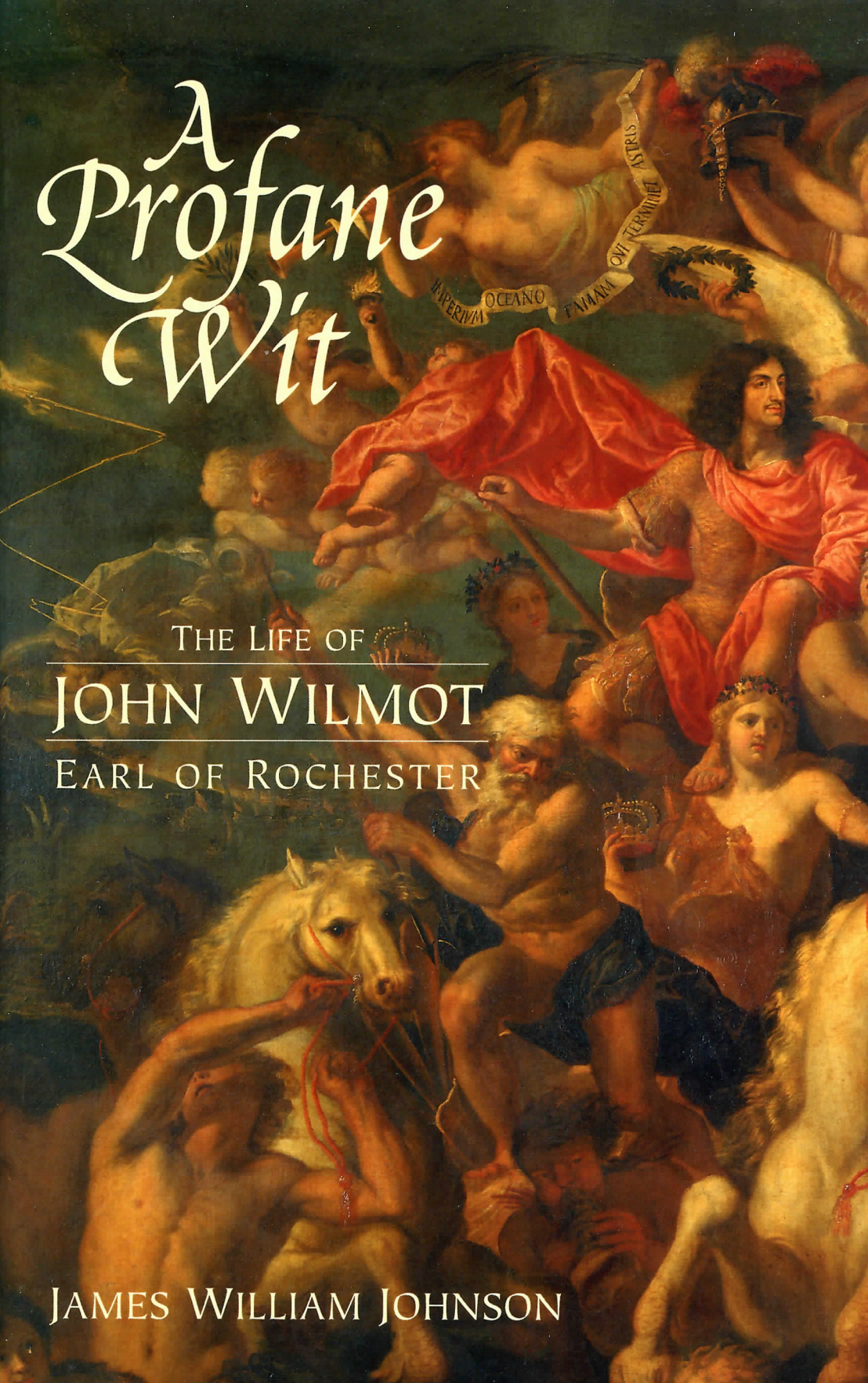
A Profane Wit
IMPERIVM OCEANO FAMAM QVI TERMINET ASTRIS
THE LIFE OF
JOHN WILMOT
EARL OF ROCHESTER
JAMES WILLIAM JOHNSON

A Profane Wit

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John Wilmot, Second Earl of Rochester. Portrait by Sir Peter Lely. Collection of Sir Harry Malet, Somerset County Council, Dillington House. Reproduced by permission.

A Profane Wit

The Life of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester

James William Johnson

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James William Johnson
July 2004

INTRODUCTION

THE ROCHESTER LEGENDS

> The very name of Rochester is offensive to modest ears. . . .
> —David Hume, *History of Great Britain* (1757)

Early in the morning of July 26, 1680, John Wilmot, Baron of Adderbury, Viscount Athlone, and Earl of Rochester, died at the age of thirty-three, ravaged by the effects of syphilis and gonorrhea. After lying on his deathbed for nine weeks of bodily torment and even worse "agonies of his Mind [that] sometimes swallowed up the sense of what he felt in his Body," he died, according to Bishop Gilbert Burnet's avidly read account of the final days, without a shudder or sound.[1]

The death of the brilliant but infamous peer immediately produced a sheaf of elegies that hailed his Christian demise. Samuel Woodford devoted fourteen stanzas to describing the departed's life and deathbed repentance, concluding, "Rochester in the LAMB'S fresh blood new dy'd / All robed in white sings Lauds to him whom he deny'd." An anonymous elegy hailed him as "*Seraphic* Lord! whom Heav'n for wonders meant. . . ." Samuel Holland likewise proclaimed: "The Mighty *Rochester* a *Convert* Dies,/ He fell a Poet, but a Saint shall Rise." And there were others.[2]

The poetic efforts at sanctifying John Wilmot were soon followed by two highly influential prose treatises by notably pious men of the cloth. In *A Sermon Preached at the Funeral of the Honorable John Earl of Rochester*, Robert Parsons concluded with an exhortation to family and friends to "turn their sorrows into joys, by the comfortable consideration of his being a Penitent upon earth, and a Saint in heaven." Subsequently, Burnet's *Some Passages in the Life and Death of John Earl of Rochester, Written by His Own Direction on His Death-bed* appeared (1680), furthering the canonizing process.

Burnet went into detail about Wilmot's last agonizing days of suffering, repentance, and joyous conversion, evoking the pattern of saints and martyrs set up by earlier *vitae* or saints' legends, and declaring, "Now he is at rest, and I am

very confident enjoys the Fruits of his late, but sincere Repentance."[3] These two prose works, authorized by Rochester and his family, were a clear attempt to recast the events of his life in such a way as to make him a moral exemplum for the ages. His family went about destroying such evidence as might diminish his evolving legendary status as penitent and saint; they made valiant attempts as late as 1749 to suppress material that sustained his earlier, ungodly reputation.

But in their zeal to stress the miracle of his Christian conversion, they permitted him to be described as "the greatest of sinners" and subverted their own purpose. His mother and wife looked on approvingly as Robert Parsons spoke, then printed, provocative statements like these:

> For this was the heightening and amazing circumstance of his sins, that he was so diligent and industrious to recommend and propagate them; not like those of old that *hated the light*, but those the Prophet mentions, *Is. 3.9 who declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not, that take it upon their shoulders, and bind it to them, framing Arguments for Sin. . . .*[4]

Parsons's hyperbolic language peaked in a comparison of Rochester to a Miltonic Lucifer:

> And truly none but one so great in parts could be so; as the chiefest of the Angels for knowledge and power became most degenerate.

Instead of assisting a saintly legend, such statements encouraged a diabolic counter-legend. What, exactly, did the dead Earl do to cause his own chaplain to call him an example of wickedness "as remarkable as any place or age can produce"?

Unfortunately for his hagiographers, Rochester's life had been recorded by numerous diarists, letter-writers, and journal-keepers. Surreptitious copies of his "Panegyricks upon Vice" existed in numbers too great to destroy. And tales about him repeated by word of mouth persisted. From these grew the counter-legendary Earl described a century later by Dr. Samuel Johnson:

> Thus in a course of drunken gaiety and gross sensuality, with intervals of study perhaps yet more criminal, with an avowed contempt for all decency and order, a total disregard to every moral, and a resolute denial of every religious obligation, he lived worthless and useless, and blazed out his youth and his health in lavish voluptuousness, till, at the age of one and thirty, he had exhausted the fund of life, and reduc'd himself to a state of weakness and decay.[5]

Concerning details in support of this colorful depiction, Johnson said, "[I]t is not for his honour that we should remember [them], and which are not now distinctly known."

In the nineteenth century, shocked by their explicit sexuality, moralists destroyed some of the branded Earl's printed works, and his poetry, if printed at all, was severely bowdlerized. His deathbed repentance, however, was perpetuated by Sunday School tracts that reprinted some of the more titillating rhetoric from Parsons and Burnet, thereby sustaining curiosity about what sins caused so passionate a conversion. A few literary historians made bold to suggest that Rochester's poetry had merit; but the condemnation of the moralists found a voice in Sir Sidney Lee's essay on John Wilmot in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Condemning the "dissolute" life of the "profligate" nobleman, Lee said of his poetry:

> The sentiment in his love songs is transparently artificial whenever it is not offensively obscene. Numerous verses of gross indelicacy which have been put to his credit . . . may be from other pens. But there is enough foulness in his fully authenticated poems to give him a title to be remembered as the writer of the filthiest verse in the language.

Lee's quasi-official version of Rochester's life and work was challenged in due course, but it shows how an interpretation of a writer's character based on the opinions of selected contemporaries can persist, appealing to the biases of successive times and critics and affecting literary judgments. For three centuries, the man and his writings were widely castigated in ways often more revealing of his critics than of Rochester himself. Unluckily for his personal reputation, Rochester's reported actions ranged from the merely foolish to the genuinely criminal, all of them shocking to his devout contemporaries. Some of his actions were violently destructive. For these excesses, he was labeled "the Mad Earl."

Any attempt to reconstruct the life and thought of a seventeenth-century English poet-nobleman will inevitably reflect the presuppositions of the biographer and his own age. This work is as grounded in the twentieth century, as Gilbert Burnet's was in the seventeenth, and Samuel Johnson's in the eighteenth. Where they saw Rochester from theologically oriented points of view, condemning his personal sexuality as well as his sexually explicit writings, the post-Freudian biographer is expected not only to deal with the sexual aspects of Rochester's life and works but also to search for their causes in his psyche.

