

JOHN WILMOT,  
EARL OF ROCHESTER

THE POEMS  
AND  
*LUCINA'S RAPE*

EDITED BY

KEITH WALKER and NICHOLAS FISHER

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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IN MEMORY OF  
KEITH WALKER & HAROLD LOVE  
(1936-2004)      (1937-2007)



[Figure 1](#). Engraved portrait of Rochester, 1681 (collection of Howard Erskine-Hill)



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- [1.](#) Engraved portrait of Rochester, 1681 (collection of Howard Erskine-Hill)
- [2.](#) Title-page of *Poems on Several Occasions By the Right Honourable, The E. of R—* (Antwerp [London], 1680) (Pepys Library, Magdalene College, Cambridge)
- [3.](#) 'How perfect Cloris, and how free', Nottingham University MS Portland Pw V 31
- [4.](#) Title-page *A Satyr against Mankind* [London, 1679] (private collection)
- [5.](#) *Upon Nothing*, National Archives, Kew, Box C 104/110 Part 1
- [6.](#) *Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian*, British Library Add. MS 28692 (title-page)
- [7.](#) *Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian*, British Library Add. MS 28692 (correction to I.i.166)
- [8.](#) *Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian*, British Library Add. MS 28692 (correction to V.iv.37)

# Note on This Edition

Keith Walker died in 2004. This is a revised and updated version of his acclaimed 1984 edition of Rochester's poems, to which has been added the play *Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian* (first published as *Valentinian: A Tragedy* (London, 1685)). Where possible, privately-produced texts from sources close to Rochester - in his holograph or from within his wider family or from a highly placed Court official - have been selected. Until Harold Love's comprehensive edition for Oxford University Press in 1999, Walker's had been the only full, critical, old-spelling edition of Rochester's verse and the preferred edition for many Rochester scholars. Love's detailed records of manuscript variations have superseded the comparatively limited textual comparisons Walker included, and these have therefore now been omitted, not least in order to prevent this revision becoming too unwieldy. It remains true to the spirit of Walker's edition, however, not least in the arrangement of the poems by genre (and where possible chronologically), in the notes and above all in following Walker's original principle of making Rochester available to students and scholars 'in versions that were read in his lifetime'.

# Acknowledgments

My chief debts are, firstly, to Ken Robinson, who introduced me to the Earl of Rochester while I was an undergraduate at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, and then supervised my master's dissertation on satiric and verse epistles in the Restoration Period; and, secondly, to Paul Hammond at the University of Leeds who was the supervisor of my doctoral dissertation on the early publishing history of Rochester's work, and has generously continued to allow me to draw on his detailed knowledge of Restoration literature. I cannot adequately express my debt to them both, and particularly to Paul Hammond, for their stimulation, patience and advice over a lengthy period. I am also most grateful for the individual kindnesses and encouragement I have received from Philip Aherne, Peter Beal, John Carey, Larry Carver, Warren Chernaik, Robert Hume, David Gareth Jones, Thomas MacFaul, Brian Oatley, James Grantham Turner and Henry Woudhuysen. Philippa Martin, Curator of the Government Art Collection, provided invaluable advice and help, and Howard Erskine-Hill generously allowed me to include an illustration of Rochester from his extensive collection of prints from the long eighteenth century. This edition has also profited greatly from the enthusiasm and expertise of the publishing team at Blackwell – Emma Bennett, Caroline Clamp, Isobel Bainton and Sarah Pearsall – and I must also record the tolerance of my wife Pam, and children Francis, Rachel and Harriet, which has been nothing short of heroic.

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Surrey; Leeds University Library (the Brotherton Collection); University of Nottingham Library (the Portland Collection); the National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University; the Houghton Library, Harvard University; and the Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm. The title page of the 1680 edition of Rochester's poems is reproduced by kind permission of Magdalene College, University of Cambridge. To the librarians and staff of all these institutions I express my warmest thanks for their assistance.

