as Rochester attempts to explain human behavior. Daphne's complaint: "All his joys are fleeting dreams,/All his woes severe extremes" (ll. 27-28), is a precise summary of Lucretius' views on love in book IV, iv. 1073-1085. Strephon's glib explanation of his wandering passions summarizes the grand thesis of De Rerum Natura, the likening of human behavior to the vagaries of nature. The metaphors of storm and flame, particularly, recall book VI:

Nymph, unjustly you inveigh:
Love, like us, must fate obey.
Since 'tis nature's law to change,
Constancy alone is strange.
See the heavens in lightnings break,
Next in storms of thunder speak,

Till a kind rain from above
Makes a calm--so 'tis in love.
Flames begin our first address;
Like meeting thunder we embrace;
Then, you know, the showers that fall
Quench the fire, and quiet all. (ll. 29-40, p. 8)

"Nature's law" as "change" is a central tenet for both Rochester and Lucretius. Daphne's startling reversal at the end only emphasizes the world of flux, the absence of order:

Silly swain, I'll have you know
 'Twas my practice long ago,
 Whilst you vainly thought me true,
 I was false in scorn of you.
 By my tears, my heart's disguise,
 I thy love and thee despise.
 Womankind more joy discovers
 Making fools, than keeping lovers. (ll. 65-72, p. 9)

Has she been faithful, and is she now speaking from pique? Or has she really been as much a rover as Strephon? One cannot say for sure; the reader is as baffled as Strephon.

Rochester is indebted to Lucretius but he is not a disciple of the Roman. When Rochester grapples with the world of the Restoration in formal satire, he is not an Epicurean, but a libertine. The withdrawal recommended by Lucretius, the retreat into contemplation and the pleasures of rest that he offers instead of the pleasures of motion, is inadequate for the fiercely engaged libertine Rochester.

The oft-noted libertinism in his poetry is not only fleshly licentiousness (though there is enough of that), but a consistent philosophy based on (a) the primacy of the senses (as counselled by Lucretius, among many others), and (b) the active pursuit of pleasure, as opposed to Epicurean rest. Though this essay proposes to halt at the brink of source study, it should be noted that the most appropriate adjective to apply to Rochester's libertine philosophy is "Hobbesian." As Pinto says:

Rochester read Hobbes's books with enthusiasm and accepted his philosophy wholeheartedly.²⁰

Hobbes was one of the intellectual leaders of the age, and had an enormous impact on Restoration literature, even if his influence only on such as Dryden and Etherege is considered. Fujimara, an authority on Hobbes's influence, says:

In fostering such a skeptical and naturalistic temper in seventeenth century thinking, no one was more influential than Thomas Hobbes. . . . the 'pernicious doctrines' of Hobbes were listened to eagerly, not only because they were presented wittily, but because they harmonized with the predilections of the Wits.²¹

The "nasty, brutish, and short"²² lives of men postulated by Hobbes find a reflection in the savage struggle of the "Satyr Against Reason and Mankind;" and the meaninglessness of this strife is an echo of Hobbes's state of nature:

To this war of every man against every man, this also is consequent, that nothing can be unjust. The notions of right and wrong, justice and injustice have there no place.²³

The abstract idea of libertinage, defended on Hobbesian grounds, unites several of Rochester's satires, among them "Timon," "A Ramble in St. James's Park," and "Tunbridge Wells"; and its most complete expression is "A Satyr Against Reason and Mankind." Each poem is characterized by a libertine persona.

Too much of the historical Rochester appears in the poems mentioned for the persona to be merely a mask; the

libertine speaker may not be Rochester in toto, but he certainly projects a good deal of him, as a look at "Timon" will confirm:

"With me some wits of thy acquaintance dine"
 . . . He asked, "Are Sedley, Buckhurst, Savile
 come?" (ll. 8, 34, p. 65)

Thus the poet is a friend of wits:

You to that passion [love] can no stranger be,
 But wits are given to inconstancy. (ll. 65-66, p. 67)

And a wit himself. Rochester's actual friendships and reputation are here recalled accurately. Various details in other satires also bring the persona of the poems close to Rochester: his familiarity with such fashionable spots as St. James's Park and Tunbridge Wells; the bilious attack on the court in the "Satyr."

So it is clear that Rochester is giving us his truth, not somebody else's; and his view is consistent throughout. The next question is: How does he apply his libertine philosophy? The "Satyr" is the best place to start in answering the question, because it is a direct philosophical statement; its objects are so large (Reason and Mankind) that large terms are required to attack them.