Only in the past few decades have scholars been free to discuss openly the previously tabooed, sexual dimensions of English life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But if such studies have done much to reveal what men and women did sexually in those centuries, they have not always identified the bio-psychological origins of sexual behavior. Some reflect the traditional assumption defined by Michel Foucault: "Sexuality was conceived of as a constant. The hypothesis was that where it was manifested in historically singular

forms, this was through various mechanisms of repression to which it was bound to be subjected in every society." Foucault's own hypothesis held that sexuality is an idiosyncratic way of fashioning the self "in the experience of the flesh" constituted from and around certain forms of behavior that exist in relation to historically specifiable systems of knowledge (i.e., rules of what is or is not "natural.")[6]

In *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*, Thomas Laqueur goes even farther, asserting that the very concept of the "natural" is erroneous:

> The comfortable notion is shaken that man is man and woman is woman and the historian's task is to find out what they did, what they thought, and what was thought about them. That "thing," sex, about which people had beliefs seems to crumble. . . . The record on which I have relied bears witness to the fundamental incoherence of stable, fixed categories of sexual dimorphism, of male and/or female. The notion, so powerful after the eighteenth century that there has to be something . . . which defines male as opposite to female and which provides the foundation for an attraction of opposites is entirely absent from classical or Renaissance medicine.[7]

In *Epistemology of the Closet*, Eve K. Sedgwick asserts that the very term "homosexual" gained acceptance only as recently as the last third of the nineteenth century and that the binary thinking it embodied has led to "a chronic, now endemic crisis of homo/heterosexual definition, indicatively male."[8] Sedgewick's "Introduction: Axiomatic" and Laqueur's chapter on Renaissance representations of sexuality and the medical theories of William Harvey (1578–1657) provide a broader context for the literary commentators and sexual historians who have tried to account for the polymorphous sexuality observable in seventeenth-century England.

Rochester's biographer inevitably confronts the problem of how much, if any, of his "creative" writing evidences his private, psycho-sexual, or biographical "reality." To some extent the same question may be asked of his presumably factual writings—letters, journals, and the like. In Rochester's case, the problem is greater because recent critical studies have tended to accentuate his shifting "personae," and the masks he often wore, poetically as well as socially.

Without trying "bladders of philosophy" to navigate such ontological and epistemological seas, I assume that whatever a man writes is *some* version of his thought, however fanciful or artificial. In instances where Rochester's candid, private utterances—to his wife, Henry Savile, or Gilbert Burnet, for example—correspond closely to ideas expressed in his poems, one may reasonably assume these reflect genuinely held beliefs. Where testimony of Rochester's interest in Lucretius is given by four separate people who knew him, it may be given creditability. Thanks to many scholars' research, there is now sufficient historical

documentation of Rochester's life and times to attempt a synthesis between the many facets of his complex mind and actions and his works.

All this research derives, of course, from twentieth-century perspectives. Can such investigations as these be used to illuminate the bio-psychic dimensions of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester? Since Rochester was preoccupied with his own and human sexuality in general, it is sometimes possible to correlate his views on a given sexual practice (e.g., masturbation) with those of his contemporaries (Aubrey, Pepys). Often, however, Rochester's inability to understand his own feelings and behavior caused him to fall back on the fixed ideas of his day and explain his actions by the temporary influence of devils or angels, or to wave away any effort to "know thyself" by simply labeling himself "the oddest, most fantastical man alive."[9]

This leaves his biographer the choice either of simply reporting and not accounting for his behavior or relying on sexual historical theorists like Laqueur, Sedgwick, and Stone on the one hand or R. D. Laing, Melanie Klein, D. W. Winnicott, and Robert Stoller, modern psychiatric theorists, on the other. In this version of his life, I have included within the text itself such psychosexual explanations as I think are justified by Rochester's own testimony or by the reconstructions of scholars; and I have put into the Notes references to modern psychiatric theories that may be helpful in making this highly complex man comprehensible. I do not pretend to psychiatric expertise; indeed, I am suspicious of efforts to "psychoanalyze" a man of a distant time and place. Yet in my hope to make the man Rochester more accessible to twenty-first-century readers, I feel justified in using certain twentieth-century terminology. Furthermore, the striking contemporaneity of Rochester's character and thought—he often appears to be a twentieth-century man displaced anachronistically into the seventeenth century—may warrant the occasional use of cultural assumptions that were only beginning to develop in his lifetime.

1

A CHRISTIAN UPBRINGING (1647–1655)

> But now Methinks some formal Band and Beard
> Takes me to Task. . . .
>
> —Rochester, *"Satyr" against Man*

John Wilmot was born at 11:00 a.m. on April 1, 1647. The astrologer and almanac-maker John Gadbury, who later recorded that information, used it to cast a horoscope, which declared that the conjunction of Venus and Mercury gave the infant an inclination to poetry, while the position of the sun "bestowed a large stock of generous and active spirits, which constantly attended this excellent native's mind, insomuch that no subject came amiss to him."[1]

Whatever the stars told about his talent as a poet, his birth on All Fools' Day was more portentous. The future Earl of Rochester was a life-long trickster and wearer of disguises. The capricious April weather that characterizes its fools was reflected in his intellectual and emotional shifts: his wild swings from gaiety to despair, from insouciant skepticism to terrified faith. His birth date also symbolized the vicissitudes of the England he was born into.

John Wilmot's parents were hardy survivors in the turbulent life of the seventeenth century. His mother, born Anne St. John on November 5, 1614, was one of the ten children of Sir John St. John of Lydiard Tregoze, in Wiltshire. As the second child and oldest daughter, Anne received as much, but no more, education than most daughters of the gentry, who were expected to marry young and begin producing male heirs. Nevertheless, she had great inborn intelligence that turned into shrewdness and iron determination during the years that ended the reign of Charles I and took the lives of three of her brothers, who died in the Royalist cause. Samuel Cooper's watercolor portrait on vellum of her was made in the year of John Wilmot's birth, when she was thirty-three. It shows a pretty woman, fashionably dressed in brocade and pearls with a hairdo of curls. Her full-lipped mouth and slightly overlong nose keep something of a girlish mien, but her clear, intelligent eyes are knowing and sad. She had long since experienced life's bitterness.[2]

As a girl, Anne St. John had disliked Lydiard Tregoze ("that dull place") and her father's tendency to stay there for long stretches of time. She preferred the family estates at Battersea and Wandsworth owned by her father's uncle, Oliver St. John, the Viscount Grandison. These were within reach of the amusements of London as well as the royal courts at St. James, Hampton, and Windsor, and the eligible young noblemen who gathered there. The extensive St. John estates lay in Battersea across the Thames from the stretch of north bank where the Danvers family held land in Chelsea that once belonged to Sir Thomas More, and where their neighbors from Oxfordshire, the Lees of Ditchley, also owned riverside properties.[3]

In October 1632 at Battersea, Anne St. John married her first husband, Sir Francis Henry (Harry) Lee, a dashingly handsome young cavalier. She was not quite eighteen, and he was sixteen, when they became wife and husband. The Dowager Lady Lee (born Eleonore Montagu) was a troublesome mother-in-law. She did not care for the St. John family and criticized them openly. She probably felt that her son was marrying at too early an age into a family whose political sympathies were distasteful to her. In any case, not long after the young couple was wed, the elder Lady Lee remarried, taking a substantial portion of the Lee property with her in the form of a jointure (joint holding of property by husband and wife with the wife as sole heir), and so creating bad blood between herself and son that lasted until his death in 1639.[4]

Harry and Anne Lee apparently had a happy enough marriage, short though it was; in later life she always showed a preference for her children by her first husband to John Wilmot, the son by her second. Three children of the St. John–Lee union survived infancy: a daughter, Eleonora, who was her mother's darling; a son, Henry ("Harry"); and another son, Francis ("Frank"), born after his father's death. During the seven-year span of their marriage, the widening rift between Charles I and Parliament created tensions among the Lees. Harry Lee was a passionate Royalist, as was his wife. His mother, however, was sympathetic to the Puritans, and her second husband, Lord Sussex, was one of the leaders of the Parliamentary rebels. When the King, in a show of strength, led troops against the insurgent Scots in 1639, the twenty-three-year-old Harry Lee followed him in a burst of Royalist loyalty. It was a fatal decision. Lee caught the smallpox; and soon after his return to Chelsea he died, refusing to let his wife near him for fear she might be infected.[5] At the age of twenty-four, Anne Lee found herself widowed, pregnant, and custodian of a toddler baronet. Despite the birth of another male child, her grief at the loss of her beloved husband was deepened when "her darling," their only daughter, died just thirteen months later. To compound her troubles, she was entangled in the legal process of sequestration, by which the Lee estates

were placed in custody while titles were cleared and lines of inheritance were established.[6]

By terms of the sequestration, Anne Lee lost all claim to the estates of her husband and sons if she married again. She did not lack for suitors. In January 1641 her father, Sir John St. John, wrote to Edward Hyde, his long-time friend and relative by marriage, that a "gentleman of ffortune" had proposed to "my daughter Lee" with promises of a jointure and a settlement for any future children. Lady Lee refused him, however, and Sir John archly suggested that were Hyde single, she might have preferred him to all others. She had proposed many toasts to Hyde's health during the recent Christmas holidays, Sir John reported.[7]

Whatever her secret preferences, the widowed Anne Lee stayed unmarried for five years. They were fearful ones for a young woman with small children in the very part of Oxfordshire where the first major battles of the Civil Wars were fought after the King raised his standard at Nottingham in 1642. In October of that year, Anne Lee supplied arms for the King's forces at the Battle of Edgehill; and when Edward Hyde, the future Lord Clarendon and Lord Chancellor of England, fled from Oxford, she hid him at Ditchley and supplied him with horses for his escape. Censured by her neighbors, she tried unsuccessfully to defend her actions to Lord Saye and the Parliamentarians, but her plea of her "mony fears" won the pity of at least one neighbor and long-time friend.[8]

Anne Lee was learning the hard lessons of surviving in a hostile, changeable world. In a letter to Hyde, she portrayed herself as filled with fear at her "ignorance . . . in worldly affaires" and a "deptter" to the kindness of a "few frinds," Hyde being "the cheefest." She then demonstrated her womanly wiles. In a postscript, she wrote: "I have ventured too prove my self a clowne too let you tast a country veneson pye if you like it command more when you please."[9]

Young Lady Lee's supportive "frinds" included men of various classes. There was a family retainer, "Geo. Pickering, Gent.," who served the Lees for thirty years and conspired with the young widow to outsmart the ploys of Lady Sussex to regain control of her grandsons' estates. After she became the Countess of Rochester, Anne Lee rewarded him by honoring his request to be buried near the Lee vault in the parish church at Spelsbury.[10] John Cary, Esq., of Oxford—always referred to as "Honest Cary"—was a trustworthy and long-serving agent for the Lees; and Cary's wife was another friend to Harry's "relict." A still stronger ally was Sir Ralph Verney of Claydon, Buckinghamshire, an old friend of Harry's father and the future godfather and official guardian of John Wilmot. And there was Edward Hyde himself, whose rise to greatness after 1660 was accompanied by his increasing services to Lady Lee and her various relatives.

Hyde's generosity lay in the future, however. During the 1640s he was in exile on the continent following Prince Charles, the young king-to-be; and

Lady Lee was forced to rely for help on the men near her in Oxfordshire. One of these was Henry Wilmot of Adderbury, who had been a companion-in-arms of Harry Lee, and who was, like him, a passionate Royalist.