The work for this edition was undertaken while I was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London, and I thank Warwick Gould for his generosity in extending my fellowship to allow me to undertake the necessary study. Latterly a Visiting Research Fellowship at Merton College, Oxford, allowed the project to be completed and I am most grateful to the Warden, Chaplain and Fellows for the generosity of their welcome and hospitality.

My obligation to Keith Walker will be apparent on almost every page (and coincidentally he supplied me with his transcript of the Harbin MS when I was completing my doctorate). But as Keith did a quarter of a century ago, so I end by acknowledging my debt to Harold Love. It was he who suggested that I should undertake this revision, and he then took an active interest in my progress; one of his last communications was to bring his discovery of another text of 'My dear Mistress' to my attention. This volume is dedicated to the memory of these two outstanding Rochester scholars.

Nicholas Fisher

# Chronology

## Rochester's Life

1 April: born at Ditchley House, Oxfordshire, son of Henry, Lord Wilmot and Anne, widow of Sir Henry Lee

13 December: father created Earl of Rochester

Rochester in Paris with mother

Still in Paris

## Historic and Literary Events

1647

1649 30 January: execution of Charles I; future Charles II in exile at The Hague

19 May: England declared a Commonwealth or Free State

1651 2 August: Charles II invades England

3 September: royalist army defeated at Battle of Worcester and Charles escapes to France with Lord Wilmot

Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*

1652 Christopher Bowman opens first coffee-house in London in St Michael's Alley, Cornhill

10 July: start of First Dutch War (1652-54)

1653 16 December: Cromwell becomes Lord Protector

1654

## **Rochester's Life**

19 February:  
succeeds to  
earldom on death  
of father at Ghent

18 January:  
matriculates at  
Wadham College,  
Oxford  
c. May: 'Vertues  
triumphant  
Shrine'  
c. December:  
'Impia blasphemi'

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1658 3 September: Cromwell dies; son  
Richard succeeds as Lord Protector

1659 25 May: Richard Cromwell resigns,  
Rump Parliament re-establishes  
Commonwealth

13 October: army-controlled  
Committee of Safety replaces  
Rump Parliament

26 December: Rump Parliament re-  
instated

1660 2 January: Monck's forces enter  
England

3 February: Monck enters London

4 April: Charles's Declaration of  
Breda issued

8 May: Charles proclaimed King in  
London

29 May: Charles enters London

21 August: patents granted for re-  
opening of theatres

## **Rochester's Life**

c. January:  
'Respite great  
Queen'  
February:  
awarded pension  
of £500 p.a.  
9 September:  
receives degree  
of MA from  
Chancellor, Earl of  
Clarendon  
21 November:  
embarks on  
Grand Tour with  
Sir Andrew  
Balfour

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1661 20 December: Corporation Act

1662 19 May: Act of Uniformity with  
revised *Book of Common Prayer*  
attached receives royal assent  
10 June: Licensing Act takes effect  
21 May: Charles II marries Catholic  
Catherine of Braganza

1663 Butler, *Hudibras Part I*  
7 May: Theatre Royal, Drury Lane  
opens



## **Rochester's Life**

1 October: in Venice  
26 October: signs Visitors' Book at University of Padua  
Visits Charles II's sister Henrietta, Duchess of Orleans  
25 December: delivers letter from Henrietta to Charles II at Whitehall

26 May: attempts to abduct heiress Elizabeth Malet; imprisoned in Tower  
19 June: freed from Tower  
6 July: joins Fleet  
2 August: under fire in Bergen harbour  
9 September: still with Fleet  
16 September: back at Court  
31 October: gift of £750 from King

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1664 Butler, *Hudibras Part II*

1665 4 March: Second Dutch War (1665-67) begins  
3 June: Dutch fleet defeated at Battle of Lowestoft  
5 June: theatres in London closed by Plague  
September: Great Plague recedes  
October: Five Mile Act

## **Rochester's Life**

21 March:  
appointed  
Gentleman of the  
Bedchamber to  
Charles II with  
pension of £1,000  
p.a. and lodgings  
in Whitehall