A leitmotiv of the "Satyr" and the key to the libertine view is an appeal to sense:

Reason, an ignis fatuus in the mind,
 Which, leaving light of nature, sense, behind.
 (ll. 12-13, p. 95)

The light of nature is sensory experience; any deviation from the senses leads the poor man through "error's fenny bogs and

thorny brakes" (1-15). The libertine is profoundly distrustful of speculative reason, as this comment on the philosopher shows:

Books bear him up awhile, and make him try
To swim with bladders of philosophy. . . .
His wisdom did his happiness destroy,
Aiming to know that world he should enjoy.
(ll. 20-21, 33-34, p. 95)

If human thought resolves itself into the extreme of useless speculation, as in "Upon Nothing," human behavior resolves itself into simple beastliness. From beginning, to middle, to end of the "Satyr," the reader can find instances of theriophily, defined by Dustin Griffin as "the argument that in many respects man is no better off in this world than the beasts."²⁴ The satire opens with a classic piece of theriophily:

Were I (who to my cost already am
One of those strange, prodigious creatures, man)
A spirit free to choose, for my own share,
What case of flesh and blood I pleased to wear,
I'd be a dog, a monkey, or a bear,
Or anything but that vain animal
Who is so proud of being rational. (ll. 1-7, p. 94)

After this, the superiority of Jowler the hound is asserted (ll. 118-122); and then the poem ends with this spiteful couplet:

If such there be [good men], yet grant me this at least;
Man differs more from man, than man from beast.
(ll. 220-221, p. 101).

"Tunbridge Wells" ends with a theriophily that is proto-Swiftian:

Faith, I was so ashamed that with remorse
I used the insolence to mount my horse;
For he, doing only things fit for his nature,
Did seem to me by much the wiser creature.
(ll. 172-175, p. 80)

Rochester does not suggest here that it is fit for man to behave as a beast. Man is not a beast, and it would be unnatural for him to act as such. Rochester satirizes men who violate their nature by straying to beastliness. He implies a hierarchy (the Great Chain of Being?) in which man is inexorably elevated and cannot sink. In "Tunbridge Wells," for instance, Rochester has a solution for a barren womb--animal vitality. But see how grotesque he makes the representatives of this vitality:

. . . .For here walk Cuff and Kick,
With brawny back and legs and potent prick,
Who more substantially will cure thy wife,
And on her half-dead womb bestow new life.
(ll. 143-146, p. 79)

In "A Ramble in St. James's Park" the satiric comparison of man and animal is even more explicit:

Three knights o' th' elbow and the slur
With wriggling tails made up to her.
(ll. 43-44, p. 41)

So a proud bitch does lead about
Of humble curs the amorous rout. (ll. 83-84, p. 43)

And in "Timon," human love is made appallingly beastly:

She asked Huff if love's flame he never felt;
He answered bluntly, "Do you think I'm gelt?"
(ll. 61-62, p. 67)

Love that becomes simply a matter of genitalia is made grotesque in Rochester. The hostess is free of the crassness of Huff, but this does not redeem her:

But age, beauty's incurable disease,
Had left her more desire than power to please.
As cocks will strike although their spurs be gone,
She with her old blear eyes to smite begun.
(ll. 49-52, p. 67)

On the one hand, humans stray too far toward animality; on the other, their civilization warps them into something perverse and savage. In "St. James's Park," Rochester finds that he can excuse his lady's natural, but not her mindless, lust.

Such natural freedoms are but just;
There's something generous in mere lust.
But to turn damned abandoned jade
When neither head nor tail persuade;
To be a whore in understanding,
A passive pot for fools to spend in! (ll. 97-102, p. 43)

"Mere lust" is honest, "generous," but the lady's whoredom of the mind, a sort of psychic impotence, is perverse and, alas, human. The unnatural atmosphere of St. James's Park with its "buggeries, rapes, and incests" and lewd mandrakes offers a "civilized" alternative to simple animality--the park is man's attempt to improve on nature--but it is not pleasant. In the "Satyr," Rochester asserts that man's civilization only warps him and drives him to greater depravity than that of the beasts:

Birds feed on birds, beasts on each other prey,
But savage man alone does man betray.
Pressed by necessity, they kill for food;
Man undoes man to do himself no good.
With teeth and claws by nature armed, they hunt
Nature's allowance, to supply their want.
But man, with smiles, embraces, friendship, praise,
Inhumanly his fellow's life betrays. (ll. 129-136, p. 99)

"Savage" and "inhumanly" are the key words here. When compared to the beasts, who normally are considered savage, man deserves the epithet more. "Inhumanly" sardonically suggests that the signal characteristic of man is inhumanity.