The Wilmots (also Willmots and Wylmutes) had settled in Adderbury before Henry Wilmot gained fame as an aide-de-camp to the Stuarts. Their fortune had begun to improve when Henry's father, Charles Wilmot, was one of a band of adventurers and fortune hunters in Ireland during the reign of Elizabeth I. His part in putting down Tyrone's Rebellion in 1600–1602 gained him the gratitude of the Crown; and with the demonstration of his continued loyalty, he was rewarded with a series of offices and titles, culminating with his being made the Lord-President of Connaught and, in 1621, Viscount Athlone. Having made his fortune, Charles Wilmot came to England to augment his respectability. He purchased the manor house at Adderbury in 1629, and began what promised to be a worthy and dignified retirement.[11]

Charles Wilmot was twice married, and he fathered two sons by his first wife, Sarah Anderson: Arthur, who died unexpectedly in Dublin in 1632, and Henry, who succeeded his older brother as heir to their father's title and estates. Living as he had in a world ruled by primogeniture (preeminent legal rights of the first-born son), Henry had prepared himself for a career as a professional soldier, like his father before him.[12] Baptized on October 26, 1613, Henry Wilmot spent his boyhood, as did his own sons in time, with a continually absent father. There were assertions after his death that he attended Oxford. No official university records support these claims, although Charles, his father, was listed as entering Oxford in July 1587. Henry's surviving letters give no evidence of a superior literacy: the much-admired Latin documents attributed to him during his service as Charles II's envoy to the German princes at Ratisbon were the work of official scribes. Letters in his own hand, hastily written battlefield dispatches, are literate but little more.[13]

In any case, Henry Wilmot's life was one of professional military activity. Between 1635 and 1637, he served Charles I in the Dutch service as a Lieutenant of the Horse, being wounded at Breda. In 1640 he was made Commissioner General of the Horse and a member of the Council of War. In the same year, he went on the Scottish Expedition in the Second Bishop's War under the command of the Earl of Arundel; he was wounded and captured at the Battle of Newcastle, then released at York on September 30. As the M.P. from Tamworth, he always argued for reconciliation between opposing factions in Parliament, but in June 1641, he was accused of participating in the "Army Plot" against Parliament and sent to the Tower.

He surfaced again in Oxfordshire when fighting broke out there in 1642. In August, when the men of Adderbury, sympathizers with the Parliamentarians,

Figure 1. Henry Wilmot, First Earl of Rochester. Artist unknown. National Portrait Gallery, London. Reproduced by permission.

tried to go to the help of Banbury under Royalist siege, Henry Wilmot "threatened he would hang up the men and send the soudiers to their wives and children." At the Battle of Edgehill in October 1642, he led the left wing of the cavalry beside the King. In July 1643, he distinguished himself for courage at Roundway Down.[14] He had a reputation for good luck, perhaps because he was often wounded without being killed and often captured only to escape.

Figure 2. Anne St. John Wilmot, Countess of Rochester. Watercolor on vellum by Samuel Cooper. From the Collection at Althorp. Reproduced by permission.

Edward Hyde wrote to him on one occasion: "y^{e} truth is, you have soe good luck in all things, y^{t} I would fayne learne of you."[15]

The period 1643–44 was crucial for Henry Wilmot. His father Charles had died, leaving the family estates to him along with the Athlone title; his first wife, Frances Norton, died about the same time or earlier, leaving him with a young son, Charles. During these losses, Wilmot continued serving his monarch with steady determination. On June 29, 1644, he was created Baron Wilmot of Adderbury. The next day, he fought in the Battle of Cropredy Bridge, north of Banbury. Wounded twice and captured twice, he was rescued once by Lord Cornwallis, and then again by young Sir Robert Howard and his men. Despite his luck, he was arrested by Parliamentary forces on August 8, deprived of his command, and sent out of the country to France, where he joined Henrietta Maria the Queen Mother and was much celebrated for his bravery and loyalty.[16]

In April or May 1644, Henry Wilmot married the widow of Harry Lee.[17] The Lee property had recently emerged from sequestration with a penalty of

£2,000 attached, but allowing Anne Lee to remarry while remaining guardian to her sons' property. Whether the marriage was one of love, convenience, or common cause is difficult to determine. Wilmot's son Charles was heir to the family property when the marriage took place, so Anne Lee could not expect to gain anything from the Adderbury or Athlone holdings. Wilmot's future in 1644 was neither secure nor promising with the Royalists losing ground before the Parliamentary forces; on the other hand, Anne Wilmot had provoked the hostility of Oxfordshire Parliamentarians in general, and the particular animosity of Lord Saye and Lady Sussex.[18] Both Wilmots brought young children by former marriages to their union. There must have been love on both sides since each was giving additional hostages to fortune. An equally strong bond was their dedication to the Royal Cause: Henry Wilmot's military career kept the pair apart for most of their married life until he died in 1658. Their continual separations over fourteen years caused some malicious speculation about the paternity of John Wilmot.[19] However, Henry Wilmot loved cloak and dagger work; at times, he came to England in disguise. He was secretly at Ditchley in July 1646, when John Wilmot was conceived, as a letter in the Clarendon archives proves.[20]

He was back in 1651 to raise troops of loyalists for the coming Battle of Worcester in September. Following the disastrous rout of Charles II's forces at Worcester, the King was compelled to disguise himself by cutting his hair and dressing as a servant, to hide in an oak tree at Boscobel, and to dodge circuitously from place to place, traveling by night until he made his way to the coast. During these royal travails, Henry Wilmot proved his utter loyalty by accompanying his master, forging ahead to arrange for safe lodgings, raising funds, and finally arranging for a ship to carry the King into a continental exile that lasted until 1660. Charles Stuart displayed his gratitude by conferring the title Earl of Rochester on Henry Wilmot in 1652.[21]

In 1654 Lady Rochester went to France, joining her husband at Brussels in July after he finished some diplomatic duties at Ratisbon.[22] Wilmot made what seems to have been a final trip to England in 1655, trying to stir up the abortive Yorkshire uprising. After 1656 he remained on the continent working for the King's restoration to the throne of England. He impoverished himself on Charles's behalf to the point of pawning his man-servant Rose to pay off his huge debts. In October 1657, he was reported to be very ill. By February 1658, Henry Wilmot was dead.[23] Thus, when he was only ten years old, John Wilmot lost the father he probably saw no more than a dozen or so times in his life.

How the early death of his father affected him is difficult to assess. Rochester's writings mention his father only once—for the "daring loyalty" to the King the son took as a model and tried to emulate. He spoke of all he

"owed" to his parents; but the "duty" he always expressed to his mother applied to his duty to "Love and Honour" an absentee father as well. Rochester could hardly have loved a father he scarcely knew, although he could have loved an idealized image of that father. Like John Wilmot, many boys lost their fathers but managed to survive in an era when the average adult male was dead at 32.[24] Some, however, like Anthony Wood, suffered life-long anxiety and depression—as did Rochester himself—probably as a result of the early loss of a father. Gilbert Burnet's threat of an eternity separated from a loving Father/God affected Rochester considerably, and it is obvious that fear of a Father/God determined many actions in his life as well as his deathbed repentance. It is equally obvious that Rochester looked for substitute fathers for many years, finding them in tutors, older male friends, and most strikingly in King Charles II, for whom Rochester's own father had served as a surrogate parent. The depth and extent of the psychic wounds he suffered from the premature loss of his father, though unknowable, also appear to have been a strong element in his continual, and ultimately unsuccessful, struggle to free himself from his imperious mother.

In April 1658, Charles II requested permission from the Governor of Nieufort for Rose to carry the late Earl's Will to his widow in England. Sometime later, the countess planned to have his body brought back to Ditchley and buried in Spelsbury Church beside the body of her first husband. Prudently, and characteristically, she postponed having a funeral tablet made until after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, when Henry Wilmot's famous loyalty could be properly acknowledged with a Latin epitaph.[25]

During their many years of separation, Lady Rochester learned to manage without her husband, as army wives must do. The challenges she faced left little time for her to nurture her children; that she left to wet nurses and tutors. Less than two years after John Wilmot was born, Charles I was executed on January 30, 1649. The shock waves that followed were all the more severe on the household at Ditchley for the family of a Royalist soldier, chief adviser to the court in exile, spy, and furtive insurrectionist.

In 1650 the Committee for Compounding declared that all property belonging to Henry Wilmot since May 1642 must go into sequestration. Calling upon the advice of Sir Ralph Verney and her other friends, his wife engaged in a series of legal maneuvers at which she would become an expert. Some properties were not Wilmot but Lee estates in trust, she claimed. Others had been mortgaged by old Charles Wilmot before his death. Even Adderbury Manor, which had served as headquarters for Prince Rupert and his Royalist troops in 1645, had been "sold" to Edward Ashe, Esq. Since the word of aristocrats was still held sacred, and official record-keeping was casual, to say the least, no

papers of transfer needed to be produced. The Countess had the cooperative "word" of Ashe and other allies that all she claimed was true.[26]

She was also helped by the fact that her close friend and agent, Honest John Cary, was the Commissioner of Sequestrations for Oxfordshire from 1652 until 1656. Like his lady, Cary was a master of red tape: not receiving letters from his superiors in London, needing additional instructions before he could take action, misreading instructions when they finally arrived. Hard-pressed by her husband's known seditious activities, Lady Rochester was forced to rely on Puritan relatives who had influence in Parliament. Fortunately, her brother, Sir Walter St. John, was married to a cousin, the Lady Joanna, whose father, Oliver St. John, was the second most powerful man in the government after Oliver Cromwell. Lady Rochester wrote directly to Cromwell in 1656, asking his aid. All the properties in question were Lee estates, she told him, and the Lees were known Parliamentarians. Cromwell passed her request on to the Committee for Compounding. His death in 1658 terminated the effectiveness of that Committee; thus the Countess managed to keep the Lee and Wilmot properties intact. When Dr. Robert Parsons preached John Wilmot's funeral sermon, his strongest praise for his mother's maternal qualities was the shrewd management of his entitlements.[27]

After his birth in the low, Elizabethan half-timbered manor house at Ditchley in 1647, John Wilmot spent his infancy and boyhood there in carefully supervised seclusion. He was far from isolated, however: the "family" included many servants, as well as tenants living on the estate. The large, extended St. John, Lee, and Wilmot families followed the custom of the day in making frequent, prolonged visits to each other. Little John was very fond of his Uncle Walter and Aunt Joanna, who rode up often from Chelsea to visit. The estimable John Cary was on hand regularly to see to sales, purchases, and accountings. Cary's sizeable family was also on hand; several of the Cary children were married in the Ditchley chapel. The numerous interrelated Verneys, Dentons, and Gardiners, longtime friends of the Lees, were regular visitors as well.