June:  
commissioned in  
Prince Rupert's  
Troop of Horse  
June-July: naval  
service under Sir  
Edward Spragge,  
displaying  
conspicuous  
bravery

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1666 25 July: Dutch defeated in Battle of  
North Foreland  
2-5 September: Great Fire of  
London  
16 November: first issue of *London  
Gazette*  
Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Satires*

## **Rochester's Life**

29 January:  
marries Elizabeth  
Malet

14 March:  
assumes post of  
Gentleman of the  
Bedchamber

29 July:  
summoned to  
Parliament by  
royal writ

2 October:  
pension of £1,000  
authorised

10 October: takes  
seat in House of  
Lords

28 February:  
appointed  
Gamekeeper for  
Oxfordshire

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1667 13 June: Dutch destroy English  
fleet on Medway, capture flagship  
*Royal Charles*

29 November: Chancellor Hyde  
flees to France; replaced by 'Cabal'  
ministry under Arlington

Dryden, *Annus Mirabilis*  
Milton, *Paradise Lost*

1668 Dryden appointed Poet Laureate  
Dryden, *An Essay of Dramatick  
Poesie*

## **Rochester's Life**

16 February: strikes Thomas Killigrew in King's presence; pardoned

12 March: sent to Paris by Charles II with letter for his sister

19 April: robbed of valuables in Paris

21 June: set upon at the Paris opera

July: returns to England

30 April: daughter Anne baptised at Adderbury

22 November: forced by illness to decline duel with Mulgrave

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1669 21 August: Death of Queen Mother, Henrietta Maria

1670 22 May: Charles signs secret Treaty of Dover

October: Arrival of Louise de Kerouaille (future mistress to King; created Duchess of Portsmouth)

Dryden, *Conquest of Granada, Pt. 1*  
Thomas D'Urfey, *Wit and Mirth*

## Rochester's Life

2 January: son Charles baptised  
Autumn: 'All things submit themselves',  
'Cælia, that faithfull Servant'

31 October: appointed Deputy Lieutenant of Somerset  
'What vaine unnecessary things'

'Att five this Morn'  
'As some brave Admiral'  
21 March: duel with Viscount Dunbar prevented  
Spring: dedicatee of Dryden's *Marriage-a-la-Mode*  
'The Gods, by right of Nature'  
'Wit has of late'  
'In the Isle of Brittain'

## Historic and Literary Events

1671 9 November: Dorset Garden Theatre opens  
Milton, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*  
Dryden, *Conquest of Granada, Pt. II*  
Buckingham, *The Rehearsal*  
Wycherley, *Love in a Wood*  
31 March: Death of Duke of York's wife Anne Hyde

1672 25 January: Theatre Royal burns down  
15 March: Charles issues Declaration of Indulgence  
17 March: Third Dutch War begins (1672-74)  
28 May: indecisive naval battle off Southwold

1673 29 March: imposition of the Test Act  
20 September: Duke of York marries by proxy Catholic Mary of Modena  
Autumn: a 'country party', opposed to anti-Tolerantist policies of King's chief minister, Danby, starts during parliamentary session to form around Halifax and Shaftesbury; Buckingham joins early 1674, and within a decade group formalised as 'Whig' party

## **Rochester's Life**

January: leaves Court after delivering 'In the Isle of Brittain' in error to King  
27 February: appointed Ranger of Woodstock Park  
'What, Timon, does old Age, begin'  
2 May: appointed Keeper of Woodstock Park  
'Strephon, there sighs not'  
*A Satyr Against Mankind*  
13 July: daughter Elizabeth baptised

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1674 9 February: peace concluded with Dutch  
26 March: opening of new Drury Lane Theatre  
September: collapse of 'Cabal' ministry