Faced with such chaos, Rochester makes an important behavioral point in his reaction to it: such a world is occasionally so unendurable that he cannot maintain a consistent ironical detachment, any more than can Swift in A Modest Proposal. Swift lapses briefly into moral indignation, and Rochester's libertine persona often writhes horribly in his own case of flesh. In "St. James's Park," for instance, he follows a cool, mocking passage (ll. 105-132) ("Ungrateful! Why this treachery/ To humble, fond, believing me?") with an abrupt and vehement curse of his wanton lady. Restraint is gone; he becomes a silly and ill-disposed railer, instead of the cool satirist. In "The Imperfect Enjoyment" his clever self-mockery of his sexual performance turns suddenly into a brutal denunciation of his faulty member ("Thou treacherous, base deserter of my flame,/ False to my passion, fatal to my fame," ll. 46-47, p. 39). In "Timon," his essential identification with his crude fellow-diners is depicted. He reveals a sexual obsession more exquisite than that of his companions, perhaps, but also more foul (ll. 75-82, p. 68). Also, as Griffin has noted, Timon's separation from his guests, his detachment, often breaks down:

We chanced to speak of the French king 's success. . .
(l. 57, p. 67)

Left to ourselves, of several things we prate. . .
(l. 111, p. 67)

. . .we let them cuff
Till they, mine host, and I had all enough.
(ll. 172-173, p. 72)

Though the persona insistently directs our attention to both civilized and beastly viciousness, he does have an ideal which looms, cold and impossible, above the depravity that he sees around him. He expresses it in the "Satyr," in the heat of his argument with the "formal band and beard" who challenges him:

But thoughts are given for action's government;
Where action ceases, thought's impertinent.
Our own sphere of action is life's happiness,
And he who thinks beyond, thinks like an ass.
Thus, whilst against false reasoning I inveigh,
I own right reason, which I would obey;
That reason which distinguishes by sense
And gives us rules of good and ill from thence,
That bounds desires with a reforming will
To keep 'em more in vigor, not to kill.
(ll. 94-103, pp. 97-98)

The key to this doctrine of behavior remains sense, the Lucretian epistemology, with the libertine "action," the pleasures of motion, added. But the whole passage proves again the religious turn of mind that provoked Rochester to theological discussions in his last year and to his deathbed conversion. Rochester is discussing right reason, a term borrowed from, among others, that gray eminence of Anglican rationalism, Richard Hooker. Hooker, if not the fons et origo of Anglican orthodoxy, was at least the most important spokesman; he is the compendium of the phraseology and arguments used to defend the High Church. Though it is hard to say whether Rochester was deliberately addressing Hooker specifically, Rochester's version of "right reason" necessarily challenges Hooker, the most prestigious thinker among the orthodox. It is thus instructive to examine Hooker, to see how Rochester opposes him.

Hooker posits three natural agents in man: reason, will, and appetite. Appetite, animal spirits, is "that inferior natural desire." Reason is a higher power, "Goodness. . . .seen with the eye of the understanding." Will is the combination of the two, with the provision that reason be the governor:

Reason, therefore, may rightly discern the thing which is good, and yet the will of man not incline itself thereunto, as oft the prejudice of sensible experience oversway.²⁵

Rochester cleverly redefines Hooker's hierarchy, ironically using language that seems to come right out of The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity. Several of Hooker's terms are present: "right reason," "will," "appetite," "desire." Hooker's arguments are imitated, e.g.: "Reason. . . .{T}hat bounds desires with a reforming will." But Rochester's right reason "distinguishes by sense," thus contradicting Hooker. Moreover, Rochester subordinates reason to appetite, which Hooker considered inferior. He has used Hooker's language to turn his system upside down. Once more, he has used religious terms to serve his libertine ends.