As the *Verney Papers* show, much was going on around Ditchley in the 1650s. Lady Joanna exchanged "receipts" and homemade remedies (dried, powdered mistletoe) for the "falling sickness" (epilepsy) with old Aunt Isham. Lady Rochester and Sir Ralph Verney, John's guardian, exchanged their troubles with Parliament and the Puritans and made plans for settling the futures of "Mun" (Edmund Verney) and "Harry" (Henry Lee) to their parental satisfaction. Lady Sussex, reconciled with her former daughter-in-law in the cause of matrimony, sent eligible young ladies on visits to Ditchley to see and be seen. At one point, the Verney squire and Wilmot lady attempted matches for their

sons in turn with Miss Margaret Eure. Frank Lee actually proposed to her, but no marriage took place after all the fuss. There was endless discussion and correspondence about politics, money, property, and legal matters, and constant talk about human concerns: births, marriages, sicknesses, and deaths.[28]

Although he had three half-brothers, John Wilmot grew up as an only child. His paternal half-brother, Charles Wilmot, may have lived briefly at Ditchley after Henry Wilmot married Anne Lee, but, when Henry went into exile in France, young Charles soon followed him there and entered school in Paris. Edward Hyde described Charles, in 1653, as "a fyne youth," dutiful and promising. The boy appears to have died soon after.[29] John Wilmot's Lee half-brothers, Frank in particular, seem to have been fond of him; but they were separated from him by age, being eight or more years older than he. In 1653, when John was six and a half, Harry and Frank set off late in the year with their tutor, Mr. Godfrey, to enter De Veau's Academy in Paris. Once there, Harry and the tutor became seriously ill in January 1654, and the hapless Mr. Godfrey died on January 17 or thereabout, as Hyde informed Henry Wilmot.[30] When word came to Ditchley, Lady Rochester left hurriedly for France to see to her sons' welfare, arriving there about February 13. Harry recovered, but then Lady Rochester and Frank fell ill and were unable to travel. Not until early summer, after she had seen her husband in Brussels, did his mother return to young John after an absence of five months.[31]

After the ill-fated expedition to Paris when he was sixteen, Harry Lee had no more schooling, probably to his relief. His mother needed him to strengthen her position with the Parliamentarians while she maintained her secret ties with Hyde and the Stuarts. She arranged an ideal marriage for Harry with Ann Danvers, the daughter of her neighbor at Cornbury, Sir John Danvers, a prominent Puritan and Parliamentarian whose Oxfordshire property was adjacent to the Ditchley estate. The Danverses' riverside estate in Chelsea was also happily contiguous to Lee and St. John holdings across the Thames in Battersea. Harry and his bride were married in Spelsbury Church in May 1655.[32]

The young couple thrived in the role of Baron of Ditchley and his lady. As the Ranger of Wychwood Forest, Harry rode to hounds, hunted boars and stags, and sat in Parliament as an M.P. As newlyweds, often accompanied by Lady Rochester, Harry and Ann Lee rode about the county making wedding calls, planning parties, talking politics, and advising Penelope and John Denton to kick a "vilin" man-servant out of doors.[33] Their first surviving child, a daughter Eleonora, was born at Ditchley on June 3, 1658.[34]

Frank Lee left for the continent and the Grand Tour after Mistress Eure rejected him. A studious sort, he lacked Harry's robustness; after his return

from the Tour, he had a long illness. He studied at Oxford, taking the M.A. degree belatedly in 1663. He, too, made a suitable marriage to Lady Eleonore Pope, daughter of the Earl of Downe. His new sister-in-law was fond of young John Wilmot and kind to him, as he remembered for years to come, although eventually they engaged in a vehement quarrel over property rights.[35]

Growing up in this family flux during a troubled era, his father constantly absent and his mother often inattentive or away for extended periods, little John Wilmot followed the prescribed routines for a young male of his class. Once he passed from the care of nurses, he began schooling at the hands of a series of tutors and schoolmasters.[36] His first teacher may have been Mr. Godfrey. At the time of Godfrey's departure for Paris in 1653, Lady Rochester enlisted the services of Francis Giffard—like Godfrey, a Cambridge M.A.—who arrived at Ditchley early in 1654 shortly before the Countess departed abruptly for five months, leaving John in the care of a virtual stranger. Not quite seven, he was given into the total control of his first governor, a young clergyman in his early twenties.[37]

The roles of the "governor" and the governed child were set forth by John Wilmot in his adulthood when he wrote a letter to his own seven-year-old son in long-established parental formulas:

> I hope Charles when you receive this, and know that I have sent this gentleman to bee y^{r} tutour, you will bee very gladd to see I take such care of you, and bee very gratefull, w^{ch} is best showne in being obedient & dilligent, you are now growne bigg enough to bee a man if you can bee wise enough; & the way to bee truly wise is to serve god, learne y^{r} booke & observe the instructions of y^{r} Parents first and next y^{r} Tutour, to whom I have intirely resign'd you for this seven yeare, and according as you imploy that time you are to bee happy or unhappy for ever. . . .[38]

His clergical training at Cambridge had equipped Francis Giffard expertly to instruct his young charge at Ditchley in the ways to be happy or unhappy "for ever." This allusion to Christian eternity—and salvation or damnation in it—was an essential part of schooling in seventeenth-century England.[39] The role of Christian faith, and the implanting of it in children of tender age, was discussed in many educational tracts of the time; and the importance of that faith being Protestant was not only an historical legacy, but also a burning issue in an era when succession to the throne of England depended upon the future monarch's religious beliefs.[40]

The English fear and distrust of Roman Catholicism, or "Popery," rooted in a longstanding dislike of things Italian or Spanish, had intensified in the early 1640s, and it was widely believed that Catholics were somehow responsible for the outbreak of the Civil War. A flurry of localized anti-Catholic panics took

place in 1640 and 1641 amid rumors that Catholics were storing arms in London and Oxford, among other places. Crudely written and argued pamphlets fed fears that papists, especially English Recusants, were gathering forces to disrupt the nation. Under Charles I, most Catholics were members of the gentry; it has been estimated that as many as one-fifth of the peerage in the early seventeenth century were papists. When the civil wars began, as Robin Clifton has pointed out, the Royalist cause was feared by many to be pro-Catholic.[41]

> The horrors that Popery held for non-Catholic Englishmen were great: Protestants were not taught to regard Catholicism simply as an alternative, or even as an aberrant, form of Christianity. In pamphlet and sermon popery was presented as essentially the *debasement* of Christ's teaching, a total and blasphemous perversion of Apostolic practice. As such it was far more repugnant and damnable than any form of paganism. It was debased and perverted because successive generations of believers had slightly modified the uncompromising message of Christ in order first to permit, and then to license, their worldly pursuits and pleasures.[42]

After Cromwell and his followers succeeded in doing away with Charles I, members of the Stuart camp saw plainly that a Stuart Restoration could be accomplished only if it was identified with the Protestant religion. As the King's supporters well knew,

> seventeenth century Protestants were educated from birth to make certain assumptions about the nature of the Catholic religion and to expect certain specific patterns of behaviour from papists, and it was within the framework of these beliefs that accusations of popish responsibility for the war were heard and believed. . . .[43]

Young Prince Charles accordingly surrounded himself with such stalwart opponents of Popery as Edward Hyde and Henry Wilmot. John Wilmot's parental legacy was ostentatiously and unwaveringly Protestant. Henry Wilmot was seen in his Paris exile serving at the Protestant altar in the presence of Charles II and the Duke of York. Rough trooper that he was, he never swore, "not so much as a single dam-me," one Protestant biographer wrote. The pious Edward Hyde was unable to fault Wilmot's Protestantism; indeed, he attested to it.[44] As for Anne Wilmot, her Christian piety was proved by the testimony of the clergymen she sponsored (Robert Parsons, most notably), the approbation of neighbors who called her "the good lady at Ditchley," and the numerous references in her letters to "God's will," "devils," and "God's mercy." She was a parishioner of several churches in Oxfordshire—at Spelsbury, Woodstock, and Adderbury—where her regular attendance was recorded by gratified vicars.[45]

Although the Countess of Rochester was a staunch Anglican, her Christian charity (or possibly her instinct for survival, or her inordinate ambition) caused her to tolerate the Puritanism of her brother's and her son's wives. She even managed to endure a Pope's picture on the walls of Ditchley along with a painting of Jesus. But the library at Ditchley contained such testimony of pious Protestantism as Bishop Ussher's *The Principles of the Christian Religion*, a pioneering effort to establish orthodox Anglican beliefs.[46] As a child, John Wilmot was dominated by that mother in those surroundings with a clergyman for a tutor. There were always household chaplains, sometimes more than one, present at Ditchley. Surrounded by praying clergymen during an adult illness, Rochester remarked that "it was but a piece of his breeding."[47]

If the religious atmosphere at Ditchley was not unusual, the oppressiveness of certain Protestant principles imparted by the Reverend Mr. Giffard to his seven-year-old pupil stayed with John Wilmot all his life. The terrible wrath of a vengeful God the Father, the burning eternity of a Protestant Hell, the sinfulness of thoughts, the temptations of the weak flesh—these and other tenets were dutifully drilled into little John's head. They later emerged as references in his correspondence, ironic metaphors, images in his erotic poetry, and, two years before his death, as an intense desire to disprove the immortality of the soul.[48]

The procession of clergymen who visited Rochester in 1679–80, before his death, included Francis Giffard, who recounted the visit to Thomas Hearne:

> The occasion was this. Says his Lordship, "Mr. Giffard, I wonder you will not come and visit me oftener. I have a great respect for you, and I should be extremely glad of your frequent conversation." Says Mr. Giffard (who could say anything to him), "My Lord, I am a clergyman. Your Lordship has a very ill character of being a debauched man and an Atheist, and 'twill not look well in me to keep company with your Lordship as long as this character lasts, and as long as you continue this course of life." "Mr. Giffard," says my Lord, "I have been guilty of extravagances, but I assure you I am no atheist," with other words to that effect.[49]

Assuming that, in his old age, Giffard reported the interview accurately, it reveals much about Rochester's relationship with him. Giffard's pietistic reprimand was usual for the time, however lacking in Christian charity it may seem; but that Giffard could say anything to a man whose wit was widely feared shows that the mature Rochester remained in awe of his first mentor, eager to placate him, still professing belief in the awful God that mentor had described to him. Rochester's dependency on Giffard was intensified by his mother's departure soon after the governor's arrival. The boy's anxieties and fears at the separation naturally caused him to want to win his tutor's approval. Giffard found his ward "very hopeful and ready to do anything that he proposed

to him and very well inclined to laudable undertakings." Little John was eager to please; Giffard lauded him for being "very virtuous and good natured . . . willing and ready to follow good advice." The intelligent child quickly learned to act the role of model pupil. Giffard revealed other significant nuances in the early tutor-student relationship. "Mr. Giffard used to lie with him in the family, on purpose that he might prevent any ill accidents."[50] Later on, when John Wilmot left Ditchley to attend grammar school, Giffard shared lodgings with him in the town of Burford. Thus for a period of about six formative years, a young man in his twenties lived in physical intimacy with Wilmot when he was, first, a fatherless, impressionable child and then a pubescent boy.

