

**ROCHESTER, JOHN
WILMOT, EARL OF
(1647–1680)**

English poet and intellectual.

After receiving the privileged education of a Restoration nobleman—Wadham College, Oxford, followed by the grand tour of the continent—Rochester became a member of a clique at the court of Charles II, where he was famous for his wit, skepticism, and ostensibly dissolute life. His surviving works are few: about 75 poems, an adaptation of a tragedy, and a scene from an unfinished play. Although his free use of sexual language earned him censure and bowdlerization over the centuries, his satirical bite has always guaranteed him admirers. Restoration culture underwent strong French influence, and it is from the libertine poets of that country, as well as the Latin satirists that were a common source, that Rochester seems to have derived his main impetus. As understood in the seventeenth century, libertinism meant not praise of licentious excess, but a skeptical attitude toward received values that went hand in hand with an effort to set forth a new and more rational approach to living. Thus the light-heartedness and flippancy of some of Rochester's poetry must be viewed within a larger context of serious purpose.

Contemporary testimony leaves little doubt that Rochester was personally bisexual. His account of a rake's reminiscence is probably not too far from his own attitudes: "Nor shall our love fits, Chloris, be forgot,/ When each the well-looking linkboy strove t'enjoy,/ And the best kiss was deciding lot/ Whether the boy fucked you or I the boy." ("The Maimed Debauchee," ll. 37–40). The same approach, recalling Horace's statement that a woman or a boy would suit his needs equally well, recurs in "The Platonic Lady," "Love a Woman? You're an Ass!," and "Upon His Drinking Bowl."

There has been some dispute about the canon of poems to be attributed to Rochester. It seems generally agreed,

however, that the obscene play in rhyming couplets *Sodom*, first published in 1684 and frequently reprinted under his name, is not by him.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. *Works: The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, David M. Vieth, ed., New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968. *Criticism:* R. M. Baine, "Rochester or Fishbourne: A Question of Authorship," *Review of English Studies*, 22 (1946), 201–6; Dustin H. Griffin, *Satires Against Man: The Poems of Rochester*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973.

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ROCK AND ROLL

See **Music, Popular; Punk Rock.**

**RÖHM [ROEHM], ERNST
(1887–1934)**

German soldier and politician; leader of the Schutz-Abteilung (SA) of the Nazi Party during its rise to power in the Weimar Republic. Röhm was an organizer of right-wing paramilitary groups who, in 1919, first made Hitler aware of his own political potential, and for the following fifteen years the two were close friends. Magnus Hirschfeld remarked that the only photograph in which Hitler appeared smiling was one in which he was in Röhm's company.

From the fall of 1930 onward Röhm transformed the SA Brownshirt militia from a handful of unemployed thugs and embittered veterans of World War I into an effective fighting force some half a million strong—an instrument of Nazi terror. He had in 1928–30 lived abroad as an instructor of the—largely Amerindian—Bolivian Army and boasted in letters to his friends in Germany that he had introduced the recruits not only to Prussian discipline but also to homosexual love—which until then had supposedly been unknown there. Röhm, who made no secret of his homosexual proclivities and of his aversion to women, was well known in the gay subculture of Berlin, and had down to the end