Rochester has given us the libertine ideal, the code of conduct for a man of wit such as himself, but he spends little time defending or explaining it; rather, he upholds it negatively, by casting a bilious eye on the behavior of those who are not true to "right reason" à la Rochester. He calls these heterodox types fools, and isolates two main types: the mere simpleton (whose varieties are legion), and the

speculative thinker attacked in the "Satyr." For the simpleton, the problem of a code of conduct is easy to resolve. He simply embraces a false certainty of some sort and thinks no more; he cannot apprehend the world of flux in its true complexity, and so imposes an arbitrary system upon it that gives him some peace, as for example the Bishop in "Tunbridge Wells":

He, being raised to an archdeaconry
 By trampling on religion, liberty,
 Was grown too great, and looked too fat and jolly,
 To be disturbed with care and melancholy,
 Though Marvell has enough exposed his folly.
 (ll. 60-64, pp. 75-76)

The Bishop is but one example of a panoply of simpletons Rochester presents in his satires, ranging from etiolated fops to drunken jingoists to dogmatic ecclesiastics. They differ in accidentals of age, sex, dress, and vice; but they come together as a farrago in Rochester's poetry, because they are out of touch with reality, which in Rochester is that shifting, uncertain world of flux. The simpleton, to Rochester, is someone who will not change, who is not flexible enough to adapt to nature's beauties and cruelties. Often, he is victimized, as in "Artemisia."

That poem has many ambiguities, to be sure; but the world of the fine lady, at least, is frankly the survival of the fittest, where the men of wit use the ladies, who in turn are "revenged on their undoer, man" by exploiting the simpleton. The fine lady's lip-smacking regard of him is the salivation of a middle-rank beast of prey:

But the kind, easy fool, apt to admire
 Himself, trusts us; his follies all conspire
 To flatter his, and favor our desire.
 Vain of his proper merit, he with ease
 Believes we love him best who best can please.
 On him our gross, dull, common flatteries pass,
 Ever most joyful when most made an ass.
 Heavy to apprehend, though all mankind
 Perceive us false, the fop concerned is blind,
 Who, doting on himself,
 Thinks everyone that sees him of his mind.
 These are true women's men. (ll. 124-135, p. 108)

She continues, in her story of Corinna, the concept of the ignorantly blissful fool, secure in his verities:

Fresh in his youth, and faithful in his love;
 Eager of joys which he does seldom prove;
 Healthful and strong, he does no pains endure
 But what the fair one he adores can cure;
 Grateful for favors, does the sex esteem,
 And libels none for being kind to him;
 Then of the lewdness of the times complains:
 Rails at the wits and atheists, and maintains
 'Tis better than good sense, than power or wealth,
 To have a love untainted, youth, and health.
 (ll. 230-239, pp. 111-112)

The word "faithful," with its religious overtones, is Rochester's inevitable religious irony at work again. It suggests that this fool heartily accepts his mistress and his religion both because they give him ease in a complex world. He doesn't have to think or be uncertain. It is no accident that he rails against wits and atheists together; he equates intelligence, "good sense," and doubt, and holds for "youth and health"--placid animal contentment--over human intelligence. But he is not allowed to be happy, because he is abused monstrously by those of superior wit. "Artemisia" is the starkest example of his penalty for contentment. In "Timon," the simpleton is not killed, but simply made

ridiculous; again, though, the salient characteristic is dogmatic asseveration, expressed in matters from politics:

"Damn me!" says Dingboy, "The French cowards are.
They pay, but th' English, Scots, and Swiss make war."
(ll. 155-156, p. 70)

and literature:

". . . Was ever braver language writ by man?"
Kickum for Crowne declared; said in romance
He had outdone the very wits of France."
(ll. 131-133)

Such foolishness comes from ignorance and want of sense; these simpletons, and others, in "Tunbridge Wells" and "St. James's Park," are not very intelligent, and so impose a primitive order on the world (noisy chauvinism, easy belief) which is ridiculous and sometimes hazardous.

In the "Satyr," however, Rochester attacks the other type who orders the world arbitrarily, the intelligent man who is addicted to speculative reason:

Your reason hinders, mine helps to enjoy,
Renewing appetites yours would destroy.
My reason is my friend, yours is a cheat;
Hunger calls out, my reason bids me eat;
Perversely, yours your appetite does mock:
This asks for food, that answers, "What's o'clock?"
This plain distinction, sir, your doubt secures:
'Tis not true reason I despise, but yours. (ll. 104-111, p. 98)

Thus speculative reason, a denial of Rochester's "right reason" based on the senses, can do as much ill as simple doltishness, because the would-be philosopher has his own blueprint. He pursues the banshee of the Absolute into the intellectual Bad Lands:

Stumbling from thought to thought, falls headlong down
 Into doubt's boundless sea, where, like to drown,
 Books bear him up awhile, and make him try
 To swim with bladders of philosophy;
 In hopes still to o'ertake th' escaping light,
 The vapor dances in his dazzling sight
 Till, spent, it leaves him to eternal night.
 Then old age and experience, hand in hand,
 Lead him to death, and make him understand,
 After a search so painful and so long,
 That all his life he has been in the wrong. (ll. 18-28, p. 95)