This was a common practice in the late seventeenth century, approved by aristocratic parents. Lawrence Stone remarks on parental "indifference to the dangers of adolescent homosexual contact," citing the testimony of John Marston, the homophile poet, and others, that such tutor-student sleeping arrangements often led to sexual activity.[51] There is no evidence that Francis Giffard engaged in overt sexual behavior with John Wilmot, but Wilmot's adult homosexual interests may have begun in emotions he experienced as a child. Rochester's sexual orientation is significant because of the obsession with varieties of sexuality in his writings and his own psychosexuality as a vital part of his creativity.[52] His directly sexual (or erotic) works—as distinguished from his moral and/or satiric uses of sexuality—imply a complex gender identity that enabled him to write feminist and misogynistic poetry with equal conviction. His absorption with varieties of sexual feelings and experiences, which made the name of Rochester offensive to modest ears for generations of pious readers, makes him all the more interesting to readers of a post-Freudian age.[53]

Francis Giffard's combination of hellfire doctrines with subliminal sexuality produced constrictive terrors in his pupil. Thomas Hearne quoted Giffard. "He says my Lord had a natural distemper upon him which was extraordinary and he thinks might be one occasion of shortening his days, which was that he sometimes could not have a stool for three weeks or a month together." Rochester's constipation was explained by the contemporary theory that "fumes" ascended to the brain while warming the body and causing both physical and emotional "warmth" or feverishness. If medical theories of the seventeenth century were limited in accounting for chronic constipation, Freud's postulates about bowel retention and parsimony might be invoked since Rochester was preoccupied with money all of his life and was notably unwilling to pay his debts.[54]

Probably as the result of religious terrors, John Wilmot's fear of the dark, beginning in childhood, continued all his life in the form of "general and Dark Horrours that Nature [Mortality] raised in him, especially in some Sicknesses,"

as Burnet put it.[55] As an adult, Rochester's fear of death made him turn to alcohol and sexual promiscuity for temporary escape. Death was ubiquitous in seventeenth-century England; John Wilmot's childhood was as marked by it as by other kinds of absence and separation. In addition to unrecorded deaths of relatives, stillbirths, and infant deaths, four of his close male relatives died before he reached the age of twelve, including two half-brothers and, most importantly, his father. By the time he was twenty, Rochester was the only surviving male heir of his generation of Wilmots and Lees. His uncertainties and ambivalences about sexuality and money were caught up in his apprehensions about death. Death so filled his mind that, as Dr. Samuel Johnson said, "the whole of life [was] keeping away the thoughts of it."

These morbid obsessions lay in the future, however. Certainly the sense of fun and play shown in his adult "frolics" (so-called) and the keen imagination and wild fantasizing visible in his writings first appeared in childhood.[56] His Lee brothers, in turn, were Rangers of Wychwood forest and Woodstock; there the boy learned the proper pursuits of country-bred aristocrats: breeding dogs, horses, and hawks; deer and boar hunting; horse racing at Woodstock. His interest in these was an important part of his own breeding that stayed with him. Despite its subterranean terrors, Rochester's life as a boy was privileged and superficially pleasant.

Apparently, as his letter to his own son showed, it never occurred to John Wilmot to doubt the principles or methods by which he was brought up, however great his other doubts or unhappy his life might be at times.[57] His explanation for the extravagances and passionate outbursts that plagued his life was always that a devil possessed him and destroyed his repose. He seems not to have suspected that his repose may have been destroyed in childhood—first by his parents and next by his tutor.

A CLASSICAL EDUCATION (1656–1659)

> Mr. Collins of Magdalen's tells me (as Mr. Giffard has done) that the mad Earl of Rochester understood little or nothing of Greek.
>
> —Thomas Hearne, *Collections*

Just as Rochester's other attributes were disputed after his death, his ability as a scholar of the classics provoked disagreement. In the sermon preached at his funeral, Robert Parsons, household chaplain to the Earl's family, asserted that John Wilmot was a man of "most rare parts, and his natural talent was excellent, much improved by learning and industry." He was "thoroughly acquainted with all classical authors, both Greek and Latin, a thing very rare (if not peculiar to him) among those of quality."[1] Anthony Wood later appropriated Parsons's evaluation, word for word, in the life of Rochester composed for the *Athenae Oxoniensis*.[2]

Gilbert Burnet, spiritual counselor to him in his last months, likewise extolled Rochester's "shining parts," his perfect mastery of Latin and the masterworks composed in it, and his "peculiar delight which the greatest Wits have ever found in those Studies." He had relished the beauty of the Latin language "to his dying-day."[3] On the other hand, Francis Giffard, Wilmot's governor in childhood, told Thomas Hearne that Wood and Burnet had been mistaken in saying the Earl was "so great a master of classical learning," that in fact "My Lord understood very little or no Greek, and that he had but little Latin. . . ."[4]

This sharp difference of opinion shows how reports of Rochester's life and talents were biased by those with personal concerns. Robert Parsons exaggerated the Earl's accomplishments ("all classical authors") to flatter as well as console his wife and mother, who sponsored the publication of the sermon, and then assured Parsons's ecclesiastical livelihood.[5] Burnet emphasized the Earl's superior intellect and classical (read "pagan") expertise to underscore the importance of his conversion into a model of Christian piety and hope.[6] Giffard, who was "supplanted" (his word) as Wilmot's educational supervisor,

naturally felt resentment. Furthermore, his doubt that Wilmot received the same supervised training at Oxford that Giffard had provided at Ditchley and Burford was well grounded.[7]

Nevertheless, Parsons, Burnet, and Giffard—as well as Anthony Wood and those Oxonians (Hearne, Collins) who later disparaged Rochester's scholarship—all agreed that mastery of ancient languages and literature, Latin in particular, was a transcendent accomplishment, and that the aristocracy in general were deficient in attaining it. Increasingly after 1660, scholarly and professional writers used linguistic proficiency and knowledge of the classics as accolades in their dedications of published works to aristocratic patrons. Some aristocrats, notably the Earl of Roscommon, together with several members of Rochester's own circle of wits (e.g., Sir Charles Sedley, Sir Henry Savile, Sir Francis Fane), actually deserved them.[8]

In an age when comparatively few aristocrats bothered to master the ancient tongues, Rochester's reputation as a Latinist was significant, and the reasons for it are revealing. He was probably motivated by a combination of parental and pedagogical expectations as well as the classical enthusiasms of several friends and peers. His father's reputation as a skilled and eloquent writer of Latin prose, deserved or not, was one factor. John Wilmot held the accomplishments of his father as a constant standard for himself in his youth.[9] Despite her own lack of classical education, his mother also esteemed her husband's reputation as diplomat, enshrining him in a Latin epitaph befitting the aristocracy—lesser "gentlemen" were remembered in English.[10] Clearly, Wilmot men were expected to be proficient in Latin, the language of diplomacy.

With her Lee sons, for political and financial reasons the Countess had encouraged Harry Lee to assume his baronial duties with minimal schooling; but after sending her younger Lee son on the Grand Tour, she oversaw his subsequent study for an Oxford M.A. In fact, Frank Lee studied there *after* his Wilmot half-brother had already gotten a Master's degree. Lady Rochester understood well the status conferred by classical learning.

In his years of schooling, Rochester had talented and determined teachers to goad and stimulate him: first the Reverend Mr. Giffard, then John Martin, and finally Dr. Andrew Balfour, who supervised his Grand Tour. Dr. Balfour's classical expertise, so clearly apparent in his account of their Tour, was particularly important, coming after the learning gap at Oxford and lasting for three full years. Rochester himself acknowledged Balfour's significant role in his education. His later associations, both social and literary, with scholars of various achievements also helped to sustain his classical interests. Such associates as Thomas Hobbes, John Dryden, John Oldham, Nathaniel Lee, and Charles Blount were able Latinists whose interests affected Rochester and stimulated

him. Equally importantly, Rochester's intelligence and lively curiosity were motivations to learning in themselves.

Accordingly, he began to study Latin at the age of seven under the watchful eye of Francis Giffard, and in time he read the authors who would influence his own thought and writing. Rochester's various works—letters, lyric and satiric poetry, prose pamphlets, and plays—show directly his knowledge of Greek writers including Homer, Longinus, Pindar, Anacreon, and Plutarch. His acquaintance with Latin authors included Cicero, Livy, Seneca, Ovid, Horace, Catullus, Lucretius, Martial, Juvenal, Tibullus, Petronius, Lucan, and Augustine. Many of these were identified as important to Rochester by Robert Wolseley, a friend, admirer, and early editor of his, and by Thomas Rymer, the classicist-turned-moralist who censured the obscenity in Wycherley and Dryden but admired Rochester's translation/paraphrase of Anacreon, even with its hint of pederasty.[11] On the whole, the evidence for John Wilmot's ability as an enthusiastic classicist is convincing.

Modern commentators claim to have found the possible influence of other authors in various poems: Epicurus, Pliny, and Sextus Empiricus among them.[12] Of course, Rochester may not have read all of the ancient writers, nor did he necessarily consult the Latin or Greek originals.[13] Translations of some were available in English during his lifetime, and in several instances he may have been more dependent on a French translation than a Latin original.[14] Nevertheless, through association with classical scholars such as Dr. John Fell and Robert Whitehall in repeated visits to Oxford, Rochester could have absorbed some knowledge through conversation.

He may have been a more accomplished reader of the classics than even his admirers claimed.[15] His revision of Fletcher's historical drama, *Valentinian*, for instance, makes changes in details about the reign of the Emperor of Rome recorded only by such recondite sources as Procopius and Evagrius.[16] In any case, Rochester's reading in the classics, the ancient historians in particular, led him to adopt some political and philosophical principles in adulthood that left their mark on his writings as well as his Parliamentary career.

In Rochester's era, most seven-year-old boys set out to learn the language by reading some elementary work in Latin, generally Roman history in an abridgment of Livy or Dionysus of Halicarnassus. The three most frequently used texts in the seventeenth century were Trogus Pompeius, whose condensation of Livy had been used as a school text by the Romans themselves; Justin, whose *History of the World* placed Roman events into the contexts (often fanciful or erroneous) of Jewish and Greek historiography; and Lucius Annaeus Florus, the most widely used of the three texts, which turned Livy into a biography of the Roman body politic. Mr. Giffard had a close knowledge of all

these authors; he probably introduced little John Wilmot to classical study by means of those standard works.[17]

Thus, along with the religious precepts given him by Mr. Giffard, Rochester absorbed ideas about the secular culture from which Christianity emerged. Roman civilization was the highest manifestation of human attainment possible without the revealed religion of the New Testament. Mighty Rome had lost its sustaining strength and *virtus*, and been overrun by barbarian invasions. The cyclic paradigm of Roman history provided instruction for the wise, containing as it did similarities to the life-cycle of a man. Pagans such as Achilles, Aeneas, Damocles, Cincinnatus, Diogenes, Timon of Athens, and Timon of Phlius, and the subjects of Plutarch's *Lives* (Anthony and Cleopatra) were exemplary of right and wrong conduct. Rochester's works cite all of these. Above all, history was "useful," teaching by examples. It was certainly no accident that playwrights hoping to get patronage from the adult Rochester dedicated plays about Nero, or Titus and Berenice to him.[18]

In 1656, after two years of Giffard's tutoring, the Countess decided that it was time for her promising son to enroll in a suitable grammar school. Sending her boys off for schooling away from home at a tender age was an item of conviction with Lady Wilmot, as with other English aristocrats, then and now; but the disastrous experience of the Lees at De Veau's Academy in Paris had dampened her enthusiasm for continental education.