## **Rochester's Life**

4 January: Charles approves building of small building at Whitehall Palace for Rochester  
24 January: appointed Master, Surveyor and Keeper of King's hawks  
Late Spring: dedicatee of Lee's *Nero*  
May: occupies High Lodge, Woodstock  
25 June: smashes King's chronometer in Privy Garden  
'Well Sir 'tis granted'

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1675 Spring: Crowne's *Calisto* produced at Court  
17 August: Charles signs agreement with Louis XIV to dissolve Parliament if supplies not provided

## **Rochester's Life**

6 January:  
daughter Malet  
baptised  
February: ill,  
reported dead  
March: *A Satyr  
Against Mankind*  
circulating  
17 June: brawl  
with Watch at  
Epsom resulting  
in death of Billy  
Downs  
Summer:  
Alexander Bendo  
disguise

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1676 16 February: Charles concludes  
second secret treaty with Louis  
XIV, receiving £100,000 p.a.  
Etherege, *The Man of Mode*  
Wycherley, *The Plain Dealer*  
Shadwell, *The Virtuoso*



## **Rochester's Life**

Spring: begins liaison with Elizabeth Barry  
13 April: petitions King for estates in Ireland  
'Some few from Wit'  
4 June: Cook stabbed at tavern in Mall where Rochester dining  
August: entertains Buckingham in lodgings at Whitehall  
October: receives visit from Buckingham at Woodstock  
November: elected Alderman at Taunton, Somerset  
December: daughter Elizabeth Clerke born to Elizabeth Barry

## **Historic and Literary Events**

1677 Dryden, *All for Love*  
February: Shaftesbury, Buckingham and others imprisoned by House of Lords  
4 November: William of Orange marries Princess Mary

## Rochester's Life

Early in year: very ill  
*Upon Nothing*

'Deare friend I hear this Towne'  
October: begins weekly conversations in London with Burnet (until April)

March: accepts challenge from Edward Seymour, but duel averted  
End April: leaves London for last time; travels to Somerset; health collapses  
End May: brought by coach to Woodstock  
June: repents his life, and is

## Historic and Literary Events

- 1678 Butler, *Hudibras Part III*  
17 May: secret treaty between Charles and Louis XIV promising neutrality in return for subsidy  
13 August: first allegations of Popish Plot  
20 November: Additional Test Act passed
- 1679 26 May: Parliament prorogued and dissolved (12 July) to prevent passage of Exclusion Bill (reconvenes 21 October 1680)  
Summer: Jane Roberts, former mistress of King, dies, attended by Gilbert Burnet  
May/June: Parliament fails to renew Licensing Act  
4 December: death of Thomas Hobbes
- 1680 Burnet, *History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, vol. 1  
April: Penny post system established in London by William Dockwra

## **Rochester's Life**

reconciled with  
Church of  
England; visited  
by many  
clergymen  
20–24 July: visited  
by Burnet  
26 July: dies at  
High Lodge,  
Woodstock  
Autumn:  
unauthorised  
publication of  
*Poems on Several  
Occasions*  
November:  
publication of  
Burnet's *Some  
Passages of the  
Life and Death of  
. . . Rochester*

## **Historic and Literary Events**

# Introduction

## The Man

John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester, was born on All Fools' Day, 1647, at Ditchley in Oxfordshire on the estate that had belonged to his mother's first husband, Sir Henry Lee. Rochester's father, Lord Wilmot, was a royalist general; witty, restless and hard-drinking, he was with the exiled court in Paris, and hardly saw his son. In consequence Rochester was brought up by his mother, who was tough-minded and a not uncommon example of well-born female piety. Although his exposure to the Bible and Prayer Book would continue through the daily routine of biblical study and prayers at his school, it was probably she who so impressed those texts on his memory that he would remember their cadences on his deathbed.