The influence of Lucretius is very strong here; the dancing vapor, escaping light, and dazzling sight are that slippery, unfocused reality that the analytic philosopher chases in vain. Rochester alludes to Lucretius again, in this passage:

What rage ferments in your degenerate mind
 To make you rail at reason and mankind?
 Blest, glorious man! to whom alone kind heaven
 An everlasting soul has freely given,
 Whom his great Maker took such care to make
 That from himself he did the image take
 And this fair frame in shining reason dressed
 To dignify his nature above beast;
 Reason, by whose aspiring influence
 We take a flight beyond material sense,
 Dive into mysteries, then soaring pierce
 The flaming limits of the universe,
 Search Heaven and Hell, find out what's acted there,
 And give the world true grounds of hope and fear. (ll. 58-71)

Rochester masterfully undercuts his opponent with the phrase "flaming limits of the universe," which is borrowed ("flammanitia moenia mundi") from De Rerum Natura, I, 73. The irony is in the fact that the philosopher uses the words of Lucretius, who, with that phrase, ridicules such speculation. The philosopher deserves such mockery, because he is such a pompous fool. The simpleton in "Artemisia" rails at wits and atheists, and is thus by implication a fond believer; Rochester's opponent here, significantly, is an aggressively devout believer too. Rochester

clearly condemns as fools all men who abandon the "right reason" appropriate to the world of flux and rush to embrace Certitude.

III

"A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country"

Rochester's longest satire, "A Letter from Artemisia in the Town to Chloe in the Country," may come to be regarded as his masterpiece. It is certainly his most comprehensive view of his world, taking in the crumbling of the ideal, the libertinism modified from Lucretius, and the theriophily of the "Satyr." "Artemisia" combines the public and external view of Rochester's satires with the private vision of his love lyrics to produce a satire darker than either, because of the breadth of its vision. It is also unusual in having a female persona and a box-within-a-box structure. Artemisia's letter to a curious country friend is not gossip narrative but a skillful drama, with sub-plots set inside the poem like so many concentric boxes. Artemisia relates her own thoughts at first, and then switches to a description of a fashionable lady, slightly disgusting and full of amorous intrigue, who in turn narrates the story of Corinna, a ruthlessly exploited and then exploitative femme fatale of the town. The poem ends with Artemisia once more writing directly to Chloe. The poem is written from the point of view of not one but two women (Artemisia and the fine lady), is addressed as a personal letter to a female audience, and relates the lives and feelings of three different women.

The poem has some inheritance from Horace's sixth satire of the second book. The judicious Roman compares the town and the country and plumps for the country. Wryly, he discusses the hustle and the trivial concerns of Rome, and offers instead the moderation, leisure, and expansiveness of mind to be had in his country villa. He clinches his argument with the story of the country mouse and the town mouse. The town mouse, tired of his rustic cousin's plain fare, offers him the sumptuous delights of a town table, only to be driven precipitously from the scene by Molossian dogs.

There are plenty of Molossian dogs in Rochester's satire, and all kinds of mice, from both town and country, for them to chase. But what is lacking in "Artemisia" that was so comfortingly apparent in Horace is the ideal that counterbalances the sordid. "Artemisia," has more horror and chaos in it than even the "Satyr," which at least entertains a notion of "right reason" and "God-like men." In "Artemisia," ideal love is dismissed as a quaint piece of Elizabethan lace, and nastiness and brutality prevail.

Artemisia does not hesitate even to diminish the muse. As if to spite even her *métier*, she self-consciously offers at the outset a snickering parody of the traditional invocation of the muse:

Dear Artemisia, poetry's a snare;
 Bedlam has many mansions; have a care.
 Your muse diverts you, makes the reader sad;
 You fancy you're inspired; he thinks you mad.
 Consider, too, 'twill be discreetly done
 To make yourself the fiddle of the town,
 To find th' ill-humored pleasure at their need,
 Cursed if you fail, and scorned though you succeed!
 Thus, like an arrant woman as I am,
 No sooner well convinced writing's a shame,
 That whore is scarce a more reproachful name
 Than poetess-- (ll. 16-27, pp. 104-105)

Vieth defines "fiddle" as "mirth-maker, jester," but this is a euphemism; in "Tunbridge Wells," a "Scotch fiddle" (l. 113) is slang for a sexual itch. "Arrant" also has a sexual double entendre which emphasizes the sinfulness of poetry. The yoking of poetry and prostitution sets the tone for the satire; it is a vicious echo of the "Satyr": "For wits are treated just like common whores;/First they're enjoyed, and then kicked out of doors" (ll. 37-38).