Of the prestigious public schools, Dr. Richard Busby's Westminster in London was the most famous. Busby had reigned supreme at Westminster since 1636, enduring through political upheavals because Parliamentarians as well as Royalists revered his abilities as scholar and teacher.[19] Busby's pupils revered him too for his kindly attentions—or else they stood in awe of his birch rod, famed for flogging Latin and Greek into dullards. His pupils included John Dryden, Robert South, John Locke, Robert Whitehall, and a host of other future poets, divines, and politicians. Westminster might appear the best place for young Rochester, who himself acknowledged Busby's preeminence in a lampoon composed in 1675. Rochester pointed out the historical inaccuracies in Nathaniel Lee's *Sophonisba*, an historical drama about Hannibal and Rome's Punic Wars with Carthage: "I laugh, and wish the hot-brain'd, Fustian Foole,/ In Busbys hands, to be well lasht at Schoole."[20]

But Rochester's mother had reason to question whether London in 1656 was a sensible place to locate a boy whose father had tried to start an uprising against the forces of Parliament in Yorkshire a year earlier. The Countess herself, in 1656, was writing false claims about Wilmot properties to Oliver Cromwell, the Lord Protector, whose London presence potentially threatened the safety of her son.[21] Dr. Busby, it is true, was a firm Royalist, like the

Wilmots. He had led his pupils in prayers for the King in 1649 when Charles I was beheaded little more than a stone's throw away at Whitehall. But Busby was directly answerable to the agents of Parliament; his power of defiance was limited, after all. If Cromwell decided to seize Henry Wilmot's son as a "pawn," could Busby prevent it?[22]

The risk of schooling in London was too great. The Countess decided to send John Wilmot to the Burford Grammar School, where John Martin, "a noted master," had recently become head.[23] Burford was a short distance away from Ditchley; it was a Royalist town, and the local gentry need have no fears for the safety of sons in the town-sponsored Grammar School. So off little Wilmot went to Burford, accompanied by Mr. Giffard, to find lodgings. As a "petty," (i.e., "petit" or younger boy), Wilmot was permitted to attend the school only by taking separate lodgings in town.[24]

One of the Cotswold villages thriving on the wool trade, Burford was a pretty little town, sloping downhill in a row of stone buildings to the meandering Windrush River. The Free School stood at the bottom of the hill next to the Church of Saint John Baptist and its graveyard. Despite its picturesque appearance, the school building was low and dark inside with small windows. Mists from the stream chilled the rooms in winter and left cold drafts in the open stretches of the Church. The physical atmosphere was sometimes as oppressive as the memories of recent events were depressing to Royalists. Only seven years earlier, Oliver Cromwell had stood in the pulpit of Saint John Baptist, sermonizing the captive survivors of his bloody destruction of the Levellers, the last of the anti-Parliamentary parties.[25]

Simon Wysdome, founder of the Grammar School in 1571, had painstakingly spelled out in the twelve items of its *Constitucions*, the school's administrative and financial arrangements with the town, the duties of its masters and wardens, the number of students (forty "men children having noe infirmite or sickness"), the daily routine to be followed, and other matters.[26] Some of these provisions had been allowed to lapse by subsequent masters, whose haphazard record-keeping frustrated Christopher Wase in 1673, when he compiled his *Survey of Grammar Schools*. John Martin told Wase no warden's book for the Grammar School had been located after a long search; and the names of previous masters had to be collected from the memories of the oldest Burfordites.[27]

By Wysdome's provisions, the "peties" were to be instructed by "gramarian schollers of the said free scole" until such a time as finances permitted hiring "some other usher or mete Scholler." In other words, the younger boys were often taught by the older. There was no limit to the number of younger boys attached to the school; but those coming from the country—boys whose fathers did not live in Burford—had to pay twelve pence at the time of entry, and six

pence for each quarter. It is safe to assume that, as a young nobleman from a distinguished Oxfordshire family, accompanied by his own tutor, John Wilmot was not treated as any ordinary petty. It is even possible that he lived in the house of John Martin, the head master; the *Constitucions* provided for such an arrangement.[28]

Nevertheless, he had to follow the strict daily routine. Master and students assembled at six o'clock in the morning in summer (at seven in winter), had lessons until eleven, then ate dinner, resumed study from one until six o'clock in summer (four in winter), and concluded the day with prayers, psalm-singing, and a selection read from the Old or New Testament. Before the school day started, if there was a morning service, the students marched two by two in a column to church, summer and winter, where they were "TO SERVE god devoutlie in singing or sayinge of Salmes." In the event of no church service, the scholars were led in religious worship in the classrooms.

On Sundays, unless there was "some Reasonable cause to the contrary," the boys had to assemble by the second peal of the bell ringing Matins, when the master led them to church, "there to serve god devoutly." There were also special religious observations at Christmas, Whitsuntide, Allhallowtide, and the end of the school year.

Unfortunately, no record of the curriculum at Burford Grammar School now exists. Burnet said of Rochester's time at Burford, "When he was at School he was an extraordinary Proficient at his Book: and those shining parts which have since appeared with so much lustre; began to shew themselves: He acquired the *Latin* . . . and was exactly versed in the incomparable Authors that write about Augustus' s time. . . ."[29] Apparently, unlike Westminster School, Burford did not teach Greek. The emphasis was entirely Roman with students applying themselves to perfecting their Latin, probably by the common practice of translating Latin texts into English and then back into Latin.[30] The Augustan authors studied would have included Virgil, Livy, Horace, Ovid, Tibullus, and Propertius. Rochester's schoolboy exercises introduced him to ways of translating, paraphrasing, metaphrasing, and parody that he later used as a poet. Some of his extant writings are English versions of the Augustans he might have studied at Burford.

Ovid was the first to contribute models for translation, adaptation, and loose imitation when Wilmot began his poetic career as Courtier to Charles II in 1665. A favorite with Restoration courtiers, Ovid was much admired for his *Epistles* or *Heroides*, which Wilmot could have read under John Martin, and for his erotic *Amores* and *Ars Amatoria*, which Wilmot certainly did not—at least not then.[31] Horace's *Satires* also became a significant source for Rochester later in works discovered under Martin. Rochester's adaptations of Ovid and Horace

began literary forms that became hallmarks of English literature in the hands of John Dryden and Alexander Pope: epistolary satires, mock dialogues, and the ironic critical survey of contemporary writers. These genres or modes may well have had their genesis when the schoolboy Wilmot labored over Latin texts in a cold Burford schoolroom, committing to memory passages and meters that in time would transmute into the mock-Ovidian "An Heroical Epistle," or the Horatian "Timon" and "An Allusion to Horace."[32]

Rochester's experiences at Burford as a schoolboy left him, as most boys, with a jumble of feelings about himself, his school, and what he was taught there. Twenty years later, he "lay his thoughts open without any Disguise" to Gilbert Burnet, promising to reveal his "Principles" and tell plainly "what stuck with him." Knowing his fear of death, Burnet asked him why "ill men" felt such terror at the prospect of dying whereas good men felt joy. Rochester "was willing to ascribe it to the Impressions they had from their Education."[33]

If his education at Burford introduced him to pagans whose works suggested possible alternatives to Christian salvation or damnation, the Burford ritual also reinforced the somber Protestant beliefs he learned as an impressionable child at Ditchley. When he left Burford at the age of twelve or so, he took with him strictures and fears built into his mind by his schooling. This conversation with Burnet, in his last year of life, showed that John Wilmot never shook off some religious principles and their attendant emotions which, like his love of the Latin language, stuck with him until his dying day.

GROWING DEBAUCHED AT OXFORD (1660–1661)

> When my Lord came to Oxford he soon grew debauched. . . .
> —Thomas Hearne, *Collections*

> There he first suck'd from the breasts of his Mother the University those perfections of Wit, and Eloquence, and Poetry, which afterwards by his own corrupt stomach, or ill juices after, were turn'd into poison to himself or others.
> —Robert Parsons, *Sermon*

How long Rochester stayed at Burford is uncertain, but it could not have been more than three years. As early as February 1659, the countess determined to send him to Oxford. John Cary paid "Caution Money" (a fee deposit) for him to Wadham College on March 1, 1659.[1] But family problems may have delayed his entering for a time. Frank Lee was sick and convalescing after returning from his Grand Tour, and at the end of March, another blow fell on the Ditchley household. One of his correspondents told Edward Hyde on March 25:

> Sir Harry Lee is much bewailed, who, having obtained leave [from Parliament] to hunt for three or four days, overheated his blood and died on Monday last at Ditchley of the smallpox.

Hyde requested further information about his "friends at Ditchley," asking "whether the brother succeeds or some other heir." Broderick wrote back that the Countess of Rochester "presents her service to you" and "the widow is with child."[2]

Since the dead Harry's only child was a ten-month-old girl, Eleonora, and laws of primogeniture pertained, the succession of the Lee estate had to await the birth and determine the sex of the posthumous infant. The determination came on July 24, 1659, when Anne, another girl, was born. A week later, Harry's widow, Ann Danvers, was dead. Thus Frank Lee succeeded his

brother as Baron of Ditchley, and the Countess of Rochester became guardian to two more infant heiresses.

Political uncertainties also may have kept John Wilmot at home longer than was intended. In early 1659 Wadham College had as its Warden John Wilkins, who was married to Oliver Cromwell's sister and who was, according to Anthony Wood, "a notorious complyer with the Presbyterians (from whom he obtained the Wardenship. . .)." After the death of the Lord Protector in 1658, Wilkins's fortunes became increasingly unstable. At last, in September 1659, he was replaced by Walter Blandford, who had shown the ability to combine political adaptability with strict academic discipline. Although Blandford had prudently acceded to the pressures of the Parliamentary Visitors when they came to Wadham, where he was then a Fellow, he nevertheless would be made a Commissioner to Charles II in 1660, and thereafter go on to greater glories as Vice-Chancellor of the University, Bishop of Oxford, and Bishop of Worcester.[3] Blandford was a man on the rise: firmly Anglican, a devout authoritarian, but politically flexible after Lady Wilmot's own ways.[4]

In January 1660, John Wilmot was admitted to Wadham as a Fellow Commoner, or nobleman, together with several other young men of notably Royalist persuasion.[5] The Countess had planned for Mr. Giffard to attend her son to Oxford, but then she decided it would not be necessary. Giffard accompanied the young Earl to Oxford in January; but soon after, on February 10, he was ordained a deacon at Lincoln. The Countess, however, had no intention of releasing her son from stringent supervision: she entrusted him to Warden Blandford, who turned him over to Phineas Berry (or Bury) as tutor.