Rochester spent part of his childhood in Paris, but most of it in Oxfordshire. He was tutored by his mother's chaplain, attended Burford Grammar School, and went up to Wadham College at the age of 12. He was at Oxford when King Charles came back to England, and he grew debauched there with the active encouragement of Robert Whitehall, a fellow of Merton college. (His more formal education would in any case have ended when he left Burford Grammar School: post-Restoration Oxford was not a place where young gentlemen were expected to study.) He took his degree of Master of Arts in 1661, and for the next three years he travelled in France and Italy with a Scottish physician as his tutor. He arrived back at the court which was to be the centre of his life on Christmas Day 1664, with a letter for Charles from his sister in Paris.

Described by his biographer Gilbert Burnet as ‘tall and well made, if not a little too slender’,<sup>1</sup> Rochester quickly gained a reputation for easy grace and wit. He was the youngest member of his set apart from Sir Carr Scroope and John Sheffield, Earl of Mulgrave. He was later to quarrel with both men, facts recorded substantially in his poetry.

What is known of Rochester’s life as a courtier is mostly in this early period, before myth takes over the record. A suitor for an heiress, Elizabeth Malet, Rochester kidnapped her prematurely, and was punished by Charles with imprisonment in the Tower, from which he was soon freed, to make good his disgrace by fighting bravely in a sea battle against the Dutch (and subsequently marrying Elizabeth with the King’s blessing). His earliest extant letter is a full account of his experiences, which make the ironic reference to ‘Dutch prowess’ in *Upon Nothing* (l. 46) puzzling.<sup>2</sup>

Certain patterns of life can be discerned: recurrent bad behaviour, for which Rochester was first in disgrace, then quickly forgiven by the indulgent Charles; drunkenness, quarrels, duels, and (the details are more doubtful here) love affairs. He had four legitimate children and a bastard daughter by the actress Elizabeth Barry. When in disgrace, Rochester would disappear to France, or go into hiding and disguise. Gilbert Burnet records:

He took pleasure to disguise himself, as a *Porter*, or as a *Beggar*; sometimes to follow some mean Amours, which, for the variety of them, he affected; At other times, meerly for diversion, he would go about in odd shapes, in which he acted his part so naturally, that even those who were on the secret, and saw him in these shapes, could perceive nothing by which he might be discovered. (*Some Passages*, pp. 27–8)

The ability to assume another’s role is a striking feature of Rochester’s poetry, as of his life.<sup>3</sup>

Rochester was deeply involved with the Restoration stage, and this involvement is probably the most fully documented series of facts about his life. He seems to have acted as patron to most of the playwrights – Dryden, Shadwell, Crowne, Lee, Otway, Settle and Fane – and the majority of these have left us testimonies of their relations with him, unfortunately usually only in the form of a dedication. Rochester's only full-length play, *Lucina's Rape Or The Tragedy of Vallentinian*, adapted and improved Fletcher's *The Tragedie of Valentinian*, but he also contributed a scene to a play by Robert Howard, began a prose comedy, and contributed the prologue or epilogue to four plays.<sup>4</sup> Theatrical motives and imagery dominate much of his verse.

In the later 1670s there is evidence of greater seriousness and greater involvement in affairs of state. During the middle of the decade, four events of importance are recorded: Rochester's accidental handing of his satire 'In the Isle of Brittain' to the King during the festivities at Court at Christmas 1673; his destruction of the sundial in the Privy Garden at Whitehall on 25 June 1675; his part in the affray at Epsom on 17 June 1676 that led to the death of a Mr Downs (see the description given in the notes to 'Verses to the Post Boy'); and later that summer his setting up in disguise as the medical practitioner 'Alexander Bendo' on Tower Hill, London. Between February and May, 1677, he regularly attended the House of Lords, and in the pre-face to the printed edition of Rochester's play (*Valentinian* (London, 1685)), Robert Wolseley confirms his interest in politics during his last years. His self-styled 'death bed repentance'<sup>5</sup> followed from a series of regular conversations he had between October 1679 and April 1680 with a former chaplain to the King, Gilbert Burnet, and is recorded in *Some Passages*. This conversion, whether real or fantasy, figured largely in his reputation but has little to do with the quality of his poetry. Rochester died on 26 July 1680.