In some respects, Artemisia, however slightly she flirts with obscenity, resembles the woman in "St. James's Park," who engages in sex not out of "mere lust" but out of sheer perversity--"a damned abandoned jade/Whom neither head nor tail persuade." Artemisia's plunge into poetry is in almost the same exquisitely decadent spirit:

Like men that marry, or like maids that woo,
 Cause 'tis the very worst thing they can do,
 Pleased with the contradiction and the sin,
 Methinks I stand on thorns till I begin. (ll. 28-31, p. 105)

The woman's point of view can also be employed to portray a Hobbesian state of nature the more effectively. Artemisia does not shrink from the knowledge that she has bigger, stronger

rivals in the world who nevertheless perish, i.e., the men of wit:

How would a woman's tottering bark be tossed
Where stoutest ships, the men of wit, are lost?
(ll. 12-13, p. 104)

Artemisia, ironically named after the virgin goddess of the moon and the hunt, has set the stage: she lives in a world in which even the stronger creatures perish, one in which she herself has not retained innocence. Her disillusionment is captured in her regretful address to "the lost thing, love":

Love, the most generous passion of the mind,
The softest refuge innocence can find,
The safe director of unguided youth,
Fraught with kind wishes, and secured by truth;
That cordial drop heaven in our cup has thrown
To make the nauseous draught of life go down;
On which one only blessing, God might raise
In lands of atheists, subsidies of praise,
For none did e'er so dull and stupid prove
But felt a god, and blessed his power in love--
This only joy for which poor we were made
Is grown, like play, to be an arrant trade.
The rooks creep in, and it has got of late
As many little cheats and tricks as that. (ll. 32-53, p. 105)

Artemisia's tone is puzzling here. The self-conscious facetiousness of her beginning, when she reflects hyberbolically upon the dangers of poetry, makes the reader suspect that the tear she sheds for lost love is not quite sincere. Corinna's victim, entering later in the poem, did not find love a soft refuge for innocence, or "a safe director of unguided youth." Artemisia's superlatives ("most generous," "softest," "only joy") suggest that, just as she mocks poetry by dramatically exaggerating its sinfulness, she mocks the ideal with her lofty

encomium by sarcastically alluding to its distance from the real. On the other hand, she could be genuinely mourning the fallen estate of love, as Rochester does in his love lyrics, emphasizing the sadness of losing pure love. Artemisia's combination of passive description and the willful flippancy she displays at the beginning makes for an unstable point of view; her mind, as well as her world, is in a state of flux.

Artemisia then proceeds to blame her sex (a diatribe made more convincing because of the female persona) for the withering of love:

And deaf to nature's rule, or love's advice,
{Women} forsake the pleasure to pursue the vice.
To an exact perfection they have wrought
The action, love; the passion is forgot.
'Tis below wit, they tell you, to admire,
And ev'n without approving, they desire.
Their private wish obeys the public voice:
'Twixt good and bad, whimsey decides, not choice.
Fashions grow up for taste; at forms they strike;
They know what they would have, not what they like.
Bovey's a beauty, if some few agree
To call him so; the rest to that degree
Affected are, that with their ears they see.
(ll. 60-72, p. 106)

Like the lady in "St. James's Park," these ladies lust not for pleasure, but lust perversely. In the last line, the pun on "affected," which means "foppish" as well "influenced," and the violent synaesthesia, "with their ears they see," indicate that the ladies are out of touch with their senses, in clear violation of Rochester's Lucretian code. They have taken on so much of the unnatural, polished surfaces of the town ("fashions") that they are now "deaf to nature's rule."

Artificiality, the divorce from the senses that Artemisia refers to in the series of clever antitheses ("pleasure. . .Vice"; "private wish. . . .public voice"; "what they would have. . . . what they like"); makes these ladies "below wit," as the subtly ambiguous phrase suggests, because they do not "admire," but "ev'n without approving, desire."

The arrival of the fine lady is the arrival of another sovereign human trait: beastliness. After dismissing her husband, she embraces her pet monkey in a scene repulsive because of its barely repressed eroticism:

The dirty, chattering monster she embraced,
And made it this fine, tender speech at last:
"Kiss me, thou curious miniature of man!
How odd thou art! how pretty! how japan!
Oh, I could live and die with thee!" Then on
For half an hour in compliment she run.
(ll. 141-146, p. 108)

The embrace, the kiss, the sexual pun on "die," the compliment, are a grotesque parody of human romance. The fine lady, the product of exquisite breeding, has gone past the jejune whimsey of fashion and has turned full circle, becoming at last a beast.