Berry had his duties spelled out for him in official Latin: his main task was *Exercidis & Actibus Scholasticis interesse.* Unfortunately, he was too easy-going or unambitious to compel his scholars to hard study. Called "a great coffey-drinker," he was reluctant to confront or discipline students even as an elected Proctor. On one occasion he took no notice when unruly students kicked a kidderkin (small barrel) along Catte Street during a formal procession. He sometimes neglected to appear at official academic functions. What energy he had went into meeting crises: young William Foulconer died at college; Francis Pyle was always missing examinations and running off to London.[6] In contrast with them, young Rochester *Dominus*, that docile and obedient lad, was easy to overlook. Berry let the boy follow his own ways without much supervision. Though he may have succeeded Mr. Giffard, Berry did not truly replace him as Rochester's mentor. With Giffard "supplanted," it came as no surprise to him that the Earl "grew debauched," as Giffard told Thomas Hearne.

When Rochester entered Wadham, it was a new and comparatively poor college. Founded in 1613, it had attracted a few bequests of books and several

outstanding scholars, but in 1660 it was a lesser-known college, seemingly out of the academic mainstream. W. Fulman's *Academiae Oxoniensis Notitia* (1665) could muster up little to say in praise of it. Wadham consisted of a Warden or *Custos*; fifteen Fellows (*Socii*); fifteen pupils (*Discipuli*); and assorted menials. It had two famous alumni (*Viri Clari*): Humphrey Sydenham the doctor and John Gauden.[7]

But these bare facts were not the complete story about Wadham. One of the former Fellows was Christopher Wren, still in Oxford in 1660 lecturing in astronomy. Under John Wilkins, a group of men interested in the New Science had begun to meet informally at lodgings and coffee houses, to discuss the so-called Natural Philosophy. In 1660 the group would become the Royal Society, the future locus of gentlemanly scientific investigation for Samuel Pepys, John Evelyn, John Dryden, and many others, who mingled with Sir Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, and other serious pioneers in biology, physics, and astronomy. In 1667 Thomas Sprat, a Wadham graduate, would publish the *History of the Royal Society*.[8] Young Rochester entered Wadham at a time of burgeoning ideas and experimentation.

For a while, custom may have kept John Wilmot at his books. As a Fellow Commoner or nobleman, he had access to the Fellows' Common Room and Library, where he had the opportunity to gain considerable knowledge about the Greco-Roman world on his own through English translations of many classics. In addition to such standard authors as Horace, Ovid, Polybius, Seneca, Lucan, and Plutarch, there was Chapman's Homer, the *Epistles* of Phalaris, and the romances of Heliodorus.[9] To professional classicists, Oxford dons, or displaced tutors, translations and adaptations were things to sniff at; but they became increasingly acceptable after the Restoration as a way to get classical knowledge for those denied a university education. In 1660–61 they could provide at least a nodding acquaintance with "all classick Authors, both Greek and Latine" for a youth like Rochester. The Wadham Library also contained the works of the major Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights, along with Shakespeare; the youth's theatrical interests also may have developed there.[10]

By March 1660, however, political disruptions in London shook the Oxonian cloisters. The Free Elections for Parliament clearly indicated that the Cromwell Era was ending, and Royalist Oxford began to rumble with the approaching events of April and May. When Charles Stuart returned to England from Holland on May 25 and made a triumphant entry into London on May 29, the eruption came.[11] Books were tossed aside and glasses raised. A sheep's rump, symbol of the vanquished Rump Parliament, was tossed through the window of Dr. Greenwood, the Vice-Chancellor who earlier had brought

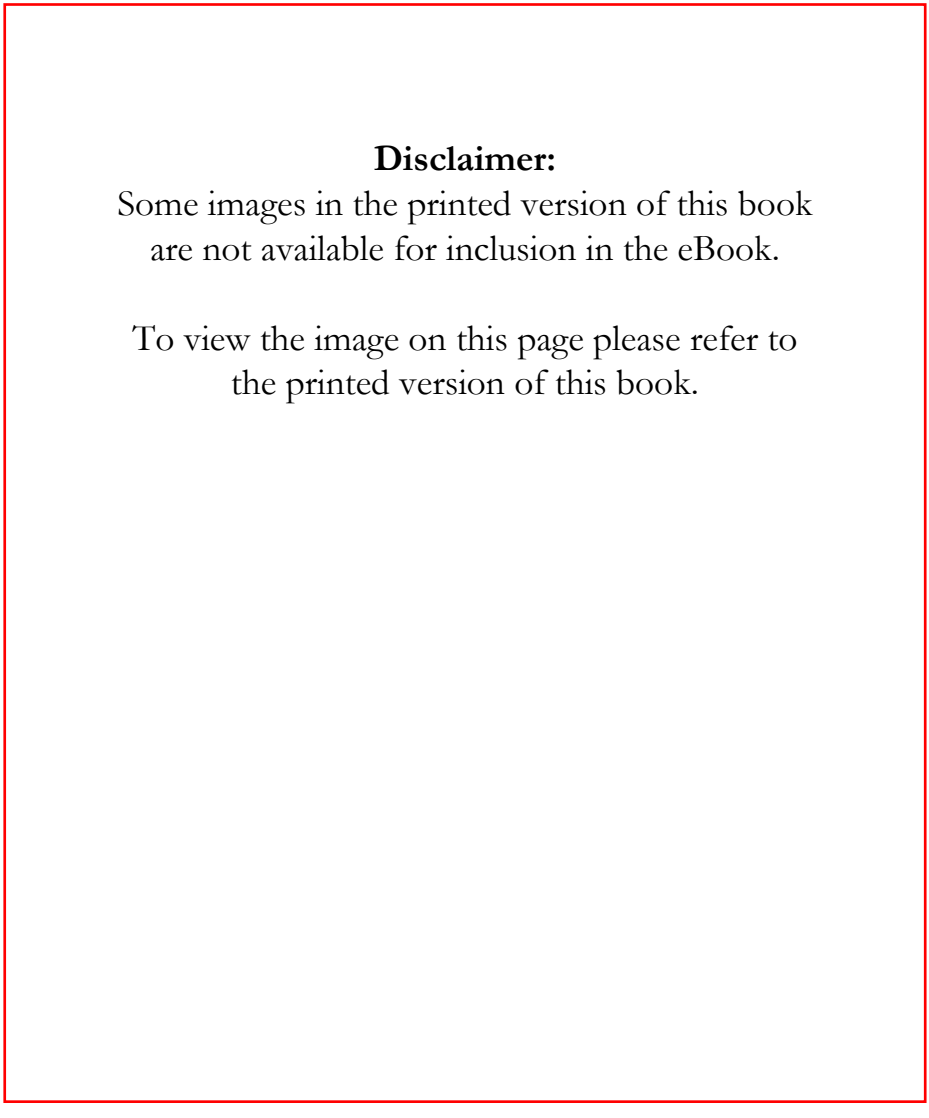

Figure 3. King Charles II. Unknown artist, 1665. National Portrait Gallery, London. Reproduced by permission.

Parliamentary troops into Oxford to awe Royalist scholars. Lectures gave way to drunken, bawdy songs, while dialogues about Caesar, Cicero, and Pompey were replaced with talk of the King, Clarendon, and General Monck, who restored Charles II to the throne. In the weeks following, the academic order was lost in anarchy as carousing, rioting, and whoring students grew increasingly wild and licentious.

Caught up in the abandonment of the times, barely thirteen and innocent for his years, John Wilmot found himself changing as rapidly as the world around him.[12] He was leaving a childhood of dutiful submission to lessons and schoolmasters in Puritan England. He was now the youth, Lord Rochester the son of Lord Wilmot, with great expectations of rewards from the restored Stuart monarch. No one was there to keep watch on him. His mother was busy at Ditchley with her duties and schemes.[13] Mr. Giffard's ties with the Wilmots were ended, and he was bent on his ecclesiastical career. Warden Blandford was trying to control the boiling mobs of undergraduates, and Phineas Berry, Rochester's "good-natured" tutor, could not keep up with all that needed to be done. Left on his own, sharing the excitement of the day, John Wilmot fell under the tutelage of Robert Whitehall, a man not at all like Mr. Giffard and certainly not the kind of governor the countess would have chosen for her son.

Like Anthony Wood, John Fell, and Robert South, Robert Whitehall was a constant fixture at Oxford. Before entering Christ Church as a student in 1643, Whitehall had been a pupil of Dr. Busby's at Westminster. In 1648, when the Parliamentary Visitors asked him about his political sympathies, as a Royalist he committed a foolhardy act that Wood reported as follows:

> "My name's Whitehall, God bless the poet,
> "If I submit the king shall know it:
> quoth Robert Whitehall to the Visitors, *anno* 1648. The said Whitehall was turned out of his place; but, by cringing to the committee at London, became soon after fellow of Merton Coll. where, following the trade of drinking as he was wont, procured to himself a red face.[14]

Temporarily chastened by his experience with the Visitors, Whitehall extended himself to win the patronage of the most prominent Puritan in his home shire, "*Rich: Ingoldesbie* the Regicide," Wood called him. Whitehall "acted the part of a Mimick and Buffoon purposely to make him merry." The ploy was so successful that Whitehall adopted it as a *modus vivendi.* Once established in Merton, he steadily played the role of Merry Andrew, scoring off on both political sides with impunity. In 1651, however, he committed another versified blunder. Whitehall wrote a hudibrastic poem, *Technepolaimogama; or, The Marriage of Armes and the Arts, July 12, 1651*, in which he mocked the way that "Sable Gownes so large and wide/ Demonstrate they can Sayle 'gainst winde and Tide." Whitehall obliquely confirmed his Royalist sympathies in the lurching meters of the verse, which guyed the submission of Oxford's timorous dons to Parliament. Whitehall was vain and imprudent enough to have the piece published in London, concealing his identity slightly by using only his initials on the title page.[15]

With the establishment of the Protectorate, however, Parliament and its leaders became too formidable to beard openly; Whitehall then decided to ingratiate himself with the Cromwells through eulogies in Latin. But Oxford itself and its denizens continued to be objects of his heavy wit. In 1655 he became a member of the *Terrae Filii* (Sons of the Earth), the official University satirists who lampooned themselves together with their fellows on academic occasions. Whitehall also devoted himself to drinking and furthering his career. His impromptu Latinate wit on one occasion was set down by Wood. A group of medical students were on their way to Aylesbury to dissect a woman who had been hanged. The weather was cold and rainy, the roads were horribly muddy, and when his miserable companions began to grouse, Whitehall remarked cheerfully, "Omnis commoditas sua fert incommoda secum." (In free translation, "Every pleasure trip has its little inconveniences.")[16]

Anthony Wood never doubted that such advancement as Whitehall got was less the result of merit than fawning sycophancy. He remarked acidly:

> by vertue of the Letters of *Rich; Cromwell* Chancellour of this Univ. of *Oxon*, he was actually created Bach. of Phys. in 1657. Since which time he made divers sallies into the practice of Physick, but thereby obtained but little reputation, and lesser by his Poetry, to which he much pretended, having been esteemed no better than a meer Poetaster and time-serving Poet. . . .[17]

In August 1657, Whitehall went to Dublin University at the request of Henry Cromwell. There he stayed until the reversal of Cromwell fortunes set him loose to seek his fortune. Once again, he managed to get his place at Merton, where he returned sometime before 1660. Indefatigable, eternally optimistic, he turned coat, confident that he would succeed under Stuart patronage.

He began composing a series of verse tributes to every potential sponsor: Charles II, Lord Clarendon, Catherine of Braganza, the Duke of Monmouth, and James II. (Poor Queen Catherine fled London in 1665 to escape the Plague, only to face Robert Whitehall in Oxford. She had to endure sixteen recited stanzas of doggerel from him as he kneeled before her.)[18] In 1660 he was, as a raffish punster noted, "loyned with sack and faced with claret"—a bibulous, bumptuous, redfaced, rhyming Falstaff on the lookout for a Prince Hal to help make his fortune. In young Lord Rochester, he thought he had found one.

There can be no doubt that Robert Whitehall contributed substantially to the debauching of John Wilmot. Anthony Wood, whose cynical gaze took in all aspects of life at Oxford, said flatly that the older man "absolutely doted" on the youth. (A few years later, Wood candidly said that the Electors to a Fellowship at All Souls chose a handsome young man with a view to "kissing

and slobbering him.")[19] The possible result of a tutor absolutely doting on a thirteen-year-old boy was frankly stated by John Marston:

> Had I some snout-fair brats, they should endure
> The new-found Castilian calenture
> Before some pedant tutor in his bed
> Should use my fry like Phrygian Ganymede.[20]

Growing awareness of pederastic activity led eventually to a report by Dudley Ryder (1762–1847) that "among the chief men in some of the colleges sodomy is very usual. It is dangerous sending a young man who is beautiful to Oxford." A major scandal in the early eighteenth century caused Wadham, Rochester's own college, to be dubbed "Sodom," which wags call it to this day. A Warden, accused with abundant proof of his forcible rape of a student, hurridly left for France while less substantial rumors of homosexual activity between other dons and students continued to circulate.[21]

Whitehall himself left evidence of homophile tendencies in a highly misogynistic tract titled *The Woman's Right Proved False* (1674). In the Preface he wrote:

> be pleased to know ye Author as yet lives in Batchelours Row at the Sign of hope in ye land of Love [slang for Oxford]. And now I am certain I shall conjure up a thousand conjectures as well as Interrogatories in your minds about it. . . . May be he is overwhelmed in Love he dares not reveal and was minded to obviate & remove all suspicion by palliating it with a contrary guise. . . .[22]

Given young Rochester's known good looks and his sleeping arrangements with Francis Giffard, it is small wonder that he should become the object of Robert Whitehall's doting or that he would accept such attentions as natural. It is quite possible that Rochester became actively homosexual during his time at Oxford. In his later writings, he described homosexual acts between men and boys.[23] If he learned about such acts during his Oxford days, he was far from unique. He had certainly discovered the practice of self-masturbation as a part of awakening sexuality, later assuming it impossible that schoolboys would forget to "frig."[24]

In the turbulent, sexually charged atmosphere of Oxford following the Restoration, thirteen-year-old Rochester also may have begun his heterosexual career. In 1661, when Lord Clarendon came to Oxford for the Convocation at which Rochester graduated, he reproved the Principal of Magdalen, Dr. Henry Wilkinson: "I heare your hall entertaineth not only factious but debauched scholars." Clarendon said proctors had told him that more Magdalene scholars were taken at "innes, alehouses, and whorehouses than any other house in Oxford hath; to which the Doctor replied but little. . . ."[25]

If Robert Whitehall did not directly arrange Rochester's entry into sexual sophistication, he certainly assisted it by providing the youth with the license of disguise. By lending his academic gown for night-time explorations at inns, taverns, and brothels, Whitehall encouraged John Wilmot to engage in the sensual and emotional "disorders" which "he came to love too much." Disguised in Whitehall's gown, Rochester found "good-fellows," presumably the sort of companions that Whitehall himself employed in the trade of drinking; but he doubtless found much, much more, given the nature of his surroundings in 1660–61.[26]

By assuming disguises as he sexually matured, Rochester grew accustomed to separating the elements of selfhood: boy and youth, innocent and experienced, open and secret. His burgeoning sexuality, which probably began with solitary masturbation, initiated habits of concealment that were encouraged by his wearing the clothing of an older, more experienced man. Concealing his "true" identity from others forced John Wilmot to contrive personae and play roles that would inevitably become part of a larger, highly complex self-image.[27] When the adolescent youth began his sexual experimentation, the moral strictures and fears of his childhood were still very strong. For years at Burford School, he had gone daily to services at Saint John Baptist and seen these words in Elizabethan lettering beneath the east window:

> 1 THE NYGHT IS PASSED AND THE DAY IS COME NYE. LET US THEREFORE
> 2 CAST AWAIE THE DEDES OF DARCNNESS. AND LET USPUT [*sic*] ON THE ARMOURE OF LYGHTE. LET US WAL
> 3 KE HONESTLY AS IT WERE IN THE DAYELYGHT: NOT IN EATYNGE AND DRYNCKNGE. NETHER IN
> 4 CHAMBURYNGE AND WA[N]TONESS: NETHER IN STRYFE AND ENVYINGE: BUT PUT YE ON THE LORDE
> 5 JESUS CHRISTE + AND MAKE NOT PROVYSYON FOR THE FLESH. TO FULFYLL THE LUSTES OF IT.
> 6 ALL TRANSYTORY THYNGES SHALL FAYLE AT THE LAST AND THE WORCKER THEREOF SHALL GO WITHALL
> 7 OF ERROUR & FEARE GOD[28]

Emerging from his nights of fleshly experimentation into the Oxford daylight, casting off Robert Whitehall's clothing, could John Wilmot fail to remember, however reluctantly, frightening injunctions of this kind? But the deeds of darkness proved too enticing to resist.

During his debauching at Oxford, along with learning to disguise himself and feign to be or feel what he was not (or feign not to feel what he did), Rochester developed some creative predispositions.[29] The tensions between his

impulses toward moral anarchy and his unyielding self-judgment, fomented in his adolescence, would conjoin in strange ways in his adult compositions, as critics have pointed out. Indeed, Wilmot's equilibrist consciousness became identical with his creative imagination.[30]

If Rochester learned much from him that did no good, Robert Whitehall actually helped the young student as a classicist and poet. Whitehall knew Latin of the scholastic variety, and he used it with an easy, Goliardic familiarity. He could throw out ripostes in Latin, quote scraps of Greek, and extemporize in distiches.[31] Rochester learned from him by osmosis; almost surely, his ability to make the rhymed impromptus that delighted the court of Charles II derived from Robert Whitehall's example.[32] He also began to write "occasional," or situational poetry with Whitehall's encouragement, if not assistance.

As a long-time Oxonian and academic survivor, Whitehall well knew that state occasions always elicited Latin poems from scholarly petitioners. When the Restoration came about, the Oxford establishment was anxious to assure King Charles of its loyalty. Royalist though it had been in the 1640s, the University had made numerous concessions to the Parliamentarians during their supremacy. Naturally, those who had accommodated themselves to the Cromwells did not want that fact to prejudice the restored monarch against Oxford. As a token of their renewed dedication to the Stuarts—and reminder of their august learning—Oxonians planned a volume of poetic tributes to Charles, hoping to win his friendship with an assortment of encomiums in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and English.

The *Britannia Rediviva* (Oxford 1660) began with a Dedication in Latin by John Conant, the new Vice-Chancellor, urging the King to "Accept the tribute of the Muse" and rejoicing that Christ once again ruled in England now that a Stuart was enthroned. Some of Oxford's most eminent scholars then offered their tributes, imitations of Virgil and other Augustan poets. Pococke contributed stanzas in Arabic and Hebrew. Dr. Robert South's Latin lines displayed ecclesiastical dignity and sonority. And Warden Walter Blandford's hyperbolic paean began with a paraphrase of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "Arma virumque cano, Qualem nec Troi Heros / Aequat. . . ."[33] The "very learned" Phineas Berry, Rochester's indolent tutor, contributed nothing to the volume, interestingly enough.

As for Robert Whitehall, his part in compiling the anthology is suggested by the facts that his Latin poem is longer than anybody else's and that he also contributed a poem in English as the final verse in the second section of *Britannia Rediviva*.[34] With all their effort to appeal to the King by comparing him to Aeneas, the epic founder of Rome, Whitehall and his colleagues could hardly overlook the opportunity to spotlight John Wilmot, the son of Henry

Wilmot, a *fidus Achates* to Charles Stuart in exile. After the opening classical section came another section in English with verses by various nobles, Fellows, and graduates (including John Locke). The first poem in this section, "To His Sacred Majesty," presented the name of its author with aristocratic simplicity in boldfaced type at least three times larger than other authorial names:

ROCHESTER

The King did not need his spectacles to see young Lord Rochester's signature or the institutional hopes pinned on him.

The eighteen-line poem concluded with a pointed reference to Rochester's father, the "faithful Achates":

> And though my youth, not patient yet to bear
> The weight of Armes, denies me to appear
> In Steel before You, yet, Great Sir, approve
> My manly wishes, and more vigorous love;
> In whom a cold respect were treason to
> A Fathers ashes, greater than to you;
> Whose one ambition 'tis for to be known
> By daring Loyalty Your WILMOT's Son.[35]

Certainly, the concluding statement of ambition to inherit the Royalist legacy of Henry Wilmot genuinely expressed the hope of John Wilmot—and his mother.

The following year (1661), two more poems appeared under Rochester's name: the Latin "In Obitum Serenissimae Mariae Principis Arausionensis," on the death by smallpox of Charles II's sister, the Princess of Orange; and "To Her Sacred Majesty, the Queen Mother, on the Death of Mary Princess of Orange," its English accompaniment. Anthony Wood later wrote:

> [T]hese three copies were made, as 'twas then well known, by Robert Whitehall a physician of Merton college, who pretended to instruct the count . . . in the art of poetry.[36]

If Rochester's English poem in the *Britannia Rediviva* is compared with the clearly inferior one by Whitehall, however, it is difficult to suppose that Whitehall's customary limitations as a poetaster could have produced "To His Sacred Majesty." Wood may have been quite literal in saying Whitehall pretended to teach Rochester how to write poetry.

The Merton physician may have had a hand in writing the ten line Latin poem, though it is of the straightforward, simple variety that an ingenious boy with shining parts might well have prepared for through written exercises at