The theme of animality, which has been seen in "Satyr," becomes plain shortly after Artemisia complains about the overly-mannered ladies. The fine lady maintains that the men of wit should not become fashionable lovers because they are cunning creatures who see through the deceits of women:

When I was married, fools were à la mode.
 The men of wit were then held incommode,
 Slow of belief, and fickle in desire,
 Who, ere they'll be persuaded, must inquire
 As if they came to spy, not to admire.
 With searching wisdom, fatal to their ease,
 They still find out why what may, should not please;
 Nay, take themselves for injured when we dare
 Make 'em think better of us than we are,
 And if we hide our frailties from their sights,
 Call us deceitful jilts and hypocrites.
 They little guess, who at our arts are grieved,
 The perfect joy of being well deceived.
 (ll. 103-115, p. 107)

This is the Hobbesian struggle. The woman, though she cannot deceive the men of wit, attempts to camouflage herself. But even the superior men of wit are denied any reward for being superior. Their "searching wisdom" is "fatal to their ease"; they lack even the "joy of being well deceived." The fine lady's diction gives force to her unconscious thesis that the artificial, jaded courtier sinks to beastliness. Her affected Gallicisms and the modish phrase "Let me die," a pun which hints at sex, serve to couple the refined and the savage. Indeed, the fine lady presents beastliness as paradoxically predominant in the over-refined town. The rest of the poem is devoted to the nasty, brutish, and short lives of its denizens.

If the women are themselves prey, they too are provided with victims: foolish men. The story of Corinna is a frank descent into the survival of the fittest:

Till fate, or her ill angel, thought it fit
 To make her dote upon a man of wit,
 Who found 'twas dull to love above a day;
 Made his ill-natured jest, and went away.
 Now scorned by all, forsaken, and oppressed,

She's a memento mori to the rest;
 Diseased, decayed, to take up half a crown
 Must mortgage her long scarf and manteau gown.
 Poor creature! who, unheard of as a fly,
 In some dark hole must all the winter lie.
 (ll. 197-206, p. 110)

Corinna has been used, poor creature, but she doesn't provoke sympathy, because she is compared to a fly. The entire satire is likewise shot through with animal imagery: the fine lady sends away her "beastly" husband (l. 86); the fools are ever "most joyful when made an ass" (l. 129); and Corinna's victim is "an unbred puppy" (l. 239). These blunt comparisons only serve to underline the fine lady's point about the nature of society. As she says:

A woman's ne'er so ruined but she can
 Be still revenged on her undoer, man;
 How lost soe'er, she'll find some lover, more
 A lewd, abandoned fool than she a whore.
 (ll. 185-188, p. 110)

Artemisia annoys with her inconsistency, the fine lady repels with her open animality, but Corinna shocks with the logical reductio of her struggle:

'Tis time to poison him, and all's her own.
 Thus meeting in her common arms his fate,
 He leaves her bastard heir to his estate,
 And, as the race of such an owl deserves
 His own dull lawful progeny he starves.
 (ll. 247-251, p. 112)

The fine lady sums up:

"Nature, who never made a thing in vain,
 But does each insect to some one ordain,
 Wisely contrived kind keeping fools, no doubt,
 To patch up vices men of wit wear out."
 (ll. 252-255, p. 112)

Nobody wins, really: the men of wit are baffled and discontented by the very cunning that makes them powerful; the

women are cruelly exploited by the men of wit; they in turn eat smaller fish, the fools.

The failure of the men of wit is a particularly chilling vision of despair, because the man of wit has "right reason" based on sense, as recommended in the "Satyr." But the senses, ultimately, are failures. The unhappiness of the man of wit is scattered throughout Rochester's poems: the uncertainty of love in his lyrics; the impotence of "The Imperfect Enjoyment"; the aggravated railing in "Imperfect Enjoyment" and "St. James's Park"; and finally, the transmogrification of Rochester's "right reason" into "wisdom, fatal to their ease." All can be traced to the Lucretian uncertainty of sensory perception, i.e., the failure of the senses, which nevertheless are all we have. The man of wit's private Lucretian chaos reflects the social anarchy of Hobbes's state of nature, in which the fine lady has realized her vision of the sweet monkey universe.

But while the fine lady emphasizes the animal world of society, Artemisia holds true to her concept of society as effete, civilized decadence. In speaking of the lady, she says:

Nature's as lame in making a true fop
As a philosopher; the very top
And dignity of folly we attain
By studious search, and labor of the brain,
By observation, counsel, and deep thought:
God never made a coxcomb worth a groat.
We owe that name to industry and arts:
An eminent fool must be a fool of parts. (ll. 154-161, p. 109)

Like Etherege's Sir Fopling, the fool of parts is, ironically, the only pure thing left in the world of flux.

"Nature" is referred to again, but Artemisia is at pains to add human aspiration, reason, to it. In a way, Artemisia's vision, while not as violent as the fine lady's, is the more terrifying. Human beings sprang from the jungle; they could possibly become inured to it again. But civilization and reason, man's distinguishing parts ("studious search," "labor of the brain," "observation," etc.) are capable of creating something more disgusting than can lame Nature and God: the fool of parts.

Artemisia, though, is not now a standard to correct the fine lady any more than she was at the beginning. The fine lady spins a tale of deceit, revenge, lust, and murder; but Artemisia merely chides her for her "impertinence." Artemisia remains too disturbingly and ambiguously detached for us to trust her as a model of recta ratio. She closes her epistle with a sigh that promises much:

But now 'tis time I should some pity show
To Chloe, since I cannot choose but know
Readers must reap the dullness writers sow.
By the next post such stories I will tell
As, joined with these, shall to a volume swell,
As true as heaven, more infamous than hell.
But you are tired, and so am I.

Farewell. (ll. 258-264, p. 112)

Once again, Artemisia's tone is unfathomable. Is she sincere? Is she mocking? Has she placidly accepted the perversion of her society, passively describing it throughout?

The apocalyptic note at the end ("As true as heaven, more infamous than hell"), like the description of love and the dangers of poetry, cannot be taken seriously without reservations. The swelling volume of her hyperbole may be just that: ironic jeux d'esprits used to mock a world she sees as low comedy, witless and in bad taste. Or, she may be expressing a genuine sense of loss and impending catastrophe. Just as her passage on love can be seen as true regret for a lost ideal, so her close can be seen as an anticipation of apocalypse for an unredeemable world. But does Artemisia have the moral energy for such an assertion ("But you are tired and so am I. Farewell.")?

The uncertainty of Artemisia's world pervades Rochester's poetry. Artemisia is like Daphne of "Strephon and Daphne": it is impossible to detect how either really feels. Ambivalence might result naturally from Rochester's studied rejection of the ideal, in favor of his world of flux. But Rochester eventually shrank from his vision, and underwent conversion in panic on his early venereal deathbed. Perhaps an ignis fatuus was better than no light at all.

Footnotes

- ¹Thomas Fujimara, Restoration Comedy of Wit (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p. 40.
- ²D. C. Allen, Doubt's Boundless Sea (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1964), p. x.
- ³Allen, p. 132.
- ⁴Fujimara, p. 41.
- ⁵Russel M. Geer, trans., On Nature, by Lucretius, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), p. 280.
- ⁶David Farley-Hills, ed., Rochester: The Critical Heritage (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972), p. 136.
- ⁷John Dryden, Letters of John Dryden, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham: Duke University Press, 1942), p. 9.
- ⁸John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, ed. David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), p. 35. This edition is the one used throughout the thesis.
- ⁹See Dryden's introduction to his translation of Lucretius in The Poems of Dryden, ed. George R. Noyes (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1909), pp. 178-179.
- ¹⁰Rochester, pp. 34-35.
- ¹¹Dryden, p. 182.
- ¹²Geer, p. 3.
- ¹³Lucretius, De Rerum Natura, ed. W. H. D. Rouse (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).
- ¹⁴A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles, ed. Sir James Murray et al., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1919), V, 465.
- ¹⁵Geer, pp. 40-41.

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¹⁶Allen, p. x.

¹⁷Seneca, Seneca's Tragedies, tr. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), I, 156.

¹⁸Miller, p. 157.

¹⁹Rochester, pp. 150-151.

²⁰Vivian de Sola Pinto, Enthusiast in Wit: A Portrait of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 22.

²¹Fujimara, pp. 43-44.

²²Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan in Hobbes: Selections, ed. Frederick J. E. Woodbridge (New York: Scribners, 1930), p. 253.

²³Ibid., p. 256.

²⁴Dustin Griffin, Satires Against Man: The Poems of Rochester (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1973), p. 175.

²⁵Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, in The Renaissance in England, ed. Hyder Rollins and Herschel Baker (Lexington, Mass.: D. C. Heath, 1954), pp. 186-87